Constructing Voices:
A Narrative Case Study of the Processes and Production of a Community Art Performance

by

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ABSTRACT

Constructing Voices is a narrative case study exploring the experiences of young women as they participated in a major public art performance project. I followed the process and production of Turning Point and Under Construction over the course of one year. Under the direction of American performance artist and educator Suzanne Lacy, this Vancouver, Canada based art project and performance sought to empower participating young women; to help them fin their voice and to provide them with a forum so that they might challenge and alter public perception and stereotypes of young women in the mass media.

Seven young women from Turning Point and three local organizers, including the project and performance producer, have offered their narratives to inform this study. Together, they take us behind the scenes of a huge and complex community art project and performance. Their stories help us find meaning amidst the contradictions inherent in art productions of this magnitude.

I approach this inquiry from a constructivist paradigm, informed by postmodern feminism. Through this research I call for a collaborative art practice which is reflexive, critical and egalitarian – one in which power is shared and where representation is determined by those whose lives are displayed. To inform our future artistic and educational practices, we need to turn to those pedagogical frameworks that best correspond to the intended goals of the projects. In the case of Turning Point and Under Construction, we need to look to *feminist, emancipatory* and *performance art* pedagogies. Only by informing our practices in this way, can these projects provide the opportunity for individuals to achieve a heightened engagement with their world – to learn through currere.

In this narrative case study, we hear from young women at turning points in their lives. They believe what they say has value and should be heard by others. Performance art has the potential to be a rich site for learning so long as the process is congruent with the goals of the art project. As art educators we can respond to these narratives in our practices by providing environments for learning where participants/learners can find their own ideas and voices while expressing themselves in personally meaningful ways.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to all of the women who generously gave their time and interest to participate in this study. Their contributions were essential.

Without the stalwart support of my spouse, Graham Coleman, the completion of this thesis would not have been possible. I extend my warmest gratitude for his never ending belief in me that surpassed even my own.

I am very very solitary   *I like my mom. I like my mom.*
                           She's always going to be my mom,
                           so I've got to work it out

It would by nice to have a father figure.
    But, he's not a father figure so, I'm not going to waste my

`They expect so much.   They never had a chance to be everyth`
`but I just feel like the weight is... and they say it's all`
`and they're just trying to help me the way they can... and`
`But... I feel so much pressure.   It's not like you guys.   W`
`but they gave me everything they could.   I can talk to my p`
`everything.   Like everything! They go to everything, any ki`
`I have, they want to go.`
`They're just like - the best.`
`They support me in everything I do,`
`                    But, I just feel so...`

My parents are more materialistic. Especially my father.
He, quote "spoils us and so we won't have anything to loc
forward to."
When emotionally I find my family... it's starved.

I am basically labeled by my friends as a tree-hugger
But I'm okay with that.

    you think you are something to a person and then...
        you find out that you're not...
`        I feel that one thing`
`        I have control over is myself.`

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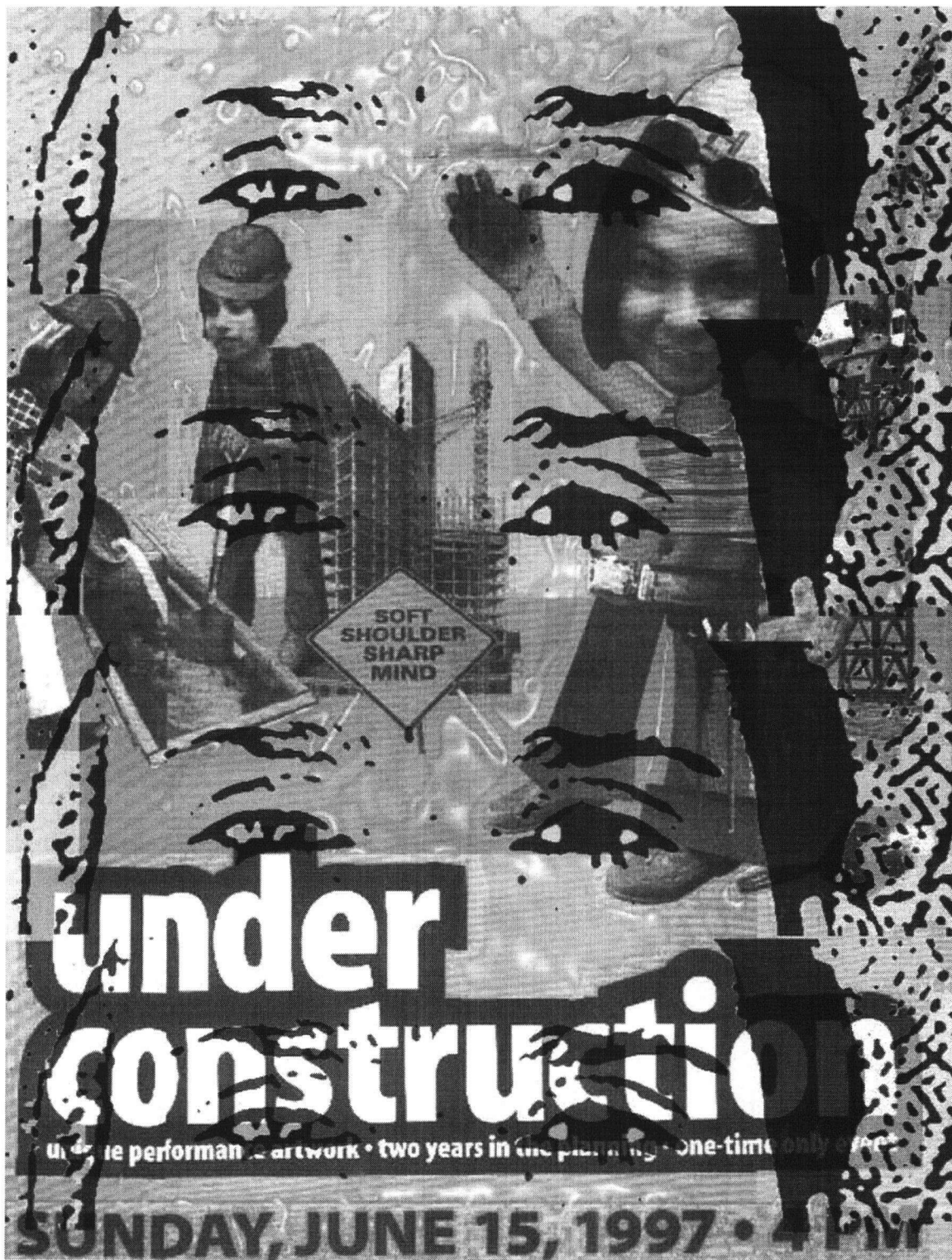
PREFACE: JUNE 15, 1997: UNDER CONSTRUCTION

All uncredited photos in this preface were taken by Lorrie Miller.

After a two year creative process in a project called *Turning Point*, the one day performance *Under Construction*[1] begins. The concrete shell of two towers hovers over the construction site below. A cement truck blocks the street from traffic. Hundreds of people line around the hot pink hoarding, trimmed with yellow caution ribbon. Construction sounds, mixed with electronic music, hum over the crowd. Girls in yellow and white hard hats, and orange reflective vests talk with the crowd.

A crowd gathers in the church on the next block.

One hundred-thirty young women sign-up, receive their tomato-red t-shirts with the *Under Construction* logo across the front, their performance packages and make their way to the chapel. Older women walk through the crowd organizing the girls into small groups. Most have never heard of this project before. Some don't even know why they are there, yet.

One of the leaders gets up in front of the group and says, *A performance piece is like a piece of theatre, and there is a lot of discipline in theatre, it's all timed. There are*

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[1]Appendix I (p. 241) offers a condensed timeline of the events leading up to *Under Construction.*

cue sheets, there are people on sound... But now, I want to have fun. We don't need to be all strict with you guys, but it's a piece of theatre that your are involved in...

The girls look around the room while squirming in their seats seeking direction. In recycled conference folders they find a list of discussion topics (family relationships, sex, media portrayal of young women, who listens to you?) an event program and a runner's tag, - the kind you wear while running a marathon, except without a number.

The girls label themselves, choosing their own identity for the public, then help one another with their labels. I look at the words they have pinned on themselves, some of them read *shy, artist, outspoken, crazy,* and on another *kooky.* The diverse group slowly blends into one large red blur of anticipation, excitement, and as time lingers on...
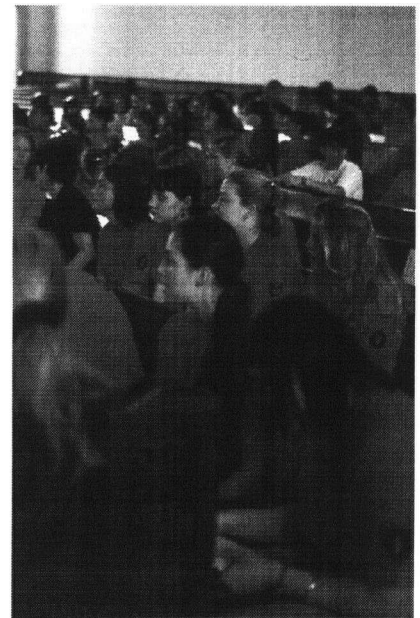
The orientation activities completed, and with time to kill, one of the older women picks up the microphone and walks through the aisle of the

church and interviews some of the young women. She asks them their names, why they are there and what they hope to do... where do they hope to be in 5 years. One girl stands up, takes the microphone and tells us *Finally somebody cares about us, thanks, lets give them a hand...* the crowd whoops and applauds. Another girl takes the microphone, *I'm Emily from Vancouver and I'm twelve.* Another girl stands up, *I'm Amy and you'll know me twenty years from now because I will be famous.* Sarah tells us that in five years from now she will be a social worker working with teenagers. Jessica is from Tsawwassen, she found out about the performance from TV. Another young woman stands up, *Some of us here are single moms, we're glad to be here.* Others were graduating in the next year, their dreams of their future ranging from being a massage therapist to being a pop singer. One girl tells us that she was really shy and was afraid to be involved in such a big group, *because I am Asian and was shy about being in big groups. But then it is so great to see all the different races in this group, and I am really happy.* One girl speaks to the group in Hebrew, and another in Tagalog.

Some of the girls sing for each other, the group applauds their songs. The energy in the room is pumped... a call comes in on the walkie-talkie... it is time.

At the performance site girls in hard-hats and vests arrange 20 litre plastic buckets into new seating groups. Only half as many girls as anticipated have come. A video-crew hovers over the girls as they work. A few members of the audience try to get in... Elizabeth, a director girl, takes charge. They leave the set and wait until the show begins.

I look up to the centre of the building in between the towers. Suzanne Lacy, the artistic director, with Alix, her performance assistant, gives directions (via cellular phone and two-way radio) to the girls on the site below. There, Lacy has contact with the crew and the director girls.

Outside the site, the crowd gets a hint of what is in store, as they watch live video feed on monitors placed in peek holes in the hoarding. Audio reveals the girls' live *chat* to the waiting line-up. Sci-fi techno-construction sound and music is layered with voice.

Ten girls in safety vests and yellow hard-hats carry signs and march in front of the main site entrance. **Soft Shoulders,** in black bold letters across a yellow caution sign, Juliet, a sign girl, turns it around, **Sharp Mind. Stop** reads another sign; the girl flips on cue, **And Listen.** The crowd watches as they file onto the performance site.
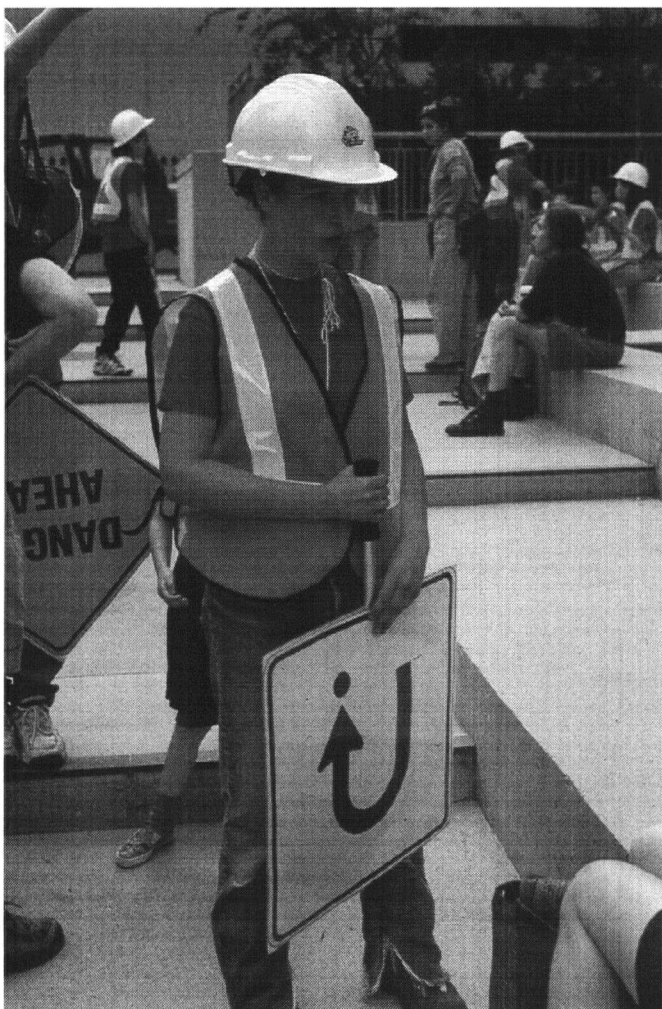
I stand in the doorway. My black *Turning Point* t-shirt identifies me with the performance, but not red like the girls. I hand out programs and answer questions. The first wave of 200 will have about 20 minutes on site, in the zone behind the light wooden railing.

From this vantage point, I can see clusters of girls in red sitting on white buckets in groups of four. They sit and talk though their voices cannot be heard. From where we are, we hear only the soundtrack. Voices blend in and out of the electronic music and techno-construction mix. Intimate stories of loneliness, loss, anger, achievement; voices of individuals, simply asking that we listen... Soft voices - wavering, pause… sigh. Another voice coolly describes moments of pain...

I like my mom. I like my mom. She's always going to be my mom, so I've got to work it out

I know that once I leave I can   never go back to being a kid.

Sometimes I feel like I have control. Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I feel like I am imagining this control, but really, it feels like I have my parent's pulling the strings. And I'm just one of those dummies moving with those strings.

I am basically labeled by my friends as a tree-hugger.
But I'm okay with that.

My mom thinks she knows what's best, but she doesn't know what I want. We're not close at all. We don't talk about things.

I feel that one thing I have control over is myself.

*My parents are more   materialistic. Especially my   father. He, quote "spoils us   and so we won't have   anything to look forward to."
When emotionally I find my   family... it's starved.*

They expect so much. They never had a chance to be everything they could be, but I just feel like the weight is... and they say it's all for my own good and they're just trying to help me the way they can... and I know that. But... I feel so much pressure. It's not like you guys. We're not rich, but they gave me everything they could. I can talk to my parents about everything. Like everything! They go to everything, any kind of event I have, they want to go. They're just like - the best. They support me in everything I do. But, I just feel so...

It would by nice to have a   father figure. But, he's not a father figure so, I'm not going   to waste my time on him.

you think you are something to a person and then...

you find out that you're not...

(anonymous voices from soundtrack, Under Construction,
June, 1997)

The crowd shuffles, quietly hanging onto the words in the emotional mix of story and sound.

Across the site on large stacked blocks of concrete, sit pairs of girls talking while painting each other's hands with henna. Frieda takes one girls hand, holds it in hers. Their lips and bodies reveal a conversation. She dips a small stick into a cup and marks the other young woman's hand and wrist. She takes her time, concentrates on her work, looks up at the other woman, then back to her work...

To the far west side of the site, a team of trades women lead girls in coveralls, hard-hats and gloves, as they empty paper sacks of Portland cement, adding water and sand... They mix.

Twenty minutes pass, some of the audience has trickled out already, the rest are now lead out as the next group enters. Sign girls come onto the site and help to usher the audience. Some wait for *it* to start. They don't realize that *it* never stopped...

Directly across the floor, on a raised platform sit the VIP's. Barbara watches the years of hard work; anticipation and anxiety play itself out in an afternoon. The girls talk below us. Hundreds look on.
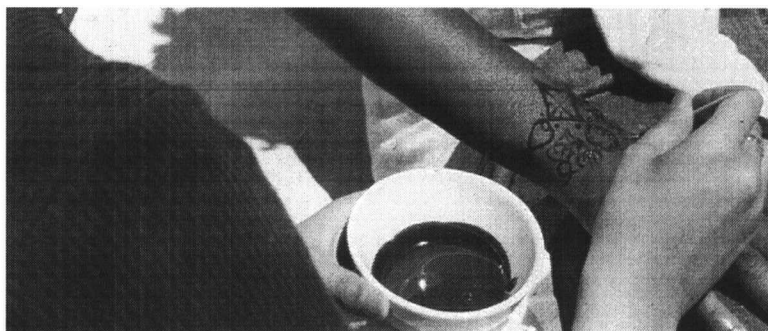
Hildegarde, Audrey and Chaara walk around the floor in red shirts and decked out in A/V recording gear. They move slowly from one group to another, quietly recording the conversations.

Elizabeth looks a little flustered. She talks to a woman beside her. They both look up to Lacy while talking on the radio. Elizabeth looks back to the group she is directing, then up again. There seems to be some minor issue at hand. Two girls in her group look back to her... One puts her hand up... Elizabeth walks over to her...

Nick directs another group. Things are quiet, she stands nearby in case Lacy changes direction, or the girls need to take a washroom break.

Emily sits in another group seemingly engrossed in conversation. She stays seated with the same group until it is her turn to go to the henna area and have her hand painted.

Lacy gives a signal, girls and volunteers spring into action. The second wave is directed out. Those people lined up behind the final wave of 200 have been told that they won't make it in. Many have already left. The third wave is ushered in.

The performance continues. Girls rotate from hand painting to a bucket grouping. The concrete mixers begin to pour concrete into wooden frames. Twenty minutes go by. The final audience is ushered down to the floor.

They walk among the girls. Now they can hear the conversations that the others were only able to see...

I see my sister, Heather, with Akask and Wolfie, my sons. They head straight to
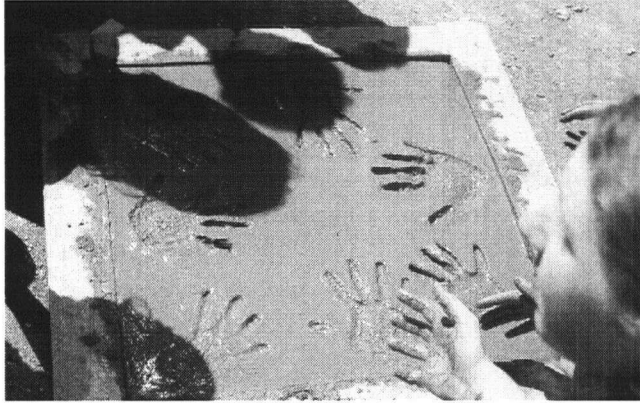
the concrete mixers. Girls place their hands into the poured moulds, leaving their print.

I leave my post to join the audience on the floor. The audience mills around and through the seated and working girls. They no not engage with them. I talk with Elizabeth to see what kinds of reactions she has had from audience members.

> Elizabeth: *Okay, like what is going on here, can you explain this to me?* They asked me. And other people saying, *Is this it? Is this?* I had one woman say, *Someone up there is laughing at me, I'm going. This is ridiculous!* I responded with *You can wait five minutes and listen to the soundtrack and maybe that will complete your picture.* She said, *No, I'm going.*
>
> I think that most people got it in terms of the soundtrack. When I was trying to move people along (on the way out for the next wave of audience)... a lot of people were like, *we were trying to stay still and listen to this really powerful soundtrack.* So a lot of people I talked to did get it. This (with the audience on the floor) feels really different. This is it - what it's all about! (Int.: PD, 3.2)
>
> I talk to some audience members myself to see what kind of a response I get.

Some of them knew a little about the project from someone they knew from within the project. Others weren't prepared for it at all.

> Woman A: *I've never seen anything like this before. I like having the outsider view to their conversations, seeing them speaking freely amongst themselves. I felt that brought a lot of respect from the older side that don't usually... that don't have that much respect for the younger side.*
>
> Woman B: *I think that it is powerful. We were standing right next to the speaker and just let ourselves settle into what they were saying and just not moving around and not waiting and just being present was really nice. Even now, (on the floor) it is too scattered for me. I get lost in the snaps and scatters, walking around... but to be able to stand present, watch them, listen to the stories. It was nice, but a lot more powerful when it was still, rather then streamed through. For me I needed to have it still, silent, or silent visually, so that the stories could run through.*

Woman C: *The sound was really well put together. It was one of the strongest elements.*

Woman D: *My first impressions are...I just like seeing this group of people, the amount of young women that I see, in proportion to other people is really refreshing. I really liked hearing their questions and their queries because they have such fresh voices. It was wonderful hearing them amplified because they are at the age when you become self-conscious of voice. And so to hear them amplified was very poignant, because it is often that voice that's often not heard in the media, and generally in the arts or literature or anything like that. It's just beautiful. It's gorgeous.*

Man A: *My impression. I think that a major part of it was actually getting the girls involved in something like this and actually doing it. Not the performance part of it, but actually doing it, the process of it. In terms of the performance, it's not like regular art, like some types of art where you go and you look at it and it inspires you in some way or you are awed by it. It was very different than that, not that it shouldn't be awe-inspiring. Instead, it makes you think.*

I am very critical of art in general and artists. I think about the effectiveness and how it might have been more effective. I think that it was a good idea to have the stages, to have the numerous things throughout the past two years rather than just a one shot deal, to have it more ongoing. It is a good way to make a social statement. Because that is what it is doing. All types of art are consequences of the artist's position and the social structure that they live in. And I guess this is another example of that. (Int.: PD, 3.4-4.5)

The crowd slowly started to leave, the soundtrack ends... the performance is over.

I spent my previous year being with and talking to

girls that had been intensely involved in the project. I took a few moments to speak with, and listen to a couple of girls that were new that day. I wanted to know what they thought about the whole thing.

Outside the performance site, near the cement truck, is a canteen, just shutting down. In front are two girls in the tell-tale red shirts. I had never seen them before, it was safe to assume that they were new… The first girl piped up, *I liked it a lot. We had no idea (of what it was going to be about). (Now) Just to learn things. We just talked about issues. Different things. Friends, school, work, jobs, sex. That kind of stuff.*

I see you got your hand painted. I say to the other girl. *Ya,* she says, *they were doing henna. You just sat there.*

So, I asked, *Did you talk while you were getting painted.* She tells me: *No, the girl that did it was in my group, and we already talked about everything.* One girl's mom ran the canteen. She urged them back to work. I had a wrap party for the girls to organize. Time for me to leave as well. I bid them a good day.

I was left wondering why were they there? Were they merely more bodies to put red t-shirts on and warm a bucket? Were they there for the aesthetic impact? Or were they there so they could express their voices and be heard. Were they there to challenge stereotypes? Unfortunately, they weren't prepared for the performance anymore than most audience members. I needed to ask the core girls how they felt about this. Did they get any more from this performance event than these two young women? Or, was all of the benefit in the process of the project, which these two had missed?

On June 15, 1997, the art performance <u>Under Construction</u> was <u>Turning Point</u>'s grand finale after two years of development. Californian artist, activist and educator, Suzanne Lacy, was first brought to Vancouver by the Vancouver Parks board to a conference in 1993. She returned in 1995 when she was invited to the Women's in View Festival. It was then that the idea of producing a large Vancouver-based project with Lacy emerged.

A working group of youth workers, educators, media makers, youth and others, invited Lacy to join them to develop:
- a public artwork, using a process of engaging diverse constituencies around issues identified by us and which we believe will be accomplished by the following means:
- Networking with people working in schools, Parks and recreation, and other departments of the city and public and private organizations to identify issues and develop policies and public awareness;
- A mass media intervention, fuelled by media awareness and media literacy workshops;
- A large scale public art performance designed by the participants working with artists.

For us, the process of coalition and community building is an integral part of the artwork. Similarly, the mass media aspects are designed as a public face for the art. Pulling the whole process together, a final performance serves as a celebratory ritual that brings the diverse themes and people together in a public site. But it is this networking and community building, the support of gender-aware policies and sensitivities, the mentoring and relationships formed, that will from the lasting legacy of this project. (*Turning Point Overview and Mission*, 1995, p. 1)

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"a model of community cultural development"

young women

Voices

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"young women's integral role and ownership of the Turning Point..."

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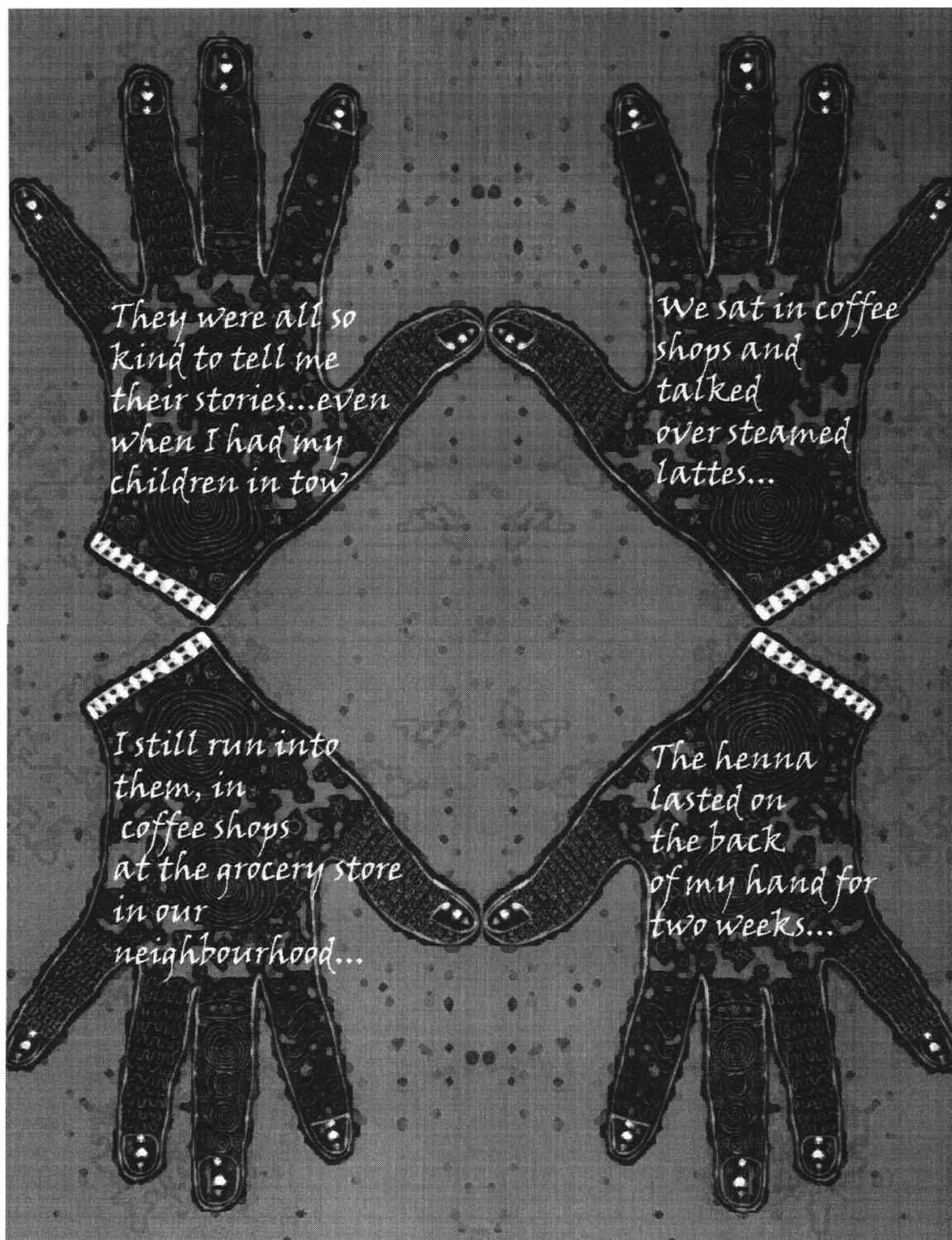
They were all so
kind to tell me
their stories...even
when I had my
children in tow

We sat in coffee
shops and
talked
over steamed
lattes...

I still run into
them, in
coffee shops
at the grocery store
in our
neighbourhood...

The henna
lasted on
the back
of my hand for
two weeks...

CHAPTER 1: STARTING POINTS

"(The Under Construction performance) will signal a desire by young women for an emerging presence in the public sphere, and it will model the community's intension to support that presence."

<div align="right">(Draft artist statement, Suzanne Lacy, April, 1995)</div>

I described the afternoon performance, Under Construction, as I experienced it as a volunteer and as a researcher. The performance and the process that led up to it form the basis of this study. This study brings together the experiences of the young and older women who participated in a public performance art project, with my own experience as a researcher, in order to find meaning in these shared experiences. Some of the narratives shared here were stirred into being through reflections on memories, through conversations over e-mail, and chatting over lattes. Some of the stories have been told before. Some are told here for the first time as I write them into existence, mixed with the stories of others, and woven with other educational research. I have found through my reading and writing, that our personal and professional lives are inextricably interconnected. I have abandoned any attempt to deny this.

Several years ago, during our first Christmas together, I received a most unexpected gift from my 'boyfriend' –now husband. It was heavy, yet tucked into a lovely floral patterned gift bag. It was the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 9th ed. Today, as I flip through the pages, for the umpteenth time this year, I find the word:

> cur-ric-u-lum /kʌ ˈrɪ kjuləm/ *n.* (*pl.* cur-ric-u-la / lə/), cur-ric-u-lums) 1 the subjects that are studied or prescribed for study in a school (*not part of the school curriculum*). 2. any programme of activities. curricular adj. [Latin = course, race-chariot, from *currere 'run'*] (Oxford Dictionary, 1995, p. 330)

Fascinated with the etymology of words, I only find *currere* as a Latin root, not as a main entry. Yet in my curriculum texts, it has become a commonly used term, with meanings grown from its origin in Latin. Curriculum theorists and researchers (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995) have asserted alternative forms of curriculum and education research, that adhere closely to *currere*. *Currere* "focuses on the educational experience of the individual, as reported by the individual" (Pinar, et. al, 1995 p. 414). As an autobiographical self-report, *currere* "communicates the individual's lived experience as it is socially located, politically positioned, and discursively formed, while working to succumb to none of these structurings." (Pinar, et. al, 1995 p. 461). *Currere* is grounded in context. As a research method, *currere* "offers the opportunity to study both the

individual's lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience" (Pinar, et. al, 1995 p. 416).

Currere is a heightened engagement with one's world, not a retreat from it. A shift from *curriculum* as a 'course of study' to *currere* 'running of the course' provides an opportunity for a person to "experience his or her past, imagines his or her future, analytically locates both accounts in his or her present, amplifying it multi-perspectively and temporally" (Pinar, et. al, 1995, p. 578). *Currere*, it would seem, lends itself to those situations that are also temporal in nature and deal with the content of one's lived experience.

Currere is precisely the type of learning experience I thought of and sought to be a part of when I first heard about the Turning Point project. It was to be a collaborative community-base feminist art project ending in a public art performance. At the center of the art project and performance was to be the experiences and voices of young women in the transition between girlhood and womanhood. Seeing as performance art is also temporal in nature, and in this case, deals with the lived experiences of participants: currere was a natural fit. Performance artist and educator, Charles R. Garoian (1999) also claims that there is a strong connection between performance art and currere.

Betty Ann Brown (1996) reminds us how "women artists have built community by speaking, moving through all the vulnerabilities of self-revelation, and encouraging others to speak." She also reminds us as to how difficult it is to speak out alone. "Women need to speak *with*". She goes on to say that "it is when we find spaces of truth, spaces for speaking *with* that change can happen. To create such a space is the impetus for the feminist art of community building" (p.157).

At the helm of the Turning Point project and performance Under Construction was internationally renowned performance artist, Suzanne Lacy – pioneer of contemporary community building art (Brown, 1996). The conditions as described in the project seemed to naturally lead to experiential reflective learning. There was the opportunity for individuals to learn about their social environment, to learn about each other, to question their own lives, to challenge others' perceptions of them, as well as to learn first-hand about performance art and art with a social public message. Participants had a chance to gain various skills, and build relationships. The Turning Point project

was to culminate in a large scale public performance, <u>Under Construction</u>. This performance would draw together the previous two years work in a one day public celebratory event. In this public venue the voices of the girls would be heard, their issues would be raised and stereotypes of young women would be challenged.

The assumption that this had what it took to be a successful and empowering project is supported by former art event participant and writer, Betty Ann Brown (1996) as she tells us of her experience in an earlier event:

> I realized I had forged important and lasting friendships through the work leading up to and culminating in the performance event, and that the community of such friendships would not have been possible without the shared goal/shared labor of this artistically identified and crafted event. (p. 161)

From my experiences at Lacy's lectures, watching produced videos of some of her projects and reading other accounts with similar sentiments to Brown's, I was enthusiastic about the possibilities that this project seemed to hold.

From August, 1996 through to August 1997, I participated in and documented the development of <u>Turning Point</u> and the performance, <u>Under Construction</u>. These experiences provided me with site for this case study, and the basis of my doctoral thesis. <u>Turning Point</u> proved to offer many opportunities for learning for participants in the project and performance.

My primary goals were to examine the production process of this particular performance art project and to understand and interpret the experiences of study participants as they relate to this project. What emerged from my own experience in this project and through the analysis of research data, was the undeniable importance of power, voice and representation. <u>Turning Point</u>'s goals were to empower participating young women – to give them voice.

Though my research goals were not emancipatory nor empowering in nature, I sought to learn about an art project that aimed to emancipate and empower. <u>Turning Point</u> intended to critically engage its participants in self-reflection, self-discovery, and ultimately, empowerment. I thought I would leave those goals to the art project and then learn about the process from watching and engaging in it.

Throughout the art project and this study, I learned that there is simply no easy way to report on the complexities within the lived experiences of individuals. I also

realize that regardless of my intensions, I am implicated through my connection to the project and through my actions as a researcher.

Through the analysis process and visiting new relevant literature, I found the work of Charles R. Garoian (1999). In his book *Performing Pedagogy* he describes Lacy's work as embodying emancipatory postmodern theory. "The praxis of postmodern theory, performance art espouses the critique of cultural codes and the development of political agency. A pedagogy founded on performance art represents the praxis of postmodern ideals of progressive education, a process through which spectators/ students learn to challenge the ideologies of institutionalized learning (schooled culture) in order to facilitate political agency and to develop critical citizenship" (Garoian, 1999, p. 39). Garoian states that Lacy's community-based art practice is emancipatory pedagogy and the praxis of postmodern theory, therefore, I looked at Lacy's modus operandi from within the frameworks of performance art, critical and feminist pedagogies.

I also found that I needed to look at the relationship between the medium and the message while considering Marshall McLuhan (1961) as Lacy claims that her performance's content –the participant's stories remain the participants'. Lacy also claims authorship over the image of the final product and control over the aesthetic. Suzi Gablik (1991) considers authorship and tight aesthetic control as elements which reside within the modern paradigm. In this study I ask, what might an emancipatory performance art project look like, feel like, be like?

Gesa Kirsch's (1999) words informed the ways in which I think about reporting on this study, and how I now think about feminist research. I see this study as another step in my growth as a feminist researcher. Kirsch tells us:

> The politics of interpretation and representation are particularly vexing for feminist researchers because they so often hope to empower the people they study and to improve the conditions of their lives. Yet, inevitably, researchers are implicated in the process of speaking for others, potentially silencing them. And in this silence, representation can become misrepresentation, the reinforcement of unjust power structures and institutional hierarchies. But the effort to make feminist research emancipatory, non-hierarchical, mutually beneficial, and collaborative raises some critical questions. How can we ever know (and predict) whether the results of a research study will benefit women – that is, whether it is truly *for* women? Who chooses emancipatory goals and why? Whose desire is it to empower? What does the desire to empower others say about researchers? Unless we learn to ask these questions and become reflective and self-critical, we

are in danger of imposing our desires, our goals, and our worldview upon others, despite and against our best intentions. (p. 46)

Performance art projects hold immense potential for being sites of learning. We can learn from Turning Point and Under Construction to better inform our future practices.

Past education research has focused on girls' experiences in various school environments (Barbieri, 1995; Brown, 1998; Calvert, 1997; Eyre, 1991; McGinty, 1999) girls self esteem, self-perceptions and youth culture (Holmes & Silverman, 1992; Kearney, 1998; Taylor, 1995). Research has also examined the under representation of women role models in school curricula (Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Holmes & Silverman, 1992; Sadker, 1995). The artistic representation of women has been prevalent in the tradition of Western Art history, but women artists have been under represented in our history books and in art criticism (Hess, 1995). Ann Calvert (1997) calls for a gender equal art curriculum where girls are exposed to artist women role models, and examples of art work that falls outside main-steam art production.

Researchers have also examined the gap between controversial contemporary art and school art (Jeffers & Parth, 1996). Turning Point and Under Construction are projects that can be considered both outside the mainstream, as well as controversial. Carol Jeffers and Pat Parth (1996) drew upon the experiences of students and teachers as they visited controversial contemporary art exhibits. They found that the students' and teachers' experiences could be characterized as "heightened awareness of controversial social and sexual issues, new ideas, materials and processes, themselves, and their own perceptual and conceptual shifts. These experiences suggest that when it is logistically accessible, controversial contemporary art also is conceptually accessible to students and teachers" (Jeffers & Parth, p. 24). Such learning experiences need to be investigated. I believe that Turning Point and Under Construction, where young women work closely with a contemporary artist, can also provide the type of opportunity which can bring about a heightened awareness of issues.

Deborah Smith-Shank (2000) has focused on giving light to women's experiences, as she has drawn upon the visual memories of elder women. Smith-Shank gives the tales of elder women respect as they recall their lives' events. Smith-Shank

considers these visual memories as "a way to facilitate exploration of what is important to the older persons themselves, to help them gain life satisfaction, and as a way to bridge the gap between the life experiences of generations" (p. 189). In the study of Turning Point and Under Construction, we also have the opportunity to listen to women's voices bridging generations, but this time we hear from the voices of youth. Women's experiences of all ages need to be considered worthy of investigation.

Women in education has also has been a topic of research. We have learned about the interest of women as adult learners (Bellamy & Guppy, 1991; Hayes, Flannery with Brooks, Tisdell & Hugo, 2000; Jackson, 1991; Rockhill, 1991), as educators (Coffey & Delamont; 2000; Irwin, 1995; Irwin & Miller 1997; Weiler, 1995), and as women recalling their own youth learning experiences (Miller, 1995; Smith-Shank, 1998, 2000).

In a typical school setting, Sue McGinty (1999) studied the experiences of five young women with life obstacles that usually hinder ones' success. McGinty sought to find out how these young women managed to become academically successful. Through her ethnographic study, she found that the young women, despite their disadvantages, wanted to do well in school. The women identified their own needs and sought support that they felt they required. They made and kept supportive friendships and built alliances with sympathetic school staff and faculty, to assist them with their school success. They also tapped into the school resources, such as the school guidance services.

This research focused on strategies used by some disadvantaged female youth in order to academically succeed. McGinty (1999) found that most of these young women held additional financial, and emotional familial responsibilities because they were young women. They couldn't rely on their parents for academic support and ended up emotionally supporting their parents, in some cases. Although this added to their overall stress, it also provided the young women with some sense of autonomy. They had to make things happen for themselves. They were responsive to "opportunities offered them at school, which enabled them to be seen as successful" (p. 141). "The young women realized that by being in the limelight of a leadership position, acting in a play, or

holding an official position in a club, they were becoming successful in the eyes of the school" (p. 141).

The girls believed in themselves, and in a brighter future. Some had experienced success in elementary school. All of them had memories of mentoring teachers who believed in them. While at times they needed to distance themselves from the troubles of their immediate families, their extended families sometimes offered helped. Relationships with academically inclined friends and sensitive teachers were seen as vital to the girls' success. It didn't appear that the content of what was taught held as much importance as the teacher's willingness to 'cut the slack' when things were tough. McGinty places the onus on schools to open up the ranks of 'the successful'.

In a more academically nurturing environment, Maureen Barbieri (1995) tells of her teaching and learning experiences teaching seventh grade literature and writing in a private all girls school. She found her students, these 'good girls', were filled with self-doubt and were preoccupied with what others thought of them. Through her teaching, Barbieri found a way to reach these girls and help them to find their voices and to confidently express their thoughts and feelings.

Barbieri was sensitive to the content in the literature often presented in schools in which girls or women play peripheral roles. "Reading books that feature the achievements of men, girls receive another lesson in second-class citizenship" (Sadker, 1995, p. x). In Myra & David Sadker's research they found that when they asked students to "list twenty famous women in American history (not counting entertainers and athletes), few can name even five." (M. Sadker, 1995, p. x). These findings are also supported by a Canadian survey of youth, conducted by Janelle Holmes and Elaine Leslau Silverman (1992), in which they found that:

> Women are virtually invisible in the list of public figures young people consider important or interesting, and whom they would like to speak or visit at their schools. Only 4% of the athletes named are women, only 8 of the 44 authors are women. Women make up just 14 of the 60 'famous' people, 31 of the 200 singers, and only seven of the 100 political figures whom young women would invite to their schools were women; three of them were, in fact, politicians' wives. (p. 62)

When again teaching in a co-ed classroom, Barbieri found herself, to her dismay, having slipped into the 'gender trap'. "Boys, it seems to me, will find ways to get what

they need from the system; it's the girls who are in the greatest danger of slipping away from us, quietly, unobtrusively, politely slipping away" (Barbieri, 1995, p. 226). From her research, and her teaching experience, Barbieri calls teachers to action:

> We must be proactive in finding out who they really are, what they really need, and how we can lead them to it. Drawing girls out, valuing their tentative ideas, and supporting their speculations will continue to be my highest priority in classrooms. Their "I don't know's" are all too common, whether they are alone or with boys, but we must not let such insecurity go unassuaged. The girls are not... "okay," just because they are cooperative; indeed their very cooperation is often a symptom of the danger they are in academically, psychologically, and socially.
>
> If we truly "don't know," it becomes incumbent upon us to wonder, to search, and finally to discover. But often, as I learned at Laurel [private girls' school] and my new school, these girls *do* know; they need their knowing validated. Nina speaks for all girls –those who are underground, those whose voices have been trained to polite docility, and those who in their hearts resist society's expectations –when she says with such vigor, "I have a really good idea." (p. 226)

Jane Gaskell and Arlene McLaren call for equal representation in the classroom. "To make schools 'girl friendly' involves, among other things, representing female experience in the curriculum. The most straightforward index of women's omission from the curriculum is a count of various indices –the number of female characters in elementary school readers, the number of female authors on the reading list, the number of women mentioned in a history text" (Gaskell & McLaren, 1991, p. 224).

Researchers have found the curriculum and school texts often lacking representation of the female experience. There is also a lack of artist role-models through there is a pervasiveness of young woman as subjects in much of Western Art history. The Geurrilla Girls have been quick to point out women artists still have not found equality with their male counterparts in the world of art exhibition. Although women make up the majority of fine arts students in colleges, universities, and art schools, they still remain under-represented in solo and group exhibitions. "Thanks to the Girls, dealers were embarrassed into representing a few token women in their galleries, and all-male shows are getting harder to find (Hess, 1995, p. 331).

What happens when a group of girls are in an all-girl environment that is supposed to empower them, nurture them, and provide them with opportunities to lead along with the chance to be mentored by women role models? In the Turning Point

project, young women were introduced to women artist role-models, and embarked on a journey of self-discovery, and empowerment. The project's goals responded to the calls of feminist educators and curriculum theorists. This was a project whose focus was the female youth experience. The project was to be peer-led, as well as mentored. This combination also responds well to calls for the importance of autonomy, and mentoring relationships with one's teachers, or role models. I had expected to witness the girls as they became self-empowered and truly found their own voices, and were finally heard. This seemed like such and ideal learning environment. I wanted to see this project be a success.

If one is working with participants in an art project where their stories and experiences make up the content of the piece then we need to be respectful and cautious about ones intentions and actions. Kirsch (1999), who writes about doing narrative feminist research, makes suggestions that I believe also apply to doing collaborative feminist art. Kisrch says that "when we decide to speak for others, we should be certain to share the reasons for our decision with readers [audience]. All the while, we should aim to include the voices of others more actively in our research by consulting with them. Assuming interpretive responsibility would mean not only presenting voices in dialogue, but also providing readers with access to the process that shaped the dialogue [or provide the audience with the process that shaped the art piece or performance]" (p.85).

We must ensure reflexivity within our own practices. In order to get closer to engaging in ethical research and I would add to this, ethical and truly collaborative art, we must be willing to be self-reflexive and self-critical. Artists, though, not necessarily acting as researchers, often deal with narratives and life experiences of their participants, and as such, they too should be reflexive in their own art practices. Reflexivity as the act of "reflecting upon and understanding our own political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers [collaborative artists] and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents [art participants]" (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 121). Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to make explicit the reflexivity of my research process.

Chapter 1 is my personal introduction as a researcher. It is my hope that this will provide a lens for my readers through which to understand the factors that brought me to this study in the first place and the influences that informed some of the central issues.

Chapter 2 places <u>Turning Point</u> in context of Suzanne Lacy's body of work, and in context of a selected review of collaborative community-based art projects. This provides the reader with an insight to the types of subject matter, and artistic practices used by Lacy and her contemporaries.

Chapter 3 describes the constructivist orientation and methodological foundations for this qualitative study. Feminist principles are woven throughout this narrative case-study, and inform methods of data collection, interpretation, analysis, and representation.

Chapter 4 focuses on interpretations of <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u> – a personal record of the day's events. The primary focus of this chapter rests with the experiences of youth participants, as well three older key participants as primarily told through transcribed research interviews. Here, I include a personal narrative and visual description of the performance event, <u>Under Construction</u>.

Chapter 5 brings together the key issues present in the study, and juxtaposes them with related literature, field-notes, and reflections in order to find meaning in their collective experiences, as told through narratives, written texts and other collected data materials. It also provides a place for reflection on this study; a discussion for the implications for theory; implications for artistic practice, and also implications for research.

Learning to listen – Learning to speak

"We are not just one single person, a unitary author, but rather a multitude of possibilities any of which might reveal itself in a specific field situation."

Lincoln (1997, p. 40)

I have kept track of my years in university through the ages of my children. Akask was three months old when I started my masters program. Wolfie was eighteen months old when I began my doctoral program. They are now nine and seven and half years old. Chloe will be eighteen months old when I finish. She won't recall a time when her mother was a student. The boys don't know a time when I haven't been a student.

Many things about my personal life have crept into my research. My sons frequently accompanied me during research interviews for my Masters thesis. They were often present during interviews and observations for this study as well. We live multidimensional lives with numerous responsibilities. Yvonna Lincoln (1997) reminds us how our "multiple selves feed into the writing or performance of a text, and multiple audiences find themselves connecting with the stories which they are told" (p. 38).

Gesa Kirsch (1999) calls for researchers to "go beyond making facile statements about our identity and begin the admittedly difficult but important analytical work of assessing precisely how these personal factors affect our work, how they enable certain perspectives and blind us to others" (p. 80). It is my intention that the explicit inclusion of my experience within this study and reflections on my writing of this report will open additional discourse and make more connections to a wider audience. Kirsch tells us that situating ourselves in our research is an important step in "rethinking traditional research procedures" (p. 83).

For more than a decade feminist along with constructivist researchers have called for researchers to acknowledge their positions within their studies. By including relative anecdotes, prose of our researcher's lives, we become part of the shift away from a "paradigm of supposed objectivity, neutrality, and distance to one that is invested in the generative value of researcher's identities, values and experiences" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 77). It is often from our personal experiences that we come to care about particular research problems and engage in specific types of research methods.

By advocating for researchers to open themselves to similar scrutiny that we ask of our study participants, and by revealing parts of lived experience in my research, I find that I am in good academic company. Through my review of literature, and second literature review following my study, I was delighted to find so many researchers who have engaged in reciprocal story-telling and have called for an end to the invisible author. Some of the authors informed the manner in which I conducted my study, while others have influenced how I have come to report on my research. Some of these authors include: Maureen Barbieri (1995); Leslie Rebecca Bloom (1998); Lyn Mikel Brown (1998); Norman Denzin (1997); Carolyn Ellis & Arthur Bochner (2000); Carolyn Ellis & Leigh Berger (in press); Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule

Goldberger & Jill Mattuck Tarule (1997); bell hooks (1990); Rita Irwin (1999); Joe Kincheloe (1997); Patti Lather & Chris Smithies (1997); Yvonna Lincoln (1997); and Kathleen Weiler (1995).

Merely embedding my stance in the study or providing a descriptive list of adjectives and group memberships is insufficient. Instead, I have chosen to be explicit about where I stand, and who I believe I am at this point in time. I have attempted to reveal various aspects of myself as they are "uncovered and identified as a part of the

REPAIRS MADE TO SPACECRAFT

The image above was from a local publication, *This Week*, Tuesday, June 1, 1987, p. 17A.

intense reflexivity which now marks postmodern ethnography and text-building" (Lincoln 1997, p. 40). By doing so, I hope to "help readers understand (rather than second guess) what factors have shaped the research questions at hand; it also helps ground the research report in a specific cultural and historical moment" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 14).

As a feminist art educator who believes adamantly in public education, I am partial to community-based public art projects. I believe there is an inherent value in public art. Successful public art is truly accessible, not selectively accessible in corporate towers, but physically accessible to the general public. I believe in the education of

youth. I believe strongly in the mentorship of young women. I find collaborative work to be very rewarding, whether team teaching, developing a project, making art, or planning the backyard play-space for my children. Working with a partner on a project where each brings unique ideas and strengths, can be extremely rewarding.

I attribute my interest in community-based, activist, public art projects to a single summer. It was the summer following my first of four years at the University of Regina where I completed a Bachelor of Education in Arts Education. It was the summer of '87 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Part of my summer job was to co-develop and deliver arts programs in Wakamaw Valley. Two co-workers and I decided to participate in cleaning some of the debris from the Moose Jaw River. Although underway, the cleanup was nowhere near completion. We wanted to blend the cleanup with an arts project. Although we advertised for adult public participation, we specifically recruited children and youth to participate. We also invited Joe

STUDENTS VOLUNTEER TO PAINT MURAL

Little by little and bit by bit, Wakamow Valley is turning into a beautiful tourist attraction for Moose Jaw. The Wakamow Valley Authority is improving the old River Park area on a gradual scale. Last week, a group of volunteer students got together to paint a mural on the cement wall of the train trestle near the sun shelter. In the top photo, painters got to work one morning and by the next afternoon, most of the work was completed. The painting of "The Edith", the Blu-ton family motor launch which operated on the Moose Jaw River in the early 1900s, measures 30 feet high by 17 feet wide. The painting was organized by Wakamow heritage educators Shauna Swanson, Lorrie Miller and Alayne Sagal. They are joined in the photos by Moose Jaw high school students, Heather Miller, Stephan Patterson, Penny Rodgers, Ila Tanna, Jill Tollefson Acton, Ron Blondeau and Loraine Harris. Gus Froese and Rob

Photo and Story credit: Leslie Shepherd, *This Week,* July 15, 1987 p. 17A

Fafard[1] to be a guest artist in this project. We were thrilled that he agreed. Fafard's presence drew more attention to the program and to this particular project.

At an invincible nineteen years old and just one year of university under my belt, I was an eager, yet apprehensive participant. *Really, what can we do?* I thought. All we had were an old beat up car (previously dredged from the river), a 3m wide satellite dish

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[1] Nationally and internationally recognized, Joe Fafard is best known for his large realistic grazing bronze cows located in downtown Toronto and Regina, as well as a bull in downtown Vancouver. He is also known for his bronze figures of well known celebrities: Diefenbaker, Queen Elizabeth, as well as Vincent Van Gogh. Fafard is from a farming community located equidistant between Moose Jaw and Regina. He now resides in Regina, Saskatchewan.

(dredged out of the river for us by a city crew) and a concrete foundation from a demolished house. We had hopes for our *drag stuff from the river and build sculpture out of it* project. We hoped we could raise public awareness about pollutants still in the river while engaging in a creative endeavour.

Was it successful? In some ways yes and other ways no. We completed what we had set out to do. There was plenty of local media coverage and community participation. However, I was less than satisfied with the resulting *temporary installation* that consisted of a painted wrecked car and a satellite dish turn spaceship. Looking back, and going over the final reports from the project, (*I can't believe that I still have them!*) it is clear that we didn't analyze the results of the project at the time. I wished then that it had looked better. Looking at the project now, I don't think the final product really mattered all that much. What really counted was the process. Having said that, the crudeness of the finished product hasn't affected how I now feel about the project.

Another memorable project from that same summer was a mural facilitated by Moose Jaw artist, Gus Froese. We brought a small group of teens together from across the city and painted a mural representing a historic scene on a "graffiti prone" concrete wall of the train trestle.

Gus Froese guided our little group through the ropes of constructing a 17'x 20' mural. We finished the painting of "The Edith" (an early 20th century river boat, operated by the Plaxton family) in less than three days. In the <u>Monthly Report</u>, Alayne Sewell states that the final product was impressive and the teenagers were amazed with their accomplishment (July, 1987). The sponsors and the city were also very impressed.

For more than a decade, only the extreme prairie seasons marked our mural. We last saw the faded mural in July 1998 while on a family vacation. When we returned to Moose Jaw in July 2000, all that remained was a freshly painted grey wall. The lower handrail that once underlined the names of the participants was raised to the level of the rest of the rail along park pathway, leaving us only memories. I felt a little sad about the loss of the mural, as it always brought me a sense of pride. I had hoped that the wall was simply being prepared for another painting project. It was about time.[2]

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[2] As I had hoped, summer 2001, Gus Froese and a walking group of older men (who call themselves the 'Grumpy Old Men') painted a near replica of our 1987 mural. "The Edith" has a second life.

My friend and co-worker, Alayne Sewell, went on to work for the City of Moose Jaw in the Department of Art, Recreation and Culture and initiated an ambitious mural program. "The Edith" proved that heritage murals would be welcomed by the residents. Moose Jaw now boasts 27 new murals, part of a heritage program.

This was the beginning of my interest in public art. My interest and involvement continues. From April to July, 1998, I was a participant in a feminist, community-based art project titled *House of Mirrors*. A group of women with personal histories touched by eating disorders, and issues around body image were lead by local artists and project coordinators. Together they produced an art exhibit at the Roundhouse Community Centre, that addressed issues surrounding women, eating disorders and body image. The process involved five small groups including one artist leader and four or five participants. Our canvasses were five, 5' mirrors. Each of the groups addressed different topics in their work. Some of the topics included: "the lies we were told," "swallowing those lies," and "telling our truths".

Postcard from House of Mirrors Exhibition, 1998.

In our group we had a ten year old girl, a twelve year old girl and us *older girls*, aged 30 - 50. We had a wide range of artistic and life experiences that filtered through the mirrors. We focused on "telling our truths". It was a series of mixed media panels that talked about personal healing, strength and sharing stories.

Besides making works of art for an exhibition we formed a wonderful working group. I was delighted to have been part of such a creative and generous group of women. It was a unique experience for me as I met with another woman in our group who also wore a back-brace as a teen. Because I have scoliosis, I spent four years wearing my 'cage'. This was something that I hadn't thought about for many years. But

through this creative forum, we added our different yet relevant experiences to the collection of distorted body perceptions and reactions, and recovery. Although my demons are rather ancient, it was wonderful giving them a little exorcizing. The show was well received and will be re-mounted in traveling education tours.

These experiences tell how I first became interested in collaborative forms of art production and how I try to continue my personal involvement in them. It is this interest in collaborative, accessible and personally engaging art that brought me to this study. The art project Turing Point is the site of this inquiry. Its artistic director is internationally renowned performance artist, Suzanne Lacy. In the second chapter, I will describe her artistic background to better place Turning Point into the context of her body of work. Primarily, Turning Point dealt with the life experiences young women from Vancouver.

Turning Point set out to give voice and to empower young women. This subject and intent drew me in. I wanted to believe it was possible. I wanted to be there to help, and to witness it happen. It is work that I believe, so desperately needed to be done – empower our youth. There is no need for them to remain silent, on the contrary, there is need for them to speak out. They deserve to be heard.

Because most of my study participants are young women I found it necessary to reflect on my own adolescent feelings about feminism (Women's Lib – as a child in the '70s, a teen in the '80s), I recalled that feminism, for me, meant non-feminine. Born and raised in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, the eldest of four and on the verge of being a woman, all I wanted was to be feminine, strong, but sexy. After all, I grew up with the Charlie's Angels, Wonder Woman, and Jamie Summers – the Bionic Woman – the first female cyborg. Images of free-love (if only in images) filled my TV's two channels. Feminism wasn't represented in those heroines, for me feminism meant hard-edged, in-your-face, no make-up and certainly not liking boys.

That definition of feminism didn't fit the description of the women that I knew growing up. I had been exposed to many strong independent women, not flawless, but strong. My mother and her friends were long time and founding members of the local Transition House, a shelter for battered women and children.

The things that occurred at "the House" on a daily basis embodied concern, care and action toward the improvement of women's living conditions. The House was an informal coming-of-age place for the young women in my family. Many of us spent at least one summer working at the House with the children who where staying there. It was wonderful, sorrowful and eye-opening.

Still, I don't think I ever heard the term *feminist*. They were too busy *doing it* to talk and write about it. The work of Janice Ristock and Joan Pennell (1996) on self-defined feminist collectives in Canada included rape crisis shelters, sexual assault centres, and shelters for battered women and emergency crisis hostels. These collectives often held a common goal: to provide a safe environment for women in need (along with other situationally appropriate support services). Yet, the participants did not agree upon a single definition of what feminism means. This didn't surprise me, as I noticed during my work-time at the House, philosophical discussions about feminism didn't occur. Discussions were about survival and improving the everyday existence of women in need. Now, that isn't to say that those conversations didn't, or don't happen, I just didn't see it.

I have clearly identified my own underlying assumption that being a feminist is a more desired state of being than not being a feminist. My spouse is a feminist man with whom I try to parent our sons and now our daughter to be empowered youth. I live my assumptions, but feel that they must be stated within this context.

I have explored various ways to tell the stories present in this thesis. I hope to present diverse ways of knowing and acknowledge pluralism, by using narrative prose, visual texts and layering narratives, analyses and research literature. Yvonna Lincoln (1997) tells us that "the idea that we can think consciously about presenting and representing the stories we tell proffers an enticing invitation to think reflexively and self-consciously –not just about he fieldwork we do, but also about the means we choose and use to relay our fieldwork tales to audiences" (p. 38). Norman Denzin (1997) describes various forms of performance texts researchers have been experimenting with over the past decades. One form in particular that resonated with me is what he calls the "mystory". "The mystory is simultaneously a personal mythology, a public story, and a performance that critiques. It is an interactive, dramatic performance"(p. 201). These

montages may include elements from the writer's personal history that are written, visual, cinematic, and auditory. "The mystory text begins with those moments that define the crisis in question, a turning point in the person's life" (p.202).

Since my inquiry focuses on an art performance whose subject is the collection of stories of young women, I have considered developing a performance text to present this investigation as I search for meanings in the narratives and experiences surrounding the art performance. Through reflection on possible representations of the inquiry, I return to story-telling. Not the type of linear story-telling with a clear beginning, plotted dramatic action leading to a definitive ending, but more of a narrative montage, a mystory (Denzin, 1997). As I read about mystories and autoethnographies, I considered how I have desired to present my research to various audiences. Within restrictions of presentations, including time and location, any attempt to present the 'whole story', reduces it to a personal myth. *Whose story am I telling anyway?* At best, I can present a brief excerpt from mystory that may achieve verisimilitude with others experiences in the art performance, that may resonate with research experiences of my audience.

Sometimes, while presenting *my research* I have felt that I am telling a group of friends about my adventure, perhaps of a vacation, as I flip through illustrative slides, and add commentary to broaden the picture for them. In between the slides, or excerpts of video, I tell of my thoughts, reflections, research methods and analyses of the inquiry. After the slide-show and talk, there is usually a discussion where audience members ask about 'what happened when...?' or 'did you consider such-and-such?' or they add to my story with 'theirstory' of a relative event or experience.

Other times while presenting my research, I have felt that 'they -the audience- don't want to hear mystory, they expect something tidier, more definitive than what I may be offering at the moment. My doubt creeps in, I wonder "maybe they don't care, maybe they don't believe me..." It is then I feel exposed, vulnerable, exposed, small... I feel my own silence coming on.

I recall my first day of kindergarten. I was four. I was small. It was there I learned how to be silent.

> *1971, Ross School, old brick building, hot crowded classroom.. Mom walked me to school that day. Me in my new haircut, bangs short, straight across my forehead - new glasses hexagonal ovoid, tortoiseshell – new*

shoes, black, buckles, tight on my toes. I was four and a half (when half years counted). My mom was a babe, all of 23. What was she thinking?

We sat around low tables. Kevin Best –the pest –kept changing seats to sit beside me. I kept moving away. He had a buzz-cut, such a nerd. He liked me. We used to be friends, that was before school started, before I knew anyone else. We had just moved into the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Bazinski was my teacher. She had us play games, tests of sorts. We had to stick small plastic coloured pegs into a perforated white plastic board. We were supposed to stand up as soon as we had completely filled our board. It was a race. I was quick, really quick. I was first. I stood up quickly too. Mrs. B. came over, my heart pounding. She took my perfectly filled plastic board. "Sit down," she told me. I sat. Then Lenny finished his board. She chose him to be the first child finished, the winner of the race.

My heart sank. "What's going on?" I thought. "I'll show her. I'll be first next time too." For the second test-game, we each received a piece of paper and a fat wax crayon. Mine was green. We were to draw a solid circle on the paper by making concentric rings in the centre of the paper, tightly spiralling outward. Okay, so mine got a little loose near the outer edges, but so did everyone else's. I was first again. More abruptly this time, she ordered me to sit back down. Being finished first didn't seem to matter if you were a girl in that class. I was never to be picked for being first.

I don't remember ever having fun in Kindergarten, even now as I look back through the luxury of time. I'm glad, however, that I stood up to Mrs. B. I knew that I had seen a turtle as big as a dog (even if it was a tortoise). I knew that it was big enough to sit on. I had sat on it at the Calgary Zoo the summer before I started school.

When I told her about the turtle, she told me that I was lying and that I should stop making up stories. My mom was there. "Why didn't she say something?" I wondered – I wonder. "She knew the truth, she was at the zoo too." I thought that perhaps Mrs. B. was right, maybe it had all been a dream. I doubted my memory –myself. When I asked my mom about it, she gave me a black and white glossy photo of me sitting on the back of this beast of a 'turtle'. I took the photo to school. "So, what do ya say now, Mrs. B???" I thought to myself as I silently handed her the picture with my quivering little hand. When I could hold back no longer, I blurted out, "I told you so." She shoved me aside, literally pushed me away. My mom was there that time too. She didn't say anything. I don't know why, she doesn't either.

This story takes me back to my four-year-old self where I learned about fairness, power, and silence. I shared this experience with my mother. I recently asked her about this memory. She also recalls it much this way. She questioned her silence and her awe

of authority. After all, Mrs. B. had also been her brother's kindergarten teacher, and her mother's teaching colleague. She assures me now, that she knows she should have said something. But then, she was so young and unsure of herself.

I also shared this story with a journalist friend of my husband and me. Mō k spoke of how this story resonated with him. He told me that not only was he surprised at how personal this was for an academic writing, but that it made him think of his own silencing as a child, also in kindergarten. I was pleased with his response, as I had hoped to have this effect on some of my readers. If we can find moments in our own lives where our voices were silenced by another, then perhaps we can better understand those who are still silent.

My reasons for including this anecdote of my first days of school are to explore and reveal my memories of silence. These may not have been my very first silencing experiences, but it is what I recall. I do know, it wasn't my last. I have found it impossible to deny the effects of silencing and recovery of voice. Throughout my graduate work, and in particular the work on my doctoral thesis, I realize that I am still in a process of recovering –discovering my voice. I believe that my acknowledgement of my own history of silence will help me to understand and to find meaning in the experiences of Turning Point participants, and the events that led to the performance Under Construction. What started out as an exploration of an art project has turned to an inquiry about voice, power and representation.

We learn silence from observations and from our own experiences. Likewise, we can learn power and voice. Power comes in various forms. We may experience or witness power imbalances within our own gender, within our own socio-economic group, within our own intimate relations. It is not always easy to identify or to acknowledge these imbalances. We may want to deny that they exist, or even chalk them up to an anomaly.

Within this story of an inquiry there are narratives of others, of me, and research literature. I have tried to weave these narrative strands together into meaningful understandings of experience and phenomena. It is not a single truth that I seek to reveal. But rather, I seek to present a story where layers of experiences and voices come together so that they might resonate with various audiences. In the end, I am the assembler of the

final text, and my voice is ever present throughout it all. This element in itself has caused me to consider my roles as a feminist researcher and writer. Issues of privileged voice and power are also present throughout this study.

I have spent a great amount of energy and time thinking about representation: there is no right answer to how to best present this research. I have tried to be thorough, ethical and to give way to my creativity –kick the science habit, as Yvonna Lincoln (1997) suggests to her graduate students. "Breaking the science habit can only come when we have sufficient self-knowledge (read: reflexivity) to understand ourselves deeply, and to accept ourselves with all our fieldwork, collegial, and human frailties. When we can exorcise the academic writing, or at least view it as only one of the many languages of the self, we will see the self emerging textually" (Lincoln, 1997, p. 51).

The methods we choose for telling our stories, within our research can vary. Along with my personal prose, I have chosen to include visual expressions on how I interpret my ways of working and of revealing. The mix of black and white clipped digitized photos of myself, interspersed with the words. If read them from top to bottom and left to right, they are: *SEE, YOU, YOU, SEE, ME, BLINK, I, I, SEE, YOU.* This translucent layer positioned over a layer of colour fields, arranged into a balanced planned pattern, that reads: *you, see, me, see, you.* Either layer can be viewed on its own or as telling part of the story. Or, they can be read together, each page referring to the other, engaging the reader in my dialogue. This still only tells a bit more of the story, adding colour to the picture, but still it is a partial and situated story. I have framed myself for the reader. It is an incomplete, yet multi-faceted picture of photo fragments of me from different moments of my life: one from a little weekend getaway with my spouse, one taken from as part of collaborative feminist art project where women photographed each other for the purposes of exploring our perceptions of our own bodies. The third photo was really just me pressing my face to the surface of my scanner while I made a birthday card for a friend. But, these aren't revealed in the slices of photos themselves (though now one may make a fairly accurate guess as to which one was which).

What I have tried to say with this image is that I wish to reveal part of who I am to 'you' -study participants, and my audience. Any attempt to reveal my whole self, or

whole anything, is a modernist myth. *Blink,* the pause for reflection. *I, eye* engaged in reflection and reflexivity as I analyzed my own actions and assumptions about my research and writing practices. I have tried to convey the reciprocal watching of research. *I see 'you'.* I acknowledging that 'you' too *see me.* I –eye, see you, see me, see you – and on it goes. However, in this case, Turning Point, the watching is bounded by the event. It did come to an end. Yet the exploration of this experience continues as I reflect on and analyze the narratives and shared experiences.

In this chapter I have tried to present a personal context for reading this thesis. I have included some of my basic personal information, along with the list of clubs I hold cards for (ie: parent's club, feminist wives' club, former Moose Javian and community art groupie to name a few). I have attempted to go beyond this list to provide my readers with some insight into who I am and what I stand for. I have included my experiences in community art along with a personal tale of silence. In the next chapter I will introduce to you the artistic director of Turning Point, Suzanne Lacy, and her body of work.
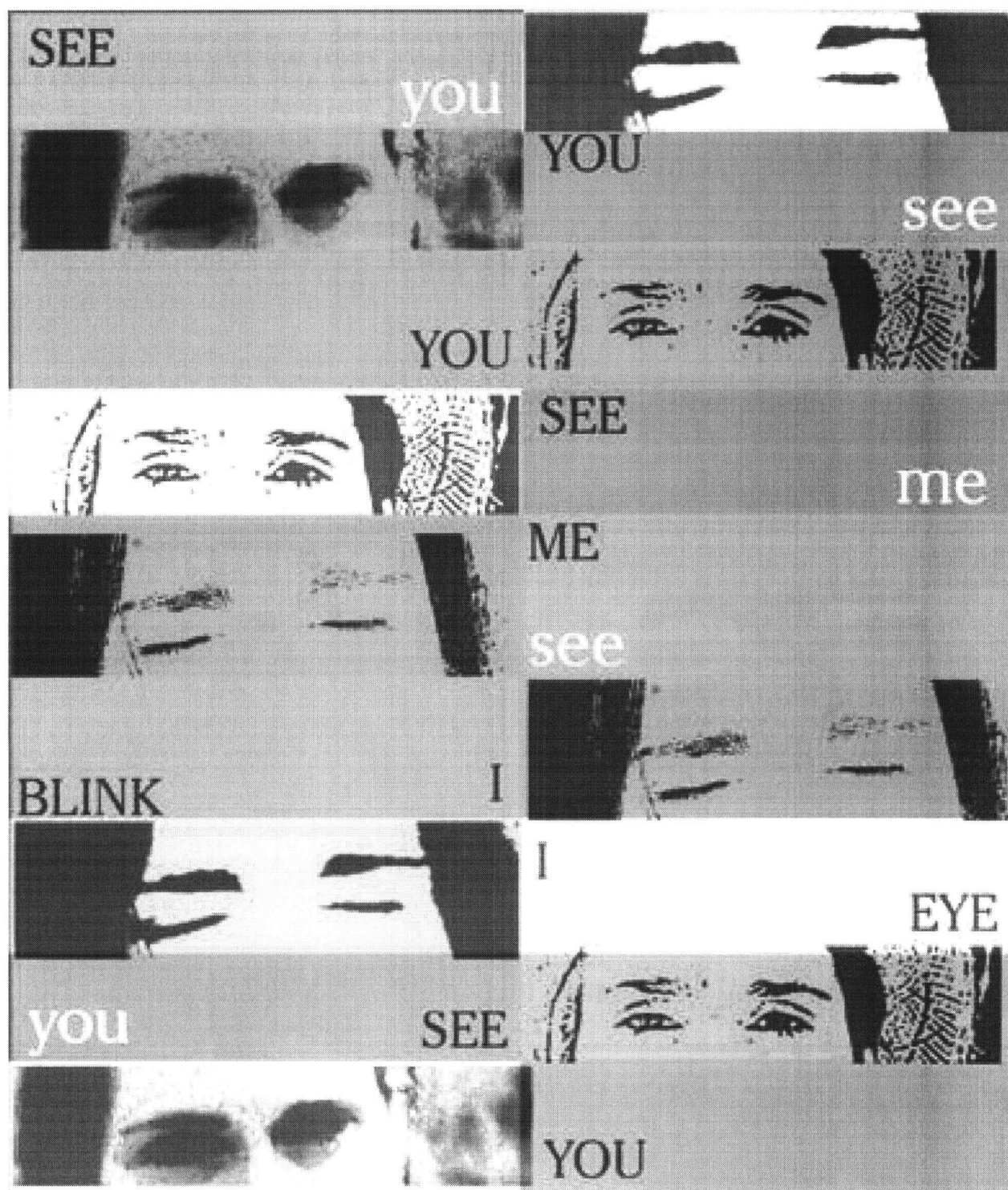
CHAPTER 2: SUZANNE LACY: DIRECTING FROM THE SIDELINES,

AND THE WORK OF OTHER PUBLIC ARTISTS

"Lacy's work is a "hard-to-describe hybrid art..." Moira Roth (1982, p.72)

(Lacy's)"work is a performative curriculum because it opens a liminal space, within which a community can engage a critical discourse, a space wherein decisions are contingent upon the collective desires of its citizens, as well as an ephemeral space because it is applicable to the particular time and place for which it has been designed. Thus, for Lacy, communities are contested sites, and performance art is a function of community development."

Charles R. Garoian (1999, p. 128)

Suzanne Lacy

Unconventional, explicitly feminist, active, grand... Suzanne Lacy's work involves making art with people. Where some public artists' "work involves sculpting with materials, Lacy says her work is 'sculpting with people and people's lives'" (Rebecca Wigod, 1997). Lacy is known for staging large scale productions that blur public and private domains. In order to more fully understand the context of Turning Point and Under Construction, I have compiled a selection of Lacy's earlier art works along with the works of other activist oriented contemporary artists. Performance art and community-based art projects described in this section are based on published critiques, reviews and essays. Although this review covers more than twenty years of artistic production, it does not provide a complete picture of these works. Details of projects and performances are primarily descriptive and give little information on the processes, on what happened behind-the-scenes.

Lacy's work, as described by Moira Roth (1982), is a "hard-to-describe hybrid art which evolved out of Dada Futurist theatre; post-World War II experimental dance theatre, music, poetry and Happenings; the dramatic political life, rituals, and encounter groups of the 1960s and, for Lacy, the women's movement" (p. 72). Lacy (1996) tells of her feminist artistic roots in the late 1960s at the California Institute of Arts: "we began to develop a political art that was participatory, egalitarian, and reflective of both the personal and collective truth of women's experiences. We wanted art that made changes, either in its maker or its audience" (p. 784). Lacy's early sentiments on her passion for egalitarian art production, resonated for me with Turning Point goals.

Lacy, who identifies herself as a feminist, recognizes that there are numerous constructions of feminism. She sees pluralism within feminism as being detrimentally fragmented, and risks forgetting our history. "Activism is pitted against analysis, with clear cut art-world bias toward the latter, oddly similar to the art world's condescension to political and community-based art during the 1970s. [....] When theory is disconnected from activism it is robbed of its vitality –its life, some of us would say. Women artists have fallen into a trap of divisiveness. Each succeeding generation has bought the media's version of the previous one...." (Lacy, 1996, p. 786). Lacy claims that the result is that we have a loss of values and no sense of why we act or analyze.

Performance artist and educator Charles Garoian (1999) positions Lacy, along with other postmodern artists, in opposition to modernist art's hegemonic discourses and practices.

> The function of subjectivity and agency for postmodern performance artists is the production of critical citizenship, civic responsibility, and radical democracy. Performance artists such as Rachel Rosenthal, Suzanne Lacy, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and others problematize the exclusionary practices of the modernists, combining their interdisciplinary practices with intercultural investigations in order to expose the hidden agendas of the cultural mainstream." (p. 9)

The political project of postmodern performance artists is the decentralization of authority by aestheticizing ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, race, and class distinctions. (Garoian, 1999, p. 10)

In his work exploring 'performance pedagogy', Garoian (1999) describes the role of an artist, in a community-based performance, "like Lacy's, the artist functions as a mediator, soliciting ideas from community members and fostering their participation in the production of art works that see the vital interests of their community. The democratic principles of this performance strategy are further reflected by the documentation and dissemination of these community-based works through printed publications, videotape, and the World Wide Web, thus giving access to an even broader sector of the public" (p. 28). Lacy's work involves engaging numerous groups and individuals to form a coalition for the purpose of producing a final art performance.

Holding Lacy's work as exemplary for performance art pedagogy, Garoian (1999) tells how Lacy brings together willing community participants, including policy makers,

business leaders, parents, teachers, youths and elderly in order to co-create a public project. As an outsider, she goes into (or is invited into a community) and engages participants in critiquing their own oppression. Garoian tells us, "As a feminist artist with a working-class heritage, Lacy understands cultural oppression…[Yet] her own identity in a community project is elusive. Although she manages, directs, and facilitates, she does so from the sidelines of a project, pulling it together. The purpose of her art is to make public the voice of those who are not heard" (p.129).

Clearly, issues of voice, power and representation, are deeply woven throughout her history of work. Yet, I am not certain why Garoian described Lacy as 'knowing' the meaning of 'cultural oppression' in any personal way. How can a highly educated, famous, (let alone employed), white American know what it means to be culturally oppressed? As a white educated Canadian woman, I would never claim to 'know' cultural oppression, no matter what I have been told by those who have experienced it. I can 'know of', but not 'know' as those who have faced oppression. This is merely an example of the dominant culture co-opting the phrase 'cultural oppression'. We need to reserve the meaning of this phrase for when it is appropriate in order that it maintains its meaning, and its potency.

In her projects, Lacy delegates responsibilities to participants which are related to their particular skills, and directs their involvement. "As an accomplished artist, she assumes final authority over its imagery to ensure artistic quality, a criterion that is essential to luring mass-media coverage and challenging its stereotypical representation of the community" (Garoian, 1999, p. 129). Project participants have approval on the content of the performance, but they "must agree that Lacy retains full authority" (p. 152). According to Garoian (1999) "Lacy claims the problem of authority always comes up in one form or another, and she honestly tries to engage in it. [In an interview with Garoian, Lacy said] 'These are not workshops for teaching public art per se. (Instead) we are going to do a professional work together, collaboratively[1]'" (p. 152). Lacy assumes authorship for the final image, although she claims the central ideas remain with the participants. But if Marshall McLuhan is right and "the medium is the message" then Suzanne Lacy has final authority over both. It is not possible to separate the authority of

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[1] This interview occurred concurrent with the <u>Turning Point</u> project and <u>Under Construction</u> performance.

the aesthetic image from the authority of the message. What happens to the integrity of participating voices? What happens to the final message that is heard by the audience after it has been sifted and refined through the artist's aesthetic filter and then mirrored back by media coverage? Ultimately who is heard?

An essential aesthetic experience in Lacy's work is empathy as "it provides an embodied connection between the artist and the world" (Garoian, 1999, p. 149). Art critic, Jeff Kelly (1995) tells us that:

> Lacy is never sentimental about the lives or experiences of her participants. What she hopes for is the mutual creation of some common ground, which if it happens, usually does so in the wake of much debate, struggle, and –in the final analysis – good faith. Empathy is not the appropriation of another's experience. It is an experience of appropriate connection with others. Lacy does not appropriate, but insists –sometimes quite forcefully –on the possibility of empathic connection. These connections are the "public" domain of Lacy's work. The body is their common juncture. Empathy is not a function of the mind over the body, but of the body *as* mind. (p. 249)

Lacy's art projects are participatory and deal with the content of individual lives, with community dynamics and media representation. We also know that she does not overtly place her own story into these public co-productions. Though these works are usually called collaborative, it is not clear as to the nature of the collaboration. Issues of power and representation enter into discussion with her participants as she engages them in critique of their own oppression, and analysis of media's representation of them. Yet, we don't know about the power dynamic that Lacy has inherently entered into with them. We know little about their analysis and critique of her aesthetic representation of them in the context of the public performance. Within this context, framing her working practice, the following descriptions of Lacy's performance art will illustrate some the themes that have from
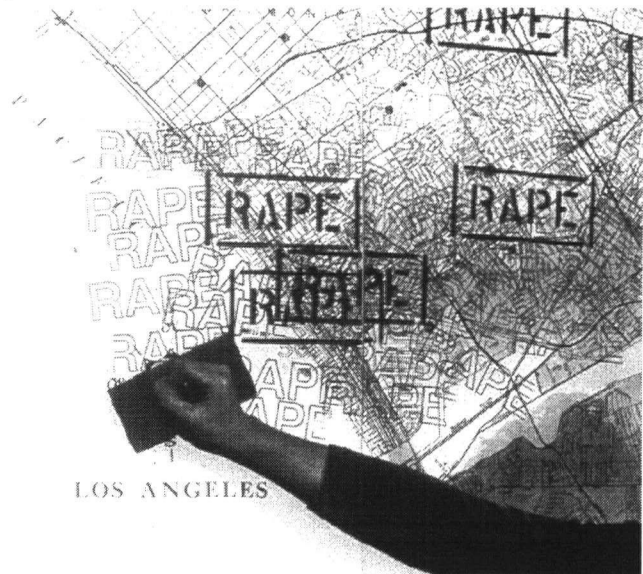
photo credit: Robert Blakack, California College of Arts and Crafts; Oakland. (In Lacy, 1995, p. 252)

Lacy's community art performances that have been produces with various groups over the past few decades.

Selected Art Works from 1977 - 1994

In 1977, Lacy collaborated with the Los Angeles Police Department and various other community organizations in the creation of Three Weeks in May. This project was comprised of thirty events held all across Los Angeles. This piece was focused on raising awareness of violence against women. Part of the project included a large map in which a red stamp marked the map each time a rape was reported. The L.A. map became a sea of red. Another map indicated locations of support services. Lacy says, "It was used as both organizing device… to bring people together from different anti-violence organizations and different political perspectives together on the same programs –and as a way to create public dialogue on rape and women's solutions for it" (cited in Josephine Withers 1994, p. 171). Press coverage was key to bringing this piece to a larger public forum. The importance of playing to a media audience is usually featured in Lacy's work. Lacy's engaged in an effort to raise public awareness about violence against women. She presented statistics about violence against women and listed public services available to those affected by violence. Lacy sought to bring change through public awareness via the media.

photo credit: Suzanne Lacy (Lopez & Roth, 1994, p.150)

That same year, Lacy collaborated with artist Leslie Labowitz and local women's groups to stage the performance In Mourning and in Rage on the steps of the Los Angeles City Hall (Lopez & Roth, 1994). The performance was in response to the media's sensational coverage of the hillside strangler who had recently killed his tenth victim. Lacy

(1994) tells of how she and Labowitz "analyzed conventions of television news, deconstructed the gender representation in sex-violent news reporting, and created a performance that critiqued this construction even as it called for concrete action ... We attempted to subvert various conventions of sex-violent reporting –like focusing on the identity of the victim as an explanation of why the crime occurred –with both imagery and statements made during the performance" (p. 267).

The performance began with a motorcade carrying fifty women, clad in black, from the Women's Building to City Hall. Once on the steps, nine of the women in black, wore towering head-dresses and veils. These towering women created an undeniable ominous appearance. Behind them hung a banner (designed to fit into a television screen) which read "IN MEMORY OF OUR SISTERS WOMEN FIGHT BACK. One woman dressed entirely in red addressed the audience. "The women's terse text placed the Hillside Strangler case into a much larger continuum of male violence against women including wife abuse and incest" (Lopez & Roth, 1994, p.151).

Lacy used the media to extend the reach of her work to a broad audience. The work, overtly political, used the visual aesthetics with its staging and props to impress their message upon their intended public audience. A work like this would be very unlikely to succeed in a typical gallery space. One would not be able to count on the massive viewing audience, nor would the political message be as potent. To arrange a show in a significant gallery venue takes often a year's notice. Timing in this scenario was vital. The story of the Hillside Strangler was well covered by print and televised media. In order to reach the same audience that had been following the story, it was vital that the artists use the same medium for their piece. The motivation for the production was not simply an aesthetic one, it moved beyond the modernist aim of formal aesthetic properties, and into the realm of social change.

Also in 1977, Lacy collaborated with Kathleen Chang to create the performance Life and Times of Donaldina Cameron presented in San Francisco. Dramatic readings and acted monologues involved the two characters, Donaldina Cameron, played by Lacy, and Leung Ken-Sun. Bhang created this fictional character modeled after Chang's husband's grandmother. Their performance focused on the experiences of young Asian women who unwillingly immigrated to California (often forcibly taken and enslaved).

Cameron hounded political powers for more than seventy years as she sought both political reform and legal guardianship of the women in her care (Stein, 1996).

In 1978, Lacy, Labowitz, Ariadne (A Social Art Network - an affiliation of women in the arts, media, government, and feminist community) and other organizers collaborated to produce the first, Take Back the Night rally. In the San Francisco rally they staged a mass ritual performance after a *Feminist Perspectives in Pornography Conference.*

Lacy designed a float which trailed 3000 chanting women. Spectators saw a huge adorned Madonna on the float. However when the float passed, spectators were then faced with the gruesome carcass of a three-headed lamb stuffed and overflowing with pornographic text and photos (Stein, 1996, p.233). The performance concluded when twenty women in black destroyed the printed material and the march moved to its final destination while singer Holly Near sang "Fight Back." Take Back the Night rallies have become annual events in various locations throughout North America. No longer viewed as performance art pieces, they are gathering sites for urban women who gain strength in numbers and walk through an urban core at dusk. The battle to be safe in our cities has yet to be won more than twenty years later.

Judy Chicago's Dinner Party is one of the most widely known examples of feminist collaborative art projects. The Dinner Party which opened at the Brooklyn Museum in 1979, also provided impetus and setting for Suzanne Lacy's International Dinner Party. On the opening night of the Dinner Party, Lacy orchestrated to have over 2000 women dine together world-wide, in various sized groups to honour women of their choice. Judy Chicago also provided Lacy with a working model for large scale art projects. Where Chicago produced objects of art on the grand scale, Lacy produced art events. Later in this chapter, I will look further at Chicago's artistic practice and some of the critique surrounding her work.

Eating within a community may not form a work of art, unless of course that is the intent of the meal. However, in many of Lacy's art projects, gatherings around tables, either for eating or talking, has often been featured. Her performances take common domestic scenes and turn them into spectacles. There are meals taken together by performance participants during the planning phase of performance production. Pizzas,

muffins, juice and coffees were often shared amongst the younger and older <u>Turning</u> <u>Point</u> women. Conversations flowed easily while we ate. There was an unwritten policy to make sure the girls were always fed. A nurturing environment like this can aid in the development of trust and community.

In line with her previous extravagant international pot-luck, Suzanne Lacy choreographed another grand dinner party in New Orleans, in 1980. Organizers of the Women's Caucus for Art conference invited Lacy to participate in their protest. They were obligated to hold their conference in New Orleans "in a state that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment" (Stein, 1996, p. 235). Delegates protested the conference organizers' choice of location by boycotting local restaurants and hotels, opting to stay in private homes and cook and eat together. This led Suzanne Lacy to create <u>River</u> <u>Meetings: Lives of Women in the Delta</u>. The evening of theatre, poetry readings and dramatizations took place upon the opening of the conference including a potluck meal that brought together 500 ethnically diverse women to celebrate their southern heritages. Roth (1993) quotes Lacy's written reflections on this event, she had "'a feeling of certainty that there was real energy afoot among women there and that this performance had helped crystalize [sic] it.' Various subsequent projects have been proposed – including the beading of a tapestry of names signed at the dinner –but, after several meetings, the New Orleans planning committee ceased to convene" (p. 161).

As I write and summarize each of the performance descriptions I find myself wanting to know more, sensing that there must be more. What else happened at these events? How did the performances affect the lives of those who participated? What happened next, or was that all there was? How was it received by the community in which it was held? How did each of these events relate to the next? Where is the critique? All I can find are descriptions. Where are the voices of the participants?

On August 13, 1982, in a Roch Bobois furniture store, in San Francisco, a tableaux of 100 women participants came to life in <u>Freeze Frame: Room for Livingroom</u>. The women came from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic backgrounds, abilities and ages. The costumes and props were decided by the participants.[2] The audience, made up

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[2]The text (Roth, 1986; 1993) does not discuss the decision making process which determined the exact props, the setting of the props, or the costuming.

mostly of family members and friends of the participants, was estimated at between 400 and 600 individuals.

Participants included African American churchwomen, teenagers, Philippine women, sex-trade workers, ex-psychiatric inmates, pregnant women, co-operate women, Chicana artists, non-traditional workers and nuns. The furnishings consisted of a long pink sofa, a white duck couch, hard upright red lacquer chairs, wood and wicker dining set, a mask and a black satin purse stuffed with hundreds of bank notes, spilled pills and syringes, yellow writing pads and pens. The costuming ranged from leg-warmers for the teenagers, overalls for the non-traditional workers, to contemporary habits for the nuns (Roth, 1982).

The theme of the piece claimed to be survival. The general intent was to capture and present to an audience a "pre-coalition snapshot," a vision of potential community between women from various backgrounds (Roth, 1982, p.71). The women seated in homogeneous groupings, discussed stories from their lives that involved survival. The performance was choreographed in such a way that the women sat in silence for fifteen minutes before being instructed to begin their dialogues or monologues

The description of this performance raises many questions for me. Who determined that a posh furniture store was a suitable setting for these women, none of whom seem likely to ever enter let alone shop there? When the women were seated in homogeneous groups for their performance, how does this represent a community or coalition? The idea that it was a pre-coalition snapshot strikes me as a bit optimistic. This claim assumes that there was eventually a coalition formed. This, I doubt to be true. I am faced with more questions from this performance than its brief description can answer.

How true was this community? Did it reflect the built relationships of these women or an image of a potential community? Whose dream community did this represent? What happened to the group, to the individual women, after the performance? How did it affect their lives, if at all? Was it a moment in the present, a reflection of their past, a new beginning.... How did this relate to their lives, in their own words? What happened when it was over? Where did these women go after, how did they relate to one another without the context of the performance?

Through her group presentations Lacy taught participants about this form of art so that they would have some understanding of a living tableau they were about to create. Roth (1982) describes how Lacy describes her vision of the performance tableaux to a group of possible participants, she recalls, "I watch the first meeting of the elderly Jewish women at the community center. Twenty in all listen to Suzanne's description of a 'living painting of women.'[3] They are taken with the image" (p. 73). We learn little more about these meetings or what happened in group facilitations. How did the images develop, who determined the use of metaphor. Lacy directed the movements in this performance. In a brief description, we get a glimpse of what it was like, "after fifteen minutes of silent tableau, Lacy flashes a green card at the sex workers and they begin to speak. She goes from group to group signalling, and voices rise to flood the space" (Roth, 1982, p.74).

On May 19, 1984, along adjacent beach coves in the retirement and resort community of La Jolla, California, over 150 women in white, shared personal stories, often secrets, about living and dying in Whisper, The Waves, the Wind. Suzanne Lacy collaborated with Susan Stone to create the sound score for this performance. The audience perched on the cliffs above the performers could only hear the sounds of the wind, waves and the pre-recorded women's conversations.

Approximately 160 white-clad women aged 65 - 100 arrived in a slow procession and seated at 40 card tables covered in white cloths. The women held conversations on topics of appearance, physical problems, sexuality, freedom, nursing homes, and death. The performance ended when the audience was permitted to join the women in their discussions on the beach. Again the energy following this performance dwindled and ceased. "So what are we left with? We are given these vast pageantlike gatherings of women celebrating their differences, their commonalities, their survival, and their wisdom –performances with enormous poetic impact but hollow in terms of action-oriented resonance" (Roth, 1993, p. 161). Roth also tells us that both the Whisper Project along with Freeze Frame, "failed to generate further activities in the city," (p. 161).

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[3]Lacy refers to 'living paintings' time and time again in describing her performance work. This will be further investigated in relation to Turning Point and Under Construction.

May 10, 1987, Suzanne Lacy's <u>Crystal Quilt</u> was executed in the Crystal Court of the IDS Building in downtown Minneapolis. Along similar lines to <u>Whisper, the Waves, the Wind</u>, this colossal public pageant in which approximately 430 elder-women participated. Lacy collaborated on this project with artist Miriam Schapiro and musician Susan Stone. Schapiro designed the impressive yellow, red and black quilt that the women performers would enact, and Stone created the audio-tape and music score that
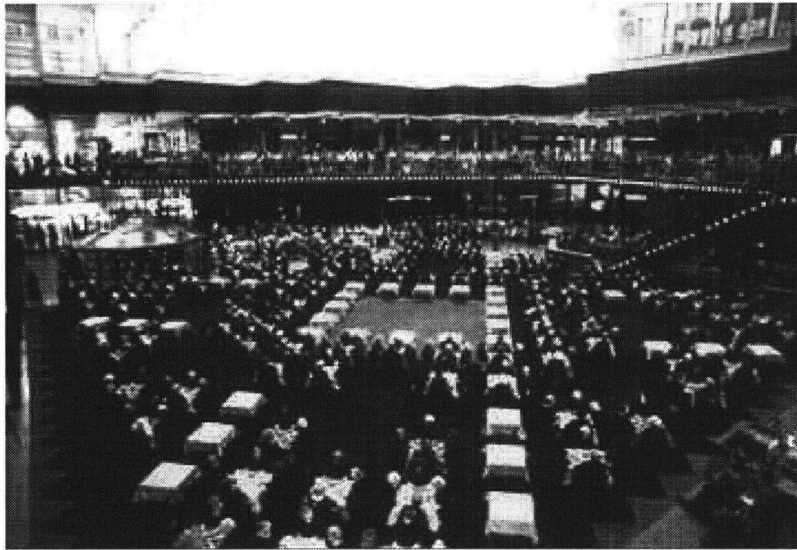
played simultaneously during the performance. Audience and media reporters viewed from balconies encompassing the performance space.

Two years of recruitment, workshops, and planning led to this grand performance. The length of time and involvement that the elderly women had in the project varied from being involved in a

Photo:.http://www.netdreams.com/registry/lacy/index/html

two-year process to a single day of the performance. The performance began with a procession of black-gowned women entering the performance set. Four women sat around each of the black-clothed square tables. Why the black gowns and procession? We have heard of the concerns and discontent with this aesthetic decision. Again, artist's aesthetics take precedence. Moira Roth tells us buried in a footnote, "of course there have also been criticism, including expressions of discontent among some of the participants and complaints by members of the audience ranging from gripes about not being able to see the event clearly enough to criticisms of style, content and intent" (1993, p. 172). Where are the written voices of discontent? Why did Roth dismiss this and not include any of this in her writings, as she has said, she has witnessed most of

these major works over the past ten years. Criticisms of content and intent are nothing to be dismissive of.

Jeff Kelly (1993) tells us how Lacy handled participants of the small performance Inevitable Associations[4], where other elderly women participants were uneasy about wearing all black dresses. Kelly (1993) tells us that "when the disagreement over the black clothing emerged, Lacy did not simply strip away at her aesthetic design but added to it by providing the red chairs from which her participants could speak out and be seen, thereby representing themselves. Participation, then, was an ongoing process of negotiation *without a hidden agenda.* The artist's motivations, ideas, and symbolic language —as far as she understood them herself—were all out front" (p. 232). Kelly claims that participation in one of Lacy's works isn't "simply a matter of agreeing with the artist at the outset of a project or her agreeing with her participants. Rather, participation is a dialogical process that changes both the participant and the artist" (p. 232).

Returning to Crystal Quilt, the women, on cue, folded the corners of the tablecloths, revealing red and yellow cloths underneath. They spoke to one another about ageing, about their lives. They held and crossed hands in unison, and brought life to the quilt. The audio-taped pre-recorded voices, detailed stories of some of the women participants, adding another layer of story-telling, conversation, narrative, to the ones created or enacted on the site below.

During the two weeks following the performance, the project organizers and coordinator contacted all of the participants to talk about how they were doing following the performance. It was an important and compassionate action to take considering the possibility of post-performance blues, and the high rate of depression in elderly women. Some of the participants continued to meet after the performance, but these meetings waned and eventually ceased.

This is the first reference to follow-up within the context of Lacy's performances. Beyond follow-up, the consideration of closure is not mentioned. These participants

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[4] In 1976, Lacy worked with a small group of elderly women for a performance in the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. In the lobby, Lacy was given a make-over to age her like the other women. The goal of the performance was to raise the profile of the invisible woman and the doubly invisible elderly woman (Kelly, 1995).

were not merely performers in a play, they are not theatrical professionals, they are regular women with diverse life experiences, sharing and giving of themselves. For many of them it was a two year commitment. This is a significant amount of time in anyone's life. Sessions of reflection and methods to help secure closure ought to have happened. After all, how much can you tell about someone over a phone conversation? Who were those calls for really? Perhaps the organizers felt it was the right thing to do, but what good did it do in reality. This we do not know.

Lacy engaged in the multiple levels of creation of The Crystal Quilt, from conception through to fruition. She took similar roles to her previous large scale performance works: artist, director, recruiter, group facilitator, and educator. Once the performance is over her role with the group ends, she disengages. Social work hasn't traditionally been the role of the artist, but then again traditionally, artists haven't used people and their social lives as the raw material for their art productions. Perhaps we ought to reconsider the role of the artist and the responsibilities examined with these new social ramifications. Lacy, when working on Turning Point, made it clear that her role ended with the performance, and if anything were to follow, it would be up to the affected community to take charge. Clearly stated as this was, it still negated the need for participant closure.

In 1993, Lacy designed an artwork or cultural action, Full Circle, to make public both historical and contemporary women who had made significant contributions to their communities in Chicago. This single project is the most thoroughly documented project I found during my literature search. The documentation provides us with an understanding of the inspiration for the project, the participants, the practical and artistic processes, as well as the use of metaphor and site choice.

In Full Circle, Lacy sought to make the work extremely accessible in a public place. "Jane Addams was a most visible symbol of the notion of public service. This project will be a modern-day 'portrait' of Jane Addams - not the person herself, but the vision, the ideals, and the activities that typified women's contributions during her time" (Lacy, 1995, p.66).

Jane Addams, 1933 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Ellen Gates Starr founded Hull-House in 1889, Chicago's first and most important settlement house. The issues

that formed the base for the activities at Hull-house included: "immigrants' rights', juvenile justice, industrial safety, protective legislation for women and children, labour unions, women's rights, public health issues, social welfare legislation, political reform, housing and sanitation reform, public recreation, progressive education, multicultural understanding and community arts programs" (Jacob, 1995, p.66).

It was as though Chicago had forgotten its founding mothers. This lack of female presence in both public monuments and sculptures inspired Lacy to develop a project that would celebrate and acknowledge Chicago's contemporary culturally and socially contributing women - women who reflect the actions and interactions of their predecessors at Hull-House. With the assistance of a steering committee, comprised of local women who had connected with Lacy over her numerous visits, the project took the form of temporarily placed monuments naming significant women in the community.

The committee acted as a sounding board for metaphors and a means of participant recruitment. It was necessary in the eyes of the committee and Lacy that the monuments represent Chicago's diverse cultural communities. One hundred women were selected from 350 nominations[5]. Ninety contemporary women were selected by a committee of fifteen women, while the remaining ten women, from earlier eras, were selected by a historical commission (Jacob, 1995).

The committee involved women in as many aspects of the project as possible.

photo credit: John McWilliams, 1993 (Jacob, Brenson, & Olson, 1995, p.67)

[5]A total of 350 nominations were brought forward after an open public solicitation which included advertising and field investigation.

They sought out a woman owned quarry from which they could obtain the required one hundred boulders. Joanne and Cecil Gillespie, two sisters who recently inherited the Wapanucka Limestone Quarry in Oklahoma, donated the boulders to the project. A bronze plaque, designed by Leslie Becker, inscribed with the name and a quotation by the named was affixed to each boulder.

Lacy worked with a sizeable crew to decide upon sites for each of the rocks and, to obtain necessary city permits, obtain and run semi-trailers and cherry pickers. Decisions about placement of the boulders along the Loop, had both contextual and aesthetic considerations. The placement of the boulders was based on a consideration of visibility, and at other times, an association between the named woman and a nearby building. On May 20, 1993 at 3:30 am the last of the boulders were unloaded from flatbed trailers and placed along the streets of the Loop.

This sudden surreal rock outcropping received immediate public and media attention. The inscribed quotations brought to the public messages about the millennium and of the anniversary of the first Woman's building

photo credit: Paula Stewart (Jacob; Brenson, & Olson, 1995, p.71)

at Chicago's 1893 World's fair. Women's groups staged several events around the rocks during the four months they remained on the Loop.

The initial event, a week after the appearance of the boulders, honoured the named women. They received certificates[6] in front of hundreds of people, including their families, friends, and colleagues. After receiving her certificate, each woman dispersed with her family and friends to the site of her rock. Lacy (1995) was interested in seeing "these small celebrations by each woman, simultaneously occurring pockets, of experience, private acts in a public setting that would create a collective ritual all around the loop" (p.71). Again we see evidence of

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[6]Certificates were prepared by Chicago artist Ester Parada.

the blurring of the private with the public experience which is so prominent in Lacy's work.

The grand finale for the Full Circle performance/installation occurred on September 30, 1993, when fourteen prominent women leaders[7] from around the globe, gathered at Hull-House for dinner. This private dinner party, which was taped and later televised, was a symbolic act. Lacy (1995) claims that it operated best in the artistic realm of the visual and mythological. It was the relationships among women that fuelled Jane Addam's social interventions and much of nineteenth and twentieth century feminist activism. It is this relationship that is so foreign to our popular culture which ignores or trivializes female alliances. Yet, these relationships can provide the power for social change.

The documentation of Full Circle gave me a peek into the inspirations and processes in the project. These accounts, descriptive as they are, give us only a fragmented picture of what it means to be engaged in an artistic production with Suzanne Lacy. We have not heard from the participants, aside from second-hand comments in footnotes. We do not know what it meant to them. We have media representations, artists' quotes, and accounts from other writers who may, or may not have been personally involved in the production.

For all that this documentation told me, it left me with even more questions. It's clear that there were elements of collaboration, but what was the nature of that collaboration? Perhaps it was more cooperative than collaborative. What happened after the performance? Were there any long term effects on the participating communities, or the individuals that played part in the production? Were these projects successful? How was it determined whether it was a success or not? Were they evaluated and if so how? What were the strengths of the project, from an inside perspective, and what were the

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[7]The honoured guests were: Magdalena Abakanowicz, artist, Poland; Cheryl Carolus, Executive Committee member of the African National Congress, South Africa; Hyun-Kyung Chung, feminist theologian, Korea; Johnnetta Cole, President of Spelman College, U.S.A.; Dr. Mirna Cunningham, physician and Congresswoman, Nicaragua; Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, psychiatrist and writer, Egypt; Susan Faludi, writer, U.S.A.; Susan Grode, lawyer, U.S.A.; Anita Hill, law professor, U.S.A.; Dolores Huerta, organizer of the United Farm Workers, U.S.A.; Devaki Jain, economist, India; Wilma P. Mankiller, Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation; Gloria Steinem, writer, U.S.A.; Rev. Addie Wyatt, labour organizer, U.S.A.

weak points? Who stayed and who left? When was it over? Lacy, herself, calls for evaluation of 'new genre' public art. Lacy (1995) asks:

> Can we trust the artist's claims for the work? Some critics have suggested that the distance between the artist's political intentions and real social change is the only criterion. This idea reflects the dualistic conundrum at the heart of critical thinking about this work –is it art or is it social work? Methods traditionally used to measure change, drawn from the political or social sciences, are never, to my knowledge, actually applied. The language for doing so is not in place, and even if it were, we are reluctant to reduce our critical evaluation to one of numbers, or even, for that matter, to personal testimonies. Concrete results in the public sphere, and how these reflect the artist's intensions, may occasionally be illustrative of a work's success but fall short, as they do not capture all the varied levels on which art operates. (p.45)

Lacy goes on to say that if we lean too far in the direction "of evaluating the work's social claims, critics avoid giving equal consideration to its aesthetic goals." I will take these words into serious consideration as I analyze Turning Point and Under Construction.

Lacy's work features common elements including intimate stories, voices and bodies of participants. Participants frequently talk to one another, while seated in groupings in front of an audience. Seeing the repetition of this common element, I have to wonder about the degree of participant influence on the form of the project. Who held the power when decisions were made? Who lead and who followed? Who is the art for?

Who was heard and who wasn't? In describing her 1987 art performance The Dark Madonna, Lacy (1993) asks the question,

> Who is speaking in *The Dark Madonna*? What did the Black, Latina, white, American Indian, and Asian pacific women in the performance feel was noteworthy in their experience, fitting material for a work of art? To begin to develop language appropriate to public art, we will need to consider how the complete process of preparation and exhibition is integral to the work –educating the community, working within the mass media stream, locating the work in its place, recruiting assistants and performers and networking with social institutions. *The Dark Madonna* was a process that began with a well-attended conference on historical and anthropological interpretations of the Black Madonna images in various ethnic cultures. Next, a series of small group discussions culminated in audiotaping sessions to provide the raw material for the soundtrack which would accompany the performance broadcast on loudspeakers during the performance. This process included linking with multiple ethnic communities and exploring racial controversy, even within the project. The project was the culmination of this process, the public presentation of the year's engagement. (p. 290)

Lacy (1993) acknowledges the power held by the artist in collaborative works as she describes the tableau as a framing device for presenting an author/artist determined opinion of reality. Lacy claims that "such intentional framing is inherently political" (p. 292). She goes on to say that "Performance and tableau act together in the public space to create a monument of meaning"(p. 293). Lacy also claims that meaning making is a "shared activity between artist and observer" (p. 299). Then I ask, where is the participant in this mediation of meaning? As she tells us that she personally does not want to discard the model of "isolate authorship" (p.37). The artist here sounds like a modernist working with postmodern materials, and someone else's subject matter.

I also wonder where Lacy's definition of public art fit into an art project that claims emancipatory goals? In conversation with Betty Ann Brown (1996) Lacy states "Public art is what happens between the artist and the audience, so public art can take place in the galleries as far as I'm concerned. I'm not so sure public art even has to have a diversity of audience, at least for any one work" (p. 164). So which audience is appropriate for that 'any one work'? Who is included, and who is excluded?

To begin to answer some of these questions, we need to hear from the individuals involved. Only then may we obtain a more complete understanding of this performance along with previously described projects. We also need to be able to place Lacy's work, including <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u>, into context with other collaborative and or community based public art, as well as art that aims for social change, so that we might more fully understand her works.

'Other' Public Artists

In this section I present selected public, collaborative, art projects and performances from the early 1970s through to the late 1990s. I describe the content of the art works as they contain elements of ecological, social, or political activism, and I examine their social and educational functions. Each piece has its own distinct location and circumstance surrounding its creation, and in each case, the general public is the intended audience for these site specific and context driven art pieces (Kaprow, 1993). New genre public art is valid content for art education as a vital contemporary art form. I argue that art of this genre is more than simply valid content for art education, but is in

itself education. These art projects encourage participants to engage in learning through the production of a dynamic and temporal art work.

During the shift of a paradigm, there is a time of overlap, co-existence. Artists construct or perform their work that reflects their times. Art within our changing societies reflects these shifts of philosophy.

> Modernism and postmodernism must be seen together, in parallax (technically, the angle of displacement of an object caused by the movement of the observer), by which I mean that our framings of the two depend of our position in the present and that this position is defined by such framings. (Foster, 1996, p. 207)

Public, community-based, collaborative, co-operative, performative, feminist: art from the modern to the postmodern are not discrete categories but are woven together. However, I have used these descriptors in order to organize selected historic artistic practices. Turning Point and Under Construction fall into the time-line of paradigm overlap - where they clearly exhibit both modern and postmodern characteristics. The structural arrangement has been planned according to the directing artist's aesthetic vision. The colours, forms, flow, sequence are choreographed by the artist. However, unlike a static sculpture, Turning Point and Under Construction contained deeply collaborative elements. These projects were not conceived in isolation, but rather within a community of participants. Each was a multi-faceted and complex work, temporal and yet held individual permanence in the memories of the participants. Although Lacy conceptually constructed the works (as in a modernist approach) she consulted regularly with participants on the physical form and central ideological content (very anti-modernist). Lacy's work firmly fits into the realm of New Genre Public Art, and responds to all three models set out by Lucy Lippard (1996) as feminist forms of art.

> The feminist (and socialist) value system insists upon cultural workers supporting and responding to their constituencies. The three models of such interaction are (1)group and/or public ritual; (2) public consciousness raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances; and (3) cooperative/collaborative or anonymous art-making. (p. 29)

According to these criterion, one could refer to Turning Point as simply a feminist art project, rather than as a community-based feminist, collaborative public art performance.

However, many people have different ideas about what feminist art projects are, and many young Turning Point participants did not see their project as being feminist

In the 1970s, American activist artists sought to emphasize democratic values through the content of art performances and productions while also including populist and folk art practices in what had been an exclusive high art arena (Felshin, 1996; Lacy, 1996). They also included collaboration within their artistic production, expressing at least the guise of democratic ideals.

The artist or creative mastermind of high modernism was not the only artistic persona that artists of the 1970s embodied. The collaborative craftsperson, artisan, performer, interpretative historian and social critic were also prevalent roles artists played.

Criticizing Modernist Public Art Production

The image of the successful artist as a solo hero or poetic seer, unbound from social and moral obligations through a freedom to create art stemmed from the bourgeois culture[8] that dominated industrial capitalism (Bersson, 1987). In the modernist paradigm, the functionality of the art object coupled with the artistic intention determined whether or not a piece was indeed art. In light of this, Suzi Gablik (1991) explains that "within the aesthetic framework, real-life actions or situations can sometimes be art, but only as long as they are not useful and serve no purpose" (p.134). Gablik summarizes the downfall of modern art in that,

> modernism above all, exalted the complete autonomy of art, and the gesture of severing bonds with society. This sovereign specialness and apartness was symbolized by the romantic exile of the artist, and was lived out in modes of rebellion, withdrawal and antagonism. (p.5)

We can see examples of this amoral approach to art when, earth sculptor, Michael Heizer, negated his moral and social obligations in proclaiming "I don't care about landscape. I'm a sculptor. Real estate is dirt, and dirt is material" (quoted in Gablik, 1991, p.140). Heizer is well known for his sculpture, Double Negative (Napier, 1992) in which he displaced 240,000 tons of earth with explosives resulting in two enormous cuts

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[8]Culture: "The particular ways in which a social group lives out and makes sense of its 'given' circumstances and conditions of life" (McLaren, 1988, p. 171).

in the Nevada desert floor. In an attempt to avoid complaints from environmentalists, Heizer purchased the land as private property rather than declaring his intentions, thereby facing a different issue, the alteration of public space (Gablik, 1991; Napier, 1992).

Modern aesthetics have been criticized as being devoid of moral purpose and social obligation (Fiss, 1990; Gablik, 1991). The artist is criticized for serving no social or political function. Gablik (1991) claims that:

> The issue now is whether modernist aesthetics needs to be complemented by a new aesthetics of participation that is less specialized, and deals more adequately with issues of context; and whether a new definition of art's cultural purpose would open it (and ourselves) up to more creative interactions with others, and with the world. (p. 150)

Many artists (Deggs, 1980; Kaprow,1993; Lacy, 1977, 1984, 1994; Scherk, Simpson, 1980; 1987 Ukeles, 1997; 1991) have focused on the idea that political action doesn't have to be only symbolic within the context of a work of art (Lacy, 1996; Miles, 1989). Artists may choose to engage in an activity that may act both as an art work, with aesthetic considerations, and politically, as a social action. One outcome does not necessarily exclude the other. Like concerns expressed by socially responsive artists, there has also been a call from art educators to move beyond the narrow elitist scope of a Western Fine Art paradigm, to one of cultural democracy. Art education researchers (Bersson, 1987; Blandy, 1987; Chalmers, 1987; jagodzinski, 1987) call for art education to be socially, culturally, and ecologically relevant, while being responsive to current social conditions.

Environmental Concerns

Some contemporary artists have successfully linked their social and ecological concerns with their art practice. In the following section I present a selection of artistic work that exemplifies the link between aesthetics and values. The conceptual practices of many contemporary public artists are framed by issues of environment, equality and representation (both historic and contemporary), violence, death, democracy, poverty and privilege.

Bonnie Sherk (Leibovitz Steinman, 1996) initiated the public art project Crossroads Community (also known as "The Farm"). The piece was a life-scale performance structure that lasted six years (1974-1980). Crossroads Community, an urban environmental education and multi-arts community centre, transformed seven acres

of various land parcels into a "city-farm" park near San Francisco's Mission District. Unfortunately, I have not found written documentation of the lasting effects of the project on the participants and community. In this example we see an urban environment transformed in a way in which directly benefitted community members. Environmental education was a central part of the "Farm" program. There were demonstrations on responsible agriculture and children's art, a performance space and a solar green house. Like one would expect of a farm, it also housed ducks, geese and rabbits. Through this complex project, Sherk "created a way of calling attention to the connections that exist everywhere" (Leibovitz Steinman, 1996, p. 275).

Buster Simpson, known for his community art projects in Seattle, has created a number of art installation projects, all in the public sphere. His work responds to environmental issues, and they vary in the amount of collaboration, or public input. In the early 1980s, Simpson created the clandestine installation Downspout - Plant Life Monitoring System. Located at Seattle's Pike Place Market, the installation is a vertical landscape of ferns planted in U-shaped downspouts that work both as plant habitats and as an effective filtering system for water run-off before entering the sewer system (Leibovitz Steinman, 1996).

In 1988, Simpson installed a temporary piece titled Composting Commode. He constructed this piece in response to a perceived public need for more public toilets in Seattle. It was first located on First Avenue in Seattle in 1988. When it was moved, trees were planted in the compost from the commode. In May of 1992, Columbia City offered to host the commode in a community garden, a site for future fruit trees. Susan Leibovitz Steinman (1996, p. 277) describes Simpson's work as one which aims "to educate the general public and stimulate it to political change through community action, and to create art that functions pragmatically." His art work combines public education and environmental concerns with practical solutions to urban problems.

There is a potency in both the descriptions and the outcomes of these art projects. Although achieved through collaboration and negotiation with city and parks officials, it is not clear in the literature to what extent the official bodies were involved, or what the process was for constructing and organizing these projects. The described environment

certainly sets the stage for education planning. However, I have been unable to determine what the education programs around Simpson's pieces were.

In Portland Oregon, 1991, Buster Simpson initiated and installed Host Analog. This art piece, like The Farm, serves to remind observers of the interconnectedness of life, a theme strongly supported by art education researchers and theorists (Bersson, 1987; jagodzinski, 1987). Host Analog shows us the power and vulnerability which lies within our eco-system. It is about life, death, and rebirth. In the woods, we see where a fallen tree starts life over as a nurse log, as it returns to the earth and supplies the nutrients of life for new trees. Simpson captures this cycle in Host Analog - where in a public city space, the placement of a fallen tree and the natural cycle becomes a work of art. The cycle of the project is not complete until trees sprouting from seeds in the host log fed by nutrients within its decomposing mass, grow to maturity and tumble with age, rejoining the earth, becoming life-food for another generation.

This art piece is a magnificent physical embodiment of the natural life cycle that will only thrive in its somewhat removed environment if civic opinion agrees that it continue its 20 - 100 - 1000 year life cycle. Although there was civic agreement when the piece was initially installed, it will require reconsideration by subsequent generations of citizens and civic officials.

Ciel Bergman initiated the art project Sea Full of Clouds, What Can I Do?. This was a collaborative art project initiated by two artists who cleaned Santa Barbara beaches, three hours a day for five weeks. With the collected plastics, they created an installation in The Contemporary Arts Forum. What began as a collaborative environmental art action, involving two participants, culminated in a dialogue which engaged the public in a debate on pollution and a discussion of what to do about the six dumpsters of non-biodegradable refuse (Gablik, 1991).

Cleaning of the environment has been at the core of the work of artist, Dominique Mazeaud in her art and life performance, The Great Cleansing of the Rio Grande River. She has undertaken this monthly ritual since September, 1987 (Carde, 1990). Dominique hopes that her project "will act as a catalyst for a better awareness of the growing problem that trash represents to our Earth and the necessity for the comeback of serious recycling, the awareness about trash disposal" (Carde, p.5). The ritualistic art

work consists of a meditation session followed by a pilgrimage to the Rio Grande River armed with garbage bags. Though usually alone, she sometimes performs her cleansing with friends or strangers.

It is a daunting task to single-handedly clean a nearly dry river bed of debris. However, Mazeaud has used this forum to raise awareness of some serious environmental issues through direct dialogue and interaction with the public, and through the media. Patricia Phillips (1996) notes, "the point is not to produce another thing for people to admire, but to create an opportunity - a situation - that enables viewers to look back at the world with renewed perspectives and clear angles of vision" (p. 70). River debris has been removed (at varying rates) by the artist and occasional participants. Media attention to this project has raised public awareness of the river's situation. Mazeaud developed an ongoing art project / performance that has sought to have direct ecological and educational results. Ritually cleaning the river may bring about raised awareness to participants and media audience, but it may not be a time effective way to deal with the problem. (It is not apparent from this review whether the river cleaning was more than a ritualistic symbolic cleansing.) However, through direct engagement with the artist in the performance site, participants were able to experience first hand the effects of careless dumping on a river habitat. Yet that engagement does not guarantee participant reflection.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, a New York artist, orchestrates performances and art projects that are provocatively designed to stimulate public debate (Phillips, 1995). The subject of her work often centres around issues of waste management, recycling and sanitation work. Within an urban context, Ukeles engages in "maintenance art", an art form committed to the maintenance of public life and performance of everyday activities.

In Cambridge Massachusetts, 1993, Ukeles completed an art project in Daheny Park, a former landfill.

> The fifty-five-acre knoll project is surrounded by sports fields and other playing grounds. Only seventy-two feet high, it still provides a panoramic view of the Cambridge-Boston area. Working with landscape architect John Kissada of Camp Dresser & Mckee, Inc., and with the support of the Cambridge Arts Council's program Art Insights, the artist designed a simple path system that winds gently around the knoll, bringing visitors to the top. The gradual incline makes the entire site wheelchair-accessible. Part of the project's program

> involved educational presentations with community children and adults. For the glassphalt used to construct the path, the glass component comes both from bottles the children had collected and a week's collection from the city. (Phillips, 1995, p. 191)

As a result of Ukeles' work, Phillips claims that "the project enhanced the value of work while making art more accessible" (p. 174).

Other artists have also made their work more accessible through collaboration with community members. Well known Saskatchewan artist, Joe Fafard, and farmer, Roy Hickling (acting as curator and project co-ordinator), constructed a large scale community art project in Barrie, Ontario (Meeka Walsh, 1997). The project began in August, 1996, with a single line drawing of a draft horse. Fafard faxed his drawing to Hickling, who then worked with engineering students to survey the land for seeding the large scale drawing. Farmers then worked the field, while pilots and photographers documented the process throughout the season. What began as graphite drawing on paper, faxed as a message, became canola seeds sewn along carefully surveyed lines. The 1,100 x 1,900 foot, living picture of the line-drawn draft horse changed hues with the seasons until harvest time, like any other field of grain.

The Fafard Field Project concluded in September, 1997 with the International Plowing Match. Other key players in this massive project included the International Plowing Match Committee, engineering students from Georgian College, local farmers, and Canadian Foodgrains Bank. The image concluded with the plowing of the canvas and distribution of the collected grains to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Fafard, like the other community/ public artists discussed in this study, collaborated with various organizations and individuals from diverse backgrounds that were drawn together to see this multifaceted project to conclusion. This project, like the work of maintenance artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, blurs the boundaries between acts of life and art, and forces us to consider the actuality or the arbitrariness of such a boundary.

These projects dealt with issues of the environment, education, and public awareness through a collaborative and active process. In each case the artist worked with others, and considered the audience and participants of the projects. Public awareness, participation, and education were also elements in each of these projects. The public and

participants had opportunities to address issues that were of concern to them and then to act on their concerns while engaging with artists and one another.

Through the creation and initial installation of the <u>Composting Commode</u>, Buster Simpson instigated debate over the placement of the commode resulting in the acknowledgment that more public washrooms were needed in Seattle. Awareness and public debate were also components of <u>Sea full of clouds - what can I do?</u> (Gablik, 1991, p. 154). Environmental improvements were desired and intended elements of many of these projects. Social commentary was certainly part of their aim, but these artists went further. They blurred artistic creation with environmental and social actions. Artists engage their audiences and challenge our notion of what art is and what it can be.

<u>Equality</u>

Writer and art critic, Arlene Raven (1988), discusses feminist art from the 1970s and 1980s in the United States. She describes feminist works of art which focus on the experiences of women in relation to: birth, rape, domestic violence, religion, home/work environments, sexuality, and war. The messages within the art works, whether they are weavings, ceramics, installations, or performances, are aimed at bringing about public awareness and social change.

Historically, women have been subjects and mythical images found in Western art history. Although present in paintings, women artists have until recently been invisible in art history. Historically women often collaborated in creative artistic endeavours. Gathering for purposes of art making can in itself create community. Arlene Raven (1995) describes an authentic community as differing from a colonized township, in that it is formed through a commonality of its citizens. This commonality expressed by each individual finds a pattern in the whole, one that may be inherited but is also chosen. This collaborative form of art production was not yet acknowledged as being legitimate when Judy Chicago commenced the large scale collaborative art piece, <u>The Dinner Party</u>, which opened at the Brooklyn Museum in 1979.

The triangular table arrangement was set with 39 place settings of sculpted porcelain plates of abstract butterfly-vaginas and embroidered table runners, each setting designed to represent a specific woman in history or legend. Key to the success of the work was the acknowledgment of the women who were absent in the common

interpretations of Western history (Stein, 1994). The names of 999 women were inscribed with gold on the white floor-tiles beneath the table.

Perhaps it is appropriate that the tiled floor was completely white, as Alice Walker was quick to criticize Chicago for explicitly representing only one black woman on the Dinner Party plates. Even then the plate for Sojourner Truth, illustrated pained and crying faces on the plate and not the elegant butterflies of so many of the other plates. Nancy Ring (1996) discusses and quotes Walker's 1979 Ms. Magazine critique:

> This special treatment, she argues, depletes Sojourner Truth's history as well as that of every black woman obliged to look to this single image for recognition of her unique and particular heritage and lived experiences: 'To think of black women is impossible if you cannot imagine them with vaginas. Sojourner Truth certainly had a vagina, as note her lament about her children, born of her body and sold into slavery. Note her comment …that when she cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard her. Surely a vagina has to be acknowledged when one reads these words. (A vagina the color of raspberries and blackberries – or scuppernongs and muscadines –and of that strong, silvery sweetness, with, as well, a sharp flavor of salt.)'…Walker helps to locate its universalism within a sphere of blind whiteness –an invented, sheltering place where thoughts and questions and worries about racial tensions and specificities do not soak and burn daily in the pores but instead are regarded as luxuries or irritants or grounds for self-congratulations. (p. 132)

Throughout the project, Chicago maintained artistic control over the design of the product, although hundreds of women were involved in the construction of individual elements. In all, the project took a total of five years to complete and included over 400 participants. Chicago demanded full-time unpaid work from her volunteers, the kind of dedication and professionalism that she brought to her work. The stress of this kind of a demand, left many volunteers leaving the project. Volunteer work is work all the same. It is ironic to consider any level of exploitation of women's work and unpaid labour while working on a 'feminist' art piece.

We need to keep in mind the era in which the Dinner Party and the Birth Project (which began in 1980 and was completed in 1985), were produced. At the time of the Dinner Party's construction, ceramic porcelain, and needlework, were not considered materials of fine art, but of artisans and craftspersons, which in turn, were seen as being of lesser value. By choosing to use these materials, Chicago challenged accepted notions of appropriate media for art production.

The shift of what is deemed to be appropriate materials and subjects for artists, has had a lasting effect on visual art practice, for both female and male art producers and consumers. Although criticized as being an example of the "cult of the personality that surrounded women artists in the 1970s" (Guerrilla Girls, in Hess, 1995, p. 313), Judy Chicago's Dinner Party provided a template for collaborative art production while using alternate media.

Yet "The Dinner Party did not fulfill the utopian ideals of nonhierarchical collaboration that are understood as having been central to the mainstream women's movement of the 1970s. As all of the participants in the project have stressed (including Chicago herself), Chicago controlled the studio, determined the design of the runners and banners, and designed the painted plates" (Jones, 1996, 105). In the Dinner Party, Amelia Jones (1996) tells us that Chicago identified her project as cooperative rather than collaborative in nature. Chicago "proposed the notion of a 'flexible' or 'benevolent' hierarchy, 'where people get recognized for their work but one person is in charge'" (Jones, p. 106). Personal sentiments, written by participating needleworkers for the Birth Project reveal what this working relationship, or flexibility meant for some of them. Chicago (1985) gives us some of these letters:

> "I am definitely dependent upon Judy's approval. I have placed her on a pedestal. That's not good for her or for me." Jan Lo Biondo
> "Most of us are not professionals, and it's difficult for us to separate the personal from the artistic. Judy doesn't understand us or our lives completely; we don't understand her and her life as an artist either. But we keep on trying, all of us." Dolly Kaminiski
> "For all of Judy's insight and vision, she does not fully comprehend the impact her images have on us. We are stitching with our souls –our deepest spiritual self is woven into our work." Frannie Yablonsky (Chicago, p. 105)

Chicago asked women to reveal their birth experiences, by both telling about them and drawing from their experiences when working on their stitching pieces. Yet, when their life and familial obligations took priority, Chicago minimized their importance. Chicago (1985) reflects: "my expectations for a time commitment to the project were based on my own lifestyle. It was a long time before my expectations began to accommodate the reality of most women's lives" (p. 62). She describes a piece that was left unfinished by a woman who was pregnant when she began the piece, but was unable to finish due to the baby's interruptions, sleeplessness, and the fact that she

became pregnant again shortly after the birth of her first child. Chicago decided to present the unfinished piece, with its needle in place, " because this happened frequently –women misassessing their capabilities and their lives –I decided to present the unfinished work as a symbol for women's uncompleted lives. This image celebrates woman's fecundity and her power to bring forth new life. How ironic that this very power often causes us to lose control of our own lives" (p. 63). Rather than Chicago having been at fault for assigning pieces too large and complex for busy mothers who were non-professional volunteers, Chicago lays the blame on the volunteers who stitched with their souls, for over estimating their ability. Their individual tales of birth and their lived realities were not what really seemed to matter for this project, but rather, to complete the artistic vision set out by the artist to represent the birth of the universe. Yet she claims that this project was founded with democratic principles in mind. "The Birth Project extends the democratization of art begun by The Dinner Party. It is meant to travel for years, to be inexpensive to exhibit and to ship, to be accessible to many different types of organizations and spaces, and to introduce images of birth and information about the realities of women's lives to a wide audience of viewers" (Chicago, 1985, p.7). After nearly one hundred shows, the tour of the exhibition ended in 1987. Since then, pieces of the project have found their way into permanent collections of various American museums.

The challenge to actually have one's art work exhibited has been a battle for many women artists. The *Guerrilla Girls*, an anonymous feminist artists' collective, has brought facts of sexism and racial discrimination in the fine art world to the public, through public poster campaigns. Their text-based, artful posters were targeted at the fine arts community. In bold black text, one such poster asks "how many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museums last year?" Beneath the question, totals for following museums are: "Guggenheim 0, Metropolitan 0, Modern 1, Whitney 0" (Nina Felshen, 1995, p. 315; Mary Garrard, 1993, p.102).

Beyond the confines of the art gallery or museum, artists have challenged accepted notions of history, including: Judith Baca 1976-1983, Edgar Heap of Birds, 1991, Suzanne Lacy & Kathleen Chang, 1977, Suzanne Lacy, 1994. Historical monuments and other markers tend to depict very selective histories that favour those in

power. Some contemporary artists have challenged common assumptions about the past, and suggest alternate histories in their art works.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles (initiated in 1976, and completed in 1983), orchestrated by Judith Baca, presents an alternative history of California. The 2,400 foot long mural, located in a flood control channel in the Los Angeles River, "portrays the contribution of indigenous peoples, immigrant minorities, and women from prehistory to the fifties" (Leibovitz Steinman, 1996, p.202). Images, often excluded from history books, include Dust Bowl refugees, blacklisted actors, Mexican Americans being deported, and Japanese Americans being dragged off to internment camps.

Participants involved in this ongoing mural include hundreds of teenagers who were hired and taught by Baca. Some of these teens included parolees from the juvenile justice program. This project also included the co-operation of the Army Corps of Engineers, the criminal justice system, the city, local politicians, teachers, anthropologists, and teenage gang members and many more.

Susan Leibovitz Steinman (1996) describes Judith Baca as:

> a teacher who creates pedagogical structures within her expanded-scale artworks, training young artists from around the country in political art. Her work is distinguished by the scope of its vision, the sophistication of community organizing techniques employed, and its impact on national and international audiences. (p. 202)

Gloria Bornstein and Donald Fels make use of public historical markers to act as social critics challenging the stated historical truths. In 1992, the artists constructed Shore Viewpoints and Voice Library along the landing at Washington Street Park, on Seattle's Elliott Bay. The artists designed signage, made to match Seattle's other public signs, and installed them along-side existing historic markers and park-activity signs. Their signs provided alternate histories about the waterfront. They also produced a voice library in which callers could access additional information about the history of the waterfront, as well as record their own comments. This temporary interactive art project was in place from June, 1991 until January 1992.

Representation

Tele-vecindario, street level videos, by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, was a complex collaborative community-based public art project that occurred in Chicago between 1992-

1993. The working-class[9] and low-income residents of West Town are predominantly Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central and South American (Jacob, 1995, p. 77). As it was Manglano-Ovalle's own neighbourhood, he sought to develop a project with the potential to change the residential street from being frightening and gang-inhabited to an environment that brought residents together in a positive and powerful way. He wanted to help take the fear and danger out of the streets so they could be comfortably re-inhabited by residents.

Some of the elements of this massive project included Street-Level Videos, known as S-LV's. Through the use of video, Manglano-Ovalle hoped to provide an opportunity for residents to speak out about their community, voice their opinions, and challenge viewers. The first video, "This is my stuff," was played continuously from May through to September, 1993, in front of Emerson House.[10] Video, an established tool of mass media and popular culture, often depicting negative stereotypes of Latino youth, became a means for the youth to represent and express themselves (Jacob, 1995).

Another intriguing use of video was an eleven monitor installation of a temporary memorial on a vacant lot. "'Rest in Peace' became a temporary cemetery in memorium to youth who had died in gang violence" (Jacob, 1995, p.85). Yearly, hundreds of residents are shot in gang related incidents.

The inauguration of "Culture in Action" provided an opportunity for the project to show works in progress in an open studio of the Museum of Contemporary Art. This public space was markedly different from the street level venue of the intended video installation in their neighbourhood. For many of the residents, it was their first time in an art museum. According to Mary Jane Jacob (1995), it was unlikely that the art museum public would reciprocate the visit to see the West Town installation in its original site. This turned out to be a long-lived and complex project. After months of meetings that included video training workshops, discussion with over forty social service agencies as well as negotiations among four rival gangs, the project culminated with a block

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[9]Class: "The economic social and political relationship that governs life in a given social order - class relationships reflect the constraints and limitations individuals and groups experience in the area of income level" (McLaren, 1988, p. 171).

[10]Emerson House Community Centre is a 1912 settlement house in the West Town.

party/video installation; performance and celebration with an audience of over 1000, from both in and out of the neighbourhood. Once the larger, more temporal project was over, videos were still produced by a S-LV crew two years later. In 1995, they were working on the production of "'Neutral Ground' a video dialogue among gang members that surround the school [sic] [Wells High school]" (Jacob, p.87).

This art project contained elements of art installation, public memorial, social planning, youth leadership development, and community development. Although temporary outcomes were sought in the initial planning of the project, long-term goals for the neighbourhood emerged. Opportunities for public education occurred at multiple levels within this project. The artist collaborated with community members, facilitated the development of a dialogue among the various age groups and factions of the neighbourhood. Individuals were able to express their ideas, concerns and knew that someone would hear them. The videos were taken to the streets, and then beyond, to the public at large. Indeed, this is an example of truly accessible public art.

Canadian artist, Beth Alber's (1997) The Marker of Change: The Women's Monument, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, is a potent example of a contemporary monument, not unlike Maya Lin's The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.[11] Fourteen young women slain in Montreal are remembered through this monument. Yet, it also signifies the senseless deaths of women at the hands of men yearly in Canada. This single tragic event makes a monument possible but it also calls our attention to the countless other instances of violence in our society. The social, personal and political context, makes this monument meaningful for me, as a woman, mother, and student, in a society that tolerates violence.

Alber as the artist worked with collaborators to select materials to portray profound physical, actual and metaphorical meanings. The memorial may provide a starting point for some to realize the continued need for discussion on violence - since we

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[11]Maya Lin, The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, 1982, located in Washington DC, has become a place for remembering, mourning, and healing. It is also the most visited monument in Washington. "A 220 foot long, V-shaped, polished black wall descent into the earth and rises out of it again. Its deepest point, the corner of the V, is ten feet below ground level. As one travels down the slope and the wall rises, one reads the first engraving, '1959', the year the war began. Then, listed in order of their death, without mention or regard for military rank, come the overwhelming names of the individuals who died in Vietnam" (Leibovitz Steinman, 1995, p. 256)

are not yet the "living monument" to the ideal of a truly peaceful society, physically free from violence. For others, it may be a place to grieve, to remember, to hope.

The collaborative effort that went into this monument is astounding, from the fund-raising, consulting with surviving family members, to the severing of the pink granite from the earth. Although it was a single aesthetic design, a unifying vision that guided the project, it was the work, effort and dedication of participants in the project that brought it to completion (Alber, 1997).

In Vancouver there are examples of artists working within a community to create works of art that are socially relevant and engage in public dialogue through the creation of art works. The work of Vancouver community public artist, Celine Rich, exemplifies community development through public discourse with a *democratic methodology* (Pulvermacher, 1996). Community outreach, bringing people together, expressing self within community and celebrating community, are prevalent within her work (in conversation with Rich, 1997).

Like Mierle Laderman Ukeles (Phillips, 1995), Rich uses community involvement as some of her raw material in her artistic practice. She works collaboratively with community programmers, consults with numerous agencies, individuals, and with various strata of the city, such as the parks board, heritage board, department of engineering, community arts council, and more. She meets with community groups, youth groups, school classes, teachers, local cultural representatives, young and old alike.

One of the key objectives of the Discovery Project for South East Vancouver, initiated by Rich in 1996, was to bring together diverse communities into a shared discussion of their neighbourhood. They discussed and planned how they would mark the special locations in their neighbourhood and local parks that would signify and talk about what it means to them to be a member in their community and to acknowledge local histories.

The process involved numerous planning sessions and workshops, construction of representative bus shelters, historical markers on light standards, wildlife and botanical pavers for pathways. Programming for this project involved a massive outreach and promotion effort including brochures, door-to-door visits, bus tours, walking tours with enacted historical plays by local high school students as well as public lectures (in

conversation with Rich, 1997). This is an example where an art project contained elements that were temporal: a dated life span, as well as semi-permanent elements. Over two years, there was a very strong aspect of community involvement at every stage of planning and implementation. However, the off shoot projects and long-term community effects are not yet known though there is a recognition that public response to this project has been very positive (Rich, 1997).

Community art projects such as these, provide opportunities for connections among community leaders, agencies, cultural workers, social workers, and other willing interested participants. These art installations, actions, and events have been devised with an aesthetic intention to reach out and provoke both the viewers and the participants. In some cases, the art project serves as a catalyst for further social and political actions. The content of the art projects, performances and installations often challenges the ideas and expectations of both the participants and viewing public. The experiences gained from being involved in such multifaceted projects are undoubtedly of educational value.

The written accounts have all been fairly positive - asserting the strengths of each project. Negative or critical descriptions were fairly scarce. Failed projects may not have been written about, or poorly documented. Rarely have collaborative public art, or community-based art been described in an artistically critical manner. Written accounts may be required by various funding bodies, or for the purpose of the artists' portfolios. However, unlike an exhibit in a gallery or a public museum where critics write about their shows, a public community-based performance can, if poorly managed or attended, quietly slip from public visibility/memory.

While reviewing documentation or essays about public projects and social art actions described in this section, one must consider the source of the information. What is the underlying purpose of the original review, who wrote it and what was their agenda? Was public spending an issue (if it was negative)? Was there a public outcry from an overtly political message? Was there a desire to support a break from the modernist artistic norm? Weaknesses either aesthetically or methodologically may have been over looked in previous reviews for numerous reasons. As a result, we have sided images of the productions from artists' and reviewers' perspectives. We haven't heard from the communities in which the art projects occurred, nor have we heard from those who

participated beyond promotional media interviews. By listening to those involved in such projects from their diverse perspectives we will have a fuller picture and understanding of the strengths as well as the weakness of collaborative projects. Polyphonic works of art, whose final forms respond to numerous stakeholders, require more complex forms of criticism than works by solo artists. Critique of the aesthetic form is no longer adequate when discussing complex collaborative, public works of art. We need to hear from those involved in the integral development of such projects to better critique, analyze, and ultimately understand these works.

Consideration of Site and Context

Although the artist can never know the full range of the viewers' personal domain, when planning and constructing a work of art, she or he must consider the intended audience/participants as well as the context and/or site of installation. Likewise, a sensitive teacher will consider the context for learning and the learner's environment (built, natural, political, cultural), when planning an effective educational unit or lesson.

We each live within our personal boundaries, albeit in flux. The edge is the place where change is marked, the boundary where one condition ceases and another begins. Boundaries blur as both conditions are known. What once seemed clear, loses focus, begins to blur. To know the temporal edge is to be aware of your acquired assumptions of reality. A crucial part of adult education involves a process where a learner is able to first be aware of and then to reflect upon her or his assumptions about life from childhood, in order to re-examine their validity in adult life (Mezirow, 1989). Perhaps one's experience in a complex, socially driven art project could lead one to emancipatory knowledge. According to Habermas, such emancipatory knowledge helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege (McLaren, 1988). Within an educational environment, one becomes aware of their personal boundaries. When learning occurs, these boundaries are pushed out a little further.

Since individuals within communities are not only relevant, but essential, it would only make sense for artists to consider the physical, intellectual and psychological domains of the audience/participants when planning community based public art projects. The audience, therefore, becomes an element of the selected site and ought to be

considered aesthetically, logistically, and intellectually by an artist if the intent is to engage an audience in experiencing elements of their edge: straddling, balancing, knowing, even crossing over.

The Content for Creation, for Learning

The value, or connection one has with a work of art is personally situated. If I were to visit the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., as a thirty-something Canadian, my experience would vary from one who returned from the war, from one whose son, brother, spouse is marked with a date on the wall. Their experience at the memorial will differ again from someone who sees the memorial wall as part of a daily routine, cleaning the park. The impact, the message, the potency for all viewers, is dependent upon the connection made with the personal experience of the viewer.

We can say then, that the personal connection between the viewer, participant, artist and art project, needs to be considered when organizing an art project. It is important that those who are involved in such an art piece feel connected to it (London, 1989). Artists should ask themselves what stake the participant, or viewers will have in the piece, and what will draw them in. It is vital that the content and context of the art projects are culturally and socially relevant to the participants (Miller, 1995). Community-based art projects, as I have presented so far, can take into account the relationship participants and viewers have with the site of construction or performance. Participants often have as much, if not more, at stake or are linked with the content addressed in the work of art than do the artists that facilitate the creation of these artistic collaborative projects (Lacy, 1996).

Learning Experiences

We can learn from and through art. We may gain insight because of their form and subject matter. We may have our perceptions challenged by what constitutes art. We may also learn about ourselves through engaging in art projects with others while forming communities. We can learn about democratic participation, human interaction, and more fully explore the intrinsic conditions of all that is around us (Blandy, 1987; Bersson, 1987; jagodzinski, 1987; Habermas, 1983). We can experience living within the blurred boundaries of art and life (Kaprow, 1995).

Participants may question our massive consumer consumption after spending a day of picking garbage out of the Rio Grande River (or perhaps even from reading a media account of the ritual). When working with a group of individuals over a long period of time, one learns about communication, compromise, media presentation and interpretation. When working with artists, and others in the realm of the visual and performing arts, a discussion, and understanding of aesthetic consideration, will develop.

There is rich opportunity for learning to occur through participation in many of the described art projects. Individuals and groups were given the chance to gain new skills, acquire new knowledge about their environment, and look within themselves in order to challenge their perceptions about the world, others and themselves. It is through these elements, that art projects become educational. Charles Garoian (1999) tells us:

> A radical form of pedagogy, performance art teaching takes its cues from the exploratory and experimental strategies employed by artists throughout this century (Apple, 1995, p. 121 and White, 1995, p. 133). The interdisciplinarity and interculturality of performance art represents a context for curriculum, instruction, and evaluation that is divergent, open, complex, and contradictory in character. Rather than universal absolutes, this pedagogical method seeks a diversity of images, ideas, perspectives, and interpretations. (p. 29)

Although the potential for learning is evident through this chapter, my literature review was not able to make clear what the impact was that these art projects had on participating individuals, nor do we know the degree of participation, in the described collaborative art projects. We do not know the power structures that existed within their group dynamics, nor do we know the nature of their collaborations. Who lead, who followed, who was included, and who was left out? Who stayed, who dropped out and why? Was it all as democratic as it seemed? Who was affected? And, what did anyone learn from it all? These questions still require consideration and answers in order that we might have a better understanding of art of this genre.

Turning Point, a collaborative community-based performance art project, held in common many similar goals to other art projects broadly described in this chapter. The project claimed to be collaborative, and sought to bring people together to form a community with a common goal. Turning Point also set out to express the thoughts and concerns of its community members to the larger public. Turning Point and Under Construction brought an art performance to the public. Although Under Construction

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was supposed to be accessible, by being free in a public location, it was also inaccessible to its audience, and even to some of its participants. Representation, and power come up repeatedly in this study. Voice is also a fundamental theme in this study. I have included *voice* under the theme of *power*, as voice is inherently a form of expression of individual power; just as silencing is the expression of one's power over another. As I come to more fully understand Lacy's art and mode of working, I am forced to question my own modus operandi as a researcher. Power, and representation are also issues that I have had to face in the research and the writing of this study. Where do Lacy's and my practices converge, where do they differ? What can we take from their similarities and differences to strengthen and improve our respective practices?

In the next chapter, I will provide the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study. In describing the site of this case-study, I will tell what I recall from the day's events in <u>Under Construction</u>, and how I went about doing this research, my considerations and dilemmas along the way. As I have sought a 'behind the scene' account of the art projects described in this chapter –only to have been left wanting, I also required this of myself. In the following chapter, I tell my research tale, a behind-the-scenes account.

CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN THE LINES – BEHIND THE SCENES

"Learning is the creative act that takes place in the relationship between an event and understanding. To understand requires an interpretive act based on a risk-taking venture."

Ellen Herda (1999, p. 137)

"Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot … be reduced to either verbalism or activism."

Paulo Freire (1989, p.106)

Charles Garoian (1999) claims that performance art pedagogy represents the praxis of postmodern theory, and that Suzanne Lacy's community-based performances exemplify this pedagogy. In the first half of this chapter, I present the theory and methods that have informed my research practice. I have turned to feminist, performative, and emancipatory pedagogies to help analyze my research data. I have described and reflected upon my role as a researcher, the researcher- participant relationships, as well the presentation of the research. The second half of this chapter deals with the study specifics, where did 'it' happen, what happened, who took part in these performance art projects (Turning Point and Under Construction) and how did they become part of this study? What form did the data take? I also introduce the two key research sites in this case: Turning Point project, and the performance Under Construction. I have tried to expose theory that has influenced me or that comments on this type of work, so that readers don't have to read between the lines. I have also tried to tell my research tale in a way that reveals more than what I learned or came to understand, but the process I took to get there.

Theoretical Grounds: Between the Lines

I have grounded this case-study in a feminist constructivist perspective. I have also taken into consideration postmodern philosophy. Feminist theories and postmodern philosophies have informed the ways in which we think about research, how we conducted it and the ways we chose to report on it (Bloom, 1998; Brown, 1998; Flax, 1990; Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; Giroux,1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; hooks, 1984; jagodzinski, 1989; Kirsch, 1999; McLaren, 1988; Olesen, 2000). In moments of doubt, feeling alone with the issues I found myself facing during this study, I have been

reassured by Leslie Rebecca Bloom (1998), as she tells that other feminist researchers also, "grapple with concerns about ethics, reflexivity, emotions, positionality, polyvocality, collaboration, identification with participants, intersubjectivity, and our own authority as interpreters" (p. 2). I wanted to do good feminist research using a feminist methodology. I knew that by nature, this project was 'a case', bounded and exemplary in nature, yet case-study methodology didn't hold for me a deep enough fit for my study (Stake, 1995). I also considered approaching the study as a phenomenon, exploring the lived experience (van Manen, 1997). However, since phenomenology aims at "making explicit and seeking universal meaning" (van Manen, p. 19) it is in polar opposition to the postmodern rejection of grand narratives and pluralism, I abandoned it as a consideration.

I ended up blending case-study and feminist methodologies. This combination didn't seem to be a huge stretch, more of an organic melding. However, Gesa Kirsch (1999) tells us that "feminist principles of research implies, no single methodology is feminist in itself, nor have feminists invented new research methods. Rather, it is a feminist perspective, including a commitment to improve women's lives and to eliminate inequalities between researchers and participants that characterizes feminist research" (p. 5). This troubled me as Bloom (1998) published *Under the sign of hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretations*. In her book, Bloom explicates a fairly well considered feminist methodology. Though Yvonna Lincoln (1997) had already assured me that there is no 'getting it right', I didn't want to get it wrong. So, I examined my practice according to Kirsch's feminist principles, and Bloom's feminist methodology, while situating the study as a case. Within a postmodern context, all is equally problematic. "Postmodernist context of doubt distrusts all methods equally. No method has a privileged status" (Lincoln, 1997, p. 38). Since postmodernism favours no method over another, I am left suspect of traditional case-study methodology and relied upon feminist principles to guide me. In the end, I have chosen what I thought would be a good research fit, a postmodern feminist case-study, framed by a constructivist paradigm.

In a constructivist framework multiple realities are recognized. Reality is considered socially and experientially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwantd, 1994). Constructivism, within a postmodern context acknowledges that there is no

absolute truth, but truths that are more or less sophisticated (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). I used to seek to tell, to find the truth. I've attempted to tell no lies, and I found myself asking, 'whose truth was I trying to tell?' and wondering if perhaps my truth was fiction for someone else. This led me to think about the blurred edge between the lines of fiction and fact. I have come to accept the ambiguity in depictions so long as they resonate with me and others, particularly those who participated in this study.

Bloom (1998) co-developed a feminist methodology (where methodology "is deeply rooted in the epistemological beliefs that a researcher brings to her inquiry") with one of her research participants known to us only as Olivia (p. 155). Olivia, a second year professor at a university worked with Kirsch as they went over Olivia's life experiences and eventually of their experiences together as researcher and participant. Bloom (1998) identifies the following five methodological concepts that were critical in her research: "the social construction of gender, the study of women's diverse lives, the contexts of the research question, the critical self-reflections of the researcher, and researcher relationships" (p. 139). To further explain these five categories, Bloom goes on to say that "gender as an analytic category remains powerful only in that it has the flexibility to be adapted when multiple subject positions and the complexities of life, nonunitary subjectivity, and interpersonal relationships are considered in relation to gender" (p. 144). In response to studying women's diverse lives, Bloom suggests that though many feminist researchers approach their "research participants with an empathetic heart and open mind, we must also approach the analysis of narratives with a somewhat sceptical or at least, un-idealistic eye, remembering that narratives never are able to represent either absolute truth or a lived experience" (p. 146). Based on feminist research literature and her own research experience, Bloom found that framing research questions from the researchers lived experience and the experiences of research participants to be equally important. Bloom also identifies the lived experiences of women, as primary research data, as an accepted feature of feminist methodology. "Another central goal of feminist methodology is that the researcher learns to openly locate her history, values, and assumptions in the text so that she, like those researched, are open to critical scrutiny by her readers" (Bloom, p. 148). Finally, Bloom identifies

what she considers the most critical component of feminist methodology, the research relationship and "the enlargement of the definition of rapport in the fieldwork process" (p. 150). From comparing and contrasting the previous proposed feminist methodology with the following feminist principles of research, we see that there is much overlap. The following are Kirsch's (1999) feminist principles of research:

- ask research questions which acknowledge and validate women's experiences;
- collaborate with participants as much as possible and so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive and cooperative.
- analyze how social, historical, and cultural factors shape the research site as well as participants' goals, values, and experiences;
- analyze how the researchers' identity, experience, training, and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis, and findings;
- correct androcentric norms by calling into question what has been considered "normal" and what has been regarded as "deviant";
- take responsibility for the representation of others in research reports by assessing probable and actual effects on different audiences; and
- acknowledge the limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data, as well as alternative interpretations of that data. (p. 4)

Kirsch is not the first feminist researcher to recommend these guiding principles, but calls for their adherence. I noted earlier in this section, these principles guided my research. Like other researchers who attempt to follow these guidelines, ethical dilemmas became a part of my research reality (Kirsch, 1999). Kirsch also acknowledges that some of these feminist principles are similar to those working in a postmodern tradition. "One thing shared by feminists and postmodern scholars, for example, is the antifoundational critique of knowledge. But one thing that is not shared is the tendency for some postmodern theory to drift into pure relativism. Feminist principles of inquiry enable researchers and readers to discern degrees of value; and feminist principles name these valuations as social constructions, not essential qualities" (Kirsch, p. 7).

As I prepared to write this thesis, I came across Lincoln's (1997) highlighted words in my tattered textbook, it read, "we will never totally 'get it right.' Perfection is not a requisite for social science research, and the postmodern doubt which we share leads us to believe that 'getting it right' is a project best abandoned...Within our partial and situated knowledges, we can nevertheless still move outward, inclusive of our orientation, thinking not first and last about our own research productivity, but rather

about the selves we bring to our storytelling lives. In moving outward, we can engage both our own multiple and complex selves, and also those whom we would speak: our subject-topics and respondents, our audiences, and our and others' texts" (p. 52). These words informed and aided my directions and actions in finding ways to manage this project.

"Qualitative feminist researchers, in making women's lives and contexts problematic, should openly render their own practices problematic" (Olesen, 2000, p. 238). I find this task inevitable, if not unavoidable. As I explore the artistic model used in Turning Point and Under Construction, I find myself also reflecting on my research practice and teaching practices. I question my biases, assumptions and my actions. What have my power relations been in this study? Have I provided the spaces for research participants to be heard? Have I provided an acceptable representation of their words, their experiences? I have attempted to be clear about where their experiences and my own converge. By hearing from these different voices and including them in this narrative account, I aim to bring about a deeper understanding of the multiple experiences in this project.

Feminisms

What feminism means for women today is different from what it has meant in the past. Though our struggles differ, they are struggles none the less. Because North American women have officially gained many equal rights, many young women today are under the impression that feminism is no longer necessary. They believe that feminists don't speak for them, though there are multitudes of feminisms. Some feminists aim to provide an opportunity for social change through creating a distance in which to critically analyze existing gender arrangements. The work of feminist social constructionists focuses on the material living conditions of women (Schwandt, 1994). Jane Flax (1990) reminds us that "feminist theory by itself cannot clear such a space. Without feminist political actions, theories remain inadequate and ineffectual" (p. 40). Turning Point as a feminist art project embodied the effort to materialize feminist goals through a collaborative project. Turning Point's goals were emancipatory in nature as they sought to empower young women, and give them voice while co-opting the mass

media into presenting their story in a favourable light –so that they might challenge media representation of young women. It is not possible to truly understand <u>Turning Point</u> or its related performance <u>Under Construction</u> without taking into account feminist theories.

From the multiple feminisms written about and discussed, not one, to my knowledge has overtly embraced perspectives of young woman. Often feminist voices we hear claim to speak for those younger, as they claim to speak for all women. *Speaking for others* was an issue that wound its way through the content of the performance in question, as well as through my research practice, and writing (Bloom, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Kirsch, 1999; Jayati, 1999; Lincoln, 1997; Lather 1995; Lather & Smithies 1997; Tisdell, 2000; Weiler, 1995a, 1995b). We need to consider the implications of this "polyphonic chorus of author/selves, subjects and participants, audiences, and texts" (Lincoln, p. 38). Lincoln also tells us that:

> Our friends and critics alike demand that they see evidence that our representational and 'othering' practices have not done violence to our respondents and their lives. They look for proof against having acted colonially or in ways which further marginalize or disadvantage. Our critics are quick to locate ways in which we have fenced round the center to keep strangers out. Often this means that voices other than the author's need to be heard. (p. 48)

In order that we attend to the above requirements, Lincoln tells us that we need to seek out these voices and find appropriate and sensitive ways to bring them into our texts. Participants will need to recognize their voices in our texts, whether they co-author them or not, and find them both meaningful and honest. We must avoid misrepresenting those who gave of their time, energy and themselves to partake in our research projects. Rather than simply reaching from our adult lives into our childhood memories, we need to reach out to girls today, and listen to them speak. Feminist research needs to include the voices of our female youth. We cannot deny them the authority of their own voices. What we can do is to include them in our research, and provide spaces within our studies where they can be heard, all the while taking care not to misrepresent them.

I believe for feminist educators and researchers, listening to our youth is very important. Yet, feminism, for many youth, has connotations that have alienated them. I asked some of the young women participants from <u>Turning Point</u> what their perceptions were of feminism. Seeing as <u>Turning Point</u> was considered a feminist project, the

responses I received were not what I had expected. In their own terms, they let me know that *feminists* did not indeed speak for them. What a dilemma. How could all forms of feminism have forgotten those on the verge of maturity? They are our daughters, nieces and friends. Even when we all seem to be speaking the same feminist language, echoing each others concerns, many of us consider ourselves to be feminist, while many of these youth reject this title, as they reject many things from the 'adult' world. Actions of feminism are more relevant to them than are the titles.

As a way to come to understand the experiences of the participating young women, I had to consider the interpretation of their narratives, our researcher –participant relationships, and my personal narratives as well. I have taken into account multiple perspectives of this project, by listening to others, some that see this as a feminist project, as well as others who adamantly do not. I do not make universalizing claims about the nature of young women, nor about their social environment. This study is about a specific project and an accompanying performance event whose characteristics may resonate with other projects and events. Also, the experiences and opinions expressed by the women study participants may resonate with this study's audience.

Jane Gaskell, Arlene McLaren & Myra Novogrodsky (1989) tell us that "There is no one place where women stand, and feminism means understanding the ways women have been silenced and women's experiences has been misrepresented to themselves and to others" (p. 39). Quasi-metanarrative feminist theories have been criticized for insufficiently attending to historical and cultural diversity, and falsely universalizing features of the theorists own era, culture, class, sexual orientation and ethnic group (hooks, 1984; Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; Olesen, 2000; Weiler, 1995). Social theories stemming from early feminist research tended to be totalizing or essentialist, as they sought to define key factors explaining sexism cross-culturally.

Feminism

Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1990) examine feminism and postmodernism by considering the relationship between philosophy and social criticism. Where postmodernists have focused on "elaborating antifoundational and metaphilosophical perspectives", feminists have prioritized social criticism over philosophy (p. 20). "Concerned with the difficulties of ever producing more than a partial story of women's

lives in oppressive contexts, postmodern feminists regard 'truth' as a destructive illusion"
(Olesen, 2000, p. 225). These two tendencies have complementary strengths and
weaknesses and provide important criticisms of each other.

<u>Feminist Pedagogy</u>

Feminist pedagogy as seen in art education is linked to new goals of collaborative,
and socially responsive art practices. Rita Irwin (1999) tells us that, "feminist pedagogy
seeks to transform social and institutional relations through the removal of oppressions
inherent in societal structures, stereotypes, and prevailing ideologies. Although feminist
pedagogy is concerned with gender relations, it is not limited to that critique. Creating a
liberating learning environment promotes a democratic process wherein learners are
directly involved in an inquiry process" (p. 37). Irwin also tells us that "Pedagogues and
learners alike become actively involved in the act of inquiry within an interactive
environment of collaboration" (p. 37). Elizabeth Tisdell (1998) tells us that feminist
pedagogy is about education for women in various environments, and that feminist
pedagogy is also about women's stories. "It is about using stories and examples from
real life in educational situations to facilitate both women's development and structural
social change for women" (Tisdell, 2000; 182). Feminist pedagogy appears to be a valid
way to look at <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u> as they both dealt with the stories
and learning of young women.

Suzi Gablik (1993) tells us that where modern art was founded on "notions of
radical autonomy and art for art's sake, the politics of a connective aesthetics is very
different" (p. 131). Though a modernist framework has been well defined, Gablik tells us
that "we do not have a process-oriented framework for those for whom the world consists
of dynamic interactions and interrelational processes" (p. 163). In this new aesthetic,
relationships are given authority, empathy is encouraged, and concrete social change is
more desired over merely symbolic potential. Gablik tells us that we need to change our
aesthetics to correlate with social good and change our ways thinking to include a
"methodology of participation" (p. 178). New goals for art include: "closeness, instead
of distancing; the cultivation of ecocentric values; whole-systems thinking; a developed
discipline of caring; an individualism that is not purely individual but is grounded in
social relationships and also promotes community and the welfare of the whole; an

expanded vision of art as a social practice and not just a disembodied eye" (Gablik, 1993, p. 181).

"Connective aesthetics and feminist pedagogy overlap in many ways. Both are concerned with collaboration, community building, caring, social purpose, listening, dialogue, modeling, taking responsibility, nurturing, and social action" (Irwin, 1999, p. 37). Irwin tells us that it is not sufficient to look at collaborative art pieces, we need listen to their messages. "We need to hear these collaborations through a listener centered, connective aesthetic combined with feminist pedagogy. We need to listen, and to be listened to, as we learn to connect with one another and our environment" (Irwin, 1999, p. 39). Turning Point, from its inception, called for this collaborative social interaction and focus on collective voices and stories. I found clear examples of the desire for connective aesthetic art production as I read through sketchbooks[1] from an early group of Turning Point girls where they answered the question: *Why do you want to do this as a group?* (this being the art project/performance). Though they were all thoughtful statements, I have selected a few to represent what seemed to be said by the group. The sketchbooks were gathered by the assistant producer of the project. Some pages were removed from the sketchbooks and bundled into common topics. As a result these pages are entirely anonymous and I don't know if these anonymous sketchbook pages, written with coloured markers, correspond to my study's participants. Rather than leaving each quotation the same, or marked with a number, I decided to simply change the font for each girl's quote. The following selection of girls' narratives are from their sketchbooks gathered after an early Turning Point planning workshop:

We are a group of girls working together to promote understanding of ourselves and each other. We want to create a number of performances which will relate our stories and experiences to the rest of society.

We want to do this as a group so as to gain the collective ideas and inspirations of various young women. To find those who can, if not relate to or feel what we have been through, empathize with our personal experiences. There is a jewel or power within each of us, however, together we can be strong *cheese.*

We want to do this as a group because we are all joined by a common thread and by common issues that we all care about strongly. Besides, we will make a bigger impact if we act together and work well as a team. I feel that we need to change the way society treats us.

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[1] Refer to page 96 of this document for information relating to gaining research access to participants.

As a group, we have collective ideas, thoughts and personal experiences. Together as a group we have a strong voice and can hopefully let other young women know that they are an important part of Canadian society. We want to create a performance that will acknowledge the struggles and achievements of young women across Canada.

Why we (the group) are doing this:
- to form a collective conscious in order to make decisions and create ideas in ways which pertain to the community of young women which we as a group of 30 represent in the midst of our larger community.
- In order to bring together all of our experiences into a mosaic of experience.
- To make a collectively strong statement that will show the many faces of young women to the outside community.
- To enjoy ourselves amongst one another and realise our value.

We want to do this because we want to go on TV and because we get four hundred dollars each but best of all we get to speak out **against discrimination against women, say we are more than just** reminders of sex **and 'cause I like to doodle on my hands and cause we all do.**
(participant's emphasis)

As a group, we represent a diverse group of young women with different ideas, issues and backgrounds. However, we, as a collective, have much in common, (being young women in Vancouver) and though this project we hope to recognize our common ground and celebrate our differences, raise awareness concerning our issues, respect our heritage, create art blah blah blah blah...

WE WANT TO DO THIS AS A GROUP BECAUSE WE ARE A BUNCH OF ~~YOUNG WOMEN~~ GIRLS –WHICH IS STRONGER THAN JUST OF ONE ~~PERSON~~. WE WANT TO RELATE OUR STORIES TO THE PUBLIC BECAUSE WE FEEL THAT THEY SHOULD BE SHARED. WE NEED TO MAKE CANADA AWARE OF THE ISSUES WHICH AFFECT US. D VERSITY
(participant's emphasis)

(excerpts from anonymous Turning Point sketchbooks, dated August 23, 1996)

I have transcribed their written words, and interpreted them with font and other word processing tools. However, I am disappointed with the sanitization of this process, losing the flavour of these notes and sketches. The following page is my response to this sterility of form and richness of content. The segments of text from the girls sketchbooks have been combined and then over-layed over a coloured doodle from one of the sketchbook pages.

We are a group of girls working together to promote understanding of ourselves and each other. We want to create a number of performances which will relate our stories and experiences to the rest of society.

As a group, we represent a diverse group of young women with different ideas, issues and backgrounds. However, we, as a collective, have much in common, (being young women in Vancouver) and though this project we hope to recognize our common ground and celebrate our differences, raise awareness concerning our issues, respect our heritage, create art blah blah blah blah...

WE WANT TO DO THIS AS A GROUP BECAUSE WE ARE A BUNCH OF ~~YOUNG WOMEN~~ GIRLS -WHICH IS STRONGER THAN JUST OF ONE ~~PERSON~~. WE WANT TO RELATE OUR STORIES TO THE PUBLIC BECAUSE WE FEEL THAT THEY SHOULD BE SHARED. WE NEED TO MAKE CANADA AWARE OF THE ISSUES WHICH AFFECT US. DIVERSITY ♀

As a group, we have collective ideas, thoughts and personal experiences. Together as a group we have a strong voice and can hopefully let other young women know that they are an important part of Canadian society. We want to create a performance that will acknowledge the struggles and achievements of young women across Canada.

We want to do this as a group so as to gain the collective ideas and inspirations of various young women. To find those who can, if not relate to or feel what we have been through, empathize with our personal experiences. There is a jewel or power within each of us, however, together we can be strong cheese.

We want to do this as a group because we are all joined by a common thread and by common issues that we all care about strongly. Besides, we will make a bigger impact if we act together and work well as a team. I feel that we need to change the way society treats us.

We want to do this because we want to go on TV and because we get four hundred dollars each but best of all we get to **speak out** against discrimination against women, say we are more than just reminders of sex and 'cause I like to doodle on my hands and cause we all do.

Why we (the group) are doing this:
·to form a collective conscious in order to make decisions and create ideas in ways which pertain to the community of young women which we as a group of 30 represent in the midst of our larger community.
·In order to bring together all of our experiences into a mosaic of experience.
·To make a collectively strong statement that will show the many faces of young women to the outside community.
·To enjoy ourselves amongst one another and realise our value.

(excerpts from anonymous Turning Point sketchbooks, dated August 23, 1996)

Sandra Taylor (1995) tells us that a feminist pedagogy "needs to take account of the complexities involved in the construction of femininity if it is to be effective. Thus it needs to draw on theoretical understandings about subjectivity and change, on research

on girls' subcultures, and also on research on popular cultural texts and femininity" (p. 4). Taylor calls for pedagogy that engages girls in a critical discourse of constructions of femininity so that, in the end they can construct their own femininity. "The key to empowerment of young women seems to lie in the development of a sense of social or collective identity as girls or young –women rather than merely in the development of a sense of identity as an individual" (Taylor, p. 15). In the early stages of Turning Point, about 30 young women were involved in a process of analysing stereotypes as presented by the media as well as their own. In group workshops they mapped out and discussed these images. Many of their suggested performance images include mirrors, images of women from the visual mass media, barbies, women holding hands, and women talking – telling stories. Based on this early analysis and potential site visits, they came up with some preliminary performance proposals. Some of their proposals include:

Seawall: lots of girls and or women joined hands along the wall singing songs and reading stories and poems at the same time.
Woodwards building: let us be an art exhibition to let people see how we feel & or how women are treated/portrayed in the media.
Construction Site: for grand opening do a performance lots of people of all different races & backgrounds from different walks of life.

SEAWALL: EACH HAVE BIG MIRROR AND FLASHLIGHT ALL AROUND SEAWALL TOGETHER TO GET ATTENTION, FLIP SIDE OF MIRROR WILL HAVE STORIES ABOUT MANY ISSUES ON THEM. WE WILL READ STORIES WITH MEGAPHONES TO ALL THOSE PASSING SEAWALL AND AT THE END SAY THESE STORIES AREN'T MYTH. THEY COULD HAPPEN TO EVERYONE INCLUDING YOU – THEN FLIP MIRROR TO SHOW THE LISTENERS THEIR OWN IMAGES TO EMPHASISE THE LAST POINT.

WOODWARDS: Women & girls in history, mothers & daughters, reopening the past, relationships, shopping – talking manikins, girls dressed up like manikins telling stories of women of the past, spotlight manikins.

Lost lagoon: Barges, boats, stories, campfire, lights, fountain
Library: tableau – visual display, people walking around with walkman, lasers and smoke.
(participant's emphasis)

Seawall: Girls on roller-blades w/mirrors &stories written on back going around seawall.

Library: Throwing barbies on to roof. 2nd floor girls acting & looking like barbies. 1st floor girls acting & looking like girls

Library: I love the shadows
Women are shadows materialize only as sexual objects only purpose. Create shadows, line audience up in rows along all viewing places on floor so floor is empty just shadows - cut out paper figures on top of glass roof & on glass windows – sides to create real images & cartoons of media.

Seawall: Chains of people and things and unity, boats made of paper in the water.
Woodwards we can use the window for displays and people.
(participant's emphasis)

Construction Site means MEN ewwww... Sleazy construction guys whistling and staring.

Queen Elizabeth Park: A funeral procession of Barbie dolls and other un-acurate female images @ Q.E. park, put pictures on a papered wall, as end of performance, take down paper, behind paper is mirrors.
Seawall: Women joining hands on seawall after a hand painting session.

SEAWALL (BY STANLEY PARK): USE THE SEAWALL AND HAVE WOMEN OF REAL SELVES STAND ON WALL UNITED W/HANDS AND BELOW ON BEACH HAVE THE BODY IMAGE/WOMEN IN MEDIA PORTRAYALS. DURING A CERTAIN TIME, USE LIKE A BIG BLANKET OR PARACHUTE AND COVER ALL THE PORTRAYALS ON THE BEACH, SHOWING, THE "HIDING OF FALSE WOMEN FOREVER" – CAN ALSO DO @ Q.E.

(anonymous Turning Point sketchbook notes on site and performance suggestions, Aug, 20, 1996)

The group visited numerous sites to consider for the performance, including: the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Botanical Gardens; Queen Elizabeth Park, City Hall, Commercial Drive; China town; Seawall/Stanley Park; Woodward's; Ford Theatre; Vancouver Central Library; Roundhouse Community Centre; and a construction site. Out of 30 girls, only two suggested the use of the Construction site, most of them didn't even comment on it at all. The seawall at Stanley Park, Woodward's, and Queen Elizabeth park were clearly favoured by the girls. The Library was also high on their list of possible sites. In the end, the construction site of The Residences on Georgia was selected because, according to Lacy "We really liked the idea of girls on construction sites. That stuck as the idea, so off we went to find a construction site" (in Cramp, 1997, p. 5). Lacy (Dec., 14, 1996) drafted a document in which she lists the Vancouver Library, A construction site and, David Lam Park/ Roundhouse as the top three sites for consideration. Lacy identified the strength of the site as a point of juxtaposition of young women in an unexpected location due to gender perceptions, and the metaphors "a changing Vancouver (diversity), building the future, forming the foundation and developing a physical sense of capability" (p. 2). Some of the girls did not like this idea

at all. One core girl wasn't sure who, or when, it was decided that this would be the final location – thinking that perhaps she had missed 'that' meeting. However, through discussions about the performance site, many of the core girls understood the metaphorical possibilities of the high-rise construction environment. Construction sites can be beautiful from a distance, with the sun glinting off their freshly cut steel, and partly installed glass. But upon closer inspection, the roughness becomes apparent and the beauty becomes a potential beauty. The building is not as complete as it first appears to be. Like a high-rise under construction, a girl at a distance may appear to be a confident woman, but as she approaches it becomes clear that the confidence is not yet there, she is still a girl –becoming a woman. The juxtaposition of young women and the male adult environment of a construction site, holds potential for engaging the audience into thinking about why is it such an unusual site for women to be, and asking where their perceptions about women and construction sites come from. All the while, they could become aware that these young women themselves are still under construction. And, these are the youth that will be responsible for building our future Vancouver.

By the time the performance came around, there were no dissenting voices questioning the performance location, from the core girls. Everyone seemed to be pleased to see this performance happen. However, the discussion about the metaphors did not enter into the performance itself, for many of the new performance girls and audience, the meaning was lost.

Feminist pedagogy, based on a desire for social change through activism is rooted in the history of women's liberation (Weiler, 1995a). In examination of Frierean and other liberatory pedagogy through a feminist pedagogical lens, Kathleen Weiler has identified three areas where these pedagogies can be expanded. "The first of these concerns the role and authority; the second addresses the epistemological question of the source of the claims for knowledge and truth in personal experience and feeling; the last, emerging from challenges by women of color and postmodernist feminist theorists, raises the question of difference" (p. 31). She has identified *difference* as a central category of feminist pedagogy. Assumptions by earlier feminist scholars that they could make claims and speak for all women, has been "exploded by the critiques of postmodern feminists

and the growing assertion of lesbian and women of color that the universal category 'woman' in fact meant 'White, heterosexual, middle-class woman,'" (Weiler, p. 31).

Shared experiences form the basis for political analysis and action according to both early feminist and Freirean pedagogy (Weiler, 1995a). Another area of commonality with these two forms of pedagogy, is in the authority of the teacher. "The feminist teacher as intellectual and theorist find expression in the goal of making students themselves theorists of their own lives by interrogating and analyzing their own experiences" (p. 34). Turning Point claimed to focus on the girls' unique experiences – diversity (shared individual stories). This was something the girls wanted to maintain. Yet, the shared experience was also in the forefront of Under Construction. The artistic director tells us that the goals of her work have been "definitely... to empower participants, to raise consciousness about certain shared conditions of being female" (Lacy in Gablik, 1993, p. 110). This was most obvious with the aesthetic elements of Under Construction. Red t-shirt uniforms, made this diverse group look the same. Being visually the same, their diversity was reduced if not eliminated. This was a common critique from the viewing audience and is noted by project manager and production producer Barbara Clausen (1998).

The second key parallel is the question of the authority of the teacher –in this case, the artist. Patti Lather (1991) tells us that we need to rethink the role of teachers who have liberatory intentions. Lather asks "how can we position ourselves as less masters of truth and justice and more as creators of a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf? How do we do so without romanticizing the subject and experience-based knowledge?" (p. 137). Though in this model of artistic construction, the artist consulted with participants and other stakeholders, right from the beginning, the artist maintained ultimate control and authority of the final image. This connects with Gablik's (1991) description of modernism where "the self is central; power is associated with authority, mastery, invulnerability and a strong affirmation of ego-boundaries –which is precisely what the modern artist's 'self' came to convey" (p. 62). Gablik goes onto contrast the modern approach with a partnership model where "relationships are central, and nothing stands alone, under its own power, or exists in isolation, independent of the larger framework, or process, in which it exists" (p. 62). For

Gablik, "community is the starting point for new modes of relatedness, in which the paradigms of social conscience replaces that of the individual genius" (p. 114). With the artistic model as expressed in this work, it seems as though the artist is crossing a threshold from a modernist paradigm into the postmodern, and operating within a hybrid paradigm. The artist's work is responding to individuals and communities, but the ultimate authority lays with the visioning artist.

Postmodernism

It had been generally accepted that attainable objective truth is dead (Tom Barone, 2000). Tom Barone confirms the suspected demise of 'subjectivity' as well, "the term is no longer needed to serve as a foil for its discredited twin" (p. 166). Hal Foster (1996) criticizes Jameson's position as being too totalizing and not culturally sensitive. He also claims that the discourse around the *death of the subject* is now also dead. "The subject has returned in cultural politics of different subjectivities, sexualities and ethnicities" (Foster, p. 209). Postmodernism rejects both the omnipotent god-gaze of the Enlightenment and the neutrality of reason (Lyotard,1991; Foucault & Deleuze, 1986; Flax, 1990; Hartsock, 1996; Lather, 1991). Nancy Hartsock quotes Kum Kum Sangari when she describes postmodern theory as "the voice of epistemological despair" (p. 46). Postmodernism is the end of the grand narrative (Lyotard, 1971) and has been characterized as schizophrenic and pastiche, as well as linked to consumer capitalism (Jameson, 1984). Over the years, elements of postmodernism have been debated. Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argue that Lyotard's conception of social critics is "too restricted to permit an adequate critical grasp of gender dominance and subordination" or dominance and subordination along lines of race and class (p. 20).

Researchers from various disciplines draw from postmodernism (not taken as an absolute, as it resists the very notion) as they construct their theoretical paradigms. Though postmodernism and its notion of multiple truths is far reaching, I was recently reminded of its limitations, in my practical lived experience. As I entered into the writing phase of my study, I was caught off-guard as I accepted default preferences of my word-processing program. Having given this just a little thought, I discovered the auto-correct feature has turned out to be little more than an ever-present positivist editor looming just below the surface of my screen –quietly 'correcting' my intended words –as they deemed

by a programmer elsewhere as being an incorrect way to write, or to think....With each strike of an 's' following 'knowledge' to make it ' knowledges, the bright red wavy line highlights my 'error'. I had to 'teach' it that feminism could also be plural, and that 'other' could be a verb as in 'othering', likewise with 'subject' in 'subjectivising'. This has been a little reminder to me, of how limited postmodernism has been in bringing about far reaching change, effectively challenging modernism's pervasive notion of an absolute truth, to spread the pluralism of postmodernism.

There are commonalties among postmodernist and feminist theories as feminist theorists enter into and echo postmodernist discourses, deconstructing "notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their neutral and universalizing facades" (Flax, 1990, p. 41). In the early 1990s, Fraser and Nicholson (1990) critiqued universalizing feminist theory and called for a postmodern feminism that is explicitly historical, culturally and temporally specific. They suggest that methods used in postmodern feminist research be tailored "to suit the task at hand and use multiple categories when appropriate and forswearing the metaphysical comfort of a singular feminist method or epistemology" (p. 35). For Fraser and Nicholson (1990), in the postmodern era "legitimation becomes plural, local and immanent" (p. 23). A decade later, Virginia Olesen (2000) reminds us that the postmodern position has "produced an uneasy and sometimes anxious concern that the shifting sands of meaning, text, locale, and the continual proliferation of identities left no grounds for reform oriented research, reinforced the status quo, erased structural power as well as failed to address problems or to represent a cultural system" (p. 226). Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont (2000) warn of the dangers that accompany liberation in postmodernism. "Whenever women intellectuals see their world differently from the elite men around them they are in danger of finding that a new theory has defined them out of existence. Paradigm shifts in dominant group ideology rarely benefit the muted subordinate group. Feminist scholars need to be alert to men changing the question" (p. 145). Simplicity is a myth when accompanying depth, or breadth for that matter. There is no clear path, no easy answer, but there may be questions so subtle in nature that they were previously overlooked. As I weave my way through the contradictions in the

research and theoretical literatures, I prepare for my research analysis. I soon became accustomed to and anticipated contradictions.

<center>Emancipatory and Critical Pedagogy</center>

Knowledge is dependent on culture, custom and historical specificity. "Some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (McLaren, 1988, p.169). This notion echoes the conditions of a postmodern feminism as described by Fraser and Nicholson (1990). Critical educational theorists view school knowledge as historically rooted and socially constructed and is deeply entwined in a nexus of power relations (McLaren, 1988).

Emancipatory knowledge helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by power relations and privilege (McLaren, 1988). Hegemony, the process by which a dominating culture exercises its power over subordinate groups, serves to maintain power relations in the form of consensual social practice. We can see examples of consensual domination in our every day, from our legal system, schools, churches and families. Friere (1993) reminds us that knowledge of power imbalances is insufficient. Significant social change requires praxis, "*reflection and action* directed at the structures to be transformed. The revolutionary effort to transform these structures radically cannot designate its leaders as its *thinkers* and the oppressed as mere *doers*" (p. 107). Patti Lather (1995) identifies the "pressing need to turn critical thought into emancipatory action" (p. 303). Lather (1991) questions the limits of the reasoning mind to free the oppressed. Lather criticizes Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux for positioning the "'oppressed' as the unfortunately deluded, and critical pedagogues as 'transformative intellectuals'…with privileged knowledge free of false logic and beliefs. Such a bald [sic] statement points out the profound dangers in attempting to speak for others, to say what others want or need, of performing the Grand Theorist" (p. 137). Aronowitz and Giroux called for educators to "'become transformative intellectuals rather than *skillful technicians*.' What was now necessary was to 'link emancipatory possibilities to critical forms of leadership by rethinking and restructuring the role of curriculum workers'"(in Pinar et. al., 1995, p. 260). Lather's critique would seem to support the implementation of the feminist principle that: *we*

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need to consider implications when we speak for others within our research as well as in our art productions. We also need to consider why we feel the need to speak for others in these contexts, and whether the author of the narratives can speak for themselves within in spaces we provide, or co-create.

Garoian (1999) claims that "critical pedagogy of postmodern performance art consists of interdisciplinary and intercultural work. While interdisciplinarity empowers spectators /students to explore and challenge the discipline-based ideas of institutionalized culture, interculturality enables them to cross borders, to challenge the biases of ethnocentricities, and to develop a world where a diversity of cultural perspectives can coexist" (p. 42). Central to issues in <u>Turning Point</u> and this study is *praxis*. For Garoian, performance art pedagogy is the praxis of postmodern theory. He claims that "performance art espouses the critique of cultural codes and the development of political agency. A pedagogy founded on performance art represents the praxis of the postmodern ideals of progressive education, a process through which spectators/students learn to challenge the ideologies of institutionalized learning (schooled culture) in order to facilitate political agency and to develop critical citizenship" (p. 39). He explains that performance art pedagogy "represents the embodied expression of culture as aesthetic experience –that is, pedagogy as performance art and performance art as pedagogy" (p. 45). Moreover, Garoian claims that the collaborative performances directed by Suzanne Lacy are curriculum text. Garoian, identifies six strategies of performance art pedagogy. Holding Lacy's work as an exemplar, Garoian claims:

> Lacy's community-based projects correspond to the six strategies of performance art pedagogy. They represent the praxis of postmodern theory. Like an ethnographer, she enables a community to represent itself, to define its own concerns, its own identity. She fosters a public discourse that exposes and challenges linguistic misconceptions and stereotypes. She inspires political activism to resist cultural oppression. She creates a climate of social awareness and collective involvement. Her community performances attract and exploit the technological apparatus of the mass media to challenge its negative stereotyping with images that shed positive light on the community's identity. Finally, by re-positioning community activism as art, she enables an ecstatic awareness of body's cultural oppression and transformation. (128)

Considering that Garoian published this work two years after this research had been conducted and was in the process of being written, I did not take it into consideration in the formation of my study, but have considered it in my writing and final analysis. I also

have to note that the basis for his claims come from reports of Lacy's performances and interviews with the artist (which incidentally were concurrent with the <u>Turning Point</u> project). I also have to admit, that I was initially seduced by the potency of descriptive reports, videos and presentations. But after having witnessed a performance, and been behind the scenes, I feel that I have a more informed and balanced perspective than I had initially.

Power is a key theme in my research in three key ways. In the first place, the claimed content of the <u>Turning Point</u> deals with the media representation – misrepresentation of young women. Secondly, there is the power relation between the directing artist and the art project participants to consider. Finally, there is the researcher-participant relationship that also warrants exploration.

Knowledge statements are human constructions of models of reality (Polkinghorne, 1997). The knowledge that I bring to this study is contextualized, bounded locally and temporally, yet remains in flux. Knowledge of the human condition is incomplete and will remain a partial and situated tale. Representation of knowledge, and lived experience is also a key in this research where: participants represent themselves in self-published zines[2]; participants analyse mass media representation of women; representation of the young women in <u>Turning Point</u> and in <u>Under Construction</u>; finally, how these young women are represented in this thesis.

<u>Performing and Reporting Research</u>

Joe Kincheloe (1997) describes the struggle within qualitative research and its use of narratives:

> As postmodernist theory has rejected modernist grand narratives along with their totalizing claims –that is, the rejection of omnifictionalization as a narrative act –a space for a new look at narratology has opened. Moving beyond the empirical belief that social reality is both perceivable and coherent in its structure, qualitative researchers have struggled to fill the liberatory space. While the replacement of monological holism with heteroglossic textual interpretations and polyphonic voices has been helpful on a number of levels, such innovations have not necessarily revolutionized qualitative research narratives. Until such

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[2] A zine is a non-profit self-publication, often produced on a photocopier. It is a hands-on print and image document. The term zine (pronounced *zeen*) comes from the term 'fanzine'. These are often very individual and quirky in nature and form (Vale, 1996). See Appendix II for a few sample pages from *Turning Point Zine* 1.

> narratives and their formations are reconceptualized, realist narratives will continue to imperialize consciousness by constructing a particular subject position for the reader. As realist narratives resolve contradictions, an unproblematized hallucinatory social whole is created. (p. 71)

Within our positions as researchers, we need to acknowledge that the power to narrate or represent is equal to the power to silence and misrepresent. There is not a clear distinction and care must be taken to ensure we do not end up perpetuation current oppressive systems. We need to render our own research practices problematic as we render problematic women's lives and contexts (Olesen 2000). There are no distinct edge between our lives and our research, and we need to acknowledge this explicitly in our research and our writing.

Tidy compartmentalizing of our work and our lives is no longer possible. Some artists blur boundaries between disciplines when they describe their artwork as cultural analysis. Others describe their work as social and political actions. Artistic and academic disciplines no longer have discrete edges (Garioan, 1999; Straw, 1997). More and more, works of art, criticism, and scholarship have come to define their projects through cultural analysis. Across these activities, we increasingly find the deployment of a shared set of analytical tools, or reference to a common body of authors and texts (Berland, Straw & Tomas, 1997, p. 4).

In theatrical improvisations, the actor is given a situation in which to respond. There is no script, but there is a theme. Conclusion comes naturally as the actors respond to one another. A successfully improvised skit will engage the audience in the moment. The flow of the scene shifts as each actor slips into unexpected material. It is the unexpected situations and the equally unexpected responses that bring richness to the performance.

> Actions in the social world are experientially guided and responsive to changing contexts without the necessity to 'stop and think' before the act. Research practice can be characterized as a dance in which investigators respond to the opportunities and challenges of their projects through 'felt meanings'. (Gendlin quoted in Polkinghorne, 1997, pp. 11)

Like actors in situated improvisations, we live our lives. Surprises come our way and we react. We create new situations and others respond. Within our established expectations of daily events, there is chance for the unexpected. Researchers who proceed inductively, with eyes and ears open to the voices and perspectives of others,

hear the unexpected and see the unimagined (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997 p. 11). This is when the boundaries between life and research blur and become even more arbitrary. In this way researched-lives, respond to and grows with each new situation. Norman Denzin (1997) tells us that "in dealing with the truths of life's fictions, the dividing line between fact and fiction is tested, and reality and the text become one. Narrative, in its many storied, performance, and textual forms is all that we have. [...] There are no stories out there waiting to be told and no certain truths waiting to be recorded; there are only stories yet to be constructed" (p. 266).

Though I have been aware of my own performance throughout this research, I have only now begun to feel comfortable with telling my performance tale. I have to acknowledge my own learning experience through this research, not only have I learned about others, but I have learned about myself and have found my own voice. I agree with Carolyn Ellis ((2000) that "vulnerability can be scary, but it also can be the source of growth and understanding" (p. 752). *Writing this research has been an intensely personal task, I feel intellectually exposed and personally vulnerable.* This personal discovery happened well into the writing process. Though intrigued by embodied performance text, at this point in time, I am determined to see this script through to its final pages rather than abandon it. As I construct this text I do so with consideration of my audience(s). The audience, in this case, are the readers of this text, including the professional (a group of scholars), and the participatory (research and art project participants) (Denzin, 1997, p. 188).

Who do we hope will read our reports? How can we make our reports accessible and meaningful to our intended audiences. This may mean more than one version of the same report, or it may mean that sections within the report take on differing tones. If we wish to retain the inclusive essence of our research, then we must consider the language and form we use when reporting narrative studies. Otherwise, resulting articles would be removed from the reality known by the participants and the researcher during the acts of research. Inclusivity in our research, through the use of narratives, would then be limited to the acts of data collection. If your ontology proclaims inclusiveness, in those cases, would be hypocritical, choosing when the participants are included and yet excluded from discourse. Particularly in research that claims to be inclusive, participants must be

considered when preparing a research text, as they may wish to read the findings of the research which they personally helped to inform.

I believe along with others (Lincoln, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1997) that it is necessary for research reports be accessible to the participants. If the language is elusive to them, then it will only serve to alienate them from the project. Often in qualitative research, participants dedicate a lot of time and personal energy. I would question then, who would such research reports serve if the participants who were supposed to benefit from the project, were not seriously considered as also a valid audience of research reports? That is not to say each report must be accessible to everyone, but that some of the report writing should be considerate of research participants.

Feminist theories have informed the ways in which social science research is conducted and reported (Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 1997, 2000; Flax, 1990; Fraser & Nicholson 1990; hooks, 1984; Lincoln, 1997; Miller, 1991). Postmodern philosophies have also effected the way many of us perceive our research practices (jagodzinski, 1989; Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; McLaren, 1988; Giroux, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 1997; Lather, 1991, 1995; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Research can respond and grow throughout the duration of the study, and can be polyvocal and consider multiple audiences and multiple perspectives. It can be, and should be, inclusive and accessible. Finally, we can talk about our research and present our narratives –free from the grand narrative, and do not have to claim 'the answer' to 'a problem'.

It is not always easy, nor obvious where we need to stop our studies. If we are still looking for 'conclusions' this task is even harder. The conclusion of a study doesn't mean that we have found the answer but may have found the appropriate moment to pause and reflect knowing that research and study is ongoing.

I often relay to others the events in my life as unified tales. Tom Barone (2000) tells us that we do not "view time as a series of isolated moments, each one disconnected from the other. Instead we tend to make sense of the moments of our lives by placing them within the context of all previous instants of awareness" (p. 123). We edit our stories so that they include details that are relevant to the plot, and we exclude those details that are of less importance. Where life events are somewhat chaotic and make for

a messy story –narratives are our framed edited tales that we construct through careful selection and edition so we can make sense of our tales, find meaning in them, and come to understandings. Donald Polkinghorne (1997) connects commonly practiced life storytelling with the function of narrative discourse in academic research. Narrative configuration cannot impose "any emplotted order on the selected events. The final story must fit the events while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that was not necessarily apparent in the events as it happened" (Polkinghorne, p. 15). For Polkinghorne and others (Ellis, 1997; Ricoeur, 1984; van Manen, 1997) "researchers speak with the voice of the storyteller rather than the impersonal voice of the logician or the arguer. They speak in the first person as the teller of their own tale" (Polkinghorne, p. 15).

"Narrative is the natural mode through which human beings make sense of their lives in time. Narrative discourse produces stories whose subject matter is human action" (Polkinghorne, 1997, p.13). Narrative has been used as a means to document stories within research. One form of narrative is eloquently told by Ellis (1997) as she reveals her provoking autoethnographic tales that are simultaneously personal and academic. Like performance artist, Allan Kaprow (1993), her work also explores the intersection of work and life, the blurring of life's boundaries. For me the research process was a personal act –as is this writing. I kept this sense of exposure in mind as I went through participants' written and audio narratives.

Lincoln (1997) describes texts as:

testaments to the facts of our existence, to having "been there," and to the many voices of the individuals with whom we have interacted. But much is being demanded of postmodern texts. Beyond being testamentary, they are expected to fulfil purposes never premised until the later half of this century [last]. Readers and theoreticians alike ask that texts "come clean" with author's partial, situated, but authentic self, preferably the "self" that showed up to begin the fieldwork, the self that accomplished the fieldwork, and the self who left changed (since authentic fieldwork inevitably changes a person). p. 48

Voice

Embedded in much of feminist research are the notions of inclusivity and the empowerment of women. One of the key issues that I have faced in doing and writing this research is a common dilemma among feminist researchers (Bloom, 1998; Brooks, 2000; Brown, 1998; Kincheloe, 1997; Kirsch, 1999; Lather, 1995; Lincoln, 1997), that is,

how do we provide a place where women's voices can be heard "without exploiting or distorting those voices?" (Olesen, 2000). Though I have requested participants to read through, edit, and comment on their narratives, I did not receive many replies. Some were merely grammatical changes, while others included current reflections on their experiences in the art project and performance. I cannot be certain that what I have written today, is true for each of the study participants. I have tried to be inclusive, but still find myself questioning my practices.

Kay Standing (1998) had similar responses from her study participants. She 'tidied' their transcribed narratives in response to their feedback on the transcriptions. But Standing also raises an important consideration for those of us who engage in recorded conversations and interviews that we later transcribe, she notes "we *do* transcribe our participants' words as they were spoken –their spoken language enters the text to make our work 'authentic' and real *–our* spoken language does not" (p. 192).

While writing this chapter, I ran into Alix, (an adult study participant you will be introduced in the next chapter) outside our neighbourhood coffee shop. It had been sometime since we had run into each other. We quickly caught up with each others' lives, the ages of our toddler daughters; the states of our home-renos; the improvement of the neighbourhood and who is also living nearby; she has changed jobs; and I am finishing this thesis. At this point, she told me, 'I was a lot of help wasn't I,' sarcastically. She went on to tell me how she had never read her own spoken words before, and that she 'sounded like such an idiot'. I of course disagreed with her, because I genuinely thought that she was fairly articulate and interesting. She was apologetic and told me that she just wanted to 'completely edit things out'. I assured her that it wasn't too late. She made it clear that she wanted to have her text, as Standing said, 'tidied up'. And again, here I am using our candid conversation as an example of how participants may feel when they read their spoken conversation for the first time. Perhaps this is related to why many of them don't make changes or respond. Perhaps, for some it is too embarrassing to read, let alone comment on. Alix and I have planned to get together to visit and let our girls play.

Occasionally, in the written narratives, I included my short clipped comments, or responses, but only to maintain the flow of the written conversation. At the time, I did

not consider what I had to say as being important to the content of the document to warrant its inclusion in the final text. Now, I know that my questions need to be visible in the text so as to get a fuller picture of what the dynamic in the interview was, and why a participant might have responded in the way she did. I know that I cannot present the 'whole picture' of what happened or fully describe their collective experience, but I hope to present a mutually agreeable narrative of the events in general, and to include contradictions and dissenting voices.

There are researchers who claim to be inclusive of their participants, and in an attempt to be true to those individuals, use narrative as a tool to record the stories and voices of participants (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995; Blenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1996; hooks, 1987; Lather & Smithie, 1995). Joe Kincheloe (1997) tells us that one "does not *discover* a voice that was there all the time but *fashions* one in negotiation with his or her environment. In the context of inquiry, critical constructivism intervenes in the fashioning process by pointing out the omnipresence of power" (p. 60). Yvonna Lincoln (1997) reminds us that "'voice' is not something we 'discover' for 'subject voices'; it is a process of discovery we may start, but which they complete" (p. 44). Ann Brooks (2000) uses the term *giving voice* as a term to articulate a previously unnamed experience. For Brooks, the term *developing a voice* is:

> a process of evolution, of gradual unfolding, with voice taking on different forms as it develops. As a metaphor, the idea of developing a voice is an attempt to illuminate how women learn to express their identities as they change and develop. A woman may need to learn more about herself in order to express herself more fully and truthfully. In turn, as she develops a voice and listens to her own words, a woman may learn more about herself, and this new knowledge may further contribute to changes in her identity. The expression of identity may not always be consistent with women's internal experience of self, and one challenge may be for women to develop a voice, a means of self-expression, that corresponds to who they know themselves to be. (p. 93)

Brooks also tells us about how upper-middle class girls reclaim their voices after choosing silence in order to fit with social expectations for female behaviour. She found that poor and working class girls also chose silence, but it was to protect themselves from gossip amongst their peers. The rediscovery of their voices came after a recognition that "voice is emotional and physical, not simply intellectual" (Brooks, 2000, p. 96).

> Voice is a particularly powerful image because it places the powerless in a proactive role. In terms of learning, voice as power suggests that women learn to

use voice in response to their experiences of power relationships. Their use of
voice may conform to inequities of power; they may also learn to use voice in
ways that subvert power....The metaphor of voice as power can be expanded to
encompass women's individual and collective voices. Women can claim voice
and power as individuals and as a group, and these individuals and collective
efforts are frequently intertwined. (Hayes, 2000. p. 102)

Voice, as individual expression as well as collective expression, was integral to Turning
Point and Under Construction. In the following chapters, we will read the narratives of
younger and older participants. The younger participants were often focused on being
heard, while the older study participants were focused on providing space for these young
women to be heard. The goals of these connected projects, aimed to empower young
women, and to give them voice. There were numerous conversations among Turning
Point participants during its development and their voices ultimately provided the audio
focal point of Under Construction. In the following chapters I have tried to understand
how this act meets the criterion of empowerment as claimed by Garoian (1999).

Narrative offers an authenticity to participants' voices, and a flexibility in the
collection of data. However, once the narratives are analyzed and synthesized they are
then reported in formats accepted by most academic serials, often exclusive of
participants as any other academic report (Sawicki, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1997).

Kirsch (1999) tells us that researchers "inevitably interpret and appropriate
participants' stories in the context of their work, filter interviewees' comments through
their theoretical framework, and analyze participants' narratives based on their own
knowledge, training, and lived experiences...Even feminist researchers who deliberately
set out to validate women's experiences can face interpretive conflicts when interviewing
women who do not share their values" (p. 49). Even though I acknowledge these
dilemmas in this research, it does not free me from the problem itself. On the contrary,
since I am aware of these dilemmas, I feel bound to respond to them in my work.

There is no consensus on how or whether we should include research participants
in research analysis, or how we include them in the text. Kirsch (1999) tells us that "we
should aim to include the voices of others more actively in our research by consulting
with them. Assuming interpretive responsibility would not only mean presenting voices
in dialogue, but also providing readers with access to the process that shaped the
dialogue" (p. 85). Kirsch also tells us that we need reveal to our readers our 'balancing

act' as we attempt to "represent the voices of others in our texts with efforts to engage in critical analysis and interpretation of research data" (p. 100). While considering engaging participants in the acts of data analysis, Jayati Lal (1999) find that bringing participants into the research analysis process problematic as she perceives it to be "a necessarily incomplete and exploitative fashion in an attempt to redress this power [researcher –participant] imbalance" (p. 123). Lal also is wary about bringing in her research *subjects'* voices to "selectively buttress my arguments" (p. 117). Issues around inclusion, representation, and reflexivity are every present in current research practices.

I ask, have I made room in this text for dissent? Did I cover my ears, conscious or not, to what I didn't want to hear? I recall hearing criticisms of Under Construction from the larger community, at the time. Implicated by my connection to the project, I responded by defending it, defending Lacy and dismissing the criticisms as simply 'misinterpretations'. I felt that the public just wasn't privy as to what was going on behind the scenes enough to make a valid judgement. In the end, or at this pause, I find that I occupy a space where conclusions are not easily drawn, and boarders blur. There is valid critique of this project, but it is not so easily made.

Specialized language within an academic discipline may serve those from in the academy, but may discourage participants and other interested parties from engaging in any resulting dialogue. This is not only an act of domination, but also a great loss for potential discussions. There may be a chance for rich exchange of ideas if participants and others, previously excluded due to inaccessible language used within the text, had a chance to engage with those who wrote the texts.

If researchers who are consistently inclusive in their ontology and methodology report in such ways that participants feel welcome and engage in the dialogue brought about by the research (Lather & Smithies, 1997), then discourse will not remain exclusively in the domain. These researchers would not then be engaged in power relations where knowledge is power and access to the knowledge is controlled by a select few (Michel Foucault & Gilles Deleuze, 1990; Jana Sawicki, 1996).

Research Narratives

Narrative, only one of many forms of reporting, has been suggested as an alternate and inclusive form of presentation. Many researchers have sought to present

their work differently (Bloom, 1998; Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Denzin, 1997; 2000, Ellis, 1997, Ellis & Bochner 2000; Irwin, 1999; Kirsch, 1999; Lather & Smithie, 1995; Lincoln, 1997; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). In the following section I describe the work of Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) who sought to reflect multiple perspectives through a multi-layered text; and Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1997) who include a variety of forms in their presentations in order to engage and include their audiences in genuine discussion, and to add their voices to the overall discourse.

Feminist academics, Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) treated their report as a multi-layered text which included researchers' dialogue and reflections that flowed with and yet separate from the voices presented by the participants as well as the highlighted boxed information within the body of the text: interviews, research reports, journal entries, and their own insights collected over their inquiry. The layers run throughout their account of their research in *Troubling the Angels*. They shared the first desktop published form with the participants well before the book ever went to press. This unique form of research reporting is not unlike some easily digestible journalism, and is not visually or linguistically intimidating. The participants were then able to provide feedback to the form and the content to the researchers.

Gesa Kirsch (1999) suggests that feminist researchers should ask themselves when writing research reports whether, "we are helping readers into new and, one would hope, more enlightened ways of reading when we wrote multi-vocal texts? Or are we just avoiding our responsibility as scholars to provide readers with the analysis and theory necessary to understand the students, teachers, classrooms, and forms of literacy we study? What responsibility do authors have to readers on the one hand, and to those they study on the other?" (p. 75). Kirsch also claims that writing multi-vocal texts is not enough. Scholars need to be clear as to their research values, goals and research effects.

Feminist academics, Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1997) describe a way of presenting their collaborative research project in a way that reflected both the content and the process of the research. Although some of their audiences expected solitary lectures, or standard

panel presentations, they found formats that made them and their audiences more comfortable.

> You can only *talk* about collaboration when you're on your on[sic] own; with the group, you can *demonstrate* it. Our style of interaction - bouncing ideas off one another as we talked, being playful with ideas and each other, sharing the job of moving the audience (or group) along, eliciting comments and ideas form those who sometimes thought they were just there to listen - tended to set the audience at ease. (Goldberger, 1997, p. xxi)

They had come to dislike the format of traditional academic conference lectures. Talking at the audience, as is so often done, was not what they were interested in doing. Having completed an academic book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, (1986) and being frequently asked to participate in lectures and conferences, they decided to do it differently.

> Instead of speaking at an "audience," we began to construe it as conversing with colleagues, working on questions that matter to all of us. Instead of disseminating knowledge and protecting our turf (our theory), we tried to involve others in questioning and expanding our ideas. We were not delivering a product; we were engaged in a process. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1997, p. xxi)

> The following excerpt illustrates an interaction with their audience in the development of a dialogue.

> We were beginning to feel authentically "voiced" when we spoke about our work, finding ways to inhabit the expert role and to speak authoritatively while encouraging collaboration.... It became important to "use" our expert status as a tool to insure that there was a dialogue about the work.

> We worked hard to devise formats that could convey the spirit of our collaboration, creating workshop designs that replicated our process of collecting and analyzing data. For instance, we would begin by clustering people into very small groups to analyze interview data. ...

> Participants were actively engaged in constructing a theory of knowledge, using the same methodology we had found so useful. By the time the whole group reconvened, everyone had had a good chance to develop and articulate their ideas in a small group. Even people who seldom speak in public places would find themselves contributing to a discussion in a large auditorium. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1997, p. xxii)

Carolyn Ellis interrupted her own writing to comment (through writing) about her own writing process, the choice of voice that she was using to present her ideas. She questions her choices for the reader to consider her situation as well as the reader's writing practices. I found this section not only very enjoyable, but thought provoking. In

italics she states: ***"Wait a minute.*** *Is this the way I want to tell this story? In an abstract mode ...This vocabulary, so familiar and comfortable to scholars, is inaccessible to readers outside the academy. Most people do not speak this way. Even as a member of this tribe, I sometimes feel alienated by this way of talking"* (Ellis, 1997, p.115). She includes herself, as researcher and participant in her research and in the research report.

This discussion on voice and representation is very important to my research as not only do Turning Point and Under Construction have these issues at their core, but I also had to consider them as I conducted and wrote about this research. Though I have tried to make the final report both accessible and rigorous, passages in the report should be familiar to study participants. Yet, the content should also be of use to educators, artists, and other researchers. I have considered the multiple, possible audiences that may be interested in the report. I have been thorough in my interpretation of the data. I prepare the final report while considering the work of academics Patti Lather & Chris Smithies (1997), Carolyn Ellis (1997), Yvonna Linclon (1997) and Mary Field Belenky, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Blythe Mcvicker Clinchy,& Jill Mattuck Tarule (1997).

Mystory

My research report is one that reads much like more traditional research. Yet at other times it takes on a personal narrative style, telling of my research journey. While reading research literature, and reflecting on the gathered data, I have found moments of *tangent interruptions. Tangent interruptions* are what happens when a lateral thought or feeling interrupts my train of thought but as a result things to 'click' together, and suddenly make sense. *Tangent interruptions* are also other times when things were making sense, and then a tangent interruption disrupts the meaning and I have to reconsider the assumptions that I initially had, or had read. These tangent interruptions are like that voice that says, *Heh, this sounds like something else that I just read, yet it is different and holds other implications.* It is also the voice that comes from a place of memory, *this reminds me of when.* It is the voice of doubt that asks, *are you sure you aren't misrepresenting them? Is this really what they meant to say?* These moments may interrupt, but also bring me to a new place of understanding. I have included many of these moments in *italics* throughout this text to privy readers to my process.

"Reflective accounts of research are important because they remind readers that scholars are always products of their culture and history, that observations are always limited and partial, that interpretations are complex and contradictory, and that all accounts of research are open to revision and reinterpretation" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 82).

In mystory, I have woven theory with my narrative along with the narratives of study participants (Denzin, 1997b). I have drawn fibres of thought from the work of others. I have woven them together into a cloth. Stitches and seams somewhat in place. I will describe the resulting garb. What I, as a researcher, as a person, hold to be true, can be seen through my ontology and methodology.

The boundaries between public and private are arbitrary. We create them as we perceive a need for them and as groups within society call for them. However, as a researcher, I dwell within my research (Ellis, 1997). I take time to breathe within the space created through the onset of inquiry. My research creeps into my everyday as my everyday life has crept into my research.

I chose to do a study within my community. Now and then, I run into participants from time-to-time as we go about our 'regular lives' –shopping for groceries, attending shows, or passing a coffee shop enroute to take my son, Wolfie to his ballet class. We always chat. Sometimes they ask about how my writing coming along. But, they always ask how I am, how my kids are, what's new. I too ask about them and their lives. First and foremost we are people who got to know each other as co-participants in a shared experience.

Within acts of research, I am present. I am not the objective observer. I am an actor in a scene of life. I just happen to be taking notes. When I am not taking notes, I try to recall what I can. I listen carefully to those who tell me their stories. Though they have been silenced in the past, what matters now is that they are no longer silent. They inform my research and a larger discourse of power and representation. I respect what they say. I asked them if I understand them the way they intend. I hope they understand me. I have tried to make my written and spoken words accessible. With new or clarified understanding in this research, I hope to find better ways to engage with others.

Study Specifics: Behind the Scenes

Turning Point and Under Construction involved many of the same people and even many of the same images, but they were very different in their modes of production and in the overall impact on participants and audience. Turning Point was a social project that focused on young women. Most of the organizers, and volunteers were women from Vancouver. There were many workshops, meetings and events within Turning Point. Initially there was a weekend workshop at Crescent Beach in January, 1996 where the girls were introduced to some of the organizers, including Suzanne Lacy. The workshop focused on mass media representation of women. These discussions continued at open workshops at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February, 1996 until later that May. That August, 30 young women were hired to be involved in Turning Point's production planning. This is when I first became aware of the project and became involved shortly thereafter.

Access

It was not until I had participated in several meetings and workshops, and felt that I had established myself with several Turning Point participants that I invited them to participate in my study. I handed out brief written invitations to talk to me. It was a wide open invitation. The text in the invitation was:

> **Attention Turning Point Women!**
> *You are invited to participate in a study that focuses on the Turning Point project. The study is conducted by Lorrie Miller who is a doctoral student at UBC. I would like to talk to you about your involvement in this project. If you are interested, or just want to ask me a few questions, please feel free to call me at home.*

I then left my home phone number and my e-mail address. I did not receive any calls from the girls from the invitation, but it did provide a personal introduction when I talked about my project during meetings. Often when I handed the invitation to the girls during or after a workshop, I would invite them to participate if they were interested. I would then get their phone numbers and arrange a time for a first meeting. All of the girls that I approached were very receptive; it was really just a matter of arranging suitable meeting times. Of course, I included a letter of permission in accordance with the university's ethics committee.

In all, I interviewed seven core girls and five organizers/ volunteers. I also interviewed some girls on the spot at the performance who were only involved in the project for a single day, as well as audience members during and after the final performance. Most of the interviewees had detailed knowledge of the project while others knew very little before they attended Under Construction. I believe that this broad range of interpretations and reflections of Turning Point and Under Construction will help us to come to understand the complexities of this project and event, and the varying experiences of participants.

Though I was supportive to the project as a whole, I had to make it clear when I could help and when I felt I had to step back to observe. I needed to take time to record my observations. I felt that I also needed to participate in order to better understand those observations. I tried to respond to the needs of the project at the time, as well as to my needs as a researcher with obligations beyond the project. There were times when I was a project helper and an adult participant, and other times when I felt I needed to be only an observer. While in the midst of a performance, and responsible for an activity, I couldn't keep clear notes and had to rely upon my reflections.

Many people have asked me whether I interviewed Suzanne Lacy for this study. I certainly considered it, but in the end, I decided that this would unnecessarily complicate my research. It was not Lacy acting as an artist in a community that I was as interested in, but the model of art production she used along with the experiences of those participants who were closely involved in the process. I felt that it was vital to talk to the community members closest involved in implementing the project, that being the project manager/production producer and assistant. These are the local folks who saw that everything fell into place.

I decided to maintain a professional distance from the artistic director, as I felt this was what I needed to do in order to be openly critical about the project. I needed to feel at ease with either critique or praise, though it is still not easy. I was able to collect many media interviews with Lacy during the preparation for Under Construction. I was also provided with her own writing which included some of her intentions and working processes (including a video recording that she produced to reflect the Turning Point project and Under Construction performance). At this point in time, I would be interested

to hear the current reflection of what happened in <u>Turning Point</u> from both the artistic director and the producer. Has this experience influenced their subsequent work? I would also be interested to hear their responses to this thesis. The producer has recently requested a copy.

<u>Scenes</u>

The girls produced three zines[3]. They planned, designed, produced and distributed them as they saw fit. The zine project was headed by a small group of girls, though it was open to all of the girls involved, or any newcomers. None of the girls had actually ever produced a zine before, but latched onto this element of the project as a means for personal expression and girl recruitment. Each subsequent zine became more complex in its form and personal in its content as one issue referred to the previous issue and included submissions from its readers (which were often girls who were already involved).

Handpainting events were key visual elements to both <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u>. The handpainting logo came from one of the girls' sketchbook pages, but the idea of doing henna on their hands first came from the artistic director as she noticed some girls doodling on their hands. The idea was then broached with the participants, they liked the idea and thought they would try it out with henna rather than with the markers they had been using. They held their first event in October, 1996 at The Community Cultural Development Conference, Assembly of BC Arts Councils. This first small event featured pairs of girls in black <u>Turning Point</u> logo t-shirts sitting at small tables handpainting and chatting to each other. Tea candles on each table dimly lit the foyer. The girls ignored the conference delegates as they watched them and listened in on their conversations.

The second event was later that December at Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. This recruitment event also involved young women sitting at small square red tables, lit with tea candles in small bowls, handpainting while conversing. It was a chilly winter day, but space heaters helped to take off the edge. The event, like all of the events, was documented by a designated <u>Turning Point</u> photographer. The watching public was welcomed by Lacy to walk among the girls as they talk and paint. The

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[3] See sample Appendix 2.

audience mostly waited at the doorway and took their own photos. Some of the girls talked to one another as they paint, others sat in silence. At one point I sat down at a table across from a girl, we talked as she painted my hand. There weren't as many girls as was anticipated, but not a bad turn out overall. Our hands were cold as she drew lines and swirls on the back of my hand. It was quiet and pleasant, yet it was still chilly. The rains came quietly into the garden beyond the doorway. After the event, we ate from a buffet that was set out and waiting for us in the Scholar's Room in the garden. We often ate together at events, and meetings. Everyone came to appreciate these little meal meetings, even when it was only juice, coffee, pizza and muffins.

As part of the 1997 Women in View Festival, Turning Point held another handpainting event located in 11 cafes simultaneously along Commercial Drive. This event was preceded by a workshop at Britannia Community Centre. This performance was primarily girl developed. Lacy asked them, "You tell me how you'd like to do the piece as in who is at the table –what is on the table…" (from fieldnotes). Though the artistic director facilitated this project by asking questions to the girls, the girls ultimately decided on the final image. Older girls volunteered to work with the girls on this project. The role of the adult volunteers was to go to the café an hour before the performance and to select and hold a table for the performance.

As an older girl volunteer, I sat at the La Quena Café and waited for the 2 pm performance. Once the handpainters arrive, I moved and then acted as support if necessary. The site managers handled everything, but we were there if they required assistance. So, I sat and supped my coffees. At La Quena, there were three girls and one older volunteer. The theme of conversation and the zine #3 (hot off the press) was *courage*. Some girls handed out handbills inviting more girls to join the project. The handbill read "Turning Point is art and social action whose goal is to use public spaces and connections to make the voices of young women heard" (Handbill Feb. 23, 1997). The handpainters, Megan and Megan sat at the black clothed café table painting each others' hands with henna. A local television crew came out to cover the event. It was a huge success according to the girls.

On May 3, 1997, as part of Vancouver Youth Week, Joyce Rosario (an active core girl) organized a coffee house and poetry reading at the Roundhouse Community

Centre. By this point, the final performance date for <u>Under Construction</u> had been moved back to June 15 from the originally planned date in May.

In <u>Under Construction</u> there were to be hundreds of young women participating in a large scale public performance that intended to highlight their issues, comments, and life experiences as told by them. These young women, aged 13 to 19, were from Vancouver and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. They would represent the social and cultural make up of young women in this region. A clip from the *Turning Point Mission Statement* (1996), written by originating adult participants and planners, states:

> We are here to have a strong voice which will raise awareness and challenge stereotypes in society. We will provide young women with an opportunity to express and learn from personal experiences and feelings in a large, supportive and diverse group. Through sharing experiences, we will build trust among our group which will enable us to create a unique art performance, allowing us to express our opinions to society.

<u>Turning Point</u> was intended to be flexible and to evolve as it grew. It took on many forms through 1996-97 and involved many more people than its mission statement suggests.

In 1995, a working group of Vancouver artists, youth workers, educators, media makers and youth collaboratively prepared the *Turning Point Overview and Mission*, in which they describe an early vision of this project. They held a common interest in the power of art to both make, and alter, community and society. *Turning Point Overview and Mission* August, 1995 states:

> This project aims to position Vancouver teenage girls as authorities– anthropologists, activists and spokespersons - for their own culture, in order to create and foster an interchange of ideas, the outcome of which is expected to affect programs, policies, public attitudes, and the self esteem of the participants.
>
> We have invited artist, educator and social activist Suzanne Lacy to join us to develop a public artwork, using a process of engaging diverse constituencies around issues identified by us and which we believe will be accomplished by the following means:
> - Networking with people in public institutions, including schools, Parks and Recreation, and other departments of the city, and with public and private organizations to build consensus and public awareness;
> - Media awareness fueled by media literacy workshops;

- A large scale public art performance designed by the participants working with artists.

For us, the process of coalition and community building is an integral part of the artwork. Similarly, the mass media aspects are designed as a public face of the art. Pulling the process together, a final performance serves as a celebratory ritual that brings diverse themes and people together in a public site. But it is the networking and community building, the support of gender-aware policies and sensitivities, the mentoring and relationships formed, that will form the lasting legacy of the project. (p.1)

The Turning Point project was mandated to be inclusive. This meant engaging in recruitment activities to reach various communities. Some recruitment activities were more successful than others. Some participants were recruited through their schools and friends. By focusing its energy on school recruitment, Turning Point excluded those girls who were not attending school. The group explored how they might include out-of-school youth. It was decided that it would be too difficult to actively recruit street youth and others not in school. As a result, the majority of participants were strong students (as this was yet another activity they were choosing to take on along with their school responsibilities). Although descriptions of Turning Point claim to include girls from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, they were typically middle-class. However, Under Construction, the final performance of Turning Point, did include a more diverse socio-economic group of girls (including a small group of young mothers) than did the core group of participating girls.

I have reviewed my notes, interview transcripts and read numerous project documents, dating form 1995 - 1997, in order to describe the general population which made up Turning Point. These descriptions were not only of the individuals that participated, but of the communities that they together created. The Turning Point Mission Statement from 1996 was composed by the group of young women that were involved in the project in the summer of 1996. This composed mission statement holds elements from the earlier mentioned sketchbook responses to why they are involved in this project as a group.

> We are a diverse, collective group of young women, ages 13-19 from different areas of Greater Vancouver. Our group is multicultural, multilingual as well as from different socio-economic backgrounds representing a broad range of issues relevant not only to young women but to the general public. (p.1)

A planning committee of 11 was struck in 1995 (10 women and one man). Two members were from the Social Planning Department, and one was from the Office of Cultural Affairs City of Vancouver. Three members were from the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. There were two independent artists. One person was from the Vancouver Art Gallery and another from the Vancouver School Board. The Project Coordinator, was from New Performance Works Society. For the purpose of this study, it is not important to go into detail about the individuals on the Planning Committee, other than there were numerous interests involved from various civic groups and organizations and individuals. Two members of this Committee agreed to be interviewed as they held many roles in this project. I felt that given their history in the project and their participation through to the finale, they would have unique insights to the project. There were women of all ages, from many backgrounds, levels of education, experiences, and cultures. Each brought their skills, opinions, and desires to the Turning Point project.

Initially, Turning Point planners had a vision to include up to 1000 girls in the final performance. Over time, this plan was modified and ended with around 300 young women, and 50 core members. With such an ambitious goal as achieving 1000 participants, a recruitment strategy had to be developed and implemented. Suzanne Lacy summarized the recruitment plan in her Turning Point: Work Plan Summary Narrative Draft 12/14/96. Many of the ideas summarized were gathered from the numerous Turning Point group participant meetings already held at that point. Questions surrounding recruitment were posed to the participating girls. The document itself was composed by Lacy (1996), however, much of the content had been agreed upon during group meetings and workshops. This document (December,14 1996) states:

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment plan has three components. A series of mini-events featuring hand-painting take place in various locations, targeted toward different communities. Radio and television sponsors run PSA's and advertisements in March and April [1997] to target young women performers. Community organizing approaches to organizations, churches, schools, and youth workers will reach groups of young women.

A Recruitment coordinator will develop a full plan that consists of these components. Working as a member of the central coordinating group, they will identify target numbers, ages, and ethnicities to create a balanced performer group. They will develop a plan to contact specific organizations and schools.

They will collect names and contact information of performers, handle releases and necessary parental permissions, generate attendance at rehearsals, assess transportation needed for performers, and distribute communication for rehearsal purposes.

1. Target populations and outreach. The coordinating group with the TP girls will make a desired target number for ethnic composition of performers, based on numbers of residents in greater [sic] Vancouver. Target numbers will also be set for girls of different social backgrounds, as well as those experiencing diverse social situations.

We will need to recruit in cohort groups for logistical reasons as well as support systems provided to girls in these groups. School sites and responsive teachers, youth workers, and scout troops are examples. The Recruitment coordinator will make contact with and presentations to various schools, organizations, and churches. TP girls will hopefully also participate in some of these presentations. As part of the recruitment plan, leaders of the cohort groups may be specifically enlisted to provide transportation, support, and rehearsal for participants.

2. Mini-events of hand painting.

In **December** [1996] we performed at Dr. Sun Yat Sen Gardens as part of an outreach effort to the Chinese [Canadian] community.

February 20-23 [1997] there is an opportunity to bring together our girls' image of performing in cafes on Commercial Drive with the Women in View Festival that will also take place there. We would also link with Britannia Community Centre for the event, which would take advantage of shared publicity and themes.

March 14 [1997] there is an opportunity to perform for the art community at the Round House [Community Centre] opening. This may be able to link to outreach to the Gathering Place and the Carnegie Center, and other downtown venues. It would necessitate winning the interest of young people who organize in that area.

Other suggestions: The girls have suggested multiple school sites, favorite cafes as opportunities for spontaneous hand-painting events. We might want to investigate bringing the Indo-Canadian community into the project by selecting a venue that relates to their culture, or working with an Indo-Canadian woman at the MOA who has already introduced hand-painting events. Finally, we might want to stage specific events for First Nations recruitment. These ethnicity specific recruitment events can be a source of self-esteem and pride for the participating young women.

3. Collecting stories. Developing the soundtrack should be part of the recruitment and community development process. Our group of TP girls will be interviewed for the sound track. The video documentation will include taping small groups discussing specific topics such as racism, etc. Telling their stories for each other, for our sound track, and perhaps for the media will be a leadership and self assertion exercise for these young women. (p. 7-8)

Events within Turning Point connected to girl recruitment for the final

performance. As a note of interest, the issue of quotas held some level of contention

among the Turning Point girls. They specifically stated in an earlier one page document titled: *Turning Point Recruitment Ideas*, that recruitment shouldn't be based on culture, and "Don't attach too much importance to cultural designation...No Quotas". They also suggested ways to reach street youth and 'welfare kids' and youth with disabilities. These suggestions are noticeably absent from the recruitment strategy (Lacy, 1996) outline described above. Absence of these groups in the document maybe linked to difficult logistic considerations. However, without firm documentation to substantiate this, all I can surmise is that it was not a priority to include these groups.

If you had been one of the 600-900[4] people to view Under Construction, you would have begun your experience in a long queue winding its way around the outside of the construction site. You would have seen live video-feed on monitors strategically placed in peek holes in the bubblegum pink hoarding. Audio revealed girls' live chat. Sci-fi techno-construction sound and music layered with girls voices, played over a loud system. Ten girls in safety vests and yellow hard-hats carried modified street signs and marched in front of the site's main entrance. **Soft Shoulders**, one sign read in black bold letters across a yellow caution sign, the girl turns it around, **Sharp Mind. Stop**, reads another sing; the girl flips the sign on cue, **And Listen** it reads on the reverse side. You could watch as you file onto the performance site. Once on-site and standing among your group of a few hundren, safely behind the light wooden barricade separating audience from performers – you would stand for 20 minutes while the pre-recorded soundtrack played overhead and the girls 'performed'. About 130 young women in identical red t-shirts were in the performance. Some sat in sating arrangements on white three gallon buckets while they talked about the issues listed in their performance kits. Others sat on large piles of concrete blocks, also hand-painting and talking. A few girls, under the direction of trades women, worked on mixing concrete and filling wooden forms.

Voices over a sound system blend in and out of the electronic music and techno-construction mix. The soundtrack loop played throughout the performance while activity continued on the floor. You would have heard intimate stories of loneliness, loss, anger, achievement; voices of individuals, simply asking that we listen... Soft voices, wavering, pause, sigh...Another voice coolly describes a moment of pain.

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[4] This number varies depending on the document reviewed.

I am very very solitary

*I like my mom. I like my mom. She's
always going to be my mom, so I've
got to work it out*

I know that once I leave I can
never
go back to being a kid.

*Sometimes I feel like I have control.
Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I feel like
I am imagining this control, but really, it
feels like I have my parent's pulling the
strings. And I'm just one of those
dummies moving with those strings.*

I am basically labelled by my friends as
a tree-hugger.
But,   I'm okay with that.

*My mom thinks she knows what's best,
but she doesn't know what I want.
We're not close at all. We don't talk
about things.*

I feel that one thing I have control over is myself.
**My parents are more materialistic.
Especially my father. He, quote
"spoils us and so we won't have
anything to look forward to."
When emotionally I find my
family... it's starved.**

*They expect so much. They never had a chance to be
everything they could be, but I just feel like the weight
is... and they say it's all for my own good and they're
just trying to help me the way they can... and I know
that. But... I feel so much pressure. It's not like you
guys. We're not rich, but they gave me everything they
could. I can talk to my parents about everything. Like
everything! They go to everything, any kind of event I
have - they want to go. They're just like - the best. They
support me in everything I do. But, I just feel so...*

It would by nice to have a
father figure. But, he's
not a father figure so, I'm not
going   to waste my time on him.

*you think you are something to a person
and then...   you find out that you're not*

(anonymous voices from soundtrack, <u>Under Construction</u>,
June, 1997)

From her third-story vantage, Lacy directed the movement on the floor with hand
signals and radio directions. After 20 minutes, your group would have been ushered out,
going around the outer perimeter of the performance floor. The movement continued as
you left. If you had been in the third and final audience wave, you would have then been
ushered onto the floor to mingle with the performers. Only this final 200 were able to
hear the conversations that before they could only see…

Though audience members of this final group did finally hear some live voices of these young women. What they would never hear, nor see, is the two year process that 30 of the young women and numerous older women engaged in to develop other smaller events, zine publications, and this one day event. It unfortunately did not reveal the dedication that they brought to the project. The final highlighting of their voices was cursory at best.

<u>Study Participants</u>

The study of <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u> was long and in depth. I participated in and studied their development over the course of one year. It is important to know the social context for <u>Turning Point</u> when talking about the participants of this study. Main interviewees were some of the 'core girls' who were intensely involved in the project. I also found it important to know about key organizers and volunteers. Participants in this study were also <u>Turning Point</u> participants: from British Columbia's Lower Mainland with diverse backgrounds, opinions, and experiences. Study participants were more than respondents to interview questions, they helped me to understand their experiences in these projects by clarifying their transcripts, editing them, and by reflecting on past events in more recent phone conversations, letters and e-mails. But, more than that, we were co-participants in the projects themselves. Maxine Birch (1998) claims that she "did not need such words as 'professional stranger', 'subjects', 'collaborators', or 'informants' to describe a research relationship, but was ... able to refer to friends and group members of which [she] was one" (p. 177). Birch chose to use the term 'participant' as did I, in which the researcher is included. Though I was not one of the girls, I was one of the 'older girls' of which there were many. We often worked along side one another in the midst of <u>Turning Point</u>. We had many conversations when the tape recorder was off and away. I don't believe that <u>Turning Point</u> participants saw my primary role as a researcher, and this has been reinforced when I hear, 'heh, weren't you in <u>Turning Point</u>?'

In the end, the project involved hundreds of women of all ages. These women committed varying amounts of time to the project, some stayed on from the initial planning stage through to the final performance. Others joined at various times

throughout its development. Most of the girls joined only on the day of the final performance.

In a document analysis, I searched through the following types of documents to come up with the description of group participants that made up the Turning Point project. I looked at planning documents, press releases, written participant testimony, transcriptions of radio interviews, transcriptions from researcher - participant interviews, artist statements, final reports, promotional material, as well as newspaper and magazine articles. The specific information that I sought in these documents included: descriptions of participants, modes of recruitment, and quotations from participants when they described themselves or others within the Turning Point project. I also noted similarities and differences in the descriptions as the project progressed.

Researcher –Participant relationships

I started Turning Point as an interested community member, then as an observer. As the art project grew, and changed, so did the roles I engaged in. Sometimes I was participant-mentor, observer, interviewer and documenter. As a participant-mentor, I attended meetings, interacted with the other participants, and provided some guidance for the Research Group (which was lead by volunteer Alix Sales). This was a sub-committee within the project. I volunteered for this role (subtly suggested by Lacy). The Research Group requested a mentor to assist them in their ominous task of gathering and organizing written information to help critically inform the project. *I don't recall how much help I really was, as they seemed to be really quite competent.* The gathered information was then presented to the other group members. Though I have moved twice since the conclusion of Turning Point, I still house the resulting archives from the project including an array of video recordings, audio recordings, slides, posters, articles, zines, workshop notes and maps, site plans, girls' sketch-books, and committee minutes. By naming the roles that I took on during the course of this study, I reveal the categories for the relationships between the participants and researcher.

During the 'get-to-know-you' phase of Turning Point, I tended to sit back and watch, but as things developed, and I felt more comfortable, I was able to just be myself. I got to know some of the girls, the other older volunteers, and hired staff. During the year, we became friendly with each other, but I didn't develop any close friendships.

Ellen Herda (1999) tells us that although, there is an emphasis on "equalizing the relationship between the researcher and participant, the responsibility for all aspects of the project in the end belongs to the researcher." (p. 120). Kirsch (1999) warns that "researchers who strive for the benefits of close, collaborative relationships with participants must accept the risk that such relationships may end in a participant's sense of disappointment, broken trust, even exploitation" (p. 27). Kirsch also suggests that researchers need to set realistic expectations about the commitments that participants make to research projects. "We must learn to respect those participants who lack time or interest in our research or who fall silent when we expect them to dialogue with us" (Kirsch, p. 36).

In this study, only some participants chose to write current reflections to me about our project. Some had time to talk on the phone, or write an e-mail to me. Some didn't respond at all. I chose to accept that this project was not a priority to them as it is to me. I gratefully accepted any responses and emotionally had to let go when the mail stopped delivering participants' responses. "We must always respect participants' decision about the degree to which they wish to interact with us. We have to remember that even if participants are not collaborating with us, they are still generous with their time, receiving no direct compensation" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 37).

Interviewing

Candid conversations were common, and on and off the record statements were made clear. The interview questions were for the most part open-ended. Although I started our taped interviews with an interview schedule, it often just provided a starting point for conversations with participating girls, artists[5], organizers, and audience members. I also adapted the interview questions to reflect the changing nature of the project, as well as to respond to the individual being interviewed at the time. Carolyn Ellis & Leigh Berger (in press) suggest that researchers should move away from "the orthodox model of distance and separation, interactive interviewers often encourage self-disclosure and emotionality on the part of the researcher....In this interactive context, respondents become narrators who improvise stories in response to the questions, probes,

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[5]The roles of participating local artists were often supportive and didn't reflect their artistic abilities, but the overall construction of the project.

and personal stories of the interviewer." I would consider the type of interviews I engaged in during this study are what Ellis and Berger refer to as *reflexive dyadic interviewing*.

> Reflexive, dyadic interviews follow the typical protocol of the interviewer asking questions and the interviewee answering them, but the interviewer typically shares personal experiences with the topic at hand or reflects on the communicative process of the interview. In this case the researchers' disclosures are more than tactics to encourage respondents to open up; instead, they often feel a reciprocal desire to disclose, given the intimacy of the details being shared by the interviewee. The interview is conducted as more as a conversation between two equals than as a distinctly hierarchical, question and answer exchange, and the interviewer tries to tune into the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself...Thus, the final product includes cognitive and emotional reflections of the researcher, which add context and layers to the story being told about participants. (in press)

Although the taped interviews in this study were often conversational in nature, they were obviously interviews with a purpose. We did not deny what we were doing, and claim that we were simply having conversations that we just happened to be recording. Bloom (1998) tells us that "what is more important is not whether one does an interview or a conversation, but that there is a resonance between the context of the relationship and the type of speech event that people have. If the relationship is a research relationship, perhaps it is less 'natural to have a conversation than an interview" (p. 40). If you are seeking an interview, then disguising it as conversation may be more 'unnatural' than an open interview. We need to be open with our intentions.

At the beginning of each taped interview I asked each participant to tell me a bit about herself, her background, and her community. Since part of the art project dealt with the development of a community, I felt that it was important to note with which community, or group, each woman most identified herself, if at all.

Below is the list of initial questions that I used in the taped interviews.

1. Could you tell me how you first became involved with Turning Point?
   - What experience have you had with art(s) projects?
   - Do you have any volunteer experience with community projects?
   - Have you ever been involved with projects that have focused on women or women's issues?
2. What do you do or have you done in this (Turning Point) project?
   - What role(s) do you play in Turning Point?
   - What responsibilities do you have?

- What activities do you engage in? (Meetings, zine making, recruitment...)
3. Tell me about these responsibilities.
    - Activities?
4. What exactly is the <u>Turning Point</u> project?
    - What is it (has it been) to you personally?
5. What keeps (kept) you involved in the project?
6. What do (did) you hope to gain from your experiences in the project?
    - What do you feel that you have gained from you experience in the project?
7. What do you hope (think) others (girls, women, audiences) will gain (have gained) from Turning Point?
8. When it is all over, what do you expect or hope will come from all of this...?
9. How will you know that the project and/or performance have been successful?

The following questions were developed after several interviews and specifically for the post production interviews.

10. Was it a success? If so, how ? If not, in what way?
11. Tell me how the performance went for you.
    - What did you do in the performance?
    - How did you feel during the performance?
    - What kinds of reactions did you see in the other girls?
    - How did you feel after the performance?
11. What were some of the difficulties and strengths in the project, in the performance?
12. How would you weigh the process vs. the product, or in this case the production?
13. Tell me about your thoughts on the art development process that this project used.
14. What is next for you?
    - What was the highest point for you in the whole project?
    - What was the lowest point in the project for you?
    - Would you do it again?

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed either in part or whole.

Going through hours and hours of taped interviews was a daunting task. I found the process surreal. My headphones and tape player acted like a time-machine. I was not only taken back to the times and places where we had our interviews, but also to that time in my life. I recalled expectations, anticipations, as well as apprehensions. The memories mixed together my academic and my personal lives. In one taped interview, held in my apartment, my then three year old son (now almost eight) interrupted us for a little 'emergency'. This interruption took only a moment from the interview, but brought me a smile while reviewing the material later. *And again each time I read this.* Maxine

Birch (1998) tells about her similar experience, "while I was transcribing I was often transported back to the setting in which the interview occurred. I remembered simple images, from sitting in my kitchen having a cup of coffee, to more complex feelings such as empathy and a sense of closeness. Through the act of transcribing I had relived the telling" (p. 179). Ellis & Bochner (2000) describe memory as "thoughts and feelings [that] circle around us, flash back, then forward, the topical is interwoven with the chronological, thoughts and feelings merge, drop from our grasp, then reappear in another context" (p. 753). Listening to the tapes and transcribing them into text, was an intimate experience with my memories, quite unlike transcribing data from someone else's interview. (Those transcribing experiences are more voyeuristic) Once on paper, with the nuances removed from the background drone of cappuccino machines, the cars on the street, the nagging child at my ankle…the texts read cleanly, not quite sterile, but there was a cool cleanness about them, that didn't exist on the tapes. It isn't exactly like being there, though it is a part of what happened. When I crafted individual letters to the participants and sent them their transcriptions, it was very satisfying. I felt a sense of letting go.

It had been three years for some of the participants since we had our interviews. Some participants had moved on and required some research to find. With others, all I could find were their parents' addresses. I sent the packages on to them at their parents' residence, in hopes of having it then sent on to the participants. I have located a number of the key girls from the project as well as central organizers. When I sent out the packages of the transcripts I included individual cover letters which outlined what kind of continued participation I was hoping for. I asked them to read through the transcripts for clarity and correction. Some of the transcripts came back with nothing more than grammatical correction, one participant commented that she wanted to be read more coherently, and supplied some minor changes to her grammar. I invited them to make any corrections on the transcriptions as well as to elaborate on any of the questions they felt needed more attention. I asked them for updates of where they were in relation to the interview, as many of them were in their final year of high-school at that time. I wanted to know if they felt that their Turning Point experience had in any way affected their lives. I asked what they would suggest to improve Turning Point. I also asked them to

include any changed opinions they might have felt since their first interview, and if so to provide a brief explanation. I offered to share my final report with them upon completion. Some have taken up my offer. I included self-addressed stamped envelopes for their easy return of their notes, transcript additions and changes.

In our correspondence we have touched on what has happened lately, but mostly reflected on our earlier interviews and the whole Turning Point experience. Each time I received an e-mail, or a package arrived at my door, it felt like a gift from the past had come my way. *Not only do they remember, but they care. This pleases me to no end.* I have their personal notes that have been sent to me along with their comments and corrections on typed pages of transcripts. I also asked them to consider and reflect upon a series of new questions.

One night in the fall 1999, at the performance of a Fringe Festival play, a young woman came up to me and asked me "You were in Turning Point weren't you?" she asked me. I then recognized her, Juliette[6], from the project as well as from our interviews. I was so pleased that she recognized me, I gave her my e-mail address, and she assured me that she would e-mail. I told her that I would like to pass on to her the notes from our interviews two summers ago and to see what her reflections on the project are now that some time has passed. She seemed very enthused, and has since given me her responses to the interviews. That fortuitous meeting reinforced my decision to make the report of my study accessible to Juliet and the other study participants, and meaningful to a broad audience.

Data Collection

Data collection began for this research project in September 1996, and continued through to September, 1997. Data collection included interviews, participation, and observation (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1998). All formal interviews were audio recorded. I observed and participated in many of the workshops. "Observation is a major means of collecting data in qualitative research. It offers a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined when interviewing and document analysis,

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[6]All the young women whom I interviewed for this project chose pseudonyms for themselves. They often chose names of famous women they admired. Participants signed waivers to use their images for Turning Point publicity, and were publicly identified in the art project, but not necessarily as being interviewed in my research.

allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 111)

Not only were there multiple methods of collecting data, but the form of the data varied (Merriam, 1991, 1998; Stake, 1995). Data forms include: audio taped interviews, field-notes, participant journals, project-planning maps, and project documents. I also examined the information documented and collected by the participants and by a professional videographer who was hired by the <u>Turning Point</u> project, to document parts of the process.

When I first planned this research project I thought I would consider the same types of validity, and reliability concerns that I had for my masters thesis. As a result I took the following precautions to maximize reliability, (Merriam, 1991; Stake, 1995): 1) triangulation, where one uses multiple methods of data collection; 2) conducts member checks, where participants aid in the clarification of the text; 3) a researcher's biases being presented at the onset of the study in the form of a personal ground. But since that time, I would also like to consider the use of the term *reliability checks* as suggested by Ellis and Bochner (2000), as this project involved other individuals besides the researcher. "When other people are involved, you might take your work back to them and give them a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds and offer interpretation" (Ellis & Bochner, p. 751). As I have previously mentioned, I returned transcripts for elaboration, and clarification. The validity in Ellis and Bochner's work is one that, seeks verisimilitude where "it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible" (p. 751). Ellis and Bochner's interpretation of research generalizabilty resonates with me. Ellis & Bochner tell us that:

> Our lives are particular, but they are also typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions. We want to convey both in our stories. A story's generalizablity is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives? (p. 751)

<u>Inductive Data Analysis</u>

Data analysis has been on-going throughout the study. I use thematic analysis in which "we are able to articulate the notion of theme we are also able to clarify further the nature of human science research. Making something of a text or of a lived experience

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by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure – grasping and formulating a themematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (van Manen, 1997, p. 79). Data has been organized according to situational factors, themes and concepts (Merriam, 1991). Merriam (1998) tells us that categories should "describe the data, but to some extent they also interpret the data" (p. 187). Names of the categories in this study came from the researcher, the participants, and research literature. Initial categories included *relationships & community building,* and *Art production as a site for learning* . Issues of *representation, process & production, audience, closure, and success &evaluation* emerged during initial analysis. The common undercurrent themes of the thesis: *power* and *representation,* emerged during a final analysis which included revisiting the data along with current research literature. From these two themes I was able to include all of the categories, both constructed and emergent. Though *voice* plays significantly in this study, I believe that it fits well under *power.* As one has the power of self, or the power over, the expression of that power(lessness) through voice or silence. These two themes run throughout Turning Point, Under Construction and this study.

Summary

  Turning Point was a multifaceted, polyphonic art project that I followed for over a year. It was an experience that I find difficult to explain, since it spread out from a starting point into having a life of its own. My task at hand is to simplify a complex project into an understandable and meaningful text. Yet Turning Point was filled with sound, movement, growth, frustrations, enthusiasm, relationships, beauty and boredom. The writing of this report also proved to be challenging due to my position in the study. I have come to realize that I had been initially too close to be able to critically examine the project. I have had to reflect upon my own role as a researcher. What does this mean in this study? Sometimes I was a researcher, noticeably observing and taking notes, at other times I was participating in the process and helping with the project. I was also a safe set of ears, someone with whom to chat about project ideas and feelings, without any repercussions. I too faced issues of power, and representation. I questioned my transparency and accessibility. Was I really as transparent as I could be? Did I have an

agenda that I needed to acknowledge? I recognized that I was in a position of privilege simply through age and education. Based on those criteria, I would have my voice heard more readily than some of the teenage participants in this study. I also wondered what effect my study had, if any, on the art project itself. Did my line of questioning encourage the girls to be more critical of their roles in the project? I also wonder how much of my own critical reflection on my roles within the research is necessary for the reader? Will this read as being self-absorbed, or will it really provide the necessary grounding to interpret the research? Janice Rislock and Joan Pennell (1996) suggest that what we want to avoid is " feeling satisfied that we have adequately located ourselves when we have merely listed the social and identity groups to which we belong" (p.67). Through reading Rislock and Pennell, I was reassured that the purpose of self-reflexivity is not necessarily a self-centred diversion into the personal life of the researcher. "On the contrary, the purpose of self-reflexivity is to improve the quality of research, not to derail it" (Rislock & Pennell, p. 66). Gesa Kirsch reminds us that "using the authorial *I*... is one way to make sure that theory and research does not make the universalizing and homogenizing claims so typical of past scholarship" (p. 79).

My literature review forced me to consider the terms that I had been using to describe my research process. I need to be truthful with the participants about where I am coming from with my questions. I need to be truthful with the reader about what I intend to do with this study.

I received feedback from the participants as I analyzed the data, in its various forms. I took extra caution with their interview transcription. I wanted to be sure that I understood what they meant in their narratives. They have had the opportunity to read our transcribed interviews and add their comments, questions and clarifications to the transcriptions. I have listened to what they have had to say about their experiences, in their own words. Participants' voices have been missing from all of the other descriptions of community-based performance art, except when they have been recorded for the performance soundtrack. These narratives are also absent in Garoian's (1999) description of performance art pedagogy –curriculum text. How can we know that this form of pedagogy is the emancipatory act that Garoian claims if we don't hear from those

whom were to have been empowered[7]. Before now we only hear participant word –their voices, is in the context of the art performance. We have not before heard them talking about their participation in the projects. What did they think and feel? Has their experience affected their lives? Why did some stay and some leave. How did it all happen? What happened when it was all over?

Significance of the study

I believe that this case study is important based on the unique opportunity for engaging in and examining a collaborative, performance art project of this magnitude. There is a lack of literature which critically examines postmodern art within the context of performance art, and a lack of research where the experiences of the participants within such a project have been taken into consideration. I believe that we need to carefully consider ramifications around representation and power when working with youth or those less powerful. Media representation, and representation of youth in general is an important topic for exploration for educators, artists and for youth. Collaborative performance art projects can provide youth with a venue for meeting, exploring issues, and expressing themselves to a larger audience than has typically been available.

I believe that this study will prove to be informative in bringing to the forefront the experiences of young women, while also examining new genre public art as an opportunity for empowerment and learning, that is, as a form of education. As Garoian (1999) refers to performance art pedagogy, it may also hold implications for teaching art in a way that only recently has been considered. This research may help artists, educators, and community developers to understand the relevance that collaborative, activist art projects can have on participating individuals..

Turning Point and Under Construction have provided me with a unique opportunity to observe and be a part of a dynamic performance art project.

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[7] In Garoian (1999), the performance project he sites specifically to illustrate Lacy's work as curriculum text and performance art pedagogy, 'praxis of postmodern theory', is the 1994 performance in Oakland, *The Roof Is on Fire*. Teens, mostly Latinos and African Americans, sat in new cars on a rooftop parking lot

This study has helped me to gain a more complex understanding of the processes,

contents and contradictions of such collaborative performance art projects.

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while they spoke about their issues. The audience, including the media, were invited to 'listen in' as the
youth spoke to one another.

CHAPTER 4: TURNING POINT AND UNDER CONSTRUCTION:
LISTENING AND TELLING

"The Turning Point project was one of the turning points of my life. I met many young women I could relate to, and that was very beneficial to me. I learned a heap about social issues, activism and public art."

"If we were to do it again, I would like the project to focus more on the young women's images and ideas. The emphasis on the production at the end got in the way of what was developing with the core group."

"I loved the hand painting: for me it was the real 'art' of this art project..."

"As we began working on the big production we began drifting apart. The final performance sent a message, but I don't think it was the message we wanted to send."

(Four core girl narratives in Barbara Clausen (August, 18, 1998) Turning Point: A Final Report)

I didn't want to share my personal life, but I did anyways. It sucked. I don't like telling yuppy strangers who would cry at 'Bambi' what I've been through: I'm tired of this shit.

(on Emily Carr workshop) Finally people had opinions past the authority and were not afraid to SHOUT. I feel like kicking butt and changing the world, but I guess, that's not what we're doing.

(anonymous narratives in Turning Point girls' sketchbooks, who dropped out of the project in the fall of 1996)

Each person's narrative tells us a bit of their story. Together the narratives create a polyvocal text which helps us to come to understand their individual and shared experiences in Turning Point and Under Construction. "Together, women may be able to name or rename their experiences, an act of power in itself. Further, the powerless can create conversations among themselves, which can lead to power even when the powerful refuse to listen" (Hayes, 2000, p. 107). I listened to their stories, as they were originally recorded during our interviews. I listened to them again as I transcribed them into written text. Finally, I hope that I have heard them as I make room in this text for their voices, so that they might be heard by the larger audience that they long ago sought.

While reading the narratives in this chapter, you need to keep in mind who is speaking and "under what concrete circumstances...and who is listening and what is the nature of her relationship with the speaker –especially with respect to power?" (Brown, 1998, p. 32). Though I have tried to represent study participants respectfully and in ways that they would agree with, I recognize that I was usually senior to the interviewee and also in control of this final text, despite my good intentions. I have included as much of the narratives as I have so that readers can "consider their own alternate interpretations," or understandings (Stake, 1995, p. 87).

I have considered organizing the narratives into their subject topics, and themes, according to their roles in Turning Point. However, I decided to frame this section in more of a chronological order, where each narrative is within the same relative context of time. In the first section of the chapter, the narratives take place during the developmental stages of Turning Point, where fundraising, girl recruitment, and project planning are well under way. The second part of the chapter begins with my narrative as I recall the Under Construction performance as a witness on the performance floor, then followed by participants' immediate post-performance narratives. In the third section, narratives describe post-performance thoughts, from individuals' written reflections from a year and more after the performance.

I have organized narratives into the following topics: 1) How participants described the events in Turning Point and Under Construction; 2) Participants' experiences in Turning Point and Under Construction; 3) Participant opinions and reflections. Within the topics, I present the narratives of each woman as they relate to these categories *Roles* each played in the project, *Growth and learning, Closure and follow-up, Success and evaluation.* From these discussions, emerged the following themes: *Voice and Empowerment, Ownership, Feminism, Process and Product, Audience, Community, Metaphor,* and *Role of the Artist.*

Turning Point asked its participants to reflect on their lives within their communities and to respond to what they found. I, in turn, asked several of these same participants in to reflect on their experience in Turning Point. So, in the end we have meta-reflections –their reflections on a process in which they were frequently reflecting. I also asked them to comment on the process that they went through, often while they were immersed in it, and again well after the project was over.

Turning Point: One Narrative at a Time

I have organized these narratives chronologically according to interview date. By presenting the narrative segments of individual young and older women interviewed for this study, readers will have a sense of the context in which each woman is speaking. I interviewed some key coordinators and volunteers. The young women chose their own pseudonyms, based on women whom they admire, from history, from their personal experiences, or from myth. The adult participants opted not to use pseudonyms as they

didn't mind being identified while also admitting that it was pointless to mask their identities given the size of the local art community and the high-profile of the project.

<div align="center">Barbara</div>

Local women organizers and volunteers played an enormous role in the growth and development of Turning Point. On March, 28, 1997, Barbara Clausen, producer of Turning Point and Under Construction, and I met for lunch at a sushi place near her office. We fit our rolls and noodles in between sentences and train of thought...

Barbara had a diverse and interconnected history in fine-art and education as well as in performing arts administration. Barbara is very involved in the local arts community and was a driving force behind the development of Turning Point, and inviting Suzanne Lacy to come to Vancouver. Although very knowledgeable about art, her main focus in her career had been in dance, from teaching dance to young children to administering dance companies. She also spent two years at the Canada Council as a dance officer in Ottawa. At the time of the interview she was working in her own business where she supports individual performing artists and projects related to the performing arts. She was very passionate about seeing Turning Point grow from an idea to a reality. She became the project coordinator from the very beginning. She was part of the team that developed *New Performance Works Society*, which was the producing body of Turning Point. Like so many of the young women, this was also Barbara's first community project, as well as her first project that focused on women or feminist issues.

Descriptions of Turning Point and Under Construction

> I think it (Turning Point) is several things (for different people) ... I think for the girls that are involved, it is kind of empowerment process and the real kind of experience that none of them have had... having mostly to do with relationships with one another in my opinion, and working on something that they don't quite get, but have faith that something will happen and also being really pleased at being involved in something that has public face and is all about girls.

> For the community of funders and supporters, Turning Point is about leadership development for girls, it is about making some kind of public statement about multiculturalism, about youth and about females.

> Last, but not least... Turning Point is really a piece of art by an artist whose name is Suzanne Lacy who makes spectacular one day events...It is a piece of art and social action, it's a kind of a girls' club, it's kind of a neat opportunity for people to interact in ways that is completely outside of their normal roles. I work now

with young women in a way that I wouldn't normally. It's an honour to hang out with the girls and do stuff with them, it's really neat. It is especially an honour for me because it puts me in a really different context with my own daughter....

Another thing that this project is... it is some kind of an interesting opportunity for a small number of girls, not a huge number of girls. The five hundred that come (plan) to the site will have a great time, but the thirty or forty who have gotten it from the beginning and have gotten to work with Suzanne and who are working with us intimately, at the moment, I think are the ones who are really getting this thing, whatever it is. (Int.: Barb, 7.1)

Experiences

This great story is.... seven of my very best female friends that are involved in the arts in one way or the other, formed this non-profit in order to look at the idea of doing projects that might come our way. But also a way to network as a way to have an old-girls club, frankly. Because a lot of us were involved in the arts, but not connected to large organizations, and you get out of the loop really fast if you're not involved in an organization where you are on a mailing list and everything else. We got together and one of things that we decided to do was, at every meeting we let someone else bring an idea, a video, an audio tape and we would talk about it... and that was where we saw the videotape of Suzanne Lacy. It was for interest, for information, but as it turned out that organization had a mandate that was wide enough to accommodate that project. So it is partly accidental, coincidental, but partly.. we were all on the same track. (Int.: Barb, 2.2)

Feminism

This is my first (women focused project). So, I am coming to feminism late. Although I am of an age where I might have been involved in a lot of feminist development, I wasn't. I was certainly aware of it, but that just wasn't my experience at the time. I am familiar with feminism action and theory, but it hasn't been part of my experience. So, this is quite interesting, and I feel very comfortable with it, and I feel that it is a very valid thing to be doing with my daughter. That is how this project is happening for me. It's happening for me as a professional, but I am also doing it as a mother, and she happens to be involved, although she wasn't at the beginning –she came to it herself. She knew about it through me, but her decision to do it was her own. (Int.: Barb, 3.2)

Roles. In the best possible sense, and I think that Suzanne would support this, I have been her partner on the ground. Suzanne didn't know anything about the city, other than she knew Susan Gordon and Rosalyn at the Parks Board, because that was who invited her up originally. So, I have been her administrative partner. She develops through a lot of experience ways of perceiving in terms of how to network and with whom to network. So from the very beginning, she would set up *okay next time I come up, I would like to meet with some educators, I'd like to meet with Park Board people, I'd like to meet with some art teachers...* So I would scurry around make cold calls and set up meetings for her, which she would facilitate brilliantly. That was the developmental part of this job, of my job was

to build a network of supporters, of funders and basic community supporters of this project...

Then my job became to make the grant applications, to raise the money, to do whatever is we were going to do in the end... So, my job has been to administer the project by understanding Suzanne's vision as it developed over time, and finding the financial support for it. Basically, housing the project, being the central communicating person. Being the person who speaks for the project in Vancouver.

I would say some of the success of this project has had to do with her vision, absolutely, but also with my reputation as an arts administrator, because I do have contacts in a lot of quarters and I do have a good reputation as being interested and committed to things that are considered legit. Not that she couldn't have done this with someone else, but I suspect that this hasn't been a small contribution to the project, it's just my reputation. (Int.: Barb, 4.1)

Barbara's roles engaged her in every aspect of the project, and only in the very final phase of development of the performance did this become absolutely impossible to maintain.

I am physically present at everything to date, but that is going to have to shift because as the project explodes at the end, into a full scale event of the proportions that we are now thinking about, I can't possibly be present at everything, and that is fine with me. (Int.: Barb, 5.1)

Barbara gives all of the credit to the vision for the project to artist. Her role was to make sure that the practical aspects of the project were viable and then taken care of. Barbara and Heather, her assistant, made sure that the "nuts and bolts" were in order. The practical aspects meant to try and accommodate Lacy's artistic vision and to fit it into the time frame, financial and logistical parameters.

I am very much working in collaboration with Heather - and not exclusively - because everything gets framed by Suzanne, but I would say, all of the details get put in place by me and Heather –not without talking to a whole lot of other people and tearing our hair out and running around in circles and saying *what do you think, do you think this will work?*

So for instance the zine, which is becoming an interesting part of the project for the young women, was not Suzanne's idea, and it was the young women's idea and it was encouraged and supported by Heather and me and we made sure that it happens. Whereas it is certainly a part of the project, as a whole, the fact that it happens is because there were people around to say *cool, we'll help you to do that, or cool, we'll pay for that.*

So it is hard to say... (back to the question of what kinds of activities is she involved in) there are probably lots of other things, like the nature of each event because, Suzanne will say *I think we should do x* and then she's literally - in the

past at least - been gone for the six weeks or so between saying *we should do x* and x happening. Which doesn't mean that she hasn't been involved in saying (things like) *and it should have, and I think we should, and then perhaps we should ...* And then she leaves. That's fine, and so Heather and I and others... I am thinking about the Sun Yat Sen project (hand painting performance), we were invited to do something there. Suzanne thought it was a fabulous opportunity, we went there, we had a quick look. She said *ya we should do it here and here... an I'll be back in a month.* And it will happen. We were obviously interested in doing it this way or we wouldn't have done it...For Heather and me to figure out... how many chairs and tables, how many girls. (Int.: Barb, 5.3)

We tried to accommodate what Suzanne wants, but because she is not present, occasionally we come up with something that we think that is a better idea, or that ... Well, we come up with options for her, alternatives, so that the visual component is completely under her control, except for the 'Drive'[1] thing, which I insisted should be more of the girls own engagement. That is one of the things I felt was missing was the girls getting engaged in how it should be organized. In retrospect, maybe it would have been better if it had been organized differently, but on the other hand they did it.

So, the visual aspect is Suzanne's, the implementation of it and the getting ... she'll say *the poster, I think it should have a hand on it.* Then she goes back home. We get a designer, we decide what the poster looks like based on ... you know. Suzanne can't be physically available, and she doesn't really care, aside from the sweeping *we should have x, we should do x, this should be better publicized than that was because we're moving in a continuum towards a very big event.* These recruitment events were basically about raising the profile of the project so that it can be as big as she wants it to be at the end. So, in some respects, the tiny details of the recruitment events are not as important as the little tiny details of the big event will undoubtedly be. And she will be in town enough to have the kind of control she requires for that. (Int.: Barb, 6.2)

Reflections and Opinions

For Barbara, <u>Turning Point</u> was more than a good idea, a fun project or even a

job. It was an opportunity to work with extremely interesting people where what

you do might make a difference.

For me, I think the metaphor <u>Turning Point</u> is pretty powerful on a lot of levels. For me it is a turning point in my own career. It's been extremely energizing and engaging and also frustrating and maddening as anything that is interesting is. I am really interested in broadening my scope as an administrator and as I near the end of my career....I like to do stuff that has social significance, which is not to say that art doesn't, like the performing arts and the Firehall Theatre, but I guess for me it is a shift in my own focus and understanding that my talents and skills, as limited as

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[1] Locally, Commercial Drive is often referred to as simply The Drive.

they are in the administrative field, can be used for stuff that perhaps is
more meaningful to people. (Int.: Barb, 8.1)

Role of the artist

Barbara found Lacy to be very understanding about the administrative function of
this project and also to be generous with her praise as well as accommodating with the
practicality of some administrative decisions. Yet, she found the fluidity of the
boundaries of roles sometimes frustrating. It wasn't always clear which decisions were
aesthetic ones reserved for the artist, whether it would be up for discussion, or could be
determined by someone else other than the artist. She noted that Lacy did accommodate
Barbara's ideas as well as the girls and others.

> She (Lacy) has given these collaborators, these young women far more
> collaborative leeway than she is normally used to doing. She is a huge
> collaborator by nature, but I think there have been points at which I or others have
> said, *Gee, I really think you should ask the girls about that.* And she does, but
> that isn't the first thing that occurs to her. It is now, interesting, now that we are
> down to the crunch. She won't complete the details of the final event until she
> has a meeting with the girls next week.

> She has found that every time she does creative brainstorming with the girls they
> just... she gets a whole lot of things solved that she can't solve. Which is a
> normal thing for her, but it would normally be another adult artist ... she
> collaborates hugely. And she is also doing that with designers and professional
> artists here. But the girls, in the various permutations, a group of five going to her
> hotel for dinner or a group of thirty in a formal session - as we will have next
> Saturday - or a couple of them going onto the site with her and just dreaming.
> That is where some of the really neatest ideas have come from for this project.
> And she is quite aware of that, and is quite willing to proceed that way. (Int.:
> Barb, 9.3)

Collaboration was a term that was often used to describe Lacy's mode of working
with communities. Yet, the notion of artistic authorship and control over the aesthetic
were also prevalent. These contradictory notions were acted out throughout this project
and also appeared in the published literature and press releases surrounding the project
and performance. This would ultimately lead to audience and participant unease with the
way the project was portrayed. As an example, a one page Under Construction press
release dated May 12, 1997; the first paragraph reads: "Under the direction of
internationally renowned conceptual/performance artist Suzanne Lacy from California,
and supported by a professional production team, the young women will create a
performance event unlike anything ever experienced in Vancouver." In the second

paragraph it states: "This is a two-year **collaboration** of a diverse group of Vancouver teenagers who have been changing public perceptions of young women. They are participants in a **peer-led** social art/community development project whose goal is to use public spaces and personal connections to make the voices of young women heard" (my emphasis). If the production had been truly collaborative and peer-led, then they wouldn't be under the direction of anyone. Collaboration involves shared power in a process. It was an artist directed project, albeit a consultative and cooperative one.

Nature of art. Many of the participant and volunteers that I spoke with (on and off the record) did not care whether this project was called a work of art. What did seem to matter to them was that it happened. It was difficult for many of them, who had limited background in visual art, to distinguish what characteristics made this project a work of art. Even Barbara, who is fairly savvy, found that it was hard to identify as art. It didn't matter to Barbara whether it was called art or not, what did matter was the expertise of the individual leading the project.

> The only thing to me that makes this is a piece of art is the fact that the woman who is doing it and who has done if for 20 years, calls it art. She calls herself an artist, she has a reputation in the art world, that is coming from a thread that I know very little about, the happenings, ... that it is part of a historical continuum, and that it is going to be written up in art journals. That is the only reason I know it's art. I know she'll have control over the visual aesthetics, she has control over its logistics, which she considers a really significant part of the art. I consider it production, but it is visual art for her, that is how it happens, how the audience comes in and goes out and where the performers are, not just what they look like, but how the communications work. She is really into communications.

> So, that is why it is art, because she is an artist, and she identifies herself as such and because she's identified by her peers as such. (Int.: Barb, 15.2)

Audience

Barbara doubted that the general audience would understand Under Construction. She recognized the difficulty of the *soft* nature of the performance, given the harder edged messages that Lacy's had centred many of her previous performances around. Although Barbara, was sure that the overall community would be confused by the performance, she hoped that they would get the key messages that Turning Point was trying to put across.

> Developing a new culture. How the voices and lives of young women, especially in a community like Vancouver where we have a huge mix of cultures, are going

to be... this is what I think it's going to become. This is a slice of...listen to this, watch this, this is who is going to be building the new community in Vancouver. And that is why the metaphor of the construction site... *Here watch this, this is who we are, this is who we are becoming, and this is how we can become together...* I think.

I am not sure yet, because I have not heard the soundtrack yet, and they were a lot of really intense interviews with young women that was based on personal experiences that were quite personal: some having to do with cultural issues, other with abuse issues, and others. So, maybe it's about that.

There is a really important thing, that I don't know is happening enough, about the connection with these young women to the women around the world, the global culture. What is it about young women that we can do this to them around the world and even here? So, it has that political edge to it...I think it is a little softer than that. Not really a celebration, but more of a massive manifestation: this is young woman, and young woman in Vancouver. (Int.: Barb, 16.2)

Success and evaluation: ease and difficulties. For Barbara, the easiest and the most difficult aspects of the project have fallen into the area of finances. In the beginning it was easy to find funding for the project as it intentionally was designed to meet numerous mandates simultaneously. However, as the project progressed, the artistic vision grew and the budget available for the grand event was no longer in sync and this major issue needed prompt resolution. They needed to hire production staff, recruit 500 young women and 100 volunteers, recruit and train them as well as get all the supplies and transportation necessary for the production. It was a daunting task and a seemingly impossible one.

I lost heart, not faith in the project, but faith in the ability to pull it off. We are, for what this is, not for what it's been all along, which has been pretty funky and wonderful and we've produced three events and gals meetings and workshops and media literacy. We've done a lot in the last two years. And I began to think, *well that's the project then, that's okay.* And it took a crisis for me to understand that *no, that is leading up to the event, which is what we've hired Suzanne to do.*

But I had gotten lost in the details, I couldn't see the forest for the trees. The forest was going to cost a hell of a lot more money than what we had left. That's not a question of spending too much money. We did everything that we were supposed to do, everything was approved by her. It was a community project, we raised the money - we spent the money, but only she approved that we do it. But we didn't see the *truck* coming. (Laugh) in a way, and as an administrator, I am slightly embarrassed by this admission because I can't understand why I didn't get that it was going to be this huge. And also, as I was going to say, I am part-time, but I work a lot more than half-time on this project, but there are a couple of other things I have to keep on the burner. My assistant Heather works 10 hours a

week and is a full-time arts student. We have two U.B.C. students working for us, one at 10 hours a week one at 4 hours a week, and that is it! (Int.: Barb, 11.1)

At the time of this interview, the financial crisis was nearly resolved and the project was well underway. Success was seen in accomplishing the final show, to see it all come off without too many hitches. I wonder about the personal toll that it took on Barbara, and her assistant, Heather. From Barbara's description, it sounds as though they were overworked, understaffed, and had out of range expectations set by someone else. Success was described often as it related to completion of the show. Participants also considered how they would personally evaluate both the process and the product.

> This project is a challenge, and in the end it will be a coup, I will feel that I have pulled something magnificent off. I already do, and that was a part of the crisis which is ... *We* have *done a hell of a lot over the last two years, we've raise a hell of a lot of money, we've got these girls engaged, we've done a lot of neat things, so what's the* problem, *so we don't do an event?...* Someone had to remind me *What did you hire Suzanne to do? ...* well ya, *a big event.*

> It will be a big personal success, for me privately and personally if I[2] am able to accomplish it. (Int.: Barb, 13.1)

Barbara described various levels of success for Turning Point. She felt that in many ways it had already been successful in achieving some of its goals.

> I already feel that it is a success, okay, because the girls have gotten engaged to the point where they are helping to determine the shape of its parts, that they are writing .....they determine... the hand logo is theirs ... the way The Drive worked. They chose The Drive, and then they went and actually planned the performance on The Drive.

> I guess it will be successful to me if all the goals are met. If we can really get 500 young women with the demographic split that is similar to the demographics in the city, and if they get why they are there, and the press responds in a way that is pro-female. I think that will be successful. (Int.: Barb, 14.2)

When I asked Barbara what she hoped to gain from her experience in Turning Point, she told me that she had already acquired what she had hoped. She had formed the working relationships with other community members that she admired.

> I have already gained it, I think. Which is a real working relationship with a lot of people I really admire in town. I feel like I have a new network of people in this city and that is because of the work I did on Suzanne's behalf.

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[2] Personal and professional stakes were associated with this project. For Barbara, as the producer of the show, the stakes were high, as she said earlier, it was her reputation. This poses some conflict as many of the decisions were made at the director level, beyond her control. As she says in this quote, she was working towards the end performance also a personal accomplishment.

I got involved in the Roundhouse (community centre) because Susan Gordon and Joslyn Kobylka met me through this (project) and now I am on an advisory board for the park board. I have learned a lot about the Artists in Residence Program. I have learned a lot about the visual arts just by being the producer of a so-called visual arts event.

It has kind of expanded my knowledge of the community in Vancouver and working with a lot of really great gals. I gained a working relationship with someone I adore, in Heather, who just walked up to me and said, I want to be a part of it. A lot of people have done that, but she has worked her butt off. I can see working with her for ever if she would have me. She is just a great great collaborator. She is the kind of person that thinks about stuff a long time before I think about stuff. I'll say *Heather have you???* and she will say *Ya, it's already done!* And she has a great aesthetic sensibility. (Int.: Barb, 13.2)

Barbara offered a three fold response to my question about what she had hoped others would gain from their experience in Turning Point. She identified three separate groups: the participating girls, the community, and Canadian artists.

My sense is that, the girls that have been involved will have a sense that they are not alone, that there is a way to connect with people that you have never met before that works, just because of your gender. I think that for some of the young women, this was news, and this was good news. That even though they were culturally really, really different, or economically, there was something that they had worked on together. It was like nothing that they had never done before, not the project itself, but the fact that they were collaborating with young women, because they were young women, no matter what else they were. So for me that is a significant thing.

I hope the girls, I've seen it, so I know it is happening with some of them, will just come up with confidence, being able to speak their mind, being able to assume that people are interested in what they have to say, because people are interested in what they have to say. The press is –it is kind of an interesting set up that we've given them, but I think that they are rising to the challenge.

I think, I hope that the community art people understand the nature of performance art, temporal public art, that public art can be temporal, not just monuments and boulders, I think that is interesting.

I hope that I can find some Canadian artists who want to do stuff like this, because now I know how to do it. (Int.: Barb, 14.1)

Heather

When Heather and I last met, it was by chance at a mutual friend's wedding. Heather had received but not yet reviewed the interview material I had sent her from our earlier interview. She finished her degree at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in the

spring of 2000. While at the time of the interview she was a full-time student, in the beginning of her program.

After my lunch interview with Barbara (March, 28, 1997), I stole Heather away from their office. We went for coffee at The Grind Coffee Shop, on Main Street. Heather had a long personal history with activist work and support work for women in Québec. She worked as an animateur, in a daytime drop-in centre for women. Her previous art experience centred around photography and photo-based art.

She holds a belief that art "needs to come out of the gallery and back to serve the community more from which it came...it needs to be more of a political thing and come together more with the people" (Int.: Heather, 1.1). Heather describes the role of the artist as related to being a story-teller. "Art is supposed to be the story-teller, or visual helper, in a way... as artists, you can create something that helps someone figure out something or illuminates an issue or a situation, and I feel that it belongs in the community" (Int.: Heather, 5.2). She first became involved in Turning Point, when she met Barbara and learned of the project.

Descriptions of Turning Point and Under Construction

Each participant described the project and performance in their own words. Some chose to use some of the tag phrases found in various media releases, while others used entirely their own phrasing. By asking each of them to describe in their own terms, I was hoping to find out what they understood the heart of Turning Point to be. Heather describes Turning Point in this way:

> It (Turning Point) is a community art project, it is for and by and based-on the work of Suzanne Lacy, and a huge number of girls, but mostly 21 young women who have through this long facilitation process trying to figure out what they want to say, how they want to say it, what are their terms.... It is an art project that has, at it's base, a grass-roots involvement of young people, but it keeps fanning out to more people, and what do they want to say, and then it shifts it a little bit because they have concerns about *this* and it resonates with the other girls and that goes through. So, it is a community art project. (Int.: Heather, 6.2)

Experiences

Heather joined Turning Point to assist in a two week workshop at ECIAD in August 1996. Heather compared the two week workshop to first year art school. She saw this as being an intensive primer for the girls. They learned what performance art was, what public art was as well as the process for making a work of art.

Basically they did a whole year, almost, in many ways –what I've been doing in my first year of art school is what they did in that two weeks. Really, I noticed a lot of similarities, it was really intense for them. I think that some of them really got it. Some of them didn't really get it, or it was too much, or will filter in later. It was facilitated by professional facilitators to help the girls with the things they had trouble with.

So for two weeks these girls talked about what is art, how do you create an artwork. That is a very big thing right there –considerations of site, scale, what does your piece say, how do you present yourself? And then there was so much to do... how do you help a sixteen-year-old articulate things that are perhaps, more than they have articulated before. So, it was a very big thing. (Int.: Heather, 2.2)

At the end of it (the two weeks at ECIAD) the girls gave a presentation based on what they learned, and they came up with a lot of the things that we have been doing for the past six months, like the hand-painting and the metaphoric connections. But all of these girls came from different places, they were all... a lot of them didn't know each other. Some of them didn't even know what they were doing there. I guess they understood in some ways, but I think in a real way, I don't know if all them really understood. From our core girls we have 21 out of 30, or of the 29, which is quite good. They are totally engaged and they completely get it and they are powerfully motivated. They are really great that way. (Int.: Heather, 3.1)

Roles. For the ECIAD workshop, Heather was responsible for all production related tasks including booking tours and transportation for the girls; ensuring that all the classrooms were open for them, as well as arranging for food.

Heather worked more or less full-time for Barbara following the workshop until January 1997, when she shifted to part-time hours. She was the production assistant, so for a particular event, like a hand painting event, she was responsible for the details like:

Setting up the posters to make sure that people could find the place and make sure the food was there, organize the rooms. We would find out when Suzanne would come down, once a month, call a meeting that day. It would be my job to get the letter out to the girls, do the mail-outs, call-backs to the girls, *are you coming, do you need a ride, are you bringing a friend?* Whatever, wrangle the girls. Then I would need to book the room, get the right number to the caterers. If we are doing a performance, and we needed to get henna; if we were getting t-shirts made, maybe, painting, we would need to get tables set up....(Int.: Heather, 6.1)

Reflections and Opinions

Heather was happy to have worked on the Turning Point project. But more than that, she appreciated the experiences that it came with it. She valued the relationships with her co-workers and the girl participants. She told me she would be thrilled to work with the girls again in a future project.

<u>Growth and learning</u>. The real legacy is what the girls take on and teach other people. For me the project is totally and completely the girls. I get so thrilled when I get to hang around them. I am such a fan. I have gone through all these emotions from being really irritated by them... and then they are just amazing. Some of the core girls, who I know the best, have gone from point A all the way around and back again. The girls really help each other. It is a really safe environment for the girls to just help each other with issues, things that they needed to work out.

So, the art project –what is it about? It is hard to answer that because it is about all of these little things that happen. (Int.: Heather 8.2)

I asked Heather why she stayed involved in the project.

Keep in mind I am a first year art student. For me as an art student, to be involved in a project like this is ... so tasty. I wouldn't have been able to hope for anything as great as this. This is such valuable experience for me. (Int.: Heather, 8.4)

I asked Heather what she hoped others, the girls, the audience and the community might gain from the project. The girls overwhelmingly took the priority in this case.

That is hard for me to say... I have looked at this project as the process from the girls, and so my thoughts have always been on the process of the girls *are they getting something out of it, is it a meaningful experience for them? How can we make it more meaningful? What are the needs that we are meeting?* I haven't really thought of the audience, like I sort of don't care, I don't care if nobody shows up... but I do, I want a lot of people to be there, and I want them to look at it and see whatever it is that the girls want them to see, and they walk away with something that is lasting. (Int.: Heather, 10.1)

Nature of Art

I asked Heather what makes this art? This was a difficult question for her, given that she spent the majority of her time on the project dealing with production particulars, and not the global picture.

The attitude of the beholder.... the main event may be seen as just an event, like a rock concert. Because it's going to be engineered, we are going to get a tonne of girls, we are going to ship them in, we are going to place them, dress them up and they are going to do their thing. That is very crass in some ways, compared to the process in how we have gone through and ... you know the project has so many different levels, and my level has been on the ground. So, it is on the details. It is very hard for me to see the whole thing because my whole job has been involved with particulars. So, when we have an event, I don't know how it has gone. I haven't got a clue. So, it is very hard for me to answer a lot of these questions... (Int.: Heather, 11.2)

Community

Turning Point manufactured a community of girls. However, the longevity of that community was fairly ambiguous knowing from the onset that they were brought together to participate in this finite project. Heather hoped for at least an individually lasting project, in terms of the opportunity for growth for the girls.

> It is going to very interesting ... I wish that in ten years I bump into some of the girls and (they tell me) *I've been doing this and this and this, and you know that Turning Point thing we did years ago? Well that really helped me when I needed to... whatever.* I guess in a more tangible way the leadership of the abilities of the girls have learned, or those sorts of things, have definitely helped, those things you can put a name on. But I think that there is a lot of other stuff you can't put a name on that has happened to the girls that will come out later. Those sorts of things will happen to me to, all the production stuff, working with great people, and those sorts of things. And for me, because I am an arts student, the more interesting stuff is the stuff that I can't name yet, the stuff that I won't even know about until after the project is done. (Int.: Heather, 12.1)

Success and evaluation. The ways of measuring success is complex when dealing with such a multifaceted project. I asked Heather how she would know that the project has been a success. She answered in terms of the audience, the girls and herself. She wasn't sure how one would assess the success of the effect on the audience, but felt that the project would need to be assessed in administrative terms, as in the promotional material, good reviews and visibility. For Heather, success for her would mean a worthwhile project in the eyes of the girls.

> It will be successful to me, if at the end of it the girls - whom I've come to know- feel that this process has been really worthwhile to them, and that they are really happy with where they've gone from when started to where they are now. It's been easy or hard.... For me that will be the most important thing.
>
> I don't know how that is going to affect the other types of community art that are happening in the city, the community centre art pieces. I hope that it doesn't affect them adversely, because this has a huge budget compared to those... I don't know, the town is very political in those ways and I don't know who gets what and who doesn't. (Int.: Heather, 10.3)

Heather had some internal, philosophical battles with the notion of community art.

> For me it is to reconcile what I think community art should be, what my prejudices and biases are and to learn to be patient with the project and to allow the process to happen, and to not put on it my ideas of ... or my biases of what I think is happening, or isn't happening or what should be happening or shouldn't be happening. (Int.: Heather, 12.2)

Reading over Heather's words, I wonder why I didn't ask her what her expectations were for the project. What were her biases of what she though should have been happening but wasn't? She also had some struggle with Lacy's working style.

> It is very difficult to work under direction when the direction changes all the time. That is the nature of the beast, and I can't fault her on that, it is not her. There are all sorts of things. I had to get to know who she was, because I had to find out what her comfort level was working with others, I mean all those sorts of things. You know the thing with Barb, we all have to find out how we fit together and then that is how we work together, we have done a lot of work that way. It's been great. (Int.: Heather, 13.1)

Heather was working very closely with Barbara and many of the core girls in the project at the time of this interview. One of these long term extremely active core girls was Frieda.

<u>Frieda</u>

April 23, 1997, sitting at the Grind, (the same coffee shop I went to with Heather). Frieda (self selected pseudonym) and I we sat talking over a tape recorder and notes. Frieda was the first <u>Turning Point</u> participant I interviewed. We talked a bit about pseudonyms. We thought that it would be fun to use names of famous women artists rather than arbitrary names. At first our conversation seemed a little awkward. I explained the use of the tapes and the need for anonymity. She wasn't particularly concerned if anyone knew who she was or her opinion. It may become clear that the girls themselves when reading this study, would certainly know who was who.

<u>Description of Turning Point and Under Construction</u>

I asked each participant to tell me, in their own words what the whole project was about, as though I knew nothing about it. Frieda frequently gave presentations to groups at schools to try and recruit more girls to the project. Frieda told me:

> <u>Turning Point</u> is an art and social action project. And we are interested in empowering young women, giving young women a voice in Vancouver. Because there are a lot of issues pertaining to young women that the rest of ... that all you guys should know about. Like, just, women's issues in Vancouver, eating disorders, for example, relationships at home and relationships in general, with your family, with guys, guy-girl relationships and what it is like to be an ethnic young woman. (Int.: Frieda, 9.1)

She also described the planned performance, which was still two months away as:

The performance is going to be at The Residences on Georgia which is just behind the Pacific Palisades Hotel. It is a building under construction, and (the performance) is called <u>Under Construction: The Turning Point</u>, I think. And there is going to be hoarding around the building, just like there is on any other building site. On one side of the hoarding there is going to be video monitors, (hopefully, if we get enough money we will do this) showing clips of behind the scenes of the project and things leading up to the project –maybe footage from the August workshop (ECIAD), just footage along the way, and hand painting as well. Oh, I should mention one other thing: this site is in front of two tall towers and in the middle is sort of a pit area is going to be, of all things, a putting green when it is all done, go figure! And between is a row of townhouses. So, that is where we are going to be is in the pit, between the towers and adjacent to the townhouses. We're going to be put in groups and we are going to be talking and as we're talking there is going to be a soundtrack playing... It is sort of a loud site, so it is really glitchy there....Along other points in the hoarding (there will be) little peep holes that are typical on most construction sites... So somewhere along the line there will be the tape recording. And I think there is going to be little mini happening type things... little tableaux, that are yet to be decided, and there is concrete mixing (during the performance) pouring concrete... There is a lot of construction paraphernalia, like big concrete mixing trucks and I think the site is going to look pretty raw...(Int. Frieda, 15.4)

<u>Experiences</u>

Frieda had been involved in <u>Turning Point</u> since the weekend retreat at Camp Alexandra, Crescent Beach in January, 1996. She found out about the project through her high school councillor. Frieda's previous experience in the arts was mostly in theatre in her school where she ended up being the resident set designer. Her visual art experience in school included printmaking and ceramics. "But in terms of this (performance art), you don't do a whole lot of that in high school" (Int.: Frieda, 4.2). Frieda had never been involved in any community-based or women focused projects before, so <u>Turning Point</u> was her first experience with both.

<u>Early workshops in 1996</u>. Frieda: It was three days, and Wow, that was so long ago... January of 96.. and what did we do.. learned a lot about...performance art, Suzanne's performance art.

Lorrie: Who was involved in taking you (the girls) away?

Frieda: There was Suzanne, and there was...I remember more Shari Graydon from Media watch and Media literacy. That was what I was trying to think of. We did a lot of media literacy and deconstructing of images from the media and television and print ads and we talked a lot about ethnic representation in the media, and representation of women in the media as well as how often they're represented...(Int.: Frieda, 2.1)

Out of the group of 30 young women only 5 - 10 stayed on to work on the Turning Point project. Frieda stayed interested in the topics presented at that weekend retreat and later participated in bi-weekly, weekend media literacy workshops at the Vancouver Art Gallery. She then worked for two weeks at the two week intensive workshop at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. Frieda told me that it " was really neat being able to get paid for that. It's really interesting how we did get paid just the fact that someone out there values things like this so much that they are willing to pay us money to do it. I thought that was really cool" (Int.: Frieda, 2.6-3.2).

Soundtrack. In preparation for Under Construction, the girls developed a series of interview questions to ask one another during a recording session. The resulting tape was edited and served as the focal soundtrack of Under Construction. Although it was a girl developed series of questions, it was professionally edited and highlighted certain stories through repetition. Lacy insisted upon a professional level of production for the performance, (this was known at the beginning of the project) and therefore, sound composer, Jan Berman, sound consultant, Jacqui Leggett, sound engineer, Dieter Piltz along with a complete production crew[3] were hired.

> Frieda: Our recording session (for the soundtrack) last month, we had a session to do a spoken-word soundtrack. The research group got together and we made up a bunch of questions... we took this big banner of issues that we had come up with [earlier] in the August (ECIAD) workshop. I worked them all down and we lumped them into (categories) race, sex, and all of that sort of thing. And we tried to come up with questions that would cover all of those, like: "Do you think you have a voice, who listens to you?" " Do you feel that you are listened to?".. So we did that, It was really interesting what come out.
>
> Lorrie: Were you surprised?
>
> Frieda: I think so. I was surprised at the depth of the topics we covered. We covered everything from body piercing, to rape and abuse at home. (Int.: Frieda, 11.1)

Roles. Frieda took on numerous responsibilities throughout the duration of Turning Point. She described herself as being very active at school, and carried this into her work on the project. She helped to recruit other girls to the project by talking to them at community centres and by phoning to remind them to come to meetings. As she said, she did a little bit of everything.

Frieda: I've done research (for the research group), I've worked on the zine. I do little things like putting together press kits, even stuff like that. I go to production meetings and give my input. I go to the big (as in many girls) *Girl* meetings, and all the hand painting projects (Mehendi). It is hard to keep it all in your head.

Lorrie: What are your key responsibilities right now in the project, at this point, since we are in the last eight weeks before the performance?

Frieda: Well, I am doing a "Coffee House" at the Roundhouse (Community Centre). That will be sort of a recruitment event, I hope. I am doing things like that.

Lorrie: Could you describe it a bit for me?

Frieda: It is going to be in celebration of *Youth Week* at the opening of the Roundhouse, and Turning Point is going to be hosting a "Coffee House" for people to have coffee and people doing hand painting and people reading poetry. It is a real casual sort of get together, (for) who ever wants to come.

Lorrie: Great, so your part is organizing. You instigated that didn't you?

Frieda: Yes, it was. We decided to do something for *Youth Week* and that is what I came up with. It kept me busy. Now to get my butt in gear and get things together.

Lorrie: So you have your coffee house that you're doing, what is next?

Frieda: I think we are having weekly sort of recruitment meetings at the Roundhouse, just drop-in sort of things.

Lorrie: Are you working at the office there? (Turning Point had an office at the Roundhouse)

Frieda: I will be soon, I am just sort of taking a bit of a hiatus because of exams. So hopefully I will start to work out of the office there and doing odd things, like calling people and faxing people stuff. I hope to get more involved in terms of the production in terms of the lighting. I want to get involved with that, designing stuff....

Lorrie: What else would you describe your responsibilities as being, or activities?

Frieda: Well there are a lot of meetings...not lately, but I have gone to a lot of meetings to get the word out about the project, such as going to Sunset Community Centre to speak to a youth group there and tell them about the project and stuff. Oh, I've also been involved in talking to media, like going on CKNW (a local radio station) and talking to them. (Int.: Frieda, 6.1-7.6)

Reflections and Opinions

Frieda found new ways to use her voice, leadership and a group of friends through her experience in Turning Point. Having gotten to know Frieda during the course of the year, it was hard to believe that she wasn't always as vocal and outgoing as she was

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[3] Additional sound production included: a text editor: Dorothy Kidd; recording engineer, David Kelln; and

around the rest of the Turning Point group. Frieda offered this insight to her experience in Turning Point, and the relationships formed among the young women in the participants. She noted the ease that came with self-awareness. "It is really easy to do that (be yourself) when you feel that you can say whatever you want, and you feel that somebody is listening to you, somebody cares" (Int.: Frieda, 23.4).

> For me, it (Turning Point) is getting together with like-minded, well not even like-minded because we are all pretty different but we are unified in that we are all girls. We are all women and we all can get along on that basis. That is the common thread between us, and within that common thread you find other things that bring you together. These are people that had I gone to the same school with all of these people I probably wouldn't talk to all of them. Just because when you are at school, you are stuck in your clique, stuck in your little tunnel vision world of people you can and can't hang out with. The divisions between people, it's there. It's inherent.

> ... it's been really meaningful for me to realize that there are so many people that are like-minded, or can that we can get together to do this project even though we are all so different. There are commonalties. (Int.: Frieda, 10.4)

Voice and Empowerment

I had frequently heard in meetings and in conversations, the emphasis placed on voice, strength, empowerment and self-empowerment of the participating young women. I asked Frieda to expand on this. I wanted to know what *voice* meant in this context.

> Frieda: The ability to speak your mind and say whatever you feel and not be discriminated against and not be judged. I think that it has been really meaningful for the girls in the project. I think. (Int.: Frieda, 9.3-10.5)

> Lorrie: Getting together with other young women who have a similar goal, but still a lot of differences and working together to pull off this type of a project, is that the heart and soul of the project?

> Frieda: And to give ourselves voice, personal voice and then to be able to speak within the group and to be able to feel comfortable within the group. I think is important, and then to take that and be able to articulate it in the big performance. That is the core of the project, I think. (Int.: Frieda, 12.2)

When I asked Frieda about what kept her involved in Turning Point, she told me that she wanted to see it through to the end, to see what happens after, and the project is completed to be with her friends in the project. These were sentiments that were held by many of the other participants as well.

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sound installation, Tim Lewis.

Just what keeps me going, is June 15th, what is going to happen on that day. Just the whole growth. I can't believe it. Another thing is that I have been involved for so long. You know, I just have to finish it. Another thing is, what is going to happen afterwards? What is it going to span into? I don't know. Hopefully some cool activist young women's group. I have no idea. My friends in the project. That keeps me in it. (Int.: Frieda, 13.1)

Growth and learning. Some of Turning Point's goals were "To Position Vancouver teenage girls as authorities –anthropologists, activists and spokespersons –for their own culture, in order to create and foster an interchange of ideas, the outcome of which is expected to affect programs, policies, public attitudes, and the self-esteem of the participants" (Turning Point Mission and Overview, 1995, p. 1). Turning Point encouraged young women to speak out, and challenge their own stereotypes. It also provided them with opportunities to investigate their own community to identify possible locations for the performance as well as to engage in creative brainstorming for possible performance images. I asked each participant to tell me about what she had gained from her experience in Turning Point, or what she hoped she would gain.

Frieda: Well, I think that I have gained a lot already. Just in how vocal I am. (laugh)

Lorrie: You mean you haven't always been this vocal?

Frieda: No, no, not at all. I used to be… I would have to read a poem that I wrote in class and I would start crying in front of the class because I wouldn't want to read it.

Lorrie: So you have found this to be a really good tool for you for getting a lot… You said that it is for young women having a voice.

Frieda: Yes, yes

Lorrie: And you have found your own voice.

Frieda: Yes, well it is really interesting, because the project came at a time when I was graduating from high school. So, now I am not going to have to be stuck in this group that I hang out with. (Int.: Frieda, 13.4)

Throughout Turning Point, I found Frieda to be a confident, articulate and friendly young woman. I had to wonder why it was that she had been shy, or afraid to speak before, and what was it about being in this environment that helped her to speak her mind publicly?

I asked Frieda, and the other participants what they hoped others would gain from Turning Point, either by being involved in it, or viewing it.

Frieda: Well, I know a girl who came to the last meeting –it had been her first time coming to a meeting –and the first time that she heard the soundtrack, and

she said that she was really moved....things like that, just touching people, getting people aware. What we are going through. I hope that people come and see it and say "Wow, this is a cool project." Open peoples' eyes.

Lorrie: If you are trying to open peoples eyes through the performance, what do you hope they end up seeing, that they might not have seen before?

Frieda: Stuff like not all short-haired women who have nose-rings are dykes and stuff you know, stuff like that, little things. Just to get their preconceptions out of their heads, their prejudices and ignorance about young women. Shed some light, along with being a cool performance. (Int.: Frieda, 14.3)

Why did these young women feel invisible? Why was being seen and heard such a huge and unique task. What has happened in their lives, in our society that reinforces this sense of invisibility and silence?

Ownership

Lacy assumes authority over the image of her community performances, but she claims that the issues, the stories that participants share remain with them. "Unwilling to presume their concerns, she [Lacy] facilitates an aesthetic space where they can participate in a public discourse and express their desires" (Garoian, 1999, p. 128). At the most recent meeting (Frieda had been absent because of school exams) Suzanne Lacy had initiated a discussion about ownership. I decided to extend this question to Frieda. I asked her what kind of ownership she felt over the project. This question set us into a rambling of issues and considerations including closure and responsibilities, and the limits of those responsibilities. I have included the whole dialogue on this segment as it illustrates the complexity of this question.

Frieda: I think it should be something that belongs to the girls involved in the project. I mean, I think what we've been trying to do is really empower young women. I know there have been concerns of people that this has been Suzanne's project and we're only doing what Suzanne wants. And that everything is leading up to that one day and after it's done "Okay, we're done with you're involvement in the project, *bu-bye*." I know I've talked to people who were really concerned about that and were turned off by that aspect. But, then again it's really difficult ... oh, I don't know... Ownership...

It's a lot of people involved. I think if the whole project was conceived to be about young women and empower young women and give young women voice and la de da, then that is who it should belong to, that is where the emphasis should be placed. Because then what is the point? What's the point... For example, I've been to a lot of conferences (including) the BCTF (British Columbia Teacher Federation) conference that I went to... It was the first time they had students there. These are teachers. These are people who are educating

students. Why would you not have students there? Why would you not have students involved in the decision making process that involves them? Society is, so-called, trying to bring up people to be, 'good participating members of the society'. Now how can you do that if you are not going to give young people an inside view of those decision making processes? It's just crap; it's just tokenism....the token young woman.

Lorrie: Like you said that you were the token student at that other conference?

Frieda: Ya, just, "look we've invited students, look at how progressive we are." Like, you know. Most of the time, the best thing that came out of it was free lunch. (very sceptical)

Lorrie: So in this project, the young women have been involved throughout (the various aspects of the project) and have been involved in some of the decision making. Do you feel that there should have been more or less democracy?

Frieda: It's really hard because I've been on the other side. On what it takes to get the girls to the meeting. All the phone calls. We are all so busy. I know what it is like to be in high school and to be super involved. And like, not have time. There has to be a lot of enabling going on and realizing that. It is hard to find a good balance.

Lorrie: Especially when you only have eight weeks to go, at this point. You've got to get it done, you have a deadline. Then what happens?

Frieda: Here I am saying, well ya, it should be focused on the young women, but then again, I mean, *hell, I am sick of calling people.* As it is right now, my feeling is why the hell, should I call people? I am calling, I am keeping tabs on people that are not much younger than I am. I am only eighteen, most of the people are like, seventeen, sixteen, like, no, "I am not going to call you to make sure you come to your meeting, you should, like, you want to be there, you be there. I am really happy when people call me instead of me having to call them. That's really cool. But again, it's difficult. It's a touchy issue, which is why you're asking I bet.

Lorrie: Suzanne is the artist in this, and she has a vision of the concept (and what's) going to happen and a lot of the aesthetics, of course.

Frieda: Ya.

Lorrie: Of what it's developed into. But the subject that is being dealt with is you. In a sense, you are a part of the medium[4].

Frieda: Ya. so, I guess in a way she does have ownership. (Int.: Frieda, 17.5-20.1)

Closure and follow-up. Frieda had mentioned in our interview that she hoped that after Turning Point, it might span into "a cool activist young women's group" (Int.:

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[4] Lacy described her work as 'sculpting with people and people's lives' in a newspaper interview (Wigod, R.the Weekend Sun, Saturday, February 22, 1997).,

Frieda 13.1). I tried to get at this notion again to see where the roles of the various

Turning Point participants fit into this type of a follow-up activity.

> Lorrie: After the end of the project, when Suzanne is gone, and the project is all over, the performance is done, and all the media crews are gone. She's (Lacy) done, the project is over, why should she continue on?

> Frieda: I will answer it this way, if it is the girls who have ownership of the project, I think that it should be up to us to sort of figure out on our own. Because Suzanne won't be here, to figure out what we are going to do. With Barb, and all of the other people who've been involved, the adults, I guess it would be their role to see it through and to help us. (Int.: Frieda, 20.5)

> <u>Success and evaluation</u>. Success can be determined by many factors, these were

discussed throughout the production of <u>Turning Point</u>. Some degrees of success were in

securing funding for the project, as well as meeting recruiting targets and media

coverage. Other ways of measuring success is on what individuals have gotten out of the

experience, whether it has enriched their lives, challenged them and/or taught them new

skills. A very clear way to check to see whether the project was indeed a success is to

check the achievements against the project's goals. With <u>Turning Point</u>, however, the

goals are less tangible: to empower young women, to have their voices and concerns

heard, to foster the self-esteem of the young women, and to raise awareness and

challenge stereotypes in society. An examination of the performance will not indicate

whether or not these goals have been achieved. So, I asked the participants, themselves,

about the success of the performance and how they judged success.

> Frieda: I think, in terms of what we get out of it –if we all feel that it went well and stuff. I don't think that success can be judged on the performance and after the fact, but what we gained along the way. Just what we've been talking about here. And what other people have gained, I think, is really important part of the success.

> Lorrie: The process?

> Frieda: Ya, that's why it is so long. I talked to some of my friends and "Gosh, hasn't your thing, like, gone up yet, hasn't it happened?" Because they are thinking in terms of theatre and that, you know. No, it is the process that is important here.

> Lorrie: There have been many hand-painting projects. There have been these short-term mile stones along the way to this project.

> Frieda: Whenever somebody has come to those things they say "Right on, this is really neat, and I am so glad that there is somebody out there doing this."

Personally that is how I measure the success of the project. (Int.: Frieda, 22.5-26.1)

We continued our conversation. We polished off our lattes, and went to catch our respective buses home. I continued to work with Frieda throughout the duration of Turning Point. She continued to study at university, and the last I heard from her, (again in a coffee shop) she was considering going to an art school in Eastern Canada.

Audrey and Hildegarde

Audrey and Hildegarde (pseudonyms) were interviewed together in my home apartment where we agreed to meet. (I also had my two young children at home). Just before writing this narrative, I received a personal letter from Audrey, another reassuring message about the worth of the project. She shared her recent life experiences with me and related what Turning Point had done for her, as well as the opportunity to remember the experience by reading through the transcripts.

Audrey was nearly 17 years old and lived in Tsawwassen and attended an alternate high-school program where she could work at her own pace. She likes film, and went to the Gulf Islands Film school. She also volunteered as a camera person for a Rogers Cable television show. She also liked music and writing, and considered herself fairly anti-social. Hildegarde, almost 16 years old, described her life as revolving around art and theatre. Hildegarde has been in both ballet and jazz dance outside of school. She had also been involved in Youth Week projects and a Youth Forum (at ECIAD) where a documentary was produced. Hildegarde was a political youth and was involved in an Amnesty International. During Women's Week she was involved in a letter writing campaign (in her school) in support of women-in-captivity in other countries, especially in the Middle East.

Description of Turning Point and Under Construction

They became involved in Turning Point through the influence of a friend who had found a newspaper clipping for hand-painting on Commercial Drive (part of the *Women in View Festival* in February, 1997). They then signed up for the project when they went to the performance on The Drive. Because of their relatively late arrival to the project, and more limited experience with the long term development, I anticipated descriptions

that differed from those with a longer <u>Turning Point</u> history. They described the project in this way:

> Hildegarde: <u>Turning Point</u> project itself, as a group, is the collaborative effort of women of all ages. It says that it is from 12 - 19 in the pamphlet, or whatever, but it's really not. People of all ages working together to voice their opinions, ideas, their thoughts and dreams, as one - as an effort. In numbers - things happen in numbers - and together throwing it all out there at once, instead of people talking on their own, and so (there are) a lot of people working together. (Int.: Hildegarde, 7.1)

> Hildegarde: (Re: <u>Under Construction</u>) I think (the construction site) is a good choice though, as a metaphor, because this is a beginning, this hasn't happened before. This is Vancouver - as a foundation for what should happen, what's going to happen in the future, and where we are going, and where we want to go. We have these dreams, needs, opinions, issues, and really a metaphor for "these are going to go somewhere now. We are putting them (expression of ideas and opinions) out into space and something is going to happen. (Int.: Hildegarde, 8.1)

> Audrey: I don't feel like I know enough about it to know what it's about really because... Kind of uniting kind of, giving women something to have a hold onto, and more awareness too for women's issues and whatever. We are doing this big thing and people are going to see it and they are going to want to find out more. (Int.: Audrey, 8.1)

<u>Experiences</u>

Though Hildegarde and Audrey were new to the project, they brought their own ideas, skills and goals about what they wanted to get out of their experiences.

<u>Roles</u>. During a pre-performance media event, I had noticed these young women with their cameras and other recording equipment documenting the painting of the construction site hoarding. They seemed focused and quite familiar with their equipment. I wanted to know how they got involved with that aspect of <u>Turning Point</u> and what exactly they were doing.

> Hildegarde: I went to a couple of production meetings. Those were kind of neat because you get to see what is actually being done.

> Lorrie: You feel that there is more action happening at the production meetings.

> Hildegarde: Yes and what ended up happening, which is why we are filming this. I had asked to become a part of the documentation, that group. And they said "you can carry cables," and I said, "I don't care." So, we decided to do our own thing. There are three of us. Two of us are filming and another girl is working on sound. She is going to put together some music. It's going to be on that day, we just want to capture what that day is about and the emotions of the site. (what's it

for) It's part of the Turning Point project, but more than that, it's for us. For us, the three of us specifically.

Because it seems as this project isn't going be carried on too heavily after this one day is done. So, we were thinking of putting together some sort of installation type of thing so this video can be used and we wanted other people to do some reflective art type stuff and have that as kind of a time capsule that we can all contribute to. I think that is more final then... and we can use that as an extension to... put in places where people can look at and see what happened. Maybe other groups who want to start something and use this as a springboard to do something else. Have it all in one little space and see that's neat. (Int.: Hildegarde, 6.2)

Lorrie: What kind of things have you done (to Audrey).

Audrey: Not much, I went to one meeting and the hand-painting. (She is actually involved in the filming project Hildegarde described)

Although carrying cables may have been necessary, it wasn't a job that Audrey and Hildegarde felt they were very interested in. They started their own project in which they could use their skills and be in control.

Reflections and Opinions

Getting together with other young women was a very important aspect of Turning Point for many of the participants. Finding a place where they could be heard, were they could freely express themselves was also important. It gave them a chance to think about what their issues were, and a chance to listen to the issues of their peers.

Community

Hildegarde: I guess what we have done is focus a lot on our issues, and (find) how to take the idea of being scared and put it into a sign, or an emblem, transferring the ideas. I think that the neatest part about it, if not on it's own, it's fine on its own, is just meeting all the people...They (other girls) know girls that they're friends with only because they go to school with them. But (in Turning Point) you find a lot of people that have a lot in common with you. I think that it's probably the most important point about it, even if there wasn't a project to end it off with. If June 15th (the performance day) never happened. I think that's maybe why we're there. I don't think we get a lot more done than that. We get together and talk. Things go on behind us, and then they come in.... the ideas of putting the show together and having everything, having this *Turning Point group* that people can come and watch. That is kind of secondary, for me at least. (Int.: Hildegarde, 5.1)

Voice and Empowerment

Hildegarde was the dominant voice in this conversation. When asked what Turning Point meant to her personally, she described her views at length and with many tangents. She touches on many issues including security in numbers, discovery that you

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aren't alone and can feel free to express yourself. She touches on the need for empowerment for women in general and their need for voice.

> Hildegarde: I think that the most important part of it is –for myself –I feel that I am a pretty strong person as far as I can throw myself into anything. I use myself as an outlet for just speaking what I want to say.... I see a lot of women in it that can't do that and they can only do that with each other because it is .. they are backed up by something in a group.

> Just to know that somebody else thinks the same things and "Okay, somebody else thought this, so now I'm going to say this." (It's) Like a safety net. That's why I want to help out with it, because I know that there are a lot of people that don't –can t do it on their own. Whether they are in the group, or whether they are going to see the performance and say, "wow, there are five hundred other girls here saying what I've always wanted to say."

> Maybe it will give somebody the backing-up to go do something, whatever they've wanted to do for years and years, and never had the courage to do it.

> And that is the other thing. Even in the soundtrack, I know a lot of the things that were said, I know that when we were listening to it...like even myself...I thought that I was only one (that thought that, or felt that) and that I was crazy for thinking it. But if you hear somebody else say it, and "Oh, my god, that's great". That was one thing that was really neat when we were listening to it, people were listening and they were (saying) " That's so great".

> A lot of people can't talk about what they want, and a lot of things on the soundtrack were really personal –haven't been said before to anyone. So, it's kind of a counselling type thing, only it's not counselling, it's what everybody needs, just to be able to talk. I feel that I'm in it because we need people to look at us. I love just being there and seeing people come out of their shells.

> Lorrie: You think that this has worked as a catalyst in a way for people to come out of their shells, to speak up, have safety for their voices. Take their very private experiences and bring them into a public space, and to make connections with other people?

> Hildegarde: Yes... that's what keeps me involved. (Int.: Hildegarde, 8.2)

Growth and learning. I asked Audrey and Hildegarde what their personal goals and hopes were for their experiences in the Turning Point project and the Under Construction performance. They both wanted to gain more awareness of themselves. They both had their ideas about art broadened, and the possibilities of what a group of people can do. Hildegarde had been involved for a longer time than Audrey and was more attached to the project: she didn't want to see it end. Even though Audrey hadn't been involved for a great length of time, she had been in for a long enough time to get a solid sense of what it was all about.

> Audrey: Well, part of it is the actual filming of it I want to get more experience filming and just...I haven't really made bonds with people. I haven't done very much. It's not like I have buddies there and stuff. But I hope I gain more awareness - and just the fact that there are other people, and it's not like when I go back to where I live, and there are all these cliques of girls and who think about make-up and boys and the cheer-leading squad and that, all the time.

> I hope that people like that, see it. People need to be more aware of things. We need to find people that can relate to them things that they think in the back of their minds, but they can't say, because they've got too much lipstick on. (Int.: Audrey, 11.1)

> Hildegarde: Something to do on a Saturday, it's a fun place to be, like after-school care, but it's not. You know that you are going to be around people that you want to be around because they are really interesting people. And there, you are going to be doing something even if you are talking or hand-painting, because that's cool. Because it's a good thing to do, and it's a lot more positive than other things. That's why I don't want to see it end, because I think it is almost one of my most favourite things. It is also a chance to leave my life, my going-to-school, my little routine that I made up for myself.

> It kind of clears my mind. Even though I have my issues, it is one place where I can sit and really think about them: it's in your face.

> One thing about the performance, I never thought things like that could be done. I never thought about doing that. It was like, I have this thing in my mind, I'm going to paint it, or I can actually get people together and we can all yell and scream and wear red shirts and, you know what I mean? It is something totally different that I never thought about doing...there is this to look forward to doing. It totally broadened my experience of art (is) and what I can do with it - just the power of it, the size of it gives it the power, the physical size, the constructing site, and 500 people and its noisy and its in the city and it's huge.

> Size also is what it's about, the issue, the thing that's turning this project and keeping it alive, it's a huge thing, it's not small. It affects half the population, half at least. That's what makes it outrageous too, Is that it's very broad because, it wouldn't work if you took little idea and worked with 500 people, it probably wouldn't work the same way. (Int.: Hildegarde, 12.1)

I asked them what they hoped others would get out of the performance, this helped to clarify Audrey's depth of understanding of the intent behind Under Construction.

> Audrey: The whole awareness thing, being able to have people they can relate to, it's real, it's not on TV. It's right in front of them, it's not another sitcom. If they're a guy, it indirectly affects them and for women it directly affects them. They should take note of it. (Int.: Audrey, 12.1)

I asked them what they felt where the main issues they wanted others to get from the performance.

> Audrey: The main issue is equality and all the other women's issues are indirectly connected to that....There are no issues, that I can say, that are any less important than the others and they all go back to equality. (Int.: 13.1)

> Hildegarde: I hope that people don't go home after and turn on the TV and watch "Friends". Just like I thought that something like that couldn't happen. But, seeing that Suzanne has done hundred's of these projects... twenty years of these things... it's unreal to me, I can't imagine it. It's not a two hour thing, (I hope) that it lasts a little bit longer than that. And even if they (audience) think that it's crap, at least they are talking about it, so long as somebody says something to somebody else....

> I would like something outrageous to happen. I would like if somebody would get up on one of those boxes, even if it's not planned, ... because all the issues that we are supposed to be talking about while we are down there are, serious, deep, and very heavy and I would like to see something really silly happen. Why can't we talk about Revlon's new lipstick, or walking down the beach and "you have a weird bikini line," I 'don't know. I don't know why, I find that it gets kind of heavy all the time. It doesn't have to be like that....(Int.: Hildegarde 13.1)

> Audrey: One of the biggest messages, I know that the tape on the soundtrack, is that we can be really strong. (Int.: Audrey 14.1)

Ownership

Issues of ownership came up whether I brought up the topic or not. I was discussed amongst the girls and the 'older girls'. Many of the women and young women grappled with what this meant, and who should own the project and what ownership really meant.

> Audrey: We've done a lot of talking and hand-painting. Sometimes I don't feel like it's really our project, because I feel that all we do is talk. I guess that's part of it. We talk a lot about within (among) ourselves. "I like this, I like that." We interact among each other and it seems like that isn't accomplishing anything. (Int.: Audrey 5.1)

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Hildegarde: I had this conversation with Chaara, and we thought that it would be really neat if it were just the people, the younger girls putting everything together, but we don't know the people, we don't have the connections... so I kind of feel like we're - not a scapegoat - but a front for the whole thing (laugh) we are on the posters, we're in the performance...but one thing that really bothers me is that I don't feel that I gave it my heart and soul...and also too that I wasn't part of it from the very beginning... (Int.: Hildegarde 14.1)

Closure and follow-up. Closure and follow-up were important to many of the participants. Some participants planned independent activities for after the performance was over. Hildegarde discussed her future plans for their documentary. Audrey, Hildegarde and Chaara planned to develop an installation (as discussed earlier in their roles) (Int.: Hildegarde 6.2).

Hildegarde: I'd like to see something else. We've done the performance art, maybe we need to get someone else who's done some other sort of art, because it is definitely a learning experience. And a lot of the women involved in this project are artists, a huge number of them,... want to pursue some sort of art, whether it be a career, or lifestyle. It would be a benefit to get to know them... Like for Chaara, she got to work in the studio with Leanne, Now she has worked with somebody who knows how to do this (sound ...) (Int.: Hildegarde 14.6)

Lorrie: Kind of a mentorship type of a program?

Hildegarde: Ya, we all have something to say. We just don't know how to say it yet.

Success and evaluation. For Hildegarde, success of the project would be to see the performance come off successfully. She had been doubtful that it would because of the low number of recruited girls and the need for many more (Int.: Hildegarde 10.2). It seems as though there was no doubt in their minds whether they would be heard through this project, the only thing holding them up was getting enough girls out to the event. Their feeling of connectedness to the project was also linked to the length of time that they had been involved. They were quite willing to have things at the performance go differently than had been planned. Hildegarde wanted something 'outrageous' to happen, and wasn't sure why they couldn't talk about other –less serious –topics during the performance.

Alix

Alix and I met at the *Talking Stick,* a coffee shop in Gastown. It was a sunny day in June not long before the performance Under Construction. She had over two years

experience in the Turning Point as a volunteer and an advisor. She had personal experience in the fine-arts as a painter and a passion for youth and community projects. She then worked for Child, Youth, and Family Advocates for BC. The focus of her work was to ensure that children and youth receive the services they need from the Provincial Government. Before that, she had worked for the City of Vancouver in the Office of Cultural Affairs.

Through her experience with the City, she was immersed in the Vancouver art scene. It was at that point that she became interested and involved in community development and community art. She often volunteered her time to committees and projects that were rooted in the arts and the local community. Some of her commitments have included sitting on the Neighbourhood Matching Funds Committee, *Banners on Broadway*, and volunteering for *Artropolis* (a Vancouver based tri-annual art show). She was also very involved in the development of the Community Public Art Program. Through her community art connections, she found out about Turning Point. She heard Suzanne Lacy speak at a *Women in View* festival. "When it comes to art, it is the community-based art that is really exciting for me." (Int.: Alix 1.2). Turning Point was her first women focused project.

Alix found herself as being connected to many communities, including an equestrian community, community-based art community, Child and Youth Services community, and her neighbourhood. Given those groups, she finds herself connecting mostly with her peer group, our generation... (that would be us tail-end Gen-Xers).

Description of Turning Point and Under Construction

Alix was involved in Turning Point from the onset in 1995. For Alix, the Turning Point project was a lot of things because her involvement was over such a long period of time. She had this to say about Turning Point:

> It's a lot of different things... it is a really cool performance that is going to happen on a construction site downtown with hundreds of young women talking and telling stories. What is so cool about it is, the reason why we're doing this because a couple of years ago some people got together and said *we want to do something* and then we brought some girls in and they wanted to do something and it's been this two year process doing a whole pile of things with hundreds of people in Vancouver mainly women and young women.

> We've developed this whole thing, they did some hand-painting on The Drive and they brought more people in, and this is the accumulation of it. It is all about

being heard and voice and it's about the spectacle of hundreds of young people in one place. And for adults are going (to see Under Construction) I say, 'you know when you ride the bus and you see a group of young women and they are having a conversation and you really want to hear what they are saying, but you don't want to be rude, and you just catch the nuances of it and you want to sit down and say...*tell me about it...* you know every parent wants really to know what their kid says when they aren't around. So, as an audience person, (you have) the chance to be a part of that discussion, to eavesdrop and hear it, to find out where they are coming from.

It's also about media and their (the young women) relationship to the media, how they're presented in the media and having an opportunity to actually understand that they can manipulate the media as well as the media manipulates them. Which is very cool to realize that you do have some control. (Int.: Alix, 6.1)

Experiences

Alix started out as the contact person for her office at work. She worked to get people excited about the project as well as to secure the first lump sum of money to get the project off the ground. She went on the first winter retreat to Camp Alexander at Crescent Beach. She was part of a small core committee which handled budgets and handled the intense sessions with Lacy. Alix prepared the first recruitment flyers to entice girls to join, worked on posters, and helped to get t-shirts for the final event.

Roles. Being a youth advocate in her professional life, these roles naturally flowed into Alix's participation in Turning Point.

When they first got the girls involved, they sort of didn't know what to do. They'd invited the girls in and then they had these girls and adults' events. They didn't know how to integrate them, and they weren't that comfortable integrating them. So I sort of got to a point where I became an advocate for the girls being a part of those meetings, so I sort of took a stance half way through the project when I felt like it was going off the... I wasn't going to go to anymore meetings unless there were girls, and if there were girls there, I didn't need to be there, because they were there. Just to try to get girls to taking on lead roles in the project and to give it more over to them. (Int.: Alix 5.1)

Now, the girls are involved in everything and it's... they were talking about the wrap party and they were saying, "No... It's just for the girls." I found that really interesting because it has now switched the other way, it's exclusive. I find that people find it hard to get a balance to work together as a group. They had troubles bringing them (girls) in. (Int.: Alix 5.2)

Alix also headed the girls' Research Group.

I was a bit of a leader, they (the girls) came over (to her apartment), I fed them pizza, we discussed some of the key issues. Some of the things we talked about were issues relating to young women and I tried to show them examples of issues.

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I think that it was really hard for the girls to conceptualize what it is they even wanted to start to say. It was really difficult. It was "okay, here we are, we don't really know each other, we are all together, and now we are supposed to get together and say something." It is kind of a complicated thing.

They didn't fall together because they were all upset about a certain way a street crossing worked or the fact that they were locked out of their apartment or ... so it was hard for them to think about what it was being a young woman in Vancouver and then how, they shared within that. I think that what mainly came out for them was just wanting to tell stories. They wanted people to know who they were, that they weren't just some *bimbo* walking down the street. So we worked on that, and we talked about what other issues young people have and stuff like that. We looked at the demographics in Vancouver and talked about representation and they did a presentation, (to the rest of the <u>Turning Point</u> group) to get the group thinking about who was sitting in the group and why. We also did the first draft for the questions for the tape, the soundtrack... which got modified by a whole lot of people, but we did the rough outline. (Int.: Alix, 5.3)

For <u>Under Construction</u>, Alix had a superb vantage point to view the performance. She didn't really know what to expect from the whole experience, but was looking forward to it, none the less.

I have a totally cool job and I'm psyched. I get to be with Suzanne and the other guy in the little (condo shell above the performance site). So, I get to have a vista of the whole performance. I should be able to see people outside, people coming in, the whole thing! It will be so cool. Well, I could end up being one of those panicked - running around like a chicken with you head cut off, and not actually noticing anything. Or I might not be, I'm not sure. But I think it will be interesting after all that time, to have that perspective, because I'll be at the radio... I'll hear a lot of who's doing what where, and what's going on in terms of how it all works technically. I've never had the opportunity to do that type of thing because I've never been involved in a performance before. It will be interesting to see Suzanne...I imagine that she must get really worked up, and she will be really wired and then... it is hard to say... what if there is only a hundred people (in the audience)? (Int.: Alix, 17.5)

Reflections and Opinions

Seeing as Alix had such a long time commitment to the project, I asked Alix what <u>Turning Point</u> meant to her personally.

When I first started I really wanted the project to push the envelope in terms of the arts in Vancouver, especially when I was talking about funding and how that process works... I really wanted to make people think about *what do we fund and why do we fund it.* With the city and the province, I wanted it to set a precedent for doing something different. I felt that youth and children, their stuff isn't at the forefront. (Int.: Alix, 7.2)

Community

Besides wanting to see the whole project through to the end, Alix valued the time she spent with those working on the project.

> I think it is just the experience of being with those people and it's being a really positive thing to do in your life. You live and you can live and spend time with cool people doing cool things or you can sit around at home and watch TV. I will think that is will have an impact on my own art. (Int.: Alix, 11.1)

Reflection on Alix's own art practice. Though Alix paints, she also thrives in the community-based art environment. We talked at length about the opposition of these two facts and explored ways that they might be integrated. In the end, now years later, Alix has found a way to bring these two passions together.

> The art that I like to do is completely solitary in the act of the art and I have already felt selfish about that. I include people in it, I love painting people, I love that whole. I can include, but ultimately it's my art, I make the decisions on how it goes… There is a whole pile of things that I have thought about in relation to my own art. Like what does a painting do to a community? How does a painting help or change a community? What impact do you have on the world by doing a painting? I didn't paint for that reason initially, it didn't have anything do with that, I just really wanted to paint, and I really liked painting, it's really fun.... but I thought that in terms of impact. (Int.: Alix, 11.2)

In our last conversation about Turning Point, Alix revealed how she has found a balance between painting and community development. She has formed a painting group, a small community of painters that get together and try out new ideas and explore new techniques. It is a safe environment for them to try new things, receive critique and feedback from their peers, and be energized by each other's company.

Community-based art. Alix described some of the issues that were raised during the production of Turning Point, as well as her impression of how an American artist works within a Canadian context.

> I know that there are many models of community art projects and how they work… I think one of the things that the Producers' Circle was struggling with, in the beginning was the model. When you talk about community based art projects, you think of a model that is very lateral or horizontal and even... I talked about that earlier when I talked about roles. But with the way Suzanne works, it's not lateral, it's kind of like a web, and Suzanne is the spider in the web. She decides where it is going to be and all that sort of stuff, *sure we can put that over there, but we can't do that over there*. That was really interesting to see that and to understand how that all works. At times people were really frustrated with that because: American artist, Vancouver-based, Canadian, work with ... how many

women? Young women aside, there are a hundred incredible women from Vancouver who are involved in this project. They are people who do incredible things all the time. (Int.: Alix, 8.2)

Process and Product

Alix, compares her experience with these intimate and yet public community

events to the performance Under Construction.

I think that the process is really important, I think that this end-thing has huge importance, the final performance. I always think the metaphor that describes the process is like a wedding. And the most important part of the wedding is the process. It's how you deal with the mother-in-law and the dad and the balancing and who's in control? Is it the bride or... Ultimately the one who is in control is the one who has the money, the end control of every single thing. But it is like a wedding, the whole way it works, but the event has to happen at the end of that. The celebration, the spectacle, the party which is what this final performance is. (Int.: Alix, 10.3)

Goals and commitment. Alix, committed to seeing this project through to

completion, hoped that it would make a difference, even a little difference.

I think that when you start on something like this and you're all committed to do it, you really all push it. You want to make it happen. You want to see if you can make a difference. For me, even if it is only one young person who watches the performance, who hears about he performance, who decides that they want to go to art school... I think that if one young person is affected in a positive way....But I believe that this thing has a multiplier effect and there is no way that there will be only one person is affected. (Int.: Alix, 9.4)

Growth and learning. Alix: So, I think that everybody has grown and developed,

I think that Suzanne has grown and developed and learned a lot.

Lorrie: In what way do you think?

Alix: I think Suzanne has really had to change her ideas of how she collaborates with people. I think that she has had to... I think that generally when she has worked on a project, she has hired professionals and she's been the boss and she works with a community and they develop the idea and that's fine and that is separate, and then she brings in professionals and hires them and tells them *you're doing this, you're doing that...you're doing this*. And here (in Vancouver) there isn't the money, there isn't the structure, it didn't start that way and so it's been... here are the professionals, and they are doing this for free and they invited her in.

It has been this whole balancing game. And when the youth got involved in the type of voice we wanted the youth to have in the project... which is what we are talking about in the grand scale of things –at first... I don't know if I want you to say this, but the biggest resister to the youth involvement was Suzanne. She didn't understand that, yes you can take youth into the financial community, and yes you take them into fund-raising. And now she's their biggest advocate, every

time she talks she talks, from the youth perspective. Like last night I was talking about the party, and Suzanne said, *well, we'll have to talk to the youth*, and I agree. It was a real change with that. (Int.: Alix, 10.1)

Alix described some of the benefits that she felt that she gained from her experience in Turning Point.

When I went to the first retreat, I was totally into meeting young women and relating to them. It was just so cool. I rode a bus down Hastings the other day and ran into three Turning Point girls whom I knew. It is a way of getting to know a community that you don't necessarily associate with....because they're younger. That has been the greatest benefit for me. But also getting work with people like Barb Clausen, Susan Gordon, and yourself and all that, it has been an incredible thing for me. And then watching an artist like Suzanne Lacy work has been very interesting for me, and watching how a project like this works is interesting. (Int.: Alix, 8.2)

I asked Alix what she thought others would get from Turning Point. She expressed the growth that she believed that as a professional artist, Lacy had gained something from this project as well. She also expressed her thoughts about the gains of the community. "I hope that it will give Vancouver a chance to see a different type of art....I think that this will give people a chance to broaden –including the artists, not just the spectators, but local artists and local people" (Int.: Alix, 12.3).

The lasting legacy of the project was also one of Alix's hopes for Turning Point. "The lasting legacy on the people, on the city, on the art we do, on the art of an American artist when she goes back to America... what affect that has on her art" (Int.: Alix, 12.4).

Success and evaluation: strengths and weaknesses. Alix told me about the impact that this type of a project can have on a community as well as the lives of individuals.

I think the strength is in the impact that you have, the profound social and artistic impact on so many people. So many people are involved. In some ways it has changed everybody that has been involved in the project, that's hundreds of people - so that is very cool.

The community building, and what I mean in community is people getting to know more people, connecting and understanding community better, and recording that understanding helps define the fact that .... and this project is one of many metaphors for Vancouver and what it is. So I think that is one of the advantages of collaborative work.

I also think that collaborative work, even if you are painting and working with a model, you are not painting the model, you are collaborating with the model, and that model has a huge impact on your painting, it's like they zip through you and you put it on the canvas. The same thing happens with a huge collaborative

process in that all of our things sort of meld together and I think that in a way it makes something greater... and more profound, more beautiful.

I think that the weaknesses are that it's really hard to organize and it takes a really long time and it's really hard to keep a vision, an artistic vision, there has to be an artistic vision... I think, I don't know, I am still challenging myself around that. But, that is how Suzanne works and I think that is what people found frustrating.

But I think there are different ways of having that artistic vision, You can be very open, just like the wedding... A wedding can be *oh no no no, you are going to be here, there, this that... and we are all going to wear white*. Or, you can say, well, my boundaries are these, and as people go you shift your boundaries. And at the end of the day you say *you know what it is going to be at that one place rather than at the other,* because someone has to make that decision, you have to have a decision maker. And I think to have a good vision, it needs to be a constant decision maker. That doesn't mean that you don't have all that input, but otherwise it could get a little crazy and you may not come out with such a moving event. And that is just around the final event.

Lorrie: That's not around what the project has been all along...and the process.

Alix: Yes, but you could be more structured about it, part of your vision could be how the process works and Suzanne had that effect and non-effect in some ways. She's actually... one of the things people found really hard is... I think they felt that she was really tight about the process. I think that she was really loose about the process and that was really hard for people and that meant that they had to make it up as they went along, and when it infringed on one of her boundaries, that made it really complicated... and to me, *we can develop any process we want, it's up to us and then we can ask her how she feels about it, but as long as it's a process that...*

Lorrie: Negotiated boundaries?

Alix: Ya.... it's interesting... the other disadvantage in this type of art, it's very hard to do things that *punch* people in the face, that have an immediate effect. You're not going to do the *Meat Dress*[5] as a community event. You know! In terms of more outrageous... But what is interesting with the way Suzanne works is how she keeps that edge. She keeps artistic control and creates spectacle, and spectacle on mass has an edge, that is how she does it... I think when you look at some of the art work that she has done that has more edge are the ones on the smaller scale. (Int.: Alix, 14.1-15.3)

I asked Alix how she would determine success in this project. She sees the high level of individual engagement in the project as marked success. She described the success in being able to entice so many young women to come out to a project that they had never heard about before, to engage them in the project and get them really excited about being a part of it. "Watching girls get involved, engage, people getting engaged,

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[5] Canadian artist, Jana Sterbak created the well known art piece, the *Meat Dress* in the mid 1980s.

that is all success. But at the end of the day, for that stuff to gel for people, they need to go to the performance to feel like it's a success" (Int.: Alix, 16.1).

Success, for Alix is when "something different happened that is going to make people think differently and feel differently.... there also has to be a good feeling after the performance. If people feel negative or disappointed, that could take away a lot of the positive things that happened" (Int.: Alix, 16.5). I asked Alix to clarify what she meant by *feel good* about the performance because some of the soundtrack content was not feel-good material.

> I mean that people are going to feel moved. It's just like a wedding, I don't know why I keep thinking wedding, but it reminds me so much of one. I come from a really large family and I have been to 50 or 60 weddings. And I am not really interested in the traditional type of wedding and like art performances, how do you push that envelope and what is a wedding and why would anyone do a stupid wedding... (laugh) what's the point. So, just like that, when you go to weddings after you have been to a zillion, it doesn't really matter what happens - but at certain weddings, there is a sense of something happening, and something moving and something real.

> So, there may be only 50 people that go through that performance –but that would be shitty –that would be bad, would it be bad and it was all media and for a minute and their hair all stood up on end...that would be success... and the girls looking back after 10 years and thinking *Ya, I was involved in that performance*..... I think it will have a big impact on the girls... it already has. (Int.: Alix, 17.1)

Alix found the hand-painting performance at Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, to be a huge success, "... and why was it a success, well there was this incredible feeling... I saw a mom getting teary-eyed, the (local) Chinese press came out to it" (Int.: Alix, 16.4).

Emily

Emily, an eighteen year old university student, described herself as a Chinese-Canadian –not from Hong Kong, she emphasised. Three days before the performance, we met for our interview in the bustling *Architectutra Office*, which had been temporarily overtaken (donated) with <u>Turning Point</u> production activities

Emily described herself as not in either dominant group in her school because she found that the students from Hong Kong were a little hostile towards Canadians and wouldn't respond to her unless she spoke Chinese. Whereas the Caucasian students tended to be more out-going and athletic than she was. As a result, she found it hard to

fit in with either group. She found university somewhat isolating as it was hard to develop friendships beyond acquaintances.

Emily had been involved in Turning Point since January 1996 when the first recruitment reached out to the schools. She and (Frieda) first became involved with the winter camp/workshop at Crescent Beach. Emily hadn't been involved in art classes since her elementary years although she did take part in the school band and choir. However, she also played piano and enjoyed charcoal drawing as well as pastel and water-colour painting. But for the most part she concentrated on her academics.

Description of Turning Point and Under Construction

Turning Point was Emily's first big art project, as well as her first experience in a project that focused on women. Emily volunteered her time in a senior citizen's home. She also attended The Vancouver Opera. However, she felt unattached to her local community, Richmond, and wasn't aware of what was going on there. Emily and Frieda were hired to work as production assistants during the final phase of Under Construction production planning. Emily described Turning Point and Under Construction, as though I was from the press:

> (Turning Point) is a large scale site specific public art performance. It combines art with social action. The point of it is to use teenage girls... I use girls. I don't consider myself a women... A public voice to address our concerns, our dreams, our hopes. (Int.: Emily, 4.2)

> It (Under Construction) is going to be a two hour long performance at a construction site. It will be where the future golf course will be. We will all be in red tee-shirts sitting on buckets and talking in groups. So, it is going to be a living tableaux. Outside, girls will be holding signs with double meanings like the ones over there. (She points) One will say *soft shoulder* and the other side will say, *sharp mind.* So people will get confused and curious and they will come in and they will hear this wonderful soundtrack that we made. We had discussions in a studio. So, it will be very similar to what the girls are going to talk about. That will be mixed with music and the actual performance. People will see this wonderful tableaux and later they will be able to go down and actually listen to the conversations live. (Int.: Emily, 5.2)

Experiences

Though Emily had never been involved in a community art project before, she took Turning Point, her first experience, very seriously. She had been involved for a year

and a half before the final performance. She took on many responsibilities in Turning Point.

> Emily Carr Workshop. Emily: We were at the workshop (at ECIAD in August, 1996). We were guided by the adults, like Suzanne Lacy and Barb, and we brain stormed about all sorts of issues, had lots of discussions on all sorts of issues. We decided not to narrow it down the project to one issue because we were concerned about all sorts. We went to look at sites. We looked at Suzanne's[6] previous projects and that is how the whole project evolved. (Int.: Emily, 4.2)
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> Lorrie: Were you familiar at all with performance art before this?
>
> Emily: I was completely bewildered. From January '96 all the way until August '96, I was in la-la land. They told us what it was about, but a performance you usually think of something on stage or something or a movie. But this thing, I didn't know what it was supposed to be like. All I could think of was the "Roof is on Fire" I didn't know how to go on developing this project. It was Suzanne who would ask for a little bit and we would give them the little bit of our input and eventually Suzanne helped thread it all together. Then we got a clear sense what we were doing. (Int.: Emily, 4.3)
>
> Roles. Some of the activities that Emily had been involved in included numerous

meetings, henna hand-painting events, and general project development.

> Lorrie: What roles...(I am in the Turning Point office during the final throws of performance preparation.) I see you here making name tags and you are on the cover of the "Georgia Straight"... What else have you done? What other roles have you taken in Turning Point and Under Construction?
>
> Emily: Bugging people for the sponsorship. Getting buckets for the performance, modeling T-shirts, trying out the buckets (for comfort and seating). All sorts of office duties and meetings and discussions and everything. I am one of the more involved along with (Frieda). But one thing that was really neat was that I got to talk with the media and I'm not a very outspoken person. So, I thought that it was a weird role for me because usually when I get interviewed I don't know what to say at first and I go blank. I'm not scared of it. I just prefer not to.
>
> Lorrie: So it has given you experience doing something that you normally wouldn't choose to do.
>
> Emily: I kind of force myself to do it. I force myself to do a lot, I guess. (Int.: Emily, 3.3)

Reflections and Opinions

Like many of the participants, younger as well as older, I asked whether they had been involved in any projects that dealt with women's issues, or focused on women at all.

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[6] The participants had looked at Lacy's earlier community performance art work to inform the development of their own project. Lacy's work has often featured large groups of people sitting in talking groups while recorded soundscapes of the participants stories play for the audience.

I was dismayed, but not surprised to find out how few had. I was surprised however on the youth response to issues pertaining to women under the title of *feminism*.

Feminism

Emily's response to my question about any previous involvement in a woman focused project was:

> Emily: I haven't done any of that really. This is the first one. I am kind of against ***Feminism***, which is weird because I am female.
>
> Lorrie: What do you think feminism is? What is your definition?
>
> Emily: It has bad connotations, let's put it that way. Because it seems so extreme. It is a very extremist term and it's like. When I think of Feminists I think of wild women out in the street with those "No Abortion" signs and arguing for the right to walk bare-breasted. You know what I mean? But this, I don't find it feminist, because it's not a bunch of women who believe in one side of an issue. We believe in all kinds of different things. It's kind of a celebration of being teenage girls rather than saying "I want this or that." (Int.: Emily, 3.1)

Somehow I don't think that feminists would be 'those wild women in the streets' protesting against a woman's right to choose. Where did she get these ideas, these images of women? Why weren't <u>Turning Point</u> girls challenging their own biases, after all of their practice in media deconstruction. In <u>Turning Point,</u> girls clearly did not question their (mis)interpretation of other women. For a group who was so concerned about being stereotyped and misrepresented, they were quick with the stereotypes of feminists. Feminists, in Emily's opinion were all in agreement, and wanted something... and that clearly, was a bad thing. Saddened by this realization, I looked further into other written documents they had published and I asked more questions on this topic. Why would polite young Emily think that feminists were wild women. Obviously, she didn't realize she was speaking to one.

<u>Growth and learning.</u> Emily claimed that she must have learned more through her involvement in <u>Turning Point</u> than she had in her whole first year in science at university. "Just interpersonal skills, relationship skills, not specifically about science, but other life skills" (Int.: Emily, 11.1). She made comparisons to the learning process in <u>Turning Point</u> and her university lectures.

> It's hard to learn from one professor and 200 students in the class. Here you have meetings, discussions, it is on a much smaller scale...And it helps not to just get lectured at. If you could contribute to the learning process instead of having the learning handed to you. (Int.: Emily, 12.1)

I asked Emily what Turning Point had meant to her personally. She described her sense of pride in being involved with her peers on the project and her personal growth.

> (Turning Point) reinforces my sense of community because cities are going to big, it is becoming more and more impersonal. And people are more and more into themselves, especially our generation, because the job market is so worrisome and we have to study, study, study. We never do anything with anyone for anything, for any big purpose.

> This is one of the most meaningful things that I think that I have done in my life. I found it very amazing that we could - our generation could actually - even work together. All we worked together for was a dinky little English project or something, but never something that would have an impact on society, like a direct impact.

> I also learned how to be... I took on more of a leadership role in my life and I think that has really benefited me. (Int.: Emily, 5.3)

Emily found that Turning Point had made her think about things she hadn't previously considered.

> It made me think of a lot of things that I hadn't thought of before. It led me to a lot of self-discovery, how I thought about certain subjects. I suppose I learned to think more abstractly and to fan out. I have been a science person for most of my life and I've always thought linearly. "Give me a formula and I will calculate this for you." This has helped me think about all kinds of different things and how they affect each other. (Int.: Emily, 12.1)

I asked Emily to comment on what she hopes others will get out of the project. She told me that she believed that other involved young women would have similar responses to herself (Int.: Emily, 6.1).

> As for the general public, say adults...my parents' generation and older, I hope they will realize that were not the stereotypical bimbos that magazines portray us as. We are not irresponsible, and sometimes it's society that does not allow us to take on leadership roles and hence that may be why we are irresponsible....It seems as though we are always portrayed as the irresponsible ones.

> Just to realize that we're diverse and we're not just one big mass of *Barbies*.

> For my generation and younger, I hope they will be encouraged to work together and to just believe in themselves and maybe they will want to go on and do something like this later. And for that generation that I missed, up to my parents' generation... I don't know what they will get out of it really: Just insight, I guess. Maybe they will be curious how ... like your generation... if we are very different from you guys (that would be us tail-end Gen-Xers). (Int.: Emily 6.1)

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Process and Product

In several interviews, I discussed <u>Turning Point</u> as an art project process and <u>Under Construction</u> as its final production. Emily stated that without the process the production would lack legitimacy. She highlighted the fact that the project needs to include the girls in the process and to do something for them.

> Both (process and product) are important, the process more than the product. Because without the process, we wouldn't have the product anyway. If this process didn't happen, then the product would be fake. It wouldn't be real.
>
> It is again a perception –the adults' perception of who we are, and not our own. It could happen, but it will benefit the public more than us because, in this way it has already be a success for me, right.
>
> If this didn't happen, then what is the point of the whole thing? It would change the general public's view of us maybe a tiny bit, but it wouldn't do anything for us. This whole project is about us.
>
> It just wouldn't make sense if it was utilizing us to gain publicity or make a mark in history. That is why I think that it is really important that we go through the process together. And after we have been through the process, then we can continue the process. But if the project just stayed in the generation of adults then it will just die out. We will still remain the little naive irresponsible people in everyone's eyes. (Int.: Emily, 8.2)

Developing a large scale project proved to be very difficult. Emily had some explanations as to why it was difficult. She also commented about the strengths of the project.

> It was difficult. At first, when you get a bunch of people together who don't know each other, who are teenage girls who have been sheltered. Many of us are very sheltered. I know that I am very sheltered. Getting them together to do this thing, they have no idea what they are doing. First of all discussion is very hard to strike up. We have been trained to follow adults and when we are put in a position where we have to contribute and actually help to develop the project. Some of us just sat there… We're not used to this kind of thing. We haven't been taught to stand up on our own two feet. So that was difficult, and then, because it started from scratch, we had never done anything from scratch either, so I guess patience....(is required...)
>
> After the winter workshop (Crescent Beach) we had several media literacy workshops at the Vancouver Art Gallery. As time went on, our numbers decreased. Some people lost interest, we kept talking about the same thing. There was a big lull in the process, it was like a drought. But in the August workshop (ECIAD), hired a bunch of people and now many of those have dropped out, about one third. It is really hard to keep a large number of people together. I guess that is the case for all projects, not only this one. And (high) school and stuff. It has been easier for (Frieda) and I (who are in university).

The strengths, you get so many different ideas, you don't get that stereotypical white skinny blonde *Barbie* world. You get all sorts of ethnic diversity, economic diversity... just the ideas keep flowing in - bridging cultural gaps. Just learning about each other because many people like me, I belong to a Chinese Canadian group, and many times I don't converse with white groups, or other groups because.. well one reason is that my school must be 80% Chinese now, I swear. It's really funny but it's just that you stick with an ethnic group and your school becomes a certain ethnic group and you can't get out of that. This (Turning Point) becomes a way to break out of that little circle. (Int.: Emily, 9.2)

Why did one third of the girls from the summer workshop drop out? There is only speculation around the reasons others opted out.

Closure and follow-up. Knowing the performance was only three days away, I thought that Emily would be projecting into *what's next, what will happen after?* When I asked her what she had planned for after the project was over, she replied:

Emily: We have been talking about continuing the zine, but since I'm one of the oldest in the group and I'm going away, and I don't have much time for this kind of community stuff. I probably won't see many of these people again. But even if this happens, I mean, we still have that connection. We still know that the other people are out there and it's a permanent mark in our memory. But physically if the zine goes then it will involve more of the younger girls, I guess.

Lorrie: Well, it is about that part of the group too. You're almost out of that loop and on with the rest of us.

Emily: If that happens, if the process continues and they do another project, it will be different because it is not our exact generation. It would have changed already. It's kind of a one time only thing. (It) lives on through story. (Int.: Emily, 8.3)

Success and evaluation. Emily, like many of the other participants, felt that even before the performance, the project had been personally successful.

Emily: But for the audience, the general public... If people come and they actually are genuinely interested and they really listen and that's all I ask really.

You are not going to have a dramatic change. The media will not change. But hopefully this is only one stepping stone. This is only one project. If there are other projects similar to this, or even variations of this, then maybe eventually those things will change. It's kind of weird, it is a viscous cycle. Media influences us but then because they know we think a certain way they play off of that too. If we can change the way that we think and then maybe that will slowly change. I don't think that it will have a dramatically direct impact on the public, just gradual, just a small one. (Int.: Emily, 7.3)

Each participant held her own goals for Under Construction, yet they all hoped for a large audience, good turn out of girls –success. The girls wanted to be heard, and they

wanted to be seen. They wanted to make the audience pay attention to what they had to say. They knew what they had to say mattered. They had all invested so much energy and had given so much of themselves to Turning Point. Like the older women organizers and other volunteers, I hoped that their expectations would come true.

I have arranged an image on the next page based on a photo that I took during a media event just prior to Under Construction. In the centre of the picture is Suzanne Lacy, around her are girls posing for a media shoot. I layered the artistic director's performance map over top of this photo. The original map on graph paper, shows titles and relationships of performance workers. The label, artistic director, identifies the individual. In the upper right hand corner is a clip from a photo I took during the performance, it shows the director's position relative to the performance floor. The Turning Point logo, the small sketched hand, is in the lower right hand corner. This image, which came from one of the girls sketchbooks, made its way into everything that had to do with Turning Point. Hands on t-shirts and in concrete symbolized working together and creating something new.

Media event... Lacy's performance
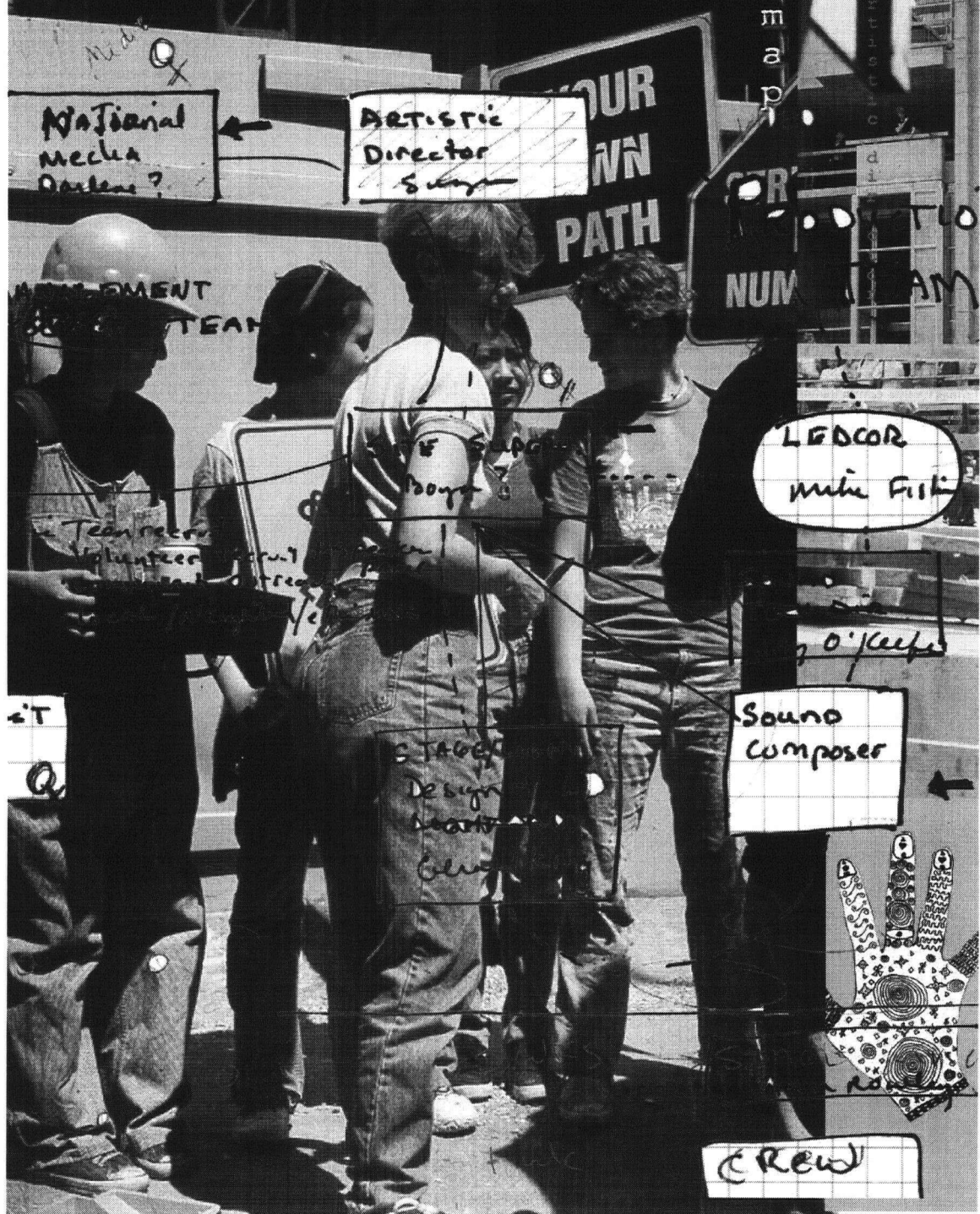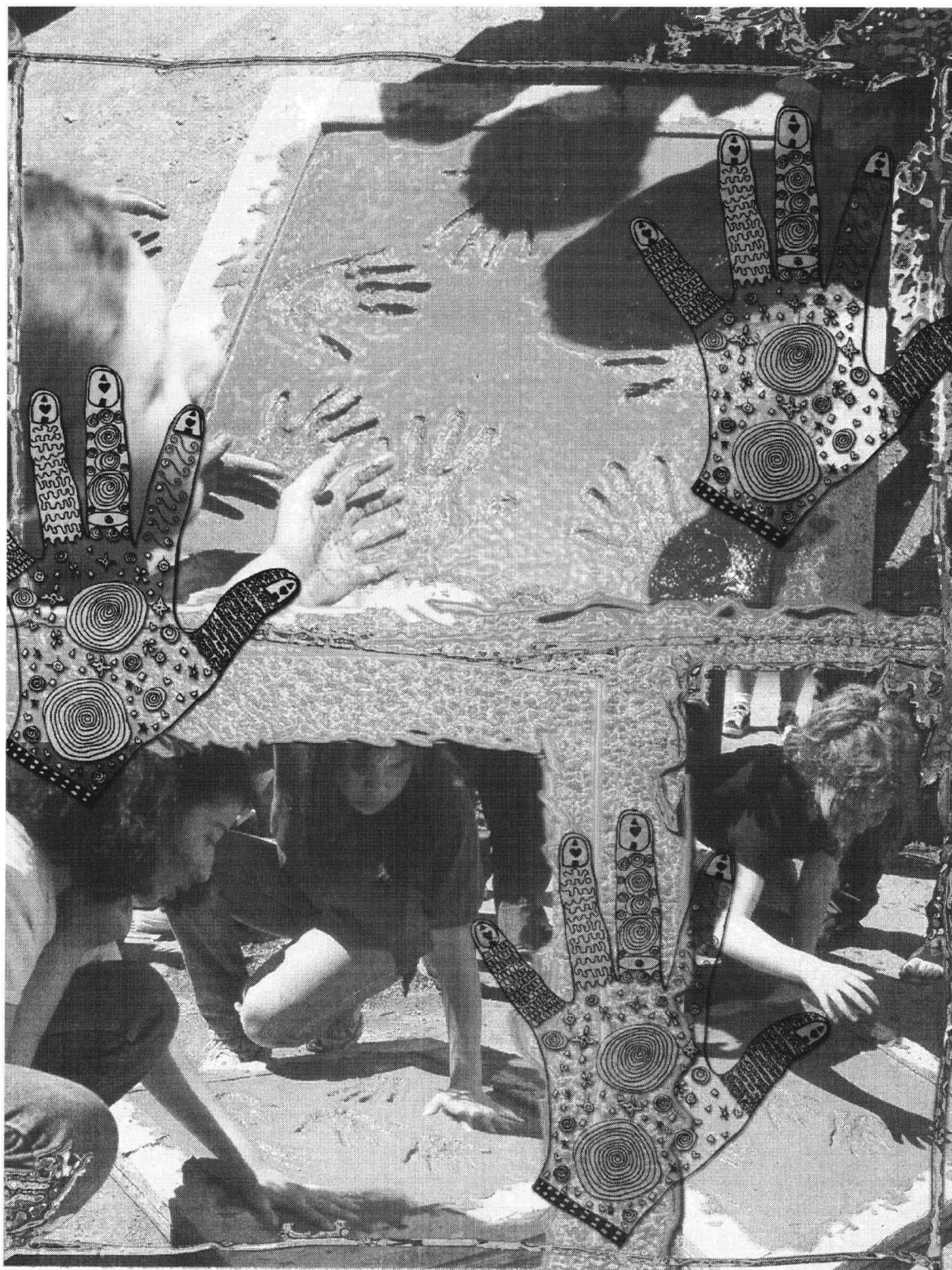
Elizabeth

June 23, 1997, <u>Under Construction</u> was eight days prior to this interview. Elizabeth and I sat at *The Grind*, a popular coffee shop that many of the participants and I enjoyed frequenting. Elizabeth had been with the project for a long time and had dedicated a lot of her time to the project. She was a mature 17 year old of mixed heritage, including Dutch and First Nations. She developed a close relationship with the artist Lacy during her time stay. I would describe it as a kind of a mentoring aunt/niece relationship. Elizabeth planned to go down to Oakland sometime later that fall for a visit with Lacy.

Elizabeth enjoyed playing piano and her art, she also played clarinet in her high school band, while she was in school. At the time of the interview she was out of school and planning to return in order to graduate. She first found out about the project two years earlier at a meeting at Sunset Community Centre. Lacy, along with a young woman (Frieda), gave a presentation at the community centre. Elizabeth described herself as having no clue about what the women were talking about. Her first impressions were: "God, these are strange women, what are they talking about... I have no idea!...What are you guys complaining about?" (Int.: Elizabeth, 3.5). The following summer she was hired to be a part of the two week intensive <u>Turning Point</u> workshop at ECIAD. She had never before been involved in an art or community project, or anything that focused on women's issues.

Experiences

<u>Emily Carr workshop</u>. The girls in <u>Turning Point</u> first got the idea for hand-painting during a visit to the Museum of Anthropology during their two week workshop at ECIAD. Besides finding hand-painting beautiful, Elizabeth liked the fact that it was only for women.

> What I really liked was that only women did it. I thought that this was great - it was totally for us. *We have to do it.* Then when we got back to Granville Island, a few of us were using these pens that we were given and we used these pens and we were drawing on our hands. Suzanne came over and was just so amazed. I thought that this was so cool. That is how we got on that (idea of hand painting). (Int.: Elizabeth, 5.4)

<u>Zines</u>. The zines were seen as a way to recruit new girls to the project. Girls developed and lead the zine production. They were the writers, contributors, and distributors. Unfortunately, after hundreds of zines were distributed, from the three produced, only two girls joined <u>Turning Point</u> as a result.

> Recruitment is really difficult, that is what really bothered me about the performance (smaller number of girls than had been planned for). Because we tried so many recruiting techniques. We only got two (girls) from the zines and it is just ... we did so many zines... all over. (Int.: Elizabeth, 7.1)

<u>Roles</u>. Elizabeth participated in many meetings, worked on the zines, contributed to hand-painting performances, participated in girl recruitment and helped with the final production <u>Under Construction</u>. She also helped with general office duties including phone calls, and help to acquire t-shirts for the final performance, and find sponsorship. In the initial phase there was a First Nation's group of girls that were working on part of the project. Elizabeth described her experience working within this group.

> We did have a woman, an older woman. There was a group of us, just the First Nations girls. We had some meetings that didn't go that well. I was in sort of in charge of that. It seemed that I was just baby-sitting them, and that wasn't what it was about. It was supposed to be... We were trying to think of something that we can do separately (from the larger group) to voice our opinions, what ever issues we had to deal with. It didn't fly. They were twelve, thirteen years old. Just hitting that teen period and off the wall. At that time I couldn't handle it, personally. It just fell apart. (Int.: Elizabeth, 6.1)

Elizabeth was involved in the production of the soundtrack. I asked her about what that experience was like. Many of the segments in the soundtrack were deeply personal and moving. It was emotional to listen to and even more so to produce.

> It was okay because before I went into the sound room, I just sat myself down and just went over –through my head what I was going to say, what I wanted to say. I tried to turn my emotions off, so I wouldn't express really strong feelings. I didn't want to cry. I laughed a little. There was a small group of us (making the recording). It was okay for me to do it then. But when I heard it afterwards, (at a group meeting), I didn't prepare myself to hear it. I broke down and started crying... powerful stuff. (Int.: Elizabeth, 11.2)

<u>Reflections and Opinions</u>

<u>Turning Point</u> was concerned with fair multicultural representation and made efforts to ensure that girl participants came from the range of cultural backgrounds that we have in the Lower Mainland. I asked Elizabeth what her opinion was regarding multicultural representation. She told me that she felt that it was "okay". "We had pretty

much, not every, but general cultural background. I was quite happy with that, as well as the performance. It was pretty much balanced" (Int.: Elizabeth, 7.3).

Growth and learning. Elizabeth talked about her changed perceptions since her experience in Turning Point. She has become more critical to media portrayal of women.

> Now I see everything totally different. I see what goes on in my parent's marriage. I really don't like my mom's role that she's given. I see advertising and I see that ... bill boards on buses and there she is crying her eyes out and beside her it say's *Shattered*, what is that relating to... battered.

> (It's wrong) the way media portrays women. The way we are supposed to act. That we're the weaker sex, and that most of us are supposed to be house wives, have children, clean the house, do all the cooking. Just, that is it. The man brings in the money. You know, women aren't paid as much for doing the same thing. That just totally doesn't make sense. Women are quite capable of doing the same thing. (Int.: Elizabeth, 4.4)

When I asked Elizabeth what Turning Point had meant to her personally, she spoke of relationships, support and community.

> (Turning Point) was pretty much my main support. In my personal life. Suzanne was totally there for me. I had a pretty bad year. It still is pretty bad. She was totally there for me to help find support when... you know professionally.. support, lawyers. She'd talk to people for me. She'd help me through a lot, a lot that went on. I don't know were I'd be if I didn't have that. My parents aren't really capable. They are trying to deal with their own stuff and it was too much for them to deal with... it is kind of scary to think about and believe that Tuning Point is over. Turning Point, that's my community. (Int.: Elizabeth, 7.3)

I asked Elizabeth what she had hoped she would have gained from her experience in the project and what she felt that she had gained.

> Elizabeth: World peace... (laugh) on a personal level.... to make me a bit stronger. To just sort of try to change. Change will take a long time. But to let people know our views.

> Lorrie: What have you gained from your experience in the project? (Besides friends and a community)

> Elizabeth: A lot of experience. I guess, respect for myself, my body, respect for who I am. Beauty is more than skin deep. Knowledge.. how to listen to my gut feelings, my intuition, to listen to what this little voice says, and you know. How to pay more attention to what is real and what is not real. How to pay attention to what is good for me and what is not good for me, emotionally, mentally, physically.

> Lorrie: Those things sound like they are about life, not just about making an art piece.

> Elizabeth: It's true. (Int.: Elizabeth, 9.1)

Process and Product

This project involved representing the ideas, opinions and voices of the young participants. Elizabeth said that she felt that the views and feelings of the core group of girls were truthfully expressed in the final performance. "It was just us, our own thinking, our own voices, our own issues, and (no one) told us what these were" (Int.: Elizabeth, 10.1). She felt that the message in the performance was received by at least some of the audience members.

For Elizabeth, the high point in the project was the few months just before the performance. Finally she had a sense of where it was going and how things were going to fall into place. She expressed her feelings about the choice for the performance site, a construction site. "We were in a place where women weren't supposed to be, it wasn't our place. Construction workers have this stereotypical thing, they're pigs, more or less. I can't stand constructions sites. I can't stand walking past them. I avoid them... all the cat calls" (Int.: Elizabeth, 10.6).

When weighing the importance of the project process relative to its product, Elizabeth finds that they have equal value. "It was totally equal. You can't have the performance without the structure. You can't have one without the other" (Int.: Elizabeth 10.9).

Closure and follow-up. Elizabeth, like many of the girls, wanted to see something of Turning Point continue. She hoped that some part of Turning Point would live beyond the final performance.

> Elizabeth: I would like to see some part of it continue. For myself, to have us all together would be fine.
>
> Lorrie: There was some talk about having the zine continue.
>
> Elizabeth: That would be cool. Have us still get together, chat. (Int.: Elizabeth, 9.3)

Only eight days since the performance and the end of Turning Point. Elizabeth was still getting used to the idea that it is over. "Turning Point took up a lot of my time and I'm just sort of...it hasn't really hit me that it is over. I am sort of waiting for a call...*You're late for a meeting!* But, no...it will take a while to get used to" (Int.: Elizabeth, 3.5).

<u>Success and evaluation</u>. The lowest point in the whole project for Elizabeth was in the beginning. She found it confusing, as she said, "it was as clear as mud" (Int.: Elizabeth, 10.8). Despite its ambiguous beginnings, <u>Turning Point</u> finished successfully, according to Elizabeth. However, she didn't find the final performance personally successful.

> Elizabeth: (During the ECIAD workshop) I had an idea of what we were doing, our motives, but I didn't know how we were going to express it. I was wondering if *is this really going to happen? Should I stick with it, should I not?* If it weren't for the events that happened for me in August, I probably would have left. But like I said they were my support.
>
> Lorrie: So in what way was the final performance successful?
>
> Elizabeth: Not really personally, but I could see how our performance was effecting the audience, I saw a few tears shed. That really satisfied me. I don't know what was going through their heads, but I knew that the message had gotten into their heads. That was one thing that I was really happy about.
>
> Lorrie: What about all the meetings, the getting together, the recruitment, all the things leading up to this. How do you feel about that? Was that successful?
>
> Elizabeth: Ya, it had to be in order for the performance to be successful. It was, at times it was crazy, frustrating, because, for me it took two years to do this performance. I just wanted to get this show on the road. It just seemed to be dragging for me. I could just see myself, if I was in the audience, and had no idea about <u>Turning Point</u>, I probably would have thought why did I do this... how could something simple like this (performance) take two years to make. That is something, if I were in the audience I would think. (Int.: Elizabeth, 9.1)

<u>Reflection: Under Construction</u>

The performance had been planned for about 300 girls to be on the construction site. There were fewer than 200 girls in the end. Elizabeth found the small number of girls to be very frustrating, and very disappointing. Elizabeth was a *Director Girl* for the performance. This meant that she looked after or controlled one area of the site and performance.

> Elizabeth: Just telling the girls not to speak with the audience - not to stand up - just to sit down, remain seated. (Tell them) not to line up to go and get your hand painted. *I'll tell you when you can. I'll tell you when you can put you hand in the cement. If you have to go to the bathroom, put up your hand. If you want to leave the stage, you can't just leave, you have to put your hand up.* (Int.: Elizabeth, 2.4)

Elizabeth had also been part of the group that had set up the site with the buckets for the girls to sit on while they talked during the performance. She found it frustrating to have

to go back onto the set and rearrange the site to properly accommodate the smaller number of performers.

Elizabeth expressed her disappointment in the performance experience. Many of the girls were new to the project as of that day, having never been to a single Turning Point meeting. In Turning Point, girls were on equal footing. But, in Under Construction the hierarchical structure placed some girls in positions of power over other girls. The girls' movement on the performance site was limited to what had been choreographed and any new directions from the artistic director.

> I was a little disappointed with the girls that were performing –were behaving towards us –me. Because I would walk around with a hard hat and a vest on. I was one of the director girls. Every time I'd try and talk to them a few of them were giving me really bad attitude. I really didn't appreciate that, because I was just doing what I was told. They kept complaining a lot, and some seemed like they totally did not want to be there. (Int.: Elizabeth, 2.2)

Though Elizabeth had been a reluctant participant in the very beginning, not knowing why being involved in an all female project would be worthwhile, she dedicated tonnes of her time and energy to the project. Elizabeth and I became friendly over time during and after the project. She came to my 30th birthday party. From time to time she also baby-sat my boys for me. I recently ran into her again as she has moved back into our neighbourhood. She is a student again, in a local education centre. I gave her my telephone number and invited her to call for coffee sometime. I hope she does.

Juliet

It was a sunny afternoon when Juliet and I met, two weeks after the final performance, at the Café Luna, in downtown Vancouver. I assured Juliet that I would be the only audio audience to this tape and she should feel free to say anything. Juliet and I have since corresponded via e-mail. She also sent back her additional comments and reflections to our interview. She has expressed an interest in my study. I will gladly share this document with her.

At the time of our interview, Juliet had planned to go to university in the fall of '98 having just graduated from high-school. She likes going to plays, (in fact, I ran into her at a play one fall during the Fringe Festival). Juliet has a few good friends she associates with along with her family. She described her close friends as those who are more open-

minded young people that like to listen and talk to her, including a lot of girls from Turning Point. In her recent letter she describes her community group as: "Turning Point: more feminist minded young women and artists, as I have disassociated myself from my high school friends" (Int.: Juliet, 1.2a).

Juliet did not have a lot of experience in art before Turning Point, but she did in theatre. She performed in a play at her school, directed another school play, and also wrote several plays. Her community involvement experience included volunteering at the Holocaust Symposium which was held at UBC.

She became involved in the Turning Point project in January of 1996, when her high school art teacher showed some of Suzanne Lacy's performance art videos, including The Roof is on Fire and Crystal Quilt. She "leapt" at the opportunity to be involved once she found out that something like that was going to happen in Vancouver. Turning Point was her first experience being involved in a group or project that dealt with women or women's issues. It was the fact that Turning Point dealt with the issues of young women that drew her to the project. "There isn't very much at school, x-school (ha, ha), there was no place where you could discuss different things, or (where) they would teach you about women's issues" (Int.: Juliet, 3.1). Juliet was happy to be hired for the two week workshop at ECIAD. The year following Turning Point, Juliet worked for a program which presented shows in schools on issues which affect youth.

Description of Turning Point

> Turning Point was to use art as a medium to communicate to the public that young women are very diverse and have valuable opinions and people should listen to them. And that there are lot of things that go on with young women that most people don't know about and it is important that they do. Because one day young women will be the foundation of the population. (Int.: Juliet, 4.6)

Experiences

Roles. Juliet was very involved in the Turning Point project and participated in numerous activities including recruitment and groups at her school. Juliet organized weekly meetings at her school and convinced girls to attend meetings at the Roundhouse Community Centre. During her school meetings, she tried to initiate discussions among the young women on the same topics that were being discussed at other Turning Point meetings.

> My art teacher and I wanted to recruit about 50 girls to be in the performance, just to have a good representation from Burnaby, because we are kind of out... in Burnaby. And so, we tried to organize as many girls as possible and keep them interested and keep them aware of what is going on. I've been in it since August and I went to all the regular meetings and tried to put together ideas for the performance, and working on all the same work that the other girls did. (Int.: Juliet, 3.3)

Juliet found that when she was trying to recruit girls to come to the performance, that less than half of them were really responsible and showed up.

Juliet was also involved in the media representation of <u>Turning Point</u>. She had her picture taken and her opinions recorded. She was disappointed and surprised at the considerable editing that happened after the interviews.

> Juliet: I was in the *Georgia Straight* photo shoot, and in the *Vancouver Sun.* Actually I got interviewed by the CBC that was supposed to go on TV, but the funny thing is, I spoke to them for 10 or 15 minutes and I was so proud of how well I was speaking, I felt very good, very good, because I normally have problems speaking with people. And then, when I watched it on TV, they didn't put one bit of what I said on and when they put (Frieda) on they only put on the snippet when she stumbled over her words and then they asked some girls that were pretty new to the project and it was kind of funny.
>
> Lorrie: What they chose to put on..
>
> Juliet: And what they filter out. (Int.: Juliet, 4.2)

<u>Reflections and Opinions</u>

Feminism

Juliet had expressed concern for the lack of feminist content in her school curriculum. She noted one exceptional circumstance in her English 10 Honours class where she had a teacher with strong feminist views, and included women into the learning content of the course. "That was the only time (at school), except for other teachers, female teachers, that I had, that would talk to my friends and I about things outside of school, but never anything that had to do with our curriculum" (Int.: Juliet, 3.2).

> <u>Growth and learning</u>. Learning is what I did at that (ECIAD) workshop, a whole lot of learning. The whole process of making performance art, this large of a scale. About different issues. All the different issues that young women have to deal with and all of the different sites where the performance could be at. So, we went to the different sites and we did a lot of brain storming about images, what the performance would look like. Every site that you went to, it would have some sort of meaning of what the performance was about and it was really broad,

deciding what we were going to be doing and how things would be. And one of the ideas was a construction site, and so... I think things grew out of that. (Int.: Juliet, 2.2)

When I asked what <u>Turning Point</u> had meant to her personally, Juliet replied that it was a lot of learning. She found that her confidence and interpersonal skills had grown as a result of her participation in <u>Turning Point</u>.

> I think, for me, being in <u>Turning Point</u> was a lot about learning. I learned a lot, a lot, a lot. Not just about art, but about public relations, about meeting people, not just friends, but professionals. It was wonderful. It was great. (Int. Juliet, 5.1)

> My confidence level has gone much higher because it is much easier for me to talk to people. A year ago, if someone approached me with a camera, I would just look at the floor, cry or run away. And that is one of the main issues that young women's self esteem level are usually quite low. It drops off like when they reach adolescence. And this (<u>Turning Point</u>) is a great thing. Not procrastinating to do things, getting active and talking to people. If you just sit around and wait for things to happen, they're not going to happen. And, you have to help other people when they need something...listening to opinions, group communication...(Int.: Juliet, 5.2)

Juliet was influenced by her experience in <u>Turning Point</u> and expressed an interest in participating in performance art projects in the future. She would like to design or produce these types of art works. "I think that it is a great way to deal with these sorts of issues or different issues, like young women or old women" (Int.: Juliet 18.3).

<u>Audience</u>. Juliet recognized that she was seeing and remembering the performance from one perspective, while also having a full understanding of what was intended to do. She felt it was also very important to understand what the audience went away with from the performance. But more than what the general audience might get out of the performance, she felt that the young female audience members were the most important target group to reach. "I think that if there is a young woman out there who benefits from the piece, then that is more important than whatever the other audience members think" (Int.: Juliet, 7.1).

> It is hard for the audience. They can see what it is for one day and that is pretty much it, but I think... If you think about <u>Turning Point</u>, it should set you in a new direction, and that is not only with the audience seeing this new direction or going a different way, or looking with a fresh perspective at young women, or for young women looking at themselves from a different light. I think that definitely, the core girls, or the girls that have been involved, if not, then they already do look at things or they will look at things, really deconstruct and reconstruct everything

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and ask questions and not just be told answers. And that is very important. (Int.: Juliet, 9.1)

Although she acknowledged that you can't reach everyone, Juliet felt that in order to understand the girls' passion for the piece as well as Under Construction itself, they would have needed to approach the performance as *sympathizers*. "The format may have not been accessible to some. This is their own misfortune perhaps. Unfortunately they would miss our message, our message being the repeatedly repeated mission statement" (Int.: Juliet 10.3a).

Since the performance, Juliet had received feedback from friends about the performance. She found that people, even in her university *Issues in Performing Arts* class, found that people that had been at Under Construction didn't get the point of the performance. She noted that one of her classmates that had been at the performance said "*it was boring, I didn't get it*". (Int.: Juliet, 11.1a).

It is clear that even years later, Juliet is still passionate about the project. Juliet wondered whether to entertain the audience with central issues and yet still hold their attention long enough to be able to get your message across.

Juliet had been a *Sign Girl* in the performance and had ongoing first-hand contact with the audiences as they entered the performance site. She found that out some of the audience understood what they were witnessing. However, "other people didn't understand it and asked *When are they going to start dancing*, or *something. I don't know what's going on!*" (Int.: Juliet, 12.3).

Community

Juliet talked about the closeness of the group of the Turning Point girls. "I have met a lot of friends and I'm very glad that I've met some of these girls. All the girls that I've met, there's a lot to them. There is much, much much, more than you would think beneath the surface, and they're great" (Int.: Juliet, 7.1). There was no need for small talk among the core Turning Point girls, they had gone well beyond that in their relationships with one another.

> Juliet: The girls from Turning Point, I just feel comfortable around even though we haven't seen each other in a long time, I can just meet them and say, "Heh," and that is fine. But if it is some girl from my class in the hallway, whom I am very timid around, then we never get onto another level, just because of the

environment, or the way things are set up. I found an intimacy, honesty and common bond with the Turning Point girls.

Lorrie: So you feel with the Turning Point girls, the core girls primarily, you are at another level of knowing them than the day-in-day-out surface stuff that might happen at school sometimes.

Juliet: The petty sort of chit chat, there is really no point to it, because you've sort of gone through it. (Int.: Juliet, 8.1)

Process and Product

Juliet claimed to have learned a lot, more than just about art, but about life, becoming confident and responsible. She felt that the project had given her opportunities that she might not otherwise have had.

I think the whole process, the whole year and a half or two years, that it was rolling along was just as valuable, if not more than the actual piece. Because the piece was about young women going through the whole project itself. (Int.: Juliet, 6.1)

The performance summarized the discoveries made in those two years. The work of the process was the work of the show, the presentation of it. (Int.: Juliet, 6.1a)

Metaphor

I asked Juliet how she liked working on the construction site, seeing that Elizabeth had a very strong opinion about being there, and what it meant to her.

I liked it, I liked it. I hope people picked up that it is straight out construction or, young women under construction, or we are deconstructing things and reconstructing them in a construction site. Constructing- construction, playing on the word. And then that the actual site itself looks from a distance, almost finished. It's very nice, you can see the windows, it's all shiny and when you approach it, or you come up close, you see that under the surface it is still being built. Which is sort of a metaphor for a young woman. You can see a beautiful young woman, but she may not be all together, or you can see something or expect something, and under the surface, she is completely different. (Int.: Juliet, 13.2)

Role of the Artist

The participants and the artist played different, yet related roles in the development of Under Construction. It has never been suggested throughout the performance that the participants themselves would be, or become artists. They were participating in an artist's performance, in which they informed the content and some of the form. Juliet expressed that she felt that it was a fairly open and communicative process that they went through. She felt that Lacy had brought her expertise to the project, and the girls brought

their experiences and ideas. At the same time she recognized the limits on the level of inclusion possible within a very large group.

> Juliet: Suzanne is the artist. She, it was her piece, I think. I admire Suzanne, really. Before in the August workshop (ECIAD) I thought well, okay, we're like clay, and we are about to be moulded, or something. But it's not that. We've worked through that. We've shot out ideas and as much input as we have and it's just been a matter of taking different things and putting them together. It came from the girls as well as it came from Suzanne. I think that she did it very tastefully, it was very creative.

> Lorrie: You felt that the communication was easy flowing from the girls and the artist, the coordinators back and forth, it was an open working relationship?

> Juliet: Pretty much, ya. The girls can't really be in tune with everything that is going on. It is too chaotic, and it is too chaotic to have too many girls. I think that it was pretty good. (Int.: Juliet, 15.1)

Closure and follow-up. Juliet made it clear that she didn't want to see Turning Point end. If there was some way that it continued, she would be involved in it.

> Juliet: I don't want it to die down. I want things to keep going. I hope that... There is talk that in the fall that we're going to continue to do things at the Roundhouse and having monthly meetings. Not, to plan some event, but to focus around art and around young women and to have different events. Like either discussion groups or coffee houses or anything like that. I think that anything (something?) is mandatory. And it is good to keep something going. It's not just us, Turning Point girls. But, hopefully there will be some other girls out there that get together, or someone else that wants to organize things, and have things happening for girls to be a part of and keep changing and to keep educating everyone.

> Lorrie: So you want it to continue, really continue, even though there is not an art piece coming up next. Or, maybe there could be, who knows, depending on what happens in the fall. There seems to be enough interest. I saw you folks this weekend at the Jazz Festival hand-painting. That is great.

> Juliet: When we were hand-painting at the beach and at the Folk Fest...

> Lorrie: At the beach, when at the beach?

> Juliet: I don't know, Barb was just talking about it if we want to do it. The girls would have to organize it themselves. But that is cool. I would do it in a second. (Int.: Juliet, 9.1)

The participants varied on their responses on how they felt after the end of Turning Point. Juliet described her feelings in this way:

> I don't know. I just sort of feel like I'm on vacation. I was ... As soon as it was over I felt sort of empty, I suppose. Not empty, but I missed it. I know that there are a lot of girls that I am not going to see, or that I probably won't because I

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procrastinate too much to call or things like that. Like (one of the girls) is going Halifax and I miss it. Let down sort of. (Int.: Juliet, 17.2)

Success and evaluation. Like Elizabeth, Juliet found that the low point in the project was the beginning when everything was very ambiguous. She found that it was hard to work in groups with so many ideas and issues, and trying to narrow them down into one idea, one event and one location. Everyone had a different opinion as to where it should be and what it should be about (Int.: Juliet, 12.5). Juliet also found the beginning to be one of the high points in the project as well as being one of the lowest points. "When I first got involved was a high point. I was just glad to be there. I was glad to meet these people and I was glad to learn about this sort of thing and speak my mind and it was wonderful" (Int.: Juliet, 17.4). There was never a time during the whole project when Juliet wasn't happy to be there, "it was never a chore" (Int.: Juliet, 18.1).

Juliet found that there was success in the fact that the performance happened and that some of the audience seemed to understand what it was all about. "People (audience) were happy, some people didn't want to leave when they were standing on the ledge, but other people left right away" (Int.: Juliet, 12.4)

Reflections: Under Construction

The girls were prepared for the performance and had been through what elements there would be, and yet there was the anticipation of not knowing how it would all turn out when it was all together.

> Juliet: I felt pretty good about it: leading up to it, during the day before the actual performance. I thought, wow, this is the day, what is it going to be like? I've seen the clippings from the other performances that she's done, but I didn't know what the actual thing is or what it is all about until I was into it. And when I was, it was exactly what we had been planning, it was just that.
>
> Lorrie: Nothing had changed. It was what you thought it might be?
>
> Juliet: I didn't anticipate. I didn't know what it would be like, but then when I did see it, it was exactly what we had been doing.
>
> Lorrie: What kind of reactions did you see with the other girls while you were on the site?
>
> Juliet: I think a lot of the girls were irritated, or some of the girls who were sitting on the floor were tired: they didn't want to sit there. I think that if we had had more girls we could have done more shuffling, like moving people around, there would have been more action. Then they wouldn't have had to sit for such long periods of time. I think that the girls that showed up on the very day, I have a

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feeling that they really didn't understand what it was. All they could think about was "my foot's sore, I want to get my hand-painted," or …stupid little things.

Lorrie: What about the conversations that were happening on the buckets.

Juliet: There is this girl that I met last year in a theatre one act festival from Port Moody and then I just saw her on the day. I didn't know she would be there and she was just so into it. She was just talking about all these different issues, and like really talking a lot. It was great. She had never been to <u>Turning Point</u> before. (Int.: Juliet, 16.1)

Near the end of our interview, Juliet told me about an article she had recently read in the *Georgia Straight*, that criticized <u>Under Construction</u> for being more therapy than art. However, even if the production of art is therapeutic to the artist, it does not necessarily negate its artistic merit. Otherwise we would never see artists produce works that connect with them emotionally or psychologically. Telling stories can also be therapeutic, but not every book makes a great read, let alone a great work of literature. When the artist produces a work of art, whether or not its production was personally therapeutic, that connects to their audience, then the work is of some worth. Juliet told me that in her opinion, the work was not therapy, and that framing the issues made it art. She later wrote, "What we <u>voiced</u> was the art work, the final piece was words. Therapy is distant from voice. Some of us found healing through expression, others simply answered questions" (Int.: Juliet, 18.4a)

<center>Chaara</center>

Chaara and I met on a sunny afternoon, in early July, 1997, down at the New Westminster Quay. Chaara was 17 years old and had another year planned to finish high school. Her primary passion was music. She plays guitar, violin, piano, and she sings. Prior to this project, she had performed for school events and also did her own recording in her Performing Arts class. <u>Turning Point</u> was the first project that she had been involved in that had a female focus. She became involved in the project after she and (Hildegarde and Audrey) went to the Commercial Drive hand-painting event in February, 1997.

Chaara has since sent back annotated transcripts from our interview, and has corresponded with me through e-mail. She is still passionate about her musical pursuits.

<u>Experiences</u>

<u>Roles</u>. Chaara: I was recording. I had a portable DAT, and I was recording sound. I was going around the groups (of sitting girls) and around the audience. I only had the DAT recorder for the weekend. (Hildegarde) was filming and I was doing the DAT because we are going to be putting that in the film. We will put different sounds on that not just the sounds (from the girls). Actually they weren't talking much during that, so, but there will be sounds.

Lorrie: Tell me about the project you are working on now.

Chaara: It is sort of a documentary, or could be, on the whole project, and (Hildegarde) and (Audrey) are doing the film of it and they on the day of the event and I did (filmed) the week before, the painting of the wall (pink hoarding). So their editing that right now and I am doing sound for it. I want it to be pretty long, but we don't have enough footage to do that. In order for it to be long like a documentary on the whole thing, the whole process, but that is impossible, because we only have footage of the actual performance and the week before.

Lorrie: Is this project something that you initiated, or is it something that has come out of the project itself?

Chaara: Well, (Hildegarde), decided that she wanted to do a film and since I am into sound and studio, she asked me to do the sound for it. Ya, that's great, I'd love to. Little did I know that it wouldn't be all fun. But it will be okay, because I am being just all melodramatic and lazy right now because it is summer and I want to play. (Int.: Chaara, 5.1-3)

<u>Reflections and Opinions</u>

It was a really big deal for me, actually it was really exciting. <u>Turning Point,</u> young women, performance art,... people kind of get confused when I try to tell them about it, but it is a neat thing. I liked it a lot. (It's a) neat idea, I felt important, I felt like I was doing something. It was really fun. (Int.: Chaara, 5.4)

Shortly after the performance, Chaara was still enthusiastic about <u>Turning Point</u>. When asked if she would ever want to be involved in another project like <u>Turning Point</u> she was certain that she would.

Ya, definitely, I would be very happy to do that, in fact I would seek something like that out. Where before, I was a little confused by it, but now I would definitely would want to go for something like that again, seek it out and do it more than once. (Int.: Chaara, 10.2)

Feminism

Although <u>Turning Point</u> was about the issues of young women, many of the participants did not see it as a feminist project. Several of the young women expressed

that they either didn't like being associated with feminism, or felt that feminism had bad connotations. Chaara expressed her opinion in this way:

> I really don't like the idea of women's groups so much because it makes you feel like a minority almost. Standing together and whining together, seems kind of silly. I totally believe in "women's issues" but I don't like the idea so much of women's groups.
>
> Although, <u>Turning Point</u>, I totally enjoyed it. I really loved it because it was just women, and it wasn't like a women's issues thing. It was more like young women hanging out and having fun. If it was like a women's issues thing it would have been so boring and too political. I would just get tired of it. But at the same time, when it comes to equal rights, I get really fed up and think that there should be more women's groups doing more things. But I just tired of it... It hasn't done us any good so far, it doesn't seem like it has, so why bother. I'm just pretty lazy too, so I just leave it to major advocates. (Int.: Chaara, 2.3)

Although not always comfortable with the term *feminism*, Chaara sees some value in the existence of feminist groups.

> That is when I think that feminism is really important, when there are young girls who are embarrassed to be joining women's groups because it isn't intriguing to men. It is the worst scenario, because they don't see it. And that is the whole reason why these things exist because you are so hung up on this horrible innate need to breed or something like this, which is forever a hindrance on their inner growth. (Int.: Chaara, 7.1)
>
> ....I can see both sides, where it is a necessary thing, feminist groups, very vital in fact, and it should be quite encouraged. And I can also see why people don't think that and why people don't want anything to do with it, because I feel like that sometimes. It isn't always very intriguing, turned off sometimes. (Int.: Chaara, 7.2)

Representation

Chaara found moments of hypocrisy in <u>Turning Point.</u> She described these events as when the young women were lead to their issues by the older women. Although many of the issues that the girls ultimately discussed may have been topics close to their hearts, Chaara felt that they might not have been the topic of choice in that given situation. Ultimately, she didn't feel that the issue of representation was "not even a big issue in itself, it was just something that we noticed. That we were told what we had strong opinions about where we may not. It wasn't a big deal because no one even heard us!" (Int.: Chaara, 4.1). She was right, only the final wave of audience was able to hear the girls' live conversations. The rest of the audience heard only the sound track.

Chaara: There would be adults saying what we should be saying, which is really funny. That is what I thought. Because we are all these young women going 'Ya, you're right, we are not quite heard properly are we...' and then you realize that they are telling us what to say. Like, this doesn't seem quite right, and I noticed it, and a few of my friends noticed it. But we sort of went along with it, because the idea seemed right. The idea of getting together and hanging out and being young women together seemed right, but actual practice of it sort of failed. Not entirely, it was good, but was hypocritical.

Lorrie: That is interesting that you found that your voice wasn't really represented there... is that what you are saying?

Chaara: It was, but in a limited kind of way. We may have had these issues, for example the cards we were given that had questions on them that we had to talk about... we may have felt those things, we may have had things as issues in our own hearts, thinking 'this bothers me, or this bothers me' but perhaps that wouldn't have come up then. We may have just sat around going " I really liked going fishing when.. Blah blah blah,' or telling stories and talking like you would and things like that would have come up, but it was already there (as a topic of discussion on the card) so ' oh, goodness lets make an issue out of it' where as some people may have been indifferent to the issues that we were told were our issues. It bothered us. But it wasn't all bad, its just that it was a little bit...sensationalized.

Lorrie: Did you feel that it was contrived in that way?

Chaara: Ya, it did feel contrived sometimes. It felt false at times, but not too severe a point where everything there should be written off... (Int.: Chaara, 3.1)

Growth and learning. I asked what she had hoped to gain through her experience in Turning Point. Chaara felt that she and others were more confident than they were before (Int.: Chaara, 9.2). She also wanted to connect with other people who felt the same way. It seems as though she found that.

I feel with the particular girls or group (of girls) feel a little more connected because... wow, look what we are doing its really neat, we can talk about that (in reference to girls amongst themselves). (Int.: Chaara, 6.2)

Chaara hoped that other young women would be able to gain some female strength and independence through their Turning Point experience.

I hope that they gain something of a female strength, independence, That is kind of political of me because of saying these women's groups are silly, but I hope that... because I know a lot of girls who feel like feminism is something that they don't want to be involved with it. Most of the time because guys don't approve of it. (Laugh) (Int.: Chaara, 6.3)

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Audience

Chaara saw dilemmas in how audience could be handled on the site. She saw that on one hand, the girls' voices needed to be heard and at the same time, it is a little uncomfortable for the girls to openly talk with a group of strangers joining their circle. "You wouldn't want them there, but at the same time people said that they wished that audience could have come in. Because that is the idea, we were told *women's voices*, but it's not. You hear the few voices that were recorded and it seemed so sparse, five out of hundreds. That is one thing I regret, the idea not being used to its potential of being heard" (Int.: Chaara, 12.1).

Process and Product

The Under Construction performance was a part of the overall Turning Point project, but for Chaara, it didn't provide the end goal of the project. Chaara expressed optimism for the future group of girls in Turning Point. Chaara said that "the performance wasn't the main thing. What is important is that we were still all together for so long and will be probably afterwards, and other things will come out of it" (Int.: Chaara, 9.1).

Closure and follow-up. Chaara told me about how the girls had planned to continue getting together. "They wanted that (to get together). Maybe it will (happen). If it does, it will probably only be a few people, but that is better than nothing" (Int.: Chaara, 9.2).

Reflections: Under Construction

Chaara was critical of the limited interaction the audience had with the performers during the performance.

> I thought it was kind of silly. We were thinking about other ways it could have been done. The soundtrack was really neat, but there were different ways it could have been done, like they could have had microphones on the people, like a microphone in each circle and then broadcast that. So we heard exactly what was going on then. That would have been a good idea. It would have been a lot more expensive too. But... it seemed more logical, instead of just a few people, because of all that the people (participating girls) that were there and only about ... I don't know how many people were interviewed in the studio, maybe about 20 people were interviewed, and there were 130 at the performance and they spoke about what bothered them, (at that time), and what was asked of them. (Int.: Chaara, 4.2)

Chaara had fun during the performance Under Construction and she felt that the other girls had fun as well. Although it was a highly public site with a large audience, it was still a safe space to be in, in amidst the comfort of one's peers.

> I think that they had fun, a lot of fun. It is really, really cool to be walking around and have these girls all excited and you don't even know each other... it should happen more often. Because the way females are with one another, they just feel safer, and if we were here right now, it still more protected, but if there were no men, we could be just that much more free...

> So we have this little cocoon where it didn't matter, we are protected because we are girls, and it didn't matter that we didn't know each other, you are just (more openly chatty), just energetic, you feel so open and free. And if there were more women around it's not like that, or if we kept that mind space when we went out in the world. (Int.: Chaara, 8.1)

> Success and evaluation. For Chaara, one of the high points in the project was being able to do her own project with her two friends. "We would have something out of it, saying something of our own out of it" (Int.: Chaara, 10.3). Her low point in the project was the dauntingly hot editing booth to finish the project that she had started.

Chaara pointed out some of the successes of the performance as well as some of its short-comings. She felt that the metaphor for the site was good, albeit melodramatic. She felt that she couldn't have come up with a better alternative for a site, but she did have suggestions on how one could have handled the sound differently.

> I think that I would have had microphones on each girl and have music or sound effects playing, that is definitely important, but not have it pre-recorded. Live girls talking and pre-recorded sound playing and then have the live voices talking. (Int.: Chaara, 11.3)

> Well, Suzanne was wanting 500 girls, and that —we weren't. We were under 200. But it was successful. There were little flaws, like the audience being a little frustrated not being able to hear people, and not being able to walk among them, until the very last (wave of audience). But it was successful, because it doesn't even matter what we planned, or what was planned goes through exactly, but the idea of it was still very intense when people still show up and they were still baffled and in awe of this strange phenomenon that they've never seen.... It isn't like *Oh, here we have another performance art thing in another construction site*....(Int.: Chaara, 6.1)

Again we hear from the girls that they weren't heard. They knew that most of the audience only heard the pre-recorded and professionally edited sound track. Their concerns and issues that they were supposed to be sharing were ultimately not going to be heard. Voices of a few were heard. They were selected by the artist, edited and mixed

by a professional, and played to an audience. In many ways the girls created the backdrop to this constructed soundscape. Chaara was quite observant, the audience was likely baffled about what they saw and experienced. However, if they had been familiar with Lacy's previous art works, they might have well said, "*Oh, here we have another performance art thing, people sitting around talking, while a sensational recorded sound mix plays over a loud-system –too bad we can't hear what they're really saying to one another...*"

Nick

July 7, 1997, Nick and I met at a coffee shop in Kitsilano, near her home. Nick had been one of the youngest of the core girls. She was going into grade 11 the following fall. She had recently switched high schools when her family moved across town. At her old school, she was head of every club. When she finishes school, she had ambitions to become a fashion designer. She is the eldest child in her family, and has a close relationship with her family, and doesn't really group herself with a larger community. Her volunteer work includes work at the Vancouver Folk Festival. She had been involved in one other woman focused project before Turning Point. There was a club at her school that was just for women, *Sore Monday*, they raised funds for starving women around the world. Nick was very involved in this group.

Nick first became involved in Turning Point when one of the teachers who sponsored *Sore Monday* told her about it. She joined Turning Point at the August workshop at ECAID. She stayed involved in the project from that point on because of the friendships that had formed in the group.

Descriptions of Turning Point and Under Construction

Nick was an outgoing, and smart young woman who was sympathetic towards other people. Turning Point was her first big art project. She had never even heard of performance art. This is how she described Turning Point and Under Construction.

> It's (Turning Point) is a project that was heavily worked on for over a year and it had to do with women and their ideas and... it was like feminism, but not in the radical sense. We dealt with performance art with Suzanne Lacy. We developed a project that had to do with what we wanted people to know about us and breaking stereotypes. (Int.: Nick, 2.4)

Girls in this day and age aren't bimbos. We talk about normal stuff and we are smart and we have our own personalities, we are not all the same. (Int.: Nick, 3.1)

The performance (<u>Under Construction</u>) was planned for over two hundred young women but there wound up only being a hundred an fifty or two hundred. We had it on a construction site. It was made up mostly for the audience. They heard an audio tape of a pre-recorded soundtrack that the young girls had made. But it was young girls placed in little groups on overturned buckets for two hours. And people with signs that we had made that diverse meanings but were street signs. And it was really good. (Int.: Nick, 3.2)

Young women just are... Just that women have a voice and we think about things that you think about too. (Int.: Nick, 9.3)

<u>Experiences</u>

<u>Roles</u>. Nick had been involved in <u>Turning Point</u> since the summer of 1997 when she joined the ECIAD workshop. Since that time she had been involved in many aspects of the project including several groups including the research group, media group and the hand-painting group. The media group was her favourite.

I was so involved in the beginning, I wanted to be involved in everything, so I signed up for all the groups.... I got to make phone calls to these media people and tell them about our project and tell them to come down and take pictures. In the hand-painting I was in Commercial Drive, I was a leader person at Quena Café. You were there. So, I got to tell the other girls what to do. I'd say I can be really bossy. When I want something done. I won't have someone else do it, I'll have to do it myself, because I want it done properly. I'm like my mom in that way. I just discovered that the other day. (Int.: Nick, 8.2)

<u>Growth and learning</u>. Nick enjoyed her experience in <u>Turning Point</u> and given the choice would do it all over again. She would seek out opportunities to be involved in projects like it (Int.: Nick, 10.3).

To me... I feel that since I've been involved in this project, I've got a lot more self-esteem and more confidence towards other women, especially people from the <u>Turning Point</u> project. I felt in control of myself. *This is me, watch out* kind of thing. But, where otherwise, if I'm waking down the street by myself and I pass, like a group of guys, I get all intimidated and I shrink down, you know. To me that was a big thing. (Int.: Nick, 3.3)

Nick hoped that other girls had gained an awareness of the depth of their peers through their <u>Turning Point</u> experience.

I talked to people after that who had just come and didn't know what it was about and they thought that it was really neat to talk being able to meet these other girls who were deep and not superficial hair-makeup kind of thing. (Int.: Nick, 4.1)

In the week prior to the performance, everyone was extremely busy. Nick was involved as anyone and described an experience that week.

> I went to a lot of the media photography photo shoot things. That morning (the morning of the performance), there was the neatest meeting because we were all sitting there and they were all these people with their walkie-talkies and came to the meeting. There was all this stuff that we didn't know, like we thought that like they were speaking in secret code. We were in this construction cabin and we all thought that was so cool. (Int.: Nick, 9.1)

Nick describes some of the changes in her life, since she became involved in Turning Point.

> Now, when I look at construction sites, I can say, "ya, I've been on one of those." I've done that. In the sense, my brainstorming cells are really good now. When I think about things, it really starts clicking, and I've noticed that since I've been involved in this project, my parents are .. think of me as being responsible. They were really impressed. Especially last year with the workshop at Emily Carr, and I was being paid to go to this workshop, they were like *wow!* (Int.: Nick, 11.2)

Audience

Nick felt that the audience would have better understood the performance had they been prepared for it, had some understanding of the history of the project. Her dad had been in the audience, and since she had told him every detail about it he was prepared for the performance.

> I don't think that it was as successful as it could have been, I think that it was more of a performance for the girls and people that were involved than it was for the people that came to watch. Unless, it was people who read about it and knew about it, thought it was better than those people who just came off the street, kind of thing. They didn't know what it was about and what it was supposed to be. So, it must have been really confusing. (Int.: Nick, 4.2)

Nick had some similar criticisms of the performance to those Chaara had expressed.

> I don't know if they got enough out of it as the girls themselves did. Because they were listening to the pre-recorded soundtrack. It could have been anybody's idea of what should have been in the soundtrack, it wasn't exactly what we were saying at that moment. Where it would have been more effective if they could have heard what they were saying. (Int.: Nick, 4.1)

I asked Nick how she assessed the level of success of the performance.

> In the performance, I don't know, you can kind of notice whether it is being successful or not, because you can look at the audience. Some of them were (just) standing and others were standing listening to the soundtrack and looking at what was going on. It seemed in general that there weren't a lot of people that were superly interested. They were all .. *okay... next shift through...*it was disappointing I thought. I don't know. I think that it would have been neat to be

able to go up there for a second to see what the audience was seeing so I had an idea of what they were feeling. (Int.: Nick, 5.1)

There were three shifts or waves of audience, each group around was between 200- 300 people (though the produced video claims that there were somehow a total audience of 2000). The first two audience waves were ushered out after watching twenty minutes of the performance. About one hundred people from the third wave went down to the floor to mill amongst the performers after their twenty minutes had passed, rather than being instantly ushered out. Many of the girls had difficulties with the lack of interaction the audience had overall, except for this final group.

> I thought that each shift would be able to come down and listen to the live conversations because I thought that that was the most powerful part of the performance. What they were saying at that moment. But, I think that the last set of audience was most amazed by the performance. because when they left, after being able to listen to these girls up close, they were "that was really cool," and stuff. So I think that the other two shifts were kind of left out in a way. (Int.: Nick, 6.1)

Ownership

Nick felt that the performance was really more Lacy's than the girls'. She also felt that because she had been in the project for so long, along with the other core girls, that in a way it was hers too.

> I thought that it was really good being there and stuff. I was really tired. I thought that the actual performance wasn't straight from us girls. I thought that it was Suzanne's project in the end and she had the final say and ... you know it was, like hers. It worked out good, but I felt disappointed in a way because it didn't turn out as well as I thought and I think I kind of blame that on Suzanne, for .. because it was her project in the end. We didn't have a huge say in the final say, when it came right down to the end. Ya, we picked the sight and picked who was going to be in it. But all the details...(Int.: Nick, 5.2)

> I know that Suzanne was out every single day for the last week meeting every single hour to figure out the final things. And there is no way that us girls could have done that too, because of the last week of school. I think it feels neat that I've been such a strong part of it because it is almost like I own part of the project, you know. I was there from the beginning. (Int.: Nick, 7.2)

Process and Product

Nick expressed her bias to the process of the whole project over the value of the end production. However, she felt that the product was essential to provide focus for the group, "it made everything work to a point" (Int.: Nick, 7.1).

I think definitely in the process. It was the whole idea of figuring out what the stereotypes we wanted to break were and talking about our ideas and our thoughts was much more important than having other people listen to them. Because we got to share them with each other, and "wow, I'm not the only one who thinks like that." So that was definitely more important than the performance. (Int.: Nick, 6.4)

Closure and follow-up. I asked Nick what she would like to see happen next with Turning Point, and what should be done with that material that has been gathered.

> Nick: I can't wait to go to the ... gardens and see the prints (in concrete), but I want to keep going. It was so good. Like, one day at school, this girl said, "have you seen this, it is this thing I picked up downtown." It was our zine, and I thought that was so cool. I hope that keeps going, it was so fun.
>
> Lorrie: How were the prints, the handprints[1], When they came out?
>
> Nick: I haven't seen them hardened. They were telling us to do them so lightly, which I found frustrating, because I thought that we needed a good print. I don't know, I thought that it was funny because the girls, the last group that got to do it, they were all doing little signs with their hands, "west side, east side" and stuff and it was so weird. (Int.: Nick, 10.7)

I felt guilty asking about the concrete handprints. I had heard from another older participant that the artistic director, along with other adult volunteers, had "fixed" the handprints made by the girls. She told me that the artefacts were of the adults, not the girls at all. I felt a pit in my stomach thinking about it. But this comment by Nick, confirmed for me that it quite likely happened, at least to some of the squares. I had been told in a taped conversation by someone who assisted in this re-handprinting, and felt it was wrong, so she told me. I never did tell Nick. I don't believe that it was a spontaneous act to correct the handprints by a few, otherwise the girls wouldn't have been instructed to print so lightly which was at odds with their earlier instructions, and practice. At some point prior to the performance, it appears that the decision was made that the girls were not capable of completing the printing of their own hands. Artistic control, ownership of the image, and medium over the message: dominated this performance.

Reflections: Under Construction

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[1] During Under Construction, 'concrete girls' worked with trades women to mix and pour concrete into wooden forms. Performers pressed their handprints, a symbol which ran throughout Turning Point, into the fresh concrete. The handprints, an individual's mark also represented the community of hands together, helping one another. They also refer to the handpainting activity, a gentle temporal and personal act which contrasts the cold and permanent nature of concrete.

Success and evaluation. The high point of the project for Nick was the morning of the performance, on the construction site, when she and the other girls were "so hyped up!" (Int.: Nick, 10.1). The lowest moment was when Nick found out that a construction site had been chosen to be the site of the performance. She didn't know what they would do with a construction site. It was really disappointing for her. However, after a while, "when we started having more ideas for that, it got better" (Int.: Nick, 9.4). Initially the sites were narrowed down to the Vancouver Public Library, and a downtown construction site. Nick doesn't know how the site was finally decided upon.

Like Elizabeth and Chaara, Nick found it frustrating to work with so many people with so many ideas and possible directions when their task was to narrow down the scope of the performance and direct it to a single topic. Like Chaara, Nick found this to also be advantageous as a large group of enthusiastic participants can offer interesting ideas.

> As well as being a disadvantage, it was also an advantage that there were so many ideas because we were always thinking of things, getting excited with a really cool idea that somebody came up with. And just being around a lot of people that made you feel strong. (Int.: Nick, 6.3)

Post-performance Reflections: A Collection of Narratives

Immediately following the performance, many participants, including myself, were still too close to the actual event to understand what had happened in Under Construction. However, time provided the space necessary to construct more detailed, and possibly more critical narratives. The following narratives, come from three sources, reflective writings from Turning Point participants, a year following the performance; letters and notes from study participants, two and half years post performance; and my own reflective narrative, now four years later.

Barbara Clausen (1998) prepared a final report for Turning Point, in which she included written statements from some participating girls. She also included her own reflections, and criticism that had been made about Turning Point and Under Construction, from the local arts community.

Excerpts from Turning Point: A Final Report

Each of the following narratives comes from project manager, Barbara Clausen's (1998) report. Each of the participating young women had been involved in the project

for much of the duration of <u>Turning Point</u>. Clausen identifies the contributing writers by only their first names.

> Joyce: <u>Turning Point</u> was very important to me. It gave me lots of contacts and opportunities in the arts, and I made a lot of really good friends. I went through a lot of changes during that time - I don't know if it was all because of the project, but I know that being involved in <u>Turning Point</u> had a direct effect on how I handled the transition from secondary school to University. If we were to do it again, I would like the project to focus more on the young women's images and ideas. The emphasis on the production at the end got in the way of what was developing with the core group [of girls]. It would be great to have a structure in place to continue the meetings and activities after the project finished, to get more young women involved and be able to continue to work together. During the performance production the demands were overwhelming, but now the project is over and dead - many of us are continuing to work in the community, but we're not working together. We need mentoring and more opportunities in administration to empower us to do things like this for ourselves. (Clausen, 1998. p. 5)

> Tricia: The <u>Turning Point</u> project was one of the turning points of my life. I met many young women I could relate to, and that was very beneficial to me. I learned heap about social issues, activism and public art. I learned how to deal with people and the media, and gained a different outlook on life. I came out of my shell, and overcame my shyness. I learned how to speak in public. I spoke often about the project at my school, where I lobbied and learned leadership skills. The hand-painting was a neat way for the young women to express themselves and connect with each other. If we were to do it again, we should take more time, develop more of a consensus, and make sure all the girls have as substantial an experience as the core girls did. The project was good. If I have a complaint, it's that there are sceptics out there who don't look at the whole project, but only focus on one aspect of that they don't like and then colour the entire project with this brush. (Clausen, 1998, p. 5)

> Chaya: <u>Turning Point</u> was a unique experience. It was weird. I met so many people and felt so close to so many girls, but now it's all gone, I didn't stay in contact with any of them. For me the project lingered but it didn't last. I wish that something could have evolved organically on its own afterwards, but nothing too structured or too contrived. Hand-painting was the best part of the whole project. It was fun, and safe, comfortable way to connect with new people and it made the most powerful statement of the whole project. Everyone who saw it got something out of it. I still have parties with my friends where we talk and paint each other's hands with henna. We all made such a big commitment to the project - we were involved for two years, but suddenly at the end it felt like things were being decided for us. For me, the final performance was an anti-climax. (Clausen, 1998, p.6)

> Amy: Through <u>Turning Point</u> I met a lot of different people I wouldn't have met otherwise. It was great that we were passionate about what we had in common,

which was an interest in diversity, not just among young women, and in making the world a better place. I loved the hand-painting: for me it was the real 'art of this project, and it was a great way to show people that everyone can be creative – it was fun to do and it embodied the cross-cultural attitude of my generation. I would have liked us to include younger and older women, so we could see how women's issues are not just about now, but come from all times and all places. Some of the girls were really disappointed when the project was over, but I was relieved. I always knew the project was temporary. Maybe it would be good to follow up and evaluate the project –maybe continue the zines, but there are other vehicles for change. (Clausen, 1998, p. 5)

Audrey[2]: When I first joined <u>Turning Point</u> I thought it was a dream: to be able to work closely with other young women, enjoying each others' company. But about half way through, I realized that the group didn't have an artistic focus, and no real direction. The highlights for me were the workshops at the art gallery, at Emily Carr and at the Roundhouse. The most important part of <u>Turning Point</u> was the process of working together, seeing how others worked, and seeing what we could do together. The big performance was not the most important part. In fact, the hand-painting sent a better message : that got people together, and as we began working on the big production we began drifting apart. The final performance sent a message, but I don't think it was the message we wanted to send. For me it wasn't the big things that counted, but the little things. (Clausen, 1998, p. 6)

In her report, Clausen (1998) described some of the impact that <u>Turning Point</u> had on the local, Vancouver art community. <u>Turning Point</u>'s steering group had established, along with the guidance of Suzanne Lacy, protocols for involving local artists. It was made clear early on, that though local artists were welcome to participate in the project, the ways in which they would be able to participate would be limited, as the artistic direction would remain with the visioning artist. "There was no real possibility for local artists to use their skills until the production was clearly defined and artistic collaborators (such as a composer, a stage designer and a video director), were chosen by Suzanne and hired as part of the professional production team" (p. 8). Clausen also described concerns identified early on in the project by steering committee. It was felt that a project of this scope should more organically and slowly than was being proposed, and "we should work entirely locally rather than accommodating what she saw as an aesthetic being imposed by someone living and working outside our community" (p. 8). Clausen claimed that this 'crisis' was resolved, but does not tell us how, yet acknowledges that this was a cause of ongoing real stress. Clausen tells us that for some, the issue of an outside artist doing work within our community, remained an issue, while others

acknowledged that "we hired Suzanne Lacy to work with us and do what it is she does" (p. 8).

Clausen (1998) described public perception of Turning Point. During hand-painting events, she describes the positive public reaction as being: "generally intrigued, fascinated, charmed and delighted by the unusual nature of what was going on, and the level of intimacy they were able to observe at close range" (p. 9). However, Under Construction elicited varied public response, ranging from "positive curiosity and enchantment to barely confinable rage" (p. 10). She attributes the positive comments to those audience members who were informed about the process of the event in advance. Negative comments came from those who did not make it onto the site at all, or were a part of the first two waves of the audience. They were "angry about being shown a panorama with a pre-recorded sound track but were not able to get close to the young women or hear what they were saying" (p. 10). Clausen tells us that other negative comments focused on the quality of the performance, including the "apparently autocratic and non-spontaneous nature of the event, and the unplanned irony of having all the girls dressed alike when one of the project's goals was diversity, and not being able to hear the girls on site when another of the project's goals was empowering young women's voices" (p. 10).

Clausen identifies some key issues in this study. The role of the artist, that is how the artist held the *power* during the process and for the final image, was problematic in creating a collaborative project. For Under Construction, like The Roof is on Fire, "aesthetic issues dictate the final image" (Garoian, 1999, p. 152). The second key issue I focus on is that of *representation*. What ultimately was presented in the performance? Audience members were frustrated that they were able to see , but held back from hearing what was being said. Participants were frustrated that they were never heard. Though diversity was a theme of the project, and yet the aesthetic image was one of homogeneity.

Study participants reflected about their participation in the project, and about the performance in general. Their narratives remind me of the friendships that were created and the wonderful young women that I met during my time with Turning Point. I needed

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[2] The Audrey in Clausen (1998) is not the same Audrey (pseudonym) as in this study.

to keep in mind the good work that they brought to the project. I listened to what they had to say.

Narratives: Really Listening

Audrey

Audrey responded immediately to the package that I mailed her containing the transcripts of our interview. Besides correcting who was who in the transcription, she added a thoughtful and reflective letter outlining her recent life experiences. In these segments of her letter, she offers this insight to her experience and to her thoughts on the project as a whole:

> At that time in my life I struggled a lot with depression, and Turning Point was an event (Hildegarde) convinced me to be a part of. I didn't take much convincing but it was something I probably would never have known about without her. I desperately wanted to be able to go out and voice my opinions and be heard but my depression and lack of self-confidence probably confined me to my suburban town, writing hundreds of pages in diaries and keeping my opinions nestled in my small group of friends...(Letter: Audrey, 1.2)

In the year following Turning Point, Audrey had a life changing experience that she described in her letter, which spurred her desire to work with women for the rights of women all over the world. She described a passion for the cause of violence against women. Prior to Turning Point, she had never been involved in a woman focused project. It seems as though Turning Point was a starting point for her, and through her life experiences, confirmed a conviction to take action in her beliefs. Audrey's statements reiterate a need for action oriented, woman focused groups and projects. It also states the desire for a continuation of the project in one form or another, and disappointment with its conclusion.

> I was not very involved with Turning Point, I came in at the end to film with (Hildegarde). I wish I had been a bigger part of it, but I wasn't. I wish the project hadn't grinded to a halt after the big day. I wish (Hildegarde) and I had finished our video, which as the summer grew hotter and the momentum grew slower, we gave up sitting in a hot editing room. I wish a lot of things, because it seems like a fading memory now. (Letter: Audrey 2.1)

> Mostly, I wish that I could get up off my ass and contribute to anything now. I want so much to be involved....I want to feel alive. I sort of wish Turning Point would be happening now, I thing I would be more involved and appreciate the connections more... (Letter: Audrey, 2.2)

I was touched by Audrey's frankness with her response to the package that included the transcript from our interview. Not only did the transcripts cause her to reflect on her experience in Turning Point, but also her present life and future. She explained why she brought up so much of her recent personal experiences.

> I bring all of this up, because your letter made me realize how very stagnant I am. I am doing two correspondence courses through U. of VIC. (University of Victoria), one Composition and Native Indian Literature, the other an Intro to Social Work. Neither of these courses stimulates my mind in any way, although I try to force them to. I want to work with women, and it seems that the way to go about that is four years of school, which appears very daunting. Your letter made me feel as though you must have such a passion for your work, you are doing your doctorate, how insane is that? Your letter made me envy your passion, for I cannot bring myself to be active in anything... (Letter: Audrey, 2.1)

Her statements warmed my heart and I had to laugh, *how insane is that?*

Juliet

In a subsequent note from Juliet, she expressed doubts relating the necessity of size, or grandeur of the final production. She questioned whether its purpose was really "to benefit **all** young women" (Int.: Juliet, 6.2a). She doubted the media's ability to benefit anyone. "I am sceptical, the function of the media now and in the future is sensation, not awareness"[3] (Int.: Juliet, 6.1a).

In her recent reflections on the project, Juliet added these comments to the issue of ownership: "Our issues **were** represented, but the ownership was outside of us. **Now**, I think or am capable of seeing we did not **own** the direction or aesthetic design. We appeared, informed the designer of the actual material (ourselves) but obviously were not the ultimate directors. We were learning just as much as teaching. It was ours because we were the art, but individually we had no scope on the whole project" [Juliet's emphasis] (Int.: Juliet, 14.4a).

Chaara

What I find very telling is the enthusiasm with which Chaara responded to my written request to review and reflect on our earlier interview transcripts. Her enthusiasm hadn't waned over time as she wrote when she responded over two and a half years after the performance. In her letter, Chaara wrote:

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[3]It should be noted that Juliet is currently in Communications at Simon Fraser University, and likely has had more insight in the roles of media since her time in Turning Point.

> I miss the meeting of community <u>Turning Point</u> had. There are so few (if any?) projects like this one. If I know of any (and if I had my way ☺) I would surround myself in them constantly

I loved the feeling of being within this openly, positively social environment working together toward a collective **artistic** goal. It was a **beautiful** thing! I miss it. [Chaara's emphasis] (Letter: Chaara, 1.1)

<div align="center"><u>Thoughts on Turning Point: A Researcher's Reflection</u></div>

Though many of the girls went to weekly meetings for <u>Turning Point</u>, some for two years, for me this project is still a work in progress. There have been times when I thought that I understood what had happened, and then I come across something while reading, or something triggers my memory, then I question my understanding. I now accept that with such a multifaceted project, there is no simple way to explain it nor to distil its meaning. There have been times when I have been frustrated with my own lack of vision. I know now that I was emotionally attached to the goals and dreams of the girls. They wanted to be heard, they wanted to be seen. I wanted them to have this desire come true. When it didn't, it was a very hard thing for me initially to see, and then to admit.

Some of the young women told me they felt empowered, yet most of the girls in <u>Under Construction</u>, did not have a clue why they were there. I did not even ask them if they felt empowered, as it seemed a ludicrous question at that point. In the performance, the girls participants moved to choreographed direction. They were not independent actors in this performance and most of their voices were never heard, though their lips could be seen moving like in a silent movie to each other –their only true audience. Though there was an audience in attendance, no sub-titles appeared to reveal their stories.

In the process of providing a venue and an audience for their voices, Lacy framed and edited limited narrative recordings that were supposed to represent all of the young women –this heterogeneous group. Yet what one saw on the performance floor was red homogeneity –moving in silence, under direction and beneath the echo of a sound-loop. Though performance film crew was privy to the intimate conversations among the girls, with their microphones hovering over the small groups, the produced video also uses the sound-loop rather than their live narratives. The audience, we voyeurs, were no closer to their tales than before the performance began –perceptions unchallenged, unchanged.

The artefacts that remain from this performance are the handprinted pavers and a performance video. Then of course, there is this report. The next chapter goes into depth the themes that emerged from this study: *power* and *representation*.

CHAPTER 5: MAKING MEANING –
COMING TO UNDERSTAND POWER AND REPRESENTATION

"Intention portends criteria for evaluation. Most important, intention establishes the values premised within the work, and assembled values are the artist's construction of meaning."

Suzanne Lacy (1995, p. 181)

"We are here to have a strong voice which will raise awareness and challenge stereotypes in society. We will provide young women with an opportunity to express and learn from personal experiences and feelings in a large, supportive and diverse group. Through sharing experiences, we will build trust among our group which will enable us to create a unique art performance, allowing us to express our opinions to society."

Turning Point Mission Statement (1996)

"If true commitment to the people, involving the transformation of the reality by which they are oppressed, requires a theory of transforming action, this theory cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process. The leaders cannot treat the oppressed as mere activists to be denied the opportunity of reflection and allowed merely the illusion of acting, whereas in fact they would continue to be manipulated –and in this case by the presumed foes of manipulation."

Paulo Freire, (1989, p. 107).

"Public art can be a form of radical education that challenges the structures and conditions of cultural and political institutions" (Phillips, 1995, p. 61). The artistic model used by Lacy has been described as performative curriculum text which corresponds to the six strategies of performance art pedagogy set out by Charles Garoian (1999). These strategies include: enabling a community to define itself; foster public discourse to challenge stereotypes; inspiring political activism and resist oppression; creating a climate of awareness and collective involvement; subverting mass media in order to present a positive image of the community in question; and enabling "ecstatic awareness" of the cultural oppression and transformation through a re-positioning of community activism as art (Garoian, 1999, p. 128).

What happens when young women engage in a feminist collaborative project in which they would be given opportunities to lead and to be mentored as they work with older women artists, organizers and volunteers? This question is where I began this study. Many things could have happened in the above scenario, but first, I had to see if the project turned out to be the one it claimed to be in its goals.

Turning Point was a community project that engaged young women in a process of self-reflection and discovery. Under Construction was initially intended to be the concluding performance that would bring to the public, issues and voices uncovered

through the <u>Turning Point</u> process. However, <u>Under Construction</u> was a one day event that had little to do with the emancipatory goals initially set forth for <u>Turning Point</u>. <u>Under Construction</u> was a one day modernist performance. Girls voices were silenced after two years of uncovering. The hierarchical structure of <u>Under Construction</u> caused confusion and disappointment among participants and audience alike.

  <u>Turning Point</u> sought to empower young women, to give them voice and to challenge the public's perception of young women. The teen's involvement was central to the success of the project. It was intended that they would be included in every level of the project development in order to give the girls ongoing input into the project, as well as the experience of working with older women on specific tasks in the project's design and development. In the *Turning Point Work Plan Narrative* draft, Lacy (1996) identifies young women's learning experiences as an area of media interest for the projects themes. By late 1996, it was clear that the stories of the young women would play a significant role in the final performance. Lacy (1996) identifies the project as "'learning' for self reflection, for valuing their own experiences, for developing their own sense of meaning" (p. 4).

  In order to understand <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u>, I have had to return to the artist's intention, the project goals, and the participant's hopes. In written documents and from interviews, it is clear that they were all congruent. Collectively, they sought to empower young women, give them voice, and a public forum to express their issues and concerns

  In this chapter I explore the two dominant themes which emerged from my inquiry, **power** and **representation,** as expressed in <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u>. In the first half of the chapter I will look at the relationships and events in the project and performance as they pertain to issues of power and the expression of power through action, and voice. In the second half of the chapter I will explore representation, in terms of self-representation and the representation of others. To explore these themes, I turn to participants' narratives, project documents and to relevant research and pedagogical literatures. Through this exploration, we can come to understand the processes engaged in <u>Turning Point</u> and the experiences of study/project

participants. We can also come to understand the complexities and contradictions in Under Construction.

Power: Strength in Numbers

The intimate sharing of stories, usually with other women in a safe context, is a time-honored way in which may women have first claimed their own voices.

Ann Brooks (2000, p. 153), *Transformation.*

(Turning Point is) about giving young women in Vancouver a voice. There is strength in numbers, so when you get a bunch of us together, hopefully we can have a strong, unified message to give out to the public.

Joyce (December, 12, 1996, CBC recorded radio interview)

Well, Lorrie, you know that when young people are given a voice they are also told what to say and how to use it. That was my impression of the whole thing.

Anonymous teen participant (in telephone conversation, December, 13, 2001).

From its inception, Turning Point intended to foster community development. In *Internal Mission Statement* (1995) it states that they[1] aimed to

> connect girls to the larger community...The process of coalition and community building is an integral part of the artwork. Similarly, the mass media aspects are designed as a public face of the art. Pulling the whole process together, a final performance serves as a celebratory ritual that brings the diverse themes and people together in a public site. But it is the networking and community building, the support of gender-aware policies and sensitivities, the mentoring and relationships formed that will form the lasting legacy of this project. (p. 2)

We need to keep these goals in mind when considering events and experiences from Turning Point and Under Construction.

Artistic Control

"New genre public art is not built on a topology of materials, spaces, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention" (Lacy, 1995, p. 28). When Suzanne Lacy works with a community, she allows them to identify their own issues for exploration, and then facilitates the exploration of these issues in order to create the content of the performance. Performers are situated both a subject and content within a final performance. During the developmental phase of the project, Lacy engaged participants in active self-reflection, to question and

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[1] A Steering Committee developed the first mission statement.

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challenge their notions of who they are living in their communities, and to think about how they are perceived by others.

When first coming into a new community, Lacy is up front with her modus operandi. Charles Garoian (1999) tells us that "in advance, Lacy informs her collaborators that they represent significant generative forces in the performance. They have approval on everything about the content of the work. Depending on the extent of their participation, they have access to editing of film and video, to all designing of the performance. They have full charge of training their community peers to produce the performance. Nevertheless, in terms of imagery, the participants must agree that Lacy retain full authority" (p. 152). It is in this way that it seems as though Lacy is claiming to be able to separate the content of the art piece from the image. In this case, the stories of the girls were theirs –their personal experiences as told by them. Yet, the final image and soundtrack, is ultimately controlled by the artist (with the hired sound designer). The artistic director directed the performance from her third story vantage point. Though Alix acted as her assistant, no girl participants had any input at that level of the performance.

"Rather than assuming the discipline of art, or a preconceived social issue a model for community activism, she [Lacy] questions community citizens, public policy makers, and community policy makers, and community service providers to evolve a performance that represents their concerns" (Garoian, p. 151). What happens in the case where these individuals are not the ones who make up the participants who ultimately give their voice to the performance? The individuals listed by Garoian, are usually the powerful in a society, not those in need of empowerment. Charles Garoian (1999) tells us that "significant to the pedagogy of postmodern performance, Giroux's condition for self-reflexivity constitutes an oppositional strategy where students and teachers learn to 'check' the codes of their own narratives" (p. 63). If the participants and the teacher, in this case, the artistic director, were to have checked their codes of their own narratives, what might they have found when they looked at the selected narrative and the image selected to represent the whole group for Under Construction?

Producer, Barbara Clausen (1998) tells that public criticism called the performance autocratic and non-spontaneous. When I asked a local artist-volunteer about the production, she told me that "It was only her [Lacy] that could make the decision,

which left everyone powerless, and in that respect, I have difficulty, because to me then it is a façade that you are allowing me the opportunity to see who I can be. Presenting it in such a way –it's a requirement that I could say, yes (to solve a problem) –but I couldn't, it always had to go back to her, (which) left me waiting for her to give me the answer" (recorded conversation, July, 1997).

I looked at the definitions of both democracy and autocracy to compare the two and to look at the descriptions of what we know to the model of artistic practice in Turning Point and Under Construction. Garion (1999) tells us that in Lacy's community-based performance art work, she functions as a mediator as well as the artistic director, as she uses democratic principles of performance art strategy.

> **democracy** /dɪ'mɒkrəsi/ *n. (pl.* **ies***)* **1a** a system of government by the whole population, usu. through elected representatives. **b** a state so governed. **c** any organization governed on democratic principles. **2** an egalitarian and tolerant form of society. [French *dē mocratie* via Late Latin *democratia* from Greek *dē modratia*, from *dē mos* 'the people' +cracy]

(Oxford dictionary, 1995, p. 358)

> **autocracy** /ɔː'tɒkrəsi/ *n. (pl.* **ies***)1* **1.** absolute government by one person. **2.** the power exercised by such a person. **3.** an autocratic country or society. [Greek *autokrateia* (as AUTOCRAT)]

(Oxford dictionary, 1995, p. 84)

Collaboration

During our interview, Barbara Clausen (int.: Barb, 9.3) told me that Lacy "is a huge collaborator" and that she gave the girls, more collaborative leeway than she usually does in her projects. Lacy's design collaborations usually have the input of other artists, rather than the participants themselves. In this case, the girls were consulted more than participants in her other projects had been. I have to wonder what model of collaboration was implemented where one controls of the amount of collaboration that co-collaborators are involved in? Collaboration in itself, implies shared power in an egalitarian process. In feminist pedagogy, we understand collaboration to be a democratic activity that engages both pedagogues and learners (Irwin, 1999). Throughout this project we see the term collaboration, empowerment, and giving voice. Yet, there are many contradictory statements and events.

Although Lacy consults with project participants, ultimately she retains authorship over the image. This model of practice is incongruent with democratic and egalitarian practices. If we look to other models of leadership such as those described by Irwin (1995), we see leaders whose "power was not conceived as control but rather as empowerment and entrustment. In turn, leadership became redefined to involve a mentorship role where women learned from the practical knowledge of one another in a community of pedagogues" (p. xi).

Alix, who was involved in Turning Point since its inception, described the change in Lacy's process. Lacy usually hired professionals and was the boss. Lacy worked with communities to develop their idea, which remained separate from the professional development of the performance. However, in Vancouver, there wasn't the budget that she had been used to and the professionals she was working with, were volunteering their time. It was also these same professionals that invited Lacy to Vancouver for the project in the first place. Alix describes how some of the participants found Lacy's process too rigid, where others found it too loose. Yet, Lacy had boundaries that weren't always clear to the participants which complicated matters within the process (Int.: Alix, 14.8).

Artist working with girls and adult volunteers. During Turning Point, girls were engaged in exploratory workshops where they learned about performance art, deconstructed media images, and built relationships with one another. Lacy facilitated these workshops, and also got to know many of the core girls well. Lacy took girls to the construction site to brainstorm about performance ideas and she had shared meals with them, sometimes at her hotel. Yet when it came down to the performance and final decisions had to be made, it was Lacy who made them. When local artists volunteered their time, they were kept busy with activities such as procuring cell phones, needed performance items, and other office duties.

During Under Construction, core girls were given key positions on the floor, as director girls, to help manage the girls on the performance floor. In each corner of the performance floor, there was an adult director, and under her there were five director girls. This clearly established hierarchal arrangement proved to be difficult for some of the participants. However, I find the notion of 'director girl' problematic. The director girls did not have actual authority on the performance site to initiate direction, they

merely followed and transmitted directions from the artistic director. In my own role on the performance site, I was caught up in the moment… in the momentum which led to the performance. I wanted to take it all in, to see what would happen, to see the reactions. I had my job[2] to do, for the performance (minor as it was). I didn't go down onto the performance floor during the performance until the audience was allowed to.

Though some of the girls were excited to meet many new people and share their thoughts with each other, there were also tensions in the power dynamic as some girls were given authority over others. Elizabeth told of how some of the new girls gave her *attitude* and wouldn't listen to her when she told them they had to sit and wait until they could leave the site to go to the washroom (Int.: Elizabeth, 2.4). Nick was also a director girl: she identifies the change in the power dynamic as she describes one experience as a director girl.

> For the project, I was just one of the girls, everybody was kind of equal. And for the performance, I was a director girl. I ran around and gave people their water on the site during the performance. That was good because I got to run around and meet a lot of the people that came… I took people to the washroom. I got to hear a lot of complaints from the girls on the way to the washroom. My favourite one was from this girl, she's raising her hand to go to the washroom, so we had to wait for a few other people, because I had to take them in shifts so I didn't have to take them one at a time. She had her group and a different group had joined with her group and while we were going to the washroom she asked me so politely *oh, would you do me a big favour, this group just joined our group and we really don't want them here because they are really superficial and all they want to talk about is sports and make-up. And we were really into a good conversation and we don't want them there.* She was really depressed about it. It was so cute. But when we got back, the other group had already split. It was really cool. (Int.: Nick, 7.3)

I had heard from many sources that the girls on the floor wanted to change their roles during the performance, switch from sitting on the hard plastic buckets to mixing concrete or have their hands painted with henna. However, when the girls spontaneously decided to do anything on the performance site, whether it was to get off their buckets and join a more interesting group, or to sit on tables that were more comfortable, they were promptly told, by the artistic director, to sit back down until they were told they can move. Though Lacy's artistic intentions are up front and not couched in a hidden agenda

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[2] I handed out performance programmes as audience members entered the site. I also helped with the girls wrap party. My main role during the performance was as a researcher.

as stated by Jeff Kelly (1993), we need to consider a hidden, or null curriculum. Here we need to look at what was happening beyond the performance plan to assumptions of roles and rights.

According to Garoian (1999) "the curricular text of performance art renders the pedagogical site of the body explicit. In particular, it exposes the implicit, null, and hidden curricular inscriptions on students' bodies" (p. 142). We can understand this hidden curriculum as consisting of unquestioned assumptions around roles of performer, artist, volunteer and audience. The audience maintained (and was instructed to do so) its distance from the performers until the very end of the performance, at which point they were permitted to circulate among the performers. The performers had been instructed to not acknowledge the audience if they came close to them, but to carry on with their private conversations. However, upon reflection, there is nothing private about a conversation held between two or more strangers in front of a video camera and an immediate public audience.

Peter McLaren (in Pinar et al. 1995) tells us that the hidden curriculum is "part of the bureaucratic and managerial 'press' of the school –the combined forces by which students are induced to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behavior and morality" (p. 244). We need to ask, what are the dominant ideologies that prevailed in the production of this art performance to which the participants were compelled to comply?

In conversation with a good friend, whom I have known since she was nine, I learned about her experience in Under Construction as a *concrete girl (whom I will refer to here as C.G.)*. She mostly mixed up concrete, poured, and smoothed the poured concrete in the forms. But for a while, her group was told to trade places with some other girls that wanted to 'do concrete' for a while. Her group ended up sitting on buckets and talking. After a while the girls, tired of talking about the given topics, they sat in silence, straining to hear the other girls' conversations. Then they started talking about how they would like to go and to talk to girls in other groups, but they felt that they shouldn't. She told me that she felt it was 'weird' that they couldn't get up and talk to the other girls. They also thought that it was 'weird' that the film crew came over with the microphones. They assumed that the microphones were to record them for the video, or to catch

snippets of their conversations. C.G. told me she thought at the time that this was 'weird' as she had thought they were primarily doing a visual performance.

In contradiction to the stated performance intent, which sought to give girls a place where their voices could be heard, the girls were scolded when they expressed themselves by acting outside the performance plan. They were told to do as they were instructed. One of the local artist-volunteers expressed concern with this. Because she was the adult director in the concrete corner, it was her job to tell the girls to "get back on their buckets because the appearance is chaos" (in conversation, July 1997). When a new girl wanted to move from the buckets to tables, and asks if her group could move, the volunteer felt torn between her own values and her directions. She told me that "for this work, it professed to give the girls a voice – to be heard –and they were not. It did not occur" (in conversation, July, 1997). The girls did not have power to act. The power and control remained with the director. Irwin (1995) tells us that "Power over others is filled with concepts such as compliance, fear, and conflict, while sharing power with others is often characterized through collaboration, community, and mutuality" (p. 132). This is well illustrated by the described experiences of some people involved in the performance. Irwin also notes that "an emphasis upon having power over others, which breeds authoritarianism, regulations, and control, will only diminish the other person(s)" (p. 15). Again, we can see evidence of this conflict as a result of the control the artist maintained over the performance.

Voice and Empowerment

Sue McGinty (1999) asks whether "we privilege the powerful with the right to determine whose story is acceptable? Do teachers' or administrators' perceptions have primacy over the young women's stories" (p. 15)? Within Turning Point, girls freely expressed their opinions. It provided a safe environments where they could have more meaningful conversations than they felt they could elsewhere (Int.: Frieda 23.4 & 9.3; Int.: Juliet, 8.1; 1.2a, 5.1, 17.4; Int.: Chaara, 6.2). Ultimately, participants in the performance, and in this study wanted to be heard. They felt what they had to say was important, and they wanted people to take notice and listen to what they had to say. They wanted to challenge the audience's preconceptions about the way they see and think

about young women, and to make them more aware of who these young women were, and what they were about (Int.: Frieda, 14.3; Int.: Audrey, 11.1; 12.1 Int.: Hidegarde, 13,1; Int.: Emily, 6.1, 8.1; Int.: Juilet, 9.1; Int.: Nick, 6.4; Int.: Alix, 5.3). Janelle Holmes and Elaine Leslau Silverman's (1992) survey of Canadian young women also find that "over and over, young women call out for ties with people who will listen to them with respect and offer them support. They yearn for wisdom and sympathy, for 'anyone who is willing to ...talk to us, and who really cares', as one young woman wrote" (p. 90).

Garoian (1999) tells us that the purpose of Lacy's art is to "make public the voices of those who are not heard" (p. 129). This is indeed precisely what Turning Point and Under Construction claimed. When young women were solicited to participate in Under Construction they were told that they would be heard by the public. "Young Women, Speak Your Mind!!!" the handout invitation told them. They were told what to wear, and what not to wear (mostly for safety reasons, ie: no heels, sandals, or platforms). They were told that they would sit and talk to each other in small groups about topics from a selection of provided topics. "The audience is interested in what you have to say. they'll listen!!!!!" (1997, Under Construction brochure/permission slip).

Chaara told me that she found some of Under Construction hypocritical as she felt that they were told what their issues were supposed to be. She says that they were told that they should have strong opinions about some things that they in fact may not have (Int.: Chaara, 4.1). Other participants felt that performance should have been more focused on young women's images and ideas. The issue of hypocrisy was the fact that very few audience members ever heard what the young women were saying during the performance. Participants noted that the performance seemed to be more for the girls and those close to the project than the general public (Int.: Nick, 4.2). Clausen's final report also notes the audience frustration with not being able to hear the girls narratives. The forum for speaking and listening was anticipated by both participants and audience. Elizabeth Hayes (2000) tells us:

> Some women may have few opportunities to speak their minds in a relationship
> without feeling the need to censor their ideas and feelings. Attentive and
> supportive listeners, through their responses, can help women find their voices –
> by affirming those voices, asking questions to draw out voice, and prompting

reflections on what has been voiced. Through dialogue, women may provide each other with models for voicing self that challenge limitations fostered by social and cultural prohibitions. (p. 101)

Many of the young women told me that they felt they had found their voices during Turning Point. They identified their experiences in the project as indeed turning points in their lives. When I spoke with these young women, it was hard for me to imagine that they had ever been shy, or fearful of speaking publicly (Int.: Frieda, 13,4; Letter: Audrey, 1.2; Int.: Juliet, 5.2, 17.4). They exuded a wonderful youthful confidence and positive focus on the project. They claimed to have gained self esteem and confidence (Int.: Chaara, 9.2; Int.: Nick, 3.3). They were happy to have been involved in the project and many were disappointed to see it finish (Letter: Audrey 2.2; Letter, Chaara, 1.1). Often the young women told me of their many new experiences in Turning Point, including talking with the media, and leading groups. I need to keep this in mind amid the contradictions within Under Construction. The experiences of these young women changed their lives. They were happy to be there, and many have gone on to lives in the arts and in activism.

We need to listen to what these young women told us through their narratives. They felt silenced, they felt ignored, and yet they felt what they had to say had value. These young women's perceptions of their experiences have been well acknowledged by feminist researchers and educators. Patti Lather (1995) states that "the overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and the *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal and social position" (p. 295). Distortion of the young women's experiences occurred in the performance's representation of their voices where there is the highlighting some events and silencing others, all framed by someone other than themselves.

For some of the participants, having a voice meant having the confidence to speak your mind. Some participants claimed to have found their voices during their time in Turning Point. But what happened to those young women who dropped out of the project, like the one who didn't want to share her painful personal experiences with a bunch of 'yuppies'? I was impressed that she expressed this in her sketchbook, but I was sorry that she didn't stay in the project and pose these issues to the larger group.

At this point, we need to consider how the voices and images of the participants were portrayed, as well as to hear how these young women viewed themselves.

Representation: Medium and Message

My perceptions about the young women in <u>Turning Point</u> were challenged during the project and this study. They seemed very confident, articulate, and analytical. Small talk stayed at school. Naturally, I was surprised when their anti-feminist stances came out. I was glad that at least they felt empowered enough to speak freely about this topic without any fear of reprisal. Though the young women had differing views about feminism, most of them viewed it as a negative thing. This is surprising, given that early on in <u>Turning Point</u>, (January, 1996), many of the core girls attended a weekend workshop that focused on the media's portrayal of women. Workshop participants analysed magazine ads and talked about how the ads made them feel and consider what they could do about it. A taped conversation following the workshop reveals how uncomfortable some of the young women were talking about feminism.

One young woman described a discussion that she had with her parents, sister and her sister's boyfriend. They had been talking about feminists, the young woman said to the interviewer[3]:

> Young woman: I hadn't much education about that before and here I am talking about that with my parents. It was a real awkward situation, I guess you could say. Once I realised what I was doing, my parents were a little taken back at the amount of knowledge that I had. I guess they didn't know about this weekend; I guess that I didn't know that this weekend would get into stuff like that.
>
> Interviewer: How does it make you feel?
>
> Young woman: I don't know if it makes me feel more powerful.
>
> Interviewer: If you could tell me in the best sense of the word 'feminist' what would that mean?
>
> Young woman: I would want to be someone who had a lot of knowledge about what the word meant and what I could do about it and who would actually take it seriously. Me, being the kind of person that I am sort of really shy about topics like that, wouldn't talk about things like that in public. But we could make choices that not only affect us but other people, smart choices. And it would be our personal choice, not everyone else's. It means to be respected, by not only men, but other women too. I would like to be treated equally as men, even though

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[3] This tape is part of <u>Turning Point's</u> archives, I do not know the identity of the interviewer nor the interviewee in this excerpt.

I'm not a man. I feel that I may be in some ways equal and in some ways better. In some ways not as good. But I have the right to have respect too. (archive tape: January workshop, '96)

When I first listened to this tape, I had to check the date for the decade. It is hard to believe that women's issues and the portrayal of women in the media would be seen as such a difficult, if not taboo topic. Almost four decades ago, Marshall McLuhan (1964) told us:

> Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they're used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. The "content" of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or speech. (p. 32)

Everyone has heard McLuhan's famous quote that "the medium is the message". Yet, a discussion of this concept is missing in Under Construction. While the young women participants were examining the mass media's portrayal of women, they overlooked the portrayal of young women in the performance, until it was over. It is not only their omission of analysis that concerns me, but the level of reflexivity as practiced by the artistic director. How is it possible that the image presented to the audience, is controlled by the artistic director, and yet the issues at the heart of the 'content' remain true to the young women? McLuhuan tells us that this separation is not possible. The medium inherently conveys a message, regardless of the 'intended' content. In this next section of the chapter I explore the representation of participating young women, how they viewed themselves, individually and as a group; how they view other women; and how they were portrayed in Turning Point and in Under Construction. It is paramount that these two aspects of the project remain distinct. Although they were connected, they had very different functions.

Reflections of Self – Opinions of Others

Suzanne Lacy is well known for her feminist stance in her activist art productions. One of the basic assumptions that I held going into the Turning Point project was that it

was a feminist[4] art project, and that <u>Under Construction</u> was a feminist art piece. These projects dealt with issues of women's voice, power, position, empowerment and community. Yet, a huge portion of the central participants told me in their words that there was no way that they were feminists. The fact that most of the girls considered feminism another "F" word, caused me a fair amount of distress. Now what is a good feminist researcher supposed to say to that? *Yes you are! You will see, it's not what you think. This is just a phase you'll grow out of.* This situation posed a complex problem for me.

Although the nature of contemporary feminism in relation to youth wasn't a question I intended investigating – it certainly was one that I had to pursue. Through writing this thesis, I have had to consider my own feminist stance and wonder about what is it about basic feminist premises that alienate our youth? This issue is not limited to this study, but has been found in other current research dealing with feminist pedagogy. Irwin (1997) describes her experience when introducing the principles of feminist pedagogy to university education students "I find it fascinating to introduce educators to literature on gender issues for the first time, watching them grapple with the ideas and issues, abandon outdated stereotypes of feminists, and recognize that the principles of feminism are often personally held (even though there often remains a refusal to be identified as a feminist)" (p. 248). This description reassured me during my reflections on this study about the lack of overt acceptance of a feminist title. The young women in my <u>Turning Point</u> study may in-fact agree with feminist principles –in general, but may not ever define themselves as feminists. They still held onto their stereotypes, and bought into the mass media's portrayal of feminists.

At times I found myself slipping into a big sister type of role trying to pass off their discontent with feminist identities. *Oh – they will grow out of this, then they will see. Why must they too be hurt, disempowered before they can find their strength and get with the program. Healing is such a long process. This seemed like a lot of pain and*

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[4]Although I did not find the term *feminist* used to describe <u>Turning Point</u> in its planning documents, the descriptions of its goals can be identified as reflecting a feminist stance. The project highlighted the ways women form relationships, supported the voices of female youth, and used "art and community action to forge a strong and positive identity in Vancouver female adolescents, model collective action..." (Turning Point Rationale, 1996).

time wasted on something that can be nurtured through a mentoring relationship rather than taught through power-relations or through a response to power relations. I held back my advice. I chose to simply ask more questions in hope that they would find their own answers.

Numerous media outlets were contacted throughout the duration of the <u>Turning Point</u> project. In an interview with Vancouver Echo journalist, a vocal long-time <u>Turning Point</u> participant, Joyce Rosario is quoted as saying that <u>Turning Point</u> is not a feminist group. "'It alienates us and puts us in another stereotype," she said. "They think of short-haired dykes and women who hate men. We're not here to bash anyone'" (Braverman, 1997, p.11).

I took note of these sentiments time and time again throughout the project. These were young women who wanted to breakdown the stereotypes that the general public has about them and their peers. But where did they get their stereotypes of feminists? I wasn't determined to use the term *feminist* in my discussions with participating girls during my study. Rather than discussing right away the 'f-word' and all it's semiotic baggage, I conversed with the girls about the actions and attitudes that they felt strongly about in relation to the project and invariably to their lives. <u>Turning Point</u> dealt extensively with the thoughts, experiences and attitudes of youth.

What did the girls think it meant to be a feminist? When I asked one participant if she had ever been involved in any project that focused on women's issues, she was much like the other girls in that <u>Turning Point</u> was her first experience. "I haven't done any of that really. This is the first one. I am kind of against *Feminism,* which is weird because I am female," Emily surprised me. So I asked her to tell me what she thought feminism was in her own definition. "It has bad connotations, let's put it that way, because it seems so extreme. It is a very extremist term and it's like when I think of *feminists*, I think of wild women out in the street with these "No Abortion" signs and arguing for the right to walk bare-breasted. You know what I mean? But this, I don't find it feminist, because it's not a bunch of women who believe in one side of an issue. We believe in all kinds of different things. It's kind of a celebration of being teenage girls rather than saying "I want this or that."

This was one of my first interviews. From then on I was prepared for this anti-feminist sentiment from the girls. It led me into a stream of questioning about who they were, and who were their women role-models. *Were their mothers not feminists, did they too think that it was just another 'f-word'? Do they think that it is an out dated idea that is no longer relevant, do they think that feminists aren't mothers? Or are these girls just rebelling against their mothers and their viewpoints?*

In each interview, whether it was with a participating girl, a mentoring professional woman, or an organizer, I asked about their experiences working within a woman focused or feminist type of environment.

The organizers, and other women volunteers, for the vast majority, had worked or volunteered within a women focused environment. However, for the participating girls, Turning Point was often their very first girl/woman focused experience. Juliet had an English Honours teacher that had strong feminist views and tried to bring in the work of women into their English class. Nick was involved in an all women club that held fund raising activities to assist starving women around the world. These two young women were the exception.

The majority of the girls did not have women focused activities, or studies in their school experiences. Female content within a school curriculum was something that these girls would have welcomed. The young women in Turning Point sought to be a part of a female focused project. Female content is all but absent in school experiences described by the participating girls, again pointing to the invisibility of the female experience. We know that content that includes a female perspective is available, yet is still not equitably presented in our schools. My discussions with the young women led me to wonder where the priorities in our schools have been placed? I am not suggesting that we are looking at overtly sexist agendas, but perhaps more at an unintentional bias that does not reflect the actions and contributions of women in our histories, arts, sciences, and general growth of our society.

I fell into the research trap of keeping quiet about my insights to the girls' narratives during our interviews and discussions. My motivation was not to influence their opinions. I sought their honest opinions, not to change them. If their opinions were to change, I had hoped that it would have been from their own considerations. I asked

more questions in response to their statements as an attempt to encourage reflection. However, now I realize that a deeper engagement with issues that both participants and I felt strongly about, could have been mutually beneficial (Kirsch, 1999).

I did reveal some of my own opinions was in regards to my feminist stance. The young women in my study were adamantly *not feminists,* I adamantly am. I probed for their understanding of what feminism meant to them. On occasion, I identified myself as a feminist (when I felt that it was not too controversial). I did not fit their anti-male, anti-family, anti-feminine –feminist stereotype. It was as though I was the exception and not the norm. I was torn to not alienate them and once again become a judgemental adult picking a part their opinions. First and foremost, I was there to listen to them, honour their voices, and give them the audience they sought.

Zines – Self-expression

When we work with the intimate stories of peoples' lives, we have to remember what the goal is. It should not be to sensationalize their stories, or to objectify these young women yet once again. But to provide them with a forum in which they can speak, and where others will listen. We also must be aware that some youth find their own forums for expression, that is, outside of our adult cultural experience. Mary Kearney (1998) tells us that "the increasing number of culturally productive female youth in our society indicates that more and more girls are successfully resisting dominant ideologies of gendered and generational subjectivities by telling their *own* stories of female adolescence. The work of these girls, diverse as it may be, requires scholars of youth culture to re-examine the ways in which we discuss and represent female adolescents and their specific cultural experiences" (p. 298).

Zines produced by the young women in Turning Point, offered a place for personal expression. They also used the zines as a recruitment tool. They produced three zines between October, 1996, and March 1997. The Under Construction program, also took on the look of a zine. The zines included visual deconstruction of media images and text, clipped cartoons, and advertising from the 1950s. They also included games, word puzzles, as well as their own drawings, poetry, reflections, and a drawing contest. The girls used readers' submissions in their subsequent zines. The theme of the third issue *courage* was hot off the press the day of the Drive hand-painting performance.

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Conversations that day stemmed from this topic. *Riot grrl* zine *Bikini Kill #2* (in Kearney, 1998) claims that female youth "must take over the means of production in order to create our own meaning" (p. 298). Kearney tells us that if "scholars involved in the field of girls' studies desire to keep current with the state of female youth and their cultural practices, we must expand the focus of our analyses to include not only texts produced *for* girls by adult-run mainstream culture industries, but also those cultural artefacts created *by girls*" (p. 256). It is not sufficient for us to look at mass media representation of youth, we need to look to youth themselves to find understanding about who they are, and what their concerns are. It would appear then, that it is also not efficient to look at adult run productions, or events in order to learn about the concerns of youth. If we want to hear the voices of young women, we need to look to those cultural productions in which the girls themselves are in control.

<u>Representation –Turning Point</u>

The images and stories presented in <u>Turning Point</u> were negotiated between the artist and participating girls. When public hand-painting events occurred, the aesthetic was decided by Lacy, though, the girls had a fair amount of independence for their performance on The Drive, where all conversations were live –un-edited. During these events <u>Turning Point</u> girls had the opportunity to meet new young women, and share stories while painting their hands. Periodically, these new girls joined <u>Turning Point</u> to participant in the final push toward <u>Under Construction</u>. In each of these hand-painting events, the public audience was permitted and encouraged to listen in on the girls' "private" conversations.

Diversity and individuality was central to these performances and yet a common aesthetic was chosen for them. They all sat at identical tables, with identical tablecloths, wearing identical t-shirts. This clearly identifies the girls as a group, but again breaks down the goal of diversity. The girls didn't wanted to be painted with all the same brush –they wanted people to see that they were individuals who were working together to be heard. Not unlike Vancouver's annual Solstice parades, where everyone in procession carries lanterns that they made themselves. All individually made –each lantern is unique. It is the expressed diversity that makes the procession come alive.

Representation –Under Construction

The images, the sound-track, and the video representation of <u>Turning Point</u>, were not decided by participating girls. Though they were consulted about images, they had no real power to determine how they would be represented. In fact, the discussion, or analysis of this representation, did not enter the narrative dialogue of the pre-recorded soundtrack. The irony of the homogeneity of the performance is astounding. How can this be seen as representing the diversity of the lives of these young women? How can it ever be claimed that their voices were heard when someone else was in total control of the selection of the sound-bites, framing, and overall presentation? The artistic intention was empowerment, and giving voice to the young women, and yet, Lacy took away that power to decide how they would be represented and how their stories would be told. If we knew nothing else of <u>Under Construction</u>, we could read on a Suzanne Lacy focused web-site[5] that

> Two hundred teenage girls participated in a public performance entitled Under Construction that culminated the project. Taking place on a live construction site of a building in downtown Vancouver, the lives and often hidden experiences of young women were explored before an audience of several thousand people. The girls spoke frankly about their lives, bringing up issues that now, twenty years after the inception of the feminist movement, are still pervasive and destructive. Accompanied by a soundtrack, the event was recorded by television and is the subject of a 45 minute documentary. (http://www.suzannelacy.com, December, 13, 2000)

This statement is more closely connected to the intent of the performance rather than what the girls claimed to have happened. Again, media is manipulating the message, and creating yet another cultural myth. Besides the generous estimation of the number of girls participating and the attending audience, we need to look at the stories that were told. No one can tell you what was actually said except the young women. The documentary uses the soundtrack for the segments that pertain to the performance. We don't know that the girls spoke frankly about their lives. But we do know that the soundtrack was not a simple accompaniment, it was the main feature. This was the only way that most of the audience ever heard any of the narratives.

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[5]This site provides brief descriptions of Lacy's work, and provides her personal email for the site contact. On this site, the date given to <u>Under Construction</u>, is 1998, rather than, its actual performance day 1997.

THE TURNING POINT PROJECT/UNDER CONSTRUCTION 1998 Vancouver

Collaboration with Barbara Clausen, video by Darlene Haber

The Turning Point Project was a two year collaboration of girls and adults that sought to identify and enhance the public voice of Vancouver teenage girls. This large-scale art and community development project had a core of 30 young women from diverse backgrounds who worked with Lacy to design workshops, public appearances, media reports, and "hand painting events" to bring young women's perspectives to the public.

Two hundred teenage girls participated in a public performance entitled Under Construction that culminated the project. Taking place on a live construction site of a building in downtown Vancouver, the lives and often hidden experiences of young women were explored before an audience of several thousand people. The girls spoke frankly about their lives, bringing up issues that now, twenty years after the inception of the feminist movement, are still pervasive and destructive. Accompanied by a soundtrack, the event was recorded by television and is the subject of a 45 minute documentary.

http://www.suzannelacy.com/projects/turning.html

(I constructed the above image by layering images and text from the listed website. This was the entire text relating to Turning Point and Under Construction, and the only image used to describe the event. I felt that by repeating and layering the same image it provides the illusion of full picture.)

It was only at the very end of the performance that the final audience group was able to go down onto the performance floor and listen to what these young women were saying. However, we have to look at the fact that they had been sitting for nearly two hours by this point, and had likely gone over all the issues for discussion as presented on their

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topic cards. The girls themselves have a different interpretation about what was discussed.

The director girls noted that many of the girls complained about being uncomfortable, and wanting to change what they were doing. They were talking about why they were there in the first place (CG. in conversation, December 13, 2001). Some of the girls felt that it didn't matter what they talked about as no one was listening to them anyway (Int.: Chaara, 12.1). Yet, some of the girls were thrilled to be a part of a big public event where the attention was on them. There was a very positive public turn out, even though the event was on Father's Day. There was potential in this performance for the voices of the young women to be heard. Some of the girls felt that their issues were heard through the soundtrack, while others felt that they were led to these concerns by the older women (Int.: Elizabeth, 10.1; Int.: Chaara, 3.1).

<div align="center">Considerations of Textual Representation.</div>

I have had to consider the ways in which I have included the narratives of study participants in this document. Though this is a multi-vocal text, it is one that is single authored (Kirsch, 1999). It is the kind of text where "the author's voice recedes into the background as she highlights the voices and views of others in her text" (Kirsch, p. 68). Yet, the author remains in control as she "scripts, choreographs and produces the voices appearing on the page" (Kirsch, p. 68). In this text, my words are primarily in the forefront, and in sections recede for other voices. I wondered whether this does –in fact – make my model of representation any different from the model of representation used in Under Construction where the events were scripted and choreographed? There may be similarities, however there are significant differences. Lacy claimed to provide voice and empowerment for participating young women and an audience for their stories. Yet, some of the young women spoke for themselves, which were then recorded and edited to represent the whole group. Some of the young women felt empowered through their experience in Turing Point, and yet most of the girls to perform in Under Construction didn't even know what the event was supposed to be about. In the performance, the girls moved to directions (hence all of the directors, under the artistic director). Unlike happenings, there was no spontaneity, no chance, or individual expression to come

forward. When individuality was attempted, it was stopped to avoid the appearance of chaos. Their power to act independently was taken away when they decided to participate in the performance.

In regards to the research, I transcribed taped interviews to form sections of this report. I edited their narratives based on their feedback, and included segments that I saw necessary. I sought readability and I wanted study participants to be able to recognize themselves on the pages of my thesis. I didn't claim that I could give them empowerment, as I believe it is not mine to give, but inherently theirs to embrace. In this study, I hoped they would have a chance to consider their lives and experiences, speak for themselves about their feelings, opinions and memories. I offered an audience who would read what they had to say. I don't claim that individuals represent all of the girls in the performance. But I do claim that each of those girls who participated in the study has her voice represented in this text. I sent transcripts to each of the participants and asked for their edition of their work. I respect their comments and included any changes they sought. It is in these ways that I believe my model of research and the artistic model from Under Construction differ.

I question artistic models which have intensions of representing and empowering others. As a feminist artist, I argue, Lacy falls into some similar dilemmas as a feminist researcher. We both have projects with feminist goals of enhancing the lives of women, raising awareness of their situations. Lacy claims to desire to empower these young women and give them *voice*. I argue that this claim to *give voice*, comes with the assumption that their voice is hers to give. Voice, I believe, is acquired through a personal process of discovery. It is not something that one can give to another. To *give voice* also refers to a "process of naming of experiences that were previously unarticulated" (Hayes, 2000, p. 92).

There were opportunities in Turning Point, but absent in Under Construction, for participating young women to develop their voices. "The term development suggests a process of evolution, of gradual unfolding with voice taking on different forms as it develops. A woman may need to learn more about herself in order to express herself more fully and truthfully. In turn, as she develops a voice and listens to her own words, a

woman may learn about herself, and this new knowledge may further contribute to changes in her identity" (Hayes, p. 93).

In this model of artistic practice, the artist provides a venue and audience for participants' voices, only so long as the artist remains in control of how the voices are edited and framed. If the artist controls and the medium, whose message is really heard?

While considering this question, I began to experiment with text and images, to express my own understanding. Initially I used the Turning Point hand logo on a black background, on which I laid text. I ran the logo through a Photoshop filter. I played with the fading of the text and the image. I printed out one copy. I then changed the background colour, and printed it on translucent paper. The blurring effect of simply changing the paper, the medium, was potent. When I changed the background from black to green, one line of text changed to red. I decided not to change it, but wasn't sure why it was the only line to change. I find that as an art educator, I analyze thoughts visually as well as textually. The computer is an interesting tool for these types of explorations.

As I neared the end of this section, I picked up a copy of Marhall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects.* I have to admit that I was in a bit of a hurry when I grabbed the book from the shelf, and thought that I had found McLuhan's earlier work *The Medium is the Message.* I was happily surprised with my error. McLuhan & Fiore (1967) tell us:

> Learning, the educational process, has long been associated with only the glum. We speak of the 'serious' student. Our time presents a unique opportunity for learning by means of humor –a perceptive or incisive joke can be more meaningful than platitudes lying between two covers.

> 'The Medium is the Massage' is a look-around to see what's happening. It is a collide-oscope of interfaced situation. (p. 10)

Their text is an engaging collection of images, text and text as images. This published juxtaposition of images and the written word came to me at a most interesting time. McLuhan & Fiore (1967) also tell us over the course of five pages that "Art is anything you can get away with" (p. 132). The text is broken over the pages, delivered like a punch-line, positioned over the image of a sculpture of a huge hollow woman, being probed by viewers.

If the medium is the message and she owns the medium.....what happens to my message

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Reflections: Implications for Future Art and Education Practices

If artists are going to engage in educative activities, they must analyze their work in educative terms as well as any other terms that they have set out in their artistic intent. Artists who claim to work outside modernist boundaries need to incorporate a new set of criteria for evaluating their work. It is not sufficient to create a spectacle with a group and not to evaluate the full ramifications of the event. In this case the artist intended to empower performance participants and to give them voice and an audience.

I believe that the learning that happened in Turning Point could be described as *curriculum*–learning a course of study, as well as *currere* –running the course; where learners reported of their learning experiences. Under Construction, however, was neither. "Unlike conventional educational discourses and practices that define curricula as preexisting designs, courses of study, or master plans that limit students' experiences to cultural reproduction, the reflexive process of *currere* enables them to participate in its creation, to experience and critique its structural conditions from the perspective of their cultural backgrounds" (Garoian, 1999, p. 130). Learning happens when there is understanding of one's experience. For those who were engaged in the process of Turning Point, Under Construction was simply a continuation of the established project (albeit with inherent contradictions to project goals). For the majority of Under Construction participants, whose only experience in the project was the performance, it seems that meaning was lost. They did not come any closer to learning about themselves, becoming a part of a community, or even learning about performance art. Janet Wolff (1991) has reminded artists who engage in cultural intervention that "the appropriate methods of cultural intervention can only be developed in conjunction with a correct perception of the prospective audience" (p. 95). Unfortunately, Under Construction's audience was no more prepared for the performance than were the new girls who were performing.

There are the obviously missed opportunities already discussed in this chapter: voice promised and not heard, stereotypes left challenged, expression of lack of diversity. Beyond these, there had been a hope that the community at large would gain a broader understanding of community and performance art. Artists in Vancouver had an opportunity to work together and truly collaborate on this project. However, many were

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used as enthusiastic volunteers where their artistic experiences and abilities were not used. There was also the opportunity to further engage in critical discussion of new genre public art, and checking the success of the project within itself –to exercise reflexivity. There was no comment within the art performance about its site, nor its metaphors. Where is the discussion about the choice of hand-painting as an activity to assist the framing of the participants' tales? The hand-painting activities created private moments between two girls, sharing a conversation or silence while they painted each other's hands. The voice they expressed was one used in an intimate moment, a private conversation between two peers, not with the public that had been claimed.

Congruent Practices

Collaboration in performance art projects holds immense potential for being sites of learning. But simply engaging in them doesn't ensure a meaningful experience for participants or audience. If we sift through the contradictions, we see a project with the potential to meet the goals it claimed. But in order to achieve this, the project needed to ensure that the process was congruent with the goals. Collaborators need to share authorship –and engage in a truly democratic process. Modernist artistic control and sole authorship are incongruent with the goals of new genre public art where the emphasis is on a connected aesthetic and empowering those less powerful (Gablik, 1993). Feminist pedagogy can also inform future success in collaborative art practices, where mutual trust, and shared authority in collaborations, community building , caring, listening, social action, and an acknowledgement of difference in female experiences are integrated into the process and the product (Irwin, 1999; Taylor, 1995; Weiler, 1995a). We need to actively listen in order to fully engage in collaborations –where we seek connection with our environment and one another; where participants and audience listen and are listened to (Irwin, 1999).

As a performance art project, we need to look at the related pedagogical criteria for performance art (Garoian, 1999). Performance art pedagogy, in theory, could bring a performance like Under Construction closer in line with its stated goals.

> Performance art pedagogy represents multiple strategies for learning and expression including the nondiscursive language of the body. It functions as a pedagogical site where brainstorming, improvisation, and experimentational strategies for learning, creating, and critiquing are equally as significant as those

that are academically determined. Finally, performance art pedagogy recognizes cultural difference as a vital resource to the development of a broader understanding of reality where participants work toward the goals of critical citizenship and democracy. In doing so, it is performed within the contentious zones of culture and where it confronts the face of cultural domination. (Garoian, 1999, p. 67)

Collaborative art practices that have emancipatory intent need to consider the range of discussion around emancipatory pedagogy. Those that initiate emancipatory projects need to develop skills of self-critique "of a reflexivity which will keep us from becoming impositional and reifiers ourselves" (Lather, 1995, p. 301). Patti Lather also reminds us that an emancipatory intent does not guarantee an emancipatory outcome. Yet I am concerned that those who are not yet aware of the implications or meaning of emancipation, may confuse the title for the deed. "Our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail" (Lather, p. 301). Such reflexivity can lead us toward a paradigm, and modes of practice which no longer rely on the frame of modernist aesthetics to empower those with whom we collaborate. Such a methodology of artistic practice would be reflexive, critical and egalitarian.

Performance art pedagogy holds some interesting and potent guidelines, yet we may need to look to more sources to find examples of performance art as curriculum text. When looking at exemplars for new pedagogy or theory, particularly, those that claim emancipatory intent, we need to be sure that the voices of those at the centre of the project are heard.

Collaboration is a powerful tool in bringing people together. Collaborative art production can provide a place for learning through experiences, where participants engage in *currere*. Research, possibly collaborative research, would be a viable method to inquire about these practices. Lather (1986) tells us that "emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes" (p. 259). If one were so invited, perhaps a praxis oriented study combined with art production, might bring new understandings to the way we engage in collaborative reflexive art production, and education research.

When artists, researchers and others work with and for participants, where participants' personal narratives are the content of the art piece or project, they need to be respectful and inclusive when considering the projects intentions and actions. We need to share our reasons for speaking for others with our audience (Kirsch, 1999). When we include the voices of those other than our own, Gesa Kirsch (1999) asks that we give our audiences access to our processes that shaped our performance, or text. When we single author a text we still need to be accountable to our audiences and especially to those who contribute to our texts.

Again we hear the call from our female youth that they are invisible and silenced. More focus needs to be made on this call for attention. Art educators, researchers, and artists who work with our youth need to take care to not overlook the concerns of our female youth and to superimpose our personal or collective feminist agendas. We can respond to these young women's narratives by opening our artistic and educational practices to include them in our processes. We can provide environments where they can feel the security that is necessary to discover and embrace their own voices and the freedom to express themselves in personally meaningful ways.

<u>Pause</u>

I have selected this time to pause in this inquiry. Though I believe that there is still more to be done. As a researcher and an educator it is an area in which I have great interest. I know that I have grown considerably as a researcher through this process, and I am grateful for the opportunity that has been provided to me. I thought going into this research that I was a good listener. Perhaps I was. I know now that I am a better listener. Because of the nature of this study, and of this text, I could rewrite this final reflection everyday as I think about what I have learned about the inquiry, about the nature of inquiry and about myself as a researcher.

I began this study in order to understand the production process of <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u>. I also sought to understand and interpret the experiences of individuals involved in what was supposed to be an empowering art project and performance. I hadn't anticipated that either the project or performance wouldn't have been as empowering as first claimed. However, I believe that I was flexible in my

approach to this inquiry to accommodate the evolution of the project. <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u> were complex and full of contradictions, which complicated both researching and writing about this study.

I spoke to my friend C.G . during the time I was writing this last section of text. I asked her about her experience with the concrete pavers, as I had already heard others' recollections of their experiences with their production. There were about 60, three foot squares, some with handprints, some without. C.G. told me that she saw the handprint concrete pavers just south of Prospect Point, in Stanley Park. She had found out where they were a couple of years after the project, when she ran into another <u>Turning Point</u> girl. She also told me how some of the girls had created *cool* patterns by interlocking their fingers in the concrete prints. She even found the paver with her own handprint with her initials engraved in the concrete beside it. She told me that though the pavers had begun to wear with time, they looked gorgeous all the same. I was relieved to have this doubt enter into my understanding of the performance.

Through re-examining my raw data, I know that there is a multiplicity of truths that could be uncovered. There is more to research in this project than I have encompassed in this study. More possible topics include: teen interpretation of media and media representation; girls and voice; school curricula and female experience; youth and leadership; creative performances and political action; and feminist youth voices. Though huge and somewhat unwieldy, I find the raw data for this project quite wonderful. The youthful perspectives on their lives and on their futures are both interesting and moving. It is ironic that by the time this document has an audience, the young women from <u>Turning Point</u>, will be one of us –*older girls*. Yet I believe what they had to say at the time is still relevant and meaningful. They were at a turning point in their lives. The desire for young women, like them, to be heard will continue. Our acts of listening should not be to simply alleviate this desire, but to listen to what they have to say.

Recently, while out on a family walk on Saturday afternoon we stopped in at the Roundhouse Community Centre, to escape chill of the winter wind that was sweeping in across False Creek. Graham and the boys headed straight for the games room for a round of air hockey. Chloe and I went for a stroll through the Centre to see what was

happening. I stopped to check out the bulletin board. A plain white notice grabbed my eyes. It was the small <u>Turning Point</u> hand logo that pulled me back in time. It has been nearly four years since I had seen a public notice for anything having to do with <u>Turning Point</u>. There had been a public viewing of the <u>Turning Point</u> and <u>Under Construction</u> video only two days earlier. It was advertised as being its first public showing. Though I have watched the video privately many times, I was surprised that it had been shown publicly only now.

I thought back to the first time I saw a public showing of Suzanne Lacy's work. It was at the *Women In View Festival* in 1995. I was running late and had been flustered with my own lack of direction with getting to the appropriate venue. Out of breath I rushed through the doors of the Firehall Theatre. The woman inside stopped me. She looked at me and asked, "are you Suzanne Lacy?" Somewhat stunned, I replied "No…" I then asked "where do I go?"

Now, several years later, I am just beginning to know the answer to my question.

EPILOGUE: 2002

In June 1997, <u>Under Construction</u> was performed. The morning of the performance, girls congregated in the chapel of a nearby church. There they were asked to imagine where they hope to be in five years time.... It is now 2002 and five years have passed. Where are the girls now?

I called Barbara Clausen the other day. We talked about <u>Turning Point</u>. I commented on the time that had passed – wondering where all the girls are now. She told me that one of the girls was right there – her daughter. The three of us talked about organizing a <u>Turning Point</u> reunion and a blitz of zine making. We are thinking of June.

The work of art envisioned and constructed by the artist, Suzanne Lacey, was certainly a factor in this study, but more significant was the model of artistic production. The experiences of local organizers, volunteers and most importantly the participating young women were the central focus of this study. How educators and artists engage with participants in co-productions of art works can be influenced by their accountability to the local community – to one another. The community of women and cultural producers in <u>Turning Point</u> prevails in this thesis: they have vested interests in how their local art is constructed and perceived.

Suzanne Lacy brought a model of artistic construction to Vancouver. Over a two-year process, local organizers worked with young women, and with the artist, to implement a model for developing a major collaborative installation. By examining and critiquing this model of artistic practice rather the practices of the artist specifically, I have outlined issues that need to be confronted during future collaborative artistic practices. I plan to continue this dialogue with local cultural producers, thereby challenging and hopefully changing our current community-based art practices.

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Turning Point Project Condensed Timeline Culminating in the
Performance Entitled: *Under Construction*

1995

April
- Planning for *Turning Point* begins as New Performance Works Society (New Works) initiates the project.

May - October
- Suzanne Lacy, artistic director of *Turning Point* and *Under Construction*, conducted a training session on art for social change through the Vancouver Social Planning Department.
- Artistic director visits Vancouver four times, and meetings are held with: young women, local artists, educators, media professionals, youth workers and city staff working on the Civic Youth Policy.
- Turning Point Producers' Circle is formed – a mission statement and protocols are developed.

1996

January
- Crescent Beach weekend workshop: 30 young women with leaders: the artistic director along with, Sherry Bie, Shari Graydon, Pilar Riano, Susan Rome.

February – May
- Vancouver Art Gallery, ten open workshops in art and media literacy: leaders: Sherry Bie, Susan Rome.

August – September
- Production Planning Workshop at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design: 20 young women were paid for their contributions to an intensive two week workshop. Coorinating this workshop is Barbara Clausen and Heather Howe, producer and assistant producer. Workshop leaders were: artistic director along with Shari Graydon, Darlene Haber, Unique Holland, Pilar Riano.

October
- Regular weekly meetings began with the girls, local organizers producer, assistant producer and volunteers.
- The first of three zines was produced entirely by participating young women with some production assistance; hand painting was discussed for the first time.
- October 24, hand painting performance: Community Cultural Development Conference, Assembly of BC Arts Councils. Artistic producer was in Vancouver.

November
- November 30, Meeting with artistic director and participating girls.

December
- December 14, hand painting performance at Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden.
- Meeting with artistic director, producer and assistant producer with participating girls.
- Second zine produced.

1997

January
- January 18, planning meetings for the next recruitment event/ hand painting performance to be held on Commercial Drive. artistic director, producer, assistant producer and volunteers meet with participating girls.
- Performance site for *Under Construction* is confirmed at the *Residences on Georgia* construction site.

February
- February 23, workshops at Britannia Community Centre;
- Hand painting performance in 11 cafes along Commercial Drive as part of the 1997 Women in View Festival. Meeting with artistic director, producer, assistant producer and participating girls.
- Third zine is distributed during the Commercial Drive performance.

March
- Recording sessions for the soundtrack for *Under Construction*.

April
- April 5, volunteer meeting with the producer, assistant producer; key volunteers take on roles in the production team.
- April 19, large scale production meeting at the Roundhouse with artistic director, producer, assistant producer, participating girls and production team;
- preview a clip from the soundtrack.
- Weekly production meetings with local coordinators begin and continue until the performance date, June 15.

May
- Intense preparations for performance, artistic director stays in Vancouver for 3 weeks in May and the first two weeks in June.
- Coffee house and poetry reading as part of Vancouver Youth Week, at the Opening of the Roundhouse Community Centre.
- Production meetings and rehearsals which involve entire core production team.

June
- Meeting with artistic director, producer, assistant producer and participating girls and other key performance participants.
- Additional meetings including: team leader meetings, volunteer meetings and girl meetings.
- Rehearsals and technical walkthrough.
- Daily meetings for the two weeks prior to the final event including media event, painting hoarding and concrete mixing.
- **June 15, *Under Construction:* public performance event to culminate the *Turning Point* project.**

turning point

#1

FREE!
PLEASE PASS THIS ON... AND ON

It all started when...

One day I was in my art class, and my teacher approached me with this paper that explained this really cool project that some people were putting together, called "Turning Point". I was really interested and curious as to what it was all about, so I went to the first meeting.

I met some girls who were around my age (17 if you're wondering), from all over the city, and we all got along as though we'd known each other for years! Then thirty of us went to a weekend camp where they explained what we were all grouped together for. They talked about women's images in the media and they also got us to express ourselves about being young and confident. The whole project was really vague at the time, because we were the ones who were to organize what we were doing. That was in January of 1996.

Now we are still a group of thirty some-odd girls, and we've got tons of big social activist plans for the near future that we need help with! We've got some rough ideas for what we want to do, and there's still much room for development. So far, we've decided to paint hands in cafes on Commercial Drive to invite new girls into our project. We'll paint other's hands with henna, and tell them what we know of our project, and involve more girls. That's why we're making this 'zine — so we can recruit all you girls out there who need a stronger voice. If you're reading this and you're not a girl, *that's okay*, you can still enjoy our kewl 'zine, and you'll probably get a chance to join in on some of our plans too. I know this sounds really exclusive, but we really need to keep our focus. So please, if you're interested at all in what we're doing, then be sure to contact us at:

Turning Point
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             Fax.(604)872-7932
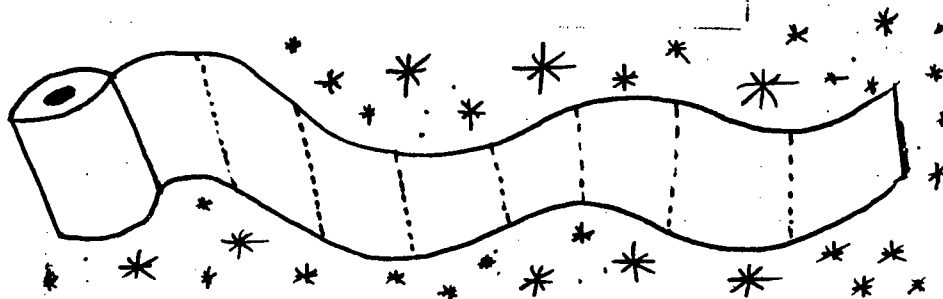
Cold Toilet Paper

Did you know that "Turning Point's" innitials also stand for "toilet paper"? Well, yes, they do. I discovered this when I was naming a file on my computer. I was going to name it "turn" or "point", but "toilet" seemed to be a bit more lively. Then, I named a file "paper", and then my last file ended up being "cold" because of something, I don't really remember why, but..... oh well. Doesn't "Cold Toilet Paper" sound kind of catchy? Kind of descriptive, you might say.