

## Chapter Three

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



**Image 11**

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

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

### **A/r/tography**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

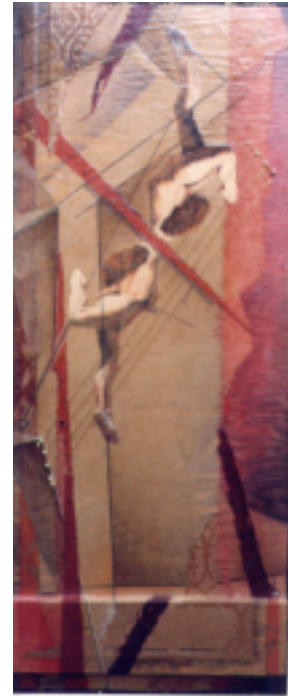
My art practice has uncanny similarities to the practice of surrealism. Many surrealist artists (Giorgio de De Chirico, Andre`Breton, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst among others) engaged, trance, free association, meditation, the double, ritual, psychoanalysis, and “the extraordinary space of the in-between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

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

challenged from my researcher and educator lens to explore these qualities within the art. The surrealist philosophical context assists situating my art within the a/r/tographic renderings. My art is *contiguously* placed within the unreal and the real (the surreal). I work with realist representations of the human body and locate it within the material element of wood or a non-sensical environment that is not confined by space, time or gravity (image 13). The relationship of the body and the ground is a contiguous one. As a collage artist who is constantly layering materials and images, the art evolves without preconception through responding to each new layer, each unfolding in present time. It is a *living inquiry*. In this way I am always working with *openings* into thresholds that can lead the art making into many different locations. *Metaphor* and *metonymy* surface in my art through archetypes and themes. These themes can drive a whole project. I worked on two major exhibitions exploring the modern archetype of Venus<sup>1</sup> (image 12) and her influence in the representation of women today. The feminist art of the 70's along with the surrealist art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reverberates through my art. Each of my art series, build upon and echo elements of past work. Finally, excess can be recognized in the representation of the body that refuses to be confined.

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



**Image 12 & 13**

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

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

## Anti-Pedagogy

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

I am drawn to Felman's<sup>2</sup> (1997) ideas about learning from non-authoritarian sources. She calls for acknowledgement of Freud's contribution to this issue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Enactment**

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

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

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

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

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

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



To assist holding the sacred space within the public gallery<sup>4</sup> that is part of an academic campus, I invited a small group of friends and family to a private pre-exhibition ritual. These invited friends were the first to witness and respond to the art with me/the artist present and witnessing their response. Their responses and the response of the two hundred plus people that I witnessed coming through the gallery space over the span of seven days, stretched my individual understanding of the art. A university peer shared that because of the subject matter (a woman's naked body) he would not have entered the gallery if I had not been present. He said having me present gave him permission to look at the art without fear of voyeurism. I witnessed women brought to tears in viewing the art and felt a deep respect from men and women who said little but nodded and said thank you as they left the gallery. This was a different and welcome response from "the art is beautiful" comments that I have most often heard in the past.

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

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<sup>4</sup> I was present in the gallery for the duration of the installation.

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

A/r/tography is not in possession of itself. It is in continual motion, ever learning. In the thesis writing component I write from the third space<sup>5</sup> that Stephanie Springgay (2003) alludes to with Merleau-Ponty's written image, "my body inserts itself between the two leaves of the world, which itself is inserted between the leaves of my body (1968, p. 264)" (p. 8). The elements of the a/r/tographical inquiry are not presented or cast together as fixed or linear. They are in an emergent stage that includes large gaps. Exposing the viewer/reader to the raw underside of a/r/tography through text and image, feels like a huge risk. Springgay's (2002) words give stability to my uncertainty.

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

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

## **Resistance/Retextured Writing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Image 14**

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

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

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

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

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

On a small wooden ledge

my large body sits poised ready yet afraid to write

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

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

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

The red, black and white colour motif of my costume echoes the “ancient colour representations of life/death that show up as significant in cultures around the world” (N. A. Jordan<sup>7</sup>, personal communication, May 2, 2004). Red, black and white are colours that are traditionally worn at funerals and weddings in many cultures. Within the metal containers are black and white documentary photographs of me in the forest writing on my body with menstrual blood and make-up pencils. I was compelled to exhibit these photos but did not want to give the viewer direct

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



**Image 15**

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

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



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

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

The creation of *Spinning Red Words on Wood* was a meditative, transcendent experience that felt like an important act of completion<sup>8</sup>. During its creation I

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



**Image 16**

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

listened to Sufi trance music, which deepened the experience for me. The double figures in the piece sit cross-legged in a kundalini yogic movement, spinning. They are in an environment of red-stained wood and inverted hand-written red words; stream of consciousness writing. A spiral of red thread inhabits the upper left portion of the piece, its tail trailing towards the spinning figures. On a small wooden ledge at the bottom of the piece lays a single crow feather its writing tip dipped in red paint. I have collected crow feathers the last few years. In some First Nations stories crows are the messengers of death. I hesitated adding the black feather to the art piece, as I was not clear on what it symbolized within the piece. The piece felt more to be an experience of the ecstatic, of life. Despite this, I chose to add the feather for its aesthetic qualities, recognizing and accepting its meaning as a messenger of death more fully only in the context of the gallery installation. I did not censor this uncanny object<sup>9</sup> in the art-making process, and in viewing it juxtaposed with my exposed body photographs, submerged in water without breath, the source of breath that had been blocked by the water returned in the looking up to view the art that hung above it. This installation piece and art image came to represent the descent (death) and return (resurrection) of my a/r/tographic journey. Death and loss co-appear alongside transformation and growth as markers of the cycle of life and learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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