

**LIVING THE DIVINE SPIRITUALLY AND POLITICALLY:  
ART, RITUAL AND PERFORMATIVE/PEDAGOGY  
IN WOMEN'S MULTI-FAITH LEADERSHIP**

BARBARA ANN BICKEL

B.A., The University of Alberta, 1984  
B.F.A., The University of Calgary, 1992  
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2004

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## Abstract

In a world of increasing religious/political tensions and conflicts this study asks, what is the transformative significance of an arts and ritual-based approach to developing and encouraging women's spiritual and multi-faith leadership? To counter destructive worldviews and practices that have divided people historically, politically, personally and sacredly, the study reinforces the political and spiritual value of women spiritual and multi-faith leaders creating and holding sacred space for truth making and world making. An a/r/tographic and mindful inquiry was engaged to assist self and group reflection within a group of women committed to multi-faith education and leadership in their communities. The objectives of the study were: 1) to explore through collaboration, ritual and art making processes the women's experience of knowing and not knowing, 2) to articulate a curriculum for multi-faith consciousness raising, and 3) to develop a pedagogy and methodology that can serve as a catalyst for individual and societal change and transformation. The co-participants/co-inquirers (including the lead researcher as a member of the group) are fourteen women, who practice within eleven different religions and/or spiritual backgrounds, and who are part of a volunteer planning team that organizes an annual women's multi-faith conference (Women's Spirituality Celebration) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The aesthetic/ritual structure of the labyrinth served as a cross-cultural multi-faith symbol in guiding the dissertation, which includes three art installations and four documentary DVDs of the process and art. New understandings found in the study include: 1) the ethical sanctuary that a/r/tography as ritual enables for personal and collective change to take place within, 2) the addition of synecdoche to the renderings of a/r/tography, assisting a multi-dimensional spiral movement towards a whole a/r/tographic practice, 3) a lived and radically relational curriculum of philetics within loving community that drew forth the women's erotic life force energy and enhanced the women's ability to remember the power of the feminine aspect of the Divine, and 4) the decolonization of the Divine, art and education, which took place as a pedagogy of wholeness unfolded, requiring a dialectic relationship between restorative and transformative learning.



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## Glossary

**altar** – traditionally, an altar is a raised structure used to hold sacred religious objects for use in ceremonies. In women spirituality ritual circles, an altar is a central area that can hold a variety of objects that are significant to the women as personal, historical, religious or spiritual, and political artifacts. Objects on the altar are rendered sacred by their intentional placement.

**apophatic** – “... a Western theological tradition that is less well known than its *kataphatic* counterpart.... Apophatism is a “negative way,” a knowing by unknowing,” which means more than simply an absence of knowledge but asks as well for a surrender of the ego, a receptive waiting for the hidden god (Shantz, 1999, pp. 64-65); it is basically a way to God or Goddess (Spirit) by removing obstacles in the way, by dissolving images of, and letting go of what we think (and have been taught) Spirit is supposed to be.

**arational** - the arational is recognized as the non-rational in a philosophical definition of mysticism but does not merit its own definition within the *HarperCollins Dictionary of Philosophy*. The *arational* (drawing from Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser and mystical traditions) is a form of knowing that includes the body, the emotions, the senses, intuition, imagination, creation making, the mystical, spiritual and the relational, alongside the rational. The arational can be found in the practices of art, meditation, psychoanalysis, the body, the senses, and so on. (Bickel, 2007, p. 239).

**art** - is the expression of spirit coming into form. Within this frame of understanding, art is a living practice of opening to spirit; being humbled in the presence of spirit’s incarnation, and developing disciplined practices of acquiring technical skills and abilities to express spirit

**arts-based priestessing** - working with art as the arational base for guiding creative ritual processes and/or creative spiritual practices; priestessing is self-proclaimed rather than officially given sanction by any necessary authority or traditional hierarchy of sanctification.

**collaboration** - is a “with/and” experience. It is a conscious working relationship with another or others that requires 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.

**Divine Feminine** – can refer to female deities of pre-historic and historical religions. It can also be understood as Luce Irigaray recognizes “... that, unless a mode of a female divine can be imagined, women will not be able to affirm their own identity in a way that liberates them from their previous symbolic confinement” (Joy, 2006. p. 23). Irigaray argues the divine feminine is embodied in all women and all relationships and needs to be recognized as such by women to reclaim subjecthood (p. 20).

**Divine** – Amma’s teaching of the Divine is that, “[t]he Divine is present in everyone, in all beings, in everything. Like space it is everywhere, all pervading, all powerful, all knowing. The Divine is the principle of Life, the inner light of consciousness, and pure bliss--It is our very own Self.” (Amma, 2007, p. 2)

**education** - is a life long interrelationship between learning and teaching. Ideally, it draws from rational and arational ways of knowing and engages autonomous and relational forms of



learning/teaching in its pursuit of diverse and transformative knowledge practices and construction.

**erotic** – Audrey Lorde wrote, “The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek work *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony.... it is an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our living, our work, our lives.” (Lorde, 1995, p. 241)

**feminist spirituality** – when engaged, as bell hooks (2000) wrote, “... created a space for everyone to interrogate outmoded belief systems and created new paths, representing god in diverse ways, restoring our respect for the sacred feminine, it has helped us to find ways to affirm and/or re-affirm the importance of spiritual life. Identifying liberation from any form of domination and oppression as essentially a spiritual quest, returns us to a spirituality which unites spiritual practice with our struggles for [political] justice and liberation. A feminist vision of spiritual fulfillment is naturally the foundation of authentic spiritual life” (p. 109). Spiritual feminist Carol P. Christ (1979) claimed that spiritual feminists’ work with “[c]hange and touch, process, embodiment, and relationship... [to get to] the heart of ... re-imaginings of God and the world....” (p. 1).

**guru** – a master teacher (used in Eastern religious traditions). One who is dedicated to making the path visible for the student and holds space for their growth as a total commitment of their relationship. In this sense, a guru is not limited to a religious and spiritual domain but may be found in all domains of learning (e.g., philetic teaching and learning).

**Her** – returning to an understanding of the Divine as manifest in a woman’s body in a patriarchal society requires the reclaiming of feminine-based pronouns as sacred utterances.

**Kosmos** –the integral philosopher Ken Wilber wrote, “...the original meaning of Kosmos was the patterned nature or process of all domains of existence, from matter to math to theos, and not merely the physical universe, which is usually what both “cosmos” and “universe” mean today.” (Wilber, 1995, p. 38)

**immanence** – refers to the embodiment of the Divine. “Immanence calls us to live our spirituality here in the world” (Starhawk, 1989, p. 10); in its healthy form, immanence integrates with transcendence as part of growth and development.

**labyrinth** – “The archetypal classical labyrinth design consists of a single pathway that loops back and forth to form seven circuits, bounded by eight walls, surrounding the central goal. It is found in both circular and square forms.... Found in historical contexts throughout Europe, North Africa, the Indian sub-continent and Indonesia, this is also the design that occurs in the American Southwest and occasionally in South America” (Saward, 2005, p. 1). Lauren Artress (2006) wrote, “Labyrinths are unicursal. They have one well-defined path that leads us into the center and back out again. Mazes, on the other hand, are multicursal. They offer a choice of paths, some with many entrances and exits.... the unicursal path of the labyrinth is what differentiates it and sets it apart as a spiritual tool. The labyrinth does not engage our thinking minds. It invites our intuitive, pattern-seeking, symbolic mind to come forth. It presents us with only one, but profound, choice. To enter a labyrinth is to choose to walk a spiritual path” (pp. 51-52).

**multi-faith** - the current Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC) planning team has defined multi-faith as people of diverse spiritual and religious traditions worshipping together and sharing each others faith practices, while remaining rooted in their own tradition that may or may not be connected to a religious faith. They distinguish it from creating a hybrid religion or spiritual practice that draws many traditions together; however, multi-faith, in the WSC sense, would include either approach.

**multi-faith consciousness-raising** – I link the two terms multi-faith and consciousness-raising as they reflect a branch of the feminist consciousness raising of the 1970s-80s that was so important in changing women's understandings of themselves in relation to the dominant patriarchal paradigm.

**oracle** – eg., Tarot, I Ching, Astrology, Runes, palmistry. These techniques employ intuition and psychic powers to expand consciousness beyond the ordinary everyday consciousness.

**performance ritual** – I combine the terms performance and ritual as ways to acknowledge and connect art with the sacred. As ritual emerged from within my art practice and most often takes place within a gallery setting, I have chosen to use the art term of performance before ritual.

**philetics** – is one of three teaching/learning styles based on Harry Broudy's pedagogical theory: "philetic, heuristic, and didactic, Philetics emphasize their relationships with students..." (McHugh, P. 1974, p. 476). Kenneth Beittel elaborates the philetic as one who assists, through the act of loving, the emergence of creation or what he calls "arting" (p. 7).

**priestess** – in a contemporary context, a priestess is a woman who take spiritual leadership roles in the work of ritual, be they roles sanctified by a traditional authority or self-proclaimed.

**religious pluralism** – as defined by religious scholar Diana Eck (2002) tackles the challenges of a global interdependent world through fully knowing the roots of one's own religious faith and being willing to study and understand the roots of other religious traditions-- and in doing so, to understand the interrelatedness of all religious traditions.

**reverence** – an honouring and acknowledgment of the mystery and sacred beauty of all life.

**ritual** – is a practice of creating sanctuary for awareness of the sacred-- of Divine presence in ones life, community or the world. Within the container of ritual group's or individual's attention is heightened and focused by beholding all actions (which can involve art making, researching and teaching) with reverence. Within ritual expressions of the sacred can be expressed through "... gestures, postures, dances, [and] patterns of movement" (Crossley, 2004, p. 32). "Ritual activity facilitates the penetration and embodiment of symbols into human selves and societies" (Grimes, 2003, p. 38).

**sacred** - honoring, receiving, and holding reverence for mystery. Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes (1995) clarifies that, "Sacred" is the name we give to the deepest forms of receptivity in our experience" (p. 69). Reason (1993) suggests, "Sacred experience is based in reverence, in awe and love for creation, valuing it for its own sake, in its own right as a living presence. It is based in emotions-- zest, joy, passion-- that help the life process flow as opposed to the stuck unexpressed emotions that may distort experience" (p. 278).

**sacred epistemology** – “... places us in a noncompetitive, nonhierarchical relationship to the earth, to nature, and to the larger world (Bateson, 1972, p. 335). This sacred epistemology stresses the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 36-37).

**sacred space** – Lauren Artress (2006) describes sacred space in its complexity as, “... the place where two worlds flow into each other, the visible with the invisible. The finite world touches the infinite. In sacred space we can let down our guard and remember who we are. The rational mind may be released. In sacred space we walk from chronos time to kairos time, as we allow our intuitive self to emerge” (p. 155).

**Source** – is the “ground of being” referred to by many spiritual teachers (e.g., Andrew Cohen, Paul Tillich) as the void from which all life arises. It also “evokes a spring or a fountain, water springing up from under the earth, and the waters of life (including the waters of birth)” (Christ, 2003, p. 8).

**Spirit** – is understood as the dialectic unfolding of consciousness through the universal and the plural, the One and the Many (Ferrer, 2002. p. 183)

**spirituality** - as understood within this research, includes but is not limited to the adherence to and practice of particular religious doctrines. It is one’s deepest connection and knowing of the sacred, Divine, God, Goddess, spirit, Source, Kosmos. Spirituality is immanent and transcendent, infusing ones mind, body, and soul.

**spiritual feminism** – see feminist spirituality

**spiritual leadership** – can include leadership affiliated with a religious institution or tradition, or it may be based in a person’s commitment to leading as a spiritual person in one’s personal life or community. In this dissertation a spiritual leader is identified as one who is actively giving to their community to enhance spiritual growth and awareness.

**synecdoche** – derived from a Greek word which means “simultaneous understanding.” It is closely related to metaphor and metonymy and denotes the part of something in relation to the whole or the whole of something in relation to the part.

**trance** – can be described as a form of active or process meditation and visioning, a waking dream state, and a practice of active imagination or free association; where one can journey to other realities through an altered state of consciousness. Within the waking-dream-state of trance, time and space become fluid, non-linear, and most normal physical restrictions and barriers dissolve.

**transcendence** – rather than a notion of “leaving behind” which the word transcendence most often evokes, I draw from Ken Wilber’s (2000) analogy of “the cell that transcends—or goes beyond—its molecular components, but also includes them. Molecules transcend and include atoms, which transcend and include particles... (p. 27); transcendence is a movement of growth and development toward greater embrace of reality—which, in its healthy form, integrates with immanence.

**unconditional love** – is a ‘gift’-- love that is shared freely without the needs of its giver motivating the giving of it—that is, without conditions or expectations attached to it.

**Void** – a Buddhist term (*Sunyata*) meaning absolute emptiness, from which relative form arises; it refers to the ontological reality that all form is laden with impermanence (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shunyata>)

**witch** – “... is a “shaper,” a creator, who bends the unseen into form, and so becomes one of the Wise, one whose life is infused with magic” (Starhawk, 1989, p. 22).

**wholeness** – Parker Palmer (2004) describes wholeness as “...not mean[ing] perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life” (p. 5). It is distinguished from “Wholism” which professes the absolute attainment of a whole which then excludes parts. Wholeness, includes both parts and the whole. As the part becomes whole it becomes a part of the whole again in an ever evolving expanding process (Wilber, 1995, p. 36-37).

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate the art and writing of this dissertation to the lineage of spiritual seekers and teachers that have preceded me in my family of origin. May the Divine in its many forms continue to reveal itself and take hold in the generations to follow.

## *Curatorial Statement*



Image 1

Bickel, Barbara, and Jordan, Nané. (2007). *Wreck Beach Cretan labyrinth in sand*. Vancouver, BC (Video still).

## Curatorial Statement

[I]t is a very kind thing to invite women together and hold carefulness amongst us, and I think your clarity... helped set intention of being gentle with each other, as you asked us to expose our bellies to each other... that was not without its power or assertiveness ... [it] is very, very political, very global.

- Cathy Bone (co-inquirer/co-participant in the study)

What if women were acknowledged spiritual leaders within our religious institutions and our society? <sup>1</sup>

These two opening quotes span the personal and political dimensions of this study which asks, what is the transformative significance of an arts and ritual-based approach to developing and encouraging women's spiritual and multi-faith leadership? Led by spirit, art, and the art making process, this dissertation inquires into the importance and difficulties of women's multi-faith leadership. Their struggles, like many others, reflect a global world's struggle to live respectfully and without fear in the midst of religious diversity and difference (Dalai Lama, 1997, 1999; Eck, 2002). To assist the politically laden inquiry the dissertation study employs the ritual care of art, care in relationships with diverse others, and care of the Divine self.

Working in the subaltern of women's religious and spiritual leadership, this dissertation risks the exposure and questioning of "truth making" (Ahmed, 2003, p. 379) testimonials of the women co-participants/co-researchers and myself as co-participant/curator/lead researcher, in bearing witness to what has been oppressed, repressed, hidden and/or lost. Feminist and cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed recognizes the interconnections of the story or testimony of subaltern woman as a political act of "truth making" in the service of "world making" where truth is made and remade (p. 383).

I offer the aesthetic architecture of the labyrinth and its embodied and contemplative practice as a guide for truth making and world making that is cross-cultural and ancient, to assist the spiritual feminist movement through the a/r/tographic installation that is this dissertation. The sacred structure of the labyrinth is a container for all the turns of this dissertation journey, from entry into the labyrinth at the moment of decision to research the Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC) planning team, to dwelling in the center during the self-reflective one month solo artist residency, to the exit of the labyrinth at the public doctoral oral defense.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the opening statement from a description written for the Women's Spirituality Celebration by their Roots 'n' Future committee, 2007.



The symbol of the labyrinth incorporates a unicursal walking pattern, offering a single path that once entered, carries one into the center and back on a pathway that turns in all directions. Although physically walked on a horizontal earthly plane, one's consciousness can descend and ascend during the walk, entering altered and potentially subversive dimensions of time, space, and place. It is a sacred walk that often enacts a spiritual/political pilgrimage. The curatorial intention of this dissertation installation is to invite others to experience walking the pilgrimage, through entering multiple realms of knowing and not knowing, of being and beingness that spirit, through the medium of art, leads us toward. If not a sacred pilgrimage, the dissertation may be entered as a postmodern art installation that is non-linear, questioning of hegemonic traditions and power relationships particularly in the spirit of the feminist art movement. That said, this dissertation can be read and experienced at many levels depending on the particular perspective(s) one enters with, for example political, spiritual, artistic, and educational.

Multiple aspects of spiritual pilgrimages and "truth making as world-making," within the community of women spiritual and multi-faith leaders of the WSC are reflected in the art that leads the writing of this dissertation. Three art projects direct the walk into the center of the labyrinth; *Re/Turning to Her*, *Womb Entering*, and *Stillpoint*. Art that is spirit-led is demanding, in that its depths cannot be fully experienced through a quick objective glance. It calls to be lingered with, as one lingers on a long stroll with a lover. To assist the experience of lingering, video DVD's of the art-making process and art are included in the three installation chapters as essential components of the labyrinthal walk, along with the art images and poetry.

The writing of the dissertation began at the moment of realization in the center-stillpoint of the labyrinthal dissertation journey. It is in the center of the labyrinth where one stops and awaits for the wisdom of the Divine, in whatever form that wisdom may take. Wisdom involves encountering one's place in the larger cosmos (Fox, 1988). It is not limited to intelligence in a rational form. It draws from the right and left hemispheres of the brain (Bolte Taylor, 2008), employing "both analysis and synthesis," it is "playful and erotic" (Fox, 1988, p. 21). Rhineland Mystic, Hildegard of Bingen posits that wisdom lives in "the very act of birthing and creativity in intercommunion with the forces of the universe" (Hildegard of Bingen, 1985, p. 49). The walk through the dissertation installation is not restricted to a linear and/or analytic reading and may cause perturbation at times for the reader/viewer, as it simultaneously reveals and subverts from direct view the mysteries of the world-making experience of the women spiritual leaders.

Chapter One is an introduction to the dissertation study, and includes some of the her/history behind the WSC. It offers theoretical underpinnings of the work as a form of "joyful revolt"

(Kristeva, 2002), and “free association” within “pedagogical imagination” (Britzman, 2006). Chapter Two focuses on the emerging arts-based method of a/r/tography, a/r/tography as ritual, and the development of a conception of radical relationality within a/r/tography. Chapter Three introduces *Re/Turning to Her* (2005-06) as the first entry into the research as a *researcher-self*, involving co-inquiry and a performance ritual into the unknown with healing artist, Tannis Hugill. In this chapter the path of the labyrinth intimately introduces the dissertation modality of research through a sacred structure meant for walking. A relational aesthetic unfolds through the art making process as we travel the spiritual path of being within “intuitive darkness” (Shannon, 1981, p.12) as a way of “knowing by unknowing” (Shantz,1999, p. 65). It is here that we encounter and grieve the estrangement of the Divine Feminine. In Chapter Four the walk into the labyrinth continues and deepens, and the *teacher-self* is fully activated in the installation of *Womb Entering* (2006-07). With a community of fourteen women as co-inquirers/co-participants (from this point on I will use the single term co-inquirers), the spiritual inquiry becomes a community learning journey. The spiritual unfolding of the group is revealed through the art making process. Nourished by the care and compassion of the women, the erotic as the Divine Feminine emerges as an individual and collective force, propelling the group to reveal themselves publicly and to celebrate courageously within a mixed-gender audience at the opening performance ritual of the *Womb Entering* installation. In Chapter Five the installation entitled *Stillpoint* (July 2007) reflects the creation of one’s own education where I, as the lead researcher, return to the *artist-self*, nourishing my depleted self on an island surrounded by water, which becomes the metaphoric center of the labyrinth and the dissertation journey. The chapter begins with a disturbing dream. It is a collective dream of the subaltern; of women spiritual leaders creating sacred space to engage with world making, and the personal, political, historical, and sacred obstacles they face in doing this work. This unexpected dramatic dream holds associative elements and energies of a collective historical trauma of loss predominant in many women’s lives. It reflected for me women’s tenuous autonomy, empowerment, and status as spiritual leaders and healers that was systematically removed during the Middle Ages when witch burnings and hangings were carried out by the Medieval Church (Goldenberg, 1982). The chapter closes with an ecstatic trance journey that recognizes the renewable source of writing as one’s own blood. The final Chapter Six, is the walk out of the labyrinth. The complexity and fragility of women’s spiritual multi-faith leadership is acknowledged and expressed. Within this chapter the need for greater understanding of “restorative learning” (Lange, 2004) and an arts-based approach in the work of “decolonizing the Divine” (Alexander,

2005; Fernandes, 2003) is brought forward as a crucial aspect of affective and effective women's multi-faith and spiritual leadership. It involves walking through what was discovered through the lens of the artist/researcher/teacher on the walk in, and what was revealed in the dissertation research from the co-researchers/co-participants.

Chapter One

*Sacred Inquiry*



Image 2

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). *Thirty Days of Mandalas – day fourteen*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, (Ink on paper).

## Sacred Inquiry: An Introduction

Spirit knowledge/knowing [i]s the medium through which a great number of women in the world make their lives intelligible. It is at these crossroads of subjectivity and collectivity, Sacred knowing and power, memory, and body, that we sojourn so as to examine their pedagogic content to see how they might instruct us in the complicated undertaking of Divine self-invention. (Jacqui Alexander, 2005, p. 299-300)

This collaborative a/r/tographic dissertation study carries forth a sacred inquiry, an embodied heart and mind inquiry into the complexity of women's spiritual and religious multi-faith leadership and pedagogy that holds an intention of offering "what is sacred within us to the life of the world" (Rilke cited in Palmer, 2005, n. p.). Obstacles are many in the work of bringing spirit knowing into the world. I often feel that I am "fighting a losing battle"<sup>1</sup> as a spiritual woman artist working within a secular society and now researching and learning/teaching within the secular academy. I find myself questioning, how does one let go of "winning" yet not give up the battle to lead a sacred life of Divine self-invention? These thoughts have increased as I have come into closer contact with institutions and their architectures of higher learning and the hegemonic powers that imbue them. I have been grateful for the inspired academic teachers/theorists I have encountered on my journey. I am encouraged to write an "alternative" dissertation because of those that have led and done so before me (e.g., the many dissertations described in Four Arrows, 2008; Sinner et al., 2006). I know the voices of alternative creative narratives are essential to uphold within institutions to counterbalance the power discourses, if we are to challenge limiting hegemonies from within. Despite this I frequently silence myself and find myself returning to the words feminist poet Audre Lorde wrote (1984), "In the cause of silence,...each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live" (p. 42).

Alexander (2005) defines the epistemology of the sacred as immortal and "linked to the pulse of energy of creation" (p. 326). The life force that is the sacred, she shares is simultaneously individual and collective, involving "multiple praxis of embodiment" (p. 326) that includes yet moves beyond, the body and involves a "rewiring of the senses" (p. 328). To take the sacred seriously she writes "would mean coming to wrestle with the dialectic of permanent impermanence" (p. 327). The Western rational enlightenment paradigm, she argues, is unable to see from its hegemonic position the mystery of the sacred, and as such is destructive of life force energy. Undertaking the mysterious work of the sacred, and rewiring the senses is

laden with contradictions in our Western society and is not easy work. The threat of being misunderstood is always looming.

Despite the difficulty of work that includes the sacred, qualitative researchers Yvonna Lincoln and Norman Denzin (2000) in writing of the bridge between the past and future in qualitative research, encourage “that we make ourselves visible [and vulnerable] in our texts. Each of us is a universal singular, universalizing in our singularity the crises and experiences of our historical epoch” (p. 1053). My story, as an artist/researcher/teacher on a sacred spiritual path, is deeply embedded within this dissertation. Autobiographical narratives are interspersed throughout the dissertation as I universalize my singularity through the experiences of my/our her/historical epoch. I introduce myself by offering a brief her/history of my spiritual lineage. I am a descendant of Lutheran missionaries and farmers from Germany. I am a granddaughter, daughter, and niece of Lutheran ministers, raised in a relatively protected and privileged environment that did not encourage questions within its male-dominated tradition.

As a child and young person, my silence and compliance was rewarded with familial and religious ‘security.’ As an independent young woman, traveling in Europe and exploring religious and cultural sanctuaries (such as cathedrals, museums, and historical sites), engaging an art practice and studying yoga, I discovered a spirituality that was not limited to religious institutions and doctrines. This ‘new’ spirituality was grounded in felt experience, the body, and the act of creating. Today, as a spiritual feminist, artist, researcher, and educator, I locate my practice within “a sacred, existential epistemology” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pp. 36-37) as well as a “spirited epistemology” where “[e]very education event is movement toward a *metanoia*, the passage of spirit from alienation into a deeper awareness of oneself” (Vella, 2000, p. 10).

In 2000-01, I embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage to my German motherland (without physically traveling there) *via* an art project entitled *Illuminatus*. This art project, led by a longing to reconnect with my female spiritual heritage, directed me to female Christian mystics of the thirteenth century through books and art, and consequently to the female spiritual and religious heritage that preceded them. During this project, I began to incorporate writing with my visual art, and ritually performed with some trepidation for the first time alone in a church sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> In studying the Northern mythologies of my ancestors I discovered that,

... [p]re-Christian European cultural traditions are well-known to have nurtured the presence of female visionaries, prophetesses and wise women known as *Volvas*, who lived and practiced their art in northern Europe. Their skills, respected and valued, were integral to the

spiritual life of the community. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries also produced many female Christian mystics (e.g., Hildegard von Bingen, Mechtild of Magdeburg). These women were revered for their visions and teachings within their communities and beyond. After this period the status of women as spiritual leaders declined drastically. The Inquisition, which lasted from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, managed to erase virtually all of women's spiritual, visionary and leadership roles in their communities, leaving a hidden legacy of terror that continues to confront women today as they reclaim and practice spiritual arts and leadership. (Bickel, 2001, p.1)

Performing artist Ananya Chatterjea, who was interviewed regarding her powerful collaborative work with women from the streets of Calcutta, holds artists as special members of civic society who can address current state issues, such as the oppression of women, racism, genocide, and the culture of fear (cited in C. Palmer, 2006). For the past sixteen years I have worked collaboratively with women in arts projects that include performance ritual dedicated to reclaiming agency through embodiment and voice. Ritual infused arts-based processes offer a depth of inquiry and trust building that I have not found in other group inquiry processes. American feminist ritual artist Mary Beth Edelson (1982), who began working with private and public ritual in the 1960s, describes the unique offering that women and the art making process bring to “ever-changing and evolving” ritual performances:

The unique and sometimes zany way in which some women think is given full reign in our art/rituals, where we have the opportunity to re-create the work in our image. Artists bring the creative process to ritual. This process adds to its contents, stimulates ritual’s evolution, and helps to avoid repetitious stagnation. (p. 323)

This dissertation exposes and renders visible the sometimes zany, pedagogical imagination of a small group of women spiritual leaders, as the underbelly of women’s spiritual and multi-faith leadership expressed by the co-inquirers through the art making experience, art and ritual. I invite the reader/viewer/listener to walk the labyrinth path one step at a time, pausing when needed while reading/viewing/listening to this experiential-based and ritual-infused dissertation which is a multi-modal art installation. Curatorial statements are interspersed within the dissertation to remind and guide one’s way in the presence of art and the sacred inquiry.

### *The Study*

The co-inquirers within the study are a diverse group of fourteen women spiritual leaders (representing eleven different religious/spiritual backgrounds<sup>3</sup>), who are part of a volunteer

planning team that co-hosts an annual multi-faith woman's spirituality conference (WSC). The current WSC planning team has defined "multi-faith" as, people of diverse spiritual and religious traditions worshipping together and sharing each others faith practices, while remaining rooted in their own tradition or spiritual practice. They distinguish it from creating a hybrid religion or spiritual practice.

I have been a member of the WSC planning team since 1999. Over the past sixteen years more than one thousand women have taken part in this conference. It takes place at and has been co-sponsored by the Vancouver School of Theology (VST), a large post-secondary Christian theological school in Western Canada.<sup>4</sup> The study is situated within and crosses the multiple domains of art, education, and spirituality, and is thereby transdisciplinary to a large degree. The notion of 'trans,' as described by film theorist Trinh T. Trinh (2005), is helpful here to understand the study as,

... something that goes over that cuts both ways.... crossing rather than having to deny one side or the other, the crossing allows us more freedom of movement and hence, of no movement as well. We can shuttle back and forth, being more mobile in what we do, even though that mobility—as we can see in the current political world events—can be turned around against us as well. (p. 25)

As an artist/researcher/teacher I embody the hyphenated identity that curriculum theorist Cynthia Chambers (2003) describes in her writing about Canadian curriculum research:

Through their work [Canadian curriculum scholars] are braiding languages and traditions, stories and fragments, desires and repulsions, arguments and conversations, tradition and change, hyphens and slashes, mind and body, earth and spirit, texts and images, local and global, pasts and posts, into a metissage, one that is perhaps as Canadian as possible under the circumstance. It is our way, and it is what we have to offer any international conversation that is curriculum. (p. 246)

The dissertation research is situated within a Faculty of Education but it includes: the making and public exhibiting of art, the stories from women organizers' lives, a public adult education conference, and takes place largely within a traditional School of Theology. Tensions abide within the three domains of art, education and spirituality, while a desire to hyphenate, bridge and transgress the rigid boundaries is the implicit purpose behind the research. What gives meaning to me as a 'hyphenated curriculum scholar'-in-the-making, is to excavate and critically challenge the limitations of these three constructed domains. Arguably, the 'world of art'--'world of education'--'world of spirituality' are too often entrenched in patriarchal and cultural norms



and values that limit many women from reaching their full potential as valued and honoured leaders in these ‘worlds.’ My lived experience in each of these ‘worlds’ has replayed what I suspect is a her/historical struggle that many women have, and have had, as leaders, change-makers, world makers. It has become clear that my choice of locating the dissertation inquiry within an event that transverses the three realms of art-education-spirituality, is a significant place of inquiry because of its commitment to fully engage these three worlds in pursuit of a sacred and whole education.

Beyond the walls of institutions, art, spirituality, and education are significant components of human life. They are distinct yet interconnected paths and locations that lead toward transformative forms of knowledge practices and construction. Recent literature within the field of education has indicated an increasing number of educators supporting the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of art, education and spirituality (Beittel and Beittel, 1991; Campbell, 2006; Irwin, 2007). Yet, Western society and its institutions still value the expertise of distinct disciplines,<sup>5</sup> which can develop unencumbered by other potentially competing discourses, hence, these three paths to knowledge practices and construction, and deeper understandings of the world, have been separated and are most often not welcome in each others’ domain. This study works to illuminate and offer ways to learn and live a dynamic relationship with and between the three domains, specifically within the context of contemporary adult education.

Art, spirituality, and education are each large domains of knowledge construction that require a dissertation each. This dissertation crosses these domains and consequently cannot enter the full depth of scholarly study required for each one. To assist the reader, I offer my basic intuitive understandings of art, spirituality and education: 1) *art*, I believe, is the expression of spirit coming into form. Within this frame of understanding, art is a living practice of opening to spirit; being humbled in the presence of spirit’s incarnation, and developing disciplined practices of acquiring technical skills and abilities to express spirit, 2) *spirituality*, as understood within this research, includes but is not limited to the adherence to and practice of particular religious doctrines. It is one’s deepest connection and knowing of the sacred, Divine, God, Goddess, spirit, Kosmos. Spirituality is immanent and transcendent, infusing ones mind, body, and soul, 3) *education* is a life long interrelationship between learning and teaching. Ideally, it draws from rational and arational<sup>6</sup> ways of knowing and engages autonomous and relational forms of learning/teaching in its pursuit of diverse and transformative knowledge practices and construction.

The learning objectives developed for the co-participants at the start of the research were to: 1) investigate the ritual art making process (using multiple art mediums and forms) of female spiritual leaders, nurturing a culture of honesty and trust, to examine and articulate the co-participants understanding of religious and spiritual pluralism, 2) explore and understand how collaborative art making could be a catalyst for individual and societal change, particularly in challenging the “culture of fear” surrounding religion and developing compassionate spiritual and religious pluralism, 3) develop and nurture a community of co-a/r/tographers, potentially extending the theory and practice of a/r/tography into the larger community and, 4) articulate a conference curriculum and pedagogy that incorporates arational and rational learning experiences.

The research questions at the start of the research were: 1) as women spiritual leaders, how do we understand the nature and impact of our own religious/spiritual attitudes, i.e., assumptions, ideology, values, worldview, political correctness? 2) how have our individual spiritual/religious beliefs been influenced by participation in the co-organizing of a multi-faith conference?, 3) how might we further develop an ethical and transformative curriculum of religious and spiritual education within a multi-faith conference? and, 4) how does collaborative engagement with art, support and extend inquiry into spiritual and religious pluralism/education? The learning objectives and questions offered an entryway into building a “circle of trust” (Palmer, n.d.) among the women through the visual, embodied, and spoken sharing of stories. The circle of trust revealed wounds, wisdom and corrective practices that can assist the building of an integrated and whole self/leader. This dissertation posits that, from a place of wholeness, one is able to lead fully and compassionately, building community that is respectful and which embraces diversity and learns through diversity.

### *The Research Site*

I offer my herstorically rendered account of the WSC to situate both myself as the researcher and the study. I began my connection with the WSC in 1999, when I first volunteered for and attended what was then called the Women’s Spirituality Dialogue, an annual one and a half day conference. The conference began in 1991 as an ecumenical Christian women’s event organized by eight Anglican women seeking the sacred in a secular academic world. I entered the organizing group during the cusp of a multi-faith direction change in the conference. I was eagerly welcomed by some of the women who were striving for a multi-faith vision, and not welcomed by others who wanted the event to remain Christian. Bringing my identity as a

spiritual feminist witch,<sup>7</sup> engaging and exploring pre-Christian pagan and earth-based traditions, into the group, began a two year journey of intense often conflictual meetings impacted by strong theological questions and fear from inside the group, our co-sponsor, and its constituents. I became what Trinh (2005) terms an “inappropriate/d other” [who] in both ways, [i]s someone whom you cannot appropriate, and as someone who is inappropriate. Not quite other, not quite the same” (p. 125). I was like them and different at the same time. I was an insider become outsider returning to the inside. I was an “inappropriate(d) other” in this group and I brought the outside into the inside “undercutting the inside/outside opposition” (Trinh, 1992, p. 74) of the group as a solid whole.

The questions and concerns expressed at our planning meetings at this time revolved around ‘Who is to be allowed to enter this sacred space of women’s spirituality?’ I was sometimes terrified walking into the meetings and often wanted to leave the group. However, the lived experience I had of the presence of the Divine Feminine at that first conference and my personal desire to reconcile my familial Christian tradition with the understanding of a feminine-based spirituality kept me returning to the meetings. Despite a desire from a number of the Anglican women within the original planning team to continue as a Christian-only event or to shut it down, the planning team shifted, but not without loss and unresolved conflict. By the late 90s, the planning team included women of diverse spiritual and religious backgrounds. To date, the event has included workshop facilitators and presenters within the large group gatherings from a variety of spiritual traditions<sup>8</sup> along with women who identify with no one tradition. Today, women of all religious traditions and spiritual practices are welcome onto the WSC planning team and to participate in the conference.

During that spiritually tumultuous time of transition to a multi-faith context I was reading the work of theologian<sup>9</sup> Carol Christ (1979). This early writing gave rise to my own questions, still relevant today. She questioned:

Where in the history of religion have women’s voices and experience contributed to the molding of tradition? What would it mean for women’s experience to shape theology and religion in the future? The word experience becomes a key term, a significant norm for feminists reconstructing traditions and creating new religious forms. (p. 6)

*Experience* is a key term within this dissertation and has been a constant quality present in the construction and reconstruction of the WSC conference over the years (see Chapter Six).

Each year the transforming of the Christian chapel (that hosted this event for fifteen years) is a significant part of the pre-visioning, planning and metamorphosis of the institutional space.

The creating of the altar and the opening and closing rituals, perform the sacred entry of the Divine Feminine presence within the educational Christian institution. In her book entitled *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Grace Jantzen (1998) draws from Luce Irigaray's concept of the Divine Feminine, from which I also draw. She wrote:

For Luce Irigaray, our fundamental moral obligation is to become divine; and the task of philosophy of religion must be to enable that becoming, or else it is ultimately useless. 'Philosophy' in its ancient meaning is 'the love of wisdom' *sophia*, which in Greek (as in Hebrew, and many other languages) is female, and divine. According to Irigaray, the wisdom that women and men in the postmodern world most require is the wisdom of becoming divine, without which we 'shriveled and die.' (p. 6)

### *The Problem: Religious Pluralism*

The problem area, for which the dissertation research was initially focused was the need for an education of spiritual and religious pluralism. Religious pluralism, according to religious scholar Diana Eck (2002), addresses the challenges of a global interdependent world, through fully knowing the roots of ones' own religious faith and being willing to study and understand the roots of other religious traditions -- and in doing so, understand, somewhat, the interrelatedness of all religious traditions. Religious (Dalai Lama, 1997, 1999; Eck, 2002; Fox, 1988, 2000) and educational (Glazer, 1999; Simmer-Brown, 1999, Tisdell, 2003) scholars have been advocating for a corrective practice of spiritual and religious pluralism, which can actively build community among diverse cultures and faiths. In a UNESCO Round Table on "Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue" prior to 9/11, spiritual pluralism was unanimously acknowledged as vitally important in the context of modern globalization to prevent "conflict" and "tragic consequences" (Anon., 2001). In a growing "culture of fear" (Fisher, 2006; Giroux, 2003; Palmer, 1998) ignited by 9/11, it has become evermore imperative to raise awareness and educate for spiritual and religious pluralism (Nash, 2002). Bishop Mark Hanson (cited in Devine, 2006), the current president of the Lutheran World Federation and Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, speaking to 500 religious leaders from all major religions admitted at the International Aids conference in Toronto that, "Our identities have been shaped by our deeply-held principals and beliefs,... When we come together, we deeply distrust the beliefs and practices of 'the other.' The current world situation is fostering this distrust, and our political leaders do their part in fostering this culture of fear" (cited in Devine, 2006, p. 2).

The critical political issue of the twenty-first century has been identified by some activists and scholars (e.g., Soyinka, 2004) as “religion.” To forestall the conflict and violence that can result from the ignorance of other traditions, it is imperative for research, education, and art to raise awareness and educate for spiritual and religious pluralism. I agree with some feminists (e.g., Christ, 2003; hooks, 2000), who claim that feminist transformation of society is dependent on the transformation of religious beliefs and ideologies. I have come to acknowledge the impossibility of separating religion from politics and propose that art offers an important bridge between the two. This bridge can serve as a resistance to the dominance of a culture of fear through supporting an educative (not propagandist) “culture of trust” (Gibb, 1991) and “community of truth” (Palmer, 1983). This educational challenge requires inquiry/learning/teaching methods that can transform deeply held principles and beliefs leading towards an expansive and compassionate worldview. Religious communities in our globalizing world are struggling to live in relationship with a variety of other religions and spiritual practices in mutual respect, compassion, and trust. Multi-faith conferences are notable learning sites in that participants can directly confront distrust and fear of the Other in our society. As an artist/researcher/educator, committed to developing “spiritual and religious literacy”<sup>10</sup> (Dalai Lama, 1997, 1999; Eck, 2002), this study offered a location for inquiring into the personal, historical, political and sacred (Abalos, 1998) motivation behind women spiritual leaders’ commitments to a multi-faith conference<sup>11</sup> through the arts-based inquiry process of a/r/tography (explained in Chapter Two). The layers of experience and understanding that lie behind the creation of the WSC could be revealed through the women’s a/r/tographic inquiry. The knowledge revealed can open the possibility of extending the vision for a whole and “sacred epistemology” (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005) beyond this particular conference and group of women into the field of education and beyond. Nurturing a learning community that dwells within and respects diversity is modeled by this particular group. The struggles and insights revealed through the sharing of the art making process within the sacred context of ritual in this dissertation are not limited to this group. In recognizing sacred connections with others we move towards a sacred epistemology.

### *Spirituality and Religion*

Spirituality and religion are terms that defy clear and simple definitions as some authors have noted (English et al., 2003; Heron, 2006; Tisdale, 2003; Wilber, 2005). Cultural and political contexts and inner development are among many contributing contexts

affecting the meaning and manifestation of spirituality and religion in an individual and community. English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003), in their comprehensive book *Spirituality of Adult Education and Training*, point to the growing use of the word “spiritual” in the past 75 years. Possibly, they suggest, because it is safer than a focus on “religion.” They believe “if one is to understand the impact of spirituality, one’s definition should be as inclusive as possible while embedding a sense of movement, relationship, and mystery” (p. 6). They advocate for an “undivided life” on the part of learners and adult educators-- a life that does not separate one’s spiritual and religious self from one’s public self. They state that the fear of religious indoctrination on the part of the learner, facilitator, and community is the first hurdle that adult educators must address when embarking on the facilitation of “spiritual learning.” They have culled together practices that encourage spiritual learning in adults. These include “adopting a spiritual perspective, reflective reading, journal writing, participating in rituals, and cultivating soul friends” (p. 49).

Elizabeth Tisdell (2003), in her study that explores spirituality and culture in adult and higher education, posits that creating space for transformative learning to occur requires a grounding in spirituality and cultural relevance that “involves the knowledge construction processes of the whole person” (p. 188) using multiple learning modes; that is, somatic, spiritual, cognitive, and through understanding that learning is relational, taking place within the paradox of “the individual [a]s the communal, and community [a]s the individual” (p. 190). Within the autoethnographic inquiry as ritual, each of these practices is attended to in some form. The community of learning is led by a commitment to spiritual learning that holds at its base the premise of striving for wholeness. In attending to the spiritual, through the making and sharing of art, attention is given “to the interconnectedness of all things... creat[ing] a space for people to bring in new ways of discovering and sharing their authenticity” (Tisdell, 2003 p. 194).

“Leona English and Marie Gillen (2000) explain that ‘religion is based on an organized set of principles shared by a group, whereas spirituality is the expression of an individual’s quest for meaning (p. 1)’” (cited in MacKeracher, 2004, p. 173). At a recent talk<sup>12</sup> in the Women’s Studies Department at UBC, long-time feminist Dr. Dorothy Riddle offered a similar distinction between religion and spirituality. Separating religion from spirituality is a common practice of distinction that becomes complicated when the focus shifts to multi-faith learning in the context of a women’s spirituality conference. At the conference and in the research project, learning about other religions through workshops, ritual, and dialogue is an integral component of spiritual development (individual and communal). The lines between religion and spirituality blur as an

understanding of multi-faith consciousness emerges. We run the risk of creating an unnecessary dualism of spirituality as personal, and religion as public and institutional, if we do not acknowledge that both contain elements that are personal and public. Returning to the Latin origin of the word re-ligio, the two terms are conjoined “connecting to a time-space-time continuum to one’s own origin” (Jantsch and Waddington, 1976, p. 43), where “it is only through the full re-ligio, the interpenetration of integration and differentiation, that human life becomes fully creative” (p. 233). Transpersonal philosopher Ken Wilber (2005) addresses the importance of understanding the multiple meanings of religion and spirituality in *A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion*. He posits that individuals who demarcate spiritual as personal and religion as organized and institutional are,

... pointing to a spiritual truth for themselves, but they haven’t given much thought to what happens if they wanted to pass their spiritual experience or truth on to another human being, because as soon as they do so, their “spirituality” starts to look a lot like “religion”.... once my spirituality is shared with another, or passed on to another generation, then I am faced with all the same problems of “religion” that I temporarily avoided by introducing the distinction. (pp. 4-5)

Distinct definitions of religion and spirituality did not emerge amongst the women as a group within the study, although individual spiritual and traditional religious identities, understandings, and experiences, were often shared. In contrast, her/historically (1999-2001) the definition of religion and spirituality was part of the planning team’s dialogue when the team was investigated and questioned by their co-sponsor, triggered by constituent complaints<sup>13</sup> regarding the inclusion of witches on the planning team and as facilitators at the conference, within a Christian School of Theology. At the time, many of the women argued amongst themselves and with VST, not to limit women’s spiritual expression to any one religious tradition, and to embrace the spiritual experience of all women within a spiritual and religiously-inclusive multi-faith context.

The shift to a multi-faith context required that the group take the next step of naming the spiritual and/or religious identities of planning team members. For the first ten years, using the term spirituality (Women’s Spirituality Dialogue) without identifying the organizing team’s dominant Christian faith tradition created, at times, a confusion of purpose and meaning for some. At times, women came to the event and volunteered to assist the planning team not necessarily knowing the group was spirituality housed within the context of one religious tradition. The challenge to the founding members was one of facing the reality that women’s

spirituality on the university campus was not limited to those practicing within the Christian religion. The Christian-only context was shifting and consequently, the conference shifted to a multi-faith focus.

To date, the planning team continues to work towards finding clarity in their mission and vision. It took many years to agree on the term *multi-faith* in the mission statement. Tackling a collective working definition of spirituality has not been undertaken by the group as yet. In one sense, not defining spirituality in the context of this conference could be said to be avoiding conflict. In another sense, it is an acknowledgment of the amazing diversity of spiritual and religious understandings and experience. In general, the women in the study do not limit their spirituality to religion or religious practices. They understand spirituality as a way of life, which can include religious beliefs and practices and be profoundly influenced by religious traditions.

### Mindful Inquiry

In preparation for the collaborative research study, which I knew could potentially disorient and cause perturbation in the lives of the women (myself included), I practiced “mindful inquiry.” Mindful inquiry employs critical social theory and challenges the positivist worldview that “factual sciences are the only legitimate form of knowledge, replacing religion, metaphysics, and philosophy as valid knowledge” (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p. 27). It questions the assumption that there is one unified scientific model and that,

... [e]thics, values, and politics have no rational basis, on the ground that they are not scientific [and r]ationality can only exist in the realm of science and not in the ethical or practical realm, which is seen as the expression of irrational or nonrational emotion, will, instinct, or arbitrary decision making. (p. 28)

Mindful inquiry situates the person at the center of inquiry. In addition, spirituality (Buddhist mindful awareness practice) is key to the research method. Although I am not a Buddhist, this unique spiritual component assisted the preparation. As a phenomenological creative act the mindful inquirer prepares and opens sacred space for the research to take place within. A depth inquiry of mindful inquiry invokes what Skolimiwski (1992) would term *reverential thinking*, where “...for the appreciative and sensitive mind, reverence for life appears as a natural acknowledgement of the miracle and the beauty of life itself” (cited in Reason, 1993, p. 24).

In sharing spiritual principles with Buddhism such as: “1. the importance of mindful thought itself; 2. tolerance and the ability to inhabit multiple perspectives; 3. the intention to alleviate



suffering; 4. the notion of clearing, or openness, [and]underlying awareness (p. 39),” mindful inquiry reflects what William Torbert (1991) calls a liberating practice of “intellectual power of balance” (p. 5) which,

... includes the visionary capacity to see what one does not see-- the visionary capacity to challenge the assumptions of one’s current way of seeing and thinking-- the visionary capacity to see other perspectives and to see through transformations in one’s own perspective. (p. 5)

Attending to a triangulation of methods, the critical social theory aspect of mindful inquiry, similar to adult educator Elizabeth Tisdell’s (2003) findings, in her study of adult educators who bring spirituality into their teaching practice, affirms the cultural and historical contextual ground of both the researcher and the co-inquirers, while remaining aware of the “historical forces of oppression” (p. 63). Through mindful inquiry, which included a practice of critical self reflection, thoughtful and non-violent communication with myself and others, a commitment to dwelling with difference, and clearing my mind through regular meditative labyrinth walking and making, I prepared the ground to enter and honour the diverse life-worlds and perspectives of the women. Additionally, I took into consideration the affect and effect that the collaborative a/r/tographic inquiry into multi-faith understandings could have on the co-researchers.

Tisdell (2003) further acknowledges that a spiritual dimension of learning is most often accessed and represented through the arts (p. x). Embarking on an a/r/tographic inquiry with the women of the WSC planning team extends Tisdell’s study on two levels. Her study was based on individual interviews, whereas this study involved a group engaging the heart, mind and spiritual dimensions of learning directly, through the powerful medium of the arts that she advocates for but did not engage in her study.

### The Practice of A/r/tography as Ritual

Through the practice of a/r/tography as ritual (explained in Chapter Two) the significance of living relationships through and with the multiple domains of art, spirituality and education as a praxis of wholeness emerged. These living relationships coincided with the making, being and doing that is inherent in the practice of a/r/tography. In opening to a living inquiry process with thirteen women spiritual leaders, the research questions, formulated by myself as the lead researcher, were left behind, but not forgotten. They were replaced by a relational and embodied experience of ritual making, art making, spiritual practice and learning/teaching that

was supported by mutual respect, compassion, and trust. The inquiry space became a sacred praxis for truth making and moving towards wholeness, even becoming Divine.

The art making process significantly captivated the women. The adventure of making art together as an experiential ritual unfolding as a community of women coming to know themselves and each other more deeply became the desired focus of the inquiry and the study. New theoretical understandings about religious and spiritual pluralism, although not absent, became secondary to the lived experience of the women. The original research agenda of coming to understand the worldviews of women spiritual leaders of a multi-faith educational conference, through an arts-based exploration of spiritual and religious pluralism, shifted. Upon reflection, I see numerous reasons for this shift, in terms of both a theoretical academic focus, and a methodological focus in the study. One reason is that the women, for the most part, knew me as an artist/teacher first. A number of them have taken art courses with me or collaborated with me in past art projects. Although I had done prior academic research on the area of spiritual and religious pluralism, the women had not, and in the midst of their busy lives they were not overly interested in the theoretical aspect of the study.<sup>14</sup> With my own bias as a practicing artist, it was easy to allow the flow of the art to take the lead in the research process. As a community of women, the participants made the project an opportunity for self and group nurturance, while having their voices of experience heard, witnessed, and recorded. In this way the women were deeply involved in an active practice of religious pluralism as historical, political, personal, and sacred stories of religious experiences were shared. When we entered the a/r/tographic process, the sharing of personal stories in ritual circles was interspersed with the making of art individually and collaboratively in ritual circle. These processes were extremely powerful and creatively generative for nearly all of the women in the study.

The a/r/tographic inquiry process with the women involved multiple processes (Appendixes A, D, E, F, and G) and levels of engagement (explained more fully in Chapter Four). These included: three sets of ritual sharing circles, at the beginning, middle and end of the study; two group art making weekends, one of which included individual trance journeys; one group trance; individual art making, video editing, writing reflections, and poetic writing throughout the study; regular email communication; three performance ritual rehearsals; two performance rituals, one at the WSC, and the other on the opening night of the full art installation; three public art installations; and two art talks in the gallery. Not all of the women participated in everything. As lead researcher, I facilitated and kept the communication flow going. Digital video

documentation took place within each of the processes. Each woman had the opportunity to be behind the camera if she chose.

### *Addressing Complications of the Study*

A somewhat risky aspect of this research arose, in that the women agreed to ethical forms that stated they will not be anonymous. In contrast to research that offers anonymity to participants, this study crossed the safety boundary of anonymity as the women became visible through the public art installations and performance rituals. As co-art/tographers, the public exhibition of the art and performance rituals were a component of public pedagogy,<sup>15</sup> offered by women spiritual leaders to the larger community at the annual WSC in 2007, and in two public gallery spaces in the city (Vancouver, B.C.) where the study takes place. All of the women remained involved in the study during its eight month duration. Nine of the fourteen women have continued on with the current 2008 WSC planning team. During the debrief ritual sharing circles and in individual conversations the women reflected on the new understandings to which they had come to; and these, when possible, have been incorporated into the dissertation (see Chapters Four and Six). The written, visual, and digital components of the dissertation were read and viewed by the women and their individual feedback taken into account in the presentation and final analysis of the study. The women were given the option of a pseudonym in the final edit of the dissertation. None have chosen this option.

My dual role as a co-participant and lead researcher with thirteen co-inquirers is complicated and, at times messy. I agree with critical curriculum theorists, such as Patti Lather (1991) who claim, “just as there is no neutral education.... there is no neutral research” (p. 50). There are a few complicating aspects to my location within this research: 1) I was not completely “equal” with the women in terms of curating the research project, and 2) I am not neutral in my philosophical-political-pedagogical stance. Both these aspects impact the validity of this study. I addressed the first complication of “inequality” at different points throughout the dissertation on my own initiation, as the women never mentioned it as a problem themselves. I take responsibility for my leadership throughout this study, although, it was a project co-led by everyone. To address the second complication, I’ve chosen here to elaborate my shifting standpoints in terms of a growing directionality and ideological critique embedded in my work, particularly in regard to my spiritual feminist philosophical-political-pedagogical stance about Western culture.

Through the gathering of theoretical resources for writing the dissertation, it became clear how many authors hold similar (or overlapping) critiques of Western culture that, when aggregated, speak quite profoundly of the beliefs they and I hold. I am not alone in my views. What I value most highly as a spiritual feminist a/r/tographer is to return to and to re-instigate ethical and embodied decisions for living an integrated and whole life. For many social critics and theorists a paradigm shift or worldview shift is offered along this ideological continuum of movement, with a format that appears quite dualistic, that is, “bad (old) paradigm” vs. “good (new) paradigm.” For example, I see this dichotomy in Matthew Fox as he calls for us to shift from a “Fall-Redemption cosmology” to a “Creation-Centered cosmology,” or Luce Irigaray as she calls for a shift from “mental-masculine wisdom” to a “feminine-relational wisdom,” or Peter Reason and John Heron who call for a shift from a “materialistic science” to a “sacred science.” However, in following a more integral (or bridging) approach, which identifies the dichotomies of paradigms or worldviews but focuses rather on the relationships in/with the paradigms, integrating them and/or operating in between them; for example, I utilize mostly the work of Jacqui Alexander (“logos-mind” and “eros-body”), David Abalos (“false coherency” and “coherency”), Parker Palmer (“divided self” and “whole self”), Leela Fernandes (“colonized Divine” and “decolonized Divine”), Ken Beittel (“broken art” and “whole art”), MacKeracher (“autonomous learner” and “relational learner”), Homi Bhabha (“pedagogical” and “performative”), Suzi Gablik (“pure aesthetic” and “connective aesthetic”), hooks (“fear-based” and “love-based”), Elizabeth Lange (“transformative learning” and “restorative learning”), and Deborah Britzman (“knowing” and “not knowing”). I acknowledge that my attraction and longing for change and transformation is not neutral and my desire to bridge what is recognized as dichotomous has somewhat impacted the study’s shape and direction as well as the interpretation and re-presentation of some of the data.

As an a/r/tographer fully engaging in the co-a/r/tographic process with the WSC women, I reflect and share my own autobiographic narratives throughout the dissertation. In teaching and engaging the co-a/r/tographic practice, my interest shifted to a focus on the a/r/tographic practice that was unfolding beyond my original expectations with the women and within myself. This shift became more apparent in the writing of the dissertation, which has three chapters (Chapters Three, Four and Five) dedicated to three separate but interrelated a/r/tographic studies. Chapter Three is a pilot study that preceded the large study, but because it reveals such an important learning experience for myself and Tannis as co-a/r/tographers/artists engaging spirit in a collaborative inquiry, I have felt it important to include as part of the complicated praxis of

wholeness that underpins this dissertation. Chapter Six became a way for me to step back and distance myself from the intense eight month research project with the women, and to visually respond to the experience as a first layer of visual writing during a solo one month artist residency. Both curriculum theorist William Pinar, in his theory of *curerre*, and artist researcher Kenneth Beittel in his theory of the *art of qualitative thinking*, incorporate a cycle in the inquiry process that suggests stepping back to see the past and the future from a distance. *Distancing*, according to Beittel and Beittel (1991), brings forward “the absent quality... in imagination” (p.141) and dispels habituation in the reading/seeing of text/art and opens the door to a depth of reading not possible prior to distancing. Similarly, Pinar et al. (1995/2004) wrote, “phenomenology and the aesthetic process share that distancing from the everyday and the familiar in order to see them with a freshness and immediacy which is like seeing them for the first time” (p. 415). Through distancing myself from my familiar environment, I was able to restore my imaginative artist self and perceive the research study with a fresh eye.

#### Transformation as the Joyful Revolt of the Uninvited Guest

The WSC has organically abided by the ancient understanding of *philosophia* by nurturing and honouring feminine wisdom. In its transformation to an inclusive multi-faith event,<sup>16</sup> it has served as a political challenge to monotheistic institutions and fear-based patriarchal organizations that have lost this ancient wisdom. Julia Kristeva (2002) wrote of “joyful revolt” as “a return to the past, and innovation, renewal of the self – ... a process of re-evaluation of the psyche, a questioning of identities and values” (p. 75). I have personally experienced joyful revolt through my initial intransigent position as a member of the planning team, my ongoing participation in the conference, the co-creation of altars and facilitation of workshops at the WSC. I have witnessed a similar experience of joyful revolt in others, who have been part of the conference organizing. This has occurred, I believe, through what Kristeva would call “symbolic deconstruction,” and “renewal” through “psychic” and “aesthetic creation” which has assisted individual “rebirth” (p. 76).

I link the work of Elizabeth Tisdell (2003) with Kristeva’s practice of joyful revolt, and the psychic and aesthetic creation that is present in the her/historical unfolding and growth of the WSC. Tisdell draws from the work of religious and sociological scholar David Abalos (1998), whose community-based, social justice work extends beyond personal transformation as focus to societal transformation. In doing so, Tisdell forefronts the importance of educators understanding

their historical, cultural, familial, and religious pasts. She suggests that everyone, especially white Western learners/educators explore and become familiar with their cultural and religious her/histories. As part of her radical stance in a secular poststructuralist academy, Tisdell refuses to separate cultural, ethnic identities from religious and spiritual identities and the impact that spirituality and religion has in constructing knowledge and creating meaning in lives. She wrote that, indeed,

... spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and an avenue of learning and meaning-making. (pp. 20-21)

Personal and social transformation through sacred relationship with spirit (the Divine life-force) is a driving impetus behind my own evolving pedagogical and epistemological understandings and practices. Transformative learning theorist Edmund O'Sullivan includes spirituality and a 'sense of the sacred' in his vision statement for transformation. O'Sullivan (2002) wrote that,

... 'transformative education' must address the topic of spirituality and...educators must take on the concerns of the development of the spirit at a most fundamental level. Contemporary education today suffers deeply by its eclipse of the spiritual dimension of our world and universe.... Nevertheless we are beginning to see a concern in education that opens onto considering education as a spiritual venture. The sense of the sacred... encompasses all aspects of transformative vision. (p. 5)

Educator Daniel Vokey (2007), in his transformative oriented work, similarly guides educators to integrate heart and mind in education. He wrote:

... desire for transformative learning very often reflects a belief that, individually and collectively, we need a radical change of heart and mind to respond adequately to the social, political, economic, moral, and/or spiritual crises that... are seen to be either looming on the horizon or already unraveling the fabric of life. (p. 2)

Curriculum theorist William Doll "envision[ed] a transformative curriculum" (Pinar et al, 1995, p. 498) that embraces a language of "development, dialogue, inquiry, [and] transformation" (p. 499) in a postmodern curriculum. This theory works to replace the modernist canonical model of science with "chaos theory.... open ended process, the roles of perturbation and confusion in disrupting structures, interactionism, nonlinear transformation, and self generation" (p. 500). For

me, each of these theorists validate Kristeva's notion of joyful revolt the WSC has practiced since its inception in 1991, although concepts such as transformative learning and joyful revolt would not be found in WSC documents, nor do they occur in conversations amongst the WSC planning team.

Expanding pedagogically on the experience of joyful revolt and its nonlinear process towards transformation, feminist educators Jacqui Alexander and Leela Fernandes, and educator and psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman see pedagogical practices as relational, erotic, and desirous in the work of becoming whole. In sharing her own struggle to authenticate her writing voice Alexander (2005) wrote, "Authenticating a voice comes through the rediscovery of the underbelly, literally unearthing and piecing together the fragmented members of existence" (p. 279). To carry out the task of piecing fragments together and thus shifting perceptions, according to Alexander, requires a daily practice of spiritual ethics. Vision assists daily work she writes, once we begin to cross boundaries and the invisible becomes seen, we long to place our soul in its service. It is important to know who walks with us as we travel closer to "being one with the Sacred" (p. 301). A sacred praxis, she writes, engages a "cycle of action, reflection and action" (p. 307). I have had glimpses of ancestral Volvas in the faces of my co-inquirers, and in the theorist's writings I have been led to. I have walked with many teachers, gurus, artists and leaders in this dissertation journey in my desire to articulate a pedagogical praxis of sacred wholeness that breaks silences, witnesses and reflects, and moves towards social transformation. Leela Fernandes (2003) similarly shares her notion of a "spiritual-material transformation" that is a "kind of mystical revolution," which can be achieved through a "lived divinity, that can transform and transcend all forms of hierarchy, injustice and repression" (p. 118). Although I am most at home in spiritual narratives, as this dissertation reflects, a praxis of wholeness is not limited to a spiritual discourse, and can be found in other narratives such as psychoanalytic thought and various forms of critical theory with a more political discourse.

Drawing from psychoanalysis rather than a spiritual discourse Deborah Britzman (2006) calls for "free association" within a "pedagogical imagination" as a practice of learning and not learning in pedagogical relations. The idea of free association, she writes, "began not with speech but with the poet's writing preparation, the taking of uncensored notes that recorded reveries" (p. 26). The rule of free association then, begins with "the emphatic unconscious: its lawless interruptions, its susceptibility to experiences not consciously noticed, and its inclination for welcoming the repressed." Within free association "meaning unhinges itself for desire. It is as if in free association desire suddenly slips into the back door of language, or leaves the door open

to the uninvited guest who arrives without reason or purpose” (p. 26). Britzman understands the practice of free association within education as an invitation to conflict and a “way of training thought to derail itself” through “giving oneself over to the Eros of language” and loosing the censor within a “clinical container.” In doing this, she claims, “research can return to what it cannot understand” (p. 29).

Free association as described by Britzman, authenticating voice as understood by Alexander, and living divinity as aspired to by Fernandes, are each fitting ways to explain the pedagogical relations that evolved within the dissertation study and the writing style of this dissertation where “meaning unhinges itself for desire.” Narratives of desire and the sacred emerge at times as “uninvited guests” as the research turns and returns “to what it cannot understand.”

### Novel Education

As I write this introductory chapter to my dissertation after months of writing and rewriting the main body of the dissertation, I turn to Britzman’s theorizing on novel education, and share an experience that was pivotal in coming to understand my own work as novel education. In sharing this narrative I hope to assist others in walking the labyrinth journey, the educational journey that is this dissertation.

*At one of my first American Education Research Association conferences (in 2005) I had the opportunity to hear feminist educators and curriculum theorists speak on a panel<sup>17</sup> in a large, (but not large enough) conference room that was packed to overflowing. It was an experience that became etched in my mind as a new graduate student, seeing and hearing the women curriculum theorists I had been reading and walking with in my studies, and now getting a sense of their character. Amongst these women Deborah Britzman’s demeanor, voice, and words stood out for me. I found myself attending her presentations throughout the rest of the conference. I wanted to speak with her following each of the three sessions, but was unable to push beyond the anonymous and distant place of awe that I found myself in. She represented for me what I now understand as an undivided and integrated educator. I recognize her as a wise woman who has done, and continues to do, the work and practice of becoming whole in this life.*

*One of the few books I took with me to read during my artist residency on Toronto Island in July 2007 was Britzman’s Novel Education. I began reading it on the flight there, and as I read I made the decision to contact her while I was in the same city where she lived. I found myself deeply moved by her writing and longed to connect with this educator who understood the illness*



*of teachers. The longing outweighed my shyness, and to my surprise she was easy to contact. After an hour long phone conversation, she suggested we meet for dinner at one of her favorite restaurants close to the ferry terminal. With a combination of excitement and nervousness, I set out to meet with her, hoping I would be able to sound somewhat coherent and intelligent in her presence. She was physically very small, smaller than I remembered, and easy to talk with. I sensed her estrangement from the world that she writes of as an analyst and solitary writer. She spoke of her anticipation of returning to teaching after many years of not teaching in the classroom. In sharing her learning of living a balanced life as an academic, she reflected that a good balance for her included solitary writing, the intimacy of psychoanalysis, and classroom teaching. When I shared that I was beginning my dissertation writing through visual writing while at the artist residency she commented that I was “making my own education.” These words resonated and stayed with me.*

The questions that initiated Britzman’s writing on novel education are akin to my own questions as I introduce my dissertation. Britzman (2006) asks:

From a pedagogical side, what is it to report, to one’s colleagues and students [co-inquirers], the experience of one’s work and remark upon how the ideas made and sometimes discarded there resist and instruct the narrative? How is a case study an encounter with learning and not learning? Existentially, what form of life do words create? What are the psychodynamic tensions within interpretation, the ones analysts create in the analytic time and those that constitute the afterwardness of treatment, that is, the writing of the case study? What is it to write therapeutically? (vii)

Within this dissertation I present as case studies the art making processes and art. I offer them in a novel form, a visually aesthetic and narrative form that includes the emotional, physical, and spiritual domains of an “unruly subjectivity” that threatens to be “an improper study” (p. ix); only if one is looking for “certainty, stability and transparency of method” (p. ix). Novel education, Britzman writes, allows the aesthetic presentation of education to alter “discourse and its object,” and consequently “Learning and not learning, it turns out, will be the expression of intersubjectivity, not a representative of the knowledge learned” (p. 15). As the narrator, my own learning is blurred with teaching as the “boundary between the object of learning and the subject of who learns” (p. 1) is obscured. She cautions that “when writing, reading, or listening to the case study, there is no such thing as innocent bystanders; we find ourselves on the side of otherness, the affect” (p. vii).

I pause here to caution others that writing into, reading, listening, and viewing this dissertation is an intimate and affective spiritual encounter with learning and not learning. It is an encounter of “radical relatedness” “... that sees beyond merely personal existence to intersubjective coexistence and [ecological] community” (Gablik, 1992, p. 51). Like the labyrinth, the form of the dissertation is not linear. Rational understandings and readings of time, space, and place are disrupted. At times one may feel dizzy or lost as the dialectic encounter between rational and arational modes of expression bump and rub against each other looking for edges of certainty, which seem often to remain aloof and distant. It is best entered as one would enter an art installation, ideally, with what the Buddhists’ call “beginners mind” (Suzuki, 1975). The experience of *being with* the multiple expressions of the dissertation includes encounters with academic theory, narratives, visual art, time-based art, poetry, trance, transcript portions of the women’s voices, and email correspondence. The dissertation admits partiality, while simultaneously striving towards an understanding, and experience of wholeness. It synecdochically oscillates amidst individuality and collectivity. It is about living and co-evolving relationships; with oneself, each other, the Divine and the Kosmos, and as such often asks one not to try to know or understand but to be with it, witness it, and through bearing witness, be willing to be transformed (Fernandes, 2003).

This dissertation, like a/r/tography itself, dwells in the hybrid zones between the disciplines of art, social science research, and education, and within the discourses of the artist, researcher, and teacher. It also works to bridge and reunite the philosophical domains of art, education, and spirituality. Interrelationality and intersubjectivity are the guiding principles of the intertextual dissertation as it draws from a variety of lenses, such as post-modern (Becker, Wilber), post-colonial (Bhabha, Trinh), transformative (O’Sullivan, Tisdell) and a spiritualized feminism (Alexander, Christ, Fernandes, hooks).

The time-based visual text of the DVDs, containing video documentation of the art making process and art, as part of the three art installation chapters, are best viewed before entering the printed text of the remaining chapters. The videos are one step less removed from the actual lived experience of the research. The videos make possible an intersubjective, affective, and spiritual encounter with the research that is not as easy to achieve through the printed text. That said, watching the videos after reading the text will offer an alternate perspective on the videos. However one chooses to walk/read/view this dissertation, it will be a unique experience based on how the reader chooses to be in relationship with the work.

Chapter Two engages a post-reflective practice of *currere* as it reveals a relational journey with the theoretical ideas of a/r/tography and its practices as they support and guide the dissertation study.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> As an artist and woman spiritual leader, who has consciously chosen to live and work in the margins of society, I know well the disabling impact of withheld or non-existent societal, financial and/or institutional support. I continually argue for the importance of the marginal spaces of learning within our society, as I know that it is within these spaces that transformative change begins, and yet I live everyday knowing that it is a life of perpetual struggle.

<sup>2</sup> The art of *Illuminatus* was exhibited and performed (June 5) in the sanctuary of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver May 28 – June 24, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Christian (Anglican, Baptist, Foursquare Christian, Presbyterian, United, Creation Spirituality), First Nations, Muslim, Buddhist, Religious Science, Spiritual Feminist Wiccan, Reclaiming, Earth-based, Feri, New Thought, Unitarian, and Jewish.

<sup>4</sup> A significant development occurred during the time of this study for the women's spirituality organizing team. The Vancouver School of Theology (VST), that has been the co-sponsor of the event, supplying administrative support and a location for the event, downsized and in that downsizing ended its co-sponsorship. The year this study took place was the last year the conference was housed at VST. This made the significance of the study, and the dissemination of the work done over the past fifteen years, that much more imperative to document and share. There was a risk that the event would not be able to find a suitable new home and the added work of relocating, and covering the lost administrative support during the year of the study, added stress for the women who operate as volunteers for this conference. On the other hand the transition, was also an opportunity for the group to clarify its purpose, deepen commitments and move to a qualitatively new level of community and service. Personally, the co-sponsorship of the School of Theology has been significant, as the Christian church, and consequently the educational system, has generally been a hegemonic force in sustaining religious illiteracy in our society. At the same time, changing the co-sponsorship and location of the event may open it to a greater number of women of ethnic diversity, and different religious traditions, who may not have felt welcomed or comfortable worshipping in a Christian environment.

<sup>5</sup> I am not inferring that disciplinarity and expertise in a field of study is a bad thing, but I am suggesting that a field of study is enriched by interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

<sup>6</sup> To further explain the concept of the arational, I draw from Jean Gebser's (1905-1973) theory of the arational. Gebser places the *arational a-perspectival worldview* as an evolutionary step beyond the rational [egoic]. He posits that rationalism within Modernism has appointed itself as authority (master) and that this self-appointed status stands in the way of an "integral worldview" of wholeness (Tarbensen, 1997). Gebser coined the term "integral a-perspectival," where no perspective is privileged and a fluid wholistic worldview is sought. He contrasted this with formal rationality, which he called "perspectival reason," a monological perspective with a narrow (egoic) lens (Wilber, 1998, p. 131), relative to an integral lens. Gebser's theory includes the rational with the arational. The arational viewed from the hegemonic Western rational (cognitive) perspective, has most often been confused with the irrational, thus disqualifying it from being seen as a valid and significant site of learning (Tarbensen, 1997). Spiritual feminist author Sally Gearhart (1981) understood the importance of distinguishing and engaging arational processes when she prophesized that "as the world situation grows worse, more people will be turning to what is called the irrational, to religion[']s based in fear], to all the freaked and fanatic doctrines that are bound to turn up. From that perspective our job may well be to get ourselves together (both individually and collectively) with our arational skills that we'll be able to cope with the onslaught of chaos." (p. 205). A limited dualistic reading (of rational and irrational) has kept arational forms of knowing marginalized, often pathologized and excluded from traditional

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educational systems. The arational, has historically been acknowledged within the mystic traditions, and by artists. As an artist/researcher/educator, I would like to expand the use of the arational beyond this marginalized positioning. Western rationalism has dominated our educational systems (Gebser cited in Tarbensen, 1997; McLaren, 1991). Rationalism can be looked back upon as the colonial justification for suppression and forced assimilation of colonized ‘Others’ to civilize their barbaric (read irrational) cultures (McLaren, 1991). Rationalism, in its pathological dualistic form, has relegated, marginalized and devalued (as irrational) women and marginalized others who practice arational ways of knowing. This has left a large part of our understanding and education of the arational underdeveloped in our Western educational systems. The arational has been kept alive in the world and our educational systems predominantly through the arts and spiritual teachings. Philosopher-futurist designer, Buckminster Fuller (1971) refers to artists as miracles. “[A]rtists are the human beings whose comprehensivity was not pruned down by the well-meaning, but ignorant educational customs[sic] of society” (p. 43).

<sup>7</sup> I use the name witch to reclaim the aspect of women that has been demonized; to reclaim the feminine within as Divine and powerful. Ecofeminist witch Starhawk (1979) defines “A Witch [a]s a “shaper,” a creator who bends the unseen into form, and so becomes one of the Wise, one whose life is infused with magic“(p. 22).

<sup>8</sup> To date, women of the following traditions have facilitated or led in the large group rituals of the WSC: Baha’i, Buddhist, Vispassana Buddhist, Goddess Spirituality, Hindu, Sufi, First Nations, Feri, Christian (Anglican, Foursquare Christian, Presbyterian, Catholic, Baptist, Quaker, United) Religious Science, Spiritual Feminist, Wiccan, Reclaiming, Earth-based, Unitarian, Jewish, Shamanic, Shea Muslim, Zoroastrian

<sup>9</sup> Carol Christ (1979) identifies herself as a theologian, in distinction to theologian, denoting the feminine aspect of the study of religion.

<sup>10</sup> During my years of growing up Lutheran, I received no education on other religions. I was indoctrinated into and participated in the Lutheran tradition while I lived in my parent’s home, but did not find a spiritual home there. In my late twenties, at the same time that I began my art training, I was introduced to earth-based spiritual traditions through women’s circles. After ten years of much self study, art making and community based ritual, and inquiring into alternate feminine based spiritual traditions, I felt able to call my self a spiritual feminist witch. During this time of spiritual exploration I became an “inappropriate(d) other,” using Trinh T. Minh-ha’s (1992) term, with my family of origin. From my new location outside of the family tradition, I began to openly question and challenge the oppressive patriarchal qualities of the Christian tradition and was perceived as a threat to my family. The pain of being mistrusted and feared as an ‘enemy’ was experienced as a deep betrayal. For a number of years I was estranged from my family and only recently have tentative relationships reformed. I admit that my personal and family loss and grief has been a powerful impetus for this study. This dissertation journey has moved me to extend myself and my work into the larger community. I believe this inquiry is an opportunity to diminish future suffering in the world through continuing to open dialogue between religions and consequently families, neighbours, and communities the world over.

<sup>11</sup> The drawing together of pre-modern religions with modern religions in a multi-faith setting is not without dangers in our society. Iranian Canadian scholar and philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo has fostered what he calls a religious “dialogue of civilizations” (Savage, 2006, p. 33) and for four months was “locked up in Tehran’s notorious Evin prison, where detainees are routinely subject to torture and abuse” (2006, p. 33). The scope of this work is not of the same scale, nor the cultural and political threat that Jahanbegloo’s dialogue poses for cultures that are still bound by fundamental pre-modern beliefs. In contrast to Jahanbegloo, my journey (and the journey of

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the women) has been set in a Western modern “civilized” society. This has allowed me to re/discover pre-Christian Western feminine-based spiritual and religious practices *via* the female Christian mystics, through reading and engaging contemporary spiritual feminist practices. Despite this freedom, choosing to identify as a witch in a society (that has silenced, oppressed, and demonized the memory of the pre-Christian Divine Feminine) has been a dangerous act. Because of my own lived experience of exile from my family of origin, I have been cognizant of the potential dangers and difficulties that arise within religious and spiritual dialogues. Religious and spiritual dialogue is fraught with taboos and ghosts, conscious and unconscious, that will remain in place if we continue to ignore and or demonize them.

I was saddened to hear that one of my teachers within the Reclaiming tradition (a wiccan tradition that emerged in the 1970’s) say that she has chosen not to share her witch identity with her family, as she finds the thought more frightening than coming out as a lesbian. I have found within the community of witches that I know in Vancouver, that few of them share their witch identity with their family of origin, work places, or peers. The danger of revealing a witch identity or a religious identity that has been demonized within our Christian-based society, and is not understood by others, will not necessarily result in incarceration and torture in our society but the potential emotional, social, and monetary exile is very present. I am reminded of how far we have not come in regards to spiritual and religious literacy and understanding in our society, when in 2008, teachers/leaders are not able to freely express their spiritual and religious paths with their families and the larger community for fear of being misunderstood and/or feared.

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Women’s and Gender Studies, 2008 Lecture Series, UBC. January 23, 2008. Dr. Dorothy Riddle lecture entitled, “What Is Feminist Spirituality, and Why Should We Care.”

<sup>13</sup> The complaints came from people who had never attended the WSC but read the brochure, which listed a description of workshop facilitators and the word priestess was used.

<sup>14</sup> An exception to the co-inquirers non-interest in the theoretical aspects of the research was with Nané Jordan, as her own academic research is in the area of women’s spirituality. It is Nané who introduced me to the spiritualized feminist work of Leela Fernandes and Jacqui Alexander. I am deeply grateful for the sharing of feminist writing and in depth conversations regarding women’s spiritual lineages with Nané. Our on-going conversations and collaborations continue to inspire and support our often times overlooked work in the academy.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Giroux (2003) advocates for a public pedagogy not limited to schools, that emphasizes politics, is performative, and takes place in multiple sites and contexts across society with the potential to persuade and transform the public to critically engage dominant values leading to “collective outrage” and action towards promoting “autonomy and social change” (pp. 63-64).

<sup>16</sup> In 2001, a ritual farewell took place at the Women’s Spirituality Dialogue (WSD) annual conference, honouring the original founders of the conference. In 2002 the name was officially changed to the Women’s Spirituality Celebration (WSC) and the multi-faith focus was instated in the mission statement.

<sup>17</sup> This panel, which I (with awe) referred to as the panel of Curriculum Theory Diva’s amongst my graduate student colleagues was entitled “(Non) Evidence and Things Unseen: Feminisms, Curriculums and Democracies in the Rage for Accountability.” It included presentations from Deborah Britzman, Elizabeth Ellsworth, Patti Lather, Janet Miller and Elizabeth St. Pierre. Maggie Maclure was the discussant. It took place on April 14, 2005 (AERA catalogue, 2005, p. 293).

*A/r/tography as Radical Relatedness*



Image 3

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). Visual Writing Mandala - February, 9, 2008, (Watercolour crayons on paper).

## A Journey with A/r/tography

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework of a/r/tography and my evolving relationship with a/r/tography, in order to assist the reader/viewer in their interpretation and understanding of the dissertation. As a practicing professional artist, I was embraced in 2002 by the small but thriving arts-based research community in the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia. My ritual<sup>1</sup> background, as a spiritual feminist artist, easily transferred into the practice of a/r/tography and my journey with a/r/tography began within my Masters program. The Masters thesis (Bickel, 2003) developed a theoretical understanding of *a/r/tography as ritual* -- in which ritual contributed to the creating of time, space, and sacred understandings of an ethical sanctuary or container for transformative learning and inquiry to unfold within. Writing of my learning within the practice of a/r/tography as ritual, I proposed that accessing the arational texts of the body, and altered states through ritual allowed ignored, forgotten and hidden knowledges to emerge in the inquiry process.

My relationship with a/r/tography as ritual has continued to develop within the Ph.D. program and the dissertation study. Although placed at the front of the dissertation, this chapter was written towards the end, after reflection on the a/r/tographic projects in Chapter Three, Four and Five. In the tradition of *currere*<sup>2</sup> this chapter offers a meta level analysis of a/r/tography -- traversing expansive ground, reflexively traveling to some theoretical antecedents to a/r/tography, situating it within a broader scholarly context, and leading to emergent understandings that can enlarge one's understanding and practice of a/r/tography. These new understandings call for further exploration, articulation, and synthesis in the future.

I acknowledge that I am foremost a practitioner-methodologist. The underlying passion that has driven my graduate work has been to find practices that allow humans to experience a liberatory, whole and sacred education through art. I have been enamored with and have inquired into numerous qualitative research methods and theorists that have influenced my a/r/tographic practice, among them are mindful inquiry (Bentz and Shaprio, 1998), spiritual inquiry (Heron, 2006), participatory action research (Kemmis and MacTaggart, 2000; Reason, 1993, 2000; Sumara and Carson, 1997), arts-based research (Finley, 2005), decolonizing methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), collaborative inquiry (Torbert, 1981), cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996), organic inquiry (Celments et al., 1998), narrative inquiry (Ellis, 2000), living inquiry (Meyer, 2005), performative inquiry (Fels, 1999), and a/r/tography (Irwin and de Cosson, 2004; Kind, 2006; Springgay, 2004). Through the theory and concepts that render a/r/tography, I have been



able to embrace the diversity of these many forms of inquiry, expanding my understandings of art as sacred inquiry, political intervention and pedagogy.

Developing the work of a/r/tography as ritual, as a sacred inquiry, and an “embodied” (DiRubbo, 1995; Jaggar and Bordo, 1992; Snowber, 1999) and “feminist pedagogy” (hooks, 2000; Irwin, 1997; Lather, 1991; Raven, 1979) within the collaborative learning community of this study, serves to elaborate an expanded understanding of a/r/tography as “radical relatedness.” Radical relatedness, understood as “connective aesthetics” by art writer Suzi Gablik (1992) “redefine[s] the self as relational, rather than as separate and self-contained, [and] could actually bring about a new stage in our social cultural evolution (p. 51). Building upon ongoing relations between the body and the mind in learning, feminist pedagogy tends to encourage critical consciousness and an awareness of power relations. Feminist pedagogy holds the intention of building community through deep listening, dialoguing on ideas and paradigms, and creating new models of social interaction. Feminist pedagogy is collaborative at its root, offering mutual support and respectful supportive criticism. From the individual and collaborative practice of a/r/tography as ritual, the dissertation thesis that has emerged is that a/r/tography has created a conceptual and theoretical foundation for an ongoing critical practice of interrelational wholeness for individuals and community.

The practice of a/r/tography requires an engagement with the multiple lenses of the artist/researcher/teacher in relationship to/with each other. The interrelationship between part and whole is always shifting and developing as it reaches towards an ever-evolving understanding of radical relatedness. The a r and t are symbolic of a waking-up of each part, artist/ researcher/ and teacher to a whole/parts relationship in a trialectic movement of learning and expansion as synecdoche. It is here that human/nonhuman/earth/Kosmic connections are exposed, embraced, and transcended. Within this chapter, I offer an extension to the current a/r/tographic renderings to further support the practice of part/whole relations in the form of synecdoche as a sacred/grounding/story/source.

Just as the co-inquirers of the study were stretched by the practice of a/r/tography, so too were my theoretical understandings of a/r/tography. Entering into the context of multi-faith leadership and education has taken me to the margins of culture and into the realm of the sacred and Divine, revealing an area that has been veiled behind a/r/tography’s current theoretical understandings. Assisting indirectly in the unveilings, various theorists were drawn upon, who are not the poststructural critical theorists such as Ahmed, Aoki, Deleuze, Guattari, Kwon, Merleau Ponty, Nancy, and Rogoff, whose work on embodied ethics, relationality, border

crossing and aesthetics has assisted the rich theoretical development of a/r/tography to date. Rather, within this chapter, I introduce spiritual political emancipatory theorists and pedagogues, David Abalos, Kenneth R. Beittel, Leela Fernandes, Jacqui Alexander, and Parker Palmer -- each of whom call for a sacred epistemology that leads towards an ever-transforming pedagogy of wholeness -- revealing the Divine as telos, which radical relatedness desires. I believe these latter theorists offer yet another location from which to approach the radical relatedness of a/r/tography.

### *Laying the Ground for A/r/tography*

A/r/tography draws theoretical understandings from action research, feminisms, post-structuralism, visual methodology, hermeneutics and other postmodern theories in its practice of understanding and integrating “theoria, praxis, and poesis, or theory/research, teaching/learning, and art/making” (Irwin, 2004, p. 28). Given its theoretical structures, it is not surprising that a/r/tography emerged as a form of interdisciplinary inquiry from within a collaborative community of artists and teachers, who were researching within the discipline of art education (Irwin and de Cosson, 2004). A/r/tography is preceded by many forms of arts-based inquiry<sup>3</sup> that have merged within qualitative research in post-colonial contexts (Finley, 2005). These include: “arts-based educational research” (Eisner, 1998), where “broadening the range of perspectives available for constructing knowledge” in research through the arts is encouraged (Finley, p. 685); “arts-based research” from the graduate work of art therapists (e.g., McNiff, 2000); “arts-informed research” that encourages “scholaristry” by bridging art and social science research (Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, and Luciani, 2004); “artistic research methodology” (Gray, 1996) that evolved in the field of art and design within MFA programs in the UK; “practice-based arts research and design” (Frayling, 2001) that emerged in the UK within multidisciplinary MFA programs; and visual “art practice as research” (Sullivan, 2005) which focuses on the artist studio as a site of research. In her overview of “arts-based inquiry,” Susan Finley (2005) wrote,

Making art is a passionate visceral activity that creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers, and the various audiences who encounter the research text. Arts-based research crosses the boundaries of art and research as defined by the conventions formed historically, culturally bounded by contexts of the international art market and in the knowledge market dominated by higher education. (p. 685)

Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole (2008) in the “Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research” similarly write of “exploring the relationship between the arts and knowledge” (p. 1). They write in the preface:

The productive fusions and tensions among qualitative inquiry and the literary, fine, applied, performing, and media arts give rise to redefinitions of research form and representation as well as new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and ethical dimensions of inquiry. (p. xii)

Arts-based research provides opportunities for communion and spirit making amongst members of a community that have been lost for the most part in our contemporary art and knowledge markets. Despite the sacred possibilities of communion through arts-based inquiry, in my reading of the variations of arts-based inquiry, I have found very few references within art-based educational research that incorporate a sacred or spiritual practice of art making with exceptions like Irwin (2006), Kind (2006) and Snowber (2002).

Recently, within the field of art education, there has been a modest, yet significant, return to the spiritual aspects of art and education (i.e., Campbell, 2006; Gradle, 2004; Irwin, 2007; London 2006). In addition to these arts educators, I have found art and education addressed most profoundly in relation to the spiritual in the work of the late artist-educator Kenneth Beittel, who like the philosopher Hegel and art educator Victor Lowenfeld before him, understood “Spirit as artist.”<sup>4</sup> The experience of spirit as artist emerges within the dissertation study and is addressed more fully in Chapter Six. As this dissertation and my a/r/tographic practice is situated within a multi-faith spiritual discourse, I offer a brief background on Beittel and his work, as it has significantly impacted my evolving theoretical understanding of the spiritual component of a/r/tography as ritual.

#### *Kenneth Beittel: Artist/Researcher/Educator*

The late art educator Marilyn Zurmuehlen, a former student and colleague of Beittel, described him as “[A] distinguished scholar, researcher, and teacher” (Zurmuehlen, 1991, p. 1), an artist-philosopher grounded in “Langer’s philosophy of art as presentational symbol... as well [as in] the praxis philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology [later hermeneutics and poetics], and through them to art as presence (Zurmuehlen, 1991, p. 18). His interests included, yet transcended, institutional art education, delving into the holistic and spiritual dimensions of life and the evolution of human consciousness<sup>5</sup> through art. He had an active professional art practice and exhibited his pottery internationally throughout his career. His research at Penn

State in his Drawing Lab for 16 years, actively focused on the creative process of “artists”<sup>6</sup> and the transformation of those that engaged the serial art making process reflectively.

The foundational method that emerged from the Drawing Lab was what he called “*the art of qualitative thinking*”-- where an in-depth interrelational dialogue is entered into with the artist through the art. In this method he drew from, and expanded upon, Dewey’s writing in *Art as Experience* and the concept of “qualitative thinking.” Beittel and Beittel (1991) explained this theoretical linkage with Dewey:

While all experience might not be thought of as art, what Dewey called *an experience*, organizes itself as art does and remains the model for a vital conceptualization of art itself. In like manner, all experiencing might not be thought of as expressing, but qualitative experiencing is meant to be the equivalent to Dewey’s usage and in addition to connote that it provide us, through expression, with an invaluable text for understanding the deeper meaning of that experience itself. This is what I refer to as an *art of qualitative thinking*. (p. 138)

They go on to explain,

*The overarching purpose of the art of qualitative thinking is to express, describe, and lead to epiphany, so that through its hermeneutic-expressive cycle consciousness becomes self-conscious of its expansion and can evolve. It moves from one expression to a still deeper one. The purpose of its cycle, as one large art process, is to extend qualitative time, to extend depth interpretation, to extend expression.* (p. 149, italics theirs)

The art of qualitative thinking challenged what Beittel called the “broken art,” (1985/2003) that he was witnessing in the art education field, which divided the process of making art from the spirit of art. In contrast, his vision was “a hermeneutic cycle which reveals the phenomenon and the interpreter’s hidden motivation as one” (p. 43). *The art of qualitative thinking* is “where paradoxical language and direct intuition take on their necessary consciousness-expanding function” (p. 181). It is composed of four moments that are dialectical and cyclical in process: (1) *expressive text*, (2) *distancing*, (3) *interpreting*, and (4) *renewing*. Within *expressive text* the originary quality of art/text is called forth as the starting point of the circular inquiry. *Distancing* brings forward “the absent quality...in imagination” (p. 141) and dispels habituation in the reading/seeing of text/art and opens the door to a depth of reading not possible prior to distancing. *Interpreting* moves the thinker/creator into explaining and understanding, and *renewing* returns to the next cycle of expressing/creating as the “mental forces reach their limit and subside” (p. 141). Each prior moment then becomes the ground for the moment to follow.

*The art of qualitative thinking* leads towards a global vision of spirit manifesting in the world through the nurturance and expansion of the human imagination.

The relational art practice that evolved within the drawing lab between the artist, the art process and the researcher, Beittel (1974) identified as “arting<sup>7</sup>.” Arting, as described by Beittel was a co-sharing between the artist, the art making process and the witness(es). In this practice the witness/researcher steps into the artist’s creative relationship with the art and “a potential “third eye” or “mid-wife of the preconscious” is encouraged into being” (p. 3). Through the witness the artist is able to see beyond the process to recognize alternate paths that may have been taken in the arting process. Thus, Beittel wrote:

...artist, witness and aborning work stand in relation: artist-witness, artist-work and witness-work. A trinitarian co-agency, co-sharing, co-creating, transcending but not usurping autonomous otherness, in as in-relation, as in-between, is what is involved. (p. 6)

Through the relational practice of arting one can understand and move with the artist and the art making process. Beittel believed all humans to be capable of creating, learning and transforming through the process of arting within the context of a “loving community” (p. 5). Assisted by a loving and nourishing dialogue, the internal eye of the artist is strengthened, in contrast to the external eye dividing the artist, as he laments, is often the case in western art education. He understood the “nature of “love” which enables the witness and co-journeyer not to “bug” but to “be with”, “to be in sympathy with”, the artist in a formative way” as a “formative philetic hermeneutics, or philetics of art education” (p. 6). He wrote,

I see now that “teaching” arting is like “teaching” loving, and since that is not possible directly or transitively...one can only begin by loving the arting itself which is concretely present, no matter how weakly, in an other. Loving the arting in an other is of necessity also a widening of transference to loving the other as a person, which makes the fullness of his [her] individuality progressively stand forth.

Beittel (e.g., 1985/2003) held an ideal and ethical vision of the power of art in assisting the development of awareness in humans. This vision was supported by his own experience of learning, growth and transformation through his life-long practice as an artist supported by his research and mentoring work at Penn State, and being mentored within an ancient Japanese pottery tradition by a hereditary Japanese pottery master.

He was a very astute scientist (experimental researcher) too, as his early work in the 1950-60s and early 70s exemplifies (e.g., Beittel, 1953; Beittel and Burkhart, 1963; and a summary in Beittel, 1972). However, as early as 1959 he critiqued science as “unwarranted scientism” (p. 26)

and “methodolatry” overall (see Beittel, 1973). In the late 1950s he was also a critic of artists and art educators, who wanted to dismiss the value of scientific research initiatives in art education, as insensitive to and incapable of understanding what artists and art teachers do. Ted Aoki, whose work is a “complex interdisciplinary configuration of phenomenology, poststructuralism, and multiculturalism” (Pinar and Irwin, 2005, p. 1) and, who has had a large impact on reconceptualist curriculum thinking, has acknowledged the significant influence of Beittel’s thought on his own thinking (Pinar and Irwin, 2005, p. 92). Beittel’s methods are, in part, that of a structuralist, in contrast to a totally committed poststructuralist. Beittel embraced tradition, deconstructed the tradition, and reconstructed it anew—making his work postmodern, but not constrained by postmodernist’s attack on spiritual holarchic<sup>8</sup> development.

Bringing the best of science and mysticism as inquiry together was of great interest to Beittel. In 1959 he wrote, “While feeling that nothing is sacred in the sense that it cannot be studied, I have maintained that there is an area of proper mysticism associated with research in art or art education” (p. 26). Beittel (1997) would be quick to acknowledge his philosophical and intellectual work (the analytical discursive) as limited, and at times taking him away from “ground zero,” (the process of making art itself) and, thus, he would try and integrate that with his “transcendelic or numinous and poetic part, since that is the real end which is my beginning, and always has been...” (p. 533).

Beittel’s philosophy and writings resonate with my experience and journey as an artist/researcher/teacher committed to the evolution of consciousness through the practice of a/r/tography as ritual in loving community. His ability to acknowledge and describe with passion the interconnectedness of the artist, researcher, and educator, with spirit, community, and nature, has assisted me to clarify my own philetic connection to the Kosmos on an ongoing basis. He draws together wisdom from his own mentors, be they his teachers, philosophers he has studied, his students, or his pots. He refuses to downplay the mystical dimensions of art. “There is a proper mystical dimension to the arts which cannot be wished away by the most rigorous thinkers” (Beittel, 1961, p. 116).

I discovered Beittel’s work in a reprinted 1985 article, in a 2003 issue of *Visual Arts Research*, the year of his death. Since 1985, his work has been largely overlooked in the field of Art Education. According to Fisher and Bickel (2006),

Only one art educator, and former student, the distinguished late Marilyn Zurmuehlen (1991), ha[s] taken Beittel’s work and given it full attention in a journal article, that we know of. Any other published renderings have been scant or tangential (not to forget the

dissertations, collecting dust on library shelves, by the plenitude of Beittel's students over the years). (p. 35)

Although many art educators have used and cited Beittel's work historically, his visibility as a theorist in the field of art education is low. In recent years though, art educators, some with an interest in holistic education, art as a spiritual practice, and the transformative power of art, have drawn support from Beittel's work (Campbell, 2005; Chung, 2006; Gradle, 2004, 2004a, 2006, 2007; Svedlow, 2004). As well, art educators mapping the history of the field refer to Beittel (Chalmers, 2004; Stockrocki, 2005; Thurber, 2004; White, 2004; Wilson, 2001) and those interested in art research in the artist studio (Sullivan, 2005).

Beittel was a large figure in the field, spending his entire career of more than thirty years within it. He had many supporters coupled with resisters of his work and thinking. This resistance carries on today, more than twenty years since he retired and five years after his death (see Fisher and Bickel, 2006). A significant portion of the resistance appears to be to the spiritual/mystical aspect of Beittel's teaching and philosophy. He has been referred to pejoratively by some art educators as the "mystic in art education" and wary critics make accusations of guru worship to those working with his theories. Such comments about his life and work still occur today (I received a reader's anonymous review of an article on Beittel with a statement in this vein). I link this to my own experience of the emergent community of a/r/tography. The mistrust and wariness that a particular form of inquiry might be led by any one person or one university is ever present in criticisms of a/r/tography, as it is sometimes misunderstood and perceived as enclosed and self-referential.

I believe creative movements are often spirit striving towards its own development. Educational environments are logical locations for these movements to arise, but sadly this is also where the forces to repress creative coalition between universities, faculty, and graduate students is greatest, it seems. Beittel wrote often of his decision to stay close to the ground of art making as a practicing artist, researcher, and teacher, and I would assume this assisted him in clarifying his lifework directions. He worked collaboratively with his students in a drawing lab with community members. Similarly, a/r/tography forefronts the importance of an art making process to guide living inquiry and forefronts the relational aspects of inquiry. It is the "relational understanding of community, art, and research that shapes the methodology of a/r/tography" (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2008). I believe Beittel's work foreshadows the current work of a/r/tography, which has a relational base and calls for a rigorous commitment to an art-making, researching, and teaching practice. As this chapter progresses, I will draw further from Beittel's

theorizing on art (and spirit) for a new age<sup>9</sup> to extend theoretical understandings of a/r/tography as it is currently conceived in the a/r/tographic literature.

### *A/r/tography and Self/Spirit*

The inception, art making, theorizing, and writing of this dissertation has been a process of living inquiry – a lived curriculum of being and becoming. Irwin and Springgay (2008) write that, “A/r/tography as practice-based research is situated in the in-between, where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (p. xxi). Living inquiry is one of the six renderings or conceptual practices of a/r/tography along with contiguity, metaphor and metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess (explained later). A/r/tography has been influenced by, and supported by, many creative and critical thinkers within the field of education. It is informed by curriculum theorists Maxine Green, Dwayne Huebner, Elliot Eisner, Madeleine Grumet, and Ted Aoki among others who support the arts and imagination within a revisionist understanding of curriculum (Pinar, 2004, p. 23). William Pinar’s theory of *currere*,<sup>10</sup> which provides a location for intellectual risk-taking where “the theorist must continually be willing to give oneself up, including one’s point of view” (Pinar, 2004, p. 119), has influenced the emergence of a/r/tography as an autobiographical practice of self-reflexive inquiry within the field of education. Pinar wrote in the introduction to the first edited compilation of a/r/tographic work that a/r/tography is “a significant advance in the sector of scholarship and research ... characterized as understanding curriculum as aesthetic text” (Pinar, 2004, p. 23).

In “Walking to Create an Aesthetic and Spiritual Currere,” Irwin (2006) draws together spirituality, art making, and currere in her pedagogical practice. She wrote:

Walking to create a spiritual and aesthetic currere is an excursion into a pedagogy of self. A commitment to a pedagogy of self encourages further excursions through recursive activities such as artmaking and writing that serve to create who we are. It is through the rhythms of a walking currere, a walking pedagogy of self, that we are introduced to a sense of freedom, transformation and flow. (pp.13 -14)

Some a/r/tographers, similar to Beittel and Beittel’s (1991) art of qualitative thinking, have referred to a spiritual aspect to their a/r/tographic practice where their “express[ions], describe, and lead to epiphany” (p. 149). Early in her practice of a/r/tography, Sylvia Kind (2004) wrote of how she,



...began to see art-making as contemplative practice and as a prayerful act. I saw similarities between inquiry and search for revelation and understanding and prayer. In this way I came to think of art-making as prayer, as a deeply spiritual act of giving voice to the inner longings of the spirit with an attitude of receptivity and openness. (p. 57)

A/r/tography, as I have come to understand it through my individual and collaborative engagement of walking with it, is an integrative form of inquiry that can move one towards a whole and sacred epistemology and pedagogy. Through one's excursion into the self through art, one can then move towards deepening radical relationships of inquiry with others (human and non-human) and the sacred.

### A/r/tography as a Relational Practice

As an emerging form of inquiry, a/r/tography calls for a committed self-reflexive practice of art making and writing (graphy). The multiple identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher are called upon and, when fully utilized, offer rigour and multiple perspectives to the inquiry. Within this self-reflexive practice “[a]/r/tographical research is not subject to standardized criteria, rather it remains dynamic, fluid, and in constant motion (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p xix). The complex collaboration with multiple self-identities requires the a/r/tographer to step outside of what may be a more familiar or comfortable identity into an interrelational process with the self. Elsewhere (Bickel, 2005), I wrote of the distinct yet overlapping identities and practices at work within the a/r/tographer:

At its best, a/r/tography encourages the combined creative freedom and risk-taking of the artist, the rigor and responsibility of the academic researcher, along with the ethics and compassion of the educator. (pp. 13-14)

To date the main research of a/r/tography has been autobiographical (Bickel, 2004; de Cosson, 2003; Kind, 2006; Pente, 2008), fictional (Sameshima, 2006), biographical (Diaz, 2005), school-based (Darts, 2004; Friedman, 2006; Springgay, 2004), teacher education-based (Sinner, 2008) and, collaborative and community-based (Irwin et al., 2006).

Sylvia Kind (2006) writes that the relationality of the artist, researcher, and teacher is the foundation of a/r/tography. It is a living inquiry that resides within the “tensioned and difficult inbetween spaces” (p. 52). “[T]he a/r/t touch, relate to, speak to, inform, enrich, and enliven the other” (Kind, 2006, p. 62). In a similar vein Stephanie Springgay (2004) writes of “touch as intercorporeality” (p. 91), where body knowledges are understood as being “formed through

beings(s)-in relation (p. 91). Irwin and Springgay (2008) further suggest that it is the relational “and ... the intertextual situations that provoke a/r/tographical research, not necessarily academic intentions (p. xxv). Irwin et al., (in press) extend the aspect of relationality in a/r/tography:

A/r/tography is a living inquiry of unfolding art forms and text that intentionally unsettles perception and complicates understandings through its rhizomatic relationality. In so doing, space and time are understood in different ways. (p 11)

In this way the rhizomatic relations of a/r/tography act as “one large art process,... to extend qualitative time, to extend depth interpretation, [and] to extend expression” (Beittel, 1991, p. 149).

A/r/tography addresses three areas of relationality (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 79) which are not limited to, but can be addressed through, the identities of the artist/researcher/teacher: *relational aesthetics*, lived through the lens of the artist; *relational inquiry*, as experienced through the researcher; and *relational learning*, as understood through the teacher (Bickel et al., 2007). Relational aesthetics is a growing practice of art in the contemporary art world as the art field becomes, in the words of French art historian and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, ‘porous’ rather than closed and autonomous (2002, p. 27). Bourriaud (2002) has suggested relationality is an “arena of exchange” where dialogue between the artwork and audience takes place (cited in Gade, 2005, p. 18). In this sense it is “public, community-based art, emphasizing social interactions between artists and spectators” (Ross, 2006, p. 136). In a recent issue of *Flash Art*, relational aesthetics has been defined as an approach, “in which the artist loses his [her] ego-centrality, in order to create a good communication with his [her] ‘object’ – but at the same time [is] always deeply respected as a ‘subject’” (Ross, 2006, p. 138). Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari see relational aesthetics as a movement towards ‘truth’ based on the interaction between the artist and the audience (cited in Bleeker, 2004, p. 146). Art writer Suzi Gablik (1992), drawing from feminist theory, writes of “the politics of connective aesthetics” in contrast to modernism’s “radical autonomy and individual uniqueness.” She understands connective aesthetics as “the spirit, or ‘binding power’ that holds everything together,” which is missing in our modernist world (p. 51).

Within relational inquiry, barriers between researcher and subject are crossed (Reason, 2005) and a relationship of care, compassion, and trust is invoked. Because of this it can hold the tensions of insider outsider research (Tuwaihi Smith, 1999). Social psychologists define “relational inquiry [a]s a way of thinking and acting that, in practice, is responsive to the emerging context. It is not a set of skills or techniques that can be learned and then performed”

(McNamee and Gergen, 1999, p. 165). Within leadership study, Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) describe the relational skills that are required to contribute to “growth-in-connection:”

[They are]... characterized by the construct of mutuality in which the boundary between self and other is more fluid and multi-directional.... The process is one that moves from mutual authenticity (we bring our authentic selves to the interaction); to mutual empathy (in which we hold onto self but also experience the other’s reality); and finally to mutual empowerment (in which each is in some way influenced or affected by the other, so that something new is created). (p. 28)

Feminist Jacqui Alexander (2005) in writing (in particular) of identity politics within Women Studies, where she has witnessed feminist scholars keeping their work divided based on identities, directs relational inquiry within the academy to “move across... borders to develop frameworks that are simultaneously intersubjective, comparative and relational, yet historically specific and grounded” (pp. 253-254).

Relational teaching/learning assists learners to “become partners in their own education of life” (Boyd and Sullivan, 2006, n.p.). Curriculum theorists Britzman, Doll, and Pinar conceptualize pedagogy as “profoundly relational” (Pinar, 1998, p. 27). Adult educator Dorothy MacKeracher (2004) points to the importance of “other-connected or relational learning” which is understood as “supportive, co-operative and collaborative and social action based” (p. 19).

A/r/tographers grapple with the richness and complexity of relational aesthetics, relational inquiry, and relational teaching/learning in their a/r/tographic practices. They draw from the relational theories and practices in each of the domains of art, research, and teaching to strengthen their understandings and practices. A/r/tographic renderings assist in the conceptual unfolding and depth interpretation of the relational a/r/tographic practice. The renderings offer multiple interconnected entry points from which to enhance learning within the inquiry and create a base from which to share the a/r/tographic research with others.

### *A/r/tographic Renderings and the Labyrinth*

The renderings of a/r/tography assist in the expansion of our notions of space, and time. They are “theoretical conceptualizations of aesthetic knowing and being” (Springgay, 2004, p. 42) that offer entry points for crossing the boundaries of writing, art making, knowing, and living. They orient themselves to process rather than method. As I strive to explain a practice that encourages the undoing of oneself, I turn to the labyrinth as an ancient cross-cultural structure that synergistically embodies the a/r/tographic renderings of *metaphor/metonymy*,

*contiguity, living inquiry, openings, reverberations* and *excess* (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005).

Labyrinths are most often circular in shape, signifying wholeness. Unlike mazes, which are a puzzle to find one's way through, the labyrinth has one entrance and one path that leads to the centre, and which one retraces on the way out.

Renderings offer a linguistic path to assist and guide ones' understanding of the multiple aspects that emerge within the art-making/inquiry/teaching process. An a/r/tographer may enter the inquiry through these guideposts or allow renderings to emerge out of the inquiry process. This is similar to walking a labyrinth where one can enter with specific concepts or questions to meditate upon or enter with no guideposts and allow the concepts, questions and ideas to emerge through the walking. There are no specific rules for walking the labyrinth, although guidelines have been developed from spiritual traditions that practice walking meditation in the labyrinth. Similarly, there are no rules for working with the guideposts of renderings in a/r/tography. They have been developed by those practicing a/r/tography and can shift and be added to as the practice develops.

The labyrinth is a sacred container for the ritual of *living inquiry* to take place within. Living inquiry refuses to separate our daily lives from an a/r/tographic inquiry process. It calls for a wide awakesness to all aspects of our lives, emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual. As a contiguous structure, the labyrinth weaves the past, present, and future as well as art, spirituality, and the moving body together. *Contiguity* reminds us of the nearness and immediacy of our artist, researcher and teacher selves. Each role rubs up against the other, sometimes causing friction at other times support. *Openings* are the in-between spaces that we often overlook or try to cover over as they can take us into other realms of awareness outside of our normal comfort zones as artist, researcher, and teacher. The openings of the a/r/tographic journey can potentially open our hearts and minds to new ways of being, generating new ways of perceiving and knowing. *Metaphor/metonymy* bring the power of symbol into our inquiry. They can take us beyond our own self-contained worldviews. Novelist Joyce Cary (1958) wrote of the transformative ability of symbols,

It is the ambivalence of the symbol that enables the artist, as teacher or expositor, as creator of meanings, to bridge the gap between the individual idea and the universal real emotion, forming by art a personality which unites them both in a single active and [subconscious] rational will. (p. 190)

The labyrinth is a contemporary metonym; that is, a symbol that has recently, by some, come to represent a sacred multi-faith space (Artress, 2006). Symbols are multi-vocal and connect us historically to past and contemporary cultures, and can assist in the transformation of future cultures. The labyrinth reverberates with the history of past civilizations and contemporary lives. *Reverberations* invite us to respond to patterns and connections that emerge through the a/r/tographic process. They make visible what may at first appear to be a simple occurrence, but if explored may lead to new and provocative understandings. *Excess* offers permission to overdo it, to extend beyond ourselves into forbidden territory. Excess is found in the margins of our lives and our society. The excess or endlessness that the labyrinth can evoke through the winding journey can cause leaks and fissures in the journeyer, transgressing limiting ways of being and knowing.

### *The Rhetorical Triad of Metaphor/Metonymy/Synecdoche: Extending a Rendering*

The framework of a/r/tography as ritual with the addition of synecdoche to the renderings is important in understanding the sacred and whole a/r/tographic process of this dissertation study. To support the addition of this rendering and the maturation of a/r/tography within the twenty first century, I refer to Beittel's (1985) understanding of sacred art for a new age, and the sacred cycle that can move a broken art to a whole art. This cycle can be endlessly entered, according to Beittel, through the dialectic and poetic interrelationship of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Metaphor and metonymy, are already in place as renderings within conceptual practices of a/r/tography. Just as metaphor and metonymy are fundamental to assisting the flow of language in its construction and complexity, they serve as a creative rendering within a/r/tography to assist movement and flow in the complexity of the a/r/tographic process. Based upon Beittel's understanding of the rhetorical triadic relationship of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, I have brought synecdoche into my own a/r/tographic practice as ritual. Synecdoche introduces the movement of the multi-dimensional spiral into the dialectic relationship of metaphor/metonymy. It blurs the boundaries of metaphor/metonymy even further encouraging and nurturing the radical relationality of the part/whole, individual/universal, individuation/unity, autonomous/communal. Radical relationality is itself synecdochical in that it conjoins autonomy with community, the human with the environment interrelationally. I suggest that it is an addition that assists the radical and relational journey towards a whole art and a whole a/r/tographic practice.

The character of metaphor as understood by Beittel (1985) is the relationship of a whole to a whole, metonymy a relationship between parts, and synecdoche enters with the desire to relate the parts to the whole (p. 50). Hazard Adams (1988) similarly expands our understanding of synecdoche and method in his theory:

Further, what counts is the relation of part to part and part to whole:

Method [says Coleridge]... becomes natural to the mind which has been accustomed to contemplate not things only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the relation of things. (p. 41)

Coleridge in his treatment of poetic method brings forth a temporal multi-dimensional and developmental aspect to synecdoche that is not just spatial (as part and whole) but, as Hazard implies, a part which anticipates the whole— a telos on the way to wholeness.

Metaphor and metonymy engage a dialogue, and when synecdoche is brought in, a trialectic between all three can extend the cycle of inquiry and learning to a full embrace of the Kosmos and our place within it. My own part/whole situatedness within the dissertation as a co-participant/co-inquirer, planning team member/university researcher is an example of synecdoche as an experience of living inquiry within this a/r/tographic study. Radical relationality itself is synecdochical in the part/whole tensions that it creates, which can alter those living the tensions so prevalent within an individualistic Western world. I suggest that synecdoche is an addition to a/r/tography that anticipates a radical and relational journey towards a whole a/r/tographic practice.

As another example of a symbolic synecdochical rendering, I offer the reflective description I wrote after a temporal multi-dimensional ritual encounter I had with a sound installation entitled “Forty-Part Motet” by internationally renowned Canadian artist Janet Cardiff. The installation was collaboratively created with her partner George Bures Miller in 2001, and has been exhibited in numerous international public galleries and cathedrals. Cardiff shares in her artist statement that she wanted to enter the music and understand the composition from the inside out, and to allow the viewer/listener an experience from the choir’s perspective.

*Peaceful... Amazing... Magnificent... are words written on yellow post-it notes by gallery visitors outside the gallery door to Janet Cardiff’s Forty-Part Motet sound installation at the Surrey Art Gallery in British Columbia (February 27, 2008). A young family is exiting the installation and asks if I have seen it and if not, to hurry in as it is starting. I quickly enter, and observe the large plain gallery space with identical hi-fidelity speakers on tripods at average ear height, placed in an oval formation. Echoing sounds of men coughing, throats clearing, and*

*young male voices in conversation are heard emerging from the forty individual speakers. As one moves around the oval installation different vocal warm up sounds and conversations are heard, then die out as the conductor's voice, heard in the distance (his voice does not merit a mic) tells the choir of male singers that he will not stop unless something disastrous happens.*

*A moment of quiet and then a cappella choral music begins. A single piercing voice emerges from one speaker and contiguous voices join in waves as my ears slowly follow the building polyphonic choral sounds, slowly turning by body clockwise from my location in the center of the oval. Just as the full circumference of my body turning is complete, the voluminous choir sound is released from all speakers and I am moved to tears in response as I stand transfixed in the center of the oval for the duration of the performance. The fourteen minutes of 16<sup>th</sup> Century English composer, Thomas Tallis's complex polyphonic music ends at the moment of climactic choral richness and is followed by an achingly full silence.*

*I remain, for the most part alone within the installation space of reverent sound, while four more exactly the same performances take place. I find myself exploring the different ways one can interact with the choir and the installation. Moving randomly throughout the space, pausing to listen to individual voices as they attract my attention. Laying down on the cushioned bench in the center of the oval, allowing the sound to drop into my body from all directions. At times I become a choir member adding my own vocal harmony to the motet. Walking clockwise at a steady pace for the fourteen minutes as the square-faced speakers become stickmen, blurring as I pass by, individual voices catching my ear momentarily to be replaced by another voice. This stark gallery space has become a soundscape within which one can play and explore uncensored. I become part of the whole that is this oval unity made up of forty, sometimes forty-one distinct voices. I synecdochically become the whole while standing and laying in the center, and a part amidst the whole as I move about listening and responding to the different voices. As I reluctantly walk out of the installation I stop at the post-it board and add the word synecdochical.*

Within the seventy-five minutes of immersion in the installation I experienced a sense of profound rest. The visual, being only one aspect of the whole sensory event, sanctioned a shift from an intense and focused viewing state to a soft-focused receptive and embodied state. One moment I was transformed into a choir member performing, in another moment I was a receptive audience member, and in yet another moment I became a keenly aware conductor. I found myself shifting effortlessly from part to whole, to whole to part depending on my physical location in the installation. The opportunity to soften and at times close my eyes, while my ears,

body, and spirit were auditorily touched and entered, revealed my entire being to a rich connective aesthetic. I became an active participant/creator in a ritual of my/the artist's making within this public gallery space. Living for a brief time in the ever expanding sacred cycle of relating parts to/with the whole.

### *A/r/tography as Ritual and Performative/Pedagogy*

For some, *a/r/tography* offers a unique inquiry space that expands notions of art, writing, and inquiry, while simultaneously holding space for the spiritual. The theory and practice of *a/r/tography* has resonated with and expanded my philosophy of art and education. As an artist interested in art as public pedagogy and research, *a/r/tography* became an intermediary between my artist self and the academy. During my Masters thesis, I developed *a/r/tography as ritual*, and made visible the spiritual and aesthetic relationships between the body, art, space, place, text, ritual, inquiry and education. At the same time, I lived through an expansive journey of identity transformation; from artist to *a/r/tographer*. This transition conjoined the identities of researcher and educator to my more developed artist identity. Ritual<sup>11</sup> was the sacred container that held and assisted me through the often disorienting thesis journey.

In the development of *a/r/tography as ritual*, I have found the work of ritual theorist Ronald Grimes (1995) helpful in expanding traditional understandings of ritual.<sup>12</sup> He found that artists play a consistent role in bringing “emergent ritual” into society through art and artistic performances, which act as vehicles to awaken reflexive consciousness in society. I perform *a/r/tography as ritual* as a “[p]rocess of invention” (Irwin et. al., 2005, p. 46) so as to move beyond mere content, interpretation, and a rational reading alone. The performative aspects of *a/r/tography as ritual* are essential to understanding what I have come to articulate as a performative pedagogy. Grimes further wrote that “[r]itual enactment at once awakens the reflexivity of consciousness and tranquilizes the anxiety provoked by doing so” (p. 69). Through offering an understanding of “nascent ritual” or emergent ritual, he challenged the study of ritual to focus, not only on historical and established rituals, but also on the new creation of ritual in postmodern society. Nascent ritual, I believe, supports the role of ritual as part of postmodern *a/r/tographic* inquiry. He further explains that rituals in this context are not set structures but “structurings” that “surge and subside, ebb and flow (p. 62).” The “knower and known” are conjoined (p. 69)” in ritualizing, and the realization that research and education happens not just on ritual, but in ritual is acknowledged.



Likewise, film-maker and theorist Trinh t. Minh-ha (2005), whose postcolonial films contain aspects of spirituality and ritual, recognizes rituals as "... dynamic agents in the ongoing process of creating a symbolic world of meaning and truth" (p. 74). She validates the aspect of ritual performance in the work of the artist:

I've sometimes defined artists and activists as "pathmakers," and "art" as a way of marking moments in our lives.... Similarly, one can say that media practice, at its best, is ritual performance. A work that remains alive is a work always in performance.... One should treat rituals as rituals if one is to step out of the servile one-dimensional mind and turn an instrument into a creative tool. (p. 74)

As part of the creative tool, spirituality, Trinh wrote "... is not something that can be discussed lightly, since spirituality has always resisted analytical thinking and the logic of consciousness (2005, p.176). I concur that the analysis and the logic of consciousness is resisted within the lived experience and inquiry of ritual. Rita Irwin (2007, p. 10) writes that performance and rituals are often "evocative and/or provocative" assisting each person involved to think critically, moving beyond patterned and comfortable ways of thinking and being with others, towards new perspectives and transformative learning experiences. Ritual, in contrast to theatrical performance, is not focused on the "performance" or the end product with entertainment as the goal. Instead, ritual is focused on the "process" of the experience for both the enactor of the ritual and the viewer/witness while in relationship with spirit. Symbols become the connecting element in ritual through enacted movements, forms and sounds. Within my own lived experience of ritual as performative/pedagogy I am not an actor performing a script but a priestess engaging with spirit in a sacred context that holds the intention of re-making our perceptions of the world. Feminist Kay Turner (1982) in writing of contemporary feminist ritual in North America forefronts the importance of women enacting rituals as a way of women empowering themselves and each other. She reminds us that "[g]enerally, men have held the rights to ritual use: in fact, the participation in ritual by men has been their most profound display of cultural authority and their most direct access to it" (p. 221). In reclaiming ritual as an emancipatory performative and pedagogical process, one can dramatically reaffirm one's place of belonging and identity within community (K. Turner, p. 226).

Nascent or emergent ritual, as described by Grimes, is what artists and women gravitate to as they create symbolic worlds of meaning (Grimes, 1995; Northrup, 1997). The practice of a/r/tography as ritual within this study works with this nascent ritual practice. Nascent ritual offers a fluid structure for inquiry and learning processes that interweave the performative and

pedagogical. The simple structure that guides nascent ritual as practiced in this study includes: 1) an intention which grounds and clarifies the purpose of the work to be done, 2) a chosen or created sacred space which acts as a safe sanctuary for the work, 3) an intentional form of witnessing that may or may not include other human beings and, 4) some manner of closure that allows one to leave the ritual space and process to return to ordinary life.

The collaborative dissertation study works with a/r/tography as ritual to create a sanctuary that holds and supports the performative/pedagogical inquiry/excavation processes, creating a supportive ground for risk-taking, challenges, and new knowledge to emerge within. Trinh (2005) wrote:

In other words, rituals serve as a ‘frame’ whose stabilizing effect, experienced through repetition in cycles and rhythmic recurrences, allows us to see things with a different intensity and, ... to perceive the ordinary in an extra-ordinary way. (p. 135)

A potential political outcome of ritual is to reinforce “bonds that inspire social change... renew[ing]... commitment[s] to evolving and transforming society as a whole” (K. Turner, 1982, p. 227).

### *Reverence and the Sacred*

Within the frame of a/r/tography as ritual, *reverence* is drawn together with the sacred. Spiritual teacher and artist Peter Reason (1993) positions action research as a spiritual practice within a “living, sacred cosmos” (p. 282) that integrates a critical social consciousness with the sacred. His relational philosophy includes an aesthetic, as well as a spiritual imperative (Reason, 2005) that requires face-to-face interaction within communities of inquirers (Reason, 2002). His notion of “action research as spiritual practice” (2000) echoes with the practice of a/r/tography as ritual.

Ritual can include the process of community making. Philosopher and educator, the late Rudolf Steiner theorized on what he called “Cosmic Ritual” or “Spiritual Communion” where it is possible to achieve communion, when one beholds the other and consequently begins to understand the other. Steiner (1964) wrote that ,

... the great process of transformation begins, where the one is able to work upon the other out of a profound knowledge and understanding, and the plastic molding of the spirit is taken up and changed to music and to speech....Word meets word; articulate word meets inwardly living word. The human souls are themselves words; their symphony is the symphony of the spoken cosmic Word in its very being (communion). (pp. xiv-xv)

Steiner teaches, “The arts are another path to Spiritual Communion through transformation and purification of feeling” (Benesch, 2001, p. xi). Art educator Sally Gradle (2006) similarly teaches future art educators,

... that humans have always responded to challenges with artful participations, sometimes called rituals, which honor and strengthen community, elaborate on valued experiences, (Dissanayake, 2000), passages of time (Eliade, 1959), and life transformations (Highwater, 1994, Abram, 1996). (p. 13)

Likewise, educator and researcher John Heron (1998) reflects that, when groups of people enter collaborative practices<sup>13</sup> of inquiry, they often come to share an “intersubjective perspective on what is universal” (p. 15). He further explains that we need to go “beyond rational discourse to resolve issues of spiritual validity” (p. 15). He suggests adopting “concourse” (*a la* Jurgen Kremer), that draws from the multiple levels (arational and rational) of human experience through all art forms, “...ritual, silence, stories, humour, spiritual practice” (p. 15). He has observed that groups entering interreligious dialogue have found it helpful to combine rational discussions with ritual and spiritual practices (p. 15). In essence, I attempted to do this throughout the study.

The inquiry practice of a/r/tography as ritual has offered a location for me, as someone interested in art as transformative education, to challenge the limiting classical and modernist aesthetics of form, order and beauty alone and to engage an integral and spiritual art aesthetic that is in relationship—a practice that follows the art process and is curious about the space between, around and inside the: mind/body, the rational/arational, cultural/spiritual, writing/art, and ritual/education. Kenneth Beittel (1989/92) understands this as an integral spiritual transformative practice of art for a new age. He wrote that,

The practice of art... is a spiritual discipline that offers a powerful antidote to an age suffering from its loss of center.... In this coming age we will see a big shift in human consciousness, away from the mental, egoistic, toward more spiritual ways of being and knowing.... to practice thus is to work at self-transformation. (p. ix)

Ritual opens the threshold to a “sacred” and “spirited” epistemology (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000 and Vella, 2000) where the spiritual and arational become significant sites of knowledge making and pedagogy, alongside the rational within our educational systems and our cultural roots of ritual. A/r/tographic ritual has challenged and expanded my ability to bridge “articulate word” with “inwardly living word” (Steiner, 1964). It is in the practice of a/r/tographic ritual that

I have been able to bring together the rational and arational aspects of art, writing, research and education.

Ritual, I argue, thoughtfully supports the practice of a/r/tography, while interweaving “the arts with scholarly writing through living inquiry” (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2008, p. 84). This further complicates and expands traditional understandings of what art, research, and education are. Ritual creates a sacred space that we can create, perform, explore, learn, and teach within. Rudolf Steiner (1964) taught the 3R’s of education as rhythm, ritual, and reverence. Through the embodied rhythm of ritual we can move into places of reverence and awe in our connections with others. From this place of open connection, revelation has the opportunity to surface, transforming our understandings of each other, ourselves, and the world that we live in. When the sacred and thoughtful space of ritual is missing, we struggle to hold the intangibility of the arational aspects of our experiences, and revelation is more easily lost or destroyed.

#### *Sacred Epistemology and a Pedagogy of Wholeness*<sup>14</sup>

The significance of a “sacred epistemology” that guides my art making, pedagogy, and research as an a/r/tographer was made clear to me through a revelation I had while ritually walking a labyrinth. I spoke about this experience at an artist talk,<sup>15</sup>

*I had a recent experience being in San Francisco and going to Grace Cathedral. When I was younger I traveled in Europe and went to cathedrals to look at the art. Spending time at Grace cathedral and walking its indoor and outdoor labyrinths, reminded me that my greatest experiences of learning have started with art – it draws me in - then spirit enters, and as I’m touched by spirit in some way, learning and education follow. That is the ongoing cycle. The experiential relationship with art begins the learning experience and that’s a place of not necessarily knowing. When I look/listen/touch art and I’m open to the spirit connection that is always present ... then... I’m in multiple conversations and I can learn.*

*... Art is about learning, going to a place where I don’t know and I am not guiding it. It comes from a place of not knowing first, where you take the risk of making or doing. I often don’t know what my art pieces mean and I don’t care what they mean when I am making them. When I share my art with people and they respond to the pieces, they give me insights and teach me about my art. (Artist Talk Excerpts, April 19, 2006)*

Beittel (1989/92) might understand the revelation I received while walking the labyrinth and looking at the art in Grace cathedral as an experience of anticipatory wholeness. He wrote of artists' commitment to dwelling with the unknown:

Artists live in a kind of participatory and anticipatory wholeness. They are committed to the form of things unknown. Tradition shows them that these forms are natural, selfless, and timeless at the same time that they are unique, present, and part of their own destiny. (p. 8)

Similar to Beittel's reflections on the critical and self-aware artist in touch with tradition, a commitment to participatory and anticipatory wholeness is present within the radical relatedness of a/r/tography. In addition, an openness to arational ways of knowing finds a receptive home within a/r/tography as ritual. The arational, as I have come to learn, has historically been acknowledged within the mystic traditions and by artists. I believe it is essential for the development of a "sacred epistemology" which expands sacred texts, "is political, presuming a feminist, communitarian moral ethic stressing the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation" (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000, p. 1052). Peter Reason (in press) takes an ethical stance in support of arational ways of knowing arguing "that reliance on the conscious and rational mind unaided by art, religious experience, dream and such like is 'necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life' (Bateson, 1972, p. 146; cited in Reason, forthcoming, p. 3). Reason (1993) teaches that we require diverse artistic means to take experiential knowing and present it in creative performative ways prior to the application of concepts, theories, and abstract ideas (p. 279). Within rational scientific forms of research, the spiritual aspects of life and inquiry are too often seen as irrational and relegated to the margins. A/r/tography as ritual offers a corrective to this marginalization where a sacred cycle of discovery and experience through art can unfold expanding knowledge construction in the arational realm alongside the rational.

My commitment to sustaining a sacred and whole practice of art/research/teaching has been both a blessing and a struggle. Keeping a balance of studio, academic, and teaching practices is not easily accomplished, as the journey through my graduate program revealed. A few years ago I was challenged reading an article by Beittel. He described the experience of writing an academic article in his studio surrounded by his pottery tools and pots. At the time of reading, I could not imagine bringing my academic writing into my studio space. The distance between

these two, seemingly oppositional mindsets (rational and arational), felt extreme and impossible. Yet, I did not forget his demanding words of wisdom.

Through the writing of this dissertation I have evolved to bringing studio supplies in to my writing space. As I have laboured to express my understanding of concepts, ideas, and theorists through words, I move back and forth to visually express these concepts in daily process mandalas (Images 3 and 4). In this way, I have kept a sacred and whole dialect in motion as I visually 'write' alongside textual writing. I still feel in the nascent stage of fully living and expressing this integration but the foundation to continue the evolution of a sacred and whole life is in place and supported by the practice of a/r/tography, and the many theorists whose work assist in its development.

I suggest that within a sacred epistemological context we can work to create alternative scripts that begin with *art*, and can lead to spirit and new understandings. The result includes aspects present within the "sixth" and "seventh moments of qualitative inquiry," which Lincoln and Denzin (2000) envision as:

... a form of qualitative inquiry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical. This form of inquiry erases traditional distinctions among epistemology [true], ethics [good], and aesthetics [beautiful]; nothing is value-free. It seeks to ground the self in a sense of the sacred, to connect the ethical, respectful self dialogically to nature.... It seeks to embed this self in deeply storied histories of sacred spaces and local places, to illuminate the unit of the self in its relationship to the reconstructed, moral, and sacred natural world.... (p. 1052)

They note that since the turn of the century disciplines within qualitative social science have begun to bring spirit and science back together in a movement to resacralize life experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 583). Educator Rudolf Steiner contributes to this movement in teaching that the task of the arts is to "carry the spiritual-divine life into the earthly" (1964, p. 45). A sacred epistemology is a manifestation of the rejoining of spirit and science, often enacted in public spaces as ritual performances with members of culture(s). The performative and community aspects of a/r/tography as ritual can contribute to this resacralization of life experiences. These performances can transport us out of ordinary reality and invite us to write alternative scripts that can assist in changing our actions with the world (Cohen-Cruz, 1998, p.1). Working within a community of co-inquirers has the potential to offer checks and balances as we explore alternate paths that move us beyond the familiar.

The five theorists: David Abalos, Kenneth R. Beittel, Leela Fernandes, Jacqui Alexander, and Parker Palmer, mentioned earlier in this chapter, each elaborate on the understandings of sacred epistemology and the resacralizing of life experiences that Lincoln and Denzin present in the sixth and seventh moments of qualitative inquiry. Unlike a/r/tography, four of the five theorists do not forefront the use of art in the inquiry process, yet I believe that their theories complement the philosophical roots of a/r/tography as currently theorized. Their theories can contribute to an in-depth sacred and whole understanding of a/r/tography as ritual. I have found their theories assist in developing an understanding of a/r/tography as an intersubjective spiritual and political practice. What follows is a brief introduction to their work and theories, while Chapters Four, Five and Six explore in more depth the rhizomatic connections and understandings that have arisen from employing their theories in this dissertation study.

David Abalos is a contemporary Latino American religious scholar and sociologist, who advocates for critical multi-cultural education that includes strategies of transformation. His theory is developed from the liberational work of Paulo Freire, and his own teacher Manfred Halpern, who developed a theory that distinguishes the four faces of humanity: the personal face, political face, historical face, and sacred face. Abalos's theory of transformation engages "the four faces of our being" for transforming culture (1998, p. 35). He defines culture as "... a network of stories that hang together in order to create a cosmos of meaning for the members of a society" (1996, pp. 6-7). Within this notion of generic culture he argues that we and the stories we live have four faces. The personal face tells the story from our individual voice, the political face tells the story from the viewpoint of societal and governmental structures. Historical face stories can be connected to traditions, codes of behavior, and can be from one's family or cultural tradition. The sacred face can involve one's religion and/or spirituality. The sacred face underlies all the other faces. It is the ethical core of a person's story, according to Abalos.

Abalos stresses the importance of telling, retelling, reclaiming, and changing our stories as they may have been imposed on us from these four faces of being and culture. Within each of the four faces we live stories that are transforming or deforming. Ultimately, he writes, acting in the service of the transformation of stories is "the deepest of all sacred sources, which can guide us to form a more compassionate and inclusive world" (1996, p. 25). He teaches that many of our faces hold stories with a false coherency. To transform the false coherency one must shift to an incoherent story that enables the transformation of the face and its story to begin. Abalos uses drama as a metaphor to teach his theory and incorporates reading literature, viewing films, and writing essays within his curriculum for transforming culture(s). However, his pedagogy and

theory would be enhanced by the creative art making process of a/r/tography. A/r/tography offers a direct entrance into the incoherent shifting grounds of culturally embedded stories through the arational process of art making. Adding the awareness of the four faces to one's practice of a/r/tography extends the scope of its inner phenomenological and hermeneutic practice to that of a political, historical and sacred practice.

Leela Fernandes and Jacqui Alexander are post-colonial feminist women of colour theorists, who advocate for the decolonization of the Divine as a personal and political act. They each call for a spiritual practice that can bring oneself into alignment with oneself, while simultaneously aligning with the Divine through the collective (Alexander, 2005). They offer an ethical feminist approach to leadership that does not separate erotic knowledge from political knowledge and offer the erotic as a life force which will assist in crossing the divisions within our society (Fernandes, 2003). Their refusal to separate the spiritual from the political supports the extension of a/r/tography as ritual into a transformative political realm. Their work calls for a crossing of 'bridges' and the leaving of familiar locations similar to the a/r/tographer's practice of identity and discipline crossings. I write in more depth about their work in Chapters Four, Five, and Six in relation to the a/r/tographic research of this dissertation.

Similar to Abalo's "incoherence" of self, educator Parker Palmer (2005) addresses the "divided self" in our society and acknowledges the damage living a divided life does to our ability to learn and trust within community. If we are living in a lie (or false coherency), he writes, it is difficult for those in relationship with us to feel secure and to trust. He advocates the creation of "circles of trust" in community that support individuals to make discerning choices in life -- decisions that are integrated and move one towards their whole self. I address his work and pedagogy for a whole education further in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

The foundational and evolutionary thrust of the practice and theory of a/r/tography leads towards personal, political, historical, and sacred transformations of the self and community. Each of these theorists, I believe, offer complementary transformative practices and theories that can assist the political, historical, and sacred development of a/r/tography.

### An A/r/tographic Vision of Collaboration

Yvonna Lincoln and Norman Denzin (2000), advocate for the emergent qualitative research frontier that I believe a/r/tography inhabits:



The performed text [i]s one of qualitative research's last frontiers. It is a version of Victor Turner's (1982, p. 25), "liminal space," an old, but new, border to be crossed. When fully embraced this crossing will forever transform qualitative research methodology. (p. 1048)

I am committed, yet sober in my efforts, to assist the crossing that can potentially transform qualitative research methods. I recognize myself fully in Springgay, Irwin, and Wilson's (2003) description of the artist/researcher/teacher that lives "... an anxious life, where the a/r/tographer is unable to come to conclusions or to settle into a linear pattern of inquiry. Instead there is a nervousness; a reverberation within the excess of the doubling process" (p. 3). They suggest that difficult and complex questions that cannot be linearly understood "permeate a life and engage emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, embodied ways of knowing—all aspects of one's private, public and/or professional self" (p. 4). Through engagement with sacred mindful inquiry, art making, and writing, I have often been undone and exposed through the "excess of the doubling process." This doubling can be experienced as being part and whole simultaneously. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (cited in Rule, 1997, p. 68) in her book *Aurora Leigh*, alludes to the uneasy task of crossing the boundaries between worlds and the doubling process that artists are confronted with:

But poets should  
Exert a double vision; should have eyes  
To see near things as comprehensively  
As if afar they took their point of sight  
And distant things, as intimately deep  
As if they touched them (line 182-187)

Philip Rule (1997) interprets Browning's lines as "Certainly this 'double vision' entails combining a divine and a human perspective which is one of the goals of religion - to try to see things as God sees them even while we are immersed in the particularity of human experience" (p. 68).

As I am particularly interested in the education and the evolutionary practices of artists in our society, I am aware and concerned that many contemporary artists do not have the emotional, spiritual, and material support required to cross the boundaries between all aspects of one's life and world. A relational practice of art making can address and support artists' double vision. Communities of feminist artist's emerged in the 1960-70s with a political (and for some a spiritual) understanding of the importance of collaborative art practice and collectivity in the face of a patriarchal art world that for the most part did not acknowledge women as artists. The

feminist backlash of the 1980s rendered the groundbreaking work of these women artists (e.g. , Eleanor Antin, Mary Beth Edelson, and Suzanne Lacy) invisible for the most part, and only since the 1990's has their art individual and collaborative and community-based begun to be studied and added to the art "canon."<sup>16</sup> A unique quality of the feminist art movement, in contrast to traditionally defined art movements, is that it is a "relatively open-ended system" not confined to manifestos and particular charismatic individuals (Cornelia Butler, 2007, p. 15). As a collaborative artist, I am encouraged in reading and witnessing the expansion of the individual art practice within contemporary art to that of collaborative art practices. In the past ten years collaborative art has been acknowledged and inquired into more fully by the international art world (Bishop, 2006), than it has for decades. Within these practices the "intersubjective space created through these projects becomes the focus—and medium—of artistic investigation" (Bishop, 2006, p. 179). This growing relational aesthetic (Bourriaud, 1998) further develops "the modernist call to blur art and life, that has the potential to re-humanize a fragmented and numb capitalist society" (p. 179- 80). At the same time, Bishop cautions that the isolated ethical stance of some collaborative artists, who sacrifice artistic authorship and aesthetics for ethics alone, will not fully assist re-humanization of society. I concur with her integral suggestion to combine the aesthetic and the social/political with the ethical (p. 182).

I return now to the mystical writing of Kenneth Beittel as he clearly laid a vision for the twenty-first century, that I believe is worth revisiting within the twenty-first century practice of *a/r/tography*. His writing and art, first and foremost, do not let one forget that the practice and discipline of the artist moves the artist and society towards a greater understanding of the world. He wrote that "... spirit itself is artist, and thus the way of being of the artist provides us a model of models in the purity of its uncodified method as a spiritual discipline for revelation and for the evolution of consciousness" (Beittel and Beittel, 1991, p. 45). In his 1985 article entitled "Art for a New Age," he first prophesized for the next millennium, which we are now living, and within which *a/r/tographic* inquiry has emerged. Although he privileged the role of the artist, he at the same time encouraged all people to engage a creative practice and to be artists. The making of art on my own and with others, within the *a/r/tographic* dissertation, has assisted an embodiment and thus understanding of the concepts of spiritual practice, *arting*, centering, disciplined spontaneity, and ultimately the "art of qualitative thinking" (Beittel and Beittel, 1991). Many of these theoretical connections are addressed in the remainder of the dissertation.

Beittel's expressed idealistic vision of "art for a new age" for the next millennium is not his alone, and is one I have attempted to live and be with in my own art making/researching/teaching

practice. His vision emerged from his own art making/research/teaching practice, where he acknowledged “the breaking of art [a]s hopeful, for it coincides with the gradual emergences of a whole art. And it turns out that to put art back into wholeness we must put ourselves back into wholeness” (1985, p. 50). The quest for wholeness, he wrote, is never absolute, but always evolving to the next moment of wholeness, requiring a dynamic and living relationship between revelation and reason. Beittel understood revelation and prophesy as the present “experienced as unfinished” (p. 40). He suggests that artists are “natural lightening rods for prophecy and revelation” (p. 41). Reason, Beittel argued stimulates and revitalizes revelation. To live the vision of art for a new age, Beittel taught that one must engage the active imagination as it is the mediator between intellect and matter as it shifts into a Great Tradition of “planetary scope” that is “transcultural, transhistorical, and transpersonal” (p. 44). In this Great Tradition the artist moves through time from Being (autobiographical) to Becoming (universal) as “[o]ur imaginations about ourselves and the universe reach out with yearning for certainties we cannot locate” (Beittel, p. 45). He further clarifies that it is within traditions that we acquire the knowledge to traverse traditions and come to understand the “unity of tradition” (p. 45). His many years of research in the Penn State Drawing Lab, his long career as a potter, which included studying within the ancient Arita pottery tradition in Japan under a master,<sup>17</sup> and his own hermeneutic and phenomenological “exploration of the role of art in expanding human consciousness” (p. 42), brought him to this epiphany of/within a Great Tradition.

Beittel’s art for a new age calls for a giving away of one’s art metaphorically and/or concretely. I understand this through my own journey of becoming an a/r/tographer in my graduate work. Despite the art of myself and the women in the study coming from a very personal place, the art created did not belong to myself or the women alone. The art as research, presented to the public and to the academic research community was an ethical giving away of personal ownership of the art, a shift from the autobiographical to the universal. It was not limited to people (the artists included) liking the art; but extended to people questioning and learning from, through and with the art, and in this, gaining understanding and ownership of the concepts and ideas raised in the art as research. In this giving away of one’s art, a dialectic and radical relationship between private, public, and education is opened in an ever-evolving sacred cycle. Beittel shared that, “... circulating artworks freely, outside of the official economy, is a secret political act hopeful of art for a new age” (1985, p. 50). A/r/tography offers a place outside of the “official economy.” In refusing to locate itself within any one domain and instead

collaborating and developing across disciplinary domains of art, research and education, a/r/tography, in my view, becomes a “political act hopeful of art for a new age.”

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> My ritual background has been influenced by the German Lutheran rituals that I grew up with in the church and in my home. As an adult, rituals most profoundly emerged within my art practice when working intimately with those I understand as co-creators (those that join an art inquiry process with me as models). In the co-creative process rituals emerge with others. In addition, when I work on my own I use ritual processes that assist my creative work. From 1999 - 2003 I studied with Reclaiming witches and learned the more formal ritual and trance practices that this community works with. As an artist, I prefer to work with intuitive processes, and I acknowledge my ritual and trance work is influenced by the traditions that I have studied and practiced within.

<sup>2</sup> In 2004, Pinar wrote of the “moments” of “currere” (p. 35). These moments break down the journey of “running the course.” When a cycle has run its course the person is infused with a clear energy source: 1) the past (*regressive*), where one can “enlarge—and transform—one’s memory (p. 362), 2) future (*progressive*), “where the student of currere imagines possible futures” (p. 36), 3) (*analytic*) being present to the past and the future, 4) (*synthesis*) a full engagement and integration of the past, present, and future (pp. 36-37).

<sup>3</sup> I focus this overview on arts-based research that is predominantly visual arts based. There are numerous forms of arts-based research that work with multiple art forms.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel’s own words (cited in Beittel and Beittel, 1991, p. x). “For Lowenfeld, art was a transcendent spiritual calling. To practice it was to work at self-transformation” (Beittel, 1982, p. 21).

<sup>5</sup> Beittel frequently cited the contemporary American transpersonal (integral) philosopher Ken Wilber. Wilber’s philosophy has influenced my life and work as well, and the notion of the development of self, as well as the notion of the evolution of consciousness (and E-W philosophical integration) in Beittel’s mature work are directly linkable to Wilber’s theoretical influence on Beittel.

<sup>6</sup> Beittel referred to any person willing to engage an art making process as an artist.

<sup>7</sup> The term “arting” has been used by others, for example, in the area of social psychology and inquiry (McHugh, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Wilber defines holarchic as part/whole = holon-- developing together toward greater complexity so that each whole becomes part of a greater whole. His theory of holarchy is an attempt to improve traditional definitions of hierarchy (Wilber, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Beittel made the distinction more than once he was not using “new age” in the popular way it is often understood (the latter, without critical philosophy).

<sup>10</sup> *Currere*, as conceived by Pinar (1994), was formed as a method for cultivating an authentic investigation of an internal dialectic (p. 119) along with political “analysis of the socio-economic system[s], of hegemony” (p. 131). Of this work Pinar (1994) wrote, that it “...often feels like a voyage out, from the habitual, the customary, the taken-for-granted, toward the unfamiliar, the more spontaneous, the questionable. The experimental posture in its most profound meaning suggests this openness to what is not known, a willingness to attempt action the consequences of which cannot be predicted fully. Such a capacity to risk—intellectually, biographically—can be cultivated.... It is a capacity those of us interested in education are obliged to develop” (p. 149).

<sup>11</sup> As early as 1912, sociologist Emile Durkheim, recognized ritual performance as a significant part of constructing social life (Quantz, 1999). Although much research supports the significance of ritual as a site of learning (Driver, 1997; Northrup, 1997; Shorter, 1987; Zigler, 1999), educational analysis of ritual is more difficult to find.

<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge the word ritual can illicit a response of mistrust and fear, as it can and has been used to silence and control others. Because of its power and transformative ability, ritual can be

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used destructively as well as productively (Driver, 1997; Pryer, 2002). When the intention is for affirmation, expressing our experience of mystery, letting go, transformation and a re-inscribing experience, it can function as a subversion to limiting cultural norms.

<sup>13</sup> Heron's (1998) description of co-operative inquiry is a form of collaboration where two or more people inquire into an area of interest as co-researcher and co-subject. The inquiry moves in cycles relationally, from individual reflection of personal experience to reflecting together. In these cycles the inquirers move "between four ways of knowing: conceptual, practical, experience, and imaginal" (p. 16).

<sup>14</sup> I have not explored in detail the work of holistic educators (e.g., D. Jardine, 1998; J. Miller, 2007; R. Miller, 2000) in this dissertation, but want to acknowledge the important work they have done in introducing wholeness into educational literature and thought. Ron Miller (2000) explains the basis of holism which "asserts that everything exists in relationship, in a context of connection and meaning--and that any change or event causes a re-alignment, however slight, through the entire pattern, 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts' means that the whole is comprised of a *pattern of relationships* that are not contained by the parts but ultimately define them" (p. 21).

<sup>15</sup> *Inarticulate Ground* was a three person installation with R. Michael Fisher and Jennifer Peterson at the AMS Art Gallery on the University of British Columbia campus.

<sup>16</sup> After six years of research, curator Cornelia Butler brought the international feminist art movement of the 1960–70s into greater visibility through a traveling exhibition entitled "WACK" exhibited between 2007–2009 in Los Angeles, Washington, D. C., New York, and Vancouver, Canada. I was able spend time with this exhibition while it was in NYC and appreciate the vision and work behind it. The work in the exhibition carries a radically different aesthetic that can only be described as feminine and relational in contrast to the masculine agentic aesthetic that still holds dominance in the contemporary art world.

<sup>17</sup> Beittel was influenced by his traditional training in the highly disciplined Japanese Arita tradition coupled with individual inspiration. Most of his art incorporated trees in some way. His art produced artifacts, but it is the lineage of tradition combined with the creative process and its connection to the land he lived on that he fore-fronted in his writing on art and the creative process (Beittel and Beittel, 1991). His art form was very physical, collecting clay from the earth, preparing it, preparing the kiln that was often out of doors, the discipline of meditation that preceded the centering of each pot on the wheel, and the relationship of the clay with his body in the formation of the pot. Once completed, he referred to his pots as mentors that he lived in relationship with.

*Art Installation I:  
At the Labyrinth Entrance  
Researcher*

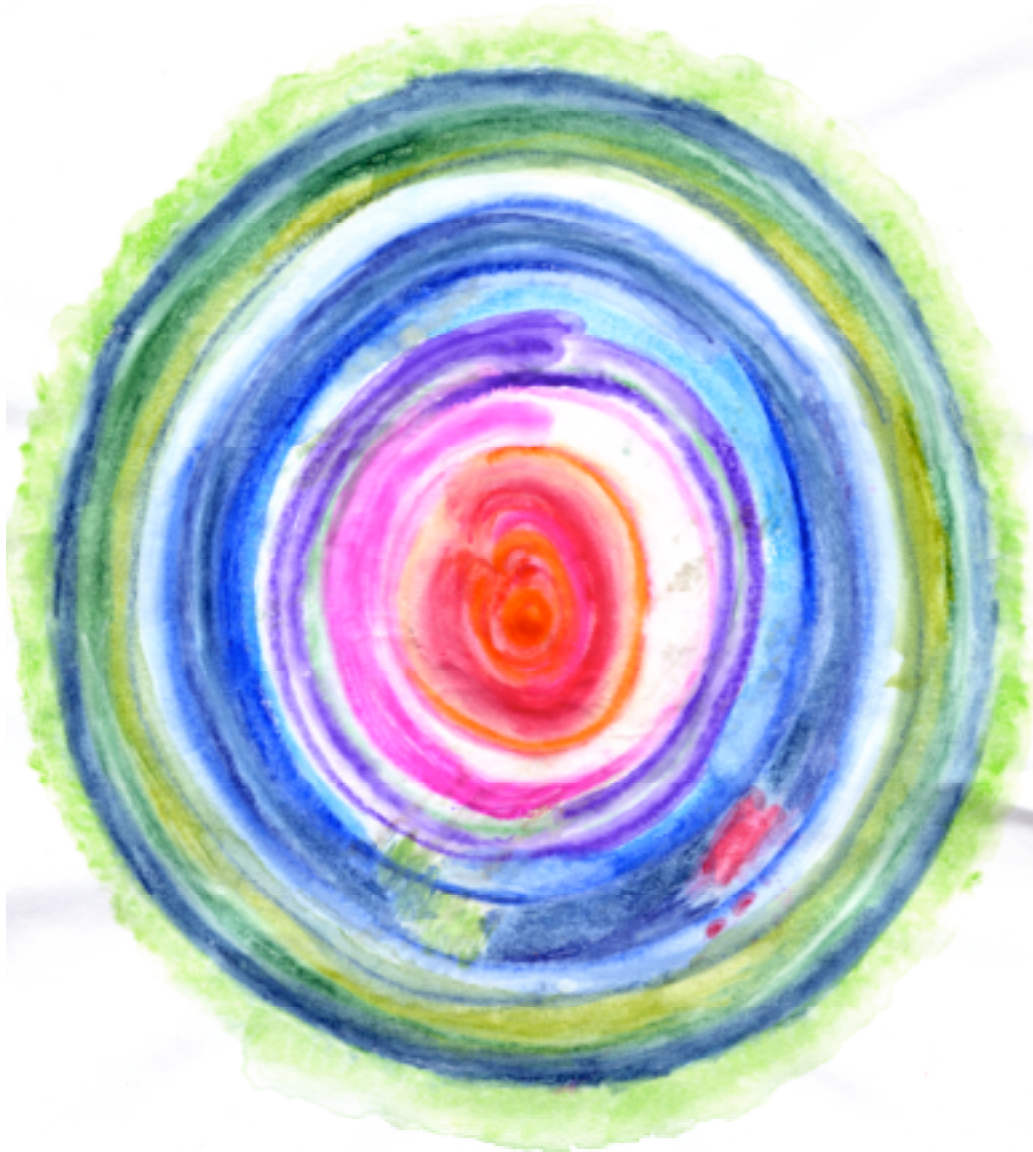


Image 4

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). Visual Writing Mandala – November, 1, 2007, (Watercolour crayon on paper).

## Writing For/With Others

Each day I cross the threshold of my office and light a tall glass-encased candle to mark the ritual space of writing. The small flickering candle light accompanies me as I move into the space of presenting, through writing, what for me has been a long and rich collaborative journey that began with a small collaborative pilot study before the larger collaborative study. My now solitary writing process is assured by the small protected candle flame. It reminds me that my writing is entrusted to thirteen women who have allowed me to travel with them, to witness and be witnessed by them, and to learn from and with them, and to re-present our journey together. Although these women are not physically with me in the writing of the two projects, their belief and trust in me is. I, in turn, trust that the small flame of my writing is protected by this circle of women spiritual leaders. Through numerous trances and dreams throughout my graduate studies, I have been graced by the presence and guidance of supportive foremothers-- wise women, all willing and able to be open and receiving of others, in order to rebuild and create beauty, despite the setbacks and obstacles present amongst ourselves and in society. Dreams and trances have been an important component of my learning/teaching. They can assist in creating a relationship between me and the listener/reader that is reciprocal, and invites mutual dream/story sharing, enhancing a spiritual learning relationship (MacKeracher, 2004).

Lighting the candle each day I write assists me to accept entering a masculine tradition of *logos*, a tradition with a nonfigurative, bodiless bias (Irigaray, 2004). The protective glass container that the flame is held within offers my reluctant being/body assurance that there is a non-destructive and non-oppressive way to be in relationship with *logos* and *eros*; with fire and water, the nonfigurative and figurative, the mind and body, the masculine and feminine, the transcendent and immanent, the erotic and Divine.

A sketchbook finds its way into my office from my studio and allows my hand and mind to express spontaneous colours and shapes in the sacred container of a mandala. A mandala-a-day emerges. It offers respite from excessive mechanical and nonfigurative writing. When my fingers no longer want to type letters from a keyboard, the art-mandala writes organically, breathes freely, bleeds colour alongside my text driven writing. Still the felt sense of anticipation of the risk of creation/destruction is present and hovers close by my side. Trinh (2005) calls this interval "between a so-called loss of reality and an excess of reality... the interval of speed-light that is neither temporal or spatial...." "Women's Time." (pp. 10-11). Within Women's Time, in this place of immanent danger and possibility, I write, simultaneously feeling the fragile appearance and disappearance of words, images, and my being.



## Curatorial Introduction to the Chapter

As is often the experience in collaborations, much communication is needed to come to a mutual understanding of what kind of collaboration the project is. Barbara has extensive experience with collaborative creative work and initiated what came to be called *Re/Turning to Her* as a pilot for the larger collaborative Ph.D. research, which Tannis is part of as a co-inquirer. That said, Tannis struggled to claim full ownership within the collaborative process and Barbara assumed the role of overseeing (lead) researcher as part of her academic program. The writing of this essay, now a chapter, and the creation of the documentary DVD, brought the notion of collaboration into question again. Barbara has been the scribe, adding in elements of Tannis's reflective writing, and created the DVD with Tannis reading, viewing, and endorsing the final pieces. As part of a critical feminist inquiry process (Lather, 1991), Tannis has been in discussion and present for the creation and analysis of these texts. Despite Tannis not being a main writer the chapter is written as a "we," with the understanding that Tannis's contribution to the entire creative process was essential to the writing and DVD creation.

As I pause at the entrance to the labyrinth, my memory sweeps back to the pilot study that took place 2005-2006. Chapter Three includes the art installation of *Re/Turning to Her*. It begins with a sixteen minute DVD documentary of the ritual inquiry. The DVD text and images reveal the sacred cycle of two women a/r/tographers journeying to the Source from an estranged and broken place of self and art with a commitment to put art and themselves back into wholeness. Within this study the challenging work of collaborative research is entered and the labyrinth surfaces as a vessel that can hold the full intensity of the study. The learning that occurred in this study laid the mindful researching ground for the larger group study, of which Tannis is also a part of, in Chapter Five.

## **Re/Turning to Her - DVD**

**Re/Turning to Her:** Performance Ritual Inquiry Documentary

16.5 minute video

Production: Barbara Bickel

Editing: Barbara Bickel

Camera work: Barbara Bickel, R. Michael Fisher, Jennifer Peterson

Co-creators: Barbara Bickel and Tannis Hugill

Copyright 2006

See <http://www.barbarabickel.com> for DVD on-line

*Chapter Three*  
*Re/Turning to Her*



Image 5

Bickel, Barbara, and Hugill, Tannis. (2006) *Re/Turning to Her*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology, (Video still - Video camera Cindy Lou Griffith).

## Artist Introductions: Barbara Bickel and Tannis Hugill

The two artists identify as priestesses: Tannis as a Feri initiate, and Barbara as a self initiated witch.<sup>1</sup> They met in 2002 through the WSC planning team, and have developed a rich friendship over the years. They believe that all creative acts are sacred, and bring us closer to the Divine. The following excerpts written individually by each of the authors are post-performance reflective writings on their spiritual and artistic paths:

Tannis: The theme of Art and Spirituality is central to my life as an artist and a person. As a young college student of Art History I felt the separation of art from spirit, which occurred in the west with the Renaissance as a severe tragedy which began a wounding in our cultural ethos that has deepened over the centuries.

Finding ways to bring a spiritual essence into form was central focus for some avant-garde artists of the twentieth century. The anguish of their struggles affected me deeply as a young artist in New York in the 70s. At that time I was also riveted by Native American art and inspired to make theatre that achieved the same resonance as the Northwest Coast rituals I was able to watch on the movie footage taken by Edward Curtis in the early 20th century. These moved me because everything was alive with spirit and the non-material world interacted fully with our reality in a way that instructed, inspired and brought greater meaning to my own life.

The pressures and influences of the New York art world were completely secular and I unconsciously succumbed to these. My own work became focused first as a minimalist exploration of body in space, then moved towards the creation of short, emotionally intense stories that expressed the existential challenges facing women. Then I began to work with people with disability and re-connected with the healing power of art. This led to my discovery of the wounded healer archetype, and my becoming a dance and drama therapist. It is here that I re-discovered the relationship of art to spirituality, and my journey led me back to the origin of my art making inspiration. Now I make ritual theatre, a new yet ancient form that must be re-introduced into our culture, though it has really never vanished.

Barbara: Although I could not have articulated it at the time, the making and looking at visual art was a form of meditation and prayer in my life since childhood. I lived in a home that regularly created sacred ritual space as a family through the Christian holy days. They also appreciated and encouraged my artistic ability. Traveling as a young woman in Europe I was in awe of the spirit that I envisioned producing the art that I saw. Like Tannis, it was not until I began creating art with people who have physical and mental disabilities that I became conscious of or fully understood art as an expression of healing and spirit. Awakening to art as spirit, through my role as a caregiver, drew me to return full-time to my own art practice in the late 80s.

Living in the frontier city of Calgary, Alberta, I left art school (with a BFA in Painting) prepared to fulfill my dreams and naive enough to follow through with them. I founded an alternative educational healing and arts center called the In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute (1992-2000) with my new life partner.<sup>2</sup> A community of men and women gathered around our teachings, art and work, and we soon expanded to a larger center that had space for an art gallery. This became the Centre Gallery<sup>3</sup> (1995-2001), eventually structured as a women's-focused gallery where women, many who had never publicly shared their work, felt safe to exhibit along with established artists (men and women). The gallery was energized and run predominantly by volunteer women. It was

within this context of community, art and healing, that performance ritual emerged within my art practice. I am not a trained performer. Working with spirit, the body, and artists in other arts disciplines lured me into the active role of what I have come to understand as priestess. I continue with this practice of priestessing through art as an individual and collaborative artist today.

### Introduction to the Ritual Inquiry

Ritual and a relational aesthetic (Bourriaud, 1998) with the different ‘other’ leads this co-inquiry into what writer Luce Irigaray (2002) describes as the “unthought of human becoming” (p. 99). Ritual entry into the unknown, facing the ‘other’ as different, as the familiar stranger turned us towards that which is below, above, between and within us. As artists who do not separate art from the sacred act of creation, we co-evolve with spirit in our art making. In this close proximity with spirit we come to know ourselves, and must “become open to the movement of Spirit in order to wrestle with the movement of history” (Alexander, 2005, pp. 294-95)

Joining ritual with a/r/tography assists the shift into the transformative realm of the sacred and spiritual through setting intentions and opening to the guidance of spirit.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologist, Victor Turner has expanded the traditional image of liturgical ritual and extended the imaginary of ritual to “threshold-crossing” (cited in Grimes, 1995, p. 60). Post-colonial theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha (2005), similarly crosses borders as thresholds with ritual in her films disrupting traditional film-making norms. Because of its power and transformative ability, ritual can be used destructively as well as for the good (Driver, 1997, Pryer, 2003). Yet, when performance rituals have the intention of affirmation, expressing our experience of mystery, letting go, transformation, and a re-inscribing of human experience, they can function as a much needed subversion of limiting cultural norms.

Within a collaborative and ritual-based a/r/tographic inquiry we explore our spiritual/religious and artistic journeys in an effort to more deeply understand our relationship with spirituality and religion(s), informed by the making of art. The underlying educational motive behind this inquiry was to personally question our historical and current multi-faith<sup>5</sup> understandings and experiences through our lived and living spiritual/religious narratives. We are both committed to expanding multi-faith awareness in our work and art practices. We agree with some feminists (Christ, 2003; Daly, 1978; Fernandes, 2003; hooks, 2000; Irigaray, 2003), who claim that feminist transformation of society is dependent on the transformation of religious

beliefs and ideologies. As practicing spiritual feminists,<sup>6</sup> artists, researchers, and educators, we have come to acknowledge the impossibility of separating religion from politics and propose that the arts offer an important bridge between the two. We have chosen to live lives as spiritual feminists, who like public intellectuals<sup>7</sup> confront, from many angles, fixed notions of constructed discourses based on rationality, sameness, and fear of the ‘other.’

As a pilot study for the larger Ph.D. study, Barbara wanted to have a first-hand experience of opening what can be the dangerous ground of women’s spiritual and religious lives to deeper inquiry through art. That said, this project was an opportunity for Barbara to take on the researcher<sup>8</sup> cloak fully within the University system before embarking on the larger collaborative project with the women of the Women’s Spirituality Celebration planning team. We began the inquiry by formulating interview questions for a digital video documented co-interview: 1) *What has your spiritual journey been and how has the journey included the exploration of religious and spritual traditions?* and, 2) *How has your artistic path been connected to your spiritual/religious journey?* At the same time as creating our interview questions we set intentions for our inquiry together: 1) *to explore and open to creativity and spirit*, 2) *to cycle with the dark moon* and, 3) *to acknowledge we are entering the spirit world which requires opening to the direction of spirit, which means we can’t preplan.*

In retrospect, we probably could have revisited our intentions more often together as a reminder of the spirit-directed work we were engaging. In addition, as co-a/r/tographers, we kept journal notes and emails, shared our writings on the project, video recorded our trances, studio work, dress rehearsals and the public performance ritual, and wrote poetry.

### *Co-creating with Spirit*

#### *Trance*

As spiritual feminist artists<sup>9</sup> familiar with entering the altered reality of trance, beginning in September 2005, we chose to enter trances together as a way to access spirit guidance for the performance ritual art we were to create. We have found trance to be a powerful inquiry practice that enables one to access alternate knowledges, leading toward new understandings of life and our purpose/role within it. Trance can be described either as a form of active or process meditation and visioning, a waking dream state, a practice of active imagination or free association, where one can journey to other realities through an altered state of consciousness. Within the waking-dream-state of trance, time and space become fluid, non-linear, and physical restrictions and barriers dissolve. Upon analyzing the trance text after transcription, Barbara has

come to recognize trance as a “female sentence” (Cixous, 1997; Irigaray, 1997), unaided by grammar and traditional sentence structure, freed from a masculinist hegemonic discourse. Trance has assisted us in finding and crossing the paths and scaffolding of aspects of the feminine principle (Artress, 2006) that has been repressed and mostly disappeared within our hegemonic rationally-based western society.

After creating a ritual circle we sat in meditation postures and through trance allowed the mind’s imaginary to guide us. In an awake-dream state we spoke out loud and shared our inner observations and experiences; seen, felt, heard, sensed and smelled, as we interacted and journeyed together. In the two different trances entered that autumn, the deep void repeatedly enveloped us as we shifted from form to formlessness. One of us would disappear to be found by the other, allowing a fully sensory, emotional, and spiritual penetration of the nothing/ness of the void to come into our inter-subjective existence. We circled large wheels in space and wrapped each other in layers of blue energy. We gathered stones that shone with an interior light, found a brilliant red flower, dissolved into gold liquid, and were draped in snake skin cloaks. We shape-shifted and traveled through the Kosmos, to other planets, and into the earth’s underworld with a blue cord attached to our waists bringing us back when we were ready to return.

### *In the Dance Studio*

In January 2006, for the next phase of our inquiry we shifted to working in the dance studio. Here we invited the arational narratives revealed through trance, to enter our physical bodies through gesture, movement and sound. In this layer of the inquiry we bodily entered moving trance states through an adapted collaborative practice of Authentic Movement,<sup>10</sup> where we followed the moving impulses of our bodies and breath. We moved and witnessed each other simultaneously in the studio sessions, followed by verbally sharing reflections on our experience together. Moving and witnessing each other simultaneously meant that we could not completely let go into an individual altered state. The challenge of authentically moving as an individual and remaining authentically connected to the other proved to be quite difficult at times. Remaining open to the guidance of spirit when we were struggling to stay connected as humans and expressing through our individual lenses and bodies, left us feeling often times dislocated and floundering. Initially we invited a friend to witness us by documenting our movement with a digital video camera, and then for simplicity sake, we chose to have a still video camera documenting us through the reflection of the studio’s large mirror.

We would sometimes watch these video recordings together but more important was taking

time to write and share after our sessions in the studio. These sharing times became essential as we worked to hold the thread of connection with each other. Barbara wrote in a post-authentic movement writing reflection,

Self or Other?  
I or we?  
how to decide where to focus attention?  
Self or Other?  
Fleeting glances            outward

Great sadness  
Let the smaller self go  
If nothing else she can move her body

In addition, we reflected within our individual spiritual practices on our own and would return with small insights into our collaborative inquiry when we next met. Trusting that our inquiry would become clear when we were ready to receive it, and trusting that the other was working for the collaboration with spirit as well, was the thread that kept us connected in our times of open non-knowingness. The study of sacred geometry reveals that formlessness moves in a coherent manner towards form in infinite patterns (Lawlor, 1982 cited in Artress 2006, p. 50). Knowing that the work we were doing was based in sacred inquiry together, we allowed ourselves to fully experience the sometimes painful process of division that was leading us toward the same source.



Images 6, 7, and 8

Bickel, Barbara. (2006). Tannis and Barbara in Authentic Movement. Vancouver, BC: Forufera Studio, (Video still).

The trance narratives, along with the embodied narratives that presented themselves to us within the studio inquiry sessions, eventually became the source material for the public performance ritual, which we entitled *Re/Turning to Her*. The trance imagery and moving



gestures slowly began to weave together the story of two women seekers returning to the Source. We came to realize through our authentic movement together that our roles were different. We physically embodied different aspects of the Divine Feminine creative process, and these differences, as revealed through the moving body, were to be honoured. Tannis generally held the space of the maker and shaper, and Barbara the de-structor and un-doer. Within the trances and in the studio, we had rich experiences of bodied communication that was quite beautiful to experience, but at other times we felt physically destabilized and ungrounded. We often found ourselves struggling to negotiate our bodies within a void or in the midst of shifting ground. Moving together brought us face to face with the great sorrow of knowing the difficulty, and often impossibility, of negotiating space with an/other and the Self simultaneously.

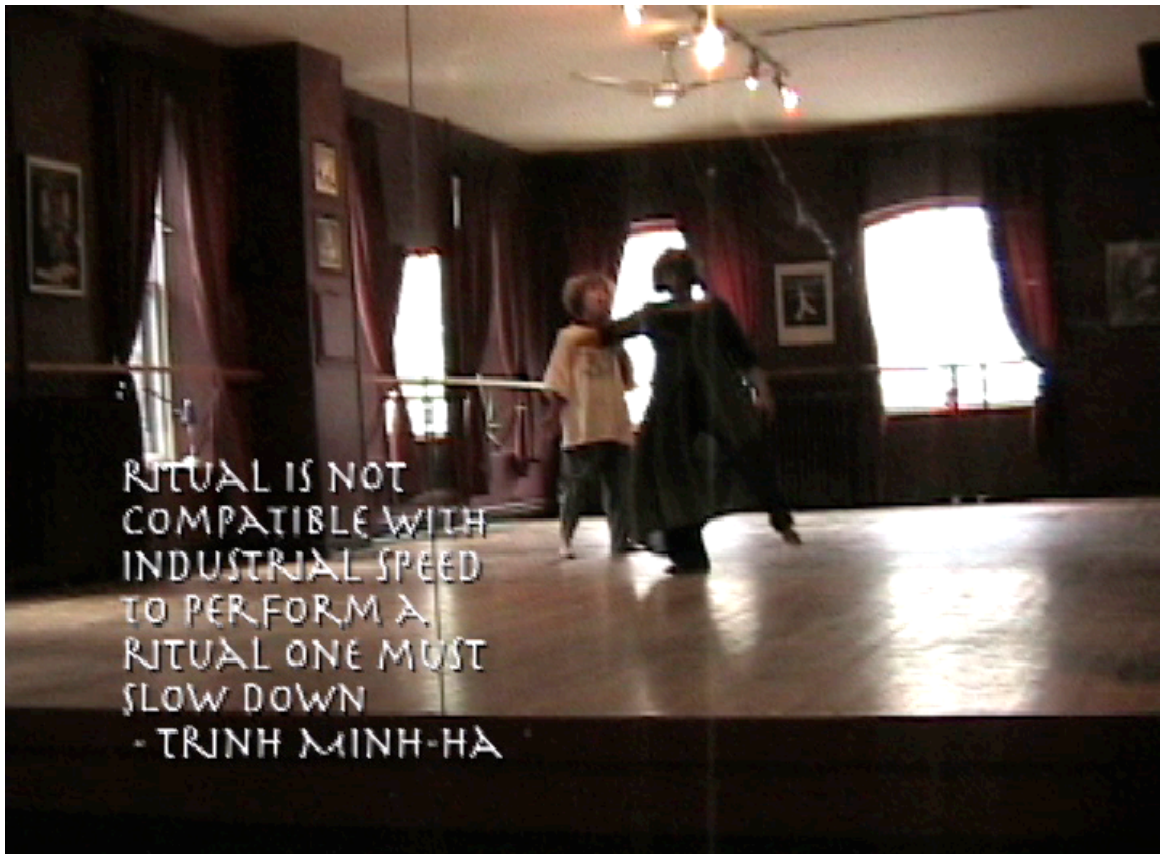


Image 9

Bickel, Barbara. (2006). *Re/Turning to Her*. Vancouver, BC: Forufera Studio, (Video still).

It should be noted that during the nine months of our inquiry we were being influenced by the powers of creation and destruction occurring simultaneously in many dimensions of our

lives. We were not able to always give time and space to fully feel and heal. In mid-May, after a disturbing and chaotic dream about the Women's Spirituality Celebration, where two toddlers wrapped like mummies in fabric, were carried around at the event, Barbara wrote in her journal, I grieve the loss of Tannis as she is contemplating leaving the WSC planning team next year... the quality of my collaboration with her is decreasing – I am critical and feel that the pilot project has failed. I have not had the space for it to do it well and with quality. Barbara found herself turning to the labyrinth in her place of sadness and grief in an effort to find nurturance in the fast moving ground of her life.

The question of a location for the public performance ritual at this point remained an unknown. Following the dream and her self admission of failure Barbara envisioned the performance ritual on the Vancouver School of Theology labyrinth (Image 10). Our inquiry together shifted markedly with the support of this sacred structure. In particular, the center of the labyrinth kept coming to mind as significant. The labyrinth has been part of both our spiritual practices. Its ancient roots called to us, offering an anchor in the midst of our very open, shifting, unsettling spiritual inquiry. The labyrinth as an ancient art symbol crosses cultural and religious boundaries and fit our exploration of religions and the artistic process well (Compton, 2002).

Once the decision to perform on the labyrinth was made, our recurring experience of the void became located and directed into the labyrinth's center. It became evident that the void was the unthought, forgotten aspect of the Divine Feminine in mainstream religious traditions. Our task was to do the grieving, lament, and recovery work to reclaim the Divine Feminine within the ancient container of the labyrinth's center.

The story that took form, guided by our trance and movement work, was the departure and descent of the Divine Feminine into the void or the earth, which was located in the center of the labyrinth. Tannis being the elder, became the priestess who unraveled the spool of fate leading to the center of the labyrinth, and descended into Her embrace. Barbara is the initiate priestess who follows, struggling to reclaim the thread of life and whose grief calls Tannis back, revealing Her gift of Love.

Luce Irigaray (1992) referred poignantly to the loss of the feminine in Western religious traditions and the need for alternative processes to facilitate recovery of the Divine Feminine. She wrote, "Femininity is precisely, that which is excluded from patriarchal representations and can only be glimpsed in their gaps and silences. For it to return, and to unsettle that which repressed it, a special process is required" (cited in Larrington, 1992, p. 448). A spiritual inquiry through a/r/tography as ritual became the special process that allowed us to enter into the



Image 10

Fisher, R. Michael. (2006). Labyrinth from above. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth, (Digital photograph).



Image 11

Fisher, R. Michael. (2006). *Re/Turning to Her*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth (Digital photograph).

unknown of the inquiry with trust, and offered a vehicle to move with and towards that which we had forgotten.

### Re/Turning to Her: The Performance Ritual

During the two weeks prior to the public performance ritual of *Re/Turning to Her* we met regularly at the Maltese labyrinth<sup>11</sup> at the back of the School of Theology to rehearse, and the process of the ritual formation intensified. We unloaded our bags that held the large spool of blue thread, the blue glass bowl, the blue snake cloak, the synthetic red flower, and the many yards of white fabric that were the ritual objects we performed with. We were often tired and unfocused coming from other meetings and appointments, so there was little time to connect with each other before we began to work, yet we were grateful to be working together at the labyrinth for these few short hours. We entered the labyrinth and the sacred story evolved as we assisted each other to fully embody the experience together. We still had many details to work through with the actual performance ritual and at the same time Barbara was organizing the program to be printed, the volunteers, and site logistics (Appendixes B and C). The most disappointing detail that was missed during this time was the WSC planning team email invitation to the women. It was thought to have been sent but did not get sent. The work that we were doing as preparation for the larger study that was to follow was not to be shared live with them.<sup>12</sup>

We are both seasoned practitioners of ritual processes, yet our personal struggles came to the fore with the pressures of ‘performance’ and the difficulties of disentangling from internalized cultural habits of being in a hegemonic patriarchal world. Habits such as overwork and fulfilling others needs to avoid feelings of failure, contributed to our struggle to connect and listen to each other, and dulled our ability to listen to, or for the guidance of spirit together. We at times lost sight of the larger spirit work that we were carrying. Tannis in later reflective writing on the project poignantly notes that,

During practice sessions, my longing and fear related to disappearing into the void, under the veils of fabric, manifested as a resistance and irritability, which at the time we found baffling, and frustrating. Yet, once covered, the pull to melt completely into a semi-stupor at times made me unresponsive to Barbara’s efforts to engage with me, bringing fear and more frustration. An overwhelming grief muted my consciousness, dulled my desire and made each movement effortful. It was as if, the process of spiraling into form required that we experience the isolation and separation of the human condition with concentrated intensity. The spiritual lesson for me is that She is always present, has never been lost, and is especially visible in all acts of love and beauty. It is we who have turn away from Her.





Images 12, 13 and 14

Bickel, Barbara. and Hugill, Tannis. (2006). *Re/Turning to Her*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth, (Video still - Video camera Cindy Lou Griffith).



Image 15 and 16

Fisher, R. Michael. (2006). *Re/Turning to Her*, dress rehearsal. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth (Digital photograph).

Although we did not know it at the time, the white fabric that Tannis became wrapped in and that Barbara assisted her release from, was an uncanny reminder of the dream of the mummified toddlers that appeared so disturbingly in Barbara’s earlier dream (Images 15 and 16). The final dress rehearsal did not go well. We were scattered, and Tannis became lost on the labyrinth path. Barbara’s dream of chaos and lostness was being replayed at the height of our work to share a different transformative story. The night before the performance ritual, there was no place left to go but to accept what was unfolding and to trust each other and spirit. Barbara shared the realization that came to her later that evening by email with Tannis:

July 7, 2006

Barbara: My thoughts post rehearsal were somewhat disturbed (and also okay with it ) by the struggles that seem to be going on with us individually and together in this piece. Last night while taking a bath I had the thought which caused all of my analytical thoughts and trying to figure things out i.e. “how do we connect fully” thoughts to drop away from me and left me in a place of joy, appreciation and peace with the space that we have created and that we will be sharing with others on Sat. eve. That on the day we just need to love each other as 2 women priestesses. If our purpose is to re/turn to the divine feminine it is to return to an unblocked place of love with each other. She holds us all and we have only to allow the love to be released from the bondage of our personal egos. Art allows us a place to practice this.

I also want to acknowledge that we have both fit this into lives that are very full with work,

other commitments, grieving.... We have made space for the creative space of art making in a world that wants to keep us preoccupied and not giving way to the spirit of art. I greatly appreciate your commitment to this place. I feel very good with where we have come to and look forward to where it will lead.

Tannis in response: It is so good to hear from you in the fullness of your experience. You have such a wonderful ability to sense quality of connection and your constant attention to cultivating this is inspiring to me.

I am a lot less conscious but realize that my question to you about how was I really came from our lack of time to stay connected in the more subtle ways we have had up till the pressure increased in performance production/creation. When I loose connection, I go right away into fearing criticism, anger, rejection. It is an old habit and very myopic I know, but feels so real often it is hard for me to catch myself in it. We haven't been able to travel together and debrief our working times and the presence of Michael, though so lovely and helpful, has decreased, for me, direct contact with you. None of this is bad, it's just how it is. But we have lost the leisurely intimacy we have been used to in the creation times before this intense phase.

Your bath transformation sounds lovely. After I expressed my concern to you I was fine. My distraction during the piece I think was caused by the environment and my knee was in pain.

The performance ritual unfolded as outlined below. What occurred in the thirty-five minutes of that evening became timeless as we entered the labyrinth.

We purify ourselves at the entrance with water from the blue glass bowl.

Tannis picks up the spool of blue thread and lures Barbara into an entranced state

Tannis enters the labyrinth at a steady walking pace while unraveling the spool of thread

Barbara calls out the names of goddesses from many cultures from her entranced state

Barbara awakes and discovers the end of the blue thread that has been left behind by Tannis

Barbara begins to follow the blue thread into the labyrinth. She stumbles and gets tangled in the process of following and holding onto the windswept thread

Unseen by Barbara, Tannis continues her steady walk into the center of the labyrinth.

Arriving at the center Tannis with passion drops her blue snakeskin cloak and breaks the thread, severing it from the spool. The spool drops

Barbara, still following the blue thread falls into an unconscious state when the thread breaks

Tannis begins her descent into the fluid environment of the void in the center of the labyrinth. Her voice calls out as she becomes covered in the fabric of the void and she descends into it

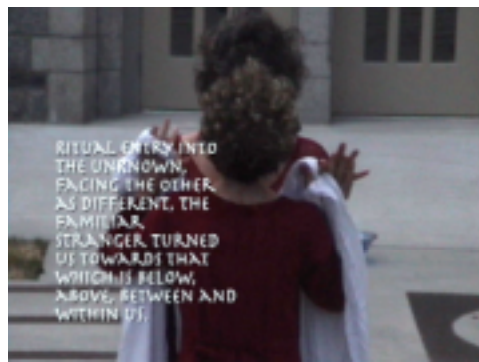
Barbara awakes upon hearing the call and continues her journey of following the thread. As she nears the center of the labyrinth she discovers the snakeskin cloak and realizes she is too late

Barbara enters the labyrinth and discovers the dead body of Tannis and begins a sorrowful lament and circling of the lifeless covered body

Barbara's grief calls Tannis out of the void and she resurfaces to offer the gift of a brilliant red flower to Barbara

The gift is shared and a reunion dance between the two priestesses ensues

Their dance takes them around the circumference of the labyrinth and back into the center, breaking the bounds of the single path  
They halt the dance in the center of the labyrinth by falling into each others hands, balancing their weight against the other  
Tannis picks up the discarded snakeskin cloak and drapes it over Barbara's shoulders, hands Barbara the bundle of white fabric, and they walk out of the labyrinth together.



Images 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22

Bickel, Barbara. and Hugill, Tannis. (2006). *Re/Turning to Her* performance ritual. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth (Video stills - Video camera Cindy Lou Griffith.).



## Post Performance Ritual

Following the ritual some people walked the labyrinth. Others joined us for refreshments and conversation. One woman shared that she felt the struggle of her brother, who has Alzheimer's disease when the thread broke and the way of the path was lost. We both felt very satisfied and elated with the performance ritual coming together without mishaps, and with the opportunity to share it with others. The following day Tannis called and left Barbara a message. Although we did not connect, we emailed each other from our differing locations, knowing that we had a debrief meeting planned for the night after.

July 9, 2007

Hi Tannis,

Thanks for your phone calls and your thoughts. I too am wandering through this day and was in a deep sleep and did not hear your second call... I feel a contented happiness as well as a quiet sadness in this space of post performance ritual today. I was on the Drive doing a few errands and was moved to tears hearing the singing and the crowds of collective energy in the aftermath of the Italia soccer victory. Remembering Cindy Lou and Jenny's words of our work being a "counter ritual" to this male cultural ritual that can gather such grand attention. Remembering the beauty of your blue eyes when we turned to face each other at the bowl.

In sad peace,  
barbara

Hi Barbara

Thank you! I look forward to tomorrow night.

Today was a wonderful work day, a treat retreat starting with church then seeing Helen's work which was brilliant. I was weeping on and off all day just cracked open.

Then I wrote, went into a vision, did a trance, wrote more, transcribed what I said in the vision and saw in the posture trance...improvised to Gurdjieff's music, sang. opening heart and spiraling through.

Love,  
T

As a closing part of the study we met and recorded a conversation intended as a debrief of the project at Tannis's home. This was the beginning of working to understand the process that we had gone through together – the good and not so good parts. Much of the conversation was focused on our differing understandings of the collaboration. Tannis admitted to having the best of both worlds, as the work was done collaboratively but she did not have to take the full responsibility for the piece. Her sense of elation following the successful performance ritual was unencumbered by the disappointments that related to the whole of the event that Barbara carried.

Barbara still grieved the loss of the missed details, such as the WSC planning team not being there to share the event. She shared disappointment in herself for backing off many things she really felt were important because of time restraints, and Tannis's boundary setting around details of the production. Further, for Barbara, the difficulty of bringing this kind of work forward into a secular university setting manifested in her being reluctant to invite colleagues she did not know well to the event.

An important place of difference and struggle that came forward in this post-dialogue was the different understandings of the union of art and priestessing. Tannis spoke of understanding herself as a performer in the collaboration working for Barbara. She wanted more feedback and encouragement so she would know what Barbara wanted. But as Barbara was not coming from the location of performer and priestess being split, she most often did not have direction for Tannis. This was a place of frustration for Tannis.

Barbara: ...maybe I didn't speak it out loud who knows, I just remember it from the beginning, knowing that this was preparation for priestessing together...

Tannis: And that's where, this is like a level of learning. The line between performing and priestessing is the distinction between performing and priestessing.

Barbara: Which is probably, more something, because for me I'm not a performer...so I don't actually...I always feel like I'm priestessing, it is not something I have to...

Tannis: Yeah, it's a new threshold for me.

Despite our blindness and stumbling regarding our roles in the collaborative work, it did become clear to us in the last weeks prior to the performance ritual that we were working to reclaim the Divine Feminine the entire time. It just took a long time to realize it, despite our confusion of the roles we were working with and priestessing for spirit.

In the months that followed Barbara had the opportunity to make visual art from the project. She entered an intense video making process, working with the many hours of footage that had been collected during the creation of *Re/Turning to Her*. During this time of dwelling with the visual traces of the inquiry, she acquired a deepened appreciation for the work that Tannis and she had done. The 16.5 minute art documentary style DVD that accompanies this chapter collages segments of the initial interview, movement and sound produced during the studio experience, trance and the performance ritual-- offering a visual, audio, and moving glimpse into the full inquiry process. Despite that fact that only twenty people witnessed the original performance ritual, the DVD has allowed the work to be seen by many in other settings. A

shortened version of this DVD was part of the *Womb Entering* installation the following year, and the DVD has been submitted to video festivals.

One year later (June 24, 2007) we arranged to meet at the Renfrew Ravine Labyrinth in East Vancouver near our homes, to walk the labyrinth together and share further reflections. Shortly before this date Tannis had experienced the loss of her companion cat. Upon reaching the centre of the labyrinth Tannis found herself filled with grief and wept, while Barbara walked in circles around her. Only upon reflection did we recognize the very familiar cycle of the year prior and our performance ritual repeating itself; grief releasing into the center of the labyrinth while the edges of the void were held to enable a return. Finding herself in a deeply reflective place, Tannis came prepared with a question: *What impact has the performance ritual had on your life?* Barbara was not prepared for the question but realized as she began to share that it had multiple impacts that had not been fully shared.

Barbara: It kept me sane as the main creative work I did that year while I was preparing to do the doctoral research. It was a difficult but very satisfying collaboration. Also showing the video to people, and telling the myth/story of the return of the Divine Feminine to young girls in my life has been wonderful. They are completely mesmerized watching the video. Even my twenty-four year old step-daughter, chose to get married on the labyrinth this past year. I am reminded of the importance of taking the video and this work out further into the world. It also gave me the foundation of the labyrinth as a practice of centering in my life.

Tannis: It took a while to realize the impact. The importance of intimacy and relationship with another person, not just animals. I no longer feel the need to dissolve into the Divine Mother but that the Divine Mother is in my body. The shift from formlessness to form with the Divine has occurred, and it opened a very productive year for me with lots of important work around ritual.

These are significant personal revelations that emerged as the result of our work together. The importance of working within the symbolic structure of the labyrinth to contain the work while we became lost in the process, staying open to loving each other as struggling women on this journey and holding the understanding of spirit as collaborator significantly informed the work done in the large collaborative dissertation research with the women of the WSC.

#### Delving Deeper into the Re/Turn

Luce Irigaray (2002) wrote of the unbridled labyrinthal sojourn back to the “forgotten Being,” the mystery that we enacted through our mind, bodies and spirit in our work together:

Turning back to the unthought of human becoming is indispensable. But sometimes the task of discovering it will not be easy. Because what is inadequately thought paralyzes the spirit as well as the domain to which it has applied. And to ensure the stepping back which leads to the source of thinking is not obvious— sometimes the paths and the scaffoldings have disappeared in the production of discourse, and a void has deepened. Between the forgotten Being and the one already fixed in language, the bridges are cut. A flight forward then takes the place of a dialectic movement going from the past to the future, from the future to the past, ceaselessly widening its circle. (p. 99)

In choosing to create our own rituals outside of traditional institutions and social structures, we encountered a great freedom accompanied by an inevitable existential struggle. We do not know whether the performance ritual transformed those who witnessed the event. We do know that our skills and learning as priestesses was expanded and called into greater awareness. These skills and awareness we took forward into the larger collaborative study with the WCS planning team. Our ability to hold the space of the unknown and to surface briefly from it, and to share it with others disrupted the fear-based forces that keep the Divine Feminine repressed in our society.

The *Re/Turning to Her* research project intersected at the thresholds of art, spirituality and education. The crossings were not always smooth and clear. The sacred epistemological research context that we worked within to create alternative scripts, began with *art*, through the practice of collaborative dance/movement. This led us closer to spirit. We then entered a trance together as a way to deepen a relational and inspirited awareness of each other. The result was *learning*, through opening to what was not known or understood prior. In creating a performative ritual narrative of the loss and return of the Divine Feminine as experienced by two women Priestesses, we reclaimed a lost part of our Divine lineage as women and offered a teaching parable to the larger community. Our task as researchers in the co-a/r/tographic process was to stay connected to spirit, which meant being willing to work with the unknown. To remain present to the void and to trust the inquiry as led by spirit is a requirement for new knowledge to surface-- beyond our egoic-self understanding as humans. Opening to the unknown of inquiry echoes the apophatic spiritual path, which entails a contemplative and dialectical practice of being within “intuitive darkness” (Shannon, 1981, p. 12) as a way of “knowing by unknowing” (Shantz, 1999, p. 65). We began with a mutual understanding that performance ritual is the manifestation of art and spirit through our bodies. We further acknowledge the body as a “site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy” (Spry, 2001, p. 706). The gesturing, breathing, uttering body was the ‘guide’ that repeatedly *Re/Turned us to Her*.

The significance of the collective emotional grief that we were performing, as part of the larger Kosmos,<sup>13</sup> was not completely clear to us until after the public performance ritual. The heaviness of spirit, that Tannis held during the months leading towards the performance ritual, lifted almost immediately after the performance ritual. Barbara became aware of the extent of a physical injury incurred during the last two weeks of rehearsals--only after the performance ritual was over.

Emotional discomfort accompanied us on this inquiry as we stretched ourselves in an effort to remain authentic and open with each other. Our ability to acknowledge and share the emotions that arose was assisted by our spiritual and ritual practices, and the strength of our friendship. Through ritual inquiry, we were able to include and embrace our motivating passions and emotions. Within a shared sacred context of respect and reverence, we accepted our emerging emotional states and did not project them onto the other. Consequently, we kept the turmoil of emotions moving. Educator Megan Boler (1999) supports and acknowledges this as a “pedagogy of discomfort.” She argues that there are “gendered rules of emotional conduct” that have created a hegemonic “politics of emotion” in our society and social institutions (p. xi). To address the educational ethics of emotions she challenges us to not privatize emotions in our learning environments. Emotions, as expression come (in part) from arational domains, and are necessary sites of resistance to oppression, according to Boler. We need to recognize how we turn emotions into an ‘other’ or dangerous ‘stranger’ through our current constructed discourses of emotions (p. xviii). In sharing the emotion-laden process in this chapter, we cross the public and private barriers of the education discourse that Boler writes of. Through the performance ritual we brought what was private and arational into the public realm for inquiry.

As artists, working as a/r/tographers, within a research intensive university (at the site of a Christian education institution) we encountered many historical oppressive triggers that threatened to undermine the work. Tannis’s reluctance to take a full role in the collaboration was impacted by the project being situated as a research study at the university. Barbara’s desire to not be solely responsible for the project and wanting it to be an equal collaboration, was a denial of her privileged position of power as a member of the university research community. Her struggle to fully advertise and share the performance ritual within the University community reflected her fear and ambivalence within this privileged community.

The collaborative a/r/tographic inquiry that we engaged as ritual and performed publicly, as a performance ritual, was a contribution to the enactment and deeper understanding of a “spirited” (Vella, 2000) and sacred epistemology that moved beyond our personal selves and into

the world. Adult educator Jane Vella locates “spirited epistemology” where “[e]very education event is movement toward a *metanoia*, the passage of spirit from alienation into a deeper awareness of oneself” (p. 10). Although awareness of ourselves, mirrored by the other, at times brought great sadness, we continued to work through and learn within the evolving experience. Through our personal practices and during reflective moments after our sessions together, we were able to recognize and distinguish personal emotional struggles and grief from the struggles that were larger than us as individuals. The intention that we set clearly at the start of the inquiry involved working with spirit. What that has come to mean to us is that we were not only collaborating with each other but we were collaborating with spirit. As Tannis clearly writes,

As artists creating ritual, we learned that habitual attitudes learned in secular art and theatre making must expand when working in a sacred context to include awareness of divine participation. The artist becomes a collaborator, a vehicle, a mediator, and must be cognizant that she is not in control but in the presence of a mysterious unfolding. Human parameters of emotional and physical reality are limited and can prevent from discerning the truth of revealed reality. These shifts in perception change everything, as the artist’s ego must become transparent, fluid, yet strong enough to sustain awareness of Divine presence.

We are struck how clearly Luce Irigaray’s (2002) writing of the feminine Divine holds and reflects the essence of our collaborative experience:

The rift between the other and me is irreducible. To be sure we can build bridges, join our energies, feast and celebrate encounters, but the union is never definitive, on pain of no longer existing. Union implies returning into oneself, moving away, dissenting, separating. To correspond with one’s own becoming requires an alternation of approaching the other and dividing from him, or her. (p. 157)

Coming together and going apart was the familiar pattern of the trances, authentic movement, rehearsals, and performance ritual. The moment of reunion was combined with the pain of separation.

Through assisting and witnessing each other in the process of sacred artful inquiry and ritual, we traveled to the hidden and forgotten roots of our spiritual/religious traditions. By performing and documenting the performance ritual of *Re/Turning to Her* on the outdoor labyrinth of a theological school, we embodied the role of public intellectuals disrupting the “culture of fear” (Fisher, 2006; Giroux, 2003; Palmer, 1998) that too often accompanies the diverse expressions of religion and spirituality. In a small way, through the public performance ritual, the sharing of the DVD, co-presenting at conferences<sup>14</sup> and this writing, we desire to assist

in widening the circle of compassionate multi-faith awareness that does not exclude the feminine aspects of the Divine.

### Unthought Being: Returning to the Source

We complete the cycle of this chapter where the performance ritual began, by meditating upon and invoking<sup>15</sup> the unthought Being who has been known by many names around the world, before the next chapter on the research project with the thirteen women spiritual leaders begins.

*Sophia Mari Kwan Yin Tara Erishkegal*

*Isis Kali Hestia Luna White Buffalo Woman*

*Diana Coatlique Innana Shakti Demeter*

*Lakshmi Freya Mary Ariadne Bathsheba*

*Changing Woman Inari Sedna*

*Verdandi Yoruba Bridget Morgan le Fay*

*Maeve Hathor Ishtar Ashtarte Tiamat*

*Shekina Arianhrod Cerridwen Pele*

*Oshun Hecate Parvati Sarsvati Lilith*

*Cybele Durga Maat Ameratsu Epona*

*Rhiannon Danu Venus Dakini Sita Holle*

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Tannis's teacher and initiate in the Feri Tradition was Chris Rossi. Both studied with Victor Anderson, "The Feri Tradition is an earth-based, goddess-centered ecstatic tradition stemming from the teachings of Victor Anderson and his wife Cora." Retrieved from ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecstasy\\_%28state%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecstasy_%28state%29))

The Wiccan tradition is a very open tradition and one can choose to be initiated or initiate one's self. Barbara has chosen to take the name *witch* as a reclamation of the demonization of the word *witch* within her familial tradition of Christianity. She has studied with Reclaiming witches, Sage, Bridgid and Starhawk. In its original meaning witch meant wise woman (Kozacari, Owens and North (1994). p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Michael Fisher began the In Search of Fearlessness Project with his then partner Catherine Sannuto the year before Barbara met him. Barbara joined him in the project in 1991 and the Centre extended that vision into a public walk-in venue.

<sup>3</sup> The Centre Gallery was co-founded by Barbara Bickel and Pamela Grof, an artist entrepreneur.

<sup>4</sup> Within Barbara's Masters thesis she introduced the practice of a/r/tography as ritual and the importance of an ethical collaboration practice. See <http://www.barbarabickel.com>

<sup>5</sup> We struggle with the term multi-faith as it assumes a non-critical use of the term faith. Faiths are normally understood as the main text-based religions in our society (i.e. Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic) and do not generally include the pre-textual earth-based spiritual/religious traditions.

<sup>6</sup> Sociologist of religion Cynthia Eller, outlined five main characteristics of feminist spirituality that reflect Barbara's working definition of spiritual feminism: 1) valuing women's empowerment, 2) practicing ritual and or magic, 3) revering nature, 4) using the feminine as a chief mode of religious analysis and, 5) advocating the revisionist version of western history (cited in L. Brown, 2005, p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> Writer and artist educator Carol Becker (1997) advocated for an expanded understanding of the artist in North American society to that of a "public intellectual" or in Gramsci's term the "organic intellectual." Described as fluid intellectuals, these artists are always moving "forever inventing themselves and renegotiating their place on the [in-between] border zones between disciplines, never stuck in one discipline" (p. 18). Not bound to any one body of knowledge, they address and reframe complex problems from any and multiple disciplinary angles, serving a valuable public role in society.

<sup>8</sup> This project was an independent study done under the supervision of Barbara's supervisor Dr. Rita Irwin, for which we wrote a paper. It served as the first draft of this chapter. Rita suggested that Barbara do a pilot prior to taking on the larger project to get her feet wet as a researcher in her larger Ph.D. study, as well as going through the process of having the research approved by the University Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB).

<sup>9</sup> Other spiritual feminist artists that bring spirituality, feminism and art together in their practices are visual and performance artists Mary Beth Edelson, and Carolee Schneemann, and poets Judy Grahn, and Adrienne Rich.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere Tannis (Hugill, 2002) wrote of the purpose of the practice of Authentic Movement: "The symbols of the Self, which for Jungian psychology is the unity of being, arise from the depths of the body, bringing material from the personal, collective and transpersonal unconscious into embodied form. This process is integrated into conscious awareness through dialogue with the witness, the one who is observing while the mover moves" (p. 2).

<sup>11</sup> The concrete Maltese labyrinth replaced the prior grass labyrinth at the time of the schools renovations. It is a space that is open and welcoming of the public. A sign invites those who come across it to walk the labyrinth and enter its structure as an act of meditation or prayer.



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<sup>12</sup> At a later date they did each receive a copy of the DVD that was created from this work.

<sup>13</sup> The Kosmos as defined by transpersonal philosopher Ken Wilber includes the multiple “domains of existence,” from matter to mind to Spirit, and is not limited to the material realm as the word cosmos is most often related to in contemporary literature (2000, p. 16).

<sup>14</sup> A co-presentation on this study entitled *Re/turning to Her: An alr/ographic ritual inquiry* was given on May 31, 2008 at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) in the ARTS SIG which took place at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver British Columbia, Canada.

<sup>15</sup> These divine Beings were called to and invoked at the beginning of the performance ritual as the journey to the center of the labyrinth began.

*Art Installation II:  
The Walk into the Labyrinth*

*Teacher*



Image 23

Bickel, Barbara. (2006). Cathy Bone's backyard labyrinth. Ladner, B.C., (Video still).

## Curatorial Introduction

we are flesh

we are word

we are flesh-made word

we are kiss

Betsy Warland ( 1987, n.p.)

The erotic arises as an individual and collective force in the co-creation, art installations, and performance rituals of *Womb Entering*. The erotic in this work (influenced by poet Audre Lorde's definition) is understood as the life force, and is a resource that resides within a "deeply female and spiritual plane" (Lorde, 1995, p. 239) of relationships. Although women have generally been taught to mistrust this resource in Western Society (Alexander, 2005, Lorde, 1995), they can be replenished by it if they choose to reclaim it as life-giving nourishment; a relational gift, not separated from the Divine. Sadly, the erotic and the relational aspects of human and divine life have not been cared for in many religious traditions (Christ, 2003, p. 92) where females have not been sanctioned to perform sacred rites (K. Turner, 1982, p. 221). In re-asserting their right to create sacred space and perform ritual women reclaim their "source of power, vision, and solidarity [a]s the symbolic corollary to equal pay, choice of abortion, domestic freedom, the establishment of women's business. etc. Successful and enduring change in the status of women will come only through the parallel transformation of symbols and realities" (K. Turner, 1982, p. 222). Nourished by the individual and collaborative making of art, ritual making and the deepening relationships among the fourteen women in this study, eros emerged in its full force to guide the co-a/r/tographic inquiry. Making the commitment to walk the labyrinthal journey together, acting as witnesses for each new creation and each birth, the women took on the "spiritual responsibility" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 92) of self-learning, self-restoration, opening the door for self-transformation, and consequently, the spiritual and political evolution of the collective. All agreed to collaborate, explore, and reflect upon the project as co-a/r/tographers, although some were able to do this more than others. Within this chapter the teaching and learning of the a/r/tographic process as ritual is revealed as a significant component of the study.

As the witness/participant scribe, who has the privilege and responsibility of collating all the research data, I draw upon a practice of spiritual ethics. A spiritual ethics challenges the “objective observer/scholar because the witness consciously accepts both the power-laden relationship and the ethical responsibility of the act of witnessing” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 83). This requires a humbleness on the part of the witness and an openness to learn from the witnessing, allowing transformation of the self to occur. A difficulty of collaborative work is deciding how one voice can speak for the collective, especially a large collective. Chapter Five is written understanding that it is impossible to have a completely objective view. The women have read and endorsed the writing and the videos, in particular when their voice/experience is being referenced.

Two DVD’s open this chapter. The first DVD documents the co-creative process from conception to the physical making of art. This DVD has four chapters of the co-creative process: 1) a sharing circle where some of the women reflect on the individual art pieces they created which were an expression of their spiritual lives, 2) the idea generation for what was to become *Her Divine Countenance* mask, 3) the co-creative process of *Her Divine Countenance* mask, and the *Woman Spirit Shield*, and 4) the idea generation for the performance ritual, which took place following a group trance process. The second DVD offers a glimpse of the gallery environment through a video walk in the AMS gallery, a slide show of all the art, and the two collaborative performance rituals.

## **Womb Entering - DVD 1**

### **Womb Entering: The Co-Creative Process**

46 minute video

Chapters:

Sharing Circle – 20 min.

Conceiving the mask – 3 min.

Co-creating the art – 18 min.

Conceiving the Performance ritual – 5 min.

Production: Barbara Bickel

Editing: Barbara Bickel, Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose

Co-creators and camera work: Mary Bennett, Barbara Bickel, Cathy Bone, Monica Brammer, Melodie Chant, Sophia Freigang, Tannis Hugill, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith, Shirin Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox with Danaan Cordoni-Jordan helping with camera work

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See <http://www.barbarabickel.com> for DVD on-line

## **Womb Entering DVD 2**

### **Womb Entering Art**

31 minute video

Chapters:

Dancing the Altars performance ritual – 5 min.

Womb Entering performance ritual – 18 min.

Womb Entering gallery walk – 8 min.

Womb Entering art slide show (AMS Gallery and Trinity St. Marks Church)

Production: Barbara Bickel

Editing: Barbara Bickel, Medwyn McConachy

Camera work: Barbara Bickel, R. Michael Fisher, Chris Koppitz, Leah Fisher

Co-creators: Mary Bennett, Barbara Bickel, Cathy Bone, Monica Brammer, Melodie Chant, Sophia Freigang, Tannis Hugill, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith, Shirin Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox with Danaan Cordoni-Jordan helping with camera work

2007

See <http://www.barbarabickel.com> for DVD on-line



Chapter Four  
Womb Entering



Image 24

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance* (top view). Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Plaster bandages, paper, fabric, acrylic paint, beads - 38 x 38 x 10 inches).

## Artist Introductions

The first day the new WSC planning team of 2006/2007 met was also the last time they met at the Vancouver School of Theology. A decision was made to meet at the labyrinth at the back of the school on this day of transition before beginning the planning meeting in the school. I responded poetically describing the poignant ritual walk that marked the beginning of a new planning team year, which would include the a/r/tographic dissertation study, and the ending of the VST co-sponsorship simultaneously.

from a distance I see  
colourful forms of woman  
moving closer closer  
at arrival  
energies intensify  
with full embrace  
touch laughter words of delight  
mark reception at the labyrinth

we twelve have come to vision  
for the future  
our work  
joined  
as servants of spirit

without orchestration  
footsteps encircle unwind  
the exterior circumference  
the grass tread  
while breath by breath the women enter  
into  
the ancient laid path  
as spirit  
wisdom  
waiting to emerge

individual steps  
walk as  
unified movement  
soles press  
the lingering trace  
of feminine soul  
that precedes  
the winding twisting turning  
journey

the center penetrated



nectar drenched  
fluid of multiple aura's blend  
surge and coalesce  
multi-full translations take form  
in stillness

a deep intake of breath  
holds the nectar  
in the chalice of her body

extended colour full  
on the return  
tapestry weaving  
heightened bodies crossing  
crossing prayers  
inner circle transfigured  
outer circle forms held till  
the thirteenth woman emerges  
from the labyrinths inner sanctuary

undoing the circle that holds the labyrinth  
supple resolute bodies enter  
the halls of the  
theological fortress  
strength exuding with each sure step  
as the chain of women extends  
the length of its halls  
expanding beyond the walls  
into the future

Barbara Bickel, June 2006

The fourteen women that make up the co-inquiry group of this project are all members or former members<sup>1</sup> of the annual WSC conference planning team. I hold multiple roles as researcher for whom this is my dissertation project, as a co-member of the planning team and co-participant in the study. The event began as a Christian ecumenical gathering on the University of British Columbia campus (then called the Women and Spirituality Dialogue) in 1991. At that time all the women organizers were Anglican. In 2001, in response to changing dynamics and interests within the planning team it officially became a multi-faith event and the name was changed to the Women's Spirituality Celebration. The event has fore-fronted experiential learning, creativity, art and ritual as essential components of the weekend. This increased significantly when artists (emerging and established) began to join the planning team in 1997.

The women involved at the time of this 2006/07 study<sup>2</sup> come from a variety of religious/non-religious backgrounds and current spiritual practices: Atheist, Buddhist-Wiccan, Christian (Anglican, Baptist, Creation Spirituality, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United), Communist/Jewish, Earth-based, Feri, Pagan/Goddess, New Thought, Reclaiming, Spiritual Feminist, Wiccan and Unitarian<sup>3</sup>. Some have art backgrounds in theatre, dance, performance art, creative writing, and visual art. Others have no formal arts training. More than half of the women have graduate degrees, although not all the women have postsecondary education. All are leaders within this group, as well as within other communities. Some work in professional leadership capacities, a few within religious institutions, and others volunteer as leaders/activists within their local communities. The women range in age from 27 to 65: mothers, stepmothers, grandmothers, aunts and daughters; single, or in committed heterosexual and lesbian relationships. The majority of the women are of European descent, and one woman is of East Indian descent from Kerola, India. The cultural and religious demographic of the group changes each year as new women join and others leave. Every year an open call is made at the conference for new women to join. The year this study took place there were four new members who joined the planning team. During the year, one member retired from the planning committee, but continued on with the research study. The group is aware that it has not attracted women of colour and non-Western religious women to the planning team in a sustainable way. The conference attracts their participation as facilitators and large gathering ritual leaders during the event, but the year long commitment to the planning team is more difficult to sustain for reasons that the group has yet to surpass.

### Introduction to the Study

The co-inquiry process was multi-layered incorporating group ritual sharing circles at the beginning, middle and end of the study: two weekends and two evenings of ritual, trance and art making; a visioning trance evening to conceive the first performance ritual for the WSC, and two subsequent rehearsals; the performance ritual at the WSC; video editing; the installation of the art; two rehearsals for the expanded performance ritual at the art gallery; the performance ritual at the opening of the Womb Entering exhibition; two art talks in the gallery; sitting the gallery during exhibition hours, and sharing reflective writing over email with each other, and directly to myself, the lead researcher. In addition to the collaboratively generated art making process, the women worked independently on creative writing and art making. It was never possible to have

the entire group present at the same time during any of the aspects of the research process. As the curator of the inquiry, I orchestrated the gatherings and was the only one always present. To accommodate the busy schedules of the women, two gatherings were scheduled for each of the multiple aspects of the research. In addition, I met individually on a few occasions with women unable to make it to a group gathering. To assist the flow of communication linking all aspects of the research to everyone, I regularly sent group and individual emails, and telephoned the women. The project spanned a period of eight months (Appendix A) while the group simultaneously organized the annual WSC.

An agreement was made to keep the research distinct from the WSC organizing meetings, although occasionally, time was set aside at the end of a WSC meeting to share research updates. Whenever the group met as part of the dissertation study, a sacred ritual space was created, and the larger intention of the gathering, be it sharing in circle, making art, sharing art made, or visioning the performance ritual, was set. I offered guiding questions prior to the first, and at the last ritual sharing circles, to assist the women enter into, and then to debrief the co-inquiry process. The initial question emailed to the women prior to the first ritual sharing circle was, *What has your spiritual and/or religious practice and journey been to lead you to being committed to organizing the WSC multi-faith event?* This was offered as a guiding question. It was suggested that they either think about it prior to the gathering or to let spirit lead them to share what needed to be spoken on the day.

The art making process was organic. The group began the art inquiry process by creating individual art pieces while in the weekend retreat space together. The large art projects envisioned during the first art making weekend were collaboratively created. At the end of the study four guiding questions were given to the women to assist the closing reflections at the ritual sharing circles: *1) How have you personally grown/struggled with your spiritual leadership journey/practice in this research project? 2) What have you observed/experienced the group go through with its multi-faith leadership practice/work in this research? 3) How/do you see this research process and research affecting multi-faith leadership practice/work in the larger world? 4) What have you learned/struggled/experienced within the a/r/tographic inquiry process?* Some of the responses to these questions are shared in this chapter and in the final chapter of the dissertation.

## *Mistica*

The term “mistica,” used in liberation theology, originated within informal grassroots communities. It means “the spirit of community” (Fernandes, p. 70). Mistica is the gathering call of the WSC planning team. The conference they organize has a spiritual focus which is committed to expressions, practices, and paths, of the Divine through the particular experience of women. As a woman-only event that recognizes women’s embodied spiritual experience<sup>4</sup> as unique from male spiritual experience, the women risk the academic critique of essentialism. Although the group advocates for women’s liberation many, but not all, of the women on the planning team identify as feminist.<sup>5</sup> An academic and political feminist discourse, that most often omits spiritual discourse, has not presented itself in the research sharing circles. In contrast, a spiritual feminist discourse (Christ, 2003; hooks, 2000), which recognizes the integral unity of the Divine that is present in all women has.

Many of the women hold the understanding of unity and diversity within masculine and feminine principles of the Divine, which are most often experienced as the tangible (masculine) and intangible (feminine), each interdependent, complementary, and equally valued as part of a healthy whole (Vandana Shiva, n.d). Some of the women in contrast hold a non-dual, non-gendered, understanding of the Divine, yet all can be said to recognize what spiritual teacher and eco activist Vandana Shiva teaches, that Western Society has generally lost respect and recognition for “[w]omen's roles as carriers of the Feminine principle of respect for life in nature and society (n.d., n.p.). On the planning team and at the WSC conference, women are honoured for their roles as carriers of the feminine principle. The intention is to empower women to take on the regenerative, embodied, and erotic leadership work needed to be done in their spiritual lives and society. At the conference women re/learn about their connection to each other, as women, the Earth, the Kosmos, Spirit, and the Divine, not solely through religious teachings and dogma but through “gatherings that nourish body, spirit, emotions and mind through the arts, contemplative and embodied spiritual practices” (cited from draft of WSC 2008 mission statement). This study is a co-a/r/tographic ritual inquiry into the mistica that sustains and motivates the individuals of this study, the collective growth of the group, and consequently the annual conference. From this a/r/tographic inquiry the following areas emerged as themes that are further elaborated in this chapter: 1) Women’s Sacred Space, 2) Women’s Spiritual Leadership, 3) Sacred Epistemology and Pedagogy and, 4) From Private to Public: A Pedagogy of Unknowing and Discomfort.

## *Women's Sacred Space*

There is a distinctiveness to gathering with a group of women in sacred space, that at this point in time is not for the most part reproducible when men are present. It reflects the many years of oppression that women and the Feminine principle have been subjected to in our Western Society (Christ, 1979; Daly, 1978). The rupture between the Masculine and Feminine principles of religious and spiritual understanding of the Divine causes suffering for both men and women (Christ 2003). In the research with the WSC planning team and at the WSC conference a sacred space is created for women to be present to themselves and each other, to empower themselves and each other. The planning team members of WSC, because of their own individual experiences and the feedback received from those who have attended the conference, are very aware of the need for women-only healing and worship space for women to experience what has been lost, repressed, excluded or hidden in their religious and spiritual practices. Women who are sensitive to the loss of the honoured sacred feminine often require a women-only space to do the healing that is essential to bring it forward fully into their lives again. The importance of offering a communal sacred space for women to experience the liminality and ecstasy of female-led ritual supported by women, contradicts the hundreds of years of silencing and oppression of women within male-dominated religious cultures (K. Turner, 1982). Bani Shorter (1987) in her study of women's self-initiation healing journey in psychoanalysis writes:

What takes place in the dark phase of liminality is a process of breaking down, differentiation, and purification of one's own attitudes in the interest of 'making whole' one's meaning, purpose and sense of relatedness once again. (p. 115)

The intention of the WSC is not to punish males through exclusion, but to begin to heal the pain that has rendered women silent, to allow women to break down, differentiate, and purify themselves in the relative absence of gendered oppression--in the desire to make whole again one's relationship with the Divine and hence with all of humanity.

The women spiritual leaders of this study are in differing stages of healing in their relationship with the principles of the Masculine and Feminine Divine within religious and spiritual teachings. Because of their own spiritual practices they understand and embrace the healing power of sacred space within which they can continue to evolve as spiritual beings. Lauren Artress (2006) describes sacred space in its complexity as,

... the place where two worlds flow into each other, the visible with the invisible. The finite world touches the infinite. In sacred space we can let down our guard and remember who we

are. The rational mind may be released. In sacred space we walk from chronos time to kairos time, as we allow our intuitive self to emerge. (p. 155)

In the first ritual sharing circle of the study, the women uniquely express the form of sacred space they long for. Melodie highlights the male-female distinction for herself:

I lack women in my life and have tried to get femaleness out of men and it does not work.... This group makes mundane religious ritual routines come alive – it brings life in.

Valerie admits that although she has been part of activist communities, “this is my first women’s community.” Annie is very clear of her needs,

I am needful of women’s space – it is very difficult to be in male spaces and male spaces of the family. I chose to stand between and being torn apart – how to negotiate that --I feel very vulnerable and this space offers a refuge for me to see myself.

Tannis shares her longing to fully reunite the Masculine with the Feminine Divine in her spirituality and shares, “I am longing for a place of permission to be as I am with or without words.” Cathy then reveals her understanding of female wisdom:

My sensate self woke up my spiritual self – through mothering, babies and bodies...vaginal wisdom in all its forms – that which is not spoken has a place to come forward in this group...the tender tenuous world changing aspect of this WSC -- it is dangerous critical work – no matter who walks in the door to be on our planning team – despite our different languages.

Catherine shares with gratitude the feminine archetypes and women that guide her spiritual evolution,

I am reminded of my grandmother who was a mentor for me. I am 27 years old and the youngest to be mentored in the group while connecting with the crone energy in myself... It is precious to be in the mentorship of women as I cycle out of maiden and into mother energy.

Shirin reveals that, despite being a woman, and an Anglican in the planning team since its inception, she still deals with feeling an outsider:

As the only one on the planning team for the first 8 years as a minority of different skin colour, I felt isolated but didn’t want to give up. When we became multi-faith it was my dream come true.

I confess my own gender biases learned while growing up:

I grew up with a very clear split between boys and girls in my [religious] home and come with a bias of working and creating art with women. I am trying to figure out what is it about religion that creates separations? ... I am glad that art is leading this research to the place of not knowing.

Sophia shares her dream of sacred space in the form of a women’s church:

This is like a refuge – a sacred place at the event and a more intimate space here. What would a women’s church look like? – a place of regular ritual- women need alot more and I’m looking for this church for women that is all about healing and spirituality, they are not separate. The women I meet with the WSC have something to offer that is unique to women no matter what faith – it is safe ground to walk and a place to call home – I quest for place and I still quest.

Nané speaks of her journey of integrating different aspects of her life within female sacred space:

My M.A. [practicum] project in Women’s Spirituality brought me in – I felt like a baby with wise elders...I am connecting my spiritual journey with my academic journey with this circle and see the transitions and my own maturing in the process... What we do together is follow the nose...through this group I have come to a greater understanding of Christianity. I brought Ariadne and Mary figures for the altar – both are keepers of the labyrinth from different times and places holding sacred space for female space that I strongly identify with. I appreciate our ability to walk into that space together and how the group holds that.

Ingrid describes the difference between male created space and female creation space,

... spires and towers, aspiring spaces... what buildings can be the highest? and women’s space is underneath, earth, labyrinth, caves... If spirituality is about creation our [creative] identities are our identities.

Monica admits,

My whole life has been leading me to this. I began with very black and white teachings and I have moved to realize we are all the same....WSC has helped me to be with not knowing. Its not an instinctual place for me to be yet I know it works. To practice being in this space of rule following and jumping off the abyss – they are the same thing... This group is a safe way to become familiar with practice outside of our scope – I can learn and expand who I am.

A longing for, and knowing of women’s sacred space, is embodied in these sharings. Each woman comes to the group with an individual story and life that is not necessarily shared on a daily basis with the group, but the group is impacted by nonetheless. To understand the complexity of the lives that the women bring to this group, an acknowledgment of some of the demands and crisis that occurred alongside this study is worth sharing. One woman was in the midst of a ecological and political protest, she found herself facing legal charges for her stance. Another, the director of an educational institute, was in the midst of massive downsizing, while another was negotiating a work contract that would give her more time in her Vancouver home. Four of the women are mothers of dependant children (two are single mothers), who juggle childcare schedules and deal with developmental life transition crises on a regular basis. Two woman were volunteer lead-organizers in a large international spiritual conference. Two women, having recently completed graduate degrees, were in the process of finding sustainable and

appropriate work. Two, including myself, were in the midst of finding their way into and through their doctoral programs. One woman was grieving the loss of her elderly mother the year prior, another the loss of a good friend's son to suicide, and yet another lost her sister to cancer during the study. A few were dealing with health issues, and one was experiencing life as a single person after the ending of a ten year relationship.

In the struggle to live with grace and integrity in a complex, not always supportive world, sacred space offers an opportunity for women to connect with others, be it human or non-human as Divine. To assist in the creation of sacred space in the gatherings as a planning team, and within the research process, altars are created. The altar is a central focal area that changes with each gathering. Although the designated facilitator sets the altar up, all the women are free to add to it. It most often has candles which are lit at the opening, and extinguished at the close. It can consist of objects from nature, home altars, photos, sculptures, and fabric. Stories behind the objects are often shared as a grounding connection with each other, and as a way to share knowledge of particular spiritual icons. For example, Nané shared the story of her altar figurines, Mary and Ariadne. For the first ritual sharing circle of the research, I had asked each woman to bring an altar item that represented her spiritual path. This provided a familiar ritual that, as one woman shared, "elevated our comfort level" for the group sharing, and focused the particular research intention of the circle. The altars are augmented by creating and activating ritual space through gestures such as lighting candles, ringing bells, praying, invoking deities, singing, moving, and touching. Co-creating sacred space together assists in transitioning the women out of what was often a distressing and overwhelming location to a nurturing and loving space. Each ritual circle is unique and is influenced by the woman attending, and also by the women who may not be present but are remembered. Within the sacred space of ritual, compassion, care, love, and a holding of each woman in the group is practiced as the work of discovering and expanding themselves as women spiritual leaders unfolds.

### *Women's Spiritual Leadership*

This project challenges the Hegelian masterful teacher/leader model (Felman, 1997), and instead engages a "novel education" that "stay[s] close to [an] affected improper study" where the risk of not knowing is embraced and new thinking has opportunity to reveal itself (Britzman, 2006, ix). During the gallery art talks, and at the debrief closing ritual circles, each woman in different ways admitted being taken out of a comfort zone at different stages of the project. At the same time, they were witnessing a care in co-leadership that acknowledged and embraced



their discomfort. As the doctoral researcher in the project, I struggled with the “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000) raised by the scholarly program I was immersed, where I questioned my own competency as a leader,

.... part of going through a Ph.D., you become a non-expert, non-valued, at some level you are just brought back down until you are in kindergarten, so it is interesting having to facilitate a process like this when you actually feel like you don't have any skills.... I have worked collaboratively with a lot of groups and this was different.... definitely more humbleness was present for me with this one. I was multi-projecting at the same time, which has been my big learning through this whole graduate program – is how do you do multiple big things at the same time? In the past I had the luxury of one big project at a time. In this project I had to trust that whatever is going to happen is going to happen.

Another learning ... and I don't know if this is a good learning, it is connected to humbleness, but I am more and more.... I don't feel like I am a complete human being on my own..., like relationships are so important, and working together is so important, and I feel less and less able to do anything on my own as a complete individual.... we—I need to be working with other people because I don't have all the answers, I don't know everything I know I need to know to do something really well, with a richness and a depth. So that's been a big humbleness. And then also, with my struggle, which I had to let go of is not having, not feeling really strongly with any traditional ritual practices, and having to still lead, because this was mine to lead, this part of it. And to keep doing it, and even today, just loving how it comes together at the last minute... the rituals just happen, they are there, and I know I don't have to be these ancient traditions that are practiced and know all the right sequence and ordering, and I know that, but at some level I have gone through insecurity because I don't have the great traditions behind me that I am going to be teaching you.

I remember the first sharing circle, I came with my questions. and everyone was kind of nervous to go first, and I said okay I'll go first, So I answered the questions, and Valerie says – you didn't answer your question. It was like -- so I can't even answer my own questions..., it was good. It is like the questions are the starting point, and then the conversations and questions grow, change and morph as we went along.

The women witnessed and experienced in a variety of ways, my particular form of leadership-- my willingness to surrender to not knowing-- yet trusting the ability of all to do exactly what needed to be done. What follows are the voices of some of the women as they speak of witnessing and experiencing a way of leadership that is different from what one might recognize as leadership in a patriarchal dominated world and academy. Leela Fernandes (2003) further describes what is needed to develop,

... a feminist approach to leadership which is based more centrally on qualities such as humility and tolerance; where visibility is a tactic rather than as end; where leadership is understood more appropriately as a form of labor and service rather than in terms of achievement. It is here that we see the ethical component of practice begin to give ways to a

wider, spiritualized understanding of practice. For a transition in the ways in which leadership operates is linked as much to an attitude of the spirit as it is to one's public and visible actions. (p. 57)

Although the group has worked with a co-leadership model for many years, the opportunity to fully experience and reflect upon an ethical spirit-led form of women's leadership in a new learning experience was a powerful revelation for them in multiple ways. The women's reflections in the circle articulate this.

Tannis clearly articulates her experience of surrendering to her limits as a leader in this group, and her coming to recognize that she is enough in whatever capacity as part of a whole:

My personal growth and struggle with this research project that we did was occurring simultaneously to a number of challenging enterprises that I was engaging in my life, one of them was a huge also spiritual project, the leadership of the ritual committee for the Spiritual Directors Conference, which I have complained about.... The question for me personally has always been – I take leadership positions alot—it has always been – the solo work, or the initiator of a project. Although I have been in ensemble, but then there was a director – we all followed the director. So to be in a collaborative environment, although initiated and guided by you Barbara, your leadership was such that you held such a huge space for all of us to be co-leaders, even though at times I would try to defer to you -- you would sort of step aside and not tell me - yes do that. So my personal struggle and this is in relationship to the Divine as well, is am I enough? So I am always doing everything, you know, to prove that I am enough. So it was hard for me to be in this with all of us and not be able to just be there all of the time, to not bring my voice forward in a really strong way. But just to be one of.... So it was a very important growth process for me to learn again and again that whatever my presence each one of our presence was in that, was absolutely enough, and a significant component to the whole spiral, creation process that we engaged.

Annie reflects on the intertwining relationship between the co-creative projects which occurred alongside the administrative organizing of the WSC:

I'm thinking of just how your fingers kind of slide in, and we slide into each other and slide out and that is amazing, utterly amazing. I think that what we have done in this project that Barbara has led us into and not knowing quite where it would go – where we've entered into a creative space but we've also entered into it with in an intention around our work together in terms of the Women's Spirituality Celebration, that what we are in fact doing is creating a way of working together that may have some influence in terms of other groups that we are affiliated with.... I think maybe this is one of our callings – is to open to space and to hold space open, I see that as Barbara's great gift.

Shirin reminds the group of how this is an experience that infiltrated individual lives, that carried and carries on in the lives of the women, calling each woman to take the work further into the world:

... I think Barbara was just a catalyst for us to create this, and a/r/tography again, she brought forth in the form of art and we all indulged, very bravely, you know and created something

and blew our minds off, because this project was not a one time event, it was a process event, in all our lives – it took a year of our life actually. Which in our subconscious mind we stored it, and drew from it every time we got together, and just the presence of each other, our memories are you know revitalized and energized and we live it.... And Barbara has done a fantastic job because I think gently and at the same time giving direction -- what it all means to us and as well as her. If it does not mean anything to me I won't participate in it, so I think including me is not enough.... You looked into individuals and I am really grateful for that, we all grew from it. And I do hope it opens up to the world, this kind of change. And I think we are responsible to do it for others, even more so now, that Barbara has given us this opportunity to do it.

Medwyn expresses passionately the educational mind shift she experienced as a seasoned leader in corporate and spiritual domains:

... there was a really important piece of education in this for me... This project wasn't about creating a bunch of artists. There was a part of it about the women creating art but it was much more about the women finding ways to express themselves through creating something that spoke clearly to other people. And I've done a lot of facilitation working business scenarios and all over the place but your capacity to facilitate this process has just been remarkable to me and you're already an established artist in your own right, so inviting a bunch of us who do not consider ourselves artists to participate in making art with you could have created a somewhat intimidating situation for people and it was the exact opposite. There was this constant sense that you were encouraging and supporting and pulling this stuff out and always reminding people that there was still time, still space and the contribution they make is important. I don't know how you are going to express that. Quite remarkable, then the whole, sort of sense you get if you create and hold a trusting intentional space for something to happen, it will.

Monica illuminates the importance of practicing a non-judgmental form of leadership, and expanding that from the group into the larger world:

... each of us brings our own experience with the honesty and integrity that we have, we've learned to express with each other, and we are capable of expressing, and encouraging other people to express that same sense of their own self, however that comes out of no judgment. So this has been a great place to practice. So we figure if we do then we are setting the templates for the rest of the world. So Barbara encouraged each of us to go beyond, to express ourselves, to explore and to play with no judgment. She had no idea, didn't say okay now this is the way it's going to look and this is the way it is going to be, she was wide open for whatever we came up with so it has really been a really interesting experience... and its becoming a little thicker.

Cathy's reflections incorporate the kinesthetic and vulnerable body-led element of the leadership in the research experience, and its link to political and global change:

I was thinking a lot as we were walking the labyrinth together, about what it was like for both of our bodies to be in a space together, when we haven't been together for a long time. And you hold for me the bodies and inertia around the project that we've been sharing. So I was experiencing you as more than you out there, so it took me back to some of the places the rooms we've been in and the ways our hands have worked together and the mediums

that we have experimented with in the last two years as we have journeyed with you in your research. And I was aware how tender and kindness of the work that you are doing. That whatever motivated you, whether art never happens alone for you, when you needed companions, it is a very kind thing to invite women together and hold carefulness amongst us, and I think your clarity as you had it of the process and the rituals that we shared, the tone of voice you used, helped set intention of being gentle with each other, as you asked us to expose our bellies to each other and I think that kind of respect and gentility that was not without its power or assertiveness, I think that kind of kindness and gentility is very, very political, very global.

Sophia reflects boldly on the leadership aspect of acceptance for the wrenching dichotomous struggle, so common to many women, when attempting to lead in one's individual life as a mother and partner, and in the world simultaneously:

... but there was a time period where I was out of the loop..., and I felt like—I don't know why but I couldn't say it to anybody, I couldn't go you know what I'm out of it, so I need to just step back and get out, I just kept hoping sort of to be able to step back in. And that just wasn't happening. You would call every once in awhile, and say 'how's things going'? And I'd be like oh god, she's still there, she's still there, she still thinks I'm part of this, that's great. I am, I mean spiritually I am, although actively I thought I was just not keeping up, I could not keep up to the amount of e-mails that were coming through, and I would have loved to. Part of me is like an all or nothing person, and if I can't keep up, okay I don't want to look at it. Cause I knew it was so big and so beautiful, I just couldn't look at it anymore, it was like no, you have to deal with the other aspect of your world, if you go into here you are going to get sunk, you're just going to get sunk with—I don't know what it is? Just overwhelmed with just another side of yourself—you cannot soften up right now, you can't because there's this other thing that you have to keep going, whatever that is. So that was sad, very sad for me. And I still chose to do it. So there must have been a gain in there for me so that is something else. And from Barbara ...there was a lot of acceptance. Just yeah, compassion and acceptance. Like a river who knew how to just get around the rocks.

Catherine speaks as the youngest and a new member of the group, and reminds the group of the importance of being mentored in leadership through this research process:

I think it was an incredible way to step into being part of the group as a new member as well. Having this project happen alongside coming into the planning committee was just such a way into deepening the intimacy and the place, and the process actually.... I just wow... have a lot of gratitude for your mentorship Barbara, it's meant a lot, you give a lot, and have just such a lovely way of being, yeah, very non-forceful but powerful. I appreciate that Barbara's leadership is very guiding, not—leading is almost strong, not that you were not strong, but you were never forceful, you were just there, holding, guiding, providing and fluid at the same time, so it wasn't obstructive or difficult, everything flowed, it was never a problem that... fill in the blank. There was always a way to fill in the blank, it was amazing, really. As a whole that process seemed that way to me.

Nané further describes the significant female leadership quality of holding space and how that was created, and how it has assisted the group's evolution into the world:

Another thing comes up about leadership, Barbara,... but your leadership in particular has been—I have been very acutely aware, because of being in an academic role and doing a Ph.D. also, I am aware of how you are conducting—how your leadership—that’s she calling you, she’s calling you, she’s calling all of us, she’s sending the e-mails, and you’ve been very fluid about how you work with us, like you are the one that is holding—I mean I appreciate that we are all holding the space too—but in fact the project, how you’ve held that—you’ve allowed—that spiritual piece.

I’m just thinking it is so fascinating how far it’s come, and your role within the group has actually shifted into this leadership role of the group moving out of the VST space and into this other space, and this process of going more public, outside the Christian-based academy, into these other spaces—you, and this project... has been part of that shift and that kind of plays into this work in the larger world.

The teachings of a feminine-based *mistica* as compassionate, gentle, powerful, ethical and flowing leadership, becomes clearly identifiable at the close of the co-researching process through the co-witnessing reflections of the co-inquirers. Spiritualized knowing, as described by feminist scholar Leela Fernandes (2003), is a transformative knowledge practice that is based in the mystery of the unknowable. It resists the colonizing tendency to bend knowledge to individual or collective will. She writes, “It is a sense of mystery that dispels the mistaken assumption that the intellectual, writer, teacher [leader] or activist is the knower rather than a witness who is always in the process of being known” (p.99). A spiritualized knowing unfolds as the women come to know each other, and themselves, amidst the ritual circles of sharing. (Edelson, p. 316, 1982). The reflections at the end of the study share a glimpse of the struggles present in manifesting *mistica* in our cultures, revealing how women leaders struggle to balance a life of caregiving others and the guilt and shame that often accompanies not being able to accomplish it all or to do it well enough. Remembering and witnessing the sacred aspect of themselves and their journey assists in coming to a place of acceptance of their perceived limitations.

What was experienced in the group of co-inquirers, resonates with what educator Peter Reason (1993) articulates as “sacred human inquiry” which “integrate[s] a critical self-reflexive consciousness with a deep experience of the sacred” (p. 282). Reason (2000) further describes the fine line that rests between “power and authority on the one hand, and collaboration on the other” (p. 5) for the initiating facilitator. He cautions that, for this balance to be achieved, the power must always be “in service of creating a space for the collaboration” (p. 6) in order to facilitate an authentic space of “us.” As the facilitator of the project, I drew from my years of experience working on collaborative projects, and trust in the mystery of the art making process which leads to an experience of the sacred. I managed this, in part because of the trust and belief

the women had in me, in spite of my own feelings of inadequacy, and not knowing, that surfaced frequently during the project.



Image 25

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance* in process, Vancouver, BC. (Video still).

### Sacred Epistemology and Pedagogy

A sacred epistemology and pedagogy is articulated within this project, reflecting what Lincoln and Denzin (2000) describe as the “seventh moment in qualitative research” which is:

... political, presuming a feminist, communitarian moral ethic stressing the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation...” (p.1052)

The pedagogical “holding of the space” and “fluid guiding” I practiced invited the group to enter into a poignant interrelationship of sacred co-inquiry and co-learning where, as Shirin poetically reflected after the first ritual sharing circle that the,

... air was stilled in moments of spoken words and at the same time was pulsating by short and long breath and sighs of the listeners. We were swept by the Divine presence in various forms, shapes, sounds, songs, poems, rhythms, movements and awarenesses.

Having learned the importance of acknowledging the presence of spirit in the inquiry process in the *Re/Turning to Her* project, on a regular basis through emails, and in circle with the

women, I reminded myself and the women that they were entering a relationship with spirit together. The co-inquiry practice of a/r/tography as ritual gave them a pathway to follow. After the first group ritual sharing circle in November 2006, I wrote:

Dear Women,

Thanks for a warm and embracing beginning to this research project. I still resonate with a high frequency of aliveness in my body this evening. I am left thinking of the many things I did not speak to regarding the whole research process. As I am committed to the exchange of air in this process of communing with you and I do not want to fill space that does not need to be filled I want to invite you to contact me (phone or email) with any questions, insights, confusions, hunches, ideas, suggestions. You may want more information than I am giving. *I am very much working with a trusting in spirit to guide us and appreciate the preciousness of having this kind of time and space with you.*

I attached a brief overview sheet on a/r/tography at the back of the package. It may help or not in understanding it. I am keen to have conversations with those that want to explore this in more depth with this project. My insight that occurred on the Grace Cathedral labyrinth in SF last year was:

*Art (creation-making) leads us to spirit, spirit leads us to new understandings of life, and from that place of new understanding we make an effort to teach and share with others.*

This is the essence of what I consciously work to do as an a/r/tographer. Thanks for your thoughtful sharing of your selves today.

Many blessings,  
Barbara

The women entered the collaborative a/r/tographic process with varying degrees of comfort. Planning and getting the group together for the first weekend of ritual and art making together simultaneously included excitement and discomfort. Excitement in anticipation of the co-creative process, disappointment for a few of the women who were not able to attend the weekend, and the struggle of traveling away from home, losing one's personal space for twenty-four hours. For some, holding the tensions between anticipation and personal comfort levels expressed itself in tiredness, headaches and nausea, for others in annoyance and/or nervousness in being video documented and being unsure of what was expected. The ritual sharing circles allowed a space for the excitement and struggles to be shared amongst the group, as well as a place to plan and agree upon the agenda for the weekend. During this intense and precious collaborative process of creating, eating, sleeping, trancing, playing, crying, singing, sharing of stories, ideas and art together the many Divine aspects of the women emerged to be witnessed. Following that first art making weekend in November 2006 at Cathy's home in Ladner I wrote to the women:

It was a weekend of Being in the presence of the Divine Feminine mirrored through each of you creating and birthing, manifesting in her many aspects, including her tired, overwhelmed and wounded aspects. And it is all good. May the Divine continue to guide us as we travel this journey of co-creation and discovery together. Doing the important work of bringing personal and collective lived understandings of multi-faith practices and experiences to the larger world.

As the lead researcher, I experienced feelings of grief and loss in the midst of the project. Some loss was due to logistical struggles, including the impact the complexity of the women's lives were having on myself and the group. I turned to my spiritual practices, to walking the labyrinth, and to my understanding of sacred epistemology, to support the work of keeping the group connected as a whole, and to hold the larger context of the research project. In addition to these autonomous practices that assisted my role as facilitator, I was able to share and acknowledge my struggles with some of my co-inquirers. In January, 2007, Tannis and I exchange communications:

Thanks so much Barbara for your call and care.

I hope I didn't sound edgy on the phone - but I am frighteningly tired which raises my fears about accomplishing all I have taken in to do in the next few months, and want to do...

Please know that my heart is there but right now my body really isn't. T

Tannis

Its a hard place to be - of wanting to do it all and do it all well. How do we support each other to manage the complexity of our lives and the limits of our physical/emotional selves? I gathered your distressed tone was not solely because of the research project. I have to keep practicing letting go - letting go - such hard work and yet it is the only way to keep doing what we are doing.

taking/being care/ing/ful, barbara

Acknowledging the absence of some of the women through group emails, was a way to remind all that their presence was honoured and felt even in their absence. After the group ritual sharing circle of making art in January 2007, I wrote:

Dear all,

An inspiring, nourishing gathering with you yesterday. Thanks to each of you for your commitment, energy and contribution to this research - at all levels. In the midst of complex and full lives I am very aware of the extra effort this work is calling forth from each of you. Please remember that whatever you are able to contribute is exactly what it needs to be. Our collective energy infuses this process whether we are physically present or not. For those unable to be with us yesterday and those that were not there for the entire time here is an overview of our time together and future logistics to think about.

As the absences made apparent, in the midst of the generative creativity and powerful heart opening experiences, there was the limiting reality of some of the women's physical health, time



restraints, and the capacity to fully enter the spirit of co-inquiry with the group. Dancer and educator Celeste Snowber (2004), advocates being willing to enter what she calls a “spirituality of messiness” (p. 125) as we “are schooled in the soul of life” (p. 12). She writes, “Teaching is a bodily act, and we must engage every part of the knowledge available to us: kinesthetic, cognitive, intuitive, artistic, perceptual; the list goes on and on” (p. 128). Her philosophy of art, education and research is a relational one and encourages the wide embrace of a dance partner, entwined with the breath and rhythm of the body as it dances with creation; whose arms hold suffering and grief as well as ecstasy and joy leading the life dancer toward multiple “avenue(s) of spiritual formation” (p. 134) and the “shoulder of Mystery” (p. 134). The vulnerable dances of relationship between the women allowed all to rest on the shoulder of Mystery at different times throughout the study.

Theologian and educator Dwayne Huebner (1999) alludes to the ever shifting relational qualities of sacred epistemology. He writes, “All knowing requires openness and vulnerability... To have new forms emerge, old forms must give way to relationship” (p. 350). There is a giving way, a release, letting go, and a dying so new forms can emerge.” (p. 99). Giving way to the relational process of art making, accepting the imperfect humanness of each other, while simultaneously recognizing each other as Divine, and opening to the mystery-filled guidance of spirit, assisted the emergence of new ways of knowing for individuals and for the group.

Adult educator Dorothy MacKeracher (2004), suggests at least seven conditions a facilitator should be aware of and incorporate within her teaching practice, for spiritual learning to occur. These spiritual learning practices were engaged throughout the study, and are described by MacKeracher as strategies that: 1) facilitate altered states of consciousness, 2) encourage play and entry into the unknown and arational modes of knowing, 3) include self awareness and self reflexive practices, i.e., dream journaling, 4) are non-judgmental, 5) deliberately return to insights and enter further contemplation through art making, writing, performing etc., 6) include respectful interchanges with others, i.e., sharing circles, and, 7) look for connections in what may seem like paradoxical places (pp. 177-180).

Within the project, the group entered altered states of consciousness through facilitated trance journey, meditation, the creative exploration of metaphor (most collectively powerful was the metaphor of womb entering), and humour. Entry into the unknown was facilitated through art making processes, spontaneous singing, dancing, and an ecstatic silliness of play with each other at times. The digital video recording (although not always easy), reflective journaling and sharing of thoughts, insights, trances, and physical sensations allowed the group to individually

and collectively reflect upon and delve into the experiences, with ever increasing depth and awareness. This was done in a non-judgmental caring way and propelled the women into deeper explorations of themselves and the group. The creation of poetry, individual and collective art pieces, the performance rituals, and art installations, allowed a revisiting of the many layers of metaphors and insights produced during the project. Meeting on a regular basis in sacred ritual sharing circles, augmented the individual learning by making visible themes and patterns which emerged amongst the women. Seeing connections to the women's lives, although they may have felt very separate from the project, was at times jarring--but ultimately the realization that spirit flows through all aspects of one's life, was affirmed.

### *From Private to Public: A Pedagogy of Unknowing*

The first exhibition of the art, and an initial short version of the performance ritual, entitled *Dancing the Altars*, took place at the 2007 WSC conference (Image 28). For some of the women this meant stepping out from the behind-the-scenes-leadership of the event they were accustomed to. It was a nascent presentation of the a/r/tographic research to the public. The individual created art was displayed in the common lounge of the conference, and the collaboratively made drum shield and mask became part of the two main altars in the Epiphany Chapel, where the large multi-faith ritual gatherings took place (Images 26 and 27). We had committed as a group to create a ritual performance with the drum and the mask for the opening evening multi-faith gathering. A few weeks before the conference in preparation for this offering, half of the women gathered with the finished collaborative art pieces in Tannis's home and entered a group trance. For most of the women, this was the first time participating in a group trance. They had experienced an individual Ecstatic Posture trance<sup>6</sup> led by Tannis, while on the weekend of ritual and art making the November prior. This trance, introduced by myself, was different in that they spoke out loud what they saw, felt, heard, smelled, sensed, and stayed connected as a group as the trance journey unfolded. Tannis began the meditation with the ringing of her glass 'singing bowl' while the women lay on the floor like spokes on a wheel with their heads underneath the faces of the mask. Their bodies were supported by the ground beneath them, and through breathing deeply, they released their beings into the collective energy of the mask, as the mutual spontaneous journey unfolded transporting them into an altered realm (see Womb Entering Video 1).



Images 26

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Women's Spirituality Celebration* front altar installation. Vancouver, BC: Epiphany Chapel, Vancouver School of Theology.

The images and events that occurred within the trance state of: salt water waves, laughter, trees, white feathers, and women of all ages dancing with the heartbeat of the drum in dialogue with the mask became the colours, elements, movements, and sounds, mutually choreographed into the five minute ritual performance (see Appendix D). With minimal rehearsal time, the women boldly stepped into the experience, followed the drum, danced with the mask, trusted spirit and became priestesses of the moment--awakening the altars for the large circle of witnessing women at the WSC. Each woman took on a role within the performance ritual that suited her level of comfort. Some moved to the edges of the circle at times to hold space and others entered fully into the center of the dance. During the small group sharing following the performance ritual, an older woman in the audience shared that she did not understand the dance. I replied that the women were only coming to understand the dance themselves-- still riding the waves of the mystery of co-creation. On March, 4, 2007, Ingrid shared a poem she wrote in response to the experience that expresses the mysterious and sacred magic of the ritual performance, where the women danced the two altars to life.

here at the centre of things

infinite store

women come  
gills to tail  
open

porous  
skin like a glove  
dive into

spumey wave

quicksilver

unafraid

together

voice  
uncoils

our countenance  
blooms mirrored petals  
drum shields  
sacred site  
salt  
gold  
laughter  
song  
tears  
dance  
rhodocrosite  
gaia's garland braid



Images 27

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Women's Spirituality Celebration* central altar installation. Vancouver, BC: Epiphany Chapel, Vancouver School of Theology, (Digital photograph).



Image 28

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Women's Spirituality Celebration* dancing the altars ritual performance. Vancouver, BC: Epiphany Chapel, Vancouver School of Theology, (Video still)

The weeks following the WSC conference, emails passed through the women's mailboxes like love letters. The energy the women raised together in the last WSC held at the Vancouver School of Theology was palpable and overflowing. To offer a glimpse into the amount of work, energy and commitment that each woman gave to this event Catherine's insightful email<sup>7</sup> written on March 4, 2007, with the subject line heading *Gratitudes*, is shared:

Sweet sisters,

Wanted to send my thanks to all of you for all the energy invested over the last year into the manifestation of a beautiful event yesterday. I am so aware of all of our unique contributions and presences. So many details and so much energy was required to birth WSC 2007, and I deeply appreciate the commitment, love and sisterhood that is so alive in the planning group. Interesting that the theme for this year was mentoring, because I feel that I have learned so much from all of you. You've supported me through your love and prayers, and given me the opportunity to grow and learn from being a part of a planning team. Barbara, I've been so touched by your commitment to this team, your creativity and your ability to priestess by holding space for others. Annie, you are a skilled story teller with a heart willing to offer help wherever needed. Monica, you work so hard and selflessly to manage the details, hold the grand vision and weave the threads together that support the foundation of our work. I see you and your work and honour this very much. Medwyn, as I mentioned yesterday, you show me how to honour my boundaries and energy, an important lesson for me. Tannis, your body and voice hold a power that shows me how to speak clearly and with intention. How to be powerful and soft at once. Melodie, your humility and your self-honouring are deep inspirations (blessings for your healing). Sophia, you hold the power of the Goddess in your heart, your life, and your intentions. You're passion for her spills onto me. Valerie, you are a model for how I would like to be as I grow into cronedom... sassy, participatory and unafraid to speak my mind. Shirin, love shines through your eyes at me and my heart wells up with goodness and love. I feel as though you are my own grandmother. Your prayers and support mean so much. Your warm embrace brings me comfort. and Ingrid...last but not least! I love hearing your stories, your poems and your wisdom. the muse seeps from your poetry and your life and I've been touched by the sincere interest you demonstrate in your exchanges with others, including me. Blessings to you all, dearest mentors. I look forward to connecting on the 23rd.

Love, Catherine

Within the sacred inquiry the lines between artist and priestess, secular and spiritual, private and public blurred, and a form of arts-based priestessing evolved. At the opening celebration of the *Womb Entering* installation (Appendixes D, E, F, G and H) six weeks after the WSC conference, many of the women were further initiated into the public realm of visual and performance ritual<sup>8</sup> art, and hence experienced themselves as public leaders/pedagogues/priestesses in a significantly different way from what they were accustomed to in woman-only space. The performance ritual in the AMS gallery was an elaboration of the shorter performance ritual at the WSC weekend (Womb Entering - DVD 2 and Appendix F).



Shirin who held the ground of the performance ritual in holding the Woman Spirit Shield with Monica shares in an email her experience of the gallery performance ritual (Image 29, 30 and 31) a few days after the opening to everyone:

Dear Divine sisters,

I am still immersed in that joy and celebration that Barbara invited us into and made a part of. Thank you Barbara, for your wonderful presence, your gentle way of including all of us in the process - a process that you embarked on with courage and with an element of adventure!

Thank you Divine women, for creating the sacred space where the Holy Spirit was experienced by all who witnessed the event by our outward expressions of inner joy and awe!!! It was the first time in so many years that I was brought to the awareness that I was the only woman of 'color' amongst you, beautiful soulful women. At times it is extremely challenging for me to express my internal self in the 'public.' On Saturday when we practiced, the thoughts overwhelmed me even to the point of thinking that the venue will be full the next day, and that I am to enter this unknown territory! But, on Sunday when I entered the beautiful 'created' venue, all my fears melted away. Seeing the bowls of sea salt on the table and the beautiful flowers evoked a deep sense of gratitude in my body. I felt all your embrace of assurance, and my inner child was willing to be 'vulnerable' dancing in the Holy Spirit. In my internal spiritual connections, I felt the physical fatigue, head aches, cold in the bodies of some of us and also including those who were not present, I was experiencing their physical and emotional pains and anxieties. Yet, when the moment came, the joy and elation was so evident in everyone's countenance. We were blessed by the Divine SHANTI enabling us to enter this creative process. Barbara, you transformed into the "warrior woman" creator and 'orchestrator' of that divine symphony. Michael and Chris [Barbara's partner and son-in-law who video documented the performance ritual] brought male, yet, gentle anchoring energies to the venue. Tannis's crystal bowl began to drone...and I entered the realm of my being where every thing within me was dancing. The walking of the labyrinth was womb entering experience for me and coming out of it was like entering the light. Medwyn's drumming was in the rhythm of my own heart beat. Holding the Shield Drum was indeed an honor bestowed on me. The dance of "KRISHNA LEELA," The Divine Dance of Masculine (the shield drum) and the feminine (Her Divine Countenance) was witnessed by all who were present there. The laughter revealed that light, airy and tingly side of our spiritual journeys. The toning joined by all, lifted us all to the cosmos??? The beating of the shield drum by Annie, took me deeper....deeper into that dark dew-drenched, lush green forest...like a deer jumping...running...and at the end, coming out through a clearing in the forest. When all this spiritual experiences ended, I felt as though it all ended too soon!!!! I wished to remain in that transcended state for a bit longer. Indeed it was "SHIVA THANDAVA" (the Divine dance of creation). Now I feel that the spiritual seeds are planted in our beings and new birth of blossoms of possibilities is transforming each of us. The Holy Spirit is speaking through our voices, thinking through our intellects, loving through our open hearts, confirming and consoling through our wills. We are inspired by HER tingly and shiny presence. We are unified by HER LOVE and dispersed into our individual life journeys. We shall hold firm to the beautiful memories of co created artful experiences that culminated into that enchanting and transforming moment in time and space.

Blessings and love, Shirin



Images 29, 30, and 31

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* performance ritual, Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Video stills – Video camera Chris Koppitz).



Nané also shares what she experienced as a healing experience in the performance ritual. She had been struggling-- knowing academics that she was studying with would be present at this public performance ritual. The risk of exposing herself in this public and ritual way, through another's research, to those evaluating her own academic work, contributed to a building sense of vulnerability and reluctance to fully let go in the co-inquiry process. She wrote,

Hello dear ones!!!

very, very healing for me ----

my headache completely cleared and i went home feeling whole and refreshed, touched by sweet spirit of each of you and happy, calm.....

it wasn't 'performance' for me in terms of having to 'get it right', or do this, do that, as was happening when we rehearsed,

i moved into a calm grounded ritual space and just enjoyed the moment,

it was a breakthrough in terms of how i've been feeling about the project as a whole - which has been mostly a place of resistance in terms of my time and ability to contribute, that all lifted somehow last night, and am grateful to Barbara and you all for the open space she has held and that we have been creating together,

much lov

Tannis also writes of her gratitude for the group, and her own revelation after the evening:

Hi All,

I am still simmering with the energy of last night's event and watch with delight and curiosity to see how this moves through us all, and continues into the world.

Thank you so much Barbara for shepherding us through such an amazing process. You held the space with generosity and open-hearted constancy.

I regret that I was not able to contribute as much as I wished, often feeling the sadness and frustrations of time/energy limitations. But such is the embodied condition. I am simultaneously immensely grateful that there was such a loving embrace of all limitations, that I felt none-the-less welcomed.

Thank you to each and all of you for your grace, wisdom, tenderness and brilliant creativity. We have opened another portal for spirit to touch hearts, recognizing the presence of women's leadership. We are changing the world, and for me, the magical discovery is that this can be fun.

Love and blessings,  
Tannis

Poetry emerges from the moist womb of the performance ritual experience. Medwyn's poem re-enters the womb of the creative process and performance ritual.

*Woman's Womb Entering*

As Sisters we gather  
women entering our circle  
of trust and love

Womb entering  
mentoring our  
collaboration  
cocreation  
gestation  
germination  
manifestation

As Divine sisters we greet with reverence  
and respect, embracing harmony  
inviting spirit into our sacred space  
we share with each other our lives

Speaking our language of faith  
namaste  
blessed be  
amen  
shalom  
shubum  
salam  
shanti  
peace  
om

Circling together in this womb  
feeding from the nourishment  
we hold each other and our work  
intimate, open, vulnerable and true

We gift ourselves with time  
to connect  
to grieve  
to celebrate  
to pray  
to learn  
to care

Called to the dance by the beat of the drum  
circling, swinging, we bear aloft the images of she who creates  
she who wonders in the eternal resonance of woman's womb entering

The unsettling task of making one's private self public through the exhibitions and performance rituals was not a step all the women took. A few chose not to share their individual art pieces and were not physically present at the gallery performance ritual and opening. This did not diminish their part in the collaborative project, but instead revealed the multiple aspects of transformative learning that must be addressed. Adult educator Elizabeth Lange (2004), in her study of adults in life transitions, found that transformative learning requires a dialectical relationship with "restorative learning." One basic requirement for restorative learning is what she calls "ethical sanctuary," which offers a stable ground for the learner. The women expressed often the sense of sanctuary they felt amidst the group while engaged in the inquiry together. This in turn contributed to some of them questioning their personal relationships and their relationship with spirit outside of the group, and as one participant shared at the closing debrief ritual circle,

I did my own little process over here, an offshoot or something. Okay,...wow, wow, that was an ah ha... and what I gained in the parts I participated in....was all positive...Yet when times were dark for me in this past year, I couldn't find my way to that [strength and power that existed in the group] that was too hard to get there.

Another woman shared her connection/disconnection with the group during the inquiry:

...you've saved space for me, that's so strange, for me that's so unheard of for someone to save a space for my presence in their presence, so it was kind of unbelievable, so because of that I was there.

These women made the difficult decisions they needed to make in their individual lives as they attended to the personal work they needed to do, while the other women carried the project forward into the world. The realization that they were still spiritually linked to the group, and doing work connected to the group, was significant for the absent women and the women present to come to an understanding of. At times some of the women's processes required they address restorative learning in their private worlds, and not the public realm. Communicating with the group first through email, and then in circle to share insights, assisted in their own and the groups acceptance and honouring of these difficult choices.

Restorative learning returns "an organic or radical relatedness to time, space, body and relationships" (p.131), and once restored the learner reclaims self care and recognizes ones connection to the community, and the larger world. Each woman in her own way stepped away at times from the group for self care; some struggled with feeling they were letting the project down but in the end most came to a place of renewed acceptance and learning about their subtle interconnected place within the group of co-inquirers. This was further strengthened by the

gentle and accepting experience of witnessing each other and co-creating. I wrote in an email after an evening of co-creative art making in February, 2007:

Dear all,

Last night we mid-wifed the Divine Feminine countenance (mask). She is now resting (drying) protected under my couch. She holds fourteen faces representing each of us in this work. It was amazing to watch the months of gestation - each persons face, energy, ideas and visions - coming together. Our next task it to clothe her.

I came home filled with clear joy energy to share with my partner last night. May the divine joy energy that we gathered last night continue to filter out to each of you and your loved ones as you move through your full lives.

Blessings, Barbara

Similar to art educator Kenneth Beittel (1985/2003), my pedagogical understanding and ethical ideal of the power of art is its ability to assist the development of human awareness (p. 43). In the refusal to separate the process of making art from the spirit of making art, I facilitated what Beittel and Beittel (1991) term the “art of qualitative thinking”<sup>9</sup> (p.149). Beittel and Beittel wrote, “*The overarching purpose of the art of qualitative thinking is to express, describe, and lead to epiphany, so that through its hermeneutic-expressive cycle of consciousness becomes self-conscious of its expansion and can evolve*” (1991, p. 149). Within the art of qualitative thinking, an indepth interrelational dialogue with the artist through the art is entered. Through its hermeneutic-expressive cycle, the art of qualitative thinking focuses and filters the practices of spiritual learning, such as uncensored play, altered states of consciousness, sharing circles, and reflection, through the dialogic art and artist relationship. Within this project the women where invited and chose to enter a visual and performance art process. All were not comfortable with a visual artist identity; and the commitment to share the art, in what came to be three different public venues, challenged them to boldly extend their self image and expression of themselves to that of women artists, even for the short time periods that the art was exhibited. Kenneth Beittel found that the art of qualitative thinking leads towards a global vision of spirit manifesting in the world through the nurturance and expansion of the human imagination (p. 43). Expanding their imaginations to become women artists making women’s art together was a revelation and spiritual learning for many of the women. Some experienced a particular awakening and expansion of themselves as women artists through poetry, visual mediums, and others through performance and dance. One woman who was a more practiced visual artist was not satisfied with what she saw as a process art piece created on the weekend retreat. She was self-critical of her art piece and spoke of feeling very detached from it and struggled to take it seriously. It was

only through hearing positive feedback from an artist who attended the art show that encouraged her to re-look at the what she had created in a positive light. It is a risk as an artist to share work that is foremost about an inquiry process and not “complete” or “finished” to ones particular aesthetic judgment. Although individual art was created it was still part of a larger group process and the letting go of ones familiar aesthetic was at times part of the learning process.

The art process gradually led the women from individual art making to collaborative art making. The pedagogical thrust of the project transitioned the women into public spaces, first within the WSC weekend, followed by the AMS Art Gallery, where they performed and became priestesses/teachers of the art, and then into the local community at one of the women’s church gallery.<sup>10</sup> For many of the women these art experiences expanded their self image as public persons. Blurring the line between personal and public was a gradual development in the facilitative path towards pedagogical imagination employed by myself. The line between public and private was crossed at the first sharing circle with the presence of a video camera. The video camera traditionally represents the male gaze and in this case reminded the women that they were being studied within a University context. The video camera was used at all the various research gatherings and performance rituals. I began, as the lead researcher, doing the video documentation, but quickly offered the camera to the women. Eventually the women became comfortable with the camera and enjoyed exploring being on the other side of the lens. The shared camera became part of the ritual of co-inquiry, recording the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual understandings that emerged within the group. To bring the camera further into the inquiry process the camera was given the name Gaia by the women and became an external witness that held the detailed memory of the eight month co-inquiry experience. Some of the edited footage became part of the art installation at the AMS Art Gallery, and is an essential component of each of the three art installation chapters in the dissertation. The video offers a visual, visceral, and energetic representation of the women, the research, and art that was co-created. Theorist and film maker Trinh T. Minh-ha (2005) understands the art of film making as ritual making, as it enters a fourth dimension, which she describes as “... the mutability of relations between the ordinary, the extraordinary and the infraordinary as captured in the mutability of the digital image itself” (p. 6). The experience of documenting and recording the co-inquiry process through the camera lens revealed reverentially the ordinary habits, the extraordinary wisdom, and the infraordinary depth of each of the women (see DVD 2). Making the co-inquiry process public complexified the women’s experiences to varying degrees. They found themselves drawing on the support and care of each other as well as a employing their

own spiritual practices to remain centered and open as they moved into deeper places of not knowing.

Frank Pignatelli (1998) relays in writing, the challenge educator Maxine Greene poses for all people: to be educated towards a complex public life.

Maxine Greene wants, somehow, to carry people over the threshold of merely disinterested, rigorous critique and into a public space where mindful caring emerges as a necessary, vital response to dangerous situations. She wants, somehow, to move people to recognize despair, to name loss even as she calls to what is not yet, to the construction of public persons nourished by moral imagining and distinguished by bold deeds. In so doing, she poses for us the challenge of leading a complex public life. (p. 262)

Each woman was carried over a threshold supported by mindful caring co-inquirers in a myriad of ways. The public sharing of the art and themselves as artists was a bold deed for the women. These bold deeds were initiated and built upon within the sacred co-inquiry. A conversation Medwyn and I had while sitting in the AMS gallery during the April show, expresses the underlying trust that supported the unfolding of the sacred epistemology and pedagogy in the a/r/tographic co-inquiry.

Medwyn: And I think about that in the context of the way we learn, and the way we were structured in educational systems, and I don't have a lot to do with the educational system now, but I certainly know from my own experience of watching my son struggling in school, a very gifted and talented young man. You know a system that's kind of set up to make you either right or wrong. And the contrast of the incredible potential in having a system that actually might be set up to sort of really support you to be who you are and what you are and explore your own potential to the greatest extent, not this is the right way and this is the wrong way and this is the right information and that's the wrong information.

Barbara: I guess what I trust is that we are all manifestations of spirit, and so that's what you are trusting.

M: Exactly.

B: And that spirit is always waiting to express itself through us as these beings that it flows through.

M: Yeah, and in that too.

B: And that goes beyond the personal, you know the person, what you might personally be capable of.

M: It goes beyond the personal, and it also, it rubs out the dividing line that we always put between personal and spiritual and educational and spiritual and mundane and spiritual. That there's a totally falsely created line that we've learned to live by and that spirit is over there and that the everyday or whatever here. And basically what you are saying is we rub out that line.

B: Yeah.

M: And hold everything in that crucible of manifestation of spirit.

B: And art is to me, the most amazing way to allow the spirit to come out, that's just my own bias and art has many forms, which shows up in many forms. But the great thing with physical art you have the artifact, that actually then holds the energy.

M: So my personal sort of journey through this experience has just expanded me in, you know I can feel my brain sort of creaking open in different sections in terms of just sort of expanding the perception I have of art and creativity and collaboration and the academy and academic work, I remember an earlier conversation you and I had, where I realized that the work I do when I make ritual or teach workshops that include ritual making is a legitimate form of educating and that sort of takes it one step beyond that constrained notion that in order to be educated you have to use a lot of words on paper. That you can educate through the body and through experience just as legitimately as you can through the written word.

As the gallery conversation begins to reveal, ritual used as a form of pedagogy, and art produced by the body while in ritual space allows learning to be expressed and reflected back to the learners. In sharing the art as learning artifacts with the public in a sacred space, the learning is extended into the community, and the challenge of complex public life begins.

### Womb Entering: The Art Exhibitions

The womb is the first dwelling space of humans. It is where the mystery of creation unfolds the "dark and secret place" where we gestate, and are knitted into form through nourishing fluids. It is a sacred place within the female body. Shirin re-enters the womb through poetic imagery:

#### *WOMB ENTERING*

From Nihilo...from nothing  
From Chaos and darkness  
The Holy Spirit births the cosmos  
She births the earth  
She births from the earth... substance  
Pulsating, vibrant beings.

The Holy Spirit overshadows...  
The woman comes into being....  
The woman the carrier of the womb-waters  
The woman the carrier of the unformed  
that transforms into being.

Naked I lay in my mother's womb  
Naked into this world I came.  
My innermost being is created by Her  
She wove me in my mother's womb...  
In the dark and secret place,

She knitted me into my form and shape.

In the depth of the earth's womb,  
Where I began as dust...  
She envisioned my body and mind..  
That very darkness where I began  
is filled with the light that is you, O Essence.

O Holy Spirit, can I hide from you?  
I knew you before sound and language  
    touched my tongue.  
I long to enter the light...  
I long to reenter that womb....  
I long to reenter the darkness that is light....  
I long to relearn the holy language of peace...  
I long to be recreated and re-formed...  
I long to reclaim my being in you.

Naming a child is a ritual that takes place sometimes during gestation or after a birth. Naming the art installations and performance rituals presented in this dissertation were unique and significant processes. bell hooks (1988) writes "To me naming is about empowerment. It is also a source of tremendous pleasure. I name everything.... It is a way to acknowledge the life force in every object.... They are a way to preserve and honor aspects of the past." (cited in Juno and Vale, 1991, p. 225). A name identifies, locates, is referred to. It is given and received. *Stillpoint* was individually chosen and given by myself reflecting a solitary inquiry into a group experience. *Re/Turning to Her* was chosen and given between two, describing the journey that Tannis and I embarked on together. *Womb Entering* was a name passed over with difficulty in the planning group when choosing a theme title for the WSC 2007 conference, which was eventually given the name *Womentering: Cultivating Sacred Mentorship*. In the few weeks prior to the AMS Gallery installation the need to agree on a name arose. As there was no time to have the in-depth discussion that a naming requires, *Womb Entering* was returned to as a name that had emerged earlier from within the group, and held deep meaning. It would be given another life through the exhibition. Once given and lived names become an opportunity to focus and expand one's understanding of its meaning in one's life and in the world. Shirin's poem reflects the depth of exploration and inquiry that a name can evoke if one is willing to fully enter it.

The name chosen acknowledges the overlapping work the women were doing within the research project, and within the work of organizing the WSC 2007 conference. The new women on the team commented frequently that it was hard to imagine the two experiences as separate. They were separate but intricately linked, not unlike the pregnant mother living her exterior life



in the outer world while the life of the child takes its form within the interior life of her womb. A lived experience of radical relationality as understood within the female body, and the woman willing to enter a depth inquiry into its mystery begins a fearless path of embodied, relational, and spiritual learning. The exploration of the mystery is heightened through the experience of giving birth but is not confined to physical birth giving. The menstrual cycle that is in relationship with the movement of the earth in its dance with the moon offers another entry way into the mystery. To enter the mystery, the women began to travel together by opening themselves to the sacred act of creating-- making art.

### *The Individual Created Art*

On the research inquiry weekend in November 2006 the group gathered at Cathy's home, a home that housed a backyard stone labyrinth, representing the Divine Feminine (Image 23). Her home was transformed into a sacred and creative learning and inquiry space for the women. The art that was initiated on that first weekend of inquiry reveals the visual/figurative language of the particular erotic life expressions of the women. They created individual art pieces on that first weekend gathering of ritual and art making. Some finished the art pieces later on their own, and one woman, who was not at the weekend, did not create an individual art piece. Prior to the art exhibition at the WSC conference, I invited the women to name their individual art pieces, and to write a response to accompany the art piece in exhibition. The art that follows was exhibited at the WSC 2007, the AMS Gallery, and in the Boardroom Gallery in Trinity/St. Marks church. These art pieces express the women's autonomous spiritual expressions and individual creative inquiries and reflect a living moment in time. They are not necessarily completed and finished art pieces. The women's individual art works are accompanied in some cases by their written text. The art is presented here without analysis as visual text. The re-presentation of the women's work and art within this dissertation is a validation process of the women as artists, and a/r/tographers deserving attention within a public and academic learning site.



Image 32 Chant, Melodie. (2007). *Untitled*. (Mixed media on wood with hide. 10 x 10 inches).



Image 33 McConachy, Medwyn. (2007). *La madre del mar*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 10 x 10 inches).

*This piece is a representation of the threads my ancestors wove into my lineage formed from the seas around the coasts of the Celtic isles of Ireland and Scotland. The ancient mothers call to me gently on the winds in the north and the west, voices urging me, asking me, 'do you know now, do you feel our presence now?' I know the women I call my ancestors were peasant folk wise in the ways of the land and sea, women whose lives were lived in harmony with nature's ways, women who knew the healing mysteries of the great mother, she from whom all things emerge, the ocean who is the beginning of the earth.*

*We are genetic threads in the eternal weaving of the ancestors*



Image 34

Theophilus, Shirin. (2006). *Dance of the Holy Spirit*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 14 x 10 inches).

*Supreme activity blending with supreme relaxation.*



Image 35

Bennett, Mary. (2006). *Untitled*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 14 x 10 inches).



Image 36

Wilcox, Catherine. (2006). *Virgin Bride*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood. 10 x 14 inches).

*Transitioning from maiden to mother, I honour the mentors without and within who remind me of my beauty and wholeness. This piece reflects my attraction to that which is erotic and powerful in the divine feminine experience.*





Image 37 Bone, Cathy. (2007). *The Lap of Generosity*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 14 x 10 inches).

*Here is the lap of generosity for all who come to it, who scamper or crawl into it, limp or collapse into it, to be enfolded, comforted and assured that in it will be known love beyond all belief and imagination, a quiet endless love, the Love of all loves, our place of Origin.*



Image 38 Brammer, Monica. (2007). *Ancient Wisdom*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 14 x 10 inches).

*This ancient wisdom is the wisdom of Spirit... the Source of all. We call it the names we are comfortable with. This wisdom of the Universe is within us as we are, each of us, Spirit. We are revealing the Wisdom within ourselves every moment. Through this wisdom we recognize the truth of Namaste... the God within me recognizes the God within you.*



Image 39

Jordan, Nané Ariadne. (2006). *Gaia*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 10 x 10 inches).



Image 40

Hugill, Tannis. (2006). *Awaking Grace*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 10 x 10 inches).

*The Brilliance of the world surrounds me  
I know you now  
Within*



Image 41 Rose, Ingrid. (2007). *Untitled*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media).

*where do we go from here*

*hide bark*

*seaworthy*

*we set sail*

*wave tossed*

*we stand fast*

*downploughed*

*no one lost*

*wom(b)entering*

*mysteries*

*naming*

*meaning*



Image 42

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Priestessing for the Divine Feminine*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 10 x 10 inches).

*The body is an organic, ever mutable, sacred temple that when honoured becomes a conduit for the Divine, where spirit and matter fuse. Sacred reverence of the body allows the depths of our authentic selves to emerge in all its wisdom, sensuality, beauty and strength.*





Image 43

Lys, Valerie. ( 2006). *The Elder*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Mixed media on wood, 10 X 10 inches).

*I dedicate my piece to Harriet Nahanee, a quiet, courageous warrior.  
I found it interesting and challenging working with deer hide. I also greatly enjoyed working  
with Annie and Ingrid, with all of us, experimenting and learning from and with each other.*



Image 44

Smith, Annie. (2007). *animal/vegetable/mineral/animal*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery. The University of British Columbia, (Wood, acrylic paint, deer hide, fabric dye, heron feathers, ancient corn, Mississippi stones).

## *The Co-created Art*

### *Woman Spirit Shield*

Creating the individual art was the first layer of art that manifested in the co-a/r/tographic inquiry. The weekend of the retreat in November, 2006 also birthed the vision in Annie's mind of a drum shield made of deer hide (Image 45). She explained her vision but it was difficult for the others to envision. The women nonetheless agreed to assist in its creation in whatever way they could. It was not understood at the time, in the midst of the twenty-four hour creative cocoon the women were wrapped in together, or in the months to come, but establishing a protective shield for the vulnerable work that the women were embarking on had begun. At the opening ritual sharing circle in October 2006 Annie expressed the simultaneous awesomeness and unease she felt while with women of differing faiths gathering to worship together at her first WSC conference,

At my first Women's Spirituality Celebration four years ago I was in awe of the women gathered together, and it was unsettling. Why had I not done it before? I had to see myself in a new way. I recognized the risk of gathering with women and worshipping.

Her words render visible the sense of risk that is present for many women as they step into the world to share their spiritual journey and religious faiths with each other. They also foreshadow the struggle the women had in publicly performing and presenting their art and the research to a mixed gender audience in the AMS Gallery. In the January 2007 sharing ritual sharing circle Annie shared a poem she wrote inspired by her call to make the drum shield. In this poem she invokes the archetype of the honourable warrior for the women in an effort to instill a protective shield ready to defend the women as they enter the realm of truth telling and world making in the revealing of their stories.

#### **Vice**

What really amazes me

is how everyone I talk to is really interested.

They seem to have clear images in their minds

as I describe the oval frame cross braced

Visions of Masai and Zulu warriors

standing dark and mysterious under blazing skies

skin painted streaked red and white and yellow

Hide stretched a second skin to cover

to tell story

to tell who

to shield.

This idea     a shield   that is a drum

     painted   skin's pigment absorbs dye

     wet   stretched stories grown into skin

   given or taken

     a hope to redeem one animal's life

     express the collective women's need to shield and proclaim

     who                we                dancing

My vision still is thwarted for want of a vice.

The *Woman Spirit Shield* is mid-wifed, birthed, danced and played by the women in the months leading to the public presentation of the art. It holds a protective auric field that is felt as palpable and real for the women, who at different times housed the drum shield in their home.<sup>11</sup> During the performance ritual the drum leaves its sentinel post to mark a protective circle around the circumference of the labyrinth, while simultaneously displaying its majesty to the gathered witnesses in the audience. Stained into its skin are religious symbols from around the world. Some symbols and designs are painted with awareness of their religious origin, while others, painted intuitively were recognized and identified later by visitors to the gallery. It stands like a guardian at the back of the gallery, like the shields of indigenous Australian warriors that are placed at the doorways of homes to protect the house and its inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> The shield is vulvic in shape and harkens to the “Sheila-Na-Gig,” a “Celtic Goddess of destruction and creation” (Edelson, p. 316, 1982) found guarding entrances to churches in Britain and Ireland. These gargoyle type sculptures portray a squatting woman holding her vulva open with her hands, daring one to enter without awareness. The *Woman Spirit Shield* became a symbol for the risks the women were taking in metaphorically inviting others to enter the womb of their spiritual and multi-faith work and offered a protective skin for the women before, during and after the performance ritual.



Image 45

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Woman Spirit Shield*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia. (Fallow deer hide, Western Cedar and Oak branches, fabric dye, 7x 4 x 1.5 feet). Frame construction and hide preparation: Annie Smith.

### *Her Divine Countenance*<sup>13</sup>

*Her Divine Countenance* mask (DVD 1 and Image 24, 25 and 49) synecdochically conjoins the individual masks to create a greater whole and becomes a symbolic act of disidentification on the part of the women. Some women, who were unable or uncomfortable having their faces cast where offered a mask made by another woman in place of their own. In painting and collaging the inside surface of the masks some women worked on their own but as all the women were not present they began working on each others masks. Soon it became difficult to identify individual masks. When the whole mask was turned over the discussion of how to paint and collage the upper surface of the individual masks began. After having worked for a number of hours on the individual aspects of the masks on the inside the women spoke of loving the openness and unity of the undifferentiated masks on the outer side. A decision was made to keep the outer masks unified and to leave the round orb white while making the inner concave side of the orb black. The final decision of attaching the cast hands of one of the women onto the center became a moment of aha. It was the addition of this small part, this single pair of hands that allowed the women to symbolically embrace their place within the Kosmos. The acknowledgment of relationship with the Divine between each of the women through this single pair of hands, in a gesture of Namaste which means “the Divine in me sees the Divine in you,” brought the art piece to completion. The radical relationality that is portrayed and lived through *Her Divine Countenance* mask underscores the depth of connection the women touched within themselves, with each other and the Divine through the a/r/tographic study. Through the intimate relationship between part and whole that surfaces synecdochically in the making of the mask, the threshold is widened for the Divine to enter the project.

The labyrinth, laid in the center of the gallery, holds the *Her Divine Countenance* mask in its core waiting to be sung to by the drum and the *Woman Spirit Shield*, and danced to life by the women and gallery visitors willing to walk into the center of the labyrinth, into the womb. The inner faces of the fourteen masks reflect the diversely expressed individuality of the women while the outer faces are somewhat isomorphic, unified by the royal layer of gold skin. A doubling of the inner faces of the masks is created by the mirror/pool of water that rests under the mask. An additional doubling occurs during the performance ritual as the women, drawn towards the hands in a gesture of Namaste (Image 50), touch and caress themselves, and slide their hands down the pregnant mound of the collective mask. As their gaze falls onto the golden masks, anointed by pearls (Images 46, 47, and 48), their transformation from silent, meditative women into zany, cackling and laughter-filled women takes place. A consecration, celebratory



dance and procession of *Her Divine Countenance* mask, upheld by the thundering rhythm of the *Woman Spirit Shield* follows as it proclaims its transformative power to the witnessing audience, calling them to join the women in the spirit of sound. The relationship between one and the many is reflected in both the *Woman Spirit Shield* and *Her Divine Countenance* mask as it is consecrated by the women in the performance ritual of *Womb Entering*. The collaboratively made art and performance rituals intertwine the communal energies of the individual women in anticipation of the whole, which is felt most profoundly and momentarily in the culmination of the performance ritual. This is an example of the synecdochical rendering of a/r/tography in concert with the metaphor/metonymy.



Images 46, 47, and 48

Bickel, Barbara. *Womb Entering*. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance* – top view details. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia. (Paper, acrylic medium, pearl bead on plaster cast).



Image 49

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance*, underside view. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Plaster bandages, paper, fabric, acrylic paint, beads), 38 x 38 x 10 inches).





Image 50

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance*, Namasté hand being painted by Shirin. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.



Image 51

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Her Divine Countenance Installation* (post performance ritual). Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.



### *Womb Entering Gallery Installations*

While sitting in the gallery during gallery hours I witnessed the space of the gallery become, for many, a mediator between secular cultural and spiritual religious worlds, offering sanctuary for cultural soul longings and needs. Almost 300 people spent time in the gallery during its week long presence in the Student Union Building. Transforming the gallery space into a sanctuary for women's art was similar to transforming the Christian chapel at the Vancouver School of Theology into women's ritual space at the annual WSC. After the first day of sitting in the gallery, I shared with the women that I felt as though I was priestessing at a temple. The gallery became a communal meeting place for some of the women co-inquirers as they came to share in the sitting of the gallery, spoke with friends and strangers who visited the gallery, and joined in the gallery art talks. Dialogues between the art, artists, and the public continue on. What follows are images of the gallery installation interspersed with comments and thoughts shared by visitors to the gallery.



Image 52

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* entrance altar. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.



Image 53

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* inside altar and sanctuary. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.

*There's nothing like a wombl/en's touch to create a space for life forces and creativity.  
Thanks*

*I find this art to be very dark and I do not feel comfortable in this space -especially in that area [the inside altar sanctuary]. I am a very spiritual man but I prefer the light.*

*My experience of your performance last evening was one of deep contemplation and therefore did not feel the need to either eat or engage in conversations. I interacted with each of the corner installations, engaged with each of the wall pieces, then left. Then, instead of taking the bus, I walked in the cool of the evening to the university gates at tenth and Blanca, where my car was parked, so that I could reflect on the meanings that I had taken from the gallery. I felt the bonding with all women, and what I had seen on your video as a ritual cleansing, turned out to be a caressing, an appreciation of the female body and being. Thank you for this experience; I felt its power. I was interested in the "drawn" lines of the labyrinth. I believe they were in fact, electronic cables, perhaps for video installations or? A very interesting juxtaposition of the ancient and the contemporary.*



Image 54

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* installation. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.

*How exciting to see a process so rich in personal discovery come alive! Thank you for letting us witness your journey and hail to you beautiful mavericks!*

*Peaceful – makes me feel a connection to all women and human kind as a whole. thank you*

*Fascinating – keep exploring femininity in all its majesty.*

*It must have been risky for the women to share in a circle knowing it would become public. Shifting contexts is dangerous. Religion and spirituality is a dangerous ground and womanhood is a vulnerable place to reveal in such a patriarchal society.*





Image 55

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* art opening. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.

*I love feeling the presence of all religions without tensions being present.*

*It is so good to see women presenting multi-faith. So often it is men – so it is great seeing women presenting it.*

*“the container and the contained” St. Augustine*

*Being in this space brings forward my longing for community – artistic community.*

*I love seeing spirituality not censored or oppressed. I am from Iran and I expect censorship there. When I encounter it in Canada it makes me angry.*

*You women were like mountains in the performance ritual. There was a strength and power. You were powered up and I felt it.*



Image 56

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* installation. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia.

*Very peacefully spiritual – enjoyable – beautiful art*

*May all the blessings fall on you and embracing the womb with the spirit. Beautiful, divine, touching.*

*I felt a strong and earthy pulse of energies intertwined, places that Sheila-na gig herself would respect. thank you*

*Hands and feather and water are always wonderful things to have. I liked the symbolism, interesting, unique pieces.*

*The show seems a bit overwhelming when I first walked in but very nice work ladies.*



Image 57

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* installation. AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver B.C.

*Thank you for creating and sharing this beautiful ritual. It was deeply moving to witness and the art work was so inspiring and intentional. Such a work of love!*

*The Roman's used labyrinths underground to survive persecution.*

*My sister was married on a labyrinth at an old bed and breakfast just outside of Harrison Hot Springs. After my brother died I went back there and walked the labyrinth and it was very healing.*

*Beautiful work ladies. I enjoyed seeing such a spiritual piece in the university environment*





Image 58

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* - St. Marks Anglican/Trinity United Church entrance with invitation board. Vancouver, BC.



Image 59

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* board room installation. Vancouver, BC: St Marks Anglican/Trinity Church.

## Becoming Sacred Art

One year after the *Womb Entering* gallery showing and performance ritual, on the eve of the 2008 WSC planning team's visioning retreat,<sup>14</sup> Medwyn, inspired by her recent viewing of the DVDs, organized a film screening of the *Womb Entering* creation process and performance ritual DVDs. She invited the women of her new community on Vancouver Island to have a conversation with the women of the WSC planning team after the screening. Following the animated discussion that the witnessing and re-witnessing of the DVDs evoked amongst the women present, it became apparent that the DVD documentation of the art making, art and performance rituals were a powerful generative curriculum tool that modeled effectively and affectively the co-creation of community through "spiritualized knowing." This tool, as a transformative knowledge practice, is based in the mystery of the unknowable, which does not bend knowledge to individual or collective will. In the process of spiritualized knowing, we are witnesses to mystery "always in the process of being known" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 99). Ingrid articulated this as a "a model for spiritual governance in community." One woman's response could be interpreted as a felt experience of *mistica*, the spirit of community:

I have never watched anything like this in my life-- it was perfect because it wasn't perfect—no one was orchestrating it—no pre-calculations. Its not my schtick—not fabulous. It was deeply spontaneous. I very seldom get emotional, yet it brought emotions out of me. It didn't come through my head, but through my heart.

A new woman on the WSC planning team, who later shared that being in friendship with women is new to her as all of her friends are men, responded to the DVD with the awareness that , " I could see why men would be scared of women getting together in spiritual community, they could twist the experience and accuse women of being witches."<sup>15</sup> Another women shared that "women do not need guns to scare men." The Sheila-Na-Gig whose "toothed vagina is a symbol of the irrational fears and fantasies some men have of castration or of women as devourers" (Edelson, 1982, p. 316) is invoked again in response to the *Womb Entering* art.

Medwyn reflected that it was so clear to her now that it is relationships that feed creativity. As she witnessed herself compassionately witnessing other women in the sharing circle she saw that it is the movement and energy of relationships that carries creation. The women agreed that they have been trained in the West to see art as framed and autonomous. This collaborative art making experience has shifted their limited perspective to see art not as a finished product alone, but as "layers of depth and thought and collaborative energy." Ingrid expressed that "art is sacred, healing, whole, wholesomeness-- the tension(s) we experience in the process is because



of the intensity of it.” Another women asks “how can you separate art and creativity/ spirituality?”

Through witnessing an intentional and sacred dialogue between the artists, the art making process and the art, art was not separated from the spirit of art making. In the act of re-witnessing the *Womb Entering* experience from a distance one year later, the women had a profound recognition and reception with themselves as art, as sacred art. In becoming art, the individual women again shifted from being an individual self to becoming a universal self. In becoming art, they became Divine and saw themselves and each other in completely new ways; outside of ordinary perceptions of themselves and each other. They were reminded again of the full absorption of the project, that for some did not expend their energies but replenished them with “the spiral energy that created a vortex every time we met.” In witnessing the creative process the women who were seeing the project for the first time and the women re-witnessing themselves, recognized spirit through creative expression-- spirit working itself in and through the women and thence through them, to the viewers/witnesses of the art.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Two women that had to leave the planning team that year but knew of the study, asked to be part of the research project. After I conferred with the rest of the planning team, and getting their consent, these two women also joined the research project.

<sup>2</sup> I am a member of the Women's Spirituality planning team and invited the planning team of 2006/07 to be part of the dissertation research project. Knowing that the women had full lives I was clear to let them know they could participate as much as they were able.

<sup>3</sup> A number of these traditions are non-mainstream and lesser known despite having histories that span back the past century and further. The *Feri Tradition* "(sometimes spelled Faery, Faerie, or referred to as Anderson Feri) is an oral, initiatory tradition of modern Witchcraft. It is an ecstatic, rather than a fertility, tradition stemming from the teachings of Victor Anderson and his wife Cora" (Anna Korn, 1988 cited on line, 2008, p. 1). *New Thought* "(also known as Science of Mind) is the study of Life and the nature of the laws of thought; the conception that we live in a spiritual Universe; that God is in, through, around and for us"(Ernest Holmes, 1959, cited on line, 2008, p.1). The *Reclaiming Tradition* is comprised of "a community of women and men working to unify spirit and politics. Our vision is rooted in the religion and magic of the Goddess, the Immanent Life Force. We see our work as teaching and making magic; the art of empowering ourselves and each other" (Anonymous, 2008, p. 1). *Earth-based, Pagan/Goddess and Wiccan*, have ancient roots in indigenous traditions. The women in this study, self-define these spiritual practices and do not adhere to any one tradition.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth considering the notion of women's culture and the impact that gathering as a group of women to share spiritual practices has on women, in contrast to women engaging in their individual spiritual practices. The embodied experience of the Feminine principle is amplified in a collective gathering of women embodying spiritual practices as a group.

<sup>5</sup> Feminism(s) rarely surfaces in our discussions as a planning team, nor did it surface during the study. While writing this chapter I sent an email to the women asking if they identified as feminist. A variety of nuanced responses were shared with me. Many of the women identify as feminist whether they call themselves feminist or not. The range in descriptions cover the ground of radical feminism, feminism as a religion, feminist earth-based spirituality, advocate of equality, "I breathe, evolve, create, live and celebrate feminism." to "I used to call myself feminist and was involved politically in the 60s and 70s but I now avoid any label." Those who clearly do not call themselves feminist believe in gender equality and the empowerment of women but do not like the label of feminist. They could fall into what Megan Seely calls the "I'm not a feminist, but... "generation." or standpoint that is present in our society today (cited in Sinsheimer, 2007, p. 109).

<sup>6</sup> Ecstatic Trance Posture work was developed by the anthropologist Felicitas Goodman (1990) from her study of bodily postures and altered states of consciousness. The thirty trance postures that she has uncovered she terms "psychological archeology."

<sup>7</sup> Catherine's letter addresses the women active on the planning team and hence does not include the three women who are part of the research group but not on the 2006-07 planning team, Nané, Cathy and Mary.

<sup>8</sup> In the closing sharing circle Shirin shared that she preferred the term *ritual performance* as she believes that performance emerges out of ritual and a number of the women agreed with her. Many years ago I chose the term *performance ritual* to speak of my work. In pondering my choice of word order following Shirin's comment I realize that my word order preference reflects my belief that spirit emerges from art, and I have consequently not altered my use of the word *performance ritual*.

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<sup>9</sup> *The art of qualitative thinking* is “where paradoxical language and direct intuition take on their necessary consciousness-expanding function” (p. 181).

<sup>10</sup> May 7 – June 22, 2007 – The art was exhibited in Trinity St. Mark’s Church Boardroom.

<sup>11</sup> A co-presentation with seven of the co-inquirers entitled *Womb Entering: A collaborative arts-based ritual inquiry into a women’s multi-faith conference organizing team* took place at the 2008 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) in the CASWE (women and education) SIG on June 2, 2008. As we were leaving the session women from the CASWE SIG saw the *Woman Spirit Shield*, inquired about it and asked if we would be willing to leave it in the room to be on display during their AGM and invited us to speak to the group about the piece. It did not surprise us that the piece was recognized as powerful by women involved in the women and education SIG and it felt very fitting to have it protect their AGM amidst the larger CSSE conference.

<sup>12</sup> I was struck by the protective power of Australian warrior shields on display at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle Washington in January, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> *Her Divine Countenance* has been donated to the Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The *Woman Spirit Shield* has been kept by the WSC planning team and will be stored in planning team members homes on a rotating basis between conferences. The members that have stored it thus far have felt the protective energies that it imbues and have spoken of missing it when it is gone from their home.

<sup>14</sup> On April 4 and 5, 2008, nine members of the WSC gathered at Medwyn’s co-housing community for a visioning retreat. The retreat began with a potluck dinner with the women of the community and community women friends and transpired into the film screening and discussion. On the following day, led by two facilitators invited to assist our visioning process by Medwyn, we engaged individual and co-creative art making processes that paralleled the larger co-creative dissertation study. Watching the DVD’s instilled awareness and permission in the women (including new women on the planning team) as they entered the co-creative process the following day. Since the weekend, the idea to offer workshops in a similar vein to other groups working on co-creating community and spiritual and multi-faith leadership using the DVD’s as a curriculum tool has arisen.

<sup>15</sup> Inadvertently perhaps, the term *witch* is used and interpreted in a derogatory nature by a new member on the team as she reflects on how she thinks men may respond to the performance rituals of the WSC. I leave this quote in as it reflects how difficult it is for women themselves to disengage from undermining cultural stereotypes of empowered and eros-filled women.

*Art Installation III:  
In the Center of the Labyrinth*

*Artist*



Image 60

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Water Labyrinth* (detail). Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, (Stones, thread, acrylic on canvas).

## Curatorial Statement

A solo artist residency at the Gibraltar Point Center for the Arts on Toronto Island in Ontario became an act of restorative learning. It took place in July 2007 after the co-a/r/tographic inquiry with the women was brought to a close. Through responding to the natural environment, making art, and intuitively seeking out spiritual and academic teachers, my artist self begins to restore and replenish the depleted resources of the researcher and teacher after holding the space and facilitating the co-a/r/tographic dissertation study. The new environment of the artist residency offers the essential act of distancing oneself from the research. Stepping away from the study location enables one to look into the past and future of the study with fresh eyes, and an expanded consciousness. It is here the visual analysis and writing of the dissertation began. Within the month long residency, the stillpoint of the creative and complex labyrinth journey of the dissertation study, is entered. From this paradoxical point of moving stillness, art is created, gurus are visited, life enriching values are reinstated and a sacred sanctuary is created for the dissertation to be housed within.

A DVD, containing two performance rituals, a meditative labyrinth walk in water, and images of the art opens this chapter, and invites the reader/viewer to slow down and enter a restorative space of being through the rhythmic pace Women's time-- of trance and dream.

## **Stillpoint: A Reflective Artful Inquiry - DVD Compilation**

### **Waterwalk**

10.5 minute - looping video projection onto a stone spiral labyrinth sewn onto fabric (4 x 6 feet)  
Video Camera work, Production & Editing: Barbara Bickel

### **Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand**

37 minute performance ritual video.  
Video Camera Documentation: Wende Bartley  
Production and Editing: Barbara Bickel

### **Voicing the Stones Performance Ritual**

15 minute slide and sound documentation of the performance ritual  
Production and Editing: Barbara Bickel  
Soundscape Composition: Wende Bartley  
Video Camera Documentation: Elizabeth Forrest  
Co-creators: Barbara Bickel and Wende Bartley

### **Stillpoint Art Installation Slide Show**

Art, Documentation and Production: Barbara Bickel

### **30 Days of Mandalas Slide show**

Art, Documentation & Production: Barbara Bickel

Copyright 2007

See <http://www.barbarabickel.com> for DVD on-line

## Chapter Five

### Stillpoint



Image 61

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Thirty Days of Mandalas – day three*. Toronto Is., ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, (Paper collage on rice paper).

## Waterlessness

The week before I set out on a solo artist residency, to begin my dissertation writing, I had a powerful dream that informed the art created at the residency. It holds the story of the struggle of the work that myself and the women of the WSC are striving to manifest through the creation of sacred space for the Divine Feminine. Our work is intensely powerful and beautiful, yet simultaneously very small and fragile. It is a larger dream that we hold, of bringing women of diverse religious and spiritual practices together to create, learn, and lead together in a sustainable transformative way. We do this work of uniting as women first, re-valuing our distinct women's work, women's ways of knowing and being together in the hopes that we will be able to share our learning and wisdom with men in the future. This dissertation is an opportunity to share the work with men and women.

## *Dream*

*June 25, 2007*

*I am with a group of women and children in a desert-like environment. We have lost everything and are taken to temporary housing. We stake out a space for ourselves, marking the four corners of the square area we will occupy in the large room. The space begins to become more ours. Fabric is hung creating tent-like walls. We keep working and adding to it and it becomes an amazingly beautiful space. It expands in size and is now multiple stories high and takes up the entire building.*

*We invite the estranged male into what now feels like a powerful and sacred space. The women and children prepare him to meet with the woman who is his former lover. She is a leader in this community. He walks through the beautiful space and comes upon a statue of his former lover's head with long hair. He cradles the sculpture and weeps. Seeing this, the women know it is time to bring the woman lover in. There is a passionate reunion of the man and the woman signifying that the estranged community has regained its status in the larger community.*

*The other men now begin to return to pay homage to the new space. They are invited into the sacred space by the women and move through the different rooms paying tribute. One of the men brings old ways in with him. This involves burning embers and as the house is made of fabric the offering he leaves begins to smolder. Another man is at the door and the young five year old girl is standing nearby. He sees the girl and picks her up and begins to rape her. The woman leader is across the street and witnesses this as it is happening. She calmly picks up a large stone and throws it at the man's head.*



*In the meantime the other men have left and the women enter the room that now has burning embers moving up the walls. They attempt to put the burning embers out with their hands as the fire spreads setting the fabric wall ablaze. The power that was returned to the community begins to fail and there is a felt sense that the larger community is glad that it has failed.*

In the dream I am an outside witness, able to see the whole, as well as identify with the woman who picks up the stone. I experience the wonder of creating a sacred space, the ecstatic reunion of the estranged masculine with the feminine, the unconscious habits of the old ways, the violence of masculine power over the innocent female, and the loss of a new way of being in relationship with others. The dream takes place in a desert environment. Water is not present. When the fire is discovered the women do not have water to extinguish the flames and must use their hands. I am reminded of the fragility of my work as a female in a predominantly masculine world of power and institutions in public spheres, as a spiritual woman within the secular academy. The dream expresses the multifarious hopes and fears that reside deep within me.

Post-colonial writer M. Jacqui Alexander (2002) cautions against practices of segregation which can give us temporary gains. She reminds us that we are sacredly connected social beings and to be separated can “wreak havoc on our souls” (p. 99). She supports the importance of living our different locations and prescribes a remedy for a transformative reunion, which is to “water the erotic as that place of Divine connection which can transform the ways we relate to one another” (p. 100). In the dream the erotic is momentarily awoken but in the context of the waterless environment it is not sustainable, and is destroyed by fire.

My emotional, spiritual, and physical state at the time of this dream, and prior to the artist residency, was in a place of waterlessness. I was in a deep and painful struggle with ill-health. Despair, depression, exhaustion, and a parched spirit, in part, brought on by the intensity I experience as a woman living within a logo-centric environment, which I recognize as the cultural dis-ease of the university and its contribution to my overall ill-health. During the darkest times, in an effort to find greater meaning, I identified with the woman shaman who ingests the ill-health of her community and must heal herself in an act of self-initiation before she can offer healing to her community (Dashu, 2007). Taking myself to the artist residency surrounded by water, seeking support from colleagues and healers, within and outside of traditional medicine, accepting the water of my tears, and approaching writing the dissertation as part of a transformative ritual process, has assisted healing the dis-ease within my body, mind and soul.

## Visual Writing Within the Stillpoint of Art and the Labyrinth

I arrived at the end of June 2007 with no pre-conceived ideas for the art I would create, in response to my dissertation study, during my month-long artist residency on Toronto Island. Fifteen islands joined by walking bridges constitute Toronto Island. It has a history with First Nations peoples as a “shaman’s healing site, it is liminal, sacred, or ambivalent for some island residents. It is an anomalous place” (Grimes, 1995, pp. 232-233). Mainlanders from the city of Toronto consider the island to be an escape for play and leisure. Many artists have lived and currently live on the island. It is the site of regular community arts rituals and festivals. By some stroke of fate, as I had not pre-researched the historical site, I had arrived to begin my dissertation reflection, art making, and writing on an island that is imbued with a history of creative community ritual, healing and the arts.

Prior to my arrival, I heard from a local artist of an outdoor labyrinth created by an artist for a ritual installation at the local Anglican church. At the center of this labyrinth is a large maple tree, its branches provide protection and shade for those walking it. I arrived prepared to find and walk this labyrinth, and with a suitcase full of an odd assortment of art supplies; threads and broadcloth, drawing materials, paints and papers, a box of mini DV tapes that held the documentation of the collaborative project with the women, a video camera, my laptop computer, a few books, and thirteen clam shells. I collected the shells the week before I left Vancouver, at a Solstice ritual at Spanish Banks, led by Medwyn, one of the women from the project. At this ritual a small group of women made and walked a labyrinth in the sand at low tide, while the saltwater crept towards us, eventually lapping at our toes and then ankles, gradually erasing the imprint of the labyrinth. We completed our walking ritual by placing our feet in the sand-warmed water where only our memory of the labyrinth remained. I experienced a deep sense of magic and gratitude for the ocean as Mother as the tide gently cleansed and emptied the temporal site of our walking pilgrimage. So impactful was this ritual, its time and space - its ocean energy – I transferred a digital photo (Image 62) of it onto my computer desktop. This image has been a visual companion throughout my dissertation writing on my computer.



Image 62

McConachy, Medwyn. (2007). *Solstice Labyrinth*. Vancouver, BC: Spanish Banks.

One week after this labyrinth walk in the water, I arrived at the artist residency with a commitment to empty, cleanse, and open to the spirit of the collaborative a/r/tographic inquiry project just completed with the thirteen women. Although I had read that the arts centre was a converted school, I was surprised to find that my studio was a former classroom across the hall from the former principal's office. I loved the large windows looking into the courtyard garden and the spaciousness of the room itself, but hated the loud square floor tiles and the bright checked curtains. The solo task of writing a dissertation felt well suited to begin in this linear masculine architectural space, with its long echoing hallways and large square rooms.

The intention for the residency was to begin the dissertation through visual writing, and to integrate my experience as a co-researcher and co-participant with the women. I planned to do this by watching the video documentation and responding with my hands and body in the making of art. Not knowing if I would be capable of responding creatively, I gave myself a disciplined practice of making a mandala-a-day where I could mark and document everyday with arational visual writing (Stillpoint DVD and Images 2 and 62). After setting my few art supplies out in the

classroom, now studio, and sitting in awe amidst the square and empty space for a while, I went outside for a walk.

*Watering the Erotic Connection With The Divine Feminine*

Walks along the lakeshore became a daily meditative ritual and the need for walking seeped into my studio. To facilitate walks within my studio space, I began creating thread labyrinths on the studio floor to walk within. If one looks very closely there are fine red threads amidst the dominant square tiles of the old classroom floor (Image 63). The thread labyrinths took over the central space of the studio, signifying the importance of mindfully walking in ritual several times a day. Work spaces were relegated to the margins of my studio space and I had to carefully move around the circumference of the room to avoid disturbing the temporary labyrinths. These thread labyrinths took the form of ancient circular patterns from Crete, Germany and India. They would last two or three days before my traveling foot would catch a thread and begin to unravel the delicate feminine structure.



Image 63

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Thread Labyrinth in Studio A*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts.

Reluctant to throw away the dismantled long threads of the labyrinth, I draped them over pins on the studio wall before I created the next thread labyrinth. The threads hung delicately on the large bare walls responding to the breeze created by movement as I walked by them. Their response called me to transform them into a labyrinth altar. Eventually, I transferred the hanging threads to a long piece of unbleached broadcloth and sewed on clear buttons that looked like water droplets, for the threads to hang from. Above the row of buttons I hand sewed and tied tiny round flat lake stones that had attracted my attention while on my walks at the beach. The stone design reflected the original design of the thread labyrinth laid on the floor of the studio. The subsequent thread labyrinths that I placed on the floor and then the wall, became side altar art pieces of a triptych (Image 64).

What began as fragile threads placed carefully onto the floor became an entryway into the body of my soul. Walking the labyrinth path multiple times each day assisted in releasing a creative floodgate of ideas. In the midst of making the first altar piece, I realized I was recreating the sacred feminine textile space that had been destroyed in my dream. Unlike the dream, this art will be nomadic, and leave the converted school room. It will travel from its place of origin on Lake Ontario to the West Coast of Canada, and to the temporary gathering places of women engaged in creating sacred feminine spaces of worship and celebration. This art is imbued with the tidal flows of the waters of the lake, the sister of the ocean, who I experience as the Divine mother. On Her shore each wave “come[s] to accept, to cleanse, to bless, to remind us that in the same way the breaking of the waves does not compromise the integrity of the Ocean, so too anything broken in our lives cannot compromise the cosmic flow to wholeness.” (Alexander, 2005, p. 322)



Image 64

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Stillpoint* altar. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts. (Thread, stones, buttons, tree branches, moth on broadcloth, 60 x 82 x 6 inches).



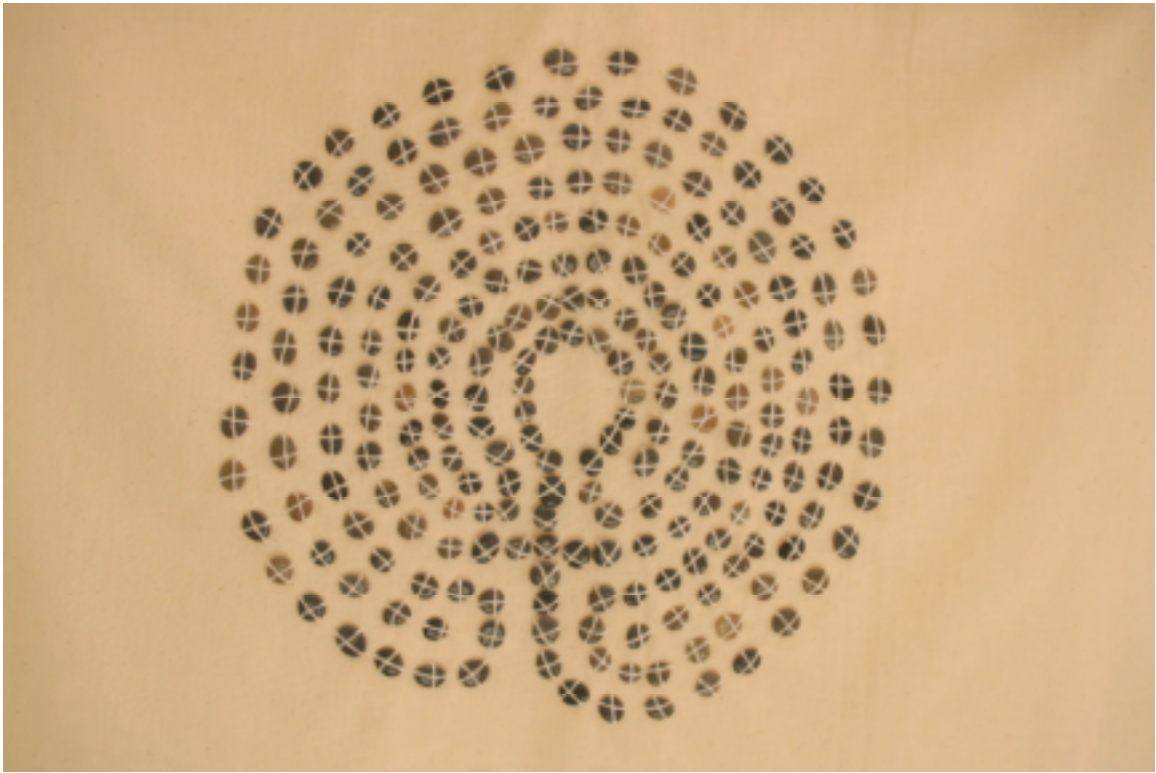


Image 65

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Stillpoint*, Cretan altar (detail). Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts.

I spent hours sewing stones onto the first labyrinth (Image 65), and during that time my mind was free to roam into the past and the future. I was regularly brought back into the present by a stiffening body and needle-pricked fingers. The small stones reminded me of planting seeds one by one, and indeed the labyrinth is historically a symbol for the seed of life (Saward, 2003) which needs water to give it life. While sewing I expanded on the idea of writing a labyrinth onto the floor with non-permanent markers. I wanted to use the transcribed text of the women from the video documentation and to make the lines of a labyrinth with their words; to first write down, and then walk, amidst their transcribed voices everyday. This idea was halted by the arts centre manager. A nomadic floor canvas labyrinth became the alternate solution. Although I was disappointed in not being able to walk amidst the women's writing during my time in the studio, the alternate large canvas labyrinth could be walked by others. It would be portable and more permanent than the original thread labyrinths or my idea of a hand-scribed labyrinth.

A design based on a pattern from Southern India called Chakra-vyuha became the form of the floor labyrinth. It holds a spiral in its center and offered a sense of joy while walking it during its thread incarnation in the studio. The disorienting sensation I experienced while spiraling into the center, reminded me of the ecstasy of childhood spinning of the body. For this labyrinth, I collected larger flat round stones from the beach, sewing and knotting each stone individually. Attaching each stone to the fabric became a prayer of gratitude for the women of my dissertation project (Image 66 and 67). The stones sublimating the women's voices and encoding a spiritual language through the making of the art. While working on this labyrinth that I later called the *Water Labyrinth* (Images 68 and 69), I knew that it would be a gift returned to the WSC and could accompany them wherever they meet in the future. Blue acrylic washes were used to stain the canvas, reflecting the home of the water-washed and shaped stones that mark its path. As well it reminded me of the experience of walking the solstice sand labyrinth at Spanish Banks, and an earlier trance where I had experienced walking a labyrinth underwater.



Image 66 and 67

Forrest, Elizabeth. (2007). *Sewing the Water Labyrinth*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts.



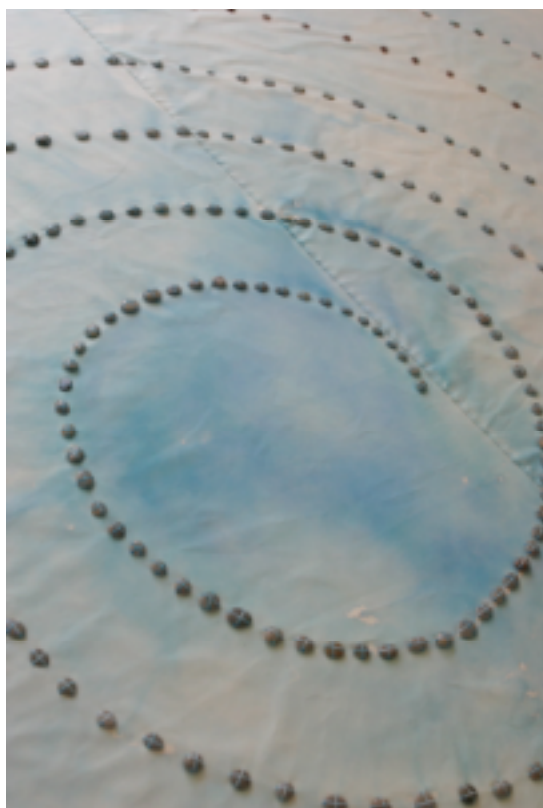


Image 68

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Water Labyrinth*, (Detail-acrylic, thread, stones on canvas on the floor).

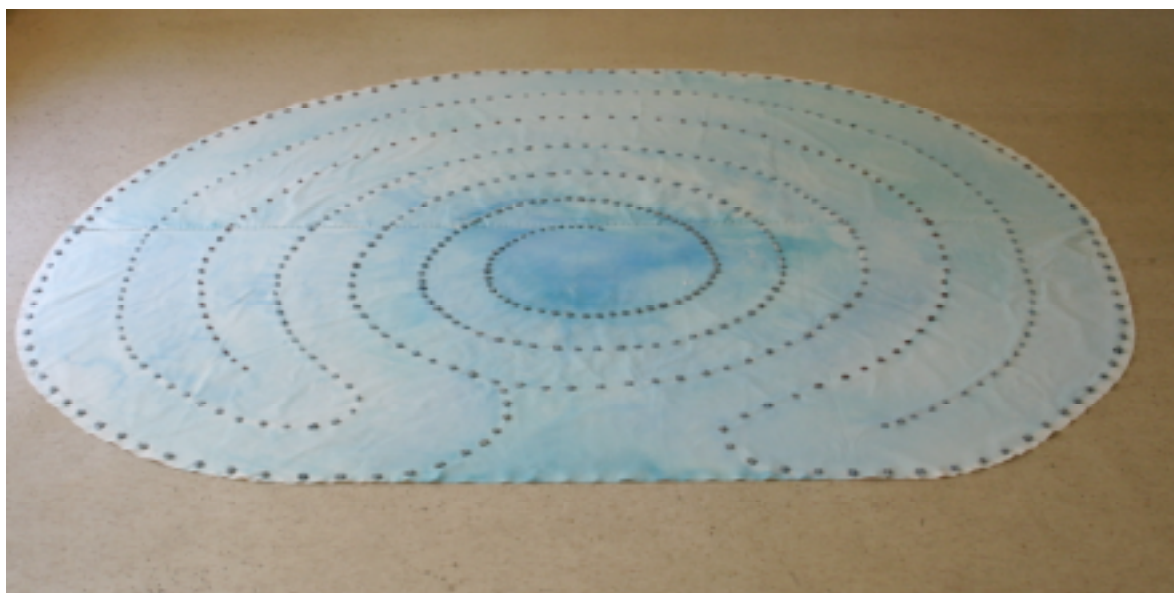


Image 69

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Water Labyrinth*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, (Acrylic, thread, stones on canvas on the floor -12 x 10 feet).

A *performative discourse* was beginning to find its counter-hegemonic home within the *pedagogical discourse* of my studio. The installation seemed to enter a conversation, a disruption between the traditional pedagogical architecture of my temporary studio space and a performative architecture informed by the natural environment I walked daily. Post-colonial<sup>1</sup> theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) distinguishes between two forms of discourse; pedagogical and performative. Bhabha (1994) wrote:

The pedagogical founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people, described by Poulantzas as a moment of becoming designated by *itself*, encapsulated in a succession of historical moments that represents an eternity produced by self-generation. The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow *between* the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside. In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation 'in-itself' and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between.' (pp. 147-148)

The pedagogical discourse of my studio was metaphorically visible in the dominant interlocking straight-line square tiles on the floor and reinforced by the manager of the arts center, who was very proud and protective of his waxed and polished floors. He made it very clear to me that it was to be left that way. Although baffling to me and other artists in the centre, the polished classroom appearance took precedence over the actual purpose of the space, which was for an artist, in the often messy process of creating in the studio.

I regularly struggled with the relationship between a static pedagogical discourse and an ever emergent performative discourse. I was disappointed that the shift from a traditional school classroom to an artist studio was not fully realized, despite the building's present status as a center for the arts. As an artist and educator I felt colonized and intimidated, yet determined to work with, and possibly transcend, what I felt were limitations imposed on my creativity within my temporary studio. Likewise, Bhabha's challenge in response to these competing discourses is to engage a cultural agonic postcolonial dialectic with the pedagogical and performative - where both are able to keep their unique voice and at the same time cross into the space of the other, engaging in a dialogue of mutual respect and curiosity, altering each others' appearance in the process. The discipline of daily mandala making assisted this dialogue. The mandalas were drawn, painted, or glued onto a role of Japanese paper; as I unrolled a clean surface to work upon each day I rolled up the prior days mandala. At the end of my thirty days, I unrolled the Japanese paper to reveal the whole of what I had documented. For the final installation I covered two

lengths of the studio wall, placing the mandalas as high as I could manage on the walls. These thirty images became a figurative alphabet lining two walls of the classroom/studio. Throughout the residency I worked with the challenge of interweaving a dialectic between the two discourses, altering the studio space and my experience of the lakeshore simultaneously, if only for a short period of time.

My years of working with the WSC at the Vancouver School of Theology, and my graduate work as an artist/researcher/educator within the Faculty of Education at a large research intensive University, had prepared me to enter the agonistic post-colonial dialectic that Bhabha proposes and that this artist residency presented to me. This dialectic emerged most profoundly through documenting a performance ritual on the last day of my artist residency. I knew only that the performance ritual would involve returning the completed *Water Labyrinth* to the lakeshore and walking it there. It would require my body to be the transporter of it from the studio/classroom to the lakeshore and back, prior to my departure from the island. I wanted the journey to be documented in video by a witness; Wende Bartley, the healing sound artist, who had a long-term studio in the principal's office across the hall, and had collaborated with me on a performance ritual that took place on the *Water Labyrinth* at our open studio the evening before became the witness/documenter.

*Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand* is a 37 minute video (Stillpoint DVD and Image 70) that documents a performance ritual that visually expresses the agonistic post-colonial dialectic that Bhabha proposes. I have come to understand performance ritual as the manifestation of art and spirit through the body. Trinh (2005), in describing her use of ritual within her own films, articulates the significance of clear locations, with revolving doorways between them that enable relationships to form -- in a state of constant formation and reformation, where one can enter as well as exit. Within the frame of ritual one can experience the material simultaneously with the immaterial in what she calls the "fourth dimension" of film (p. 29). But to do this we must let go of our normal habits of perceiving to fully sense and experience the extra-ordinary with all of our senses.

In this closing performance ritual I returned to the sand and the lake and consecrated the water labyrinth. The walking journey with the labyrinth, both over my shoulder and under my feet, allowed me to experience the dialectical poles of my residency; the pedagogical with the performative discourse; the converted school with the natural environment; flight in the air with walking on the ground; the material with the immaterial, the art with its inspiration; and the beginning of the residency with the end. *Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand*, within its



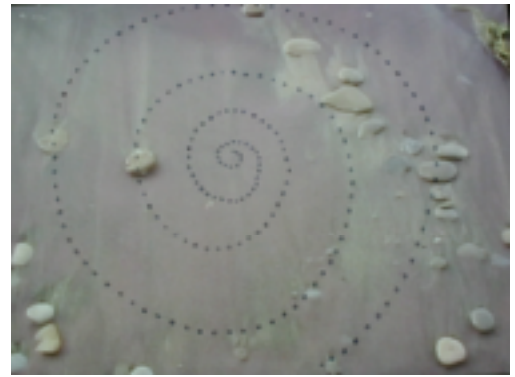
Image 70

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts. (Video stills - Video witness Wende Bartley).

circular, spiral path, articulates the mundane with the Divine. Within the interlocking still video frames that enter this text (Image 70) a ritual dialogue between the interlocking square tiles of the static studio floor (Image 63) and the shifting lakeshore ensues, thus, realizing the revolving door of the pedagogical with the performative, the cultural with the natural, the mundane with the transcendent, the ground with the sky, and the human striving to live and learn amidst it all.

At the halfway point of my residency a video that represented my labyrinthal walk came into form. *Waterwalk* is a 10.5 minute looping video that is projected onto 4 x 6 feet of unbleached broadcloth (Stillpoint DVD and Images 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77 and 78). It has a large spiral shape of stones sewn onto it. *Waterwalk's* cyclical narrative emerged from daily walks along the lakeshore, where I collected flat round stones and immersed my feet in the waters edge. I documented these meditative walks with digital video for the first two weeks of the residency and once I began working with the collected clips, a walking narrative emerged. *Waterwalk* is a labyrinthal walk in water that transcends one's normal experience of time, gravity, and cultures. Although the walk is linear in form, as it traces the waters edge, the cyclical nature of the walking ritual overshadows a literal reading of it. The intermittent appearance of the linear formation of the cormorant bird's flight path assists in alleviating the limitations of this worlds gravitational pull.

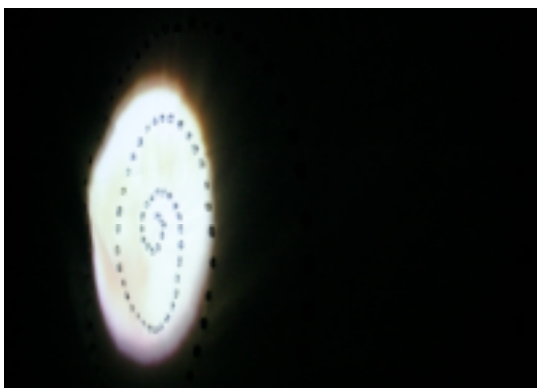
Two full moons book-ended my hiatus on Lake Ontario, framing the month long water walk, calling my attention to Women's Time and energies that are written by the body, just as the moon cycle influences the menstrual cycle. The stones that define the spiral on the fabric are sewn on and knotted individually, in a process of active mindful meditation in the studio. Within the complete installation the interaction of the projected moving water with the still textile ground holds a contemplative dialogue between motion and stillness -- the water, the stones, and the human body. The lull of the lapping water meeting each placement of the human foot may induce a trance-like state that extends the dialogue further into the dream realm.<sup>2</sup> The rhythm of the dream then becomes a revolving "door between mind and body" (Trinh, 2005, p. 153). The walking dream plays continuously within the larger installation while those within the space walk onto and into the Chakra-vyuha style labyrinth. As the walker spins into the centre of the *Water Labyrinth* on the floor, the waves and the stepping feet within the *Waterwalk* video keep pace with them. A double 'other' travels with the viewer who walks the labyrinth in the installation.



Images 71, 72, 73, and 74

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Waterwalk*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts. (Video stills projected onto fabric, stones and thread).





Images 75, 76, 77, and 78

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Waterwalk*. Gibraltar Centre for the Arts: Toronto Island, ON. (Video stills projected onto fabric, stones and thread).

The labyrinth has been a gift received and walked in various ways in my relationships with the women of the WSC. It is a revolving door that allows me to enter its sacred sanctuary while exiting a mundane world; to then turn me back out into the sacredness of the everyday world. The most basic form of a labyrinth is based on the natural created spiral. In ancient Cretan society the labyrinth represented the womb of the Divine Feminine (Gadon, 1989, p. 91). The sound of the waves in the *Waterwalk* video returns one to the memory of the lapping sound of amniotic fluid that is heard by the gestating child within the womb. The labyrinth is an archetype of transformation (Saward, 2003). It is an ancient symbol that can be traced back some 4000 years to the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age. In Medieval monastic traditions walking the turns of the labyrinth assisted in the activation of both hemispheres of the brain required to solve complex thoughts and ideas (Saward, 2005). It can represent a metaphor for the life journey, or as in my case, was an active symbol and ritual practice that sustained my dissertation journey. The mystery of the complex thoughts and ideas that have emerged within the dissertation work unfold through the act of walking, turning and putting one foot in front of the other.

### *Crossing the Water to be Hugged*

Three weeks into the residency I found myself on the ferry, leaving the island and my art work behind, embarking on a twenty-four hour pilgrimage into Toronto with a few of the women artists from the arts centre. We were to take part in a Devi Bhava and Darshan ceremony, where we would be hugged by Amma, who is colloquially known as the *Hugging Saint* from the State of Kerala, in Southern India.<sup>3</sup> With the anticipation of entering the unknown, we spoke animatedly amongst ourselves about what we knew about Amma. Amma is a humanitarian, healer, teacher and spiritual leader, considered by some to be an embodiment of the Divine Mother. Her teachings, do not ascribe to any one formal religion, she “rather says that her religion is Love” (Amma Summer Tour, 2007, p. 9) and shares that “When love overflows and is expressed through every word and deed, we call it Compassion. That is the goal of religion” (p. 5).”

A number of the women on the WSC planning team had shared their individual experience of receiving Darshan from Amma and encouraged me to attend this event. I was curious to have my own experience with this woman spiritual leader, who travels the world with the simple yet profound spiritual practice of hugging people, and teaching love. Her practice is based on the understanding that,



The Divine is present in everyone, in all beings, in everything. Like space it is everywhere, all pervading, all powerful, all knowing. The Divine is the principle of Life, the inner light of consciousness, and pure bliss--It is our very own Self. (p. 2)

I felt a longing to be embraced by this woman, who was willing to be the embodiment of the Divine Mother. At this point of active watering of my spirit in the dissertation journey I was more than ready to receive a transmission of unconditional love from her. Upon the suggestion of Nané, one of the women from my study, I took a photo of the WSC planning team of our foot washing ceremony (Image 79). Nané explained that I could hand the photo to Amma when I received Darshan and she would bless the work and the women of the WSC.



Image 79

Kennedy, Barbara (2007). *Foot washing ceremony*. Women's Spirituality Celebration 2007, Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology, Epiphany Chapel.

We arrived early at the Sheraton Hotel as we had heard thousands of people come for the free event. We were ushered in and told to enter the already forming queue to receive a number, which would be our place during the Darshan. At 7pm we were led into the large ceremony room in single file and sat in rows on the floor. Within this formal setting we awaited the arrival of Amma for the Devi Bhava (teaching) and the Atma Puja (peace ceremony). Amma is a physically small round woman who smiles often and likes to make jokes and laugh at our

humanness. Her teaching of love was simple and traditionally supportive of the family as a sacred entity.

Following the end of the Atma Puja the space transformed; musicians set up and began to play instruments and chant, kiosks surrounding the ceremony space appeared, and a market atmosphere ensued as the wait began for the individual Darshan hug. I was now free to roam within the hotel. It was filled with families, and groups of friends of different ethnic backgrounds, particularly those of East Indian descent. I felt oddly transported into India and was struck by the non separation of ritual and commerce space within this East Indian environment. While I awaited my hug I shopped, ate, talked with others, and in a mesmerized state witnessed hundreds of others receive their hug in anticipation of mine.

In the amazingly organized time and people consuming ritual process of Darshan, I waited more than four hours. As my number neared I sat in a line of chairs and slowly progressed, chair by chair, closer to the stage. I bought a mango from a vendor as an offering for Amma, and was given an information sheet to read on becoming a devotee. As I neared the platform the energy increased as I watched her assistants manage the four rows of people entering the platform in an orderly flow of bodies touching bodies, directing bodies towards Amma. Caught in this flow of body movement, that I was not in charge of, I managed to hand the photo to Amma along with the mango offering, and asked her to bless the women and our work. Both the mango and the photo disappeared into her hands as my head and body were enfolded into her body, my head pressed against her head, my arms free to encircle her body as she spoke into my ear with her thick accent what I heard as, “mine daughter, mine daughter, mine daughter.” An energy surge passed through my entire being. As I left the platform in a dizzied and silenced state, an assistant handed the photo back to me. I did not notice until I was back on the island the smudged streak of paste that crossed my head and spread through the center of the photograph (Image 79). A deep sense of calm settled into my being following the Darshan that continues to reside with me. I left the ceremony more fully understanding why people seek out spiritual teachers and choose to follow and serve them. A spiritual teacher offers to act as a direct channel to the Divine for the devotee, and to support the devotee by dispelling darkness and the “confusion that there are two parts to reality instead of one” (Beittel, 1985/2003, p. 46) in their life journey of accessing the Divine. The teachings of my Lutheran background did away with Saints as intermediaries to God and offered direct access through Grace. Although I have left my family religious roots as a practice, the teachings still influence my own understanding and choice of a direct path to the Divine.

I did not become an Amma devotee after this experience. I do remember the felt experience of her, through listening to music recorded from a Darshan, and bringing her spirit of the Divine Mother to mind when I find myself in need of unconditional love and support in the midst of my life and work. Bringing her presence to mind assists me in dispelling confusion and reaching a deeper Ground of Being from which to let go of surface distractions that unbalance me.

### *Voicing the Stones*

A few days after our Amma experience, Wende Bartley and I entered a trance state accompanied by her musical composition created from vocal and soundscape recordings made in Greece on the islands of Crete, and Patmos Acropolis Hill on the island of Patmos, and the Phaistos Temple site of Crete. We did this in preparation for the final eve of my residency where we would offer a co-created performance ritual in my studio installation for friends, and other artists at the residence (Stillpoint DVD and Appendix J). Working together with trance, music, the newly created floor labyrinth, stones I had collected from the beach, and our common interest in ancient and contemporary understandings of the Divine Feminine, we invoked and danced with the energy of stones. The twenty-two minute performance ritual that emerged from this work we called *Voicing the Stones* (Image 82).

On July 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, with a full moon rising in the sky, along with two other women artists at the arts centre, Elizabeth Forrest and Martha Stonehouse, we opened our studios and traveled with our mainland guests from studio to studio. The last stop on this hot evening was at Studio A, where the installation eventually called *Stillpoint*, was waiting. The twenty some, guests walked the labyrinth (image 80) and wandered throughout the installation, listening and asking questions, as Wende and I spoke about our individual work and its connections to our collaborative work.

I met Wende at the WSC in March of 2007. She was in Vancouver for the winter working on musical compositions. We both participated in Nané Jordan's workshop entitled, *Womentoring and Womb-Entering: Walking the labyrinth of the Goddess as Witness and Mentor*, and began a conversation that continues today. Finding out that her studio was on the island and that we had many similar interests in ritual, performance, the labyrinth, and art, spurred me to complete my application for the residency at Gibraltar Point, which I had been debating. On June 19, 2007 Wende wrote in an email.

Am so looking forward to having you here on the island. A few weeks ago I led a small group of retired teachers on a soundwalk and sounding labyrinth ritual. I hope we can do

something together at the labyrinth while you're here... some sort of public ritual is what I'm thinking of.

This idea came to fruition when walking within the frame of the *Water Labyrinth* and Wende's musical composition (Stillpoint DVD) that we offered in our performance ritual to our guests.



Image 80

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Studio walk*. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts. (Digital photograph).

Picking up stones along the walk and listening to their sounds as we played them, enlivened our bodies, the stones, and the space. While in the center of the labyrinth we poured stones onto each others hands. The movement of the stones passing from our hands and into our bodies was augmented by the pulsing rhythm of the music. Our bodies extended themselves, reaching up and outward until spent and complete. We then began the descent -- the walk out of the labyrinth. At turning points in the leave-taking of the labyrinth we would pause and share arm and hand mudras, still, gestural tokens inspired from our stone energy infused bodies. Exiting the labyrinth we walked full circle to the Labyrinth altarpiece and faced our quests in a spontaneous closing body gesture of the “Double Goddess,” a motif of “women sharing power” (Jordan, 2007).

In an email correspondence after my departure from the Island, Wende shared a quote in response to the description I offered of her work as a healing sound artist to a friend.

We are all born with this ancestral heritage, with the ability to “read” and respond to the sensuous Earth. But with the discovery and learning of written words, literate cultures lost something special—even something sacred—that had been integral to the oral traditions.

With the written word, language fell silent, and we became strangers in our own land.

(Christian de Quincey, n.d., review of David Abrams *The Spell of the Sensuous*. <http://www.deepspirit.com/sys-tmpl/thespellofthesensuous/>)

I found this in my notes this morning... notes I had made this past spring. It resonates with your phrase *it was a sensory ability that we used to have and that people have lost the ability for the most part to hear the sound and memory of space*. For me the delightful twist you contributed was the insight that hearing and sounding space is a sensory ability. - wende (Sept.18, 2007)

Within the performance ritual of *Voicing the Stones* we reclaimed the sacredness of a lost and fragile feminine language. Wende’s sound composition revealed a feminine musical aesthetic, and our sound-making derived from listening to the stones with our bodies further realized the power of a nonlinguistic language imbued with spirit. The stones that called me to collect them became a bridge to the voices and prayers of the wordless language of the earth, and through my working with them, the voices and prayers of the women of the WSC.





Image 81

Bickel, B and Bartley, W. (2007). *Voicing the Stones*, Performance ritual. Toronto Island, ON: Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts (Video stills - Video camera Elizabeth Forrest).

## Re-integration

During the one month residency I entered Women's Time through crossing the threshold into ritualizing time. The practice of daily walks and mandala-making embodied rhythmic cycles that transpired through breath, sound, collecting and gathering, dreaming, creating, and unconditional love. Trinh T. Minh-ha (2005) offers that "rituals serve as a 'frame' whose stabilizing effect, experienced through repetition in cycles and rhythmic recurrences, allows us to see things with a different intensity and, ... to perceive the ordinary in an extra-ordinary way" (p. 135). A frame is required to contain momentarily unstable conditions that are outside of our control in a complex multi-lingual and ordinary/non-ordinary world. The dream that opened this chapter speaks to the fragility and instability of our relations within Women's Time, which I equate with performative time, and the ongoing need to recreate it and support performative time in relationship with pedagogic time.

The residency returned me to my individual, watered-self, after the intense period of researching collaboratively and supporting thirteen women in art-making experiences the winter and spring prior. For months following my return from the residency I struggled, feeling the dissertation was complete. I had no desire to enter a relationship with *logos* after my immersion in *eros*. I wanted the art created by the women in *Womb Entering* and the art of *Stillpoint* to be accepted as the dissertation. At the same time I trusted that when I was ready to write, the dissertation would flow and I would be able to write from an integrated location of *logos* and *eros*, with a beautiful relationship between the figurative and the non-figurative. The creative and fluid ideas generated during the residency extended beyond the art I was able to realize there, and have continued watering an erotic and performative discourse within the pedagogical discourse of writing the dissertation.

Titling the body of work, and naming the individual art pieces took place in Vancouver. It was not until my return that I understood the one month residency as my time in the center of the labyrinthal journey of my dissertation. Three years of walking into the labyrinth preceded the residency, with one month of pausing at the centerpoint or stillpoint of the labyrinth. The final year of writing was the walk out of the labyrinth. The chosen title of *Stillpoint* reflects the moving stillness of the art created during the residency. A DVD of the art and performance ritual videos was compiled, documenting and re-presenting the many aspects of the residency (Appendix M). The Vancouver exhibition of *Stillpoint* (Images 82, 83 and Appendix L) and a solo performance ritual (Images 84, 85, 86 and Appendix J) took place on April 13, 2008 at the



Image 82 and 83

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). *Stillpoint Art Installation*. Vancouver B.C: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Digital photograph).





Image 84, 85, 86

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). *Stillpoint Performance Ritual*. Vancouver B.C: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Video stills – Video camera Chris Koppitz).

AMS Gallery on the UBC campus<sup>4</sup>. Being with the art installation while working on the final edits of this dissertation brought to mind Beittel's practice of being with the wisdom of his pots while he wrote his papers. The *Stillpoint* installation is a visual reminder of the multiple mentors that the residency brought to me.

Priestessing the *Stillpoint* installation was a restorative experience as I alternated between having conversations with visitors, who often pointed out their sense of the feminine nurturing qualities present in the installation and editing the dissertation. On the first day of the installation a family came in. As the mother walked the labyrinth with the three year old, the one year old who was being held by the father became fussy wanting the mother. The father handed the baby to the mother as she and the older child entered the center of the labyrinth. During this labyrinth walk a young Korean woman, who was visiting Canada to study English and knew nothing of labyrinths, was engrossed in watching this family labyrinth walk. After the family left she spoke to me of her profound feelings in watching the mother with her children in the center of the labyrinth. She said it was like watching the mother with her children in the womb. The solo performance ritual I performed later that day as part of the opening involved carrying the stones I had gathered on the lake into the center of the labyrinth. I set the stones free as I spun in the center-- a metaphoric birthing and giving away of my dissertation to those that choose to receive.

The nomadic life of the *Stillpoint* installation has begun. The *Waterwalk* video piece has traveled and been exhibited in a public gallery.<sup>5</sup> The *Stillpoint Triptych Altar* was the main altar for the WSC 2008 (Image 88), and the *Water Labyrinth* began being walked upon at gatherings of the WSC planning meetings within a week of its arrival in Vancouver. It has been gifted to the WSC and will continue to be walked throughout the years.

I close with the mandala (Image 87) that emerged during the writing of this chapter, along with a trance I experienced on the November 2007 full moon in an Ecstatic Trance Posture workshop with Tannis Hugill, who is part of the study. I am grateful the daily ritual of mandala-making while at the residency transferred into my home writing space. The figurative writing of the trance is carried into the mandala. The mandala that I share here references the emergent symbols of the art of *Stillpoint*, *Womb Entering* and *Re/Turning to Her*. Transcendent and immanent, it alludes to feet walking the labyrinth, and the foot washing ceremony performed by the WSC women. Small lake stones create the protective circle of the mandala that sing women's prayers. Inside two feet rest side by side, rooted on the earth, at the same time as being suspended in space. The right foot is full of the life giving source of blood. The left foot is empty and clear. Rivulets of red thread flow from the toes, streaming beyond the confines of the

mandala into the blood red trance text on the next page. The trance signifies the nearness of the dissertations conclusion with the distanced perspective and resolved knowing of the journeyer.

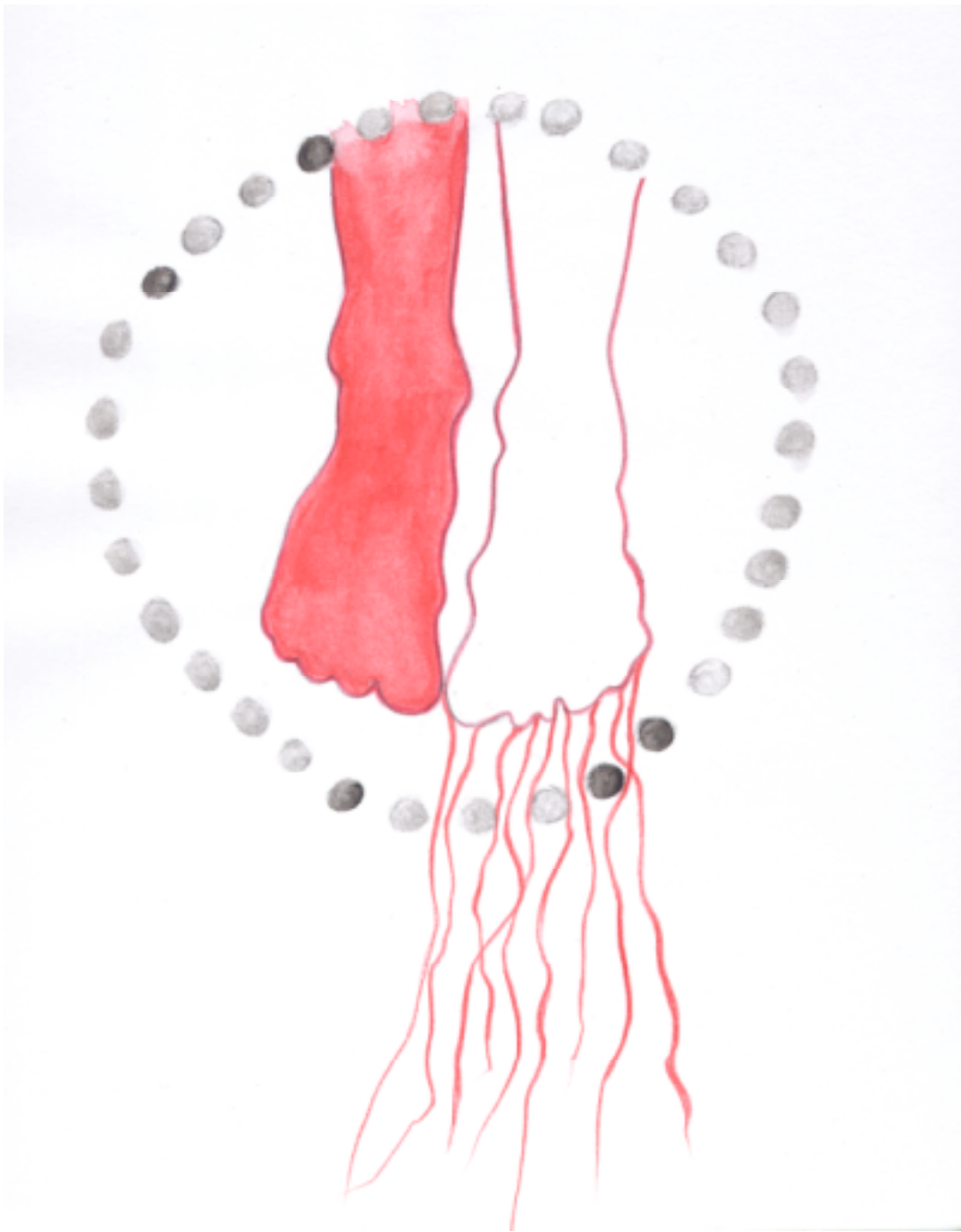


Image 87

Bickel, Barbara (2007). Visual Writing Mandala – December 2, 2007. Vancouver, BC., (Watercolour pencil crayons and crayon on paper, 7.5 x 10.5 inches).

## Ecstatic Trance<sup>1</sup>

I feel my body dropping and my vulva releasing. I am in whiteness. Walking in a field of snow. I am dressed in tanned leather. Whiteness surrounds me and I can see medium sized evergreens out of the corners of my eyes. I am curious to find I am in this snow environment. Now I am wearing snow shoes and walking on top of the snow. Walking easily in the midst of this whiteness. Walking. Now I am climbing up a pole that has appeared standing straight up in the snow. I climb up until I reach an ice ledge. I sit on the clear ice ledge and see the vast field of snow and trees below.

I have a moment of seeing the women at the WSC below me, painting on a large ring of white paper with bright colours. This circular painting is surrounding the altar in the center of the main hall of the Center for Peace.

It is very cold in this atmosphere but I am not cold. My left index finger pad begins to drip blood (from a pin prick wound I acquired while sewing the day before) onto the ice sheet. A pool of red blood begins to form. Because the blood is warm from my body, the blood is melting the ice and a bowl is formed in the ice. The bowl of blood becomes the size of my hands cupped together. Its redness is in stark contrast to the white snow below. I have an inclination to sprinkle the blood onto the snow below and imagine doing this but a voice halts me and says, “ This is the blood that you have lost. It is the amount that you have to work with; write with. Your body will regenerate the lost blood.” I sit in meditation with the bowl of blood beside me and know that this is the ink I write my dissertation with. I understand that the blood I have lost during the dissertation journey is now to be used for writing. When the bowl is empty I will be complete.

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<sup>1</sup> Nov. 24, 2007 (full moon) Diviner: Nupe Mallam Posture

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Through a post-colonial discourse “Bhabha has encouraged a rigorous rethinking of nationalism, representation, and resistance that above all stresses the "ambivalence" or "hybridity" that characterizes the site of colonial contestation--a "liminal" space in which cultural differences articulate and, as Homi Bhabha argues, actually produce imagined "constructions" of cultural and national identity” Retrieved on February 1, 2008 from <http://www.thecore.nus.edu/post/poldiscourse/bhabha/bhabha1.html>

<sup>2</sup> The dream realm in Shamanic traditions refers to “becoming aware of secondary processes, noticing dream-like experiences during waking life, and sensing and living the energy of impulses and figures until they become you.... This is a matter of awareness in feeling, moving, seeing, hearing, and relating” (p. 129). “Native Australians call it, “dreamtime.” Shamans refer to it as “becoming a warrior on the path of the heart”” (Mindell, 1993, p. 23).

<sup>3</sup> Two weeks earlier I had taken the same ferry into the city to meet with an academic teacher/guru, Deborah Britzman. These two “guru” visitations, unbeknownst to me at the time, have played a significant role in the development of my own teacher identity and teaching as a spiritual practice within the dissertation journey.

<sup>4</sup> *Stillpoint: A Multi-media Installation* was exhibited April 13-19, 2008 at the AMS Art Gallery on The University of British Columbia campus. A solo performance ritual, adapted from the collaborative *Voicing the Stones* performance ritual with Wende Bartley, was enacted using her sound composition *Skoteino Cave*, Crete, on April 13. Two a/r/tographic talks took place in the gallery on April 16 and 19, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The *Waterwalk* video was part of a group exhibition at the Oceanside Gallery in Parksville, British Columbia, Canada for the Mayworks 2008 group exhibition entitled *Water and the Human Condition*.

# *Walk out of the Labyrinth*

*A/r/tographer*



Image 88

Bickel, Barbara (2008). Stillpoint triptych labyrinth altar. Installed with floor labyrinth at the WSC 2008. Vancouver, BC: Great Hall, The Center for Peace.



## Curatorial Introduction

The blood ink is running low, now reaching the bottom of its bowl as the a/r/tographic walk out of the labyrinth begins in Chapter Six. The labyrinth created on the floor of Great Hall of the WSC 2008 (Image 88) is visually invoked to assist the final walk out. The multiple labyrinths walked during the dissertation journey begin to merge and synthesize the women's experiences of *logos* and *eros*, illuminating wisdom. The wisdom revealed through reflective Women's Time in the arational processes of art making, ritual, trance, poetry, art installations, performance rituals, analysis of written reflections, sharing circles and the art talks is expansive of endless depth. The walk out of the labyrinth-- out of the womb signifies the beginning.

Within this chapter, *ritual* is expanded as a *performative/pedagogy of philetics* within a sacred cycle moving towards wholeness. Ritual as performative/pedagogy is the overarching theme amidst the many sub-themes revealed through the a/r/tographic inquiry. While in the sacred sanctuary of ritual, one's wholeness is more or less restored and becomes a gift to the world. These emergent themes speak strongly to the women co-inquirers experience, as well as to my practice as a spiritual feminist a/r/tographer, reaching into the realms of spiritual and religious multi-faith learning and understanding through art and ritual. A/r/tography as ritual, ritual as a performative/pedagogy, and restorative and transformative learning are offered as a gift to the practice of a/r/tography within the academy and beyond. Within Chapter Six I write more fully into the multiple themes and perspectives that this dissertation journey has encountered.

*Chapter Six*  
*Expanding the Sacred Cycle of Ritual*

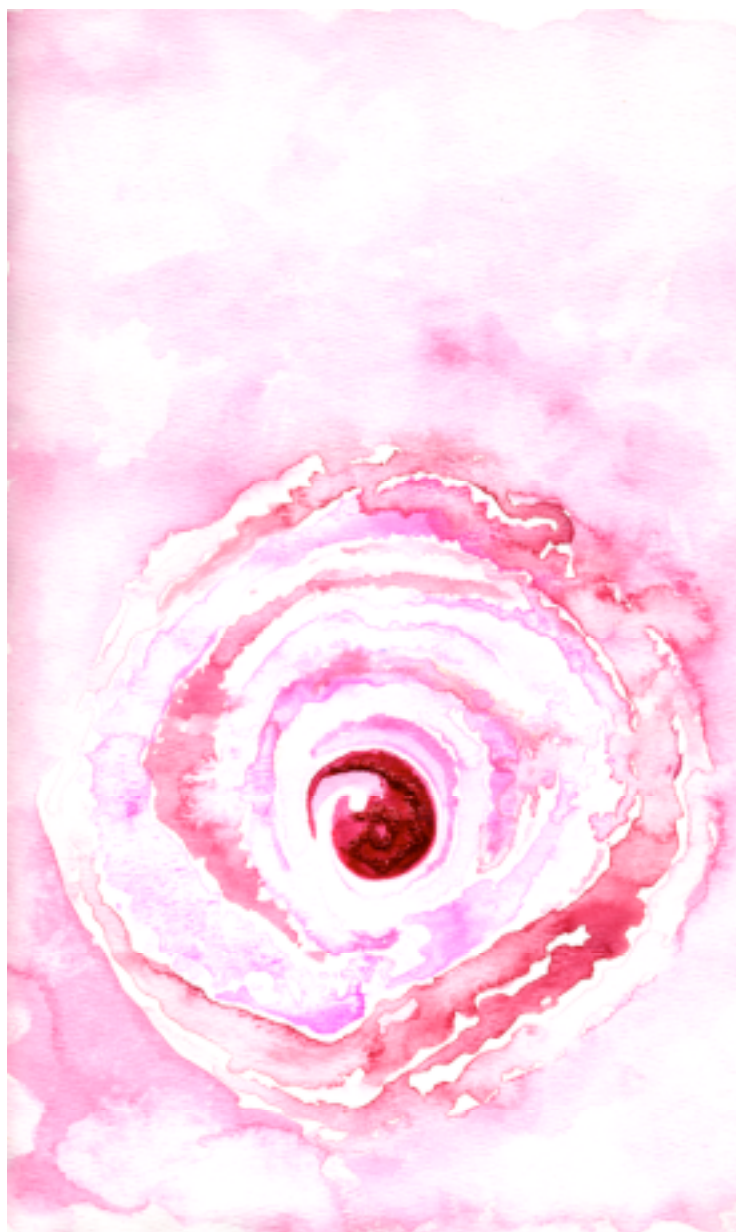


Image 89

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). WSC Vision. Courtenay, BC: Creekside Community. Women's Spirituality Celebration Visioning Retreat, (Watercolour on paper).



## Leaving the Womb

“Those religions which base their world picture ... on the dualism of good and evil, venerate the spoken word as the primary force by whose sole agency Chaos was transformed into an ethnic-religious cosmos.”  
- Cassirer

she's just a hole

the World-Goddess's womb  
Sophia  
'poured out, From the first,'  
before 'the beginnings of the world'

fluency of  
our voicing (w)hole

these are holy waters

Betsy Warland (1987), n.p.<sup>1</sup>

Rituals help us cross the boundaries between the world we know and the world we imagine. They help us move through conflict, with the changes in identities, roles, and meanings that conflict brings. Sometimes metaphors, rituals, and stories help by stirring things up enough for new meanings to emerge.  
Michelle LeBaron (2002), p. 34

Feminist writer Betsy Warland's poetry, and law professor Michelle LeBaron's reflection on ritual within her book, "Bridging Troubled Waters: Conflict Resolution From the Heart," returns to the heart of this dissertation study. The study has been a spiritually-led pouring out of art and ritual by women spiritual leaders in the service of stirring up, what are often conflictual and dualistic relationships in a world struggling to 'break free' of its predominant ethnocentric religiosity. The work of the WSC and this study verifies that it is possible to break free, but it requires a mindful practice, which includes the holding of sacred space for leadership and the decolonization of the Divine to take place within. This study also demonstrates a practice of a/r/tography as ritual while holding an intention of unconditional love. I have come to understand the lived practice of this as a pedagogy steeped in the philetics of loving community (Beittel, 1974). The practices that are brought into the performative/pedagogical discussion of this a/r/tographic dissertation are not didactic or overly heuristic teaching styles. Rather, they are based in the teaching/learning style of philetics, of loving community, and underscore the spiritual, restorative and transformative learning practices that came to be articulated through this study. Understood in this way, the implementation of a curriculum that is

performative/pedagogical in this study, can assist living and being with the holy waters required to bridge the troubled waters of ‘broken art,’ the divided self, and the suffering of our world.

The following two video stills (Images 90 and 91) visually capture heightened moments of symbolic Women’s Time within the holy waters of the womb/labyrinth. In the first image the women appear as haunting forms not yet fully birthed into the world. The art at this point has not been danced into form. *Her Divine Countenance* mask radiates with the collective energies of the individual masks of the fourteen women, like a lotus flower waiting to be picked from the center of the labyrinth. The *Woman Spirit Shield* rests quietly behind the women awaiting the release of its voice. The women are experiencing the last moments of gestation together in the womb, before being poured out into public space of the world as, priestesses, teachers, artists -- as Divine women voicing the (w)hole. No words are spoken during this performance ritual of *Womb Entering*. We hear the sounds of the drum, the singing crystal bowl, breathing, and eventually, the reverberations of voices toning and merging, becoming (w)hole.



Image 90

Bickel, Barbara. (2007). *Womb Entering* performance ritual. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Video still – video camera Chris Koppitz).



Image 91

Bickel, Barbara (2007). *Womb Entering* performance ritual. Vancouver, BC: AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Video still – video camera Chris Koppitz).

Within the second image, the women are more fully formed and recognizable as individuals. The ritual journey (performance ritual) out of the womb has taken place. The *Woman Spirit Shield* is illuminated and now stands fully upright behind the women, its protective resonance filling the space. The half-circle formed by the women on the outer edges of the labyrinth is not a closed circle. Its openness frees the circle to extend and include those who have witnessed the birth on the other side. The residue of the ritual birth spreads out onto the labyrinth's path, and the body of visual-writing that has gestated within the womb takes its first breath in relationship with those who have witnessed the birth. Trinh (1999) describes this as "...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" (p. 262).

These images, captured by the video camera, are fleeting moments in ordinary time as they are re-presented from an originary Women's Time. The ecstatic moment of birth from the womb simultaneously imprints the moment of loss – the loss of memory, of connection, of co-creation within this a/r/tographic ritual inquiry. It is from a place of remembering -- of touch, sound,

movement, sights, and unconditional love, that this dissertation text is formed. The experience of radical relationality and the erotic life force of the inquiry is replayed, only ever-partially through the multiple texts of still and moving images, and written words that are incarnated in this dissertation. Loss of presence known in the moment of the present through the representation of the presentation accompanies the birth experienced in this performance ritual. Peggy Phelan (1993) writes:

Performance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance. Poised forever at the threshold of the present, performance enacts the production appeal of the nonreproductive.

Fluent introspective writing, and the transcribed voices of the women emerge further within this chapter. They offer a doubling of ephemeral, transient and ambiguous Women's Time to inform and re-perform moments of leadership, learning, teaching, and priestessing experiences birthed within the study. The imagining of what a community can do for/with/in the world has been anticipated in this dissertation and requires an on-going commitment on the part of the co-inquirers and the readers/viewers of this dissertation to move towards ritual as a performative/pedagogic practice of living (w)hole in this world.

#### Guidelines for Assessing Validity in the Study

In a piece of writing Tannis (May, 2007) entitles "Womb Entering: Emanating Reflections," she articulates what I recognize as a strong component of the post-*Womb Entering* experience.

I searched for the shadow in our work, for some aspect of our process I could 'criticize,' rub against, to locate my own edges. But, finally I realized that this was a shared activity done with such a level of mutual trust, acceptance and encouragement, that edges, shadows and bumps gently folded into the emerging patterns. Fruitful generativity streamed uninterrupted. Enveloped by the cushion of amniotic waves, I had trouble sensing my body. Now that the project is birthed, I feel more present. Why then my discomfort in such a nurturant environment? Was it just unfamiliarity? ... "Womb Entering" catalyzed my urge to curl inwards. Yet our goal was to show ourselves. I was torn without consciously knowing why.... We have been through a developmental process, similar to every art creation, but for one crucial difference – the presence of consciously invoked divine power... This circle allowed me to move towards the formless but the tension between form and formless remains painful. I am simultaneously challenged to be present in this world, dancing in many circles, juggling projects, responsibilities, attachments to colleagues, friends and family. Hovering between, I am consoled and intrigued by the knowledge that we are each weaving our visions, and our longings. Our loves are linked by spirit in the shapes of harmonious beauty beyond imagining. What we have accomplished will never end.

These heart-felt words reflect a woman's journey to wholeness with spirit that is relational, co-creative, and filled with edges, discomfort, paradoxes, and longing. She articulates a feminine Divine— a spiritual journey that is not marked by the transcendent eclipse of life often striven for in the traditional depiction of a patriarchal spiritual journey. Hers is rather a journey that is embodied, interwoven with the lives of others, and marked by the relationship of multiple loves in this immanent corporeal world. The tensions of living a spiritual life in-relation with multiple others can propel one into the richness of interrelationality as well as isolate. The push and pull of this dynamic tension was ever present amongst the women during the study.

Tannis's reflective writing brings to the foreground the inherent desire for critical reflection and assessment in the aftermath of a significant journey. Assessment, if it is to take place, most often occurs on the walk out of the labyrinth. After reflecting on the questions asked upon entry into the labyrinth, (and spending time in the centre as an open vessel, to receive Divine wisdom in response to the questions), the walk out of the labyrinth is a time of integration and synthesis. New understandings and visions that arise from the questions are given time to gestate on the walk out in preparation for the return, ideally with newfound wisdom, to offer the world.

As a way to reflect upon the new understandings articulated within this chapter, I restate the research questions asked at the beginning of the study. Although the questions fell into the background (unconscious), during the rich sensory engagement within the a/r/tographic inquiry, they were each being addressed in experiential, praxis-based ways: *1) as women spiritual leaders, how do we understand the nature and impact of our own religious/spiritual attitudes, i.e. assumptions, ideology, values, worldview, political correctness?, 2) how have our individual spiritual/religious beliefs been impacted by participation in the co-organizing of a multi-faith conference?, 3) how might we further develop an ethical and transformative curriculum of religious and spiritual education within a multi-faith conference? and, 4) how does collaborative engagement with art, support and extend inquiry into spiritual and religious pluralism /education?* These questions are addressed and touched upon throughout the rest of this closing chapter.

#### *Feminist Guidelines*

To assess the study, I employ Patti Lather's (1986) feminist guidelines for validity (trustworthiness) in qualitative research (see Appendix N). I find her suggested guidelines for assessing "postpositivist praxis-oriented research" (p. 51) approaches, that are conducive to "generat[ing] ways of knowing that can take us beyond ourselves" (p. xviii), appropriate for this

‘feminist’ grassroots study, where it was understood that “every woman has something important to say about the disjunctures in her own life and the means necessary for change” (p. xviii). Because, as Lather points out, there are no “formulas to guarantee valid social knowledge,” these guidelines [of triangulation, construct, face, and catalytic validity] offer a strategy for engaging “a vigorous self-reflexivity” (p. 66) as a researcher.

The guideline of *triangulation* establishes the inclusion of “multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes” (pp. 66–67) in this study such as: 1) *group ritual sharing circles*, where the co-inquirers spoke to emergent questions, reflected, and shared thoughts on the study offering suggestions for the next step within the study, 2) *reflective writing* (creative and letter forms), shared by email with all the co-inquirers, and on occasion with just the main researcher, 3) *individual* and *group trance*, which offered a direct entry into the arational realm of being, 4) *art making*, (which included individual and group art pieces) another arational process, which was reflected upon in group sharing circles, individually, and at the artist talks, and 5) *public art installations, performance rituals, conferences presentations* and *DVD screenings*, where some conversations with viewers were documented, and written responses from the public in the gallery Comment Book offered objective/external responses to the research as presented and re-presented.

All sharing circles and artist talks were digitally video recorded and transcribed, and viewed by some of the co-inquirers. In addition to the process of art making and the creation of the performance rituals, the completed art installations and performance rituals were video documented and viewed by all of the co-inquirers. The women shared the task of documentation with the video camera. Although they knew that the study was to be video documented, discussion regarding the awkwardness of being viewed and recorded by a camera lens was brought forward at the first sharing circle. To alleviate the discomfort, and to allow the main researcher to step into the co-inquiry equally, the video camera documentation was shared amongst the women. For some, this became a new learning and part of their creative art making process.

*Construct validity* establishes that new concepts arise in the research beyond the researcher’s own preconceived concepts and ideas. This was implemented most profoundly by my entering the study with guiding questions and ideas, yet leading from a place of not-knowing. In this way I entered the unknown of the art process alongside the co-inquirers. The dialectic that the co-inquiry afforded allowed the group to move and shift in multiple directions throughout the study. The power of the group in its non-interest (for the most part) in theory and abstract ideas,

circumvented much of the power that a researcher's *apriori* conceptions may hold onto in a study. A significant pre-conception I arrived with in the study was that the study was understood to be supported by the Divine Feminine. This was true for a number of the co-inquirers but not all. Hence, I shifted and began to include the gender unspecified Divine and not only the Feminine Divine in the writing of the text. This was reinforced by the theorizing of Leela Fernandes who writes of the decolonization of the Divine in all its aspects.

*Face validity* links the research analysis with the co-inquirers experience of the research. The women's spoken insights from the transcripts and conversation are drawn from to offer their experience of the inquiry throughout the analysis. The women also read a draft of the dissertation and offered corrections and feedback that was taken into account in the final draft. Because the research was done within a pre-established group that holds similar values at the onset it was important to have member checks regularly established in the sharing circles as well as by email and phone connection. Some checks were done privately if the co-inquirer was not comfortable sharing information with the entire group. The arts-led (arational) inquiry assisted the possibility of differences and "false consciousness" to surface on the part of the co-inquirers and the group. In practicing multiple forms of expression, one's defenses have less places to hide as conscious, subconscious and transpersonal aspects of knowing and not knowing emerge to be critically reflected upon individually and as a group.

*Catalytic validity* reflects "the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, a process Freire (1973) terms conscientization" (p. 68). Numerous shifts in awareness and actions emerged from this study, in the group and for individual co-inquirers. Eight months after the study was completed some changes were visible, as most of the women have continued to work on the 2008 planning team. I am not able to reflect on the catalytic validity as clearly for the women who are not on the WSC 2008 planning team, but I offer reflections on the women that are still present on the planning team, myself included. At the last closing ritual sharing circle, it became apparent to Nané and those present that the women who were mothers in the study, struggled significantly more to fully participate and be immersed in the study than those not in an active mothering role. This discrepancy was not noticed until the end of the study. This awareness led to us commit to offering more support to mothers within the WSC. In the WSC 2008, Nané herself took action and offered a workshop entitled *Mothering the Divine* that addressed the "challenges of being mothers and women of spirit" (Jordan, WSC 2008 brochure) by reflecting on ways to nourish and inspire women as mothers.

The group recognized the need for the mentoring of spiritual leadership and worked consciously in the mentorship of the four new members in the 2007-08 planning year. A full day retreat was held in the fall of 2007 and an overnight visioning retreat took place a month after the WSC 2008. The visioning retreat took the 2007-08 planning team to a new creative threshold with the new women on the planning team. A powerful bonding took place through individual and co-creative art making processes that the Roots 'n' Future committee organized with our hosts, the Creekside Community. A number of the women became conscious of the need for spiritual circles for practice and support in their lives on an ongoing basis. Since the study, Tannis has become part of a women's spiritual circle that Ingrid has been part of, which meets monthly. In addition, the vision of having a monthly gathering of women, spawned from WSC 2008, is being organized from a list of women who signed up at the 2008 conference. One of the new planning team members has offered to support the formation of the new group. This initiative extends the support of women as spiritual leaders beyond the planning team and into a new community of women. The youngest woman in the group, Catherine, was mentored into the public role of mistress of ceremony by Medwyn at the WSC 2008. After having to step back to restore balance in her own life during the study, Melody took on a significantly larger administrative leadership role in 2007-08, deciding that she wanted to offer the group her strongest skills. She has become the communication hub for the group, regularly taking meeting notes and sending email reminders. Valerie's voice as an elder has become stronger in the group. She took part in a Croning<sup>2</sup> ceremony at the WSC 2008. Cathy shared in an email on April, 22, 2008 that through the dissertation project she became "acutely conscious of the need for sacred time in order for art and ritual to be birthed" she then linked it to her understanding of,

quantum theological physics... (The ability to build quantum sacred objects in the dimension of non time non space). It is about being in love and suspending other commitments to leave space for bodies and souls and energies to meet and explore and connect... it is about moving into another sacred dimension...with the tension and discomfort of being pulled by some resistant gravitational destructive paradigm to meet time and production deadlines.

During the year of the study a Roots 'n' Future subcommittee was formed with Medwyn, Ingrid, Melody, and myself. This continues to assist the leadership visioning of future directions for the WSC, while sustaining its roots. It has assisted in giving focus to the two retreats and plans to begin writing proposals to secure outside funding and assist the expansion of programming of the WSC beyond the annual conference.

The goal of attracting more women to the WSC 2008 was successful, and manifested as a



balance of age groups and more women of colour, particularly Asian women, attending the conference. Monica and Shirin, the longest standing members of the planning team continued to guide and nurture the 2007-08 planning year, and at the same time were able to step back and allow leadership to emerge in new forms for the WSC 2008. For a few of the women, who had to step back at the end of the research project, their own recovery process has continued. The WSC group has emerged from the study with a clearer understanding of the political multi-faith leadership work they are doing in the world, and a deepened appreciation for each other and other women leading this work. With a deepened Divine perspective to hold and sustain the group, personality conflicts around leadership still may emerge and disagreements continue but the appreciation for the Divine gifts that each person brings is not forgotten. Despite the ongoing challenges and nomadic existence of this conference and planning team a richer respect for the human limitations was gained as we each now possess the awareness that we are part of something that is greater than us as individuals in the present.

In retrospect, a focus group would have been good to incorporate into the final stage of the research, in order to enter a collaborative discussion on the interpretations of findings and experiences from a completed draft of the dissertation, as Lather (1991) suggests. Individuals have read and offered their feedback and thoughts, but because of time restraints a full group reflection on the final dissertation findings was not feasible. This can be followed up on in the future with the women, in whole or part.<sup>3</sup>

### *Tenants of Mindful Inquiry*

To further reflect upon the insights that arose from this study, I return to the combined critical thought and spiritual principles of mindful inquiry (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p. 27) that assisted the mindful preparation for the study as a way to assess my practice as researcher in the study. These were “1. the importance of mindful thought itself; 2. tolerance and the ability to inhabit multiple perspectives; 3. the intention to alleviate suffering; [and] 4. the notion of clearing, or openness, [and] underlying awareness (p. 39).” The practice of mindfulness was a challenge to sustain during the full and chaotic schedule sustained during the study. My practice was one of being in the moment and refraining, as best I could, from judging my human limitations. In practicing compassion for myself I was able to extend it to the women, and potentially alleviated suffering for all of us. Walking the labyrinth during the study assisted my

return to mindfulness and the ability to be with the multiple perspectives that were surfacing within the study.

A daily mindful practice was easier to implement during my time of distance from the study during the artist residency. While there, I engaged a daily practice of walking the labyrinth, mandala making, art making, and sitting meditation at the lake. It was during this time that I experienced an emptying of my self and began to create a space of non-suffering to enter the analysis of the study. As the clearing took place, I was able to begin reflecting upon the study and embark upon the writing of the dissertation. From the mindful writing practice, further inquiry took place and new understandings from the study emerged, which I share in this chapter. Reverence for the women, the study, and the spiritual leadership work of women was a byproduct of the mindful practices that sustained me throughout the study and by extension sustained and supported the women of the study.

#### *Four Commitments within A/r/tography*

Rita Irwin (2008), in recent writing on “communities of a/r/tographic practice,” draws from the philosopher Jean Luc Nancy (1991/2000), who writes, “being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singular plural coexistence” (p. 71). Hence, relationships are based on the coexistence of singular plural commitments with/to another, whether they are articulated or not. We can never be completely autonomous, nor can we be completely relational. We are synechdochical beings that exist with and as part and whole. Irwin (2008) offers what she recognizes as four core commitments of a/r/tographers, they include but are not limited to: “a commitment to a way of Being in the world; a commitment to inquiry; a commitment to negotiating personal engagement within a community of belonging; and a commitment to creating practices that trouble and address difference” (p. 72).

I use the four commitments in a/r/tography to assist evaluation of the practice of a/r/tography as ritual as the study engaged in various ways the four commitments described by Irwin. It invited an ongoing entry into becoming through Being together and entering the unknown of each moment through art and ritual. Whether it was in a moment of deep listening and silence in a ritual sharing circle, in a moment of hands creating side-by-side, or bodies moving in rhythm with other bodies in rehearsal, the women shared their beings and becoming with one another within the sacred sanctuary co-created each time they met. The generativity of creativity that emerged was profound, considering the time restraints at work in the women’s lives. As curator, I found myself reluctantly having to contain the many burgeoning and

complicated ideas and emotions that arose in the creative process, in order to ensure our ability to complete the projects. Through the art making, ritual, and inquiry process, a number of the women made positive reconnections in remembering and drawing strength from their ancestral roots, which further underscored and strengthened their paths of spiritual leadership.

The commitment to inquiry further involved what spiritual teacher and researcher John Heron (2006) understands as radical “spiritual inquiry” and “divine inquiry.” In his handbook “Spiritual Inquiry: A Handbook of Radical Practice,” Heron proposes that combining spiritual and divine inquiry practices with collaborative human inquiry can assist in transforming the rift between spirit, science and education. As curriculum designers of an educational conference, the women in this study practice a philetics of loving community underscored by spiritual and collaborative inquiry. This loving curriculum can contribute to innovative and creative possibilities for multi-faith and spiritual education within other settings and with other groups. The group invoked spiritual practices such as ritual, divination, and spoken and embodied prayer, to support the teaching and learning engaged with. Drawing from the wisdom teachings of Judaism, Christ, the Buddha, and Medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, Heron writes that “spiritual practice is about returning home, coming back to now” (2006, p. 1). He posits that spiritual inquiry is about *opening to spirit* as well as *acting with spirit*; “... a consummation of human-divine flourishing, a celebration of intimate communion, and of transformative going forth” (2003, p. 10).

A commitment to an intimate communion within spirit became very clear in the *Re/Turning to Her* pilot study, where recognition of the collaborative connection with spirit and each other could not be overlooked. Collaboration with spirit required the performance ritual to be performed by priestesses rather than solely as artists. The awareness of an arts-based collaboration with spirit carried on, as Tannis noted earlier in her reflection, into the large study with the women. This offered the thread of spiritual and Divine connection that was essential in holding the larger context of the work--of being women spiritual leaders visibly teaching/priestessing multi-faith awareness in the world, in the midst of full and complex lives. For women to undertake the demands of spiritual leadership work requires a community of supportive others. This support can be accessed at many levels. The recognition that “non-present communication” was at work within the group despite people being physically separate, was recognized and attests to the spirit of collaboration that was working its way through the art making experience of *Womb Entering*. Medwyn explains this further at the art talk,

...we were not all together...at the same time when transference of ideas and information occurred. Whether each time we gathered we consciously would call in the presence of the others who were not able to be physically with us. And those who were not physically there would at some point say something or bring forward some thing that actually had happened in the gathering... The same information... ended up flowing back in without those of us who were not there even knowing that.

The commitment to negotiating personal engagement within a community of belonging, was an area in the study that required a form of feminist spiritual leadership. This was a practice of spiritual leadership able to hold the sacred space of the inquiry and group, while simultaneously remaining engaged nonjudgmentally with those that needed to move to the edges. The evolution of the inquiry, as led by art making and questions delving into multi-faith spiritual leadership, brought forward a diversity of responses and reactions in the women. Some found themselves nourished, emerging more fully as women spiritual leaders. A few found it difficult to engage in the dual functions of co-participation and co-leadership, as the in-charge leadership they were accustomed to practicing was not required. At times they found themselves stepping back from the group and its process, not quite sure how to engage. Others found themselves stepping back and turning to areas of their personal life that needed immediate attention. Each of these locations became important pieces of the whole learning for the group, and reflect the many factors that influence a group process. Many layers and forms of learning, leadership and letting go occurred simultaneously, each requiring thoughtful reflection and negotiation at any one time in the group.

The sense of connection and belonging that was built within the group was expressed by a number of the women. The connection of trust and the learning acquired did not end with the study. It carried a presence into the next year's planning team. There was an expressed awareness by some in the group that the intimacy attained could transfer into an exclusionary experience for new members joining the planning team. Because of this awareness the group knew their responsibility required keeping a consciously open and extended welcome for those who entered the 2007-08 planning team as new members.<sup>4</sup>

The a/r/tographic commitment to participate in practices that trouble and address difference is explored in the inquiry, while addressing the diversity of spirituality/religion(s) through the making of art, and dwelling with the art. Heron (2006) purports that spiritual inquiry is a spiritual practice "outside of the aegis of any tradition" (p. 18), that translates Divine reality, while simultaneously dwelling within it. Art simultaneously translates reality, while dwelling within it. In addition, art offers visible artifacts of individuality, which includes diversity and differences,

along with the interconnection of those differences. The individual art pieces reflect unique voices, while the collaborative art brought the individuality and differences together in a cohesive whole. In sharing her observations of the group process one woman noted that,

... no matter how much we are focused on honouring difference as part of what we are doing overtly, there is a desire and yearning to be the same. So I feel that there was an unarticulated move towards developing a community of group norms, some of which aren't articulated but kind of happened as we kind of did what we explicitly agreed to do but sometimes did something quite different. And from that emerges how society becomes right. So it makes me think back [to] that guy Jesus, who never intended to start a religion, right? Or never intended to start something like Christianity. Over time a revolution arises, then there is a kind of unconscious desire to have structure.

The desire for sameness and structure that was observed in this reflection is important to voice and question as it requires a channeling towards mystica, the revolutionary spirit of community that is the force behind liberation movements, rather than an enclosed, rigid survivalist, and fear-based movements. A desire for sameness can also be understood as a yearning for belonging and home, a striving towards wholeness (Alexander, 2005). Cathy, in her closing reflection, touches upon the participatory and global aspect that she experienced the group moving towards, as they negotiated a diversity of practices and working styles, in order to engage a spirit larger than the group and the project:

I just think of the pivotal aspect of love in the group, if that is what the world needs, then that is a very global aspect of it that was being done.... I find hope in... my own Christian practice that complexity and polarities are a creation and a wonderful, terrible, beautiful part of what God brings into our relationships and is at home with. If all of our faiths had a place where that kind of diversity, irony and complexity could kind of be laughed at a little bit and create something beautiful. I think that our group dipped into that alot.

From yet another perspective Ingrid shares:

I pretty much forgot that anybody had a different faith, I mean it wasn't that obvious to me. It felt very much that the [a/r/tographic] process we engaged in, we created our own ritual, that it was a very fluid process. So actually I think this would solve all the world's problems... [it] was remarkable for me because it sort of brought together I think all the areas of my interests, because it felt like it was working at the personal level, and the larger social political level for me.

It was perhaps an unconscious strategy on the part of myself and the group to channel so much of our energy into the art. The art became a safe and rich location to express ones spiritual/religious beliefs and practices. It became the bridge to share our different spiritual/religious practices without necessarily confronting the differences directly. When the group moves to language many heated conversations can and do ensue around specific words,

terms and practices, and what they mean to each person depending on their cultural, spiritual and/or religious backgrounds. The key practice that has developed when these differences arise is to listen with openness, love and respect.

At the 2008 visioning retreat, after a day of individual and collaborative art making, the group reflected on how they deal with difference and conflict as a group. Two key terms that surfaced were “yielding” and “movement.” Rather than a tradition of head on confrontation or a practice of forgiving another when conflict and disagreements occur a practice of respectful listening and yielding has developed amongst the group. The understanding that there are different perspectives at work and at times one needs to let ones own way move to the side in order to allow another way to surface is in place with a core number of the group. This practice of yielding and hence continual movement within the group is modeled to new members of the group. This is not always easy and feelings of loss are expressed when the movement means that something or someone is lost. In the debrief meeting after the WSC 2008, Shirin expressed her disappointment that there were very few Christians workshop leaders in that years conference. In her expression of loss we as a planning team became aware of the loss of our Christian sisters moving away from leadership roles in this conference. We do not know that we can alter that movement, but being aware of the absence can shift our future outreach work.

Having offered an assessment of the dissertation process and emergent understandings through three separate but related frameworks; Lather’s guidelines for trustworthiness in research, Bentz and Shapiro’s (1998) tenants of critical mindful inquiry, and Irwin’s commitments to a/r/tography, I offer some guidelines for the reader/viewer in assessing, (e)valuating, and responding to the dissertation. Because Lather reminds us that there is no guaranteed formula for valid social knowledge to emerge in qualitative research, and because Springgay and Irwin (2008) suggest, that the “a/r/tographical act is its own possible measure” and the “assessment-- is created in the act of being in the midst of a/r/tography” (p. xxxii), it becomes the responsibility of the a/r/tographer to create the most appropriate form of assessment for the research. Creating a circle of trust was a powerful component of the spiritual inquiry process. I offer these suggestions because an individual external reader/viewer can not know the experience of this trust, built within a community context, and consequently may find it difficult to respond to or to validate the trustworthiness of the a/r/tographic study that is experientially and relationally-based.

In addressing the problematic gap between the reader/viewer and the study I suggest, as an extension of the living inquiry that is a/r/tography, the reader/viewer enter their own

(e)valuation. In the spirit of the life-force energy of the study, I suggest that the (e)valuation not separate the arational from the rational, the part(s) from the whole, and the coherent from the incoherent in its structure. Thus, I encourage an additional co-creative engagement with the dissertation that can extend the work shared in this dissertation. This may take the form of creating or performing a piece of art or writing. A participatory response may emerge as a prayer or a political action in ones life. Co-creative participatory (e)valuation, I believe, will be strengthened if it incorporates the ever-changing sacred cycle, the spiritual phenomenon that shifts a ‘broken art’ to a (w)hole art, a divided person to a (w)hole person, and a falsely coherent community to a coherent community; albeit, acknowledging it is a back and forth, fragile, non-guaranteed process.

### Participation in the Whole

Postmodern transpersonal consciousness scholar, Jorge Ferrer (2002), has systematically articulated the “participatory turn (i.e., a radical shift of emphasis from intrasubjective experiences to participatory events in our understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomenon).” Ferrer maps out the epistemic features of a “participatory vision” for “spiritual knowing” (p.115)-- “...that is, a multidimensional access to reality that can involve not only the creative power of the mind, but also of the body, the heart, and the soul” (p. 3). For Ferrer, the validity of participatory knowing, in a spiritual sense, has more to do,

... with its emancipatory power for self, relationships, and world (e.g., its capability to free individuals, communities, and societies from egocentric understandings of reality and associated ways of life) than with any particular spiritual referent or picture of reality disclosed [and pregiven by traditional [ethnocentric] religions and myths]. (p.3)

This collaborative a/r/tographic inquiry enacts the participatory turn mapped by Ferrer, and echoes Heron’s notion of spiritual and divine inquiry. Through making art, the women moved beyond pregiven traditional religions and myths, while translating an understanding of spirit that was deeply rooted in their beliefs and values, traditional and non-traditional. Creating art as part of a participatory whole enabled them to honour their individual values, while the group transcended entrenchment in any one tradition, becoming world-centric. The essential practice that applied to both the individual and the collaborative art making, was opening to and acting with the spirit that is present in all traditions. Spirit expressed itself through the erotic life force energies of the women in the sharing circles, art making experiences, and metaphorically

manifested in the art installation as a womb that could be entered. The womb of the art installation represented the sacred space of the Divine Mother. Within these sacred spaces, learning and inquiry was supported and the recognition of and lived experience of each woman as Divine was magnified. Working within a woman-only group intensified the emergence of the feminine aspects of the Divine, and cannot be ignored as an act of decolonization in the midst of logo-centric, patriarchal, text-based religions.

*A Connective Aesthetic and Radical Relatedness*

The experiences of the multiple a/r/tographic ritual inquiries within this dissertation find a theoretical home within the work of art writer Suzi Gablik (1992), who introduces a vision of “connective aesthetics” or relational aesthetics that underlies a new cultural imperative that is



Image 92

Bickel, Barbara (2008). *Dancing the Altars Performance Ritual*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School of Theology, Women’s Spirituality Celebration 2007, (Digital manipulated video still).



ethical at its base and accountable to others, the earth and the Kosmos. She describes art and connective aesthetics as integral, and that which “speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us into relationship (p. 51). This is a radical shift from the modernist understanding of individuality and freedom of art and artists. Chicago artist Othello Anderson supports Gablik’s (1992) vision, stating that,

... as an artist I can no longer consider making art that is void of moral consciousness, art that carries no responsibility, art without spiritual content, art that places form above content, or art that ignores the state of the world in which it exists. (cited in Gablik p. 50)

Tannis, who for many years had a performance art practice in the New York art world, shares at the closing sharing circle her aversion to the word a/r/tography and other academic discourses that try to redefine art. This is followed by what she has learned about a/r/tography and her respect for it in returning art to the community, hence introducing the new cultural imperative that Gablik and Anderson speak of:

... you know that I turn my nose up around it – sorry. But like, art is art, let it stand for itself, you don’t need to talk about it and analyze it and put it into an ography, and make it in to an academic discipline.... However, that being said, there is such a crucial, I mean it is really important for world progress for art to become more embedded in community and that is what a/r/tography is for, to bring people to an understanding of how – art has become isolated from community and art needs to be brought back to the community. And people need to know that each one of us is an artist, its not like artists over here, and spiritual leaders over here, and spiritual leaders over here and teachers over here. But we are each artists, and a/r/tography, which as I understand it, allows art to be – to be really seen as a mode of exploration of what it is to be alive, otherwise I don’t think people really understand that. So I’m now appreciating the incredible value of a/r/tography, so we made this whole project in community, we shared it with the community, and we did it in such a way that without having to stand on a podium or give lectures – it just seamlessly engaged people and seamlessly offered a space for people to find themselves in relationship to what we were doing, and find their own specific relationship to it.

Monica describes the lived relationality that she felt was strengthened within her own life, and by consequence, the lived connection within the group:

So I am seeing less boundaries, less compartmentalization in my life. In my head I knew it was all One, spirituality, creativity, life, everything is all that One.... So I am really very pleased the [a/r/tographic] process that we did with your project, for me just strengthened that, that whole thing, and then carrying on as it did it to me, it did it to the group, this strengthening, this cohesiveness.

The practice of radical relationality, according to Gablik, assists us to “redefine the self as relational, rather than as separate and self-contained” (p. 51). She goes on to explain that “The self that sees beyond merely personal existence to intersubjective coexistence and community is

the ecological self, opened up to our radical relatedness” (p. 51). This relational self she proposes has the ability to assist the evolution of social and cultural awareness. Mary Grey (1996), writing in a feminist theological context, draws from lesbian feminist theologian Carter Heyward in her argument that posits that the way to fully understand and manifest God as “power-in-relation” in the world, is to strengthen a feminist ethics of radical relatedness through exploring the ethics of connection. Buddhist teachings of transformation concur and profess a “radical relatedness and compassion for all living beings” (Davis, 1990, p. 81; Parachin, 2006). Within the realm of adult education, Elizabeth Lange (2004) found that adults in life transitions require restorative learning (explained more fully later) which includes “organic or radical relatedness to time, space, body, and relationships” (p. 131). With radical relatedness somewhat restored in their lives, Lange’s students were able to reach beyond the “personal spheres and ego self on to broader ecological and global human concerns” (p. 131) – i.e., world-centric value sphere. Within the art of nursing care, H. Gaydos (2006), defines the creation of radical relatedness as “cocreating a shared vision of what can be: art that overturns conventional perceptions of reality” (pp. 70-74). A notion of radical relatedness and the causal effect of change and transformation can be found when the disciplinary boundaries of art, religion, and science and education are crossed.

### Extending the Sacred Circle: New Visions

Monica, who has been part of the planning team for the past ten years, envisions an extension of the co-creative work she and the women have done--moving beyond personal selves and into the larger world. It is possible, she says, because the group’s learning has prepared them to take the next step:

So it is sort of exciting that in looking back we have had a couple of growth spurts or stages as a group, and we are on the verge of another one, and it is sort of like the other ones prepared us for this one, that this one you know we can take it on the road, take it out, within our community, within ourselves, so its this empowering sort of flight, or we could be on the edge...and say I don’t think so...[but] I think we’ve gone too far, there is no turning back that we have to go ahead and allow it to be as big as it will be and have no fear that we won’t be able to do it because I think as a group we have grown so much... I don’t see that it couldn’t be presented at the next parliament of the World Religions...when I was there is 2001 in Barcelona, that’s what they were wanting. How do you achieve dialogue? How do you work together? What do you have to let go of in order to embrace others? Mentally this is a great idea but how do you do it? Has anyone ever done it? And we have!

The postmodern approach of a/r/tography as ritual was able to take many of the women in the group (at least as a vision) to this next level of radical and relational engagement with the world.

It is radically relational in that it fosters a relational engagement with the world that is willing to “liv[e] and inquir[e] in the in-between, of constantly questing, and complicating that which has yet to be named” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xxxi). To live and inquire relationally in the world requires a commitment of responsibility to the other; human, non-human, the earth, and the Kosmos. This responsibility is not bound by regulating authorities but is a commitment to inquiry that is questing for new possibilities that arise out of relationships of inquiry, such as within communities of a/r/tographers, practicing within “circles of trust,” (Palmer, 2004) and co-creating with spirit, with the Divine (Heron, 2006).

In a world dominated by materialism that fosters living as a divided self (Alexander, 2005; Beittel, 1985; Fernandes, 2003; Palmer, 2004), an a/r/tographic practice brings the multiple aspects of the self, as artist/researcher/teacher/spiritual leader together. As an extension of this relational practice, a/r/tographers are radically asked “to understand living inquiry as responsibility,” and to engage an ethical practice that is willing to bring “responsibility to [self and other to] light” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xxxii). Responsibility is inevitably tied to our understanding of ethics. Stephanie Springgay (2008) situates the ethics of embodiment within the evolving theory of a/r/tography. Drawing from feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed (2000), who distinguishes ethics from morality, Springgay questions research methods that do not address the relational aspects of working with embodied others, as beings in relation. She suggests an ethics of embodiment as being-with, and is concerned with the processes of encounters, the meaning that is made *with*, *in* and *through* the body – and, not by discernable facts about a body (p. 154). Monica’s, Cathy’s and Ingrid’s global visions bring responsibility to light. These visions born from within the study may stretch each member of the WSC planning team to take the responsibility of thinking beyond the local, and to offer what they have learned and know to the global community, thus potentially entering an ethics of embodiment as being-with. Working with the body as a sacred site of knowing was explored and invited the women to fully know themselves and others more deeply as complex, multifaceted, and wonderfully diverse human beings. Within Merleau Ponty’s philosophy the importance of an embodied consciousness is articulated well: “The body is therefore a hinge; an articulation of the world” (Vasseleu, 1998, p. 27). The touching, eating, performing, walking, talking, singing, dancing, and erotic bodies of women being with each other is the hinge that articulates the learning/teaching within this dissertation.

When the practice of a/r/tography draws from the best of postmodern sensibilities and practices it offers an ecological inquiry practice. From its interdisciplinary locations it has the

possibility of decolonizing art from its limited patriarchal roots through its theoretical relational renderings and commitments that integrate a modernist visual paradigm, a postmodern listening paradigm, in an integrated visual and listening paradigm that includes the intercorporeality of all senses. As an inquiry into a the multi-faith learning context, the practice of a/r/tography as ritual assisted in the decolonization of the Divine, as well as the decolonization of secular education and art.

### Holding Sacred Space and Women's Spiritual Leadership

To understand the complex personal, historical, political and sacred relationships of women spiritual leaders in a multi-faith consciousness-raising group, as they strengthen their connection to the Divine Feminine, and evolve as a group, requires the creation of sacred space and an understanding of the unique locations they live in as leaders of multi-faith and spiritual education. In her writing on feminism, sexual politics, memory, and the sacred, Jacqui Alexander (2005) speaks of the decolonization of desire, and the restoration of erotic life forces in all aspects of our lives. Sacred space is understood by Alexander as the "... space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine" (p. 282). It is, as Alexander shares, a place of interdependency, a metaphysical place of yearning for home that is not based on passive sameness but a "movement towards wholeness" (p. 282). Wholeness, as understood by Alexander, breaks down divisions and hierarchies that are part of the dismembering tactics of colonization. Coalitions motivated by a yearning for wholeness require sacred space for developing an active *conscientize*, defined by Paulo Friere as "shifts in consciousness [that] happen through active processes of practice and reflection (p. 283). It is a "job of changing the self" (p. 282) Alexander writes, that requires excavation work and practice on the part of the individual and cannot be done from watching on the sidelines. Creating and/or entering sacred space can assist in altering ones sense of displacement from the self and others.

Religious scholar Joan Branham (2002) reminds us that "sacred space is not a static unchanging concept. It changes over time depending on the different culture, different time, different place" (p. 1). Artist educator Susan Shantz describes sacred space within her art practice as a space where one's existence is opened up rather than closed down (1999, p. 68). In his seminal book *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade (1957) defines sacred space and place as the sacred center of the world for religious humans, where experiences and signs from

the Divine are communicated. Sacred space, in his understanding is cosmos-centered, in contrast to chaos laden profane space (as interpreted by John Durham, 2003).

Adult educators English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) offer an overview of ways to “cultivat[e] learning environments as sacred spaces” (p. 80), suggesting that invoking spirit into a learning space brings forward the common element of air and breath, which keeps us alive. They write, “Our spirit is a place where the sacred part of us may live– in fact, must live. We must create a space for the spiritual” (p. 81). This space is “both open and structured... welcoming and challenging... [it is] inviting for individuals and the group... honor[s] both individual stories and stories from the discipline... support[s] solitude and community building... [and] welcome[s] both quiet and speech (pp. 87-88). Shirin, who is the only remaining founding member of the WSD, remembers the sacred space she was part of creating at the University as,

... a wonderful thing on campus in the educational system, is the recognition that secular and sacred can work together, and co-exist and need to co-exist. The reason is that our women’s spirituality conference started with this dire need in a secular university to find a sacredness, and to recognize in each other that sacredness is important for our survival.

In summarizing Jane Vella’s three essential components of sacred space, which can move us beyond a survival experience, English et al., (2003) wrote, “It simply makes sense to us as adult educators and trainers that the triumvirate of respect, dialogue and accountability will effectively help adult educators and trainers create sacred spaces in the learning environment” (p. 85). John Heron (1998) supports this understanding of sacred space:

A sacred space is much more than a geographical entity. Sacred space is created not so much with things as with attitudes and dispositions. A space can never be embodied with a sacred nature until it is inhabited with particular thoughts, people, and care. ( p. 34)

Educator Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005), refers to pedagogical space as a pivot point through which we learn and know differently, where the inside and outside are in interrelationship, destabilizing binaries and rigid ways of knowing (p. 37). Although Ellsworth does not address sacred space as such, her theorizing of space and place situates pedagogy at the threshold between chaos and the cosmos, at the place of yearning and change that many others recognize as sacred space.<sup>5</sup> Educator Parker Palmer, writes of the learning space of education as a spiritual journey (1983), and advocates for transformative learning through what he calls a “circle of trust” (2004). Within this circle, a striving towards wholeness and integrity, and living an undivided life is its sacred thrust. Palmer (2004) roots the circles in two basic beliefs:

First, we all have an inner teacher whose guidance is more reliable than anything we can get from a doctrine, ideology, collective belief system, institution, or leader. Second, we all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us discern the inner teacher's voice" (pp. 25-26). Within a circle of trust, unconditional love is paired with the expectancy of the revelation of truth in the moment; creating a collective space that has reverence for, and emboldens the inner journey. The sacred space created, held, and sustained, within the study became the pivot point of learning within the circle of trust and reverence, and was clearly voiced as such by the women. Within sacred space their inner teacher emerged and was attended to by the other women and themselves. Through the multiple avenues of expressing and learning engaged in the study, the divided life of the women had an opportunity to glimpse itself as whole within the group. The ability of the group to hold sacred space, and to allow themselves to be held within it, distinguishes women's leadership based on shared power, giving service and complex interrelationships from traditional patriarchal male leadership so often based on individual heroic power and autonomous direction (Fernandes, 2003).

Alexander (2005) further defines the epistemology of the sacred in her work as immortal and "linked to the pulse of energy of creation" (p. 326). The life force that is the sacred, she shares is simultaneously individual and collective, involving "multiple praxis of embodiment" (p. 326) that includes yet moves beyond, the body and involves a "rewiring of the senses" (p. 328). To take the sacred seriously she writes "would mean coming to wrestle with the dialectic of permanent impermanence" (p. 327). The Western rational enlightenment paradigm, she argues, is unable to see from its hegemonic position the mystery of the sacred, and as such is destructive of life force energy. Part of the work of this dissertation, and possibly the reason the study was so fully embraced by the women, was because it would become a record of this sacred work, validated by and archived within, the public institution of the university. Sacred space created in learning environments is a rare and powerful occurrence that is fully felt in the moment, but its memory can be fleeting. It relies on the voices of women being spoken and recorded, and on the continued renewal of commitments to learning/teaching and the emergence of new commitments to learning/teaching. It relies on creating circles of trust from which to co-lead, ensuring the direct presence of sacred space, and thus Divinity in our lives.

In their evolving roles as spiritual leaders in the study, the women create an annual time-limited event within a sacred space of learning, that operates in the tangible/intangible space of permanent impermanence. As of the year of this study, the event no longer has co-sponsorship with an institution or a permanent space to support the work. The group and the conference more

than ever could disappear with virtually no trace at any time. The conference is completely dependent on the volunteer work of the planning team-- which is a group that changes each year. There is no hierarchical organizational structure linked with any one religious or secular institutional body in the group. Yet the group is linked tangentially to numerous religious and institutional bodies through the individual women. Mary Farrell Bednarowski (2005) writes that, ... women's simultaneous roles as insiders and outsiders in institutions and culture.... is particularly apparent in religion. Historically, women have outnumbered men in religious participation, at least in the West, thereby affording them an intimate knowledge of many aspects of their traditions. (p. 184)

Having intimate knowledge of their individual traditions as insider/outside suggests a predisposition for women to become multi-faith leaders. At the same time, shifting locations leads to crossing borders that cause one to "... to live aloud the malaise of categories and expertise [and to] be questioned and pushed to their limits so as to resist the comfort of belonging and of fixed classification" (Trinh, 2005, p. 16). Trinh has referred to this experience as an "inappropriate(d) other."<sup>6</sup>

As of the year of this study, the women embody the identity of inappropriate(d) others in that they are creating sacred space in the margins of multi-faith education outside of any one religious tradition. This affords them a renewed position of joyful revolt located in-between as insider/outside offering "knowledge-without-power." Of this Trinh writes:

Between knowledge and power, there is room for knowledge-without-power. Or knowledge at rest.... The terrain remains fresh for it cannot be occupied, not even by its specific creator.... Can knowledge circulate without a position of master? Can it be conveyed without the exercise of power? No [and],... Yes, however, because in-between ground always exists, and cracks and interstices are like gaps of fresh air that keep on being suppressed because they tend to render more visible the failures operating in every system. (1999, p. 262)

The Kosmos-centered location the women have co-created requires they continually operate within an internal and external transitional space that crosses their individual spiritual and/or religious identity with their multi-faith leader identity. A/r/tographers are located in a similar troubling position within education as they continually position themselves as inappropriate(d) others, crossing, and sliding between and amongst their locations as artist, as researcher, as teacher. A/r/tographers unsettle and disrupt fixed categories within the traditional disciplines by drawing attention to the suspended meaning of differentiated expertise in any field or discipline. The women of the WSC planning team practicing as a/r/tographers unsettled and disrupted rigid

binaries and ways of knowing while nourishing the sacred through art making as a location of restorative and transformative learning within the study.

*Living the Divine Politically and Spiritually*

Leela Fernandes (2003), Jacqui Alexander (2005), Luce Irigaray (2005), David Abalos (1998), and many others theorists call for the reintegration of all aspects of life within the person, if we truly want to transform all configurations of injustice and oppression within our world. This work recognizes the decolonization of the Divine or the sacred from secular and religious-based colonization as essential for multi-faith consciousness to emerge and flourish in our society. Creating an integral space for the human yearning for wholeness, and being with others, is part of the work of decolonizing the Divine. Abalos calls this integral space the “four faces” of humans, which need to be acknowledged and attended to for liberation to take place. He names these faces as the political, personal, historical, and sacred. Fernandes refers to integral transformative work as living divinity in all areas of ones life; Alexander as nurturing the erotic as the divine connection between the spiritual, sexual, and political (p. 283), Irigaray in turn, claims that for “humanity to become itself divine breath” (p. 137) requires an “alliance between the divine and the mortal” (p. 145). While reflecting upon the creation of the performance ritual at the gallery art talk, Annie notes the alliance between the divine and the mortal that she witnessed and was part of:

... we came from a place of wanting to express our spiritual selves... the process allowed ritual to grow out of us, out of our bodies, out of our heart's imaginations, and yes, we bring who we are with our past conditioning to it, but to be able to create something that was truly all of us, and yet would resonate with everybody who witnessed it. I think it was very... it certainly was a profound experience for me being part of it.

To further understand how expressing all aspects of ourselves can transform a community, I draw from Fernandes (2003), as she articulates well in “Transforming Feminist Practice,” the political problem of separating religion and spirituality from secular politics, which I posited as a significant problem in the introduction of this dissertation. She addresses the problem of liberation by calling for the decolonization of Divinity from secular and religious institutions. She claims that separating the spiritual from the material allows the colonization of the Divine to be perpetuated by both religious organizations and political groups. She writes that resistance is not enough, and transformation of all “forms of hierarchy injustice and repression” (p. 118) requires that we live Divinity in all aspects of our lives. This understanding of lived Divinity is



known in the “mystical roots of organized religion.” It does not teach the “commodification of ‘God’” (p. 115). She critiques many postmodern thinkers in their rejection of mysticism and spirituality by mistaking the “unrepresentable for the unrealizable” (p. 118). The women within the study began to move beyond resistance and towards transformation in the practice of holding each woman on the planning team as Divine. This in turn brought to light the dividedness of the women’s lives and the importance of “restorative learning.”

As a multi-faith group, the women in the study often turned to the mystical roots of religious traditions to find sacred resonances and understandings of the Divine present in all religious traditions and spiritual practices. Within the group, the Divine is understood as beyond gender, but for many the Divine is recognized and addressed as feminine. The manifestation of the Divine as feminine is then easily transferred to, and associated with, each woman in the group. The spiritual agreement implicit within the group, is to hold each other as sacred and Divine. Within the study this was directed into further manifestations of spirit through the making, performing and exhibiting of art, arguably acting as a further decolonizing process.

In recognizing each other’s presence and creative acts as Divine, the group entered an open and vulnerable space. Sharing stories, reflections, and art, and being witnessed by the group, allowed the historical, political, personal and sacred faces to be valued and given voice, increasing the possibility of integration of all aspects of the women’s lives to occur. At the same time, the collective and consistent impact of being recognized as Divine and entering an in-depth exploration together through the study, made visible the contradictions, fears, and imbalances in the women’s everyday lives. Educator Parker Palmer (2005) writes of the “divided self” that is so prevalent in our society and acknowledges that,

Living integral lives is daunting. We must achieve a complex integration that spans the contradictions between inner and outer reality, that supports both personal integrity and the common good. No, it is not easy work. But as Rilke suggests, by doing it, we offer what is sacred within us to the life of the world. (n.p.)

The women could not easily hide personal struggles while being invited to reveal themselves as Divine within the group. The “underbellies” of a colonized Divine or colonized spiritual self became visible as the unintegrated aspects of lives became apparent. Melodie voices with acute clarity the struggle of the divided self that so many women live with:

What I saw going into the first process was that my religion, that’s now turned into my spirituality, because I define them very different, distinctly different, has always been extremely private. And my spirituality that I began to unfold in this circle, wasn’t something that I was prepared to share with the world. In that it was for me... and this process was

bringing it into the world and that was terrifying for me. It was oh, I can't do that, I won't do that. I shouldn't do that, could I do that? And a whole struggle of hierarchies of ego, the presence of things I didn't even know I had in my lineage, practices of my family, or non practice of my family... -- huge stuff boiling over.

In differing ways, throughout the study, the difficulty of integration was evident for many of the women—that is, at work, with parents, with family, with one's art, with one's academic community, and with friends. An imbalance of life force energy was at work obstructing either full participation, or the ability to fully share the project with others outside of the group. In my view' this is related to the chaos and complexity at work in the women's lives. If women spiritual leaders struggle to live integrated lives, the struggle of humans living divided lives in our society without spiritual awareness and support is probably even greater. The group's creation of the *Woman Spirit Shield* as a protective artifact speaks simultaneously to the paradoxical and hence conflictual desire and fear present in women to fully embody and integrate their lives with the calling of the sacred and the Divine<sup>7</sup>.

### *Religious Disidentification*

In response to the common struggles and problems that arise from unintegrated lives, Fernandes directs us to the practice of “religious disidentification,” which she claims is required to live fully as Divine. This does not mean leaving one's religious tradition but it does mean releasing one's religious claim to one truth<sup>8</sup> (p. 103). Fernandes's stance is that until there is a releasing of religious truth claims, inter-religious conflict and intolerance will be perpetuated. The women in this study have reached, to varying degrees, a level of disidentification from a religious identity, as without at least a cognitive level of disidentification, they would not be able to fully enter the work of a multi-faith conference that does not profess any one religious claim to truth. Fernandes further argues that the borders of religious territory have been symbolic and material, and need to soften. In loosening the borders, there is an opportunity to do the work of decolonizing the Divine. In loosening the borders of the women's religious identity further through making and publicly performing and exhibiting of art, the women stepped to the edge of disidentifying as women-only spiritual leaders-- standing up as public spiritual leaders outside of the contained women-only conference setting. Fernandes (2003) points to the importance of religious leaders publicly speaking out for interreligious respect:

In recent times, the violent nature of religious conflict and intolerance has become so brutally apparent across the world that we have seen numerous religious leaders speak of a need for interreligious harmony and a respect for the existence of religious difference. Such

developments are of invaluable significance, given the fact that religious leaders of institutionalized faiths continue to have an immense impact on a majority of individuals. (p. 109)

She points out that if this call for harmony is framed within a material language discourse of anti-colonialism, or one of historical religious oppression, it can exacerbate the secular colonizing of the Divine that often is underlying the struggle. Colonialism she reminds us has “shaped both secular and religious movements” (p. 109). Within mystical religious traditions, the essence of the teaching is to decolonize “the divine from all forms of hierarchy, control and injustice” (p. 107). In keeping with mystical teachings, she further argues that the work of social justice and decolonization requires that we do not revert to tactics that are embedded in the material language of anti-colonialism, and instead advocate a living Divinity integrated fully in our lives. This means to interconnect the personal, political, historical, and sacred aspects of individuals and society; the inner with the outer reality. The difficulty of living Divinity as fully integrated in ones life in a material world, is revealed as possible; although complex and not without struggle, within the circle of trust that the women of the study created. This study offers an example of how *a/r/tography* as ritual can reveal and support the radical and relational practice of living an undivided life with spirit as the Divine, through the creation of art.

Fernandes (2003) calls for disidentification and integration of the Divine into all aspects of one’s life, and offers a good foundational basis for radical relationality within liberatory social justice groups. It should be noted that it is an *ideal* to work towards, and requires a level of emotional, spiritual, and political maturity that not all persons possess or are able to live in an integrated way. Pedagogically, a gradual entry into the process of disidentification and integration is required. In addition, there is a responsibility to hold sacred the complexity that will inevitably arise from doing this work with groups. The support of responsible and committed others willing and able to consciously hold the “disorienting dilemmas” (a la Mezirow) that surface, is essential. The women in this study have a commitment to hold each other as Divine, yet in the stretching of the WSC group’s boundaries into a public research and art sphere, the contradiction of unintegrated divided lives revealed ruptures in the group. One could question if the WSC group underestimated what it means to hold each other as Divine in an integrative way? It is a risk to make the commitment to live the Divine politically and spiritually-- a risk that takes people into unknown territory, and that we can never know prior, what the impact may be. The practice that guided and supported the group in the disorienting group dilemmas was one of continued respect for each individual without judgment, letting go of

attachments, disappointments, and personal ideals and beliefs, while keeping the circle of Divinity and trust intact.

### *From Private to Public*

Fernandes notes that a person's spirituality is not private, but rather represents her or his relationship with the world (p. 114). The shift from private to public and becoming visible as spiritual women leaders in the open public forum of the AMS Art Gallery, reflected the women's relationships with the world, and brought forward varying degrees of anxiety and discomfort. Feminist dance educator Sherry Shapiro (1999), echoes the experience of the women as artists and validates their struggle to step into transformative action in a new way:

Art must remain on the fringes of society to retain its liberating powers. Yet artist must not go too far from the real if their work is to reveal and indict reality, to hold within it the hope for change. Art must incorporate Freire's definition of authentic liberation as a praxis where one is engaged in reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Women as artists, must look at their own hopes and desires, coming together in the struggle to reshape our lives. (p. 123)

The women were impacted in different ways. Shirin became acutely self conscious of the fact that she was the only woman of colour in the group. Her colonizing cultural conditioning of being quiet and not seen within public venues, in particular, where both genders are present was disrupted. Nané more fully realized the vulnerability and resistance she had been feeling as a graduate student, "outing" herself spiritually, within another's research, while in relationship with faculty members who attended the gallery opening performance ritual. Annie found herself not being willing to invite family members to the event for fear of their judgment. Three women chose not to be part of the performance ritual at the AMS gallery, and two of those women found themselves not able to cross the public boundary to visit the gallery during its one week showing. One of the women chose not to exhibit her individual art piece in the public exhibition, although one year later she is able agreed to have it present in this dissertation. As the main researcher, I found myself thrown into an initial state of shock when my two male dissertation committee members appeared at the opening. I had been so caught up in the women's energy, the details of the installation, and preparing and holding the space for the other women, I forgot they were to be there. Their presence reminded me that I, and this work, was being evaluated, assessed, and could fail. It then took a number of days for me to shake the inner fear that this work was not supported by others.

Living the Divine politically and spiritually, as is evidenced in this study, requires conscious and supportive community with a deep commitment to one's own development as a spiritual woman leader. Women's historian Gerda Lerner (1993), clearly states "the most important thing I learned [in writing *The Creation of Patriarchy*] was the significance to women of their relationship to the Divine and the profound impact the severing of that relationship had on the history of women" (p. vii). The profound impact of this loss continues to this day. Jacqui Alexander (2005) in speaking of what is required of those desiring and striving towards a return of the Divine into all aspects of life tells us this work, which is not limited to linear human time, "needs our courage, revolutionary patience, and intentional shifts in consciousness so that we can anchor the struggle for social justice within the ample space of the erotic" (p. 283).

Remembering the dream I had prior to the artist residency, I understand the need for courage, and even more so for the "revolutionary patience" required to integrate Divine erotic life forces with traditional mainstream institutions and their worldviews. My human life will probably not see a huge shift in the integration of masculine and feminine Divine consciousness, yet, my contribution to the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine is significant in that it is contributing to the paradigm shift. The contribution of the WSC conference in making this shift, is minute, but significant. It creates an intentional space for shifts in consciousness to occur, for truth making and world making even momentarily, in many woman's lives-- to know themselves as Divine. In response to the title that this dissertation was eventually given, "Living the Divine Spiritually and Politically," a few of the women shared not feeling it was an accurate reflection of the study. Others appreciated that it reminded them of the important work that we are doing in the world. Shirin (April 24, 2008) responded after engaging her own further research:

Initially I was taken aback by the title including the word 'politically' for I had not given much thought about it. Yesterday I came up on a book 'Interfaith Pilgrims: Living truth and truthful living' by Eleanor Nesbitt (Swarthmore Lecture 2003. Published by Quaker Books, May 2003 (London). After reading it, I understand the full implication of adding 'political' in to your title. She writes: "What is true is to try to work out how truth relates to one another – truths which are enshrined in different scriptures, then internalized and articulated (I would add, ritualized, expressed and experienced) by different faiths (and spiritual paths) .... Truth is not discovered in isolation from others.... Truth can talk to each other....but they do so in the sense that is itself dialogical. Truth is already interfaith, it is our own inner conversations, and in our exchanges with others, that we catch sight of truth"(p.98).

This engagement with Truth and our commitment to Truth, is defined by a word: 'Satyagraha' coined by Gandhi. 'Satya' means truth and 'graha' means 'seizing' and 'holding firmly.' For Gandhi, this was manifested in the political struggle of non-violence. "Darshan" is the benediction of glimpsing Divinity, however fleetingly and of knowing that the Divine gaze has fallen upon one....Darshan further validates our memories of significant

encounters with inspirational individuals, with works of art, or places of great natural beauty in the course of our own spiritual journeying.’ (p.75). *Women’s spirituality celebration* then becomes our ‘Satyagraha,’ where ‘Darshans’ happen and spill over to our ‘other’ lives.

Medwyn reflects on the contribution and spilling out into the world she recognizes WSC making towards the multi-faith movement:

I look at some of the other multi-faith organizations and I don’t have the same sense of openness and invitation. I also don’t have that same sense of multi-faith being interpreted to being anything we already have a name for and all the other things we don’t. I have a sense with our celebration that we have room for all other spiritual expressions and faiths that aren’t labeled or named.... I love that we have people among us who proudly carry the names of two or more different spiritual traditions. And I think that is something, perhaps that we need to have more of out there.... We have something very precious and very valuable in this culture today, something that really speaks to some of the biggest challenges our society and many societies and cultures are facing in the world today. You know we are demonstrating and making evident that it is possible for different traditions to come together. And to show at the core of every faith tradition, there is this piece about love and tolerance and being a person of spirit no matter what label you put on it – has basically the same meaning no matter what your tradition is, and we have shown that.

Women’s multi-faith spiritual leadership is complex and fragile. Despite this being a group of women, who have created and worked within what feels like a safe sacred space, when the project shifted to exposure in a public sphere, opening itself beyond a women-only celebration, the divided aspects of the women’s lives surfaced to the point that a number of the women were unable to be part of the public aspect of the research. Although we have political sanction to express religious and spiritual practices freely, the cultural, historical, familial, and emotional limits that are held individually and collectively as women’s traumas still keep us divided as humans. In North America we are (theoretically) the most ‘free,’ yet many women still struggle with internalized oppression(s) that limit their ability to be fully whole as spiritual leaders. The work of change and transformation, as my dream of the creation and destruction of women’s sacred space reminded me, is “revolutionary slow” as Alexander reminds us.

The naming of the conference as a “celebration” when it transitioned from a Christian-based to a multi-faith focus can be read, in the light of this study, as a device of the women, as subaltern spiritual leaders, to safeguard an effective experiential and affective woman’s spiritual learning space that challenges the normative “truth” of some mainstream religions. The name serves to underplay the political significance and emotional risks that many of the women in the study have given testament to. Sara Ahmed (2000) addresses the political risk that subaltern women enter when “bearing witness to historical injustice” (p. 380) through “truth making” (p.

379) in her article entitled “The politics of fear in the making of worlds.” This dissertation offers space for women spiritual leaders’ testimonials as subaltern subjects, and holds the power of emotional affect that is based in relationality, which can move us to “make” and “unma[k]e” worlds (p. 380). Each year the WSC is experienced and witnessed by women participants, facilitators, healers, and organizers, as world making and unmaking takes place. Spiritual world making is not a static undertaking and requires continual truth making that is not afraid of change. The “truth making” of the subaltern, Ahmed argues, is often a threat to the normative truth of institutions that have “epistemic commitments” (p. 379) to “rules and procedures that govern institutional life becom[ing] “truths” that are lived as givens” and defended “ against the risk of injury or loss” of change.

#### Decolonization of Art and the Divine

It is my opinion that art lost its creative urge the moment it was separated from worship.

Ingmar Bergman (cited in Steiner, 1964, p. viii)

Acknowledging that we have been and are colonized both in our minds and in our imaginations, we begin to understand the need for promoting and celebrating creative expression.

bell hooks (1995, p.4)

Art theorist Carol Becker (2002), in agreement with Stuart Hall, says that we are in a post-*postmodern* moment in time. Which means we know what has preceded this time and are, “tired of deconstruction, uncertain about the future” (Becker, 2002, p. 26), and determined to move ahead by “extend[ing], not abandoning, the terrain of past philosophical work” (p. 26). This post-postmodern time can be seen as soiling of contexts, rendering them relational, creating wild connections (Reinhard Braum, n.d.). These theorists can be said to be looking for a distinction between the best side of postmodern assumptions<sup>9</sup> and the “extremist wing of postmodernism, and the result of... a totally deconstructed world...” (Wilber, 1998, p. 121). My attraction to these theorists is because of their turn to an interrelational theory and practice of art, and engaged citizenship, in a complex and globalizing world. However, from a postmodern feminist perspective, post-postmodernism<sup>10</sup> is potentially embedded in an undermining of the best of the feminist project (Braidotti, 2005), and is to be scrutinized more than it is.

The decolonization of the Divine is linked inextricably to the decolonization of art within a spiritual feminist a/r/tographic practice that does not separate the spirit of art from art or the artist. Art and religion are historically linked, and thus art has been colonized by the same

patriarchal patterns found in secularism and religion (Coleman, 1998). Modern artist, Wassily Kandinsky “held that when art is not flourishing, religion languishes: ‘... periods, during which art has no noble champion ... are periods of retrogression in the spiritual world’ (Coleman, 1998, p. xv). Through the making of art, Irigaray’s alliance between the Divine and the mortal is made. Through the colonization of art, first by the religious, and then the secular world, women have been further separated from actively developing a direct relationship with the Divine, and by extension, from public recognition of this relationship that being an artist offers (Edelson, 2002). Through the invalidation of crafts as legitimate art forms, an area of art-making that women have been enabled to participate in, the contemporary art world continues to ignore and colonize the Divine. In addition women continue to be excluded from the contemporary art world as feminist art activists such as The Guerilla Girls (Chadwick, 2002) regularly point out. Although it was not an objective of this study to make women into “artists,” the study offered the women an opportunity to manifest their relationship with the Divine through art. Annie, a theatre artist in her own right, expresses the integrative learning that she gained from this research:

Well, I learned a lot as an artist,... how to access my artist self through spiritual practice... So this idea of trance and visualization and something coming out is very powerful, is hugely powerful and its one way I see myself working through all those blocks that I’ve put on myself all those years.... And I came from an evangelical background... so this is really interesting allowing in other understandings of spirituality.

Medwyn likewise discovered through the study the interrelatedness of her spiritual leadership work being fed by her creativity:

... the other day I was reading somewhere... that creativity is spirituality and spirituality is creativity... that’s been a wonderful revelation, how much of my spirituality and spiritual practice as it stands now is an expression of my creativity?

Monica shares the learning she has acquired in the a/r/tographic process, having come from a thirty year science background:

I really learned a lot about letting go. And seeing this process work. I’m the detailed oriented person... So it was cute sometimes, I was the one saying, trust me, it will work.

Monica also began keeping an artist journal. Keeping track of process is something she struggled with in her own art practice: “... part of my learning with this group was to have a safe place to say words.” Shirin too found a new place to express words. English is her third language but she found herself writing and thinking poetry in English for the first time during this a/r/tographic process, because she was invited and encouraged to write. Valerie admits at the art talk in the gallery to being afraid of making art on her own at the first weekend of art making. She then



describes in detail the excitement of experimenting with painting on deer hide, side by side with Annie and Ingrid, while she produced her own art piece on the group retreat weekend. Cathy reflects on the embodied and creative aspects of the performance ritual, *Dancing the Altars*, she was part of at the WSC weekend:

I had a real sense that we were playing, not play at something, not pretending, but that we had allowed playfulness to be there. If women who were watching [at the conference] who had not been allowed to play, make faces at each other, move their bodies – what was it like for them to say ‘gee, looks like they are having fun, looks like they might now each other a little bit, looks like they may have played with each other for two years.’ Yeah to be known hey -- to know each others bodies.

Nané comments on the contrasts between the preparation for and the actual gallery performance ritual.

... that Friday night practice where we were so tense, you know, and then doing the actual work on the Sunday night, and it was so beautiful, and then when you watch it [on the DVD], wow, total priestesses!

To exhibit the art and perform as artists/priestesses in a public art gallery and at the WSC validated the women’s Divine creative connection personally and publicly. In this sense, the making and exhibiting of art within the context of an integrated spiritual and art practice contributes to the decolonization of both the Divine and art. Medwyn shares her revelation: “It was a sacred ceremony, it was art... it is not just a ritual and not just a performance, but a performance ritual.”

### *Cosmic Christ Blessing*

The decolonization of the Divine and art infiltrates our small planning meetings outside of the study as well. Recently, I was at Shirin’s home with the group of women who are visioning the large group gathering rituals for the WSC 2008 weekend. Shirin is the leader of this part of the conference planning and prepared a feast and set her best china for us. This meal and visioning meeting is positively anticipated as part of the planning ritual. Shirin offers this annual meal of eating together as her gift of nourishment for the women, and the women in turn are always deeply touched by the gift, and gratefully receive it.

From my seat at the table I saw pottery plates made by Shirin, and a print of the painting by Leonardo da Vinci of the *Last Supper* hanging on her walls. I was reminded of feminist artist Mary Beth Edelson’s art piece, *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* that created a stir in 1972, when it was first exhibited and again 20 years later in 1992 when it was donated to

the Women's Center at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania. Most recently, in 2000, the debate was opened again at Franklin and Marshall College when eight faculty members complained about its presence as an affront to Christianity (Aleci, 2002, p. 33). In this piece, Edelson works with a print of da Vinci's Last Supper painting and replaces the heads of the disciples with photos of the heads of living women artists. For the head of Christ she chose Georgia O'Keefe's head. Around the border of the art piece she collaged eighty-two more images of living women artists. Edelson's art and performance rituals have been challenging and de-stabilizing patriarchal representation of women since the 1970s. This particular art piece "sparked debate between religious communities and feminists" (Aleci, 2005, n.p.), and is a particularly poignant example of both an act of the de-colonization of art and the Divine Feminine. Art writer John Ewing recognized this double challenge and wrote "Linking art with religion and picturing women in a male context, Edelson challenged the historical hierarchies of two powerful narratives" (cited in Edelson, 2002, p. 32e). Edelson herself writes,

The interest in this poster that continues today arises, I believe, from the lack of real power and position for women in organized religion. While this position has not changed substantially, there is considerable pressure to make these changes and this tension is most likely the underlying cause of resurgent interest, a quarter of a century later. (Edelson, 2002, p. 32e)

I made a wild connection, and smiled as I thought of this art piece hanging in Shirin's home, and recognized that we are, in part, performing Edelson's art piece of decolonizing the Divine, scripting a woman empowered narrative while visioning the large ritual components of the next WSC conference. As I sat at the ritual table with this group of women spiritual leaders, eating bread pudding and drinking red wine, I was deeply grateful for and in awe of the Divine wise woman leader offering her "Cosmic Christ"<sup>11</sup> blessings to the women at her sacred table through her art and food.

### Spiritual Learning

The WSC conference crosses the domains of both religious education, multi-faith education and spiritual education, not through the teaching of religious doctrine, nor multi-faith content as focus, but through the sharing of expressions of the Divine and one's spirituality, through diverse ritual, workshops, symbols, music, dance, and conversations. Within the doctoral study, religious education took place in sometimes unexpected ways. A profound interaction occurred at one of

the sharing circles, where some of the women were forced to look beyond their own religious biases and hurts to that of a participatory vision for spiritual knowing, that does not need to exclude religious symbols (Womb Entering, DVD 1). Shirin had returned from a family trip to India the day prior to the gathering of sharing art. Although not Catholic herself, she had visited a Catholic cathedral where she experienced thousands of worshippers praying. She was so moved by the energy she experienced at this place that she found herself buying rosaries<sup>12</sup> as gifts for the women on the planning team. In the circle she shared her story and one by one walked around the circle and handed each of the women a rosary. Each received the gift in various ways. For a number of the women there was a moment of apprehension in receiving this Catholic symbol.

The group sharing that followed, in response to the gift, included memories of attending a friend's Catholic mass as a child and loving the ritual, of traveling in a Catholic country and being in awe of the apparent spiritual leadership of older women in the communities. For others, receiving this gift raised their ongoing discomfort and struggle with Christianity. Ingrid spoke with humour "this is just what a Jew needs." Some chose to wear the rosary around their neck. Others were not able to move beyond holding it and playing with it in their hands. Yet, all received the gift with gratitude and left with a sense of connection to the Catholic spirit that was brought from India through these rosaries. A simple symbolic gesture served to cross the line of tolerating other religious symbols, to receiving another's religious symbol as part of one's life in some small way. A few of the women brought their rosaries to be part of the art installation at the AMS Gallery. I regularly see a few of the women wearing the rosary at WSC planning team meetings. My black rosary, although I have not been able to wear it, has hung above my desk, alongside a divinatory pendulum given to me by my stepdaughter, and a shell-bead-feather Brazilian earring given to me by a friend. Each reminding me of the different cultures and spiritual practices that touch my life.

### Restorative and Transformative Learning

Some of the learning that occurred in this study is "transformative" yet it is impacted by and nuanced within the complexity of "restorative learning," that is, self care, and spiritual connection within the relationality of the co-inquirers. Transformative learning theory (e.g., Mezirow, 1991) "suggests that transformative learning develops out of a cognitive disequilibrium or a disorienting dilemma" where chaos and order simultaneously occur (Lange,

2004, p. 122). Based on her study of adult learners in life transitions, Lange critiques transformative learning theory as having (for the most part) insufficiently focused on the relational, spiritual, and restorative aspects of transformation. She points out that although transformative learning theory understands the requirement of stability to survive the disorientation of transformation, it tends to locate itself predominantly in the discourse of individual psychology and autonomous actions. Restorative learning, according to Lange (2004), acknowledges the often disillusioned and divided life of learners in Western society. It offers the learner an opportunity to recover and reinstate displaced ethical values and practices in their life. It requires the creation of an “ethical sanctuary” or sacred space for the learning to be engaged, and a return to a whole experience of the radical relatedness of all aspects of life. This entails a slowing down to reconnect with the Kosmos, nature, and nurturing relationships. When these requirements are met, a shift “from having to being” (Lange, 2004, p. 132) has the opportunity to take place. From a restored location, redefining values and meaning, that are supportive of living with integrated ethical, and embodied values and practices can occur.

In overcoming the divided self, the passion to fully engage with others in groups, movements, and life is opened wide. Gablik (1992) and others call this the “ecological self.” Educator and psychotherapist Eimear O’Neill (2005) whose practice is based in transformative learning within a participatory worldview, suggests that,

The growth of sanctuary is both internal and relational. It is embedded in the natural world as we are embedded in the natural world. And, sanctuary, as an interior space is loving.

Loving and knowing are the same word in many languages. Fully understanding another’s world fosters love.... Sanctuary is mutually created. (p. 10)

Lange (2004) argues that once one has found sanctuary and restored the equilibrium or balance of an ecological self the ability to change or transform one’s consciousness and way of living in the world is more possible. It is here that transformative learning can occur. Lange expands on the significance of engaging a dialectic of restorative and transformative learning:

The dialectic of transformative and restorative learning is vital, for it affirms that transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness.... thus, as participants restore their ethics and transform their interaction with the material, social, and physical realities, they seek avenues for getting involved in community issues that enact their sense of social and environmental responsibility. (p. 137)

Knowledge of restorative learning, as part of an a/r/tographic inquiry process as an ethic of embodiment, became visible within this study and by extension in the WSC conference. I further explain the restorative learning that emerged in the study as it was an intuitive development within my own dissertation journey as well as for the women within the study.

Before embarking on the artist residency I wrote of feeling that my being was parched and waterless. I knew that the ecological balance of my life was off, and recognized my need to empty myself and detoxify emotionally, spiritually, and physically, before I could begin to respond to, and write the dissertation. Jacqui Alexander's reminder to "water the erotic as that place of Divine connection which can transform the ways we relate to one another" (p. 100) was well taken. I took myself to a sacred space, to an artist studio on an island surrounded by water, and began a daily practice of reconnecting with my body, soul, and spirit. I regained my connection to the Kosmos in watching the moon wane and wax within the time-frame of two full moons. I began to remember my purpose and reasons for doing this work and began to overcome my pattern of forgetting the passions that ignite my spirit. I restored connection with my body and spirit through daily sojourns along the lakeshore, walking labyrinths, conversing with a wise academic over dinner, and by receiving a hug from Amma as the Divine Mother. Fed by the landscape I was immersed within, I further watered my soul through the daily creation of mandalas and the textile art that unfolded. I shifted from being full of emotional and physical pain to Beingness, and was able to return to, and re-instigate ethical and embodied decisions for living an integrated and whole life. The transformation of self that I experienced has included an ability to live in the moment with gratitude, and a sense of inner peace. This has involved releasing the afraid part of myself that jumps into the future to worry, creating unnecessary anxiety. Re-instilling an anchor in the water of the unconditional love of the Divine Feminine allowed me to return to a still very full, and challenging life but now the time that was spent in anxiety is time spent with self care, remembering my passions and nourishment.

As the women spiritual leaders engaged in individual spiritual practices, working towards a wholeness of Being, the women engaged (rather instinctually) a practice of restorative learning similar to my own. It was an important learning component of the inquiry. For some, this was assisted by the making of their individual art pieces. For others, it was a stepping back and boundary-setting around the amount of commitment they could make to the group. For others, it was returning their full focus to the home and close family members. At the same time, the women kept their spiritual connection with the group alive; often commenting that they could feel the transmission of healing energy from the sacred sanctuary of the group, even when they

were not able to be physically with the group. For some of the women, the restorative learning continues as they work to re-instate the ecological balance of their lives. For others, a transformation is visible through their new creative undertakings and renewed commitment and increased leadership role within the WSC planning team.

The dialectic of restorative and transformational learning is also at work within the annual WSC. The attention to creating nourishing, safe, and sacred space has grown over the years. Not surprisingly, considering the experience of restorative learning that was occurring during the study for many of the women, the theme that was chosen for the 2008 WSC was *Nurturing Spirit: Self~Community~Earth*. Beyond the small group workshops and the large community ritual gatherings, the event has come to incorporate additional offerings that provide places of ethical sanctuary. Over the years, a meditation room for quiet reflection has been established for women participants where they can restore connection with themselves. This is a safe space provided for women to find solid ground and to Be with themselves in quiet without having to interact with others. Healing touch and body practitioners offer the gift of short healing sessions during the event, allowing women to receive assistance in balancing the energetic body with the physical body. The planning team members, as committed holders of the sacred space, are introduced and wear name tags that encourage the participants to seek assistance from them whenever needed during the conference. Many participants take leadership roles at future conferences. The conference is structured for and presented as women leading each other. Invitations and encouragement to consider future leadership roles within the conference are made frequently throughout the weekend. Some women follow up on the invitation as a way to give back to the conference that they have experienced as important. Other women are moved to step further into leadership roles in the world and find support within this conference to take the next step. The intuitive and embodied practice of restorative learning, I believe strengthened the a/r/tographic process in the study and is an augmentation of a/r/tography's relational theoretical understandings of Being and Beingness.

### Walking the Nomadic Feminist Path

In coming to a resting place from walking the labyrinthal path of this dissertation, I cycle back to the dream of the creation and destruction of women's sacred space, the short-lived reunion with the masculine, and the trance that explains the metaphoric loss of blood for myself as writer of the dissertation journey. My final art piece of the dissertation, entitled *The Foot*

*Washing* (Image 93), further develops my earlier mandala in Chapter Five with two feet surrounded by a stone circle (Image 87). It completes the installation of *Stillpoint* and is a reminder to rest while traveling the revolutionary slow path of women's spiritual leadership in the companionship of other women. In connecting the sleeping and awake dream together, the art re-works the arid climate of the dream and the displaced plight of the women, by remembering the need to stop and ritually wash weary dust-covered feet from *nomadic wandering*, which is "understood as a "space of going" (Careri, 2002, p. 36) rather than staying. Nomadic space is fluid and pourous, it is "... infinite, uninhabited, often [an] impervious void: a desert in which orientation is difficult, as in an immense sea where the only recognizable feature is the track left by walking, a mobile evanescent sign" (p. 38). Writing of her song recording process in the forthcoming work entitled *Take Me To My Tent*, Issa (formerly Jane Siberry) (2008) writes:

rather than my steps taking me farther  
they took me deeper.

Her words resonate, as I stop to pause on this labyrinthal walk and attempt to orient myself by looking at the tracks the women and I have left-- the experiences, words and images are deep traces in the sand that no doubt will be covered all too soon.

As I reflect upon the richness and depths of mystery that this journey of co-inquiry led us to and which can never be fully shared, I am aware of the importance of the nomadic spiritual and multi-faith leader remembering who she is, and remembering the Divine connection she holds with others, human and non-human. The struggle of carrying on the lineage of women's spiritual and multi-faith leadership is fraught with *forgetting*-- forgetting in the face of the cultural trauma women have been carriers of for thousands of years. At times, forgetting is a blessing, as it has often enabled women to survive in a hegemonic patriarchal culture. Yet, it is a cultural survival practice that needs to be broken/remembered for women to fully restore their Divinity. The wandering co-inquiry that has taken place in this dissertation journey has focused on creatively drawing forth, honouring and remembering women's wisdom and Divinity.

One of our greatest struggles as women spiritual and multi-faith leaders is to *remember* this, and to assist others to remember. I have been reminded of this frequently throughout the study, as I have witnessed myself and the women loose touch with their Divinity. The documentation of the difficulties and struggles of the group and individual women, although significant, has not taken precedence over documenting the celebration and experiences of life force energies in the co-inquiry. I would suggest, we will not easily forget the struggles and difficulties of this work as women spiritual and multi-faith leaders. It is the remembering,

honouring, and feeling at ease with our Divine lineage that this dissertation aims to assist with. Restorative learning emerged as a powerful theme in the study because of the need for remembering our place in the Kosmos.

The journey does not end in stepping out of the particular labyrinth of this dissertation. The need for the remembering of and the development of women's spiritual and multi-faith leadership is a pressing need in our society. Reflecting on the walk of this dissertation, and *The Foot Washing* art piece further, I am taken to the writings of thirteenth century German mystic Mechtild of Magdeberg, which teach "a servant leadership that encompasses the command to wash disciples' feet" (Vogel, 2000, p. 169). The gesture of washing other's feet, done at the 2007 WSC weekend was an honouring and loving gesture. Foot washing is a sacred act that is practiced in many religious traditions across cultures. It summons a humbleness in the person who may be washing their own feet prior to meeting the Divine through prayer or someone offering the service of foot washing to an other as an honouring of the Divine in that person. A foot washing respite space was installed in the *Stillpoint* installation, to literally and metaphorically water the feet and quench the souls of those who entered the sacred space of the temporary transformed AMS Gallery. No one chose to have their feet washed within the public gallery space. I had created a sanctuary space within the gallery with a sign that read:

Footwashing rituals are part of many spiritual and religious traditions.  
It is a gesture that reminds us of and honours the presence of the sacred.  
The soles of our feet support us to walk the journey of this life.  
Footwashing is a time to honour the sacred path of each person.  
During this *Stillpoint* installation you are invited to stop,  
rest and if you choose have your feet washed.  
If you would like assistance please ask. Barbara

Footwashing is a powerful practice that also causes discomfort and conflict in some instances. As I was considering offering this in the gallery there was a controversy in the news of Muslim University students requesting footwashing basins in public spaces at the University to assist their regular prayer practice.<sup>13</sup> As well, a controversy was occurring in the US as a Christian group was gifting shoes to under-privileged children in elementary schools and a footwashing ritual proceeded putting the shoes on the children's feet.<sup>14</sup> Recently Medwyn sent me an email that tells the tragic story of an artist who was walking as part of an art project called *Brides on Tour*<sup>15</sup> from Milano, Italy to Jerusalem with another artist wearing white wedding dresses, talking to people along the way, sharing ideas about art and washing the feet of midwives along the way as a offering of respect for the life-giving work they do for the world in contrast to the death-forces that are so prevalent in our world. Her journey was halted when she



was raped and killed in Sophia. It is important to note that simple ritual gestures of touch can instill fear and anger in a world that is in mistrust and divided. The powerful experiences of footwashing rituals that I have been part of with the WSC have been within a community context of women-only spaces and within the context of nurturing and honouring each other. My impulse to share this gesture within a public space where I was the only one present, I realize in retrospect, was not a strong enough container for people to enter the ritual interaction.

A gift unfolded in the installation of the *The Footwashing* art piece that etches the tracks of the work of this study a little deeper. I asked Melodie, who struggled with the crossing of the personal and private in the study and did not take part in the *Womb Entering* exhibition and performance ritual, if I could borrow her foot washing basin and pitcher for the footwashing station of the show. This basin was the one used in the footwashing ceremony at the 2007 WSC. She agreed, but we were not able to connect prior to the installation. She said she would try to come to the opening performance ritual of the *Stillpoint* show with her children and having this task would help her to actually get to the show. She did make it to the show with her young children, where they walked the labyrinth together and were able to share a part of her life that they do not often get to see. The basin did not end up being used for footwashing but became the sacred artifact that completed *The Footwashing* art piece. Prior to the footwashing basin arriving, the red threads representing the life blood of this dissertation ran off the end of the tapestry and onto the cement floor. The basin became a container to hold the red threads, and the water-filled pitcher rested at its side, waiting to water the sacred space as needed. In a later email, Melodie shared that the basin was made by her mother given as a wedding gift and held much significance for her. The restorative bridge that Melodie's gift offered to this art piece reflects the restorative learning gift that her journey in this study offered.



Image 93

Bickel, Barbara. (2008). *The Foot Washing*. Vancouver, BC: AMS Gallery, The University of British Columbia, (Stone, thread, wood, acrylic, photo transfer on broadcloth, ceramic basin and pitcher).

Six years of exhibiting at the University AMS Gallery came to an end with the *Stillpoint* installation. My week of sitting in the gallery (a marginal space on campus) was a closing ritual of meeting with strangers and having conversations with friend and colleagues who stopped by. I recognize and appreciate my graduate journey on campus as a spiritual feminist a/r/tographer as a nomadic,

.."space" traveler, successively constructing and demolishing her/his living spaces before moving on. S/he functions in a pattern of repetitions which is not without order, though it has no ultimate destination. The opposite of the tourist, the antithesis of the migrant, the nomadic traveler is uniquely bent upon the act of going, the passing through. Nomadism is a form of intransitive becoming: it marks a set of transformations without end product. Nomadic subjects create politically informed maps for their own survival. (Braidotti, 2005, p. 80)

The politically informed map of my survival as a spiritual feminist artist/researcher/teacher within an academic setting has been drawn with the visual-writing of art installations and performance rituals in the liminal space of the student gallery. Similarly, Alison Pryer (2004) writes of artist/researcher/teachers practicing a/r/tography as liminars who live within the limen; that is "[t]he frontier, the margin, the border between one thing and another, between this and that, known and unknowns, knowable and unknowable" (p. 204). In this way she observes that a/r/tographers act as challengers to and nomads of the academy:

Their work may be criticized for not being rigorous, scientific, reliable, or serious enough.... They will certainly feel the force of others within the larger sedentary community pushing them towards assimilation. Yet, true liminars will continue to abandon the centre, choosing instead to speak from the margins, regularly shifting locations, roles, and voices, continuing always to challenge the dominant culture around them. (p. 208)

My nomadic place within the university has felt intransitive at times, it has followed a cyclical nomadic feminist a/r/tographic path, as understood by Braidotti and Pryer. Braidotti's additional understanding that, "Nomadic feminists are aiming to undo the power structures that sustain the dialectical oppositions of the sexes, while respecting the diversity of women and the multiplicity within each woman" (p. 180), further places the work of this dissertation within a nomadic journey.

The WSC has now walked further into a nomadic feminist path with the loss of institutional co-sponsorship. Acknowledging that nomadism "cannot survive without sedentary society (Cannon, 1989; Khazanov, 1984)" (Pryer, 2004, p. 206), the work of honouring the diversity of

women, while encouraging women to develop as spiritual leaders to disrupt hegemonic power structures, is revolutionarily slow, yet more than ever required. The “spiritual leader” evolves with each step taken. The nomadic life of the WSC calls for an ongoing making and unmaking of political world maps.

### *Naked Feet Keep Walking*

Feeling the ground moving as I reflect on the nomadic path, I dig deeper into a footprint in the sand and find words, like those sent to me by Cathy, while I was at the artist residency. On July 6, 2007 she wrote:

Dear Barbara,

Naked feet keep walking,  
naked earth hold her up,  
naked soul bless the work,  
that all may be seen, and heard, and known.

In Peace,  
Cathy

I reread these words frequently during the residency, as they reminded me to keep walking. I and the WSC are not lost but walking a spiral path and mapping the walk as we go. Careri (2002) writes,

Walking, though it is not the physical construction of a space, implies a transformation of the place and its meanings. The mere physical presence of [wo]man in an unmapped space and the variations of perceptions [s]he receives crossing it constitute a form of transformation of the landscape that, without leaving visible signs, culturally modifies the meaning of space and therefore the space itself. Before Neolithic era, and thus before menhirs,<sup>16</sup> the only symbolic architecture capable of modifying the environment was walking, an action that is simultaneously an act of perception and creativity, of reading and writing of the territory. (p.50)

The architecture of the labyrinth has offered a sacred structure for the cultural modification of space and the often dizzying walk of this dissertation. Ritual as pedagogy has been the pivot point of relational and restorative learning in this dissertation, supporting this inquiry into women’s multi-faith and spiritual leadership which is not a solo journey, but a walking *with other* pedagogy. The act of reading, writing and troubling the territory of women’s spiritual leadership within a multi-faith context has been entered through the women’s perceptions and

creativity. The stones that form the paths of the *Stillpoint* labyrinths are women-inspired and placed menhirs on the unicursal path. New understandings and awareness of the qualities that assist the creation and sustenance of women's spiritual leadership and community have arisen. At the most recent visioning retreat for the future of the WSC, the metaphor of a spiral emerged that was entwining, yielding, creating, honouring, mutual, caring, and transparent-- simultaneously in motion and stillness. The recognition that women's spiritual leadership within a multi-faith context resides within the stillpoint of a spiral that is relationally rich, empowering and fragile, is worthy of further exploration. Theologian,<sup>17</sup> Carol Christ (2003) writes that, "Change and touch, process, embodiment, and relationship are at the heart of many feminist re-imaginings of God and the world (p. 1). These same re-imaginings in North America she writes, still invoke "fear that if women come together across religious boundaries, all hell will break loose" (p. 2). These fears, equally complex and fragile, require ongoing truth making as world making by communities of women willing to hold sacred space for the work of the Divine as it manifests itself in the world.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I thank my co-inquirer, Ingrid Rose for introducing me to Warland's writing and gifting me with a copy of this Vancouver-based writer's book as I was writing this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> A crone is an elder wise woman. A croning ceremony marks the passage from mother to crone for oneself and in one's community.

<sup>3</sup> As an extension of the public oral defense of this dissertation a circle was facilitated by one of the co-inquirers after a public reception. Nine of the co-inquirers attended and assisted in the creation of ritual space and participated in a performance ritual as part of the oral presentation. Some of the women offered the University examiners and audience members a ritual cleansing by sweeping over their body with swan feathers as they entered the space while Medwyn played a singing bowl. Shirin offered an opening prayer followed by Nané drumming the *Woman Spirit Drum* which was held by Monica and Medwyn. During the sharing circle (which included other members of the audience) the nine co-inquirers had a chance to respond to the doctoral presentation and share their experiences of the study and debrief being part of the defense. As a researcher the inclusion of the women in the defense, offering them the space to participate if they chose, and to speak to and debrief the close of the study felt crucial as a form of closure and acknowledgment of the women. The possibility of doing a longitudinal study with the co-inquirers in coming years has been spoken of as we have come to the close of this study.

<sup>4</sup> The next year's planning team (2007-08) included four new women. A conscious effort was made to welcome the new women and mentor them into the planning team. Early in the fall of 2007 we had a day-long retreat where the new women had a chance to get to know each other and the planning team.

<sup>5</sup> An ongoing lack in postmodern theory and writing is the omission of the spiritual and religious dimensions of life. Somehow this gets missed or ignored in the pluralism of postmodernism and could possibly be contributing to the problem of postmodernism that Patricia Hill Collins brings forward, whereby postmodernism "operates more effectively as a critique of power than as a theory of empowerment" (Collins, 1998, p. 141). Ellsworth's (2005) educational theory would be strengthened by the inclusion of spiritual and religious discourse and examples. Unfortunately, she is missing the architecture of sacred sites, like, cathedrals, mosques, temples, synagogues, pilgrimage paths, and sites in nature, and human made, as powerful spaces/places of learning. She does not take the next step of acknowledging spiritual ways of knowing that have been studied and documented extensively in religious literature. She connects art, and science but misses the third domain of religion.

<sup>6</sup> The inappropriate(d) other is the person who leaves an inside location of belonging and enters the margins. As an outsider she is then able to critically see and reflect upon the inside location from an outsider location. She is labeled "inappropriate" by those who have remained inside and appropriated by the marginal outsider location she has entered. She fully belongs now to neither location and is able to critique and question the insider location from the outside. She is both inside and outside. I quote Trinh here at length as her explanation deserves a full reading, "The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vis versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. (This is often viewed by the outsiders as strategies of partial concealment and disclosure aimed at preserving secrets that should only be imparted to initiates.) She refuses to reduce herself to an Other, and her reflections to a mere outsider's objective reasoning or insider's subjective feeling.... She is the Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while

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persisting in her difference; and that of reminding “I am different” while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (1991, p. 74).

<sup>7</sup> The *Woman Spirit Shield* continues to offer a reminder of the need to protect this work. At a recent planning meeting (January 2008) it was suggested that the shield be brought to the 2008 conference, as well as to the visioning retreat that will take place after the conference. At the retreat, part of the focus is for the planning team members to look at what gets in the way of fully bringing this work into the world.

<sup>8</sup> Diana Eck (2002) and others write of the importance of grounding oneself in a religious tradition but also of learning history and traditions of other religious traditions and honouring other religious truths.

<sup>9</sup> Wilber (1998) identifies three core assumptions of the best-side of postmodernism: 1. Reality is not in all ways pregiven, but in some significant ways is a construction, an interpretation (this view is often called ‘constructivism’... 2. Meaning is context-dependent, and contexts are boundless (this is often called ‘contextualism’). 3. Cognition must therefore privilege no single perspective (this is called ‘integral-aperspectival’),” and he believes “... all three of those postmodern assumptions are quite accurate (and need to be acknowledged for their internal tensions/contradictions and honored and incorporated in any integral view)...” (p. 121).

<sup>10</sup> Braidotti’s view of feminist post-postmodernism is a negative one. She associates any post-postmodernism with neoliberalism and individualism-- as a return to master narratives where difference is celebrated but ideological critique is gutted. Difference therefore loses all political radicality and is appropriated into capitalist globalization. Braidotti is demonstrating the integral power of postmodernism for example, in the organization of a Postsecular Lecture Series (2007-08) jointly sponsored by Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities and BAK, Centre for Contemporary Art in Utrecht. “The aim of this academic year-long lecture series is to investigate post-secularism as our historical condition and to approach it as a series of crossroads and mutual engagements of secularism and religious discourses in the contemporary world and especially in Europe.... The lecture series will draw together fields of scholarship which are often separated by disciplinary orientation, institutional divides and methodological traditions, so as to create spaces for dialogue and cross-disciplinary exchanges.” Retrieved from [http://209.85.173.104/search?q=cache:2oHmUkjZCcJ:www.genderstudies.nl/cms/uploads/Postsecular\\_Lecture\\_Series\\_programme.doc+%22Rosi+Braidotti%22+%26+post-secular+feminism%22andhl=enandct=clnkandcd=1andgl=caandclient=firefox-a](http://209.85.173.104/search?q=cache:2oHmUkjZCcJ:www.genderstudies.nl/cms/uploads/Postsecular_Lecture_Series_programme.doc+%22Rosi+Braidotti%22+%26+post-secular+feminism%22andhl=enandct=clnkandcd=1andgl=caandclient=firefox-a)

<sup>11</sup> The notion of the Cosmic Christ is understood by theologian Mathew Fox and others as a return to a living cosmology that was deposed at the time of the Enlightenment movement towards a rational and historical understanding of Christianity. He writes, “One cannot explore the meaning and power of the Cosmic Christ without a living cosmology, a living mysticism, and the spiritual discipline of art as meditation. *The holy trinity of science (knowledge of creation), mysticism (experiential union with creation and its unnamable mysteries), and art (expression of our awe of creation) is what constitute a living cosmology* (1988, p. 78). In non-theological language Wilber brings art, science and morals together as the ‘Big Three’ that can move us towards integral wholeness (2000).

<sup>12</sup> A rosary is a Catholic prayer tool. It has a Christ Crucifix attached to it, and can be worn around the neck. Each bead has a prayer attached to it. A St. Mary prayer card accompanied the gift. Praying with rosary beads are a regular practice for many Catholics.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2007/04/13/minneapolis>

<sup>14</sup> See [http://www.jewsonfirst.org/07c/augusta\\_shoes.html](http://www.jewsonfirst.org/07c/augusta_shoes.html)

<sup>15</sup> See [http://www.kudmreza.org/alkatraz/arhiv/razstave/2008\\_03\\_eng\\_bridges.html](http://www.kudmreza.org/alkatraz/arhiv/razstave/2008_03_eng_bridges.html)

<sup>16</sup> Menhirs are stones left as markers in the environment by early humans.

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<sup>17</sup> Carol Christ distinguishes the traditional theology as the study of God from her own work which is the study of Goddess, hence the feminine term thealogy.



*Postscript*  
*Emergent Understandings from the Labyrinth Walk*



Image 94

Bickel, Barbara (2007). *Water Labyrinth Walk*. (Video transition still).

The video still (Image 91) that opens this postscript arrests the moment of the walker's step in the center of the labyrinth while incoming ocean waves cast a visual veil over the labyrinth. The moment of perception is held in time through the image but the walker and the path are disappearing and will disappear. It is not an easy task to take the last step out of labyrinth that is this dissertation journey. Multiple voices continue to call out to me, offering more ideas, art and questions. I live the tension of the many parts clamoring to be given voice while the dissertation waits to be gathered up as a whole. I feel the impossibility of completion and am reminded that the whole once reached rests only fleetingly in the moment before cycling back into the sacred journey once again. With that understanding I collage the new understandings that have brought themselves forward through this dissertation into a momentary whole within the learning theory that underscores the dissertation, which is, *art moves us towards spirit and spirit leads us to new understandings of life that in turn moves us to learn/teach* and the cycle begins again.

#### Elaborations on A/r/tography

Within the labyrinthal walk of this dissertation a/r/tography is expanded upon to include a greater understanding of radical relatedness as it manifests within the practice of *a/r/tography as ritual*. Infusing the art making, researching and teaching process with a connected and ethical co-relationship with space, time, spirit and the body “overturns [one’s] conventional perceptions of reality” (Gaydos, 2006, p. 74) leading to transformation. Combining an engaged and embodied practice of *restorative learning* with a/r/tography strengthens and enhances the transformative possibilities of a/r/tographic practice. Ritual provided the ethical sanctuary that is an essential aspect of restorative learning. When an a/r/tographic process is engaged it inherently disorients the a/r/tographer by residing in-between the multiple domains of art, research, and education. As co-a/r/tographers, the women were unsettling and disrupting rigid binaries and ways of knowing, while being nourished by and nourishing the sacred as a space of restorative and transformative learning.

The addition of *synecdoche* to the renderings of a/r/tography assists the articulation of the radical and relational practice of a/r/tography. Synecdoche invokes creative tension through a trialectic relationship with metaphor/metonymy extending the radical relationality of the part/whole, individual/universal, matter/spirit and autonomous/communal in the cycle of inquiry and learning. Working with these tensions creatively led the women to a full embrace of the Kosmos and their place within it. Synecdoche, in its desire for an intimate relationship between

part and whole, expands the threshold for the Divine to enter the radical relationship of the rhetorical triad of metaphor/metonymy/synecdoche. Radical relationality itself is synecdochical in the part/whole tensions that it creates, which can alter those living the tensions so prevalent within an individualistic Western world. I suggest that synecdoche is an addition to the a/r/tographic renderings that anticipates the radical and relational journey towards a whole a/r/tographic practice. This connects a/r/tography to Beittel's vision of art for a new age which moves from a broke art to a whole art – an ever shifting sacred cycle.

The study included the teaching of a/r/tography to the co-inquirers and thus, carried the practice and learning of a/r/tography into the community. The women of the study fully engaged an art making, inquiry, and teaching practice and as one co-inquirer said, “blew our minds off.” In this way the women modeled the accessibility and spirit-generated aspects of a/r/tography as ritual, within a community context, as a practice not limited to professional artists or those working and studying within the academy but accessible to all who are willing to commit themselves to Being with/in an a/r/tographic practice.

#### Women's Spiritual and Multi-faith Leadership

Through the multiple turns that took place within the labyrinth walk of this dissertation a feminist form of spiritual and multi-faith leadership transpired, demonstrating respect, reverence, care, unconditional love, critical reflection and the holding of sacred space. Jacqui Alexander (2005) writes of the core movement that carries the pulse of the sacred in this study:

The central understanding within an epistemology of the Sacred is that of a core/Spirit that is immortal, at once linked to the pulse and energy of creation. It is that living matter that links us to each other, making that which is individual simultaneously collective. (p. 326)

Relationships fed the creative pulse that led to the restorative and transformative learning experiences of the women as artists, researchers and spiritual leaders/teachers. The role of women's spiritual leadership and teaching in the service of the decolonization of the Divine was revealed in the sometimes unsettling intersections of the private and public spheres of women's lives. Through sacred dialogue between the art making process and the art, art was not separated from the spirit of art making. In the act of witnessing each other in the *Womb Entering* experience the women had a profound recognition of themselves as sacred art. In becoming art, the individual women bridged the divide between the individual and the universal self. In becoming art, they became Divine.

Living the Divine politically and spiritually became a decolonizing act supported by a community of women acknowledging each other as Divine. Luce Irigaray (1992) wrote, “Femininity is precisely, that which is excluded from patriarchal representations and can only be glimpsed in their gaps and silences. For it to return, and to unsettle that which repressed it, a special process is required” (cited in Larrington, 1992, p. 448). A spiritual inquiry through a/r/tography as ritual was the special process that allowed the women to enter into the unknown of the inquiry with trust and boldness offering a means of expression to move with the Divine towards our universal selves.

The ability to create and hold sacred space was recognized as an essential aspect of women’s spiritual leadership in the work of priestessing and mentoring for multi-faith consciousness raising. The creation of sacred space and the practice of ritual as performative/pedagogy assisted the erotic life force energy of an embodied Women’s Time to emerge. At the same time the a/r/tographic practice disrupted familiar ways of thinking and being, allowing differences and struggles to surface and be learned from. This dissertation affirms the importance of creating a circle of trust, and remembering the radically relational aspects of women’s spiritual and multi-faith leadership as it reveals the diverse struggles that women, willing to lead in this world, face.

Within the ethical sanctuary of ritual as performative/pedagogy a process of restorative learning, as articulated by Elizabeth Lange (2004), transpired. This study resonates and corroborates the findings Lange’s study revealed; the importance of a dialectic between restorative and transformative learning for adults learners. Restorative learning, as a radically relational feminist aspect of the dissertation transfigured the predominately agentic aspects of transformative learning. An ethical and responsible cycle of learning is thus supported by the findings of this study, as it reveals the importance of nurturance, unconditional love, and the erotic life force within the dialectic of restorative and transformative learning. This dialectic learning theory in turn reflects the dialectic cycle of the feminine spiritual path, that is one of relationship and immanence *with* the masculine spiritual path of solitary contemplation and transcendence.

The dialectic practice of restorative and transformative learning in the service of spiritual and multi-faith learning is not always a clear and direct path. Leela Fernandes (2003) reminds us that spiritual learning practices are based in the mystery of the unknowable and that, “[i]t is a sense of mystery that dispels the mistaken assumption that the intellectual, writer, teacher [leader] or activist is the knower rather than a witness who is always in the process of being known” (p.99).

## The Philetics of a Loving Community as the Base of Art, Education, and Spirituality

A/r/tographic inquiry as ritual was a lived interrelational practice within and across the domains of art, education, and spirituality, opening a rich and sometimes dissonant dialogue between these disciplines. For humans to be able to create, learn and transform we require art, education and spirituality that has the support of loving community. Living relationally as an ecological society requires that we enter complicated conversations with these three major domains of knowledge construction. As the study reflects, restorative learning returns our privacy and apartness back to our ecological self. The apartness that has occurred within the domains of art, spirituality, and education in a modernist era of differentiation and dissociation requires the dialectic of restorative and transformative learning to correct its imbalances. Entering the transformative aspects of learning requires the letting go of secure ground and stepping into new areas of knowing and not knowing. This was demonstrated by the women as they stepped forward as artists, researchers, and spiritual leaders/teachers within the study. Likewise, for transformation of global consciousness and learning to occur, we must be willing to step out of the familiar entrenched territories of art, education, and spirituality and enter anew the realms of not knowing and unfamiliarity, as we strive to develop a connective aesthetic that can embrace the diversity of postmodernism, while retaining the depth of wisdom gained from modernity.

### Ritual as Performative/Pedagogy

The arts-based multi-faith curriculum and praxis that has deepened within this dissertation is not a didactic curriculum that teaches content and strategies. Instead it is felt and lived as a philetic curriculum through being with, witnessing, and then living the curriculum, in ones unique way as a teacher/leader. A philetic curriculum obliges that one rest on the “shoulder of mystery” (Snowber, 1999) within a co-created sacred sanctuary long enough to allow restorative and transformative learning to unfold. Within the “third space” of sacred sanctuary, ritual as a performative/pedagogical praxis enters its dialectical dance. It takes a community to build a sacred rhythm, a curriculum of love that is strong enough to hold and dance with the tensions based on difference in our trouble world. Just as the women spiritual leaders of this study danced the art to life in the gallery, they have danced their philetic curriculum for spiritual and multi-faith learning/leadership to life in this dissertation. The dissertation is now given as a “gift of art” to those who desire to learn from and with it-- to embark upon the co-creation of compassionate and spirited multi-faith bridges between self, other and the Divine.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Research Schedule**

November 1 & Nov 17, 2006 - Opening Group Ritual Sharing Circles

November. 24/25, 2006 - Weekend Retreat of ritual and art making

December 30, 2006 - Barbara calls everyone- begins to talk of collaborative art ideas  
and performance ritual

January 12, 2007 – Face casting

January 21, 2007 – Group Ritual Sharing Circle - with finished individual art and  
construction of mask is brainstormed

February 1, 2007 - Face casting & construction of mask

February 17 & 18, 2007 – Weekend of collaborative art making - painting of drum and  
collage/painting of large mask

February 23, 2007 – Trance visioning for performance ritual

March 1, 2007 - Rehearsal for WSC performance ritual at VST

March 2 & 3, 2007 - WSC weekend performance ritual and art installation

April 6, 2007 - Video editing begins

April 16, 2007 -Rehearsal

April 20, 2007 – Rehearsal in the gallery

April 21, 2007 - Show set up

April 22, 2007 - Show opens – evening performance ritual

April 26, 2007 - Art talk

April 28, 2007 - Art talk and take down of installation

May 7 – June 22, 2007 – Art Installation in Trinity St. Mark’s Church Boardroom

May 19, 2007 - Closing Group Ritual Sharing circle

June 13, 2007 - Closing Group Ritual Sharing circle

June 18, 2007 - Closing Individual Ritual sharing

June 26, 2007 - Closing Individual Ritual sharing

**Appendix B**

**Re/Turning to Her: Performance Ritual Invitation**  
Designed by Barbara Bickel



*Re/Turning to Her*

A Performance Ritual

*Barbara Bickel & Tannis Hugill*

Saturday, July 8, 2006 at 7pm

Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth  
Iona Patio, SE corner of the building 6000 Iona Dr. UBC campus



## Appendix C

### Re/Turning to Her Performance Ritual Program

This performance ritual is the outcome of an 11 month co-researched process of exploring religious and spiritual pluralism. Through co-interviews, trance and movement work we shared personal stories of religious traditions, spiritual experiences, and the role that art has played in our understanding of spirituality and religions. This has been a pilot study in preparation for Barbara's PhD dissertation. Up to 12 women will be co-researchers in the larger arts-based study on religious and spiritual pluralism.

#### Performance Ritual

As artists who do not separate art from the sacred act of creation, we co-evolve with spirit in our art making. Performance ritual is the manifestation of art and spirit through our bodies.

#### Trance

A journey to other realities in an altered state of consciousness, also described as a waking dream. In this state we can access subconscious knowledge and hence find new understandings of life and our purpose/role within it.

#### Labyrinth

An ancient symbol that crosses cultural and religious boundaries. Engaged as a walking meditation it leads one into the center of the circle and back out through a self reflective practice/prayer.

## Re/Turning to Her

### A Performance Ritual

Barbara Bickel

Tannis Hugill



Sat. July 8, 2006  
7pm

Vancouver School of  
Theology Labyrinth

Healing artist **Tannis Hugill**, MFA, RCC, RDT, ADTR, is a registered dance and drama therapist, BC Clinical Counsellor and creator of ritual theatre, she has been devoted to the healing arts for over 20 years. She is also a Certified Practitioner of Ecstatic Body Postures. In Vancouver, her private therapy practice includes teaching workshops in Authentic Movement, and Moving Prayer; as well as leading Community Movement Rituals. Her passion is helping others experience the healing pleasure of the wisdom of their bodies. To read more about her work see [www.awakeningbodywisdom.com](http://www.awakeningbodywisdom.com)

**Barbara Bickel** is an artist, researcher, educator and independent curator. She is currently working on a PhD in Education at UBC where her research focus is women, spiritual leadership, art and education. Barbara completed her MA in Education at UBC in 2004 where she engaged and brought forward the practice of "a/r/tography as ritual". She holds a BFA in Painting from the University of Calgary and a BA in Sociology and Art History from the University of Alberta. She co-founded The Centre Gallery (1995-2001), a non-profit women's focused gallery in Calgary, Alberta. Her art and performance rituals have been exhibited and performed in Canada since 1991. Her art can be viewed on-line at [www.barbarabickel.ca](http://www.barbarabickel.ca)

#### Program

Approx. length 55 minutes  
The performance ritual will be videotaped  
7:00 Performance ritual begins

Post performance ritual  
refreshment, dialogue and/or  
walking of labyrinth

Conceived & Performed by  
Barbara Bickel & Tannis Hugill

#### Percussion Accompaniment

R. Michael Fisher &  
Bridgid McGowan

#### Video Documentation

Cindy Lou Griffith

#### Gracing

Leah Fisher

#### Thanks

Cathy Bone for her administration and spirit support in the use of the labyrinth. Michael Fisher for his support of our creative process, and Rita Irwin, who in her role as supervisor to Barbara's PhD program, has created a supportive ground of trust for this arts-based research to emerge within.

We acknowledge the spirit of the Divine Feminine, who has been our guide in the creation of this performance ritual.

## Appendix D

### Transcribed Group Visioning Trance for Performance Rituals

(Barbara, Catherine, Ingrid, Melodie C., Monica, Shirin, Tannis)

- b. seeing us on the ocean edge standing in a row with lapping waves coming in
- i. i can see the horizon with the wave coming in - on it is the shape of the drum
- c. we're smiling
- m. the drum is being pushed by a dolphin
- i. my body is supple
- t. we're all inside the boat
- c. the ocean is a huge round ball of water – all the oceans - it looks like the shape of the mask
- i. the mask is underneath like the bowl of the sky above as bells are chiming around the mask – each voice chiming
- s. I see a huge womb in which we are held – the ocean and the earth
- m. the water of the ocean – the smell of salt in the air
- t. the drum has become a huge tree growing out of the center of the ocean
- i. roots and branches of the tree
- c. ripe fruit on the branches
- t. we offer fruit to each other
- mc. we look into the mask smiling – stars appear
- t. the mask appears golden and shimmering
- i. by its light we see our face
- t. the mask is turning – top of the trees – crowned
- i. maypole – we are weaving in and out circling around the tree – ribbons coming out from its crown
- mc. our arms reaching
- c. tree changing you though a
- t. we are turning
- m. the mask holds it all together – it is the sun and the moon
- t. bubbles come from the center of the mask
- mc. they become amulets that reflect the faces of the women
- c. i see a large mirror – earth ball
- b. looking at each others faces – seeing sophia and medwyn's face
- i. torch – no candle – each one holding up the candle to look at each other
- mc. sword
- t. feet moving on air – making footprints
- mc. in the sand
- b. in the salt
- i. putting our finger in the salt and licking our fingers
- b. licking salt
- i. bowl of salt/sand/water/fire
- b. everyone's fingers spread – sticking tongues out – lion pose
- mc. laughing
- s. making angels in the sand – up and down – kicking up – laughing
- mc. wing bones embedded
- i. heads on each others bellies
- m. ripple of laughter around the air – feathers in the air – spiraling up to the moon


t. feathers cover us and the  
 mc. drum  
 b. white feathers  
 s. gentle caress  
 mc. sound is fine-clear – finite it carries  
 i. whispers us to follow it - the drum begins to move – we follow the beat of the drum  
 ripples of energy flowing out from the drum  
 m. mask turning  
 i. snake with the drum through binding connection  
 mc. the sand shifts to fur – soft  
 c. we lay down on soft ground – warm  
 i. the mask above us radiating  
 t. turning still  
 m. the mask is the mirror for everyone to see  
 c. lying on our backs we  
 mc. we begin to sing  
 s. we are like spokes of the wheel marching into the mask  
 b. many other women are starting to circle around us – attracts  
 t. our spiraling bodies- creates a centrifugal force  
 m. the center of the vortex – multiple circles encircling  
 i. i see  
 m. the spiral  
 mc. the drum and mask still in the center  
 t. a gathering of voices singing – joining us  
 b. stops  
 m. drum standing up at the head - the mask and us like a spoke and wheel are the body  
 t. the drum has become the axis of the mask held by the hands  
 i. a dialogue between the drum and mask – a dialogue of movement and sound – one is feminine  
 calling and masculine which comes together  
 t. the mask and drum and our bodies spiraling on this body of water – we are going to the other  
 parts of the world with this energy  
 m. the upright drum is the sail form that moves us – the mask the compass that shines the way  
 b. it feels very subtle – grounded energy  
 t. the traveling of the mask through the oceans creating energy that is bathing each continent  
 c. path way – pioneering energy – exploratory  
 t. the mask is sprouting green plants – tendrils shoots  
 b. the drum is beating a heartbeat  
 m. the mask is the conduit/center where all the energy of women all though the centuries is being  
 held  
 b. we feel like we come from another place and have landed in this time and place  
 t. i see beings – celestial angelic beings – pouring a vessel of gold substance and coming towards  
 us  
 b. we are becoming gold  
 i. the dance and drumming is creating this container for this substance – we are gathering all  
 kinds of energy both from the sky and the earth  
 t. turning of the mask as it turns and shapes the energy  
 m. as we look at the mask we become that energy  
 i. every woman is invited to connect with the mask and part of her mask  
 t. and bath themselves

i. i lick salt  
 m. gold  
 i. sea salt  
 mc. some women have instruments – flutes – beautiful sound  
 t. many women have scarves and streamers  
 c. many women are grandmothers – some are young girls  
 t. some carry young on their backs  
 s. in their wombs  
 t. young grandchildren  
 i. there's a lot of laughter – noise – sense of each and pleasure  
 mc. yet there is a presiding peace  
 s. and light  
 t. those that have been sacrificed  
 b. the ancestors are here  
 i. this makes them glad  
 b. medwyn is passing out sound hooters that blow out and make noise  
 i. a festival  
 mc. celebration  
 i. i see lots of colours – bright  
 mc. sunlight – rainbow colours  
 m. paper streamers – ribbons – colour energy  
 c. women are dancing together  
 i. suspended or hanging objects from the stars or sun – a current of energy back and forth  
 t. lightning flash from the heavens down on us  
 mc. sweet – like apple blossoms  
 b. floating and settling down with that smell like we just had a big orgasm party and settling down now  
 i. become soft  
 mc. and naked - warm  
 b. we're curled up together  
 t. the mask floats above us  
 b. spiraling  
 i. the drum marks off the space  
 mc. i hear a sound of a bowl bell becoming louder  
 b. calling us back  
 mc. see the sound – its purple and red  
 b. calling us back  
 t. the drum has multiplied now into four - one in each direction

## Appendix E

### Womb Entering Posters

Designed by Barbara Bickel



**Womb Entering**  
*A Collaborative Multi-Media Art Installation  
& Performance Ritual  
April 22 – 28, 2007*

Mary Bennett, Barbara Bickel, Cathy Bone,  
Monica Brammer, Melodie Chant, Sophia Freigang,  
Tannis Hugill, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Valerie Lys,  
Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith,  
Shirin Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox

*Performance Ritual & Opening Celebration*  
**Sunday, April 22, 7pm**  
*A/r/tography Talks*  
**Wednesday, April 25, 12 noon**  
**Saturday, April 28, 1pm**

AMS Art Gallery  
Students' Union Bldg. East Mall  
The University of British Columbia

Gallery Hours: Daily 10 – 5pm  
For more information call 604 224 3384  
email: radicaltrust@shaw.ca  
barbarabickel.ca

A spectrum of spiritual and religious paths nourished this co-researched arts-based inquiry. The art is an expression of fourteen women's desire to reveal, create, dialogue, educate and celebrate as women leaders of multi-faith awareness and practices. The self-identified traditions and spiritual practices drawn from, but not limited to, include: Anglican, Baptist, Buddhist-Wiccan, Christian, Creation Spirituality, Earth-Based, Feri, New Thought, Pagan/Goddess, Religious Science, Spiritual Feminist, Unitarian, Unitarian, United, & Wiccan-Reclaiming.

We invite men and women of all religious traditions and spiritual paths, as well as the non-religious and those that love art, to join us and contribute to this arts-led multi-faith dialogue.

The art is the culmination of a six month co-creative research process as part of Barbara Bickel's Ph.D. dissertation research in Curriculum Studies (Art Education) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Canada.



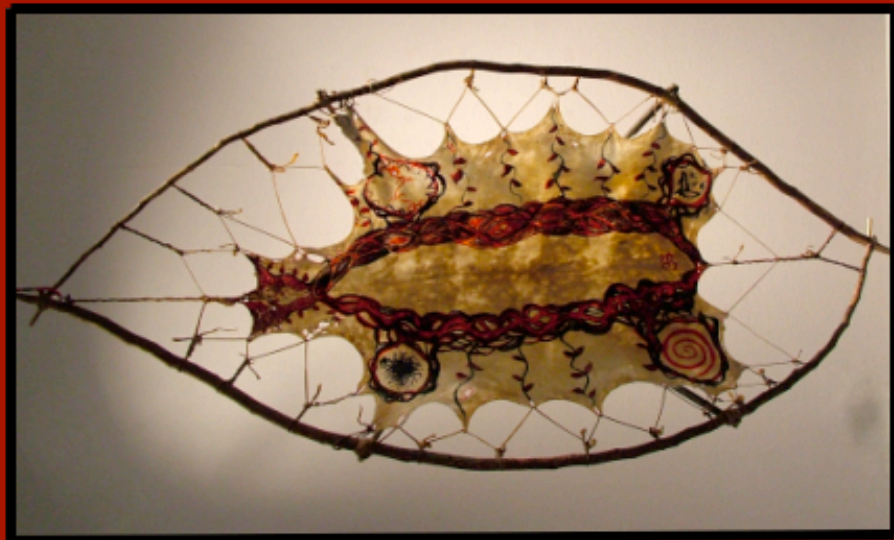
# Womb Entering

*A Collaborative*

*Multi-Media Art Installation*

*Women spiritual leaders exploring spiritual and religiously diverse paths*

Mary Bennett, Barbara Bickel, Cathy Bone, Monica Brammer,  
Melodie Chant, Sophia Freigang, Tannis Hugill, Nané Ariadne Jordan,  
Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith,  
Shirín Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox



**Currently showing at:** Trinity Saint Marks Church  
805 Larch St., Vancouver, B.C. 604 736 2838

The art is created by the planning team of the annual Women's Spirituality Celebration and was facilitated by Barbara Bickel as part of her PhD research in Education at UBC.

**Next Years Women's Spirituality Celebration:** February 29th & March 1st 2008

Canadian Memorial Center for Peace, 1825 16th Avenue West, Vancouver B.C.

For more information on next years event please contact us through

[www.awakeningbodywisdom.com](http://www.awakeningbodywisdom.com) or [www.medwyn.ca](http://www.medwyn.ca)

## Appendix F

### Womb Entering Performance Ritual Outline

A few of us are stationed at the entrance and offer a cleansing with sea salt.

A few others are handing out programs

We are mingling aware that we are priestessing/holding space for people as we welcome them into this womb space that we have created.

7:15 ish start with the sounding of the crystal bowl

Barbara welcomes all. Gives a bit of a context. Invites all to join the toning during the ritual.

Medwyn acknowledges and honours the ancestors of the first nations land we are on and Tannis invites the audience to bring in what they holed sacred

Bowl ring-singing begins.

We will be dispersed around the outskirts of the labyrinth and begin to make our way to the entrance of the labyrinth (Shirin & Monica first as they will leave first to get the shield and ground the performance ritual)

Annie makes her way to the drum which is leaning on the back wall and makes 3 circles around the labyrinth marking the space followed by Medwyn drumming

We pause at the entrance then walk our individual journey to the center accompanied by the singing bowl.

When we reach the center we wait and meditate on the mask until all are gathered and standing around the mask (Shirin & Monica exit to hold the drum shield)

3 women kneel– enter trance

2 stand and begin to turn

The end of the bowl singing marks the trance over

All 5 women kneel at the mask

We connect with the namaste hands on the mask and lay our hands onto the belly – pause there

Drumming begins with Medwyn here – like a heart beat we are feeling from the belly

Slide our hands down the belly – over a gold mask – and onto our bodies – touching our bodies, washing our bodies

We look down at the mask and into the mirror and we transform

Hands to sides of faces – fingers splayed we begin to laugh – yoga lions pose with our face and tongue - as if we have just licked salt

Turn into celebration with our laughter and 3 times throw handfuls of feathers into the air

Stand up

Barbara & Ingrid lift the mask

Begin to dance the mask in the labyrinth – the 3 others dance/flow within the labyrinth

At the Labyrinth exit Ingrid & Barbara pause with mask and hold it up high

We process around the outside labyrinth x 1 showing the mask to the audience (with the 3 others continuing to dance in the labyrinth)

Drumming of heartbeat ends

Barbara and Ingrid return to the entrance and walk into the center as we begin to tone joined one by one by others (the audience may join in the toning)

At the center while toning, the mask floats above the mirror – moving with the energy

At one point everyone uses one hand to hold the mask and we turn x 1 in a circle

The mask continues to be held and to hover with the toning energy.

Lower the mask as the toning energy declines.

Pause as the mask returns to its resting place in the center

Shield drumming begins by Annie. Monica and Shirin are holding it steady

Those standing in the circle raise our hands with the energy of the drum shield and come down with the energy of the drum shield. This feels like us growing as trees and each of our limbs extending like branches and fingers extending as smaller branches reaching to the sky.

Pause and connect with each other

Namaste the mask

Namaste the drum and complete the 4 pointed turn with a namaste to the audience

After we namaste the drum – the drum can be hung onto its installation perch by Annie, Shirin and Monica

The 5 women walk out of the labyrinth and we gather in a semi circle around the labyrinth facing the audience

Barbara thanks everyone for coming and invites them to enter the womb themselves now and join us for refreshments.

We all disperse with everyone into the reception space. Uncover food table.

Installation is turned on i.e. lights, video projections turned on

Celebrate



**Appendix G**  
**Womb Entering Program**  
Designed by Barbara Bickel



To experience...co-belonging implies leaving representative thought and letting oneself go in the co-belonging to Being which already inhabits us, constitutes us, surrounds us.

Ingaray (2002)

In very early religion... creativity was seen as divine: we still use religious language to speak of creative 'inspiration' which shapes reality anew and brings fresh meaning to the world.

Karen Armstrong (1993)



Thanks to Rita Irwin, Bill Pinar and Daniel Vokey who in their roles as advisors for Barbara's PhD program, have created a supportive ground of trust for this arts-based inquiry to emerge within.

Cover Art: a manipulated video still from the performance ritual entitled "Dancing the Altars to Life" at the WSC March 2, 2007.

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**Womb Entering**  
A Collaborative Performance Ritual  
Sunday April 22, 2007

AMS Art Gallery  
April 22 – 28, 2007, 10 – 5pm daily

We acknowledge the spirit of the Divine, who has been our guide in the co-creation of this performance ritual and art installation.

#### **About this Art**

The art and performance ritual is the culmination of a six month co-creative research process with fourteen women who together make up the planning team for the Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC). This research is part of Barbara Bickel's Ph.D. dissertation in Curriculum Studies (Art Education) at The University of British Columbia.

The performance ritual has been expanded from its original performance which took place on March 2, 2007 during the opening multi-faith gathering ritual of the WSC conference in the Epiphany Chapel at the Vancouver School of Theology.

A spectrum of spiritual and religious paths nourished this co-researched arts-based inquiry. The art is an expression of fourteen women's desire to reveal, create, dialogue, educate and celebrate as women leaders of multi-faith awareness and practices. The self-identified traditions and spiritual practices drawn from, but not limited to, include: Anglican, Baptist, Buddhist-Wiccan, Christian, Creation Spirituality, Earth-Based, Feri, New Thought, Pagan/Goddess, Presbyterian, Religious Science, Spiritual Feminist, United, & Wiccan-Reclaiming.

We invite men and women of all religious traditions and spiritual paths, as well as the non-religious and those that love art, to join us and contribute to this arts-led multi-faith dialogue.

**Please join us for refreshments, dialogue, viewing of the art, and walking the labyrinth following the performance ritual.**

#### **Program**

7:15 Performance ritual begins, approx. length 15 minutes  
We invite you to tune with us during the performance ritual.  
The performance ritual will be videotaped

#### **Collaboratively Conceived by**

Mary Bennett, Barbara Bickel, Cathy Bone, Monica Brammer, Melodie Chant, Sophia Freigang, Tannis Huggill, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith, Shirin Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox

#### **Facilitated by** Barbara Bickel

#### **Performed by**

Barbara Bickel, Monica Brammer, Tannis Huggill, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Valerie Lys, Medwyn McConachy, Ingrid Rose, Annie Smith, Shirin Theophilus, Catherine Wilcox

#### **Video Documentation**

R. Michael Fisher, Chris Koppitz

---

**Performance Ritual** is the manifestation of art and spirit through our bodies.

**Trance** can be described as a form of active meditation, a waking dream state, where one can journey to other realities through an altered state of consciousness. This performance ritual emerged from a group trance.

#### **Labyrinth**

An ancient symbol that crosses cultural and religious boundaries, it is a multi-faith symbol in a world of diversity for some. In ancient Cretan society it represented the womb of the Divine Feminine. It can represent perpetual movement towards spirit. Engaged as a walking meditation it leads one into the center of the circle and back out through self reflective contemplation/prayer.

## Appendix H

### **Womb Entering A/r/tographic Statement**

The art installation, *Womb Entering*, is the fruit of collaborative women's work. As part of my arts-based dissertation inquiry, thirteen women accepted the invitation to explore their understandings of spirituality and religion as leaders of an annual multi-faith conference for women. Planning the Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC) has been part of my yearly cycle of volunteer work since 1999. Although, new women join and others leave the WSC group every year, some of the thirteen women in this inquiry have been part of the event since its inception in 1992. The current planning group added this research project to their already rich and complex lives. I'm deeply grateful for the gift of their spirits and energy in this co-creative project. My desire is that this art installation publicly validate women's sacred leadership work, which is so often invisible and taken for granted in our society.

Our first WSC planning meeting of the year took place last June at the Vancouver School of Theology (VST). Here we gathered at the outdoor labyrinth and ritually walked the journey together. The co-creative inquiry for this project began last November on a weekend retreat in one of our homes. A stone labyrinth filled the backyard of this woman's home. Over the weekend, within the circle of ritual, we shared stories, entered trance, meditated, created individual art pieces, slept, ate, laughed, cried, journaled, danced, and reflected on our lives as women spiritual leaders on particular historically-informed spiritual journeys. The labyrinth, in this installation, graces the gallery floor and connects each of our journeys to our diverse spiritual and religious ancestral histories.

The gallery opening performance ritual took place on the labyrinth, with a co-created sculpture at its center, *Her Divine Countenance*. This resting mask waits to be activated by each person's reflection when they enter the center. *Woman Spirit Shield*, is a co-created guardian, which when drummed, awakens the call to gather. Within the gallery, meditation sanctuaries offer a place for witnessing the co-creative process through a DVD documentary and a hand-bound book containing a collection of poems and trances that emerged within the inquiry. The performance ritual that took place at the WSC opening ritual in March 2007 entitled *Dancing the Altars*, as well as the pilot project performance ritual entitled *Re/Turning to Her*, which took place on the VST labyrinth in July 2006, are

projected into the gallery space. Their audio soundtracks echo back and forth between each other. The individually created art pieces installed on the walls allow a glimpse into each woman's expression of her spiritual self. These art pieces, similar to the spiritual journey, are not necessarily "finished" pieces of art, they express moments and places in time.

The practice of a/r/tography calls for an interwoven relationship between art/research/teaching through art making and writing. The women of this project entered a co-a/r/tographic process with me. I have had the dual role of facilitator and co-participant. As one of the women pointed out, I have had the task of holding together, yet keeping untangled, the multiple golden threads of this project. The mindfulness required for this role has been overwhelming at times, yet rendered possible by the level of respect, compassion, care and commitment on the part of the women in their support of me and this work. The ability of the women to communicate thoughtfully, combined with a willingness to be vulnerable, open and honest has allowed this project to be simultaneously a fragile and powerful undertaking.

In a world made up of diverse cultures, religious histories and practices, the public revealing of this collaborative art and inquiry process has an educational purpose of bringing awareness to the importance of multi-faith understanding, learning and practices. We do this through revealing ourselves, our spiritual paths and religions personally, through art. Art offers an arational language that can perhaps assist communication between the rational and irrational expressions so prevalent in our religiously diverse and warring world. We invite you to enter into this womb space as a transformative learning site, with an open heart and willingness to see yourself reflected, in whole or in part, within the diversity of spiritual and religious paths revealed here.

Barbara Bickel  
Vancouver, B.C.  
April 21, 2007

## Appendix I

### Stillpoint Poster

Designed by R. Michael Fisher



*Stillpoint*  
A Multi-media Art Installation  
& Performance Ritual  
April 13 – 19, 2008

*Barbara Bickel*

Performance Ritual & Opening Celebration  
Sunday, April 13, 7 pm

*a/r/tography* Talks  
Wednesday, April 16 at 2 pm  
Saturday, April 19, at 2 pm

AMS Art Gallery  
Students' Union Bldg., East Mall  
The University of British Columbia

Gallery Hours: Daily 10 – 5 pm  
For more info. 604 224 3384  
radicaltrust@shaw.ca  
www.barbarabickel.ca

This body of work is part of an *a/r/tographic* (arts-based) Ph.D. research study in the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia (2004-08). It visually distills and writes the larger collaborative research project that took place with thirteen women spiritual leaders exploring understandings of an annual multi-faith women's spirituality conference (Women's Spirituality Celebration).

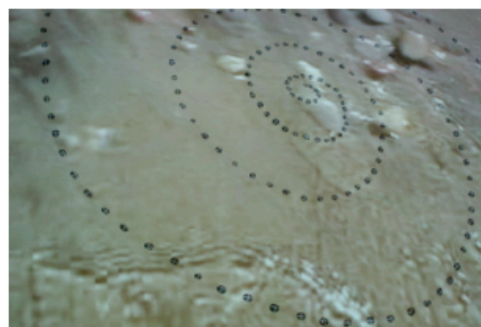
**Appendix J**  
**Voicing the Stones Program**  
Designed by Barbara Bickel



Cretan Temple (Kato Zakros)  
Photo credit Wende Bartley

Front cover image: Video still of "the water labyrinth"  
projected onto stones, thread and unbleached cotton.

## Voicing the Stones



### Performance Ritual

**Wende Bartley  
& Barbara Bickel**

Gibraltar Point Center for the Arts  
Toronto Island, Ontario

#### About this art

Stones, water, labyrinth walking, trance, breath and sound  
are combined in this collaborative performance ritual.

During my one month residency at Gibraltar Point I found myself collecting stones, and immersing my feet in the water while walking along the lake shore each morning. To continue the meditation of walking when indoors I began creating thread labyrinths on my studio floor. The stones, thread and water eventually wove themselves together creating a triptyche labyrinth altarpiece, a water labyrinth video projection onto a stone spiral labyrinth, and the floor labyrinth in the design of a stone labyrinth from Southern India called Chakravayuha. **Voicing the Stones** takes place upon the floor labyrinth.  
*Notes by Barbara Bickel*

The music for the labyrinth ritual was created from vocal and soundscape recordings made in Greece on the islands of Crete and Patmos. In the fall of 2004, I traveled to many ancient temple and cave sites to record my voice in these places. Most of the recordings you hear in **Voicing the Stones** were made in Skoteino Cave, an immense cavern of stone that descends 5 levels down into the earth. Caves on Crete were sacred to the Goddess, and symbolic of returning to the womb. Descending down into the stone chambers, the sounds of the bats and pigeon wings welcomed me. As I began sounding into the cave walls, I felt a welcoming embrace. Close by stood a large stalagmite that looked like the figure of a woman. Other recordings were made on the Acropolis Hill on the island of Patmos, and the cicadas and closing voices are from the Phaistos Temple site in the south part of Crete.

The sonic journey begins by the water's edge and takes the listener down over the rocks and stones to meet whatever or whoever awaits. The voices encountered there enter into the cellular structure and awaken memories, awaken the sensory body, creating a reconnection with the power of the earth. Leaving the cave, the listener travels up and out into the windy expanse of the mountainside. Long forgotten voices merge with the ever-present soundscape of the cicadas. The reunion of voice, body, earth and water.  
*Notes by Wende Bartley*

Performance Ritual — 14 minutes

Conceived & Performed by Wende Bartley & Barbara Bickel

Video Documentation — Elizabeth Forrest

**Performance Ritual** is the manifestation of art and spirit through our bodies.

**Trance** can be described as a form of active meditation, a waking dream state, where one can journey to other realities through an altered state of consciousness. This performance ritual emerged from a trance accompanied by Wende's music.

#### Labyrinth

An ancient symbol that crosses cultural and religious boundaries, it is a multi-faith symbol in a world of diversity for some. In ancient Cretan society it represented the womb of the Divine Feminine. In monastic traditions walking the turns of the labyrinth assisted in the activation of both hemispheres of the brain required to solve complex thoughts and ideas. It can represent a metaphor for the life journey. The mystery unfolds through walking.

You are invited to walk the labyrinth and  
experience it yourself this evening.



## Appendix K

### Stillpoint Programs

Designed by Barbara Bickel

*Stillpoint* is the visual distilling of the larger collaborative a/r/tographic dissertation research involving thirteen women and myself, who organize the Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC), an annual multi-faith conference in Vancouver (now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year). Within this project we explored our individual and collective experiences and understandings of spirituality and religions, which resulted in a co-created art installation and performance ritual entitled *Womb Entering*, that took place in April 2007 at the AMS Gallery (UBC).

The performance ritual you will witness this eve is impacted by a solo a/r/tographic (artist) residency and the collaborative a/r/tographic research of *Womb Entering*. It is part of a Ph.D. dissertation in the Faculty of Education, UBC.

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

We beheld the beauty of the Labyrinth....  
We were invited to enter this hallowed path  
We were invited to experience the power & elation....  
We were invited to rest our traveling minds & clamored souls....

(excerpt from a poem written by Shirin Theophilus after walking the Chakra Vyuhā labyrinth)

## *Stillpoint* *A Performance Ritual*

*Barbara Bickel*



April 13, 2008 at 7:15pm  
AMS Art Gallery

A/r/tography Talks  
Wednesday, April 16 at 2 pm  
Saturday, April 19, at 2 pm

Gallery Hours: Daily 10-5 pm  
For more info. 604 224 3384  
radicaltrust@shaw.ca  
www.barbarabickel.ca

#### Artist Bio

Barbara Bickel is an artist, researcher, educator and independent curator. She is currently completing an arts-based Ph.D. in Art Education at The University of British Columbia, and completed an MA in Education in 2004. She holds a BFA in Painting from the University of Calgary and a BA in Sociology and Art History from the University of Alberta. Her art and performance rituals have been exhibited and performed in Canada since 1991. She is currently represented by the Kensington Fine Art Gallery in Calgary, Alberta. She co-founded The Centre Gallery (1995-2001), a non-profit women's focused gallery in Calgary, Alberta. Her art portfolio and thesis can be viewed on-line at <http://www.barbarabickel.ca>

#### Labyrinth

An ancient symbol that crosses cultural and religious boundaries. Engaged as a walking meditation it leads one into the center of the circle and back out through a self-reflective practice/prayer. The Stillpoint labyrinth is made from a classical design found in India, called Chakra-Vyuhā.

This solo performance ritual is an extension of a previous collaborative performance ritual with healing sound artist Wende Bartley, entitled *Voicing the Stones* at the Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts on Toronto Is., ON., on July, 30, 2007.

#### Program

Approx. length 15 minutes.  
The performance ritual will be video taped.

Please refrain from clapping.

After the performance ritual Please stay for the opening celebration, enjoy the installation and walk the labyrinth yourself.

**Conceived & Performed by**  
Barbara Bickel

**Performance Ritual**  
**Direction**  
Tannis Hugill

**Music**  
From the CD:  
*Sonic Journeys in Ancient Ritual Spaces*  
Skoteino Cave, Crete  
by Wende Bartley

**Installation Assistance**  
R. Michael Fisher  
Cindy Lou Griffith

**Video Documentation**  
Cindy Lou Griffith  
Chris Koppitz

**Grace**  
Leah Fisher

This performance ritual is dedicated to the women of the *Women's Spirituality Celebration*. I am blessed to have each of them as Divine Sisters in my life.

## Appendix L

### ***Stillpoint: A Reflective Artful Inquiry A/r/tographic Statement***

An art installation and three performance rituals are the outcome of an artist residency at the Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts on Toronto Island, Ontario, during the month of July 2007. This creative hiatus became the stillpoint or centerpoint of the labyrinthal walk of my dissertation journey. I was in need of a sacred, arts space to empty and reflect upon my research of the past three years at The University of British Columbia in the Faculty of Education. I entered Women's Time and worked between two full moons cycles which book-ended my residency. The writing of the dissertation was fed by this reflective artful inquiry.

*Stillpoint* is the visual distilling of the larger collaborative a/r/tographic dissertation research involving thirteen women and myself, who organize the Women's Spirituality Celebration (WSC), an annual multi-faith conference in Vancouver (now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year) Within this project we explored our individual and collective experiences and understandings of spirituality and religions, which resulted in a co-created art installation and performance ritual entitled *Womb Entering*, that took place in April 2007 at the AMS Gallery (UBC).

Within the womb of my island residency on Lake Ontario I found myself walking along the lakeshore each morning, drawn to collecting flat round stones and feathers, and immersing my feet in the water. This meditative walking ritual seeped into my studio (a converted elementary school classroom), as I began creating thread labyrinths on the studio floor. The stones, feathers, thread and water eventually wove themselves together--creating an installation of wall hangings, along with *Waterwalk*, a video projection onto a stone spiral labyrinth sewn onto fabric, and a floor labyrinth entitled *Water Labyrinth* in a design from Southern India called Chakra-vyuha which is made of stone, and two videos documenting *Voicing the Stones* and *Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand* performance rituals. A further meditative practice of creating spontaneous mandalas each day documented and nourished the inquiry.

*Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand* took place on the last day of the residency. In this spontaneous performance ritual my desire was to return the labyrinth of stones to the lake. Wende Bartley witnessed and documented this final walk that brought my womb-like hiatus to a close.



The Stillpoint art installation and *Voicing the Stones* performance ritual were part of a studio showing at Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts on July 30<sup>th</sup> 2007 on the eve of the full moon. The *Stillpoint Altar triptyche* was part of the 2008 WSC at the Center for Peace in Vancouver B.C. The *Water Labyrinth* has been gifted to the WSC for future conferences.

*Voicing the Stones* was a co-created performance ritual with sound artist/composer Wende Bartley. Working together with trance, Wende's music, the *Water Labyrinth*, and our common interest in ancient and contemporary understandings of the Divine Feminine, we invoked and danced with the energy of stones. Wende's accompanying musical composition was created from vocal and soundscape recordings made in Greece on the islands of Crete and Patmos Acropolis Hill on the island of Patmos. The cicadas and closing voices are from the Phaistos Temple site of Crete. Wende's music also accompanied the *Stillpoint Performance Ritual* performed by myself on the opening eve of the AMS Gallery exhibition.

A life of learning and following spirit to a place of wholeness requires many long walks. Walking is a metaphor/pedagogy for following the sacred path(s) in this installation. A sanctuary for foot washing is contained within the gallery space as a sacred ritual that crosses diverse religious traditions. I offer the ritual of foot washing as an act of gratitude for those that choose to stop, rest, and receive during the duration of this installation.

Naked feet keep walking,  
naked earth hold her up,  
naked soul bless the work,  
that all may be seen, and heard, and known.  
- Cathy Bone

Barbara Bickel,  
April 13, 2008

**Appendix M**  
**Stillpoint DVD Cover**  
Designed by R. Michael Fisher

**Stillpoint**  
**a reflective artful inquiry**

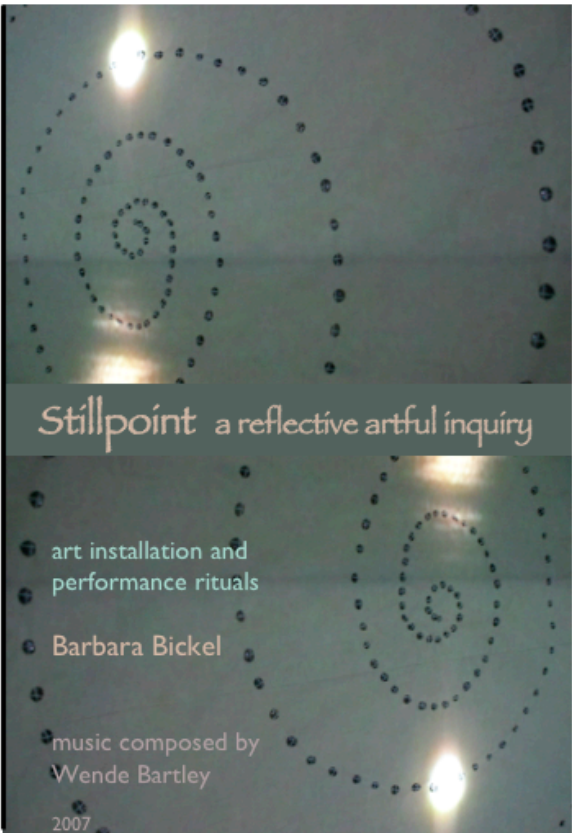
This DVD documents an artist residency at the Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts on Toronto Island, Ontario. This creative hiatus became the stillpoint or centerpoint of the labyrinthal walk of my dissertation journey – a sacred, quiet arts space to empty and reflect upon my research of the past three years.

A collaborative a/r/tographic research project involving thirteen women and myself, who organize an annual women's multi-faith conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, preceded the art of *Stillpoint*. Within this project we explored our individual and collective experiences of spirituality and religions, resulting in a co-created art installation and performance ritual entitled *Womb Entering*.

*Voicing the Stones* was a co-created performance ritual with sound artist/composer Wende Bartley. Working together with trance, Wende's music, the labyrinth, and our common interest in ancient and contemporary understandings of the Divine Feminine we invoked and danced with the energy of stones.

*Contra Pedagogical Time/Walk on Sand* took place on the last day of the residency. In this spontaneous performance ritual my desire was to return the labyrinth of stones to the lake. Wende witnessed and documented this final walk that brought my womb-like hiatus to a close.

Copyright 2007 Barbara Bickel



**Stillpoint** a reflective artful inquiry

art installation and performance rituals

Barbara Bickel

music composed by Wende Bartley

2007

Stillpoint a reflective artful inquiry  
Barbara Bickel with Wende Bartley 2007

## Appendix N

### Patti Lather's Guidelines for Validity in Qualitative Research

(adapted from Lather, 1986)

“*Triangulation*, [is] expanded beyond the psychometric definition of multiple measures to include multiple *data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes*, is critical in establishing data trustworthiness” (p. 67).

“*Construct validity*.... Emancipatory social theory requires a ceaseless confrontation with the experiences of people in their daily lives in order to stymie the tendency to theoretical imposition which is inherent in theoretically guided empirical work. A *systematized reflexivity*, which gives some indication of how *a priori* theory was been changed by logic of the data, become essential in establishing construct validity in ways that will contribute to the growth of illuminating and change-enhancing social theory” (p. 67).

“*Face validity*.... Reason and Rowan (1981) argue that such member checks (recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents) need to become a standard part of emancipatory research designs: “good research at the non-alienating end of the spectrum... goes back to the subject with the tentative results, and refines them in the light of the subjects’ reactions (p. 248)” (p. 67).

“*Catalytic validity*... is premised not only on a recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so that the respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation” (p. 67).

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## Pilot Study

B05-0826 - Performative Bodies: Within the Spiritual and Within the Religious

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Project Information

### (H05-80826) B05-0826 - Performative Bodies: Within the Spiritual and Within the Religious

<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b>	Rita Irwin	<b>Approval Department:</b>	Curriculum Studies
<b>Primary Contact:</b>	Rita Irwin	<b>Department Approver:</b>	
<b>Type of Study:</b>	Behavioural	<b>Review Board:</b>	Behavioural Research Ethics Board
<b>Minimal Risk:</b>		<b>Co-Investigators with Signing Authority:</b>	There are no items to display
<b>Initial Approved Date:</b>	October 13, 2005	<b>Date Expires:</b>	October 13, 2006
<b>Current Approval Certificate:</b>		<b>Version:</b>	1.0
<b>Type of Funding:</b>	N/A		
<b>CM Conflicts:</b>			

Correspondence
Provisos
Post Approval Activities
Application Changes
Activities Log

This contains all the correspondence and activities completed on the application before the initial approval. The title bar shows each activity that was completed, who completed it, and the date and time it was completed.

Correspondence

Activity	Author	Activity Date ↕
REBA Comments	Snezana M Milosevic	10/4/2007 4:00 PM PDT
ARCHIVED, Box # 2, 213088719.		
Terminated	Snezana M Milosevic	8/27/2007 9:25 AM PDT



The University of British Columbia  
 Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
 Suite 102, 8190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL**

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Rita Irwin	<b>DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Education/Curriculum Studies	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H06-80393
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
Institution UBC		Site Point Grey Site
Other locations where the research will be conducted: N/A		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Barbara Bickel		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Women Leaders Expanding Notions of Religion and Spirituality through Collaboration: An Arts-based Inquiry		

**EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: June 11, 2008**

**APPROVAL DATE: June 11, 2007**

The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board