

# Chapter Five

## Listening for Echoes: Collaboration, Ethics & Education



**Image 30**

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

## **Listening for Echoes II**

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

## **The Gift**

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

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

## Co-appearing Bodies

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

Returning to the thesis question, *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* this chapter extends toward a deepened discussion of a collaborative aesthetic<sup>1</sup> as part of my ethical feminist<sup>2</sup> art practice. In my first artist statement (1993) I wrote of my relationship to the art medium of wood.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Image 31**

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

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

### **Collaboration**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by the visioning artist who utilizes the contribution of the collaborators. This form of art can be found in Suzanne Lacy's collaborative community art (Garoian, 1999). Because of the power differentiation in partial collaborations it is important live an ethical feminist leadership role as the visioning artist. Judy Chicago in an interview with Dinah Dossor (as cited in Robinson (1987)) shares her thoughts on her attempt towards a feminist leadership. She wrote,

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

### **Relevancy**

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

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

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

### **Power Dynamics**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(pp. 28–29)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Witnessing and Testimony as Collaborative Ethics**

As the visioning artist I see my role as guide and witness. As guide I hold the space for the work of the project to be carried out. I do this by communicating, as best as I can, the parameters of a project and offer a supportive structure. I remain open to the flow of the process, which is fed by/with my collaborator(s) and their experience. As the witnessing artist, I receive the testimony of the collaborator. Roger I. Simon (n.d.) places the role of the witness as an inheritor of a gift<sup>3</sup>. He wrote:

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

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

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

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

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

(p. 4)

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



**Image 32**

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

## **Lost and Found: To find traces of her estrangement**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Taking on the thesis question: *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* I have evolved from the singular identity/role of artist to the plural identity/role of a/r/tographer<sup>4</sup>. I do not let go of my role as artist in this evolution, but add to it, with the roles of researcher, educator and writer. As an autoethnographic study I hope this thesis can, through its exposure of my practice, resonate with others who are artists that are educators or artists interested in their art as education.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full visual encounter with this journey see my website [www.barbarabickel.ca](http://www.barbarabickel.ca)

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

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

### *A/r/tography as Ritual*

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



death and transformation of my modern artist self to a/r/tographer self took place.

A/r/tography as ritual within this study called for a transformative re-integration of art, science and religion as well as *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis*.

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

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

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

*A Pedagogy of A/r/t*

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

I have found and cited several supportive forms of pedagogy within this thesis: feminist, transformative, psychoanalytic anti-pedagogy<sup>5</sup>. I believe these are important resistant forms of pedagogy that fit well within a/r/tography. The revolutionary form of anti-pedagogy does not operate from mastery but from the awareness of non-mastery or ignore-ance. It is a form of pedagogy that turns ignore-ance into an instrument of teaching. I can now articulate that I have gone through a process of becoming ever more conscious of my ignore-ance and limitations as an artist/researcher/teacher. I can now become an aware and useful educator.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Artist Education*

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

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

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

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

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

### *Underneath*

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

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