OPEN LETTER

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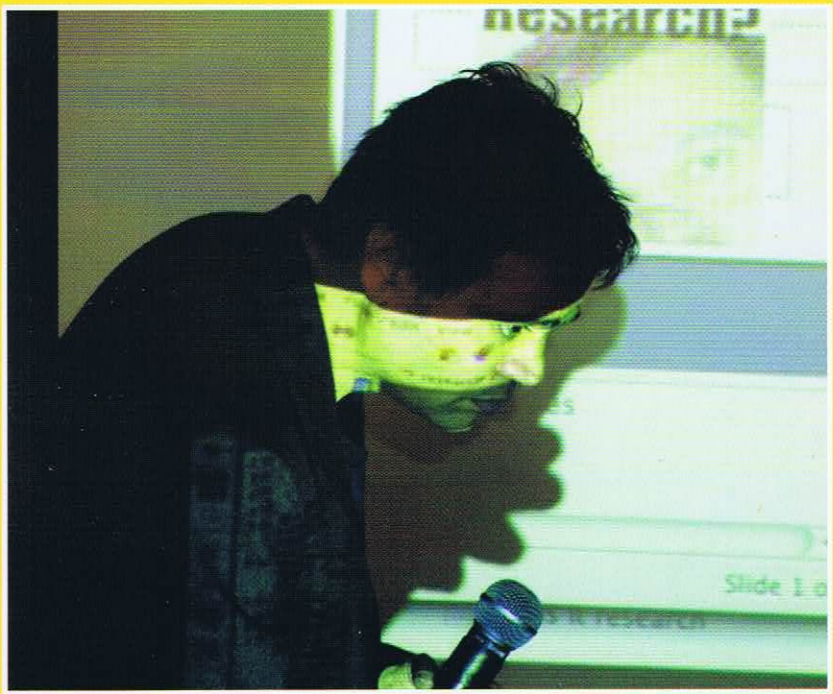
Artists' Statements and the Nature of Artistic Inquiry



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Artists' Statements & the Nature of Artistic Inquiry

Guest-edited by Rachel Nash and W.F. Garrett-Petts

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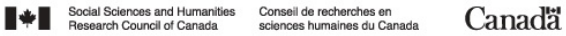

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The editors and the contributing artists have made every effort to track ownership and obtain formal permission for photographs and images included in this special issue. Our thanks again to the participating artists; to the Kamloops Art Gallery; to the Hellenic Cultural Center of Chicago, and to the curators and artists of the *Art of the Artist Statement* exhibition; to Columbia Records; to MGM Studios Clip + Still Licencing; to Fred Douglas and his estate; to New Day Films; to Bloodaxe Books and Random House.

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On Artists' Statements and the Nature of Artistic Inquiry

Rachel Nash and W.F. Garrett-Petts

Ironically, though there's ample evidence that we need to integrate visual ways of representing knowledge throughout life, universities have, until recently, singled out print as the privileged medium for intellectual work. Things are changing, however. Cultural theorists, including those involved in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies, are beginning to acknowledge a 'visual turn' in academic and creative work. The pressure to understand and accommodate 'non-linguistic' ways of knowing and communicating has become particularly urgent in Canada, since the major funding agency for the humanities and social sciences (SSHRC) has set aside new support for artist-researchers via its Research/Creation program.

These researchers and their practices are introducing new modes and methods of inquiry, and new challenges to traditional academic notions of research. At present, however, although the academic climate seems especially warm toward notions of 'creative research' in general, we have no clear consensus about the definition, value, and impact of these modes and methods of *artistic inquiry*. Much has been said and written about research *on* visual arts, but there is relatively little about research *for* visual arts (the array of practices that both inform and constitute artistic production) or research *through* visual art (where artistic practice becomes a vehicle for producing and presenting new knowledge).

What we do know is that artistic inquiry often challenges disciplinary thinking and employs multimodal representational strategies. Often described as 'hybrid,' 'mixed,' or 'alternative' discourse, multimodal writing, for example, seems intimately connected to changing notions of authorship, new media technologies, challenges to education posed by multicultural classes, feminization of the academy, national funding strategies tied to collaborative and interdisciplinary research, and a renewed interest in the role of the personal, especially the personal essay and creative nonfiction as

legitimate vehicles for academic inquiry. Alternative forms of academic discourse reflect changes in, and the growing diversity of, the academic community. Coming to terms with and understanding artistic research – its limitations and potential – has become a crucial challenge to the academic community at large, not just those directly involved with it.[1]

For the last few years, we've been studying changing notions of research in Canada – and elsewhere. We've been working with visual artists, studying their practices, intrigued by the way their work (especially the work of those artists working and teaching in universities) challenges traditional notions of research. An area of particular interest for us has been the 'artist statement' as a contested site of practice, a point where writing meets (variously intrudes upon, supplements, contextualizes, contradicts, enhances, extends, or gestures toward) visual arts production and exhibition. We are also intrigued by the notion of the artist statement as a vehicle for creative inquiry.

In November 2005, with support from SSHRC, we brought together 29 emerging and established artist-researchers (from the visual arts and creative writing): artists, writers, language and discourse theorists, critics, curators, and cultural administrators from Canada, the United States, and Europe. This workshop, *Artist Statement: Artistic Inquiry and the Role of the Artist in Academe,* had two related objectives: (1) using the workshop as an initial site of research exchange, we sought to develop a research community based on increasing interest in the broad issue of artistic inquiry; and (2) as a result of the workshop, we undertook to produce this edited collection of essays on the topic of artistic inquiry, thus providing a record of the many discussions and exchanges during the workshop, and laying the groundwork for future collaborations.

On *Day One* of the workshop, designated participants introduced the three key strands of investigation: the artist as researcher; an investigation of 'artist statement,' what artists say about their own works; and the artist's place in academe. Our preliminary "Discussion Questions" focused on the following:

Artistic Inquiry:

(a) Our working definitions of 'artistic research'? 'artistic inquiry'?

(b) How does artistic research contribute to knowledge? Are there, for example, visual ways of knowing?
(c) What are the difficulties in, and implications of, institutional recognition of artistic research – for universities? for artists? for others?
(d) Other emergent questions requiring our attention?

Artist Statements:

(a) Our working definition of the 'artist statement'?
(b) The relationship of 'artist statements' to manifestoes, prefaces, introductions, interviews, and artist talks?
(c) The history of 'artist statements'?
(d) 'Artist statements' as vehicles for, or products of, artistic research?
(e) Other emergent questions requiring our attention?

Participants gathered in small working groups to discuss key issues and problematics in the field, reporting back to the whole workshop. The afternoon sessions were devoted to the presentation of individual papers. In the evening, as co-curators of the complementary exhibition at the Kamloops Art Gallery, *Proximities: Artists' Statements and Their Works*, we led the workshop on a guided tour of the installations.

On *Day Two* of the workshop, participants continued to share their research and engage in an extended critique session. We expected that these sessions would have a particularly strong impact on the cohesion and quality of the present edited collection. Day Two concluded with a shared reception between participants in the Artist Statement Workshop and the opening of *Court/House*, an exhibition and public panel presentation on "Vernacular Modes of Inquiry," funded by a Research/Creation Grant and headed by workshop participant Donald Lawrence.

The morning of *Day Three* employed the resources of BCcampus and provided an electronic archive of selected panel presentations, images from the workshop, discussion exchanges, notes, and draft copies of papers presented. We've tried to capture some of this for you in the accompanying DVD.

Our original intent was to publish papers from the conference in an edition of *Open Letter*, much like the one in which you are reading these words. However, workshop participants soon challenged the

(unintentionally) discursive bias of our proposal. The critique first emerged in terms of the technical limitations of *Open Letter*: those who were primarily visual artists, by and large, needed a different kind of medium than this small black-and-white journal if we were to do their work any kind of justice. Further, and upon reflection, we agreed that the 'standard' essay form itself, the staple of most traditional humanities and social sciences research journals, was not necessarily appropriate to the work of artist-researchers. So, the product before you represents a series of negotiations and accommodations, as well as a learning process for its editors. The format, most obviously, is dual. We have included a DVD while retaining the values and virtues of the venerable print medium; taken together these two presentational modes comprise the full edition of this journal, and, we hope, will enable readers/viewers to engage with this emerging, hybridized field, at least as we began to recognize it at the *Artist Statement* workshop.

The print version begins with a series of articles that extend and investigate the notion of the artist statement. Rhetorician Tracy Whalen considers the issue of display in "The Artist Statement and the Phantom Presence" through a series of meditative "snapshots." The artist statement, she points out, balances the push-pull between "concealment and revelation," inhabiting a space of ambivalence, not only for members of the artistic community who must produce them, but structurally, as they seek to communicate to the larger world, without appearing to give away or simplify the artwork itself. Whalen then inspects the problematic underpinnings of this dichotomy, apparent in the work of artists who explicitly incorporate the artist statement into their artistic practice. She argues that not only do they foreground the materiality of language, reminding us that it too, is another artistic medium, but, even more significantly, they draw to our attention to what she calls the "phantom presence" of language: the porosity and ultimate slipperiness of any representation, including language and that – in our debates and head-scratching over verbal/visual divides – we ought not neglect the always provisional nature of language itself.

In "Artists' Statements and 'The Rules of Art'" Frank Davey, like Whalen, examines artistic works which blur "the boundary between inside and outside." Drawing especially on the artistic practices of the

Dadaists and their Canadian inheritors, poet bpNichol and painter Greg Curnoe, Davey argues that the artist statement is the first step in the supplementation of an artistic work and that this supplementation is necessary to position the work in the "game" of cultural competition. In order to get ahead in the current art world, the artist must exhibit self-awareness and a mastery of the discourse of art. Even an apparent refusal to play, Davey contends, is yet another move in the same game.

Marsha Bryant offers a close study of supplementation, this time in relation to the strategies used by women poets. In "Displaced Artist Statements, Reluctant Artist-Researchers: Poet-Editors of Women's Poetry Anthologies," Bryant reads the editorial work of women poets who anthologize the poetry of other women writers as displaced artists' statements which can be read back both into the work of the poet/editors themselves and into the larger cultural domain in which the entire category of "women's poetry" has only a tenuous status. Focusing first on the unfamiliar idea of poets writing artists' statements, Bryant then compares two British women's poetry anthologies in terms of their editor's statements, representations and images, reinforcing the cultural nature of the work performed by poetry, as well as its aesthetic service.

Will Garrett-Petts comes to the artist statement through the work of photographer Fred Douglas, particularly his final unfinished bookwork *Flutter*, which Garrett-Petts reads as an artist's statement that "becomes art." Drawing on his own previous work with the theoretical notion of the "vernacular" – a kind of authenticity generated in the moment through performance rather than residing in the artist or art object per se – Garrett-Petts takes up Douglas' proposition that the ideal artist's statement should "uncontain," spooling generously out and over the preconceptions of the reader/viewer, opening and generating, rather than fixing and reducing. *Flutter*, the title itself a gesture to movement and instability, provides an example of how that process might happen.

In "How To Be Influenced," Michael Jarrett uses popular music to theorize influence – an almost obligatory element in artists' statements (i.e., "who are your influences?") – as a method of invention, "a procedure for conducting artistic inquiry and producing art." Turning the conventional understanding of influence on its head,

Jarrett argues that it's not influence that produces artistic accomplishment, but, instead, artistic accomplishment that creates the need to identify influence (or, rather, raises the question of influence). Jarrett rehearses the three standard ways in which influence is understood in a literate environment: integration, representation and reduction. Then, drawing on Greg Ulmer's work, Jarrett introduces a fourth model of influence, "conduction," which accounts for different relationships of influence, ways of connecting from thing-to-thing that make sense in electronic, visual and aesthetic terms.

In the second section of the print component of this journal, a diverse series of articles explore *artistic inquiry*, suggesting the rich, underdetermined nature of this concept. Henk Slager, a professor at the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design, reports on his institution's innovative PhD in Fine Art in "Operational Research." Slager then brings to our attention the methodological issues artistic inquiry foregrounds about the nature of 'research' itself. He theorizes that artistic inquiry transgresses disciplinary boundaries, creating "novel, reflexive zones" and cautions against delimiting artistic research. In order to guard against the introduction of "one-dimensional contextualization," Slager proposes a dual methodology for artistic inquiry, linked to both knowledge production and ethics, in which the operational, contextual and practical nature of artistic research, combined with on-going critical self-awareness, constitutes its always emergent methodology.

Ashok Mathur's essay "Researching Artists Required: Inquire Within" offers both a portrait of artistic inquiry in practice and a perspective on ways of integrating artistic inquiry into universities, while resisting the worst aspects of institutionalization. Mathur interstices his description of the origins of the Canada Research Chair he holds in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry with text from *Suggesture,* his collaborative artwork with Kristi Malakoff and Sandra Semchuk. Re-constructing the past, and re-imaging the future, he muses on the range of possibilities that become available when welcoming spaces open up to process-driven artistic and critical inquiry.

Si Transken writes about the process of putting together her tenure and promotion package in the discipline of social work, an occasion to reflect on her multi-pronged activities as a social justice activist. Her article "Re/Searching with Art/Ists: Praxis, Practice, and Social

Justice" not only challenges conventional ideas of research with action-based research that demands accountability to the communities it affects, but also argues for the centrality of arts to action-based research and for a redefinition of art. Transken ultimately characterizes herself as an "artivist," someone who uses art, in many guises, to communicate and convince. And, indeed, her whole tenure and promotion application and the article itself may be read as a new kind of genre, the artivist statement.

We've given the last word (as it were) in the print issue to more visually-intensive material. Adelheid Mers, a conference participant and contributor to the DVD, shares with us a hand-drawn diagram entitled "Tools for Making Sense [short version]" which begins, quite literally, to sketch out the relationships between art and other more traditional conceptions of research. A photo essay, featuring the work of Dana Novak, visually documents the *Artist Statement: Artistic Inquiry and the Role of the Artist in Academe* workshop, providing a sense of the activities, speakers, and spirit of the event, and, we think, a fitting complementarity to the verbal snapshots in Whalen's essay which begin this collection.

The DVD, which you will find attached to the back cover of the journal issue, offers a diverse selection of technical, aesthetic, and experiential engagements with the issue of artists' statements and artistic inquiry:

> Video interviews with artist-researchers Ernie Kroeger and Eileen Leier allow them to speak directly to the relevance of research and explication to their respective creative practices.
>
> Live footage from the Saturday morning panel at the *Artist Statement* workshop – a final exchange after an intense two days of meeting, sharing and talking – features presentations by Adheleid Mers, John Craig Freeman, and Michael Jarrett, and subsequent discussion.
>
> The short film *Writing on the Walls* provides an eye on *Proximities: Artists' Statements and Their Works* – an exhibition curated by this issue's editors at the Kamloops Art Gallery concurrent with the *Artist Statement* workshop.

Dana Novak's visual/verbal text "Translating Chicago" allows us to access another pivotal exhibition on this topic, the *Art of the Artist Statement* curated by Maria Paschalidou and Georgia Kotretsos, held at the Hellenic Cultural Center, Chicago, Feb. 18, 2005-Apr. 2, 2005.

Alan Brandoli's discussion of the status of children's artwork and their artists' statements in "I to eye-stories" is accompanied by beautiful images from child-artists, as is the complementary electronic copy of *eye stories: children's art and words*, the exhibition catalogue from a show curated by Helen MacDonald-Carlson and Brandoli.

In the document "Around Fiddle Reef," Donald Lawrence shows – through a combination of photos (archival and contemporary), sketches, and notes (technical and reflective) – how he conducts artistic research as he creates a series of related artworks.

Adelheid Mers uses the electronic diagram format, mapping the different fields that comprise the art world in "The 'Early Adopters' Exhibition as an Example of Artistic Research."

Finally, Paula Levine's "Shadows from Another Place: Transposed Space" demonstrates the use of technology in practice, as she maps war-damaged Baghdad onto San Francisco, her home, and explores the possibilities of new and experimental forms of artistic research.

We hope that you will both enjoy and be provoked by this special issue – and consider it the beginning of a longer conversation about artistic inquiry, creative research, artist statements, and the construction of new knowledge. We offer this collection of essays, images, and mappings as a collective statement on the possibilities for artistic research.

Notes

1. These preliminary conclusions are based upon an investigation of possible models for artistic inquiry that began with our participation in the Small Cities Community-University Research Alliance, a five-year arts-led research program. As part of the research alliance, we are now in

the midst of working out forms and models of collaboration involving artists, academic researchers, and community organizations. To date, four artists have been engaged to work with four community-based research teams. Each is following one of three inquiry models: (1) *Affinity* – where the artist is encouraged to match existing work with issues under exploration by a particular research group; (2) *Response* – where the artist is encouraged to create new work responding directly to the particular research group's project; (3) *Integrated* – where the artist works with a particular research group, becoming in effect a co-researcher by committing skills, insights and art production to the research findings (Garrett-Petts and Dubinsky 6-7).

Works Cited

Garrett-Petts, W.F., and Lon Dubinsky. "'Working Well, Together': An Introduction to the Cultural Future of Small Cities." Ed. W.F. Garrett-Petts. *The Small Cities Book: On the Cultural Future of Small Cities*. Vancouver: New Star, 2005. 1-13.

The Artist Statement and Phantom Presence

Tracy Whalen

> Presence may or may not occur naturally. A book may fall off a table drawing our attention, but the *art* of *creating* this presence is the art called rhetoric. (Tucker, "Figure, Ground, and Presence," 410)

> Working collaboratively, we gesture towards each other through visual and written means that finally shape our presence here in *Proximities*. (Mathur, Malakoff, and Semchuk, "suggesture" 1)

I was a phantom presence of sorts at the 2005 *Artist Statement: Artistic Inquiry and the Role of the Artist* workshop at Thompson Rivers University. I flickered in and out of the activities: I facilitated workshops, ate lunch with hilarious, creative, and reflective workshop participants, chaired a session, took notes, listened, laughed, and connected. But I did not present a paper, did not have an installation in the concurrent *Proximities* exhibition at the Kamloops Art Gallery, and did not make any public 'statement' of my own. I was sometimes 'figured' (when I asked a question, told a joke, or generated discussion from the front of the room) and I was sometimes, by choice, in the background. My presence at the workshop might have seemed to some a tad mysterious, as I did not really have a category to speak of. I left that workshop thinking about that phantom presence status of mine. I would argue, after the fact, that such an idea is a useful way to conceptualize the elusive, sometimes playful, suggestive, and suspended-in-the-moment meaning-making potentials of the artist statement, too.

One might think of the phantom presence here as a relationship between text and reader, an invisible yet tangible force that achieves a moment of salience or meaning in the in-between space of text and viewer – a presence that is there and is not there, a presence that flickers on that line of *revealing and concealing* so central to the discussion of display.[1] Philosopher George Steiner calls such forces

"real presences," rhetorician John Shotter, "uncanny power" or "*felt* understanding": "an invisible but nonetheless real agency that, so to speak, has a 'life of its own' and as such can exert its own 'demands' and 'judgments' on our reactions to it" (274). One might think of the whole world of potential meanings that one creates together in virtual communication, say, with an unknown other. The artist statement as object of display – what I discuss as an example of epideictic rhetoric – is bound to provoke anxieties about the possible lapidary status of such exhibition. But an artist's meanings, I have noticed, can occur in liminal spaces, in the peripheral vision, in the timings, the gestures, and the nuances of the statement. Such phantom status helps ameliorate that anxiety around etched-in-stone articulations of what a piece really means. In this discussion, I reflect upon the various kinds of vital, flickering otherness-es created, suggested, and examined by the artists, artist-researchers, social activists, and cultural theorists who contributed to the workshop prompting this publication. Thinking in terms of a series of snapshots, fragments of thinking that invite "suggesture," to use Ashok Mathur's word, I begin with the notion of display, where the artist statement, as site of ambivalence, invites the kind of presence that resists corseting.

Snapshot One: Statement as Epideictic Rhetoric and Ambivalence of Revealing/Concealing

My thinking about the revealing/concealing ambivalence around the artist statement (and its phantom presence) began with blue carpet cones. Of all the striking images and terminologies that ran their fingers along my cerebral cortex during the *Artist Statement* workshop, it was those cones that remained with me, made themselves present in my imagination. Workshop presenter Maria Paschalidou described them first – and Georgia Kotretsos, later – when discussing the 2005 exhibition, *The Art of Artist Statement*, which they co-curated at the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center in Chicago. In that exhibition, Ryan Swanson's cone installation artist statement, "Seduction Tactics," altered the museum space and literally tripped up some of those walking in the gallery:

> Swanson drew from the physical space of the museum by using its carpets and the large white fabrics, which covered the columns (which imitated ancient Greek columns). By pulling down the fabrics,

> the artist revealed the upper half of each column and mixed the fabrics laid on the floor with sculptures he made from the museum's blue carpet in the shape of big cones. The result was a disturbance to the classical environment... Similar to the carpet, Swanson's sculptures were quite unsettling. Many exhibition visitors accidentally stepped on them, temporarily losing their balance. With its floor rough and unsteady, the museum as a formal institution looked less stable, especially for regular visitors who took the museum's stability for granted. After finishing his installation, Swanson stated 'that's my artist statement.' (Paschalidou 5)

These carpeted cones underscore for me the status of the artist statement as material act or performance, one that operates rhetorically as a physical artefact having direct bearing on other physical bodies – tripping them up, disorienting them, making them change their walking trajectory, and defamiliarizing what these bodies took to be a decipherable space. It is a moment both physically tangible (the title word "tactics" so fitting for this tactile/attack-tile moment), but the experience is also elusive and not-pin-downable. (What is the "that," exactly, in Swanson's claim, "*That's* my artist statement?"). The cones – seen, felt, and said (insofar as it is a "statement") – both show and tell, a "bringing forth" of meaning that brings us into the realm of epideictic rhetoric, simply, the rhetoric of display.[2] Debra Hawhee, in her book *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* points to the simultaneous showing and telling in classical epideictic and notes the embodied, material foundation in Greek understandings of such rhetoric:

> The very term *epideixis* displays the necessary relation between showing and telling; for those who study rhetoric associate *epideixis* with a particular kind of speech, one of Aristotle's "big three" – epideictic, deliberative, forensic (Rhetoric 1.3.1-3). Still, *epideixis* primarily meant a material or bodily display, as when Thucydides employs the term to describe an Athenian naval expedition's "display of power" ... or when Xenophon uses the word to describe the beautiful Theodote's display of her body (*Memorabilia* 3.11.2). (175)

The artist's statement as we typically know it – the didactic, the artist interview, the portfolio, the poetry anthology introduction, the grant proposal – finds itself displayed on the gallery wall, in museum booklets, in volumes of art history and criticism, before the eyes of

money-granting institutions. Epideictic rhetoric marks occasions of lamentation and celebration and "suggests an exhibiting or making apparent (in the sense of showing or highlighting) what might otherwise remain unnoticed or invisible" (Rosenfield 135, qtd. in Shotter 273). Academy award speeches, eulogies, public monuments, commemorative photographs, tattoos, doomsday billboards along the highway – all draw us into the embrace of epideictic. Rhetoric – and especially epideictic rhetoric – has been in dire need of public relations repair work, traditionally associated as it is with showing off, superficial ornamentation, and impractical, fleeting exhibition (yes, the word is resonant in this context).

Yet, as rhetorician Gerard A. Hauser has argued, the subject matter of epideictic offered "public norms for proper conduct" (17) and served an important educative function in Athenian society, as it taught, through encomium or blame, what constituted virtue in the civic community. Marsha Bryant's workshop paper, "Prepare to be Transported: Displaced Artist Statements in Women's Poetry Anthologies," illustrates just this inculcation of revered 'norms': how introductions in contemporary women's poetry collections, a form of artist statement, both lament and celebrate the current marketing of women's poetry in the UK, Bryant's research site. In that discussion, we see how Carol Rumens, the "reluctant poet-editor" (3) of *Making for the Open: The Chatto Book of Post-Feminist Poetry 1964-1984* chooses the jeremiad as her rhetorical approach, lamenting what she believes are the compromised standards in current women's poetry publications, which emphasize "women" at the expense of Very Important Literary Values. Maura Dooley, on the other hand, the editor of *Making for Planet Alice: New Women Poets*, celebrates in her introduction the funky, personalized, hard-talkin', and sexy democracy of verse she sees at play in that illusive, place-of-the-elsewhere called "women's poetry." Whether poetry-marketing antagonist or apologist, both anthologists use the exhibition space of introduction to make a comment about the *good*, about what elements a reader *should* value in such a genre.

Lawrence Prelli points to a central tension in epideictic rhetoric and one central to my thinking about artist statements, one that I have suggested above: "the meanings manifested rhetorically through display are functions of particular, situated resolutions of the dynamic

between *revealing and concealing*" ("Rhetorics of Display" 2, italics mine). Discussions from the workshop revealed ambivalence, a tension between wanting to display one's artistic experience in terms of research and practice (in fact, make it a central component in exhibition) and wanting *not* to reveal a context for the art piece, to preserve some of the suggestive openness of interpretation. Georgia Kotretsos, in her paper, "The Art of Artist Statement Encounter," for instance, recognizes the usefulness of artist statements, especially those constructed *after* the work is displayed (and not from a context of artist solitude, pre-display, in the studio alone). But she also writes that, "statements can interrupt the interpreting/misinterpreting process by fencing or directing our thinking process before we even get to look at the artwork" (12). According to photographer and researcher Dana Novak, who visited *The Art of the Artist Statement* Chicago exhibition, one of the artists there, Thulani Earnshaw, "held a strong conviction that art should … speak for itself" (12). Another artist, Brandon LaBelle, in his instalment, "Hearing Things," playfully showed videos of people listening to artist statements through headphones, establishing a still-secretive, second-hand remove from the original text. Rhetorician John Shotter believes that established frameworks of knowledge can dampen the dynamic meeting between viewer and unfamiliar display and contends that such categories for understanding mute the shock of otherness – the uncanny, the unsettling, the mysterious, even – that might otherwise occur:

> Aimed at mastery rather than at understanding, they [modernist modes of inquiry] function to keep us at a distance from the things around us. Thus, rather than 'entering into' a display's world and becoming a witness to the nature of its being, its original otherness, we aim simply at using it for our own ends; rather than celebrating it, we think of manipulation; rather than embracing it, we evaluate it for its worth or gain to us; and so on. (274)

The cry of T.S. Eliot's Prufrock could very well represent the plaintive wail of the posted gallery didactic: "And I have known the eyes already, known them all – /the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase/And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin/When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall/Then how should I begin?"

Yet artists, especially those from the periphery, Paschalidou argues, perceive the artist statement as enabling, as it "supports the

artwork," and helps to "clarify ideas" and "communicate with curators" (7); an artist herself, she views the artist statement as "an action of taking responsibility towards an artwork," what is essentially a political display of *ethos,* a statement of character or credibility. Will Garrett-Petts writes that

> In general, artists' statements present an intriguing, if problematic, example of what Milan Dimic calls "literatures of less diffusion," ostensibly minor works of prose poetry or criticism that, lacking either the status or dissemination of more canonical writing, have gone unnoticed or become hidden from public view. (4)

Workshop presenter Si Transken, an activist and social worker (what she prefers to call "organic intellectual"), argues that artist research documents must be noticed, must draw attention to themselves, as a necessary means of connecting with other artist/activists and funding bodies to direct resources to socially just causes.[3] For many, the artist statement is a site of research, is practice, is an artistic work itself, is a multimodal site of interaction between viewer and viewed; but even if visible (in fact, even if huge or loud), these forms remain nonetheless removed, porous, ethereal, suggestive, ambiguous, gestural, second-hand, non-linear, what have you.

Snapshot Two: Presence and Epideictic Rhetoric

This ambiguity, I (and others) believe, summons up, as I have suggested, the rhetorical notion of *presence*, especially in the liminal spaces of encounter, the in-between. Will Garrett-Petts illustrates the rhetorical power of presence in his paper, "Exhibiting Writing: On Viewing Artists' Statements as Art," which opens with that well-known scene in Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall* where Marshall McLuhan pops out from behind a playbill to contradict the academic pontificating loudly behind Alvy and Annie in the line-up to a movie. Garrett-Petts writes that, "wherever we might stand on questions of authorial intention, authority, and hermeneutics generally, few would argue that McLuhan's presence in the scene doesn't make a difference" (2). Presence, a concept explicated by rhetoricians Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, is a strategy of "displaying ... certain elements on which the speaker wishes to center attention in order that they may occupy the foreground of the hearer's conscious-

ness" (142), the result of such focus and expansion being that certain selections are impressed "on the consciousness with a certain intensity" (143). In historical terms, presence is the process of mediating the "then of the text and the now of the reader" (Holub 59, qtd. in Oakley 53). A writer or orator can achieve psychological presence for absent or abstract concepts – a strategy of paramount importance to argumentation, rhetorical theorists argue, because we act on what we perceive – through the essential element of proximity, pulling an object close in time and space and making it concrete: at its most basic, by selecting a present tense for the depiction of an event or showing a physical object (like a bloody tunic) to make the phenomenon more real. A discussion of presence is particularly fitting for epideictic rhetoric, which, as Aristotle argued, was – of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic rhetoric – the genre associated with the temporal *present*:

> The three kinds of rhetoric refer to three different kinds of time. The deliberative orator is concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises, for or against. The party in a case at law is concerned with the past; one man accuses the other, and the other defends himself, with reference to things already done. The epideictic orator is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time ... (*Rhetoric* 1358b, qtd. in Rollins 6)

Effecting presence is no easy task, however, given the undifferentiated mass of attitudes, values, perceptions, and unnoticed phenomena that we walk through each moment. Swanson's carpet sculptures expose our general lack of awareness, our unconscious, habitual movements through unnoticed objects – until something stands out (here, in tactile ways) and knocks us off kilter or forces us off our habitual walking path. Take those cone sculptures, for instance: seemingly invisible, they exerted measurable agency in tripping people up and, as a physical otherness in a space that had, for many, been otherwise familiar, brought about an embodied reaction to their (to use Heidegger's term) "thereness." Museum-goers could not set themselves at a distance from the art/statement (as one might do with the traditional interpretive didactic, say) but found themselves in the middle of an unfolding moment (whether one of falling or confusion or suddenly changing one's course) brought about through the

interplay between text and responding subject. But for this presence to be effected, Shotter contends, there must be a relationship that is "mutually responsive" and "dialogic," one of "interinvolvement" and "paired interplay." One could imagine the give of a cone (its falling, too, or its displacement) in response to the physically or cognitively displaced person walking over it.[4]

Snapshot Three: Phantom Presence in the Play of Visibility and Invisibility

Swanson's carpet cones epitomize the general ambivalence between concealment and revelation, blurring the lines between art and artist statement, between seeing and not seeing, between agency and passivity as reader of text. Regarding this last, the person tripped up has been caught unaware, has likely not initiated that fall; but the cones might teach us that we *do* have some measure of choice over how we read a text – whether we choose to see the sculptures as salient or overlook them as meaningless background 'noise.' The cones play on that line of visibility and invisibility, a phantom presence resonating there, but not there. The structures are concealed under the same carpet as the rest of the museum but they are also inescapably *there* – they stand out from the floor, they come off the ground, quite literally, like the more salient figure in a figure-ground relationship. The whole structure is like a gestalt moment: what is the figure? Where, quite literally, is the ground? The artist does not resolve that ambiguity for the audience members in any easy way. Robert Tucker's "Figure, Ground, and Presence: A Phenomenology of Meaning in Rhetoric" defines presence, in part, as "the inevitable property of 'standing-out-ness' that results from our encounter with ambiguity" (403). He contends that one might make a lexical comparison with puns and ambiguous statements, really any statement in this complicated world of ours – places where utterances can slide back and forth between one salient meaning and another. Indeed, the whole idea of making the *artist statement* the figure (lifting it from its usual ground status) in the Kamloops and the Chicago exhibitions effects a slippery movement between art and its commentary and gives the statement a presence it often does not receive.

Exemplifying this ambiguity, too, is Richard Koening's photographic work in Paschalidou and Kotretsos' exhibition, one accompa-

nied by the script, "I have nothing to declare." This paradoxical statement enacts a similar figure-ground dimension of double-suspended meaning, where one interpretation of the statement necessarily becomes subordinated in that instant to the other contradictory, paradoxical one, just as the duck becomes background in one moment to the more salient rabbit, and the vase background to the more salient facing profiles in familiar visual figure/ground relations. This paradox presents "two diametrically opposed meanings," which, as rhetorician Richard Lanham says of satire, forces the reader to "continually oscillate between the poles of this bistable illusion" (127). Tucker claims that these double meanings cannot be sustained concurrently: "We cannot simultaneously read *In Praise of Folly* as ironic and literal" (408). One interpretation must be more present, figural, at any given moment.[5] But in this movement, I would argue, lies the power of this artist statement; it is the oscillation in moments of ambiguity that keeps meaning precarious and changeable, keeps it from being "pinned and wriggling."

Snapshot Four: Phantom Presence and Typography

> The visual side of typography is always on display . . . (Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style* 9)

Philosopher George Steiner, in his book *Real Presences*, grants that critical writing about art *can* translate "matter into sense" and can effect a "bringing-into-being" (this last phrase, fittingly, a gerund in lexico-grammatical terms, a noun form suggesting the active, contingent unfolding of verb). But, Steiner contends, such translation does not happen often. Instead, he writes,

> [g]rammatico-logical discourse is radically at odds with the vocabulary and syntax of matter, with that of pigment, stone, wood or metal. ... If at all, speech is edged in reach of materiality, this is to say, in educative reach of that which must, finally, be left unsaid, in the notations made by artists and craftsmen. (George Steiner, *Real Presences*, 16)

Unless, of course, the *materiality* of the word is the very thing emphasized by the artist, as is the case with the thousand-word statement created by Ashok Mathur, Sandra Semchuk, and Kristi Malakoff in the *Proximities* exhibition at the Kamloops Art Gallery,

which accompanied the *Artist Statement* workshop. This instalment was present, first of all, in spatial terms, a sixty-foot display of words foregrounded at the entrance to the gallery and visible to pedestrian and vehicular traffic from the outside. The physical make-up of the words on the wall itself – the font style, the size of the words, their relative *proximities* to each other – was, in fact, central to the meaning-making practices at play (and in keeping with the title of the exhibition). Written in vinyl lettering in Optima typeface,[6] the script ranged from one inch to three inches high and took up the space of the entire wall that met the viewer as she entered the exhibit.[7] The words included the following:

> is that this project forces us to revisit our own artist statements and to reconsider our notions of the statement as such – in so doing, we challenge ourselves as creators and resist complacency.

I have argued that epideictic occasions of display lead a double figure-ground life of *both* visibility and invisibility, and that a phantom agency guides the eyes, it seems, from one way of seeing to another. Typeface, an epideictic event, does just this. In arguably one of the most elegant and efficient descriptions of typographic style, Robert Bringhurst pinpoints font's necessary balance between reticence and striking elegance, what he calls "statuesque transparency":

> In a world rife with unsolicited messages, typography must often draw attention to itself before it will be read. Yet in order to be read, it must relinquish the attention it has drawn. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of statuesque transparency. (17)

Font is another invisible presence, a "creative non-interference" (Bringhurst 19). Typographic elements on a gallery wall are intended to be objects for display (more self-consciously artistic choices, perhaps, than those in the less public, less aesthetically imagined memo, email, or classroom essay); their very materiality performs the artist's statement and hints at phantom presences offering cues for response. The text (like, again, the figure/ground relation) sets up a simultaneous bodily reaction of the eyes and mind: do we focus on and thereby make salient the size differences between words, the shapes of the letters, the general shape of them on the wall? Or do we

refocus our attention on the semantic, ideational content of the words (their meaning as words and sentences together)? Which, metaphorically, becomes figure and which background in that instant of reading? Either the geometric pleasures of the words become near, or present, to us, or the content of the script does; one could imagine the interplay as one reads *through* and then looks *at* the materiality of the script itself. Such slippage is particularly fitting with Optima font, as this, Hermann Zapf's most successful typeface, is considered to be *both* beautiful and utilitarian (an object of admiration but also an unobtrusive mechanism for reading ease); it "is today widely used not only for *display* composition but also for *continuous reading*, for which its contrast of strokes makes it more adaptable than the monotone sans-serif types" (Lawson 329, emphasis mine).

This discussion may at first seem reductive, bringing interpretation back to binaries of either/or; I would argue just the opposite, however: the possibility of instantaneous shifts in figuring one and then the other way of seeing enacts a resonant both/and moment of reading. The materiality of the word, then, exerts a demand, has an agency – a "life of its own" in Shotter's terms (you read *according to* the text or *with* the text, instead of only looking at the text). While Shotter's study of real presences centres on the stereogram, those two-dimensional dots that prompt three-dimensional images to emerge from the page, the same insights can apply to font, as well, a graphic configuration ultimately made up of multitudinous dots, one that effects presence "in the unfolding temporal course of our visual involvement with the special patterning of the dots on the two-dimensional page. It emerges and is only there in our orchestrated interaction with the whole distribution of the dots on the page" (Shotter 276).

Snapshot Five: Phantom Presence and Inhabited Worlds of Gesture

As with other abstract concepts like force, energy, and intensity, an encounter with presence cannot necessarily be shown or proven – it is often *felt*, indicated, or shared. Steiner, tongue-in-cheek, puts this "something" in the category of "verification transcendence" (226), that which constitutes the unknown, or the mysterious, in art, music, or poetry, his use of religious terminology intentional, as he makes claims for the presence of the divine in encounters with art.[8] Brooke

Rollins, in her article, "The Ethics of Epideictic Rhetoric," observes that presence in epideictic is sometimes articulated in terms of *luminosity* (recall the notion of "shining forth"); she references rhetorician Lawrence Rosenfield, who "links his reconfiguration of the character of presence within epideictic rhetoric to the pre-Socratic notion of luminosity" (10). Rosenfield writes that, unlike the listener in matters of deliberation or forensic decisions of innocence or guilt, "the epideictic auditor is not asked for a judgment of the present state of those matters, but to be a *theoros* ("witness") to the *radiance* emanating from the event itself." (Rosenfield 140, qtd. in Rollins 10, emphasis mine). Fittingly, Michael Jarrett, in his workshop paper "Grammatological Elvis," mentions the centrality of Elvis' Hollywood "presence" for fans, how Elvis' mere appearance in films (especially "the really bad ones," he tells us) reassured audiences that there was some present Elvis flickering behind such roles (and one described, again, in terms of luminosity or "glow"). Citing Lester Bangs, Jarrett writes: "Elvis never even had to move a muscle, not even in his face – he always, from day one up till almost the end, had that *glow*" (326, qtd. in Jarrett). This idea of luminosity leads me into a strange space, perhaps: into a comparison between the artist statement/artist research (how it might suggest a felt, virtual sense of what the art might mean) and the way the unknown world of particles is understood (the mysterious made present) in the scientific fields of electromagnetism and thermodynamics, unfinished and highly conjectural fields. For this connection, again, I turn to the generative work of rhetorician John Shotter and his consideration of real presence in scientific discourse.

Coming back to this idea of luminosity, physicists, Shotter claims, speak of an entity as if "a definite influence emanates from it, or is exercised upon it" (283). Referring to the work of E. Ochs in her studies of physicist talk, these scientists, in describing unknown worlds, "nonetheless display the felt presence of a 'something' not yet (scientifically) stabilized and finished as a reputable finding" (Shotter 283). They produce in their actual, bodily conversation together shared liminal worlds (particle worlds hovering in the space amongst them like the 3-D shape in a hologram or the rainbow or a pantomimed wall or the category of "women's poetry") through their gestures, their blackboard curves, the way in which they imagine

spatial relations in a world that none of them can actually perceive (e.g., "I'm in the paramagnetic state" or "When I come down I'm in the domain state" (Shotter 283)). These worlds assume a personified agentive status, one that the scientists respect and begin to imagine themselves part of, as they narrate themselves existing in the midst of forces and influences that become "real" to them; by envisioning "phantom" relationships between these entities, they can further anticipate how these prompt other behaviours and actions in that system. While this world may seem imprecise at first glance, the scientists have a shared felt sense of presence, what I think of as a 'prepositional' feel for this world, as they create and then inhabit what is an almost ineffable, yet nonetheless real understanding of spatial relations and movements.[9] The work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty seems fitting here: "In the midst of sensuous experience there is an intuition of an essence, a sense, a signification. The sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured by the visible" (xli).

So where might this take us in our thinking about artist statements? I want to focus on the insight, discussed with reference to the scientists, that through shared talk, communicants create and sustain a felt sense of flow, of etiology and consequence, a re-creation of the actions leading up to a particular point and then following through from that point (in the path of some particle, say). Here, one might think of presence in terms of a stimulus, " a *fluid movement* that enables thought" (Rollins 10). And such is gesture. Many of the artists speaking at the workshop spoke of statements *gesturing* toward the work or, as in the case of Mathur's thinking, in terms of collaborative research amongst artists as a gesturing toward each other. The gesture, in short, summons up an embodied, shared presence and physical thereness. (Even when we say something was a nice gesture, we are suggesting that the person was *there* for us). And, like typeface, artist statement as gesture is not designed to draw attention to itself, but is a real presence that directs the eye to certain ways of seeing the piece. I would argue that gesture is a form of phantom presence, the co-imagining of something not yet stabilized or finalized in meaning – watching a gesture, we have some sense of where it just came from and where it is headed, one fluid movement, not break-downable into parts. A *gesturing towards* might constitute

one means of creating a world that one cannot access directly – that of the meaning of a piece of art itself or the motivations and personality of the creative artist behind it.

Garrett-Petts alludes to such gesturing in the artist statement when he offers the suggestive phrase, "gesture of partial understanding" (5) when referring to the work of now-deceased Vancouver artist Fred Douglas, and his artist's book *Flutter*. (Douglas, himself, called the book "intrinsically a public gesture" (Garrett-Petts 5).) The term, flutter, itself, calls up the idea of a phantom presence in that it intimates that almost imperceptible shadow of an image (of greyness or blurred vision) in the beating wings of a bird, say, or in the rapid fluttering of a flag. In the in-between spaces of that fluttering exists a kind of visual residue that brings about mild perceptual confusion. (Is that a wing I see? Or is that the delayed afterimage of a wing?) As Garrett-Petts points out, a metaphorical fluttering is Douglas' way of playing "hide and seek" with the audience in his artist statement strategies of concealment and revealing. Further, fluttering is restless and unpredictable and irregular: John Craig Freeman's contribution to the workshop – a virtual reality demonstration of place where the viewer/participant clicks a mouse and enters a labyrinth of maps and aerial views and ground shots – replicates that phantom presence of place as a lived sense of connections, spatial relations, and non-linear (somewhat random) movements through space.

Snapshot Six: Phantom Presence and the Immediacy of Encounter

Instead of a frozen explanation, what presence invokes is an impulse, a sense of immediacy. The fabric cones of the Chicago exhibit, the virtual felt sense of space in a computer-mediated instalment, the suspensions and gratifications in the breathing of syntax on a gallery wall, the salient art object, the energy of paradox, the felt agency in a piece of art that makes the reader see *through* it and *with* it – all speak of the immediacy of phantom presence. Exchange between the viewer and the piece of art is unsettled and unfinished, the meaning responsively shaped and always open to further articulation. Meaning is not locatable, but is diffused amongst all those participants in the encounter. Like a hologram image, a rainbow, a pantomimed object, a typeface's "statuesque transparency," or Elvis' glow, phantom presences emerge in the space in-between the artefact and the person

seeing. How intriguing a dialogue to consider the many ways an artist might flicker, flutter, stutter, shudder, or hover across that line of concealment and revelation that haunts our rhetorics of display.

Notes

1 In "Creating Real Presences," Shotter draws upon the example of the rainbow to demonstrate such duality of presence and simultaneous lack of tangibility. The rainbow is there, seemingly, but cannot be touched or located, spatially, as a 'real,' thing; it is, instead, the product of a relation – the vision produced by the angles of sunlight, the viewer, and water in the air. Another example he discusses is the three-dimensional image that seems to come off the page (into the middle space between text and viewer) from the two-dimensional stereogram, those configurations of seemingly senseless dots and colours that become recognizable shapes and images when we focus (or do not focus) our eyes in a particular way, a physical response, he stresses, that is demanded by the arrangement of the text. This presence – the virtual figure coming off the page – is thus an effort of both text and reader, the text making its own demands for reading and the viewer moving her eyes to accommodate those cues.

2 Of course, the artist statement is not exclusively epideictic: depending on the context, the artist statement could also function as a piece of deliberative rhetoric (as part of a grant proposal, say, where a committee would deliberate on the future of such a project and decide whether or not such a vision would be funded).

3 While it does not mention the term explicitly, Transken's work seems to summon up the Heideggerian notion of *aletheia*, the truth or understanding that comes from disclosure, but an understanding that depends upon something first being perceived or attended to.

4 Dana Novak's response to the exhibition is noteworthy, given this discussion: "I felt as if I was *slipping and sliding* on an *unfamiliar terrain* of multiple and competing languages" (see "Translating Chicago," in the accompanying DVD to this issue, emphasis mine).

5 Tucker points to the rhetorical phrase "*figure* of speech" to emphasize the slippage between the visual and verbal worlds of salience.

6 The Optima typeface, Alexander Lawson tells us in *Anatomy of a Typeface*, is a sans-serif font designed by Hermann Zapf in the 1950s, a font that "gripped the attention of typographers as the most satisfying blend to date of the best features of both the roman and the sans-serif structures" (327).

7 I would like to thank Ashok Mathur for providing all these technical specifics.

8 The poignancy of Steiner's writing on this point is worthy of a note. In speaking of the presence of God, Steiner claims that even when we argue for His absence, His presence is there still: "The density of God's absence, the edge of presence in that absence, is no empty dialectical twist. The phenomenology is elementary: it is like the recession from us of one whom we have loved or sought to love or of one before whom we have dwelt in fear. The distancing is, then, charged with the pressures of a nearness out of reach, of a remembrance torn at the edges" (230).

9 I can't help but think of prepositions as having a similar phantom presence status. What kinds of shared worlds (and relations within them) get summoned up by an *on* or an *up* or a *with*? In Newfoundland, for instance, I would often hear a woman say she was pregnant *on* a child; on mainland Canada, I heard a woman say she was pregnant *for* her child; and, then, of course, there's the more common *with* a child. All these choices summon up differently imagined virtual worlds of relations, a felt sense of how people connect, one that can be difficult to teach those learning a new language.

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Artists' Statements and 'The Rules of Art'

Frank Davey

What interests me most in this inquiry is the function of the artist's statement in the visual arts – what kind of information it can be considered to convey, and what is the nature of its connection to the artwork to which it is attached? I am also interested in bringing to bear on these matters the history of similar artists' statements in literature and literary criticism.

Historically, artists' statements have tended to be made during times of transition in artistic modes, and to have played a mediating role between artworks which diverge from past artistic practices and audiences who know only those past practices. Thus in English poetry we have Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, written at a time when the idea that English might be a literary language was just beginning to be accepted, and when secular and empiricist values were starting their now widespread ascendancy; we have Wordsworth's prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads,* written at a moment of expansion in the romantic movement; we also have the numerous manifestos of literary modernism, written at a moment when romanticism had come to seem trite and sentimental, and when the violence of both industrialized manufacture and industrialized warfare appeared to call for new and more relevant aesthetic responses. These manifestos paralleled the similar visual arts manifestos produced by the Futurists, Surrealists, and Dadaists. In this period we even have T.S. Eliot attaching explanatory footnotes to his long poem *The Waste Land.* At each of these moments there seems to have been a belief that the new artwork was difficult for its intended audience to understand or appreciate – that in communicating with this audience art was not enough, and that discursive explanation was not only 'needed' but was also more accessible, that the intended audience was discursively literate before it was artistically literate. At the same time, there has also been in our culture a long-standing skepticism about the relevance of artists' statements. In his *Apology of Socrates,* Plato has Socrates tell his judges that he went to poets and asked them to

explain the meaning of "their poems, those which I thought they had taken the most pains to perfect," and found that "all the bystanders ... had something better to say than the composers had about their own compositions. I discovered, then, ... about the poets that no wisdom enabled them to compose as they did, but natural genius and inspiration; like the diviners and those who chant oracles, who say many fine things but do not understand anything of what they say" (Rouse translation 428). Here we have the earliest romantic explanation of artistic creativity as the irrational, spontaneous actions of people who are inarticulate in rational language – people who, at an extreme, can be perceived as idiot savants whose only way of communicating is through the creation of things like poems, paintings, music, dance, or sculpture.

Now while there is of course no necessity for someone who creates intriguing artwork to also be linguistically articulate – cognitive studies suggest that such activities may concern different sides of the brain – there is also no necessity for the two kinds of ability not to occur in the same person. We have numerous examples of artists who could also produce high quality analytical work, Wyndham Lewis and T.S. Eliot among them. However, I think it is arguable that since the beginning of the modernist period, roughly the late 19th-century, we have tended to privilege the linguistically articulate artist, to demand a certain level of self-consciousness of artists, and correspondingly to attribute, perhaps questionably, relevance to the statements they produce about their work.

This has corresponded in part with the development of something almost unknown before the last century, the development of art colleges and university art departments which often assume – in order to protect their own existence and curricula – that the artwork is a product of conscious knowledge, consciously acquired skills, deliberation, and planning. Just as creative writing students are asked to write critical introductions to the novels, short stories, plays, or poems which constitute their graduating theses, and often called upon to be able to account for them analytically in an oral examination, fine arts students are usually required to articulate in words the meaning of their graduating exhibitions.

The most influential caveat in literary circles against trusting such words has been W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardley's 1946 essay

"The Intentional Fallacy." Like Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, this was an uncompromising document, written at the height of the New Criticism's attempts to have works of art regarded as self-sufficient, ahistorical, acultural objects that, in poet Archibald MacLeish's famous phrase, "should not mean but be." In their view, the artist's statement was first of all unnecessary: "If the poet succeeded [in carrying out his intention] then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do." And of course if the poet did not succeed, then the poem was an ineffective object and not worth the artist's commentary. The artist's statement was also for Wimsatt and Beardsley reductive; for them, poems were complexes of meaning and style, and differed "from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention." Thirdly, the poem was not the author's property to interpret; "it is detached from the author at birth" (80) – a point that would be reasserted in a very different way a decade later by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author."[1] They suggested that perhaps the only role for artists' statements was to inform an audience about "private or semi-private meanings attached to words or topics by an author or by a coterie of which he is a member" (83). If artists persist in going beyond that, as in Eliot's footnotes to *The Waste Land,* they suggested that these statements should, rather than being regarded as authoritative texts that speak from outside the artwork, be regarded as part of the artwork itself, and be subject to same kind of critical examination, rhetorical analysis, and skepticism that artworks are subject to.

This last suggestion curiously foreshadowed one that Jacques Derrida would make in 1981 in an essay on what he called "Outwork" – "outworks" being texts such as prefaces, afterwords, introductions, and appendixes that purport to be situated 'outside' of the texts that they comment upon. Instead, he suggested, these are supplements to the texts they address, supplements that transform those texts which seem to be "wholes" into "parts" that require completion or supplementation (56). That is, an author or editor's act of commenting on a text demonstrates that text's insufficiency. Similarly, an artist's commentary on an artwork may reveal that work's insufficiency by changing it from a work that appeared to stand on its own into a something which is a part of a larger and perhaps continuously growing body of work, and which requires the textual elements of

that larger work in order to complete itself. "This kind of supplementarity," Derrida adds, "opens the 'literary game' in which, along with 'literature,' the figure of the author finally disappears" (56). The individual literary work becomes a mere part of a system of publishing, promotion, self-promotion, reviewing, anthologization, critical commentary, canonization, and education, and becomes meaningless outside of that "game" or system. Not only does the author cease to be significant in such a system, but 'literature' itself as a concept of intrinsically worthy texts vanishes when it is revealed to be merely a rhetorical term that is variously interpreted and deployed in numerous unending social processes. Ironically, according to Derrida, it is this process which creates a nostalgia for the 'pure' free-standing artwork, for the authority of the author, and for literature as a transcendent value, and which – through this nostalgia for something which never was – creates the illusion of transcendent artistic value.

Now it is important to note that whereas Wimsatt and Beardsley were theorizing prescriptively, offering an account of how literary criticism *should* proceed, Derrida was theorizing descriptively, offering an account of how texts actually circulate and how their meanings are constructed. Whereas Derrida viewed a chain of supplementarity to be part of a metaphysical fantasy of lost self-sufficient objects, which never could have existed as such, Wimsatt and Beardsley urged readers to entertain such a fantasy – to believe that a poem could be intrinsically meaningful and beautiful outside of any social and historical determinations of what meaning and beauty could be. In terms of Derrida's essay, it would be supplementarity which had produced Wimsatt and Beardsley – without such supplements as critical inquiries into intention, and authors' declarations of intention, the desire for the lost 'presence' of the pure, unadulterated and unmediated poem or other artwork would not have arisen.

The literary "game" that Derrida somewhat cynically exposed was a large part of the focus of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work in the 1980s and 90s. His major works on the rhetorical, material, political, and ideological dimensions of artistic production, which included such titles as *Language & Symbolic Power* (1991 [1974]), *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), and *The Rules of Art* (1996 [1992]), are also descriptive. Bourdieu has argued that while there is

no such thing as an unmediated or pure free-standing artwork, the myth that there is such a work is essential to artists who seek credibility by appearing to produce work that seems autonomous and disinterested. For Bourdieu, all artists and the art they produce are created by a general field of artistic production which encodes general principles about what is art, what its genres are, and the procedures for achieving artistic value. Even Marcel Duchamp, he argues, required this apparatus to claim significance for his ready-mades – "his act would be nothing but a crazy or insignificant gesture without the universe of celebrants and believers who are ready to produce it as endowed with meaning and value by reference to an entire tradition which produced their categories of perception and appreciation" (*Rules* 169). Artists' statements, for Bourdieu, constitute a genre which has been allowed significance by "an ensemble of institutions for recording, conserving, and analyzing artworks" (170) – a general institutional apparatus of critics, academics, curators, gallery owners, museum directors, art auction houses, and so on. Without this apparatus and its long and expanding history, the artists who wish to augment their work with commentary would have no structure within which to play that game. By participating in the *Artist Statement* workshop, of course, we were joining that apparatus by further legitimating and defining the artist-statement genre. Bourdieu writes that the artwork is "made not twice [once by the artist and a second time by the apparatus which creates or acknowledges him as artist] but hundreds of times, thousands of times, by all those who have an interest in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, decoding it, commenting on it, reproducing it, criticizing it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it" (171).

In this view the artist is definitely one who has material, symbolic and career 'interests' in the work he or she has produced; when writing an artist's statement, he or she is not merely supplementing the work but re-making it, and putting forward that re-making to compete with and influence other re-makings such as those offered by other artists, gallery owners, curators, journalists, and critics. Therefore one should not read the artist's statement as providing the truth about an artwork; one should regard it rather as a strategic attempt to position the work in an advantageous relationship to the

artistic field of its time – a relationship which could be anything from apotheosis to rebellion – and to take a strong and career-serving position within "the rules of art." The most visible such gesture in our time has been the manifesto.

The English word manifesto historically comes into being in the early 17th century as a statement by a church father or a prince; a manifesto's authority derives from that person's authority within the institutions of the church or government. It is written – or 'issued' – in mid or late career, near the peak of the person's authority. The borrowing of the word by early modernist artists borrowed also that connotation of authority – a connotation that was later upheld when others took that claim of authority seriously, such as when the police in Germany tried to prevent Dadaist exhibitions in 1918, or when art historians began reprinting such manifestos in academic publications in the 1950s. The artist's manifesto, however, has been usually written by male artists near the beginning of their careers, as a claim of authority. Sidney was 29 when he wrote *An Apology for Poetry*, Wordsworth 30 when he wrote the preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* Ezra Pound 27 when he formulated the Imagist manifesto, Tzara 25 when he signed "Dada soulève tout." (Female artists – perhaps because of the social forces that they have had to overcome even to be artists – have tended to write manifesto-like texts later in their careers, if at all. Gertrude Stein, for example, was 57 when she published *How to Write*; Niki de Saint Phalle's *My Art, My Dreams* was published the year after her death at 72. In Canada, Dorothy Livesay was 60 when she published her self-characterizing "The Documentary Poem: a Canadian Genre," and Daphne Marlatt 40 when she published her similarly influential essay on poetics, "Musing with Mothertongue.")

There is a long institutional distance between the modernist appropriation of the manifesto, with its vigorous assertions of the agency of the artist, and the professionalization training undertaken by contemporary art schools which requires students to learn how to position their work within the discourses of contemporary art and theory, although in each case the ultimate object is similar – to re-make the artwork verbally so as to position it strongly within the general field of art. One of the many contributions of Dada was to blur the issues of supplementarity and strategy by blurring the boundary between the inside and outside of the artwork and the inside

and the outside of the manifesto. That "Dada soulève tout" manifesto of 1921, for example, signed by Tzara, Ray, Picabia, Huelsenbeck, Ernst, Duchamp, Crotti, Arp, and Aragon among others, was printed in a variety of fonts and presented as simultaneously a manifesto and a kind of visual poem. One can see this tactic occasionally in the work of two of the principal Canadian inheritors of Dada, painter Greg Curnoe and poet bpNichol.

Nichol began his 1971 *ABC: The Aleph Beth Book* with a visual poem that declared "Poetry being at a dead end, poetry is dead," and then framed his visual-redrawings of the alphabet with sequences from this poem across or down the margins of the pages – although whether these spaces were indeed 'marginal' was one of the things the entire book placed in question. Curnoe frequently created paintings that were entirely painted text, including ones such as "Vote Nihilist, Destroy Your Ballot" (1963), and "The True North Strong and Free" (1968), in which one of the painted phrases is "Close the 49th Parallel etc." His drawing "It Was All Perfectly Normal" (1980) creates a manifesto of a kind, part of it purporting to be a page from an "Ontario University Fine Art Teachers Manual" which instructs teachers that art consciousness should include only art from U.S. cities. This was indeed for Curnoe a kind of Bourdieuian position-taking within Canadian culture and art, and served, as Bourdieu noted, also as a legitimizing tactic, in this case associating Curnoe's work quite publicly with the evolving history of Canadian nationalism.

Nichol's tactic in *ABC* of declaring earlier art "dead" and proclaiming an utter break with the past is a familiar manifesto position, notable in Dada publications, and in Canada in the 1948 Automatist manifesto "Refus Global," although Bourdieu would probably suggest that Nichol's was anything but an utter break but rather a move paradoxically sanctioned and historicized by ongoing institutional practice. Nichol's book was published by an established small press (Oberon Press), and assigned ISBN and Library of Congress numbers. A year before, he had won Canada's Governor-General's Award for *poetry.* The youthful signers of the Refus Global declared that their duty was to break definitively with all the customs of Quebec society, to dissociate themselves from its utilitarian spirit ("Rompre définitivement avec toutes les habitudes de la société, se

désolidariser de son esprit utilitaire"). One can now find numerous commentaries on the internet that frame the manifesto as one of the more important moments in Quebec cultural history, and several of its signers – Paul-Emile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Marcelle Ferron, Fernand Leduc, Françoise Sullivan, Pierre Gauvreau – are regarded as major Quebec abstractionists, and their paintings as safe investments. Irving Layton, who became Canada's best-known poet in the 1960s, prefaced all of his many poetry collections from 1959 onward with a similar assault on his society's values – the familiar "épater les bourgeois" of the early modernists. "Each day the world must be created anew" (*Engagements* 81), he begins explaining his poems in 1959. "I smell the demise of our bourgeois-Christian civilization" (82), he continues. "Why are people destructive and joy hating?" he asks in 1959 (83). "Each poem that thumbs its nose at death is a fusion of accident and destiny," he declares. In 1976, in a collection he titles *For My Brother Jesus,* he writes that "[o]ne of the functions of poetry is to disturb the accumulated complacencies of people," and then goes on to attack Christianity for having been "founded neither on myth nor fiction but on an ignoble lie" (xv) – Christ's divinity – that ultimately led to the Holocaust. Layton's overwritten and sometimes scandal-begging prefaces helped him create a widely-circulating persona which became an attached element of his poems – and which helped his publisher sell up to 14,000 copies of each title and his supporters dream of a Nobel Prize.

Both Curnoe and Nichol moved later in their careers from manifestos to artists' statements that were more lengthy and meditative, with Nichol compiling a body of discursive prose that was posthumously collected and published under the title *Meanwhile* (a title which strongly hints at a supplemental relationship to his better known work), and Curnoe leaving two large manuscripts to be edited and posthumously published. In the last two years of his life, Curnoe spent as much time writing as painting, engaging the interwoven issues of history and identity in parallel writing and painting projects. In this work there was not a sense of supplementarity (for that would have raised the question of which was the work and which the supplement), but rather one of complementarity. That is, Curnoe seemed to be recognizing that each medium had its limits; that there were effects that could be achieved more effectively in literary genres

than in visual-art ones. In Nichol's work, too, I would argue, there is an implicit complementarity of genre – that his essays and other artist's statements are works in themselves as much as they are auxiliary to his various kinds of poetry, although the question still remains of whether many people would read Curnoe's books *Deeds/Abstracts* and *Deeds/Nations* if he had not been a remarkable painter, or read Nichol's collected essays if he had not been a remarkable poet, sound poet, and visual poet. One could ask similar questions about Eliot's essays, Pound's Imagist manifesto, the "Refus Global," or Marlatt's "Musing with Mother Tongue." That is, one can turn the question of the status and function of artists' statements back to the reader, back to how and why the statements are read and used, and in this turning come back to Derrida's function of supplementarity and Bourdieu's of legitimation.

The recent Matisse exhibition (2005), "Matisse: Une Seconde Vie 1941-54" at the Musée de Luxembourg, is a good example of such use. Matisse had not left artist statements explaining his later work, much of it *papier découpé*. But he had kept up during much of this period an almost weekly correspondence with his friend the writer André Rouveyre (writing him more than 1000 letters), in which he described in general terms what work he was doing and the satisfactions it was giving him. The curators framed their exhibition with these letters, printing brief extracts on the walls of the museum, and displaying the actual letters in glass cases in the centre of the exhibition rooms. What had been personal news passed to a friend, who would read it in the context of that friendship and his knowledge of Matisse's earlier work, became explanations easily digestible by tourists – the Musée de Luxembourg is a part of Paris's art-tourist industry – who may never before have seen a work by Matisse, but who could learn here that he sought a "simplified design" (23), that he was trying to work "definitively in colour" (24). The curator's writing on the walls was a sign of the legitimation apparatus that was here trying to legitimate Matisse to crowds of middle-class modern-art skeptics that keep Parisian hotels and restaurants – and the Musée itself – in business. It was also a sign of the contemporary academic and curatorial insistence that visual artists must verbalize their 'views' of art. Again there was the implication that visual art needs words to mediate its reception, that language is more understandable

than visual art, that contemporary culture – despite television and the internet – is still discursive before it is visual.

These implications are similar to those of the exhibition held in Kamloops, *Proximities: Artists' Statements and Their Works*, which began, according the exhibition website, with the observation that "North American artists applying for exhibitions are ... obliged to explain their visual work by way of a written text" – a text which may later, if the application is accepted, be "hung on the gallery wall" as an "explanation" to the gallery viewer or become "an element of the installation itself." What we see in this observation is the extreme beginning of the process of supplementation, and thus expansion, of the artwork into a legitimating complex of work and discursive representation that may eventually include gallery catalogues, newspaper reviews, radio reports, website pages and – if the process (and note that I say the process and not the artist) is extremely successful – will eventually include auction catalogues, history books, retrospective shows, catalogues raisonnés, and textbooks. We also see the extent to which in this legitimating process discourse is privileged over art – starting with the fact that the discursively unskilled artist is handicapped from the outset if he or she is unable to fabricate an artist's statement persuasive enough to win an exhibition. In the case of a successful legitimating process, the artist's statement will have been a small part of a growing series of representations of a work which inevitably becomes the sum of its representations. Or, we could say, the various accumulating commentaries will all have become elements of the work's existence as a legitimate virtual installation in the social realm.

Notes

1 In this essay Barthes argues that concept of an Author who is an individual of interest apart from his or her texts or paintings, who is believed to have existed before their creation, and whose life is therefore assumed to have influenced them and thus be capable of explaining them, is a recent and temporary invention of English empiricism, French rationalism, Reformation individualism, and contemporary capitalism. He suggests that, to the contrary, the text or artwork creates its author, that individuals perform themselves into being through artistic creation, that the materials of art are ready-mades that an artist's "sole power is to

mingle" (53).

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Displaced Artist Statements, Reluctant Artist-Researchers: Poet-Editors of Women's Poetry Anthologies

Marsha Bryant

As W. F. Garrett-Petts and Rachel Nash note in their introduction to *Proximities*, the rise of postmodern theories has enabled critical inquiry on hybrid discourses such as artist statements. "In the contemporary period," they explain, "the fragmentation of critical consensus and the dissolution of master narratives have encouraged, perhaps obligated, artists to speak up" and think beyond conventional modes of expression (10-11). Moreover, the blurring of disciplinary boundaries in the academy has produced modes of critical inquiry that bridge analytical and creative thinking, including the artist-as-researcher. Not surprisingly, visual arts and museum culture have dominated current thinking on both artist statements and artistic inquiry. Most studies consider explanatory brochures, exhibit didactics, and gallery lectures rather than *ars poetica*, *belles lettres* criticism, and poetry readings. My essay aims to expand the parameters of this special issue by bringing contemporary poetry and cultural studies into our discussion of artist statements. Cultural studies has greatly expanded the materials for academic research, but it remains "decidedly wary" of poetry, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out (8-9). Some elide the genre with a falsely 'universal' white-maleness, an outmoded New Criticism, or a discredited bourgeois subjectivity. Besides applying methodologies to poetry that may seem inhospitable, my analysis also considers displaced artist statements that fall outside the model of proximity. Although the poet-critic is a longstanding cultural position, poets' artist statements rarely appear alongside their poems. In fact, they rarely appear at all.

My essay will focus on women's poetry because this category arose from feminist inflections of postmodernism, and because its recent modes of circulation invite a cultural approach to poetry. Editors of contemporary women's poetry anthologies tend to be

practicing poets, so we can see their introductions as displaced artist statements that articulate an individual aesthetic as well as an editorial agenda. Diana Scott, editor of the 1982 *Bread and Roses* anthology, explains that "just like a literary critic, or indeed any kind of author, an anthologist writes a book" (9). Individual and collective, authoritative and provisional, marginalized and mainstream, feminist and 'post-feminist,' contemporary women's poetry anthologies reflect our postmodern critical climate.

A Cartography of Poets' Artist Statements

Do poets write artist statements that offer explanations for their own exhibited or proposed artistic production? Classic defenses of poetry such as Sir Philip Sidney's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's do not gloss their own poems, but rather vindicate the genre itself to a society that undervalues it. Both the traditional *ars poetica* and more experimental articulations of poetics (like Charles Bernstein's and Susan Howe's) share a similar agenda of addressing the nature of poetry more generally. As for poet-critics, their prose tends to provide only indirect glosses on their poems, and is usually published separately. Manifestoes of artistic movements are somewhat closer to a poet's work, as Frank Davey notes in discussing contemporary Canadian poet bpNichol. But these forms tend to lack the degree of individualism, narrativity, and proximity of most of the artist statements discussed at the TRU workshop. Perhaps poets come closest to approximating this model when delivering extempore comments at their readings, which tend to reveal a poem's sources. These performed, contingent, and ephemeral artist statements are even more audience-driven than those of visual artists. But some poets refuse to offer such didactics at their readings on the grounds that 'good' poems must speak for themselves; they are certainly not *required*.

American poets rarely produce artist statements in the usual sense of the term. Sidney Wade, current President of the Associated Writers and Writing Programs, notes that "no publisher or arbiter of any contest would dream of asking for such a silly thing" as a poet's artist statement. But many US universities require graduate students in creative writing programs to include an abstract with the thesis they submit for a Master of Fine Arts degree. This statement, which Wade terms "an inoperative appendage, not unlike the appendix in

the body," offers a brief account of the collection of poems or stories. The young poets in my university's MFA program often find this self-curatorial exercise a rather daunting enterprise. According to Wade, who teaches in our creative writing program, "their responses vary from a single mysterious and sometimes tongue-in-cheek sentence to a serious attempt to provide a theoretical analysis of the work presented."[1] I attribute the discursive instability of these abstracts not only to the writers' self-consciousness, but also to their lack of professional models. The thesis abstract is the only kind of artist statement most of them will ever write.

The UK's Poetry Book Society (PBS) offers another rare instance of poet's artist statements, but these are displaced from the poems. A subscription book club founded in 1953, the PBS seeks to expand the readership for contemporary poetry. Poets whose volumes are either chosen or recommended by the PBS must submit a brief artist statement for its quarterly *Bulletin*. According to poet-translator Michael Hofmann, this is "the one forum" for poets' artist statements in the UK, "a really rare and somehow difficult opportunity to talk about what one does."[2] A comprehensive collection of these statements appeared in the collection *Don't Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in Their Own Words* (2003). As the title indicates, garnering these professional poets' artist statements amounts to a forcible extraction – a "squeezing blood from stones" from the perspective of editors Clare Brown and Don Paterson, or a "do-it-yourself dentistry" according to former US laureate Billy Collins (xiii, 36). While not in proximity to the poems they explain, these statements come closest to the kind of writing that visual artists produce for exhibitions and grants. The PBS collection allows us to map poets' artist statements, considering the degree to which they comment on the work and the way it is consumed. As we shall see, the latter issue proves especially fraught for women poets.

In *Don't Ask Me What I Mean*, poets adopt a variety of postures toward their readers. James Fenton admits sheepishly that he included "somewhat foolish" poems in his volume, U. A. Fanthorpe archly personifies her poems as unruly characters and "unsatisfactory children," Thom Gunn expresses "a certain revulsion" in seeing his work completed at last, Carol Ann Duffy waxes witty about an audience's response to a reading (Brown and Paterson 82, 79, 94,

61). While this tonal range precludes formulating a template for poets' artist statements, we can position them along axes of evasion/explication and autobiography/process.

Some poets convey sheer bafflement at the idea of providing self-commentary, offering evasive substitutes. Simon Armitage, for example, confesses that "it's hard to express with any conviction just what the sixty-one poems are about," while Elizabeth Jennings claims that in contemplating her fourth volume, she feels "scarcely more capable of discussing my work now than I did when my first book appeared" (Brown and Paterson 3, 133). At the other end of the spectrum, Michael Donaghy and Seamus Heaney provide detailed explications of their volumes, drawing from key sources to present themselves as expert commentators on their own work. Some poets opt for pointing out the larger themes of their volumes; for example, Edward Braithwaite emphasizes the "triple view" (Caribbean, European, African) that shapes the Anglophone West Indies, while Jo Shapcott maps her volume's themes as "Englishness, gender, and identity" (Brown and Paterson 22, 260).

If the statements tell 'the story' of the artwork, they focus either on the poet's life or the writing process. In the biographical category, Mark Doty provides a mini-memoir of his partner's succumbing to AIDS, while Anthony Hecht sketches key points along his way to professional poethood. These types of comments conform to the narrative contours that the *Artist Statement* workshop found in most artist statements. Process-oriented poets' statements tend to address either the impersonal effects of language or the more intimate rituals of writing habits. For Hofmann, writing a poem involves crafting "a line like a mosaic of magnets, charges and repulsions in every word," a creative act requiring "distance, perspective, irony, derision." Adopting a closer relationship with his readers, Collins offers a behind-the-scenes look at himself organizing manuscript pages laid out on his study floor (Brown and Paterson 121, 37). Clearly there is no formula – or even consensus – for how poets should write artist statements.

And yet the PBS collection reveals a shared concern about how contemporary poets' audiences will read their work. Unlike visual artists, who can witness gallery patrons in the ways that Georgia Kotretsos described during the workshop, poets do not have such

access to their own reception. Poetry tends to be consumed individually in private spaces. Several of the poets in *Don't Ask Me What I Mean* address the lack of proximity to their audiences, and lack of control over their readers' interpretations. Hofmann and Maura Dooley, for example, insist that their poems are not *confessional*. Alice Oswald worries that readers will not notice the rhythmic qualities of her work, so she offers detailed instructions: "Please read the poems very slowly, leaving enough time to turn right round between the verses and to click the fingers between the lines." If Oswald doubts readers' rhythmic aptitude, Craig Raine seems to doubt their mental acumen. Pointing to the "neutral, objective tone" he employs in *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*, he lectures: "I hope no one will be stupid enough to mistake this tone for lack of feeling." Sarah Maguire offers a friendlier overture to readers of her volume *Spilt Milk*: "I'd like you to feel well fed by the end of it" (Brown and Paterson 207, 222-23,170).

Reception anxiety proves especially pronounced among the women poets, several of whom address gender biases that shape the consumption of women's poetry. Kate Clanchy confronts the consequences of writing openly about relationships with men. Noting that her first review reduced her debut volume to "poems about blokes," she remarks "I always had an uneasy feeling that my poems about men would preoccupy the critics." Ruth Padel asserts that "the world ... still tends to see women as basically or potentially mad." Wendy Cope launches a preemptive strike against being perceived as anti-male, insisting that her sequence poems "Traditional Prize County Pigs" are not "about men"; she also disaffiliates herself from the *feminist* label. Penelope Shuttle finds it inevitable that some readers will categorize her under that term, so she constructs it as a throughway rather than a fixed origin or destination: "If feminist writing must exist, and if this is it, then it travels in my poems from and to a further place that is non-nihilist, non-sadistic, non-disposable" (Brown and Paterson 31, 210, 40, 263). Note the tentativeness of her affiliation with "feminist writing," a label that some elide with women's poetry more generally. As Jane Dowson has noted, women poets of the late twentieth century reflect a "female affiliation complex" that prevents them "from identifying themselves with one

another in either the past or the present"(17). Taken as a group, these artist statements by women poets suggest two things:

- the woman poet's artist statement performs double-duty, engaging both her own work and the primary category in which it is consumed
- the term 'women's poetry' remains unstable across the millennial divide.

The Woman Poet-Editor as Reluctant Artist-Researcher

Poets who edit poetry anthologies function as artist-researchers who sort poets, articulate an aesthetic, and shape literary criticism. If their own work appears in the anthology, poet-editors position themselves strategically within a canon of influences and peers. As participants in the *Artist Statement* workshop noted, poet-editors effect a means of 'fitting in.' Of course, an anthology edited by an established poet has cultural weight because it signifies "an act of criticism instead of a mere expressing of taste," as Germaine Greer points out (7). Indeed, Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982), which had only 25% women poets, played a key role in contemporary canon formation. Women poets have yet to achieve canonical parity with their male peers, so editing a women's poetry anthology can be a fraught enterprise. Does such an anthology bring more prominence to its contributors, or segregate them further from the literary mainstream? Does a women's poetry anthology minimize or exacerbate the tendency to see women poets as interchangeable rather than as individual members of a group? Does a women's poetry anthology expand or restrict readership? How does it affect the way poems are read? Because of these uncertainties about reception, women poet-editors tend to be reluctant artist-researchers.

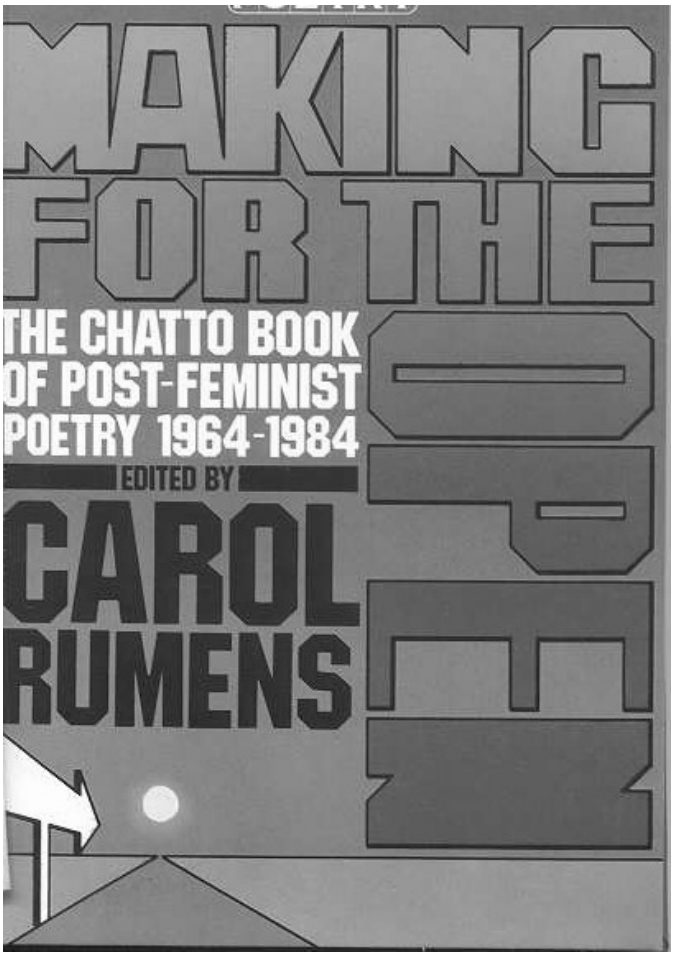
In the millennial US anthology *The Extraordinary Tide* (2001), for example, Susan Aizenberg and Erin Belieu's introduction is wary of "the perfumed category known as 'women's poetry'" (xxii, xxviii). In *Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (2003), editor Jen Hofer states disbelief in "such a beast as 'women's poetry'" (4). In Britain, which has yet to name a female poet laureate, women poet-editors express considerable discomfort in their roles as artist-researchers of women's poetry.

Carol Rumens holds the *women's poetry* label at arm's length, concluding with the paradoxical hope that her anthology, *Making for the Open* (1985), "might prove to be a small stepping-stone to the time when we do not feel obliged to think of writers in terms of gender at all" (xviii). In *The Faber Book of 20th Century Women's Poetry* (1987), Fleur Adcock frets that anthologies like hers will relegate poetry by women "into a ghetto, occupying the 'Women's' section of the bookshop rather than the poetry section"; she also shows a reluctance to include her own work (2). In her introduction to *Sixty Women Poets* (1993), Linda France expresses a kind of editor's remorse: "Ghettoising and separatism are not options I willingly court, nor is it part of my intention to exclude or alienate the male reader" (14). Maura Dooley confesses her horrified reaction at being asked to edit *Making for Planet Alice* (1997): "'Another anthology of women poets? Not again, not now, surely not?'" (12). If the PBS poets didn't want to explain what they meant, these editors don't want to defend women's poetry. Doubly displaced, their introductions call into question both the editor's aesthetic and the *women's poetry* category in which it circulates.

Contemporary women's poetry is hard to place, hovering somewhere between Sappho and the 'chick flick'. And so it should come as no surprise that several women poets resist editing it. As Dowson points out, part of the problem lies in "the continuing difficulty in formulating a satisfactory critical terminology for reading women's poetry" (7). Does the term mean poems by women, poems about women, or poems for women? Is the term synonymous with *feminist poetry*? Does women's poetry constitute a separate canon, a sub- or counter-canon, an unnecessary literary category, a viable marketing category? In the UK, titles to several contemporary women's poetry anthologies effect a sense of displacement; David Wheatley states that they tend "to strike a note of breakthrough and departure in their titles: *The World Split Open*, *Making for the Open*, *Making for Planet Alice*" (n.p.). Tellingly, a poem by Elizabeth Garrett from the latter anthology states: "My only bearings the imperative of / Displacement" (64). On the back cover of *Making for Planet Alice*, the directive "Prepare to be transported" promises readers some other, even alien, dimension. I will focus on Rumens' and Dooley's anthologies because they serve as displaced artist

statements to volumes of poetry that each editor produced in the same year with the same respective publisher. (Rumens' books were even reviewed together in the *TLS*). Although neither poet included her own work in her anthology, each one attempts to shape its consumption by redefining *women's poetry*. This process occurs through the introduction and the gallery of contemporary women's poetry that each anthology constructs.

Carol Rumens and Making for the Open: *Protecting "Poets of Quality"*



In *Making for the Open: The Chatto Book of Post-Feminist Poetry 1964-1984*, Rumens reacts more against the first wave of contemporary women's poetry anthologies than against the male-dominated canon. If Sidney and Shelley defended poetry against skeptics, Rumens feels she must defend "quality" poetry from feminist fans who overvalue less literary productions by women poets. She constructs an aesthetically restricted gallery – one resisting not only the "nonliterary" but ultimately the label *women's poetry*.

The anthology's striking cover design balances tradition and timeliness, combining its distinguished publisher's name with a bold, red-tone title font (Fig 1). Chatto & Windus dates back to 1873, and its poetry editor at the time of *Making for the Open* is the current Poet Laureate of England, Andrew Motion. The charged term "post-feminist" in the subtitle renders Chatto as a bold explorer of new territory, and yet the cover design leaves very little open space. Its unidirectional arrow and narrowing road lead to a vanishing point beyond the flat and undistinguished landscape. I find the cover design congruent with Rumens' editorial agenda: she flushes women's poetry into the 'open' so she can sort a few "poets of quality" from the undeserving mass (xvi) and secure them within the preserve of English poetic tradition.

Rumens believes publishers have placed too much emphasis on *women* and not enough on *poetry*. Especially disconcerting for her are poems that privilege "specifically female experiences" or feminist themes, so that proper poets are "swamped by the noisy amateurs proclaiming that women, too, have a voice" (xvii, xv). Indeed, the poem titles on the initial contents page deflect any expectations of poems about domesticity and relationships; instead we find "The Passing of Alfred" (as in Lord Tennyson), "By the Boat House, Oxford," "Jury Duty," "Overseas Student," "The Roof." Nary a breast nor womb to be seen here. Leafing through the anthology, readers find literary allusions not only to Tennyson, but also to Li Po, Pasternak, Ruskin, Lawrence, Baudelaire, Dante, and Ovid. Barbara Guest's "Roses" invokes Gertrude Stein only to dispute her claim about painting. Rather than selecting the most 'womanly' poems or plotting a women's tradition, Rumens embraces the male-centered canon.

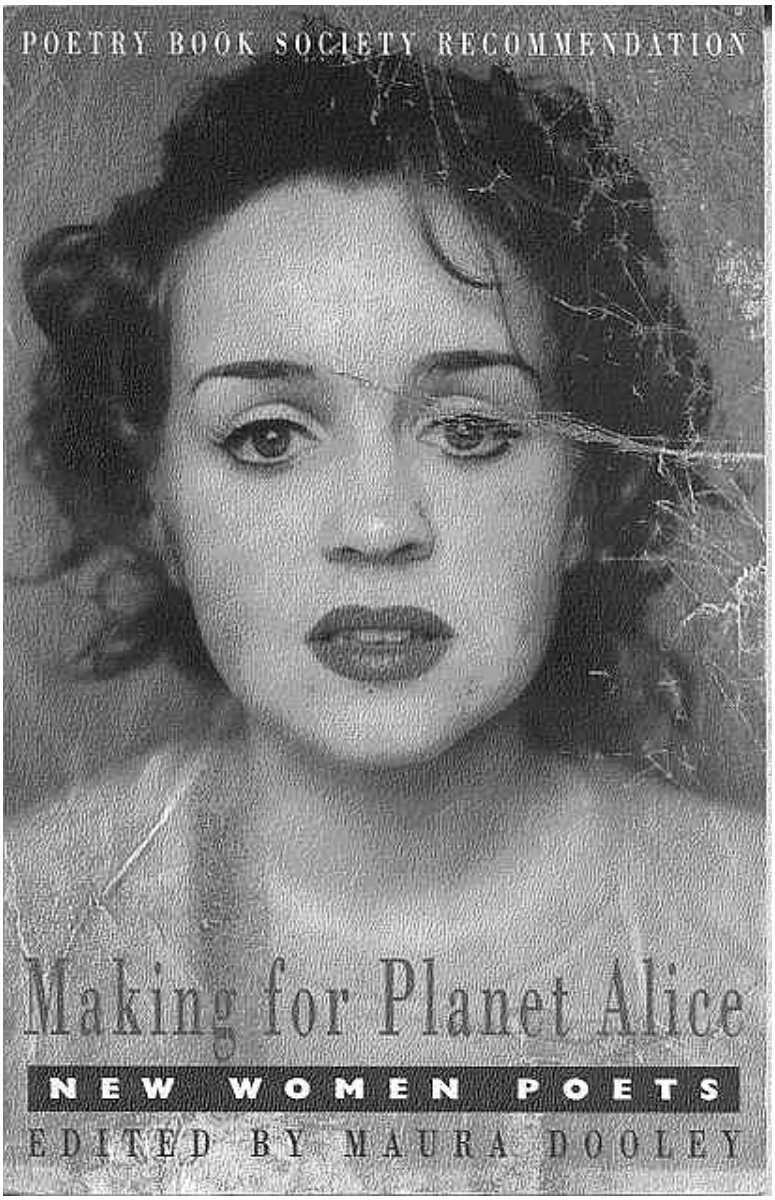
Her position falls squarely on the 'equality' side of the equality-versus-difference debates of the 1980s. As Joan W. Scott explains, "If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it" (43). Rumens seeks to steer poems by women – including her own – into the literary mainstream. If she had her way, she would dispense with the category *women's poetry* altogether.

Throughout her introduction, Rumens assumes a traditional view of poetry that perceives threats from middle-brow taste, mass culture, and the women's movement. At times she echoes Matthew Arnold's sneering at the Philistines' cultural bankruptcy. Vicki Bertram detects a "slight whiff of righteous worthiness" that arises from exaggerated fears of "dungareed separatists making a bonfire of their copies of Shakespeare" (273, 280); incidentally, Chatto & Windus published editions of the immortal Bard. While Bertram rightly reveals Rumens' personal distaste for women poets who write their bodies and employ free verse, I believe that her introduction also responds to shifting relations between contemporary poetry and its readers. Indeed, Rumens' main concern seems to be that bad poetry by women has a ready readership of those who cannot appreciate poetic craft and tradition. She believes that too many women's poetry anthologies eclipse these "higher" aspects of poetry, and lack "stringent measurements of excellence" (xviii). By changing the ways that women's poetry circulates, publishers change the ways the genre is read. This shift threatens entrenched positions of cultural guardianship by linking poetry and popular culture. In her review of Dooley's *Making for Planet Alice*, published a decade after *Making for the Open*, Rumens likens women's poetry anthologies to "the up-market version of the woman's magazine." For Rumens, "the glamorous, saleable product" of women's poetry yields "an unfath-omably if vaguely fashionable mass which may actually prevent individual poets – and more importantly, poems – from emerging" ("My Leaky Coracle," 26). Ultimately, this position reinscribes a conventional hierarchy of individual/mass, high/low, and hard/soft that allots "quality" poems by women limited space within a cultural preserve.

Maura Dooley and Making for Planet Alice: *Embracing "the General Reader"*

Like her predecessor Rumens, Dooley proves a reluctant artist-researcher in editing her anthology, *Making for Planet Alice: New Women Poets*. But she sees such anthologies more as a cause for celebration than alarm. Displaying a lesser degree of "female affiliation complex," Dooley positions her selected poets within a women's canon ranging from modernists Stevie Smith and Elizabeth Bishop to contemporary peers Eavan Boland, Denise Riley, and Carol Ann Duffy. But like most women's poetry editors, Dooley is uncomfortable with the ways the label shapes readers' expectations. If Rumens bristled at an imperative for "female experience," Dooley resents conflicted expectations: "Write about blood, babies, the moon and jam-making and be a 'Woman Poet': or, cut out half of your experience of life and get taken seriously" (13). Thus for Dooley the problem with 'womanly' poems lies more with critical reception than with a perceived lack of craft. *Making for Planet Alice* includes titles that foreground gender ("Bitcherel," "The Womanhood," "Grandmother," "The Eater of Wives"). Moreover, several poems fall under what one student called "the heavy, full-breasted category of women's issues," addressing the topics of motherhood, infertility, romance, orgasms, divorce, and sewing. Womanliness also inflects Dooley's head notes, which provide fuller and more personal information than Rumens's listing of poets' birth countries and places of residence. And yet despite the anthology's emphasis on gender, Dooley refuses to define women's poetry.

The arresting cover image of *Making for Planet Alice* complements Dooley's editorial ambivalence . Resembling a found photograph, this close-up shot of a young woman suggests a 90s version of hip womanhood. Her look combines heavy make-up (ultra femininity) with an understated t-shirt (androgynous attire), and her expression blends vulnerability with sass. This contemporary appeal registers the freshness of the anthology's "New Women Poets." Indeed, a recent student declared that "little about this edgy 90s anthology could be described as lacking 'flavour,' as the pages boast female poets whose work Dooley describes much like highly caffeinated Starbuck's coffee blends, 'wide-ranging, richly-textured,



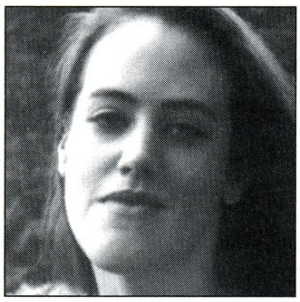
bold and sensuous,' 'unexpected and delicious,' or 'dark and erotic.'"

The cover image functions as a Rorschach test for both contemporary femininity and women's poetry. In her review, Rumens saw a "pert, sensual, wounded little face" that represents a "banal" and "extremely male-orientated" view of femininity ("My Leaky Coracle," 26). But one of my male students saw a t-shirted 'Everywoman' who made women's poetry more genuine and relatable. The anthology's title proves equally ambivalent, conjuring up images of *Alice in Wonderland* as well as an alternative all-girl band. Dooley draws this title from Deryn Rees-Jones' poem of the same name, which appears in the book; "Making for Planet Alice" asks for transport to a "strange safe place" in a tone of edgy innocence (149).

If Rumens' editorship operated through a fixed opposition between 'bad' (emotional, formless) and 'good' (controlled, traditional) poetry, Dooley's operates through a 90s femininity that balances sexiness with smarts. Publisher Bloodaxe Books shapes this identity by including close-up photos of the poets, such as these rather fetching mugs of Eleanor Brown and Gillian Ferguson (Figs. 3, 4).

One of my students characterized the anthology's gallery of poet's portraits as ranging "from frank, to daring, to exotic, to defiant." Dooley's head notes complement these images with an occasional sassiness. For example, we learn that barmaid Brown "handles rhythm and rhyme, the men and the boys, with equal assurance" (20), that Kate Clanchy "writes about desire" as straight-

Eleanor Brown



ELEANOR BROWN was born in 1969 in England but grew up in Scotland. She studied English at York University, took temporary jobs in hotels and bars and then travelled in France where she lived for a while in a convent. Similarly enjoyable juxtapositions are at work in the poems of this witty, sophisticated writer who handles rhythm and rhyme, the men and the boys, with equal assurance. Eleanor Brown won an Eric Gregory Award in 1993. She lives in Hertfordshire where she works as a barmaid. ●

Selection from: *Maiden Speech* (1996 Bloodaxe).

forwardly as a man, that Ruth Padel was a nightclub singer, that Rees-Jones titled one of her volumes *Scouting for Boys*. Some of the anthology's poems take place in bed; of these, Linda France's provide especially provocative diction ("Let him eat grown-up pussy," "what's cooking between their legs"). And yet Dooley's insistence on the poets' mental acumen outflanks this sexual subtext: Elizabeth Garrett's poems display her "sinewy intelligence," Lavinia Greenlaw's her "intellectual rigour," Maggie Hannan's her "intelligent dark humor," Mimi Khalvati's her "lyrical, supple intelligence," Gwyneth Lewis' her "demanding intelligence." And Padel the nightclub singer produces poems that are "finely intelligent." Equipped with brainy beauty and aggressive appeal, Dooley's poets seem to escape the divided self that feminist critics since Alicia Suskin Ostriker have attributed to women's poetry. These denizens of Planet Alice become postmodern Lois Lanes who only need Superman for an occasional good time. Angela McRobbie notes that the rise of New Labour in the late 1990s ushered in a paradigm in which young women became prime symbols for social change, operating within a discourse of female meritocracy that linked "success in work with traditional success in body and appearance" (361, 371). Entering British culture the same year that New Labour assumed power, *Making for Planet Alice* reflects changing gender roles in a decade that saw a tripling of British female executives (Wilson 251).

Gillian Ferguson

SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY

GILLIAN FERGUSON was born in 1965. She studied Philosophy at Edinburgh University, tutored for the Open University and worked as a wildlife and botanical illustrator before moving to journalism. The intricacies of the natural world infuse her work, shedding light on the still more curious goings-on of the human sphere. Gillian Ferguson was awarded a Scottish Arts Council Writer's Bursary in 1993. She is the television critic for *Scotland on Sunday*. ●

Selection from: *Air for Sleeping Fish* (1997 Bloodaxe).

Despite her anthology's fresh take on 90s femininity, Dooley remains vexed on the issue of whether the *women's poetry* label ultimately furthers or hinders her aim of drawing widespread attention to "a landslide of excellent and invigorating new poetry by women." She echoes her sister editors' concerns about excluding male readers and creating "a cultural sideshow," but also notes that the poets of Planet Alice are "too little recorded and too often overlooked" by reviewers and critics – despite the "current happy climate for women" and "sheer slog of the women's presses" (12-14). So contemporary women's poetry is both newly liberated and critically ignored, experiential and intellectual, gendered and gender-free, alternative and mainstream.

Like her publisher Bloodaxe Books, Dooley embraces "the general reader" and feels confident that this constituency – rather than proclaimed experts – will most fully appreciate the poems themselves (14). *Making for Planet Alice* garnered a Poetry Book Society Recommendation; the organization maintains a high-to-middlebrow web presence by promoting a readership that enjoys the arts. The PBS website touts the prestige of co-founder T. S. Eliot, and soothes novice readers with "jargon-free tips" from Simon Armitage. Bloodaxe Books offers more fully extended arms to the general reader, offering an interactive "New to Poetry?" page "designed to help you find out what sort of poetry you like." The publisher's website invites visitors to discover their personal tastes by sampling a series of categories ("academic," "animal poetry," "mainstream," "love poems," "avant-garde/experimental," "death and bereavement," "science interest," etc.); website visitors can also fill out a questionnaire about their reading habits. While the PBS website features reading tips from a prominent poet, Bloodaxe's shifts more fully toward the consumer end of poetry production.

Women's Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Everyday

Bloodaxe's format of pairing poetry, photographs, and reader-friendly head notes has raised some hackles in the British poetry establishment. For example, Hofmann felt that photographs and introductory material displaced the poetry in *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Women Poets* (1985), while Rumens was unimpressed with the "high graphic input" in *Making for Planet Alice* (Hofmann 1370; Rumens, "My Leaky Coracle" 26). Assessing Bloodaxe's

Poetry with an Edge (1988), Andrew Michael Roberts claims that this anthology's "use of photographs plays straight into the media tendency to see the value of poetry as lying in the commodification of personality and the representation of personal experience" (113). Note how this interpretive bias raises the stakes for women's poetry, which detractors dismiss as a niche market of female identities.

Because it creates a more permeable boundary between poetry and visual culture, as well as poetry and popular culture, *Making for Planet Alice* prompts new inquiries about the cultural status of contemporary women's poetry. Indeed, its cover image could just as easily grace an album, in effect making women poets of the 90s the literary equivalents of singer-songwriters like Liz Phair and Alanis Morissette. The fundamental ambiguity of this image intersects with Henri Lefebvre's theory of the *everyday*, which he drew from his perceptions of postwar women's magazines: "It is a world where triviality does not exclude the extraordinary, where the physiological does not exclude high culture, where the practical does not exclude the ideal, and where these aspects never become disconnected" (81). The 'both–and' quality of Lefebvre's everyday makes it a useful concept for rethinking contemporary women's poetry, positing a different type of ambiguity than the New Critical ideal. While Lefebvre's idea of ambiguity is not without problems – it invokes stereotypes of mysterious femininity – I find its heterogeneity useful in moving women's poetry beyond the limiting confines of polemic and confession. Moreover, Lefebvre's feminized everyday does not pit domesticity against art, so it can help critics resolve the contradictory expectations for women's poetry that Dooley laments. The everyday intersects with E. D. Blodgett's and Henry Sayre's theories of the vernacular, which exists "somewhere among mass, popular, and high art cultures," as Garrett-Petts and Nash point out (23). Both the everyday and the vernacular are fundamentally hybrid discourses, but Lefebvre's theory further eludes the prevailing dualisms that position artistic forms as a counter-discourse to popular culture.

Literary critics tend to view poetry and the media in oppositional terms – especially if the former is by women and the latter is conflated with the market. Paul Hoover, editor of *Postmodern American Poetry* (1994), insists that the poets in his collection separate themselves from "mainstream culture" (xxv). Generally

speaking, poetry critics find media influences most palatable when poems critique them, and feminist critics praise women's poetry for resisting popular images of women. But pitting poetry and the media against one another strikes me as an increasingly untenable position in postmodern culture.

Frank Davey suggests that "artists' statements have tended to be made during times of transition in artistic modes" (1). We may be at a transitional moment when more poetry is being consumed outside the classroom. Some of these alternative venues are politically engaged, such as the art therapy and social work that Si Transken described at the *Artist Statement* workshop. Her recent anthology, *This Ain't Your Patriarchs' Poetry Book: Connections, Candles, Comrades* (2003), draws together a collective of social workers, victims of oppression and neglect, and activists in order to change readers' "relationships with all the females and female energies in their lives" (xx). Transken concerns herself with how poetry can effect new gender relations. Contemporary women's poetry anthologies can also move us beyond restrictive prescriptions for consuming poetry; as Raymond Williams reminds us, one did not always have to choose between being "poet or sociologist" (30). Anthologies like *Making for Planet Alice* offer a means of reuniting these lines of inquiry, drawing our attention to poetry's cultural work.

Acknowledgements

The cover of *Making for the Open* is reproduced courtesy of Chatto & Windus.
The images of Eleanor Brown and Gillian Ferguson, and the cover of *Making for Planet Alice* are reproduced courtesy of Bloodaxe Books.

Notes

1 Correspondence with the author, 13 June 2007.
2 Correspondence with the author, 20 October 2005.

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Exhibiting Writing: On Viewing Artists' Statements as Art

W.F. Garrett-Petts

I want to reflect on the occasion of a panel presentation, on the rhetorical situation of co-presenting with an artist whose photographic work is the topic of discussion: the scene was a panel at *The Photograph, An International Interdisciplinary Conference* sponsored by the journal *Mosaic* and held at the University of Manitoba, March 11, 2004. There, along with Donald Lawrence, I presented a talk on the work of contemporary artist Fred Douglas with Fred Douglas present as part of the panel.

There's a famous sequence in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* where Alvy and Annie are standing in line for the movies and a man behind them is speaking loudly, showing off his knowledge of contemporary cultural theory:

> MAN IN LINE: (Loudly to his companion right behind Alvy and Annie) We saw the Fellini film last Tuesday. It is not one of his best. It lacks a cohesive structure. You know, you get the feeling that he's not absolutely sure what it is he wants to say.

When the man switches the subject to Marshall McLuhan, Alvy, visibly irritated, steps forward, waving his hands in frustration, and stands facing the camera. Sighing and addressing the audience, Alvy says, "What do you do when you get stuck in a movie line with a guy like this behind you?" The man walks over to speak to the camera in his defense, and Alvie tells him, "the funny part of it is, M – Marshall McLuhan, you don't know anything about Marshall McLuhan's ... work!"

When the man continues arguing, Alvy pulls Marshall McLuhan out from behind a playbill:

> MCLUHAN: I hear – I heard what you were saying. You – you know nothing of my work. ... How you ever got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing.

"If only life were like this," says Alvy directly to the camera.

This *Photograph Conference* was something like that: while giving my paper I was acutely aware that in 20 minutes or so, I'd be cast as either Alvy or the man in the line faced with the subject of discussion speaking in first person, available, that is, to confirm or contradict. From Alvy's perspective (one shared, I think, by the viewer), McLuhan's presence puts the academic (who, we are told, teaches a class in "'TV Media and Culture' at Columbia") in his place: the man in the line protests, "I think that my insights into Mr. McLuhan – well, have a great deal of validity"; for Alvy, questions of validity in interpretation are trumped by the fantasy of resolving a dispute by enlisting McLuhan himself.

I first saw *Annie Hall* while still an undergraduate in English at the University of Victoria, and I remember the sense of satisfaction and justice I felt in seeing a professor so publicly corrected. Today I might argue that the power of McLuhan's ad hominem attack, his authority in the scene, is based upon a naive appeal to a rhetoric of authenticity: as viewers we are encouraged in the commonsense belief that the author of *Understanding Media* understands and thus speaks about his theories better than any university prof in a movie

line-up. But wherever we might stand on questions of authorial intention, authority, and hermeneutics generally, few would argue that McLuhan's presence in the scene doesn't make a difference.

Fred Douglas' presence at the conference made a difference, too. It made us a little more self-conscious; more importantly, it provided an opportunity to rehearse a novel model of critical inquiry, one that works in public dialogue with the artist as co-researcher.

When artist-critic Donald Lawrence and I first proposed the panel, we summarized our initial critical position on Douglas' work – and on what we saw as Douglas' place in the photo conceptual landscape of the Vancouver art scene. Here's our original wording, wording rehearsed as a proposed abstract for the official conference program:

> *Original Abstract*: Though an active and influential member of Vancouver's arts community since the 1960s, Fred Douglas has worked against the grain of Vancouver's photoconceptual practice. He has begun to speak out against what he sees as an exhausted, overly self-conscious, overly settled, "over-coded" artistic practice. Two recent works, *Crossfade* and *Flutter*, represent Douglas' efforts to find an unsettled, moving space for his pictures and stories, one that fades across vernacular forms of personal and commercial expression. For Douglas, "The writing is ... an un-containing of things – a fluttering, a dispersal, a profusion." Finding and revitalizing the "fluttering presence" languishing dormant in the everyday means confronting the neglect or indifference or misreading that everyday objects suffer. This panel presentation provides an occasion for a dialogue on the issues of memory, melancholia, narrative, and photographic representation that Douglas' work raises.

In preparation for the panel, Douglas asked us to reconsider the wording of our abstract, viewing it not solely as a convenient program summary, but as a variation of a genre more closely aligned with the visual arts: the artist's statement:

> Don and Will, I felt uncomfortable with parts of *the statement*. While it is true, I have seen many pictures done in the photo conceptual mode that I would describe as the result of working listlessly in an exhausted area, but I can't say this about all such work. I've seen just as much work that excites and interests me in this area as I have in any other area of art. More importantly, I would be horrified to find myself embroiled in a discourse revolving around work that I have

> little regard for – and I would rather spend no time at all combating such work. So I've modified the statement a bit. If you find parts of the modification acceptable make whatever changes you think will improve it. Thanks Fred. (italics added)

With characteristic generosity, Douglas provided two alternative statements, one a revised version of our original abstract, and one a more conventional artist's statement.

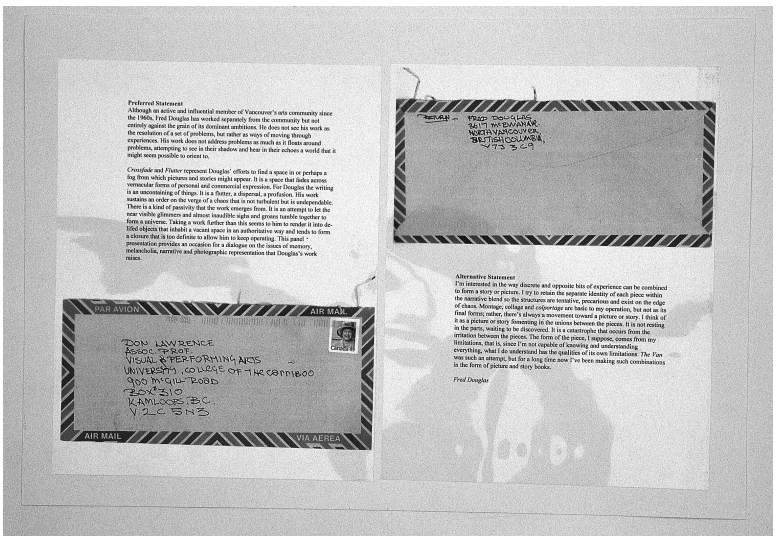
> *Preferred Statement*: Although an active and influential member of Vancouver's arts community since the 1960s, Fred Douglas has worked separately from the community, but not entirely against the grain of its dominant ambitions. He does not see his work as the resolution of a set of problems, but rather as ways of moving through experiences. His work does not address problems as much as it floats around problems, attempting to see in their shadow and hear in their echoes a world that it might seem possible to orient to. *Crossfade* and *Flutter* represent Douglas' efforts to find a space in or perhaps a fog from which pictures and stories might appear. It is a space that fades across vernacular forms of personal and commercial expression. For Douglas the writing is an uncontaining of things. It is a flutter, a dispersal, a profusion. His work sustains an order on the verge of a chaos that is not turbulent but is undependable. There is a kind of passivity that the work emerges from. It is an attempt to let the near visible glimmers and almost inaudible sighs and groans tumble together to form a universe. Taking a work further than this seems to him to render it into delifed objects that inhabit a vacant space in an authoritative way and tends to form a closure that is too definite to allow him to keep operating. This panel presentation provides an occasion for a dialogue on the issues of memory, melancholia, narrative and photographic representation that Douglas's work raises.
>
> *Alternative Statement*: I'm interested in the way discrete and opposite bits of experience can be combined to form a story or picture. I try to retain the separate identity of each piece within the narrative blend so the structures are tentative, precarious and exist on the edge of chaos. Montage, collage and colportage are basic to my operation, but not as its final forms; rather, there's always a movement toward a picture or story. I think of it as a picture or story fomenting in the unions between the pieces. It is not resting in the parts, waiting to be discovered. It is a catastrophe that occurs from the irritation between the pieces. The form of the piece, I suppose, comes from my

> limitations, that is, since I'm not capable of knowing and understanding everything, what I do understand has the qualities of its own limitations. The van was such an attempt, but for a long time now I've been making such combinations in the form of picture and story books.

I take Douglas' intervention to be more than a critical corrective: the impulse to complement visual representation (or conference presentation) through multiple verbal *essais* (tries or statements) has been a constant element of his artistic practice. While eschewing the didactic, Douglas seeks to refashion the artist's statement, positioning it as a form of vernacular theory integral to his art making. In general, artists' statements present an intriguing, if problematic, example of what Milan Dimic calls "literatures of lesser diffusion," ostensibly minor works of prose poetry or criticism that, lacking either the status or formal dissemination of more canonical writing, have gone unnoticed or become hidden from public view. Artists' statements take the form of short comments – miniature essays – that usually introduce an actual or proposed exhibition. Like prefaces, forewords, prologues, and introductions in literary works, the artist's statement performs a vital if complex rhetorical role: when included in an exhibition proposal, a slide application package, and sent to a curator, the artist's statement must provide content, context, technical specifications, establish the artist's ethos and persuade the reader of the artwork's value; when hung on a gallery wall, the statement (or 'didactic') becomes both invitation and explanation, and in some measure an element of the installation itself. Less formally, artists' interviews, journals, albums, sketchbooks, and all manner of private correspondence can, when made public, create meta-narratives that speak to and about the work.

Not all artists and curators are comfortable with the public foregrounding of private aesthetics, written typically, as Derrida reminds us, "in view of their own self-effacement"; yet the visual arts community nonetheless employs artists' statements as key liminal documents, as writing that both directs the viewer's gaze and indirectly announces or affirms the artist's rite of passage. Artists' statements call attention not only to the artworks they introduce but to themselves – and, I would argue, to 'the artist' as creative and critical agent. Artists' statements are palimpsests, presenting, in

words, a narrative or argument apparent beneath (or overlaying) each principal visual representation.



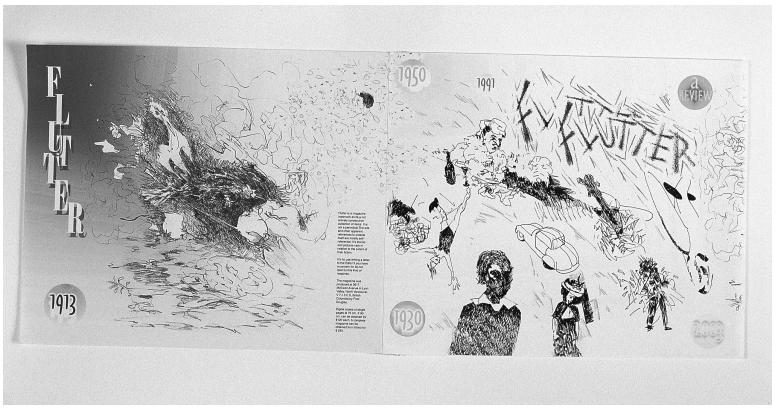
Fred Douglas' *Flutter*, the subject of my *Photograph Conference* presentation, is an artist's book in progress, a work complicating our understanding of artists' statements, making it difficult to distinguish artwork from statement. Douglas does more in his bookwork than play image against text: *Flutter* asks us to reconceptualize the role of the statement, denying it full authority while letting it wander, emerge and linger as a gesture of partial understanding. In *Flutter*, artist's statement becomes art.

Douglas' bookwork, fashioned as a series of maquettes, suggests a prototype, a kind of invented magazine drawing from existing forms but not trying to duplicate them. The magazine, what Douglas calls "intrinsically a public gesture," provides a mass culture foil for the artist's exploration of form. "*Flutter* is a magazine," it says in the introductory section, where Douglas installs a brief artist's statement in place of the usual front matter of editors' names, place of publication, circulation details, and so on. Douglas' text states:

> *Flutter* is a magazine inasmuch as it's a not entirely consecutive collection of items. The ads and other apparent references to outside

> itself are mostly self-referential. Its stories and pictures vary in relation to the extent of their fiction. (6)

Below this we read, "It's no use writing a letter to the editor if you have a concern, for it's not open to this kind of response." It is evidently the reader, not the magazine, that must be open to respond.



A more extensive artist's statement, a foreword to the main narrative, is split between pages 12 and 90. Felicitously entitled "Forward," the statement attributes Douglas' long-held aesthetic positions on artistic creation and audience response to a fictitious sociologist, Mac Mowhard. Here Mowhard/Douglas details four categories of creative action and response (each inflected by but not nostalgic for 1950s terminology):

> (1) *the generative*, those who initiate a new style yet to be named; (2) *the hip*, those who share an innate understanding of and enthusiasm for the new; (3) *the chic*, those who keep their eyes on the hip, and thus do not relate to the new experience in the same way; (4) *the squares*, those who require the new to be spelled out and thoroughly explained.

Anticipating phrasing used in the alternative statement prepared for the conference presentation, Douglas points to the squares as "the ones who must have the thing completely *stilled* before it appears to them. It is at this point that the thing becomes more or less *de-lifed*" (12; italics added).

Douglas shows greater affinity for the generative and the hip than the chic and the square, but he recognizes that these states too are in

flux: "I don't believe that any of us is constantly generative, hip, chic, or square. We pass from one state to another depending upon the context we find ourselves in" (90). Conventional artists' statements, we might assume, appeal to the square in all of us. They explain and thus, to some extent, "still" the life of the artwork. In contrast, Douglas wants his artists' statements to flutter, to play hide and seek with the audience: such a statement opens up a field of possibilities; it moves us from statement to state, elaborating us into a new context, an undifferentiated space where we are encouraged to linger.

Flutter, if I'm interpreting the bookwork correctly, comes closer than any previous work to simultaneously articulating and enacting Douglas' theory of art and art-making. Elsewhere, Donald Lawrence and I have written about Douglas' version of the vernacular as a form of catachresis, a "naming out of difference" ("Between Vernaculars" 188): at root, vernacular means a local or indigenous form of expression, one tied to the ordinary or everyday. The dictionary

defines the vernacular as "a slave language," as removed from the so-called dominant discourse. What interested us in *PhotoGraphic Encounters* – and what still interests me – is how the vernacular emerges accidentally or whimsically in relation to (often in opposition to) sites of cultural power. It emerges most often as a sign of loss, a nostalgic or melancholic token. Ironically, the vernacular is, by definition, that which is least "at home" in popular, mass, and high art cultural expression – and yet one senses that these other forms of expression could not exist without traces of the vernacular. So, while the vernacular may embody the local, the affective, the past, it becomes visible or readable out of difference.

The vernacular involves a sense that one's personally experienced past (often hidden or buried) can be recovered, even redeemed, in the present moment – specifically at the point of contact where artist and audience meet. When vernacular art moves us, it does so not because of its originality or its illustrative function, but because it strikes us as authentic, authentic, that is, to the moments of production and contact. Fred Douglas' artist's statements focus on these moments.

My thinking here has been influenced by the work of E.D. Blodgett and Henry Sayre. Following Henri Gobard's tetralinguistic model of language systems – his focus on the vernacular (a language affective and local, linked to region or territory), the vehicular (the lingua franca of commercial exchange), the referential (the language of education and culture), and the mythic (the sacred language of belief and community consensus) – Blodgett sees the vernacular functioning as a deferred memory, a "sign of loss," or as a mythic hope of recoverable communion situated somewhere among mass, popular, and high art cultures. Logically, to be recognized as vernacular, the words and images must remain apart from, and thus subordinate to, the dominant discourse: "For the poet," says Blodgett, "the vernacular is not a viable option in itself, but can only be articulated as a code among others. It is the basis for the movement toward the mythic, the discourse in which the vernacular is sublated in a process of figurative reterritorialization" ("Towards" 627). [1]

The vernacular must remain in motion, in process, unstable, for once it is pinned down or legitimized as a fixed genre, it changes; it becomes conventional, easily subsumable within the prevailing discourses (especially those of mass and popular culture). Henry

Sayre sees artistic fascination with the vernacular as a matter of hope – a matter of "pursuing authenticity," of searching out "the vernacular moment" as an alternative to the arrested moment of high modernist art. Sayre sees the vernacular moment in terms of performance and storytelling – terms that have much in common with Douglas' use of the artist's statement: performance situates the vernacular between "creativity and commerce," a particular junction that makes notions of authenticity problematic. The sense of absence or questionable authenticity, though, acts positively as an invitation to narrative, as a trigger for storytelling. By focusing on the vernacular moment, Sayre offers an alternative, perhaps an anodyne, to postmodern cynicism and the seemingly endless cycle of ironies that treat 'authenticity' as a naive, antiquated idea. Authenticity can be documented (especially via photography, says Sayre), and the authentic vernacular impulse can be recovered, even shared (via narrative), by a ready audience.

Sayre rehearses the story of Lee Quinones, a New York graffiti artist, who 'bombed' a ten-car train with Merry Christmas murals twelve feet high and five hundred feet long. Quinones is quoted from a personal narrative where he describes in vivid detail the immediacy of the creative moment, the sense of being there. This story, as Sayre presents it, is something of a cautionary tale, for soon after the graffiti event, Quinones' authentic impulse and talent (his generative potential) is co-opted by commercial interests, which, seeing a market for Quinones' work, begin wide-scale promotion. His work enters mainstream culture and begins to circulate in chic 'graffiti boutiques.'

At first, such a story seems little more than a thinly disguised parable told by someone nostalgic for lost origins, what Michael Jarrett has described as part of the "rhetoric of degeneration" (190), a familiar script charting how authentic expression (frequently coded as 'ethnic') "constitutes an initial raw material which is then appropriated and reduced in cultural force and meaning by contact with a white industry" (191-92). Jarrett rejects this colonization model, arguing that "it cannot account for innovation"; it fails to explain how 'authenticity' arises. Similarly – and this is what makes his contribution important to this present discussion – Sayre situates authenticity not in the work but in the work's performance, its "left

over" narrative: "The act of creation, of personal expression, is no longer an *originary* [or, in Douglas' terms, a *generative*] act – that is, a first instance; it is, rather, *exemplary* – worth saving, worth repeating. It has the authority of evidence. It is, finally, in the full sense of the word, *telling*" (158).

The vernacular, then, is not something contained by a work or object; it is, rather, a shared moment where the narrative performance is variously released, rehabilitated, recirculated and/or recreated. As Sayre explains it, "the authenticity that we discover at the vernacular moment" exists temporally in the making or hearing or reading or viewing of narrative, "when the aura of originality is supplanted by the aura of the authentic, the exemplary" (159). Sayre's notion of narrative performance provides an apt description of Douglas' artist's statements at work.

For Douglas, the vernacular moment occurs when a fossilized history (temporarily stilled or "de-lifed" as an object of representation) enters or re-enters the world. Narrative performance (enacted through the embedded traces of the work's own making and through an interplay of theory and story) keeps the resolution of Douglas' work into any particular form always provisional – remaining as much a question as an answer to his investigation. Taken as a whole, his works provide a model of a creative endeavour not driven by any overriding notion of aesthetic form but, rather, as a culling together of many artistic and vernacular forms both within and across the conventions of the visual and literary arts, including film, street art, commercial design, advertising, posters and billboards, craft, decoration, and architecture. As Douglas writes in his alternative statement proffered for his *Photograph Conference* presentation,

> I'm interested in the way discrete and opposite bits of experience can be combined to form a story or picture. I try to retain the separate identity of each piece within the narrative blend so the structures are tentative, precarious and exist on the edge of chaos. Montage, collage and colportage are basic to my operation. But not as final forms; rather, there's always a movement toward picture or story. I think of it as a picture or story fomenting in the unions between the pieces. It arises from the process and is not inherent in any of the pieces. It is not resting in the parts, waiting to be discovered.

In this context, the artist's statement works against explanation. Douglas is not interested in text as caption: "The writing is not an envelope to put things in, nor is it a layering of things. It doesn't contain anything, but things emerge from it. It is an un-containing of things – a fluttering, a dispersal, a profusion. It is an inter-tidal zone" (qtd. in Davison "Ruminating" 11). The ideal artist's statement helps un-contain that which has been constrained by prejudice, bias, taste, cultural inertia or fashion. Un-containing means resituating the objects of attention in an "inter-tidal zone" of imaginative exchange, giving the object new life by reinserting it into the ebb and flow of multiple and intersecting narratives. Artists' statements are a crucial part of this narrative mix, encouraging, as Donald Kuspit has said of collage, a feeling of incompleteness, a "sense of the perpetual becoming that animates it ..." (43).[2]

I want to conclude by looking back at a curatorial statement Douglas wrote in the mid-seventies for a catalogue on *Eleven Early British Columbian Photographers*, an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Writing in reference to the work of Phillip Timms, Mattie Gunerman, Leonard Frank, and Claire Downing, Douglas articulates a kind of gloss on his own work. He distinguishes between photographic explorers and settlers:

> The explorer comes in search of the exotic and dramatic and it is part of his plan to return home again. His vision is sweeping and expansive .... The settler on the other hand has left home forever, with all that implies. He has come to a strange place and his main interest is to establish it as home. This consists of sensing how old conventions fit into the new place, and of inventing new conventions for experiences that have no correlation with the old life – a process that results in a more intimate experience of a place. (7)

Douglas sees the art of the photographers he admires as a matter of settling in, not moving through. "In looking at their work it's possible to get a sense of a place taking form," he says. I would argue that understanding how space takes form is crucial to appreciating *Flutter* as well.

Douglas says of his bookwork, "it has become an obsession for me. In a sense I don't really like it." Like the settler artist, the process of making something new leaves him temporarily displaced. As he explains, "Working on the book, this has happened to me:

making this book has intensified isolation to the point where I worry about it" (personal interview). Traces of this obsession can be found in the form of the prototypes, in the overly profuse collages and layering. The maquettes detail an extensive record of experimentation, both technical and artistic. Here the artist's presence can be felt, the false starts and the revisions charting Douglas' course back to the vernacular. The work has a sense of time, "it unfolds itself giving a sense of pace ... If you are not sensitive to that [as an artist] then there's a kind of falseness." Veracity emerges during the making; Douglas works his way back to the vernacular over time: "When I patch the work together, I don't know exactly what will happen. It grows out of a situation" (personal interview). *Flutter*'s appeal is to this felt sense of "space taking form over time"; its success as art depends upon the artist's generative presence and upon our readiness to enter and experience that space with him.

If there's a sense of melancholy in Douglas' work – and I think there is – the sense of loss is located more in the future than in the past. It lies in the anticipated act of completing that which, once completed, no longer embodies the performance of space taking form. In this sense it is the maquette, not the near-finished, more polished bookwork, that invites ongoing vernacular response. Fred Douglas died on Valentine's Day, 2005, and *Flutter* remains his most successful unfinished work.[3]

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Fred Douglas and his estate for permission to reproduce images from his work in this essay. The photographs of Douglas' works are by Donald Lawrence. The image from *Annie Hall* is reproduced courtesy of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios's Clip + Still Licencing division.

Notes

1 Deleuze and Guattari argue that the four languages in the tetralinguistic model can be defined in terms of their spatial and temporal coordinates: "vernacular is here; vehicular language is everywhere; referential language is over there; mythic language is beyond" (23). The emphasis on presence, on experiencing art in the here and now, becomes both theme and *topos* in the work of an artist like Douglas. Within this "tetraglossic" schema, the vernacular plays a double role: it both marks

the "here and now," opening and maintaining personal contact between artist and audience, and it also marks a voice no longer "at home" within the dominant vehicular and referential languages of popular, mass, and high art cultures. As I note in a recent interview (with Héliane Ventura), "The vernacular is ... both a sign of loss and a sign lost. It also has the effect of deliberate or accidental displacement, for ... the vernacular only becomes visible and gains rhetorical force in relation to other languages – to the languages of high art or commerce or popular culture. In becoming noticed, its presence, or the ghost of its presence, inevitably changes our perception of the competing, more ostensibly dominant, linguistic and visual modes. Vernacular language is language in process, language of the moment and in use, but different from the official languages of power and institutional authority."

2 Douglas calls this vernacular moment a "crossfade" of words and pictures. "Once it is a story it remains one or fades," says Douglas in his preface to *Excerpts from Cars*.

3 My thanks to *Open Letter*'s anonymous reviewers for the helpful comments and suggestions, many of which I have included here – especially the need to clarify that the vernacular's "lesser diffusion" among academic elites does not lessen either its importance or felt impact. In addition, as one reviewer astutely points out, in Douglas' work, "the impulse toward defense, which has a long and complicated relationship to criticism (both in academic and journalistic settings), if not to art itself, is summarily left behind by a form that asserts (or creates space for) itself as a public provocation that works against explanation and toward encounter."

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How To Be Influenced

Michael Jarrett

> To write is perhaps … to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my self. (Deleuze and Guattari 84)

You know the sound of Steve Cropper's guitar. You have heard it on "Green Onions" by Booker T. and the MGs, on "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay" by Otis Redding – a song Cropper co-wrote – and on "Soul Man" by Sam and Dave. It is one of the identifying features of Memphis soul. More important, it is a sound I still love. Not too long ago, on assignment for *Fretboard Journal*, I interviewed Cropper at his Nashville office. Musicians are the artists with whom I have most frequently spoken. I generally know what to ask them.

"Steve, what experiences – what artistic inquiries – came prior to and led to your innovations?" Those may not have been my exact words, but I am duty bound to touch upon the question of influence. I must visit the topic. It is prescribed by the rhetorical situation. "What brought you here?" "How did you discover this place?" "What started you on this path?" There are lots of ways to ask about artistic influences. Talking with Cropper, I mentioned a rhythm-and-blues band, the 5 Royales, and its guitarist, Lowman Pauling. "I was extremely influenced," Cropper quickly admitted. "All you got to do is pick up one of their records and listen, and you'll hear Cropper trying to copy Lowman Pauling. Everything comes from something. A lot of the guys that I was around tried to copy B. B. King. I was going after Lowman Pauling. B.B. was a little bit too sophisticated for me."

"We took doo-wop and put a dance beat to it," Cropper says of the Mar-Keys, whose hit "Last Night" went top-ten on both R&B and pop charts. "And without question we were the number-one call band in Memphis, Tennessee. Reason? A bunch of white boys playing good old R&B dance music. Nobody else was doing it; we were doing it. A lot of bands played rockabilly. They worked, and they

played a lot of clubs. But they wound up getting stuck over in Arkansas in farm towns. And we were getting all these senior proms when we were juniors in high school, because we played the music they wanted to hear. We listened to Ray Charles and to James Brown. We listened to everything. But those were the main influences. And, of course, the 5 Royale stuff. We did 'Think' and 'Say It.' Our whole trick was real simple" (Jarrett "Mystery and Manners"). This is not false modesty. Within the economy of Memphis soul, simplicity was a virtue, and success was measured by dancing feet.

*

If songs, like paintings, were displayed in gallery space, then Cropper's comment would qualify as a readymade artist statement to accompany his music. In fact, a similar statement might very well make its way to a display – say, of guitars – in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum (Cleveland), the Experience Music Project (Seattle), or the Stax Museum of American Soul Music (Memphis). We might contrast the different spaces our culture provides artists for framing their work with language. For example, except for opening-night commentary at a gallery or museum, visual artists do not have the equivalent of between-song patter afforded musicians. But we should not be surprised that musicians often say, "Let the music speak for itself" – if they even declare that much. Nowadays, Bob Dylan in concert says next to nothing to his audience. Maybe he would proceed differently if gallery walls gave him the opportunity to situate and contextualize. Maybe not. Musicians can easily publish artist statements in liner notes that accompany their recordings, but typically, they take little advantage of this medium. Liner notes are commonly paired with reissues and with new recordings of musical styles, such as jazz, that have attained 'art' status. With few exceptions, journalists – not musicians – are contracted by record companies to write liner notes. And here again, in this 'space,' the question of influence – the business of who-begat-whom, has to be raised.

Instead of elaborating further on the various forms that artist statements can take, since artforms are constrained by institutional structures and politics (and phenomenological differences), I want to theorize influence, not so that we might better explain the artistic

process, but so that we might turn influence into a procedure for conducting artistic inquiry and producing art. The goal is to transform explanation into invention. I plan to take all of my examples from popular music.

However interesting the musician's answers might be, the question of influence potentially reinforces a basic misunderstanding. Influence implies that a variety of forces act upon a performer and lead directly to innovation or invention. But that line of reasoning is, at least conceivably, *post hoc*. For example, we decide that Louis Armstrong's artistic accomplishments – analogous to the design manifest in nature – demand an intelligent, originating cause: i.e., agents of influence. Influence becomes a type of metaphysics – art's version of creationism. Accomplishment – the appearance of intelligent design – summons or calls forth influence as cause. But influence can be understood, just as plausibly, as a result of accomplishment. We do not speculate about the influences of those who accomplish nothing. Influence is an effect that is retroactively read back as the cause or the source of accomplishment.

Michael Baxandall issues a corrective to the conventional notion of influence. At first glance, it looks like a naïve reinstatement of agency. It is not. Influence, Baxandall writes, arises when an artist acts upon the environment. We might call this action artistic inquiry, and we might imagine the environment from a Darwinian viewpoint. A bumble bee in a meadow darts from blossom to blossom. "The colors and shapes of the flowers," writes Frederick Turner, "are a precise record of what bees find attractive" (76). The artist inquires. He is similarly arrested by and, thereby, selects (or, conversely, is selected by) elements to include in his aesthetic (work or practice). He is, in Althusser's term, "interpellated" by what he might later claim as influences. The flowers in the meadow employ the bee just as surely as the bee selects the flowers. But for a moment assume a fixed, stable perspective: the meadow does not grow prior to or without the bumble bee's dance. Through the process that Darwin labeled natural selection, the bee brings the meadow into being and prompts it to flower. Subjectivity or agency is unnecessary, or rather they are effects. (Only when subjectivity and agency and intention are introduced can a distinction between natural and artificial selection be created and sustained.) By extension, we might ask:

Without the inescapable accomplishments of Louis Armstrong, would Buddy Bolden, one of Armstrong's primary influences, even exist? This is not an ontological question. It is historical and practical. Were it not for Armstrong, would we think to look for Bolden? More important, could we even locate him? Would there be any trace of the man? Or consider another, perhaps more significant, question, especially pertinent to the claims of influence and inquiry found in artist statements. Were it not for a long line of painters, poets, novelists, photographers, and filmmakers claiming jazz and blues as a major influence on their art, what would 'jazz' and 'blues' mean? Again, I am not suggesting that, for example, the music of saxophonists Lester Young, Louis Jordan, and Roscoe Mitchell would not 'exist' without the work of artists such as Sterling Brown, Romare Bearden, Roy DeCarava, or Bob Thompson. That is, at some level, nonsense. But what makes the sounds of these very different musicians culturally audible or identifiable as 'jazz' and 'blues'? Answer: an artist assigning jazz and blues a position of influence on his art is one way that 'jazz' and 'blues' become terms that carry meaning (as well as the mechanism by which the artist's work and self come to have meaning). By analogy, this is how a meadow (the field of influence) appears and seems to exist prior to pollination by bees. Declaring that one is a jazz painter retroactively imbues disparate types of music with coherence – it establishes a unified set, a style, or genre – sufficient to define both painting and music. Connections between Young, Jordan, and Mitchell's approaches to the saxophone are far from obvious – certainly not inherent in the music they have made. Connections have to be conferred, and naming these saxophonists as an influence on one's painting or photography would do just that: confer connections.

An even larger point needs to be emphasized. When influence is not conceptualized through arboreal metaphors that graph lineage as 'family trees' – towering oaks instead of knotted rhizomes – it is understood as temporally ordered "routes of linkage" (Ulmer 194-5). To illustrate – or, better, to make audible – the routes of linkage that govern conventional notions of influence, I refer readers to what I suspect will be a generally unfamiliar piece of music. I came across it one Friday while listening to Monica's show on WFMU. The selection Monica played is titled "Lunch Life." It is by Wang

Changcun and can be found on *China: The Sonic Avant-Garde*, issued by the Post-Concrete label. "Lunch Life" features a steady-state rattle topped by a metal-shearing-metal drone that sings in chorus. It prompts a rush of recognition – a series of recollections, really. That's why I seized upon it. That's why I love it. It repeats an old song: the railroad refrain. It vibrates sympathetically – to railroad time. It situates listeners in a space that recalls an empty box car clipping along rails at a moderate speed. In short, just about anyone hearing the track would immediately notice that it sounds like a train; just about anyone would conclude that it was obviously influenced by the sound of trains. What Wang Changcun might actually think is irrelevant. (He's our bee in the meadow of music.) "Lunch Life" is irrefutably a train track.

"Farther Down the Line" is the name I've given another train track: an audio collage of jazz, blues, country, gospel, r&b, hip-hop, and rock. Assembled to accompany this essay, this mix is available for download at my website.[1] It ought to remind readers that the railroad exerted a massive influence on popular music of all varieties. Or as Houston Baker puts it: "The dominant blues syntagm in America is an instrumental imitation of *train-wheels-over-track-junctures*." He continues:

> This sound is the 'sign,' as it were of the blues, and it combines an intriguing melange of phonics: rattling gondolas, clattering flatbeds, quilling whistles, clanging bells, rumbling boxcars, and other railroad sounds. A blues text may thus announce itself by the onomatopoeia of the train's whistle sounded on the indrawn breath of a harmonica or a train's bell tinkled on the high keys of an upright piano. The blues stanzas may then roll through an extended meditative repertoire with a steady train-wheels-over-track-junctures guitar back beat as a traditional, syntagmatic complement. If desire and absence are driving conditions of blues performance, the amelioration of such conditions is implied by the onomatopoeic *training* of blues voice and instrument. Only a *trained* voice can sing the blues. (8)

"Farther Down the Line" begins with the voice of Little Richard and leads to a snippet from the opening to "Lucille." While Little Richard takes full credit for inventing rock and roll, he is quick to credit the railroad, even more than the church, with influencing his

piano sound. In the WGBH/BBC series *Rock & Roll*, Little Richard speaks of his childhood in Macon, Georgia. "The train would shake the house that was in front of the track," he says. "Everybody would get out of the bed 'cause the train shook the house, 'cause they couldn't sleep. And the train would say, 'Chocka chocka chocka, chocka chocka, chocka chocka chocka, chocka chocka.' To me it was a rhythm. To me it was just like a song, you know. It had this thing to it, to me" (*Rock & Roll*). I want to borrow the title of Kip Hanrahan's record label and call "this thing," this railroad thing, "American clavé": one-two-three, one-two; one-two-three, one-two. "Chocka chocka chocka, if you get a notion."

Figure 1: How Influence Works; film still from *Style Wars*

The alignment of popular music and the railroad has been exceptionally generative. It has produced music for more than 150 years. In the next few paragraphs, I want to work through the sorts of linkages understood by the music-railroad connection. More abstractly, I want to show the sorts of couplings referred to by influence and artistic inquiry as the terms are conventionally used. If we understand influence not as a cause of innovation, but as an effect

that follows from what we make, then we can more easily use the concept of innovation generatively as a set of instructions for making art. We can learn how to make ourselves be influenced. There are three basic tracks of influence and inquiry. They correspond directly to the three traditional modes of reasoning – abduction, deduction, and induction – and to three basic tropes of figurative language – metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche.

To make the tracks of influence and inquiry concrete, let's stick with the alignment of popular music and the railroad. If we declare – e.g., in an artist statement – that a song was influenced by the sound of the railroad, then presumably one of three tracks of logical inference have been taken:

1. I notice that a song *integrates* an essential quality of railroads into music; the song is an instance of a rule about the sound of trains, or, conversely, the sound of trains makes the song intelligible.

   Abduction/Synecdoche – The thing prompts recollection of a rule or quality. "Hear that rattle and repetition – those overtones – in Chessie's "At Grade"? There's really only one likely explanation for such features. They are basic qualities of the railroad. Hence, the song was influenced by the railroad."

2. I notice that a song *represents* the sound of railroads; a rule about trains has been mapped onto a song, establishing the song as a case. The song "explains" the sound of trains.

   Deduction/Metaphor – The rule is applied to – or, better, represented by – a case. "If Little Richard's 'Lucille' is a train song, it will be heard as similar to the sound of trains – e.g., its syncopated momentum and repetitions as 'train like' – despite manifest differences between train sounds and songs."

3. I notice that a song *reduces* train sounds into music; certain songs can be tested against train sounds to see if they are train songs.

   Induction/Metonymy – The case is compared to things; test case against things or reality. "This song epitomizes the rattles and drones of the train that runs behind my house." "Brian Eno's 'Chemin de Fer' (1976) refers to

> Pierre Schaeffer's *Étude aux Chemins de Fer* (1948), the first example of *musique concrète*, which alluded to Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'Arrivé d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895)."

And so, if we want to make music influenced by trains, we might turn the above descriptions into instructions for inquiry:

1. The route of *abduction/synecodoche*: "Create music that integrates sounds of the railroad." "Make music that evokes essential qualities of nights spent riding the rails."
2. The route of *deduction/metaphor*: "Create music that represents sounds of the railroad." "Map or translate a rule about train sounds into the language of music."
3. The route of *induction/metonymy*: "Create music that reduces some aspect of train sounds." "Make a song that manifests some sonic feature of trains."

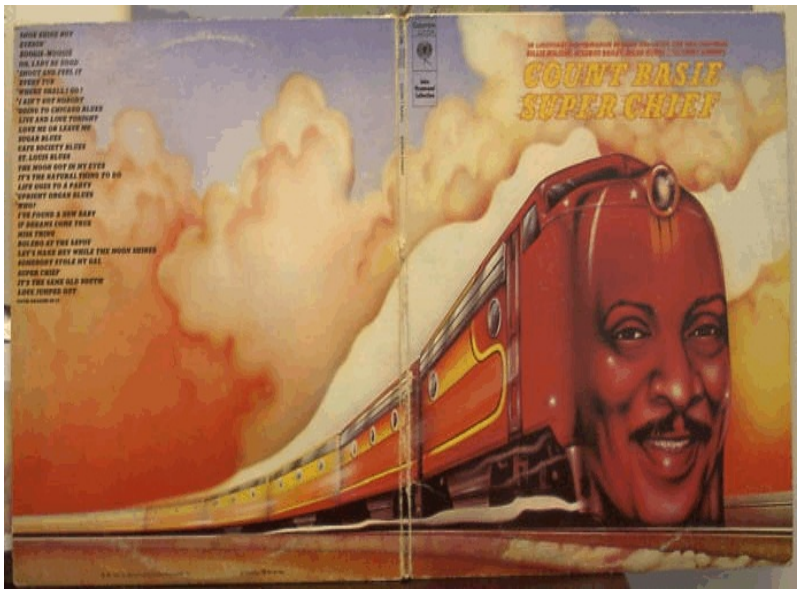

Figure 2: Album Cover, Count Basie's *Super Chief,* courtesy of Columbia Records. Gregory Ulmer writes: "The process by which Africans integrated their cultural practices with the materials of whatever place they found themselves offers a frame for understanding how literacy becomes electronic" (Rickels).

I do not doubt that influence and inquiry can work in the above described manner: that we can trace their motions following traditional routes of logic or inference, and that they trope or transform data through basic cognitive operations. I am, however, very skeptical that influence and inquiry generally travel such orderly routes. Traditional ways of conceptualizing influence and inquiry derive from a literate or logocentric paradigm – the step-by-step patterns of inference – institutionalized in universities, especially in English, philosophy, and comparative-literature departments. Stated differently, we have known for a long time now that 'logic' is a historical consequence – an effect – of the invention and institutionalization of alphabetic writing. Like mathematics enabled by Arabic numerals, it was not done in the head. For example, deductive logic required physical support – the apparatus of writing (pencil and paper) – and associated institutions (the cultural support of church, school, and state) (*Seulemonde*). "Concept formation," notes Gregory Ulmer, following Lord, Parry, Ellis, Ong, and other theorists, was "invented through literacy." It "allowed us to move beyond myths and storytelling into philosophy and analysis" (Rickels). We should not be surprised when comparative approaches favoured by literate analysis employ influence and inquiry as a concept to explain the relationships between artists (or, as I have done, the relationship between music and trains). And we should not be surprised when influence and inquiry come to resemble logical processes, when they follow preset tracks. The trick is how to unthink influence and inquiry as literate concepts and rethink them as artistic (image-based) practices more indicative of, and more useful in, electronic culture.

"We're now at a stage," claims Ulmer, "where we have equivalent support to move beyond the concept – now three thousand years old – and we're ready to develop a new dimension of reasoning that's a practice and not something that's in the brain" (Rickels). More than any other contemporary theorist, Ulmer has conceptualized – tried to think through – the paradigm shift represented by electronic culture. He writes, "There is now equipment" – which we might picture metonymically as the computer – "which will support inferences that move directly from thing to thing." Instead of supporting step-by-step patterns, the "chains of reasoning" enabled by print culture, this

equipment makes possible "inference patterns" that (from a literate perspective) seem improbable, irrelevant, and unexpected: a kind of "duction," then, that jumps tracks. Ulmer calls this newly emerging mode of inference "conduction" (*Seulemonde*). It "puts into logic the aesthetic operations of images (word and picture)" (Rickels). Its trope is *catachresis* – "the manifestly absurd Metaphor designed to inspire Ironic second thoughts about the nature of the thing characterized" (White 37). We need to invent the syntax of *conduction/catachresis*, says Ulmer. We need to learn how to infer directly from thing to thing, how to make influence jump tracks.

Any incredulity I've had about conduction – about the logic (that is not a logic) operative within the paradigm Ulmer calls "electracy" – has been laid to rest by a fairly simple realization. This type of inference has long been the norm, perhaps among all artists, but particularly among African American musicians. Conduction is artistic inquiry. Though he does not label it as such, Graham Lock explicates conduction in *Blutopia*, as he explains the 'sense' behind the perceived madness of Sun Ra and Anthony Braxton. We discover that, more often than not, conduction describes (or names) how influence (the flip side of inquiry) actually operates. Inferences are drawn directly from thing to thing. For example, graffiti ('bombing' subway trains), break dancing, and rap music connect – they fit or match up – and that fit yields hip hop. Ulmer says as much when he writes: "The process by which Africans integrated their cultural practices with the materials of whatever place they found themselves offers a frame for understanding how literacy becomes electronic" (Rickels). We should note that this process of integration – of criss crossing or jumping tracks – is nothing less than another name for influence and inquiry retooled and operating within electronic culture. It is not oedipal, not driven by anxiety.

A number of theorists have charted parallels between mainstream jazz musicians and the poets – the griots and bards – of oral cultures. Both invent in the moment, collapsing (literate) distinctions between composition and performance. Both draw upon 'licks' – preset formula, sometimes borrowed – stitched together. Both ascribe to an aesthetic of virtuosity, the cult of the soloist. The list could continue. But once exhausted, it might only substantiate Ong's point that electronic culture is "secondary orality" (3). More pointedly, we might ask: Why have African American artists proven remarkably

adept at managing electronic culture? "Natural rhythm," said the traditional, racist answer, and its sting makes us avoid a difficult but still intriguing question. Clearly, the matter is grossly overdetermined. But while there may be no single reason for the disproportionately large success of African American artists, and musicians in particular, there is a useful explanation. Blocked from any meaningful involvement in literate culture, African Americans were allowed to participate in entertainment culture. Indeed, "allowed" is too weak a word. The cultural productions of black Americans were largely restricted to entertainment culture, which, beginning in the late 19th century, transformed into an early manifestation of electronic culture. As a group, black artists were practically force-marched into the newly emerging paradigm of electracy.

In 1966, Glenn Gould wrote: "We must be prepared to accept the fact that, for better or worse, recording will forever alter our notions about what is appropriate to the performance of music" (337). Gould seemed transfixed by "the prospects of recording," and in particular by the invention of "a new kind of listener" (347). But to whom is he speaking? (The question is rhetorical; you already know the answer.) If his audience is the largely white audience for classical music, then Gould's oracular, almost apocalyptic tone makes perfect sense. The statement, and his larger essay, reads as a manifesto. But just for kicks, imagine Gould directing his comments to Louis Armstrong, at that time enjoying immense fame but nearing the end of his life. (Gould and Armstrong both recorded for the same record label, Columbia.) Gould's future-tense world turns out to be the only world that Armstrong had known – for almost half-a-century. Gould's manifesto rates as old news. Or better, as Sun Ra put it, "We are in the future."

In his autobiography, *Satchmo*, Armstrong recalls a rainy day in New Orleans spent with his first wife. He writes: "Daisy and I were in the front room listening to some new records I had just bought, new releases of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band [1917], which we were playing on an upright Victrola we were very proud of. The records were 'Livery Stable Blues' and 'Tiger Rag,' the first 'Tiger Rag' to be recorded. (Between you and me, it's still the best.)" (161). The point is not so much that the Victrola has replaced the hearth in this domestic scene. Or that, in reference to the newly emerging

music (created by hometown boys), 'song' has come to mean 'record.' It is to underscore that Armstrong arrived 'prepared,' his notions about what was appropriate to the performance of music already altered by the implications of recording technology. Armstrong seemed fashioned for (and by) recording. He was a perfect fit. The new technology seemed to summon him forth. As a young man in the 1920s, now living in Chicago, Armstrong fronted the Hot Five and the Hot Seven, groups created specifically for recording in a studio, and he responded to "the prospects of recording" with astonishing confidence, demonstrating in the process how recording had altered notions about appropriate performance. What was an option to Gould – whether to accommodate implications of an emerging paradigm – was an early mandate to Armstrong.

Figure 3: The Little Train that Could, still from *Style Wars*

If we want to study conduction/catachresis, we would do well to understand how influence and inquiry have operated in African American music – within the realm of entertainment – for a full century. Entertainment provides us with good models for new patterns of thinking. In fact I should clearly state that popular music, of all sorts, has been electronic for a long time and is, therefore, a rich source – a tutor text – for operating within the new paradigm.

Black music just makes a particularly good example of possibilities suggested by electronic culture. Obviously, the railroad did not influence black music alone. In an essay on the "man-machine interface," Peter Shapiro writes: "The rhythm of life in most of America was created by the railroad, and pre-war blues and Country records were often little more than imitations of the locomotive using jugs and guitars: listen to The Memphis Jug Band's 'KC Moan' from 1929; Darby & Tarlton's 'Freight Train Ramble,' also from 1929; or Bill Monroe's 1941 'Orange Blossom Special'"(134). The railroad undoubtedly meant different things to black Americans than it did to white Americans. Muddy Waters catches the train to sweet home Chicago and, forever, leaves behind his life on Stovall's Plantation. Elvis Presley covers Junior Parker's "Mystery Train" for Sun Records. Shortly thereafter, he then takes a train to New York and a series of television appearances. It is a wonder Presley finds his way back home to Memphis. The earth has shifted on its axis. Focusing exclusively on the connection between black music and the railroad is, therefore, arbitrary – wholly a convenience.

But while particular manifestations of the railroad's influence vary from artist to artist, the type of connection between the railroad and music remains generally constant across electronic culture. It's "conduction." Conduction jumps the tracks of logic, aligning thing and thing. In electronic culture influence becomes a type of inquiry – a practice. The train becomes a catachretic vehicle, a means to invention, a way to make music.

Let me close with an example. On the day it was recorded, "Shhh/Peaceful," the Miles Davis composition that became side one of *In a Silent Way* (1969), was known as "Mornin' Fast Train from Memphis to Harlem." In all probability that was Davis's working title, not producer Teo Macero's. On the session sheet, an engineer labeled the tune simply "Choo-choo train." (280). Heard through this frame, the composition – in biographer John Szwed's phrase, a "slow-moving fog of sonority" over a shuffle beat – anticipates Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express," Irmin Schmidt and Bruno Spoerri's "Rapido de Noir," Herbert Distel's *Die Reise*, the KLF's "Elvis on the Radio, Steel Guitar in My Soul," Banco de Gaia's "Last Train to Lhasa," the Chemical Brothers' "Star Guitar," and Out

Hud's "The 'L' Train Is a Swell Train and I Don't Want to Hear You Indies Complain."

Davis was notorious for communicating musical information to his sidemen through the most laconic and cryptic sorts of code. Bob Belden, who produced *The Complete In a Silent Way Sessions*, told me: "As a musician, you go up to the bass player and say, 'F and C.' You go to the drummer, and you say 'Cold Sweat.' You go to the keyboard player, put your hands on the keys, and shape a sound. Like he [Davis] would say to Herbie, 'I don't want any Rachmaninov.' Nothing else would be said." Given the caliber of musicians in the Davis band, these instructions were sufficient. As was the title, "Mornin' Fast Train from Memphis to Harlem." The musicians understood. (In fact, the ability to understand quickly and to execute instructions identified them as a particular type and level of musician.) They came prepared, fully cognizant that recording had altered what was appropriate to the performance of music. Their job was to figure out a way to make improvised music and train sounds go together; to understand a "mornin' fast train from Memphis to Harlem" as catachresis, a precisely absurd line of inquiry leading to a set of instructions for improvising.

"The general theory that I'm working on," poet Kamau Brathwaite told me, "is that Shàngó [Yoruba god of electricity and thunder] comes over to the New World. One of his disguises or apotheoses is the locomotive engine. Wherever you turn, you have music which not only has 'train' in the title but, of course, is using an imitation, a mimesis, of the train. In fact, I go on to say that nearly all black music is based on the concept in one way or another, either from the howl or the engine stutter or from the click of the track – and here you get a lot of drumming coming out of that – all of this is based on the train. Which I then go on to call Shàngó, rather than simply locomotive engine."

We know how influence works within a literate paradigm. We know how to think our way from railroad to music using abductive, deductive, and inductive logic. The problem posed by influence and inquiry in electronic culture is how to work conductively, how to "reason" directly from thing to thing. Brathwaite suggests a model that recalls "possession" by spirits. Filled with Shàngó – locomotive

breath – we get in a groove, form a human-machine conjunction that replicates and mutates. "Groove," writes Kodwo Eshun,

> is when overlapping patterns of rhythm interlock, when beats syncro-mesh until they generate an automotion effect, an inexorable, effortless sensation which pushes you along from behind until you're funky like a train. To get into the Groove is to lock into the polyrhythmotor, to be adapted by a fictionalized rhythm engine which draws you on its own momentum. (82)

On "Shhh/Peaceful" the Miles Davis band vibrates sympathetically to railroad time: "less a question of imitating than of occupying corresponding frequencies" (Deleuze and Guattari 331). They're conductors, converting "locomotive energies" into music. Through them, the railroad invents music. The railroad trains the band, makes them jump.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 Michael Jarrett. "Farther Down the Line," an audio montage which cobbles together bits and pieces from a number of recordings is available at www.yk.psu.edu/~jmj3/. The playlist is available online.

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Operational Research

Henk Slager

In our day, the curricula of many European institutes for art education has been dominated largely by an art historical model of thought. As a consequence, those working in such institutes gratuitously assume a clear-cut, marked duality: on the one hand, artists produce artistic work, while on the other hand, external professionals (mostly art historians) supply frameworks for interpretation. During recent decades, standard works such as Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* have provided a methodological foundation for such nearly dogmatic art historical hermeneutics.[1]

Gadamer describes the encounter with visual art as an experience corresponding with that of intently reading a letter, which also implies a certain element of expectation. Gadamer indeed realizes that every interpretation has a horizon, that it is rooted in a temporality, which also counts for human knowledge. However, in spite of such a sense of perspective, Gadamer still believes that, in encountering a work of art, the viewer must retain the possibility of determining a significant meaning.

Gombrich's work demonstrates a similar way of thinking, where he spends many words on the conventional character of representation and the important role of the spectator in arriving at the intended meaning of the image – "the eye of the beholder." At the same time, Gombrich believes that it is indeed possible for adequate art historical research to arrive at an iconographically exact meaning of a certain image. In light of such art historical hermeneutics, the artistic image is, in fact, a mere substitute for one meaning.

However, today's practice of visual art, makes clear that it is time to declare monolithic thought framed in binary models of truth (the hermeneutic method) and illusion (the visual creative) as obsolete. Moreover, it seems that the practice of art shows that art and method could connect in a novel and constructive way. In such a connection,

the emphasis will shift from an art practice focused on final products to a practice directed toward an experimental, laboratory-style environment, exploring novel forms of knowledge and experience. In other words, artistic practice has become a dynamic point of departure for interdisciplinary experiments governed by a reflexive point of view. Critical reflection deals with questions such as what makes art 'art,' what art should be, and what the context of art might become. Such a conception of artistic activity causes many present-day artists to be challenged to view their artistic projectivity as forms of research.

Obviously, the approach of art in terms of artistic research has considerable, institutional consequences, since the focus on research requires an adequate curriculum from the side of (advanced) art education. Ute Meta Bauer's publication *Education, Information, Entertainment* gave us an impetus to critical reflection on such a curriculum.[2] Bauer argues that the curriculum of art academies should radically break with the (art historical) paradigm of autonomous art in order to be able to anticipate the artistic developments of today. Furthermore, art academies and their curricula should particularly focus on the cultural preconditions of visual art, that is, on the circumstances and conditions which enable artistic activities. This means that the reflexive attention to art education should depart from researching "the political, social and media-related conditions which decisively determine the artistic concepts and practice," says Bauer.

Presently, the concept of research does not only appear in academic curricula; research also plays a decisive role in how institutional programs of advanced art education become redefined in the context of the introduction of a Bachelor's-Master's post-secondary accreditation structure. Departing from a researching practice of art, art institutions start thinking in terms of research projects and granting PhDs. In light of these developments, the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design concentrates on a specific sector of artistic research – on the status and position of the artistic image in our present visual culture.

The three-year PhD program (Fine Art) is embedded in the structure of the MA research program. In the first year, the PhD student is expected to participate in two MA seminars: Methodology

and Transmedial Research. During these research seminars, the progress of the research is discussed. At the end of the first year, the PhD student must be prepared to present a concrete plan for a research trajectory. During the next two years, the student stays in close contact with his or her supervisor. In order to keep contact with the research activities in the MA program, the PhD student is offered a teaching assistantship. In addition, peer review seminars take place at least six times a year.[3]

How does an artistic image relate to different forms of visual production? Could it be possible to arrive at a topical form of cultural criticism in investigating art? That position evokes critical questions about concepts such as presentation and representation. In order to elaborate further on these issues, students enrolled in the Utrecht research program reflect upon their methodologies, both tacit and explicit. More importantly, they reflect upon the role of methodology as an *a priori* possibility. Next, they become trained in developing research hypotheses and models. In addition, they must give thought to the specificity of research subjects. Questions arise such as: What are the boundaries of the artistic domain? Where could constructive cross-overs with other fields of knowledge and visual domains be envisioned? Could such cross-overs lead to novel concepts? In short, how could a topical artistic concept be formulated and how could, in line with this, an adequate, artistic visual grammar or language be developed?

Students also explore whether a visual language is constituted differently by various media perspectives or whether it should be considered ultimately as transmedial or intermedial. Put differently, what is, for instance, the factual input of the photographic paradigm in the field of topical visual art? Is reflection from the painterly paradigm still relevant for understanding a topical artistic production? Do the visual language of cinema and the reality of the screen influence the imagination of current visual art? And last but not least, the question pertaining to the contextualization of the artistic image should be investigated – also in light of the exploration of the preconditions of the artistic communication process as such. What is the optimal context for a specific, artistic image; what curatorial and communicative preconditions does such an image require; and under what circumstances should it ultimately be presented?

These research questions make clear that it is urgent to reflect on the specificity of artistic research whether institutionalized or not. It seems that in such context the differences and similarities with other forms (alpha, beta and gamma) of research should particularly be investigated. After all, artistic research seems to thwart continuously academically defined disciplines. In fact, art knows the hermeneutic questions of the humanities; art is engaged in the empirically scientific method; and art is aware of the commitment and social involvement of the social sciences. It seems, therefore, that the most intrinsic characteristic of artistic research is based on the continuous transgression of boundaries in order to generate novel, reflexive zones.

However, what then are the criteria determining the object of knowledge as zone-exploring activity? The concept of research evokes (unmistakably) certain expectations. After all, research implies an organized approach, a systematic treatment of information, and a significant contribution to the information and knowledge economy. Furthermore, research could imply ethical responsibilities, such as a better understanding or improvement of the world. Does this indicate, though, a characteristic element of research? One could say that each form of research seems to be focused on how to formulate a methodology. Research might not be inspired by a great cause or an accidental discovery ('serendipity'), yet may ultimately lead to a novel, methodologically formulated form of knowledge. The force of the method seems to determine the value of the results. In that context, incidentally, a continual control should clarify to what extent methodological conditions have been applied. Moreover, although research methods obviously differ regarding field and subject, they still share a fundamental basic principle: methodological research is primarily directed toward formulating questions (De Landa: pointing out problematic fields) and towards providing answers. Thus, it seems that research as such could be described most adequately as the methodological connection of both questions and answers, and answers and questions.

As argued above, a similar attention to the concept of research could be observed currently in today's practice of visual art. However, the mostly trans- or interdisciplinary research into visuality conducted by artists in their artistic practice is not really character-

ized by an objective, empirical approach. After all, by definition, art does not strive for generalization, repetition and quantification. Rather, art is directed toward unique, qualitative, particular, and local knowledge. In that respect, artistic activities still seem tied to what Baumgarten has defined as the aesthetic domain, where knowledge is described as a knowledge of the singular.[4] Although artistic knowledge as "mathesis singularis" – because of its focus on the singular and the unique – cannot be comprised in any sense in laws, it indeed deals with a form of knowledge, says Baumgarten. Yet, the emphasis on the singular and the unique in the aesthetic domain does not imply that artistic research would be impossible, as for example the philosopher of science Karl Popper tried to substantiate. After all, an operational form of research seems to entirely satisfy the most fundamental research criteria, in particular, a focus on the importance of communication, a critical attitude, and autonomy of research.

In contrast to academic-scientific research's emphasis on the generation of 'expert knowledge,' the domain of art emphasizes a form of experience-based knowledge. Whereas pure scientific research often seems to be characterized by purposeful uselessness, artistic research indeed focuses on involvement, on social and non-academic goals. That does not preclude the fact that artistic research as a form of idiosyncratic research should still be able to answer two well-defined questions: Firstly, "How could autonomous research take place significantly in the domain of visual art?" Secondly, "How could the chosen methodology (as compared with research projects of other artists) be described?"

The epistemological perspective of uniqueness and divergence requires a further methodological deliberation. After all, in contrast to other forms of longstanding research, the methodological trajectory of artistic research and its related production of knowledge cannot easily be defined. However, in my view, this trajectory could be designated as a differential iconography, since such an iconography reveals a worldview no longer formed by a transparent unity. Fundamental aspects such as indefinability, heterogeneity, contingency, and relativity appear to also colour the trajectory of artistic research. Therefore, artistic research should explicitly request tolerance, an open attitude, and the deployment of multiple models

of interpretation. Only then will artistic research be able to manifest itself as a critical reflection on the status and position of the artistic image in our current visual culture. Artistic research as differential iconography is a form of research with the capacity to always thwart the danger of a one-dimensional hermeneutic anchorage of the image.

Thus, the most important methodological paradigm of artistic research could be described as a way of research permanently aware of divergence without creating any hierarchy of discourses, as, for example, was the case with the prevalence of hermeneutics in art history in Modernism. Awareness of divergence implies the capacity to mobilize an open attitude and an intrinsic tolerance for a multitude of interpretations that, if necessary, could be transformed into a form of revolt against the danger of any one-dimensional contextualization.

One could conclude that artistic researchers continuously need to deploy a meta-perspective in order to enable critical reflection on both position and situation of the temporary, operational parameters of the research project. Such a methodology might be considered a form of two-plane analysis based on a dual, methodological research perspective, one linked to a knowledge economy and ethical responsibility.

Plane 1: The perspective of the first plane is expressed in Jean-Francois Lyotard's postmodern maxim that, in their research of visuality, artists should pose the epistemological question of what art is. Or better put, in their transcendental research, artists should investigate whether the institutional or territorial foundations of the concept of art should be deconstructed.

Questioning the essence of art implies questioning the concept of art. That is, "a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art." If this perspective is implemented too extremely or too one-sidedly, then art risks becoming the equivalent of its definition. Art has evolved in such a way that the philosophical question of its status has almost become the very essence of art itself, so that the philosophy of art, instead of standing outside the subject and addressing it from an alien and extended perspective, became instead the articulation of the internal

energy of the subject. It would today require a special kind of effort at time to distinguish art from its own philosophy.

Plane 2: The perspective of the second plane is clearly underscored by Merleau-Ponty's definition that the artist has the capacity to observe what others keep unnoticed. After all, through mere visual means, the artist succeeds in making visible what ordinary vision fails to see. Because of that, the everyday categories of perception become dislocated in a flash. The artist compels us to see – for one moment – the world in a different way: according to different norms, according to different habits: not in images ultimately replacing reality, but in images as novel visibilities. With that, art determines a variety of polymorphic ways for flexible observation. The artistic image provides an open view while liberating the spectator from a frozen perspective. "Essence or existence, imaginary or real, visible or invisible, art disrupts all our categories by revealing its dream universe of sensuous essences, of striking similarities and silent meanings."[5] From that perspective, artistic research is also connected with the search for a critical understanding of our existential conditions and the formulation of (utopian) proposals for improvement. Such a modernist view is inseparably linked with an emancipatory ideal, that artistic research should express the educational imperative of human freedom.

These planes of research correspond to the impetus of Immanuel Kant's two Critiques, i.e., the *Critique of Pure Reason* about the foundation of human knowledge, and the *Critique of Practical Reason* about the preconditions of human morality. However, as a continuation, Kant also formulated a third critique, the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, where he envisions art as an interstitial space, a zone, where both faculties of cognition, pure reason and practical reason, meet.

The perspective of a third space as *reflexive zone* seems to be of immense, topical interest in today's visual art, certainly after the two episodes of modernism and postmodernism, where the two planes of analysis mentioned above become emphasized unilaterally. Today, artistic research takes place in a (meta)operational and experimental way in a zone determined by a configuration of these two planes.[6] However, different from one-dimensional scientific research, the methodological perspective of artistic research cannot be decided *a*

priori. After all, artistic research as an operational process is "an open-ended work-in-pre-growth" (Balkema & Slager 53). Thus, in artistic practices, there is not something entirely defined beforehand; it is by definition impossible to research the artistic process in a manner assuming that such a definition would exist. Therefore, in artistic research, one should speak of a continuous, self-reflexive and recursive movement, questioning the situation and determining a position with regard to the configuration of spaces of analysis. While determining a position, the issue is not a fixed concept or a static point, but the indication of a zone leaving unmarked room for the continuation of artistic experiment. As a consequence, artistic research continually produces novel connections in the form of multiplicities characterized by temporary, flexible constructions. These constructions run up against problems, but rather than creating solutions, they keep on deploying novel methodological programs while producing continuous modifications.

In sum, topical research creates methodological trajectories determining how, why and where the operational research proceeds while engaging in critical, parallel discourses. Such a model is in continuous flux: as a work in progress it always involves articulation, segmentation and reconstruction. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the zone as a nonlocalizable relation of speed and slowness. One could argue that the non-localizable zone of artistic research is characterized by reflecting interactions, by accelerating speed, and by mutating flows of thought. Such a refuge of artistic research could be cut through by a relative stoppage of flows of thought and by points of accumulation intending to introduce forms of rigidity in the variety of flows of reflection. In both processes, the two planes of analysis play a decisive role. Not surprisingly, the artistic methodology as an operational, cartographic composition does not offer a closed system with a localizable structure of components. In line with Deleuze and Guattari, one could argue that the zone of artistic research "always has detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and multiple entryways" and idiosyncratic lines of flight (21). It is for that reason that it is only possible at the end of operational research to determine whether the trajectory of the proposed methodological process has indeed produced interesting connections, accelerations and mutations.

Artistic research can never be characterized by a well-defined, rigid methodology. Rather, its form of research could be described as a "methodicee": a strong belief in a methodological result founded by operational strategies which cannot be legitimized beforehand. Indeed, that is the essential characteristic of artistic research.

Notes

1 See Gadamer, Gombrich, and Slager, *Archeology of Art Theory*, 133-141.

2 Ute Meta Bauer, ed. *Education, Information, Entertainment*.

3 These seminars are given by experts in the field of transmedial research. The research seminars will also pay ample attention to curatorial studies, since the experimental process intended by transmedial research has a direct impact on how the students both reflect critically and construct models of presentation. Therefore, a final exhibition (in a professional environment) or a series of "sub-exhibitions" will be part of the research trajectory. The PhD student is expected to contextualize his or her research trajectory in a research essay of approximately 30,000 words that coherently reports on its contribution to topical methodological discussions.

4 In his book *Aesthetica* (1758), Baumgarten introduced the concept of aesthetics as a philosophy of the senses. He says, "Aesthetics should investigate for accuracy analogous to logic, that is at the basis of scientific knowledge, the concepts constituting sensibility."

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes similar research as a *mathesis singularis*, "a science of the person, which can attain a generality which does not belittle nor shatter."

5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, 35.

6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari alternate the concept of zone with plateau: a self-vibrating region of intensities characterized by the absence of a logical point of cumulation or crescendo. *A Thousand Plateaus*, London, 1988. See also Sarat Maharaj's description of plateau in *Dokumenta XI Catalogue*, "It is about duration, prolonged immersion, sustainable absorption – not retinal replication, but about production."

7 Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (eds.), *Artistic Research*, survey of a conference on the position of research in European Advanced Art Education, 53.

8 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

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Researching Artists Required: Inquire Within

Ashok Mathur

Trajectories and vectors. I have been thinking about trajectories and vectors a lot lately. Might seem oddly placed, to talk or think about artistic research using terms usually tied to time and space, but sometimes that is the way a mind goes, circling around to get to the centre, so to speak. If a trajectory is a path, albeit an imagined one often illustrated by dashed lines in high school textbooks, and a vector is a line that indicates both magnitude and direction, then conceptualizing artistic research in/around these terms is to question direction, force, agency and lineage. At least, such a starting point, a way of problem-situating, and determining such an initial space, it seems to me, is integral to this exploration. But starting points, of course, have antecedents, so let me go back to go forward, trace a trajectory into history so I might, perhaps, explain where this is going.

In the summer of 2002, I was sitting on the patio of the Arts Club on Granville Island in Vancouver, watching the aquabuses shuttle back and forth across False Creek, keeping an eye out for a colleague who had called a few weeks prior to meet this particular afternoon. I was not sure I would recognize Will Garrett-Petts, for I had met him only once, and that almost ten years previous, although I knew he would be coming by aquabus and I knew that he would be travelling with another colleague (who I had never met), so I kept my eyes peeled for a man I might recognize from my past and a woman I would not. Trajectories, as I thought back to when I first met Will, as he and still another colleague had come to my Calgary house to interview me about a micropress project I co-published at that time, when I taught itinerantly at the Alberta College of Art and Design. That, said Will on the phone to me as we set up the Arts Club assignation, was what he was thinking of when he came across my name as now-faculty member at the Emily Carr Institute, another postsecondary art college, a province and a mountain range away. A

dotted line traced behind to my backyard in Calgary (another summer's day as I recall, heat beating down as we explored the intricacies of tiny books whose form mimicked and fostered its content) and then forward to whatever would come after our meeting that day on Granville Island.

Will said that he and his colleague, Rachel Nash, wanted to talk to me about my potential involvement in an exhibition they were curating at the Kamloops Art Gallery, an inverted project (a vector turned inside-out?) where the focus would be on "the artist statement," where normally the artist statement, didacticized to an exterior wall and photocopied for distribution to viewers, was a complement to the 'real' work. Interesting inversion, I thought, as I watched various pairings of people walk up the ramp from the aqua-bus. Eventually, it would lead to a thousand-word statement writ large on sixty feet of wallspace at the KAG, viewable from the street with letters that ranged from a few inches to over a foot tall. This is

how the text would begin:

It could be said the artist statement exists outside the territory of the exhibition. It is external, explicatory, and, ultimately, ephemera. To bring this statement into the centre is trickster-like, an inversion that breaks apart what we know to be true, disrupting our senses of

ourselves as practitioners, opening up possibilities for communication within us, between us, without us. How do we investigate how our collective actions infect one another and how our collective words speak alongside both our practice and ourselves?

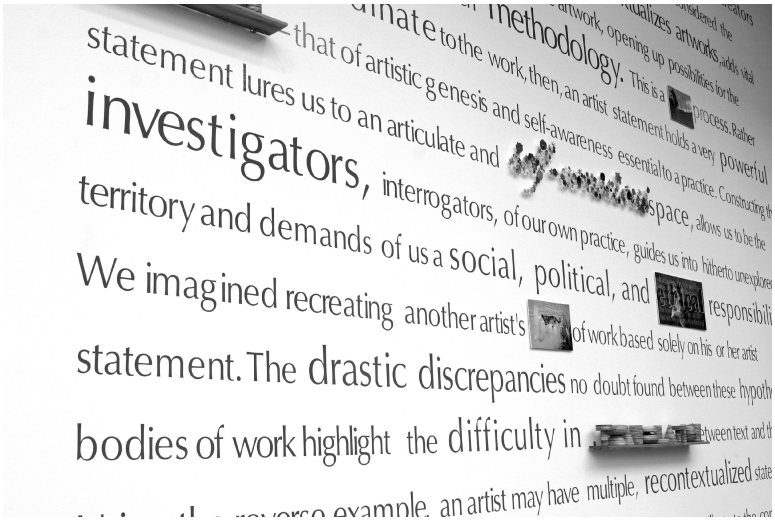
I did not recognize Will as he walked up the ramp and past my patio position with Rachel, so the trajectory they took by necessity was around the patio, and into the front door, where they began their search for the elusive me. Fortunately, I think, they found me and did not shrug shoulders, give up, and decide that there must have been some miscommunication of time and space. The dotted line led to me and we began what turned into a conversation of some hours, leading well into and past dinner as we discussed language, art, pedagogy, politics, postsecondary institutions, and a host of other related and unrelated topics. Vectors flying this way and that, varying magnitudes, dynamic directions. It was reflective of many other similar conversations I have had over the past few years when the evening turns to talk of artistic responsibility and agency, and it was exciting to roll these ideas off each other, tease out possibilities, see where it all takes us, yes, on what trajectory, on which vector.

A few weeks later, we followed up on this conversation with discussions around possibilities for Canada Research Chairs at the then-University College of the Cariboo (now Thompson Rivers University) that focused on arts and culture. I was excited by this prospect, particularly for what it could bring in terms of collaborative potential. Indeed, even as we spoke, I was formulating ways to make my contribution to the artist statement show, "Proximities," into a more collaborative venture. Eventually, this participation was comprised of a three-person team – my one-time team-teaching colleague, a graduating student from Emily Carr, and me. Together, Sandra Semchuk, Kristi Malakoff, and I eventually worked on the artist statement that would constitute the wall-lettering, and this too was the start of something very particular in the context of artistic research.

We each – Sandra, Kristi and Ashok – come to this project with different relationships and levels of experience with the written word. As well, we bring multiple perspectives, both complementary and conflicting. Through discussions in person, on the phone and

through email, our personal zones of comfort have been pushed, yet we have also expanded our notions of self, text, artistic practice and collaboration, ultimately resulting in chance collisions from disparate places converging (in a rush of excitement) on this wall of the Kamloops Art Gallery. One of the things that entices us about this project is its unpredictability. Working collaboratively, we gesture towards each other through visual and written means that finally shape our presence here in Proximities. Of simultaneous intrigue and challenge is that this project forces us to revisit our own artist statements and to reconsider our notions of the statement itself – in so doing, we challenge ourselves as creators and resist complacency. To begin this process of inquiry, we first considered the function of the artist statement. Though a statement contextualizes artworks, adds vital information or elaborates on a part of the whole artwork, opening up possibilities for the audience, it also provides a research methodology. This is a fertile process.

Fertile it was, but equally so was the ongoing discussion around the model of a research chair dedicated to artistic inquiry. To have such a post that was outside the realm of creativity, that is, which critiqued but did not create, seemed counterproductive. But that then raised the question of how to formulate such a research chair, under what parameters, what mandates? I began thinking of the artist statement and how it functioned in contemporary practice, but also



quite clearly how it did not function but might be able to – that is, most specifically, how a process of reflection and contemplation (not necessarily explicatory, but sometimes so; not necessarily didactic, but often so) could be the germination, the taking-off point rather than the post-process arrival point.

Rather than being subordinate to the work, then, an artist statement holds a very powerful position – that of artistic genesis and self-awareness essential to a practice. Constructing the statement lures us to an articulate and self-conscious space, allows us to be the investigators, interrogators, of our own practice, guides us into hitherto unexplored territory and demands of us a social, political, and ethical responsibility. We imagined recreating another artist's body of work based solely on his or her artist statement. The drastic discrepancies no doubt found between these hypothetical bodies of work highlight the difficulty in translation between text and the visual. Using the reverse example, an artist may have multiple, recontextualized statements that all point back to the same body of work. While these examples illustrate the complexity of the relation-ship between the visual and the written word, they also point to a certain flexibility and fluidity with the artist statement itself and gesture to its potential for play, self-discovery and contextualization of ourselves and our practices in welcomed new ways.

It may be somewhat trite and formulaic to be talking of recontextualizations and experimentation with new ways of research at a university, but I do believe there are grounds for such focus and, possibly, a way of restructuring how we think about artistic practice, academic research, and contributions to a social, material world.

In my research program application for the CRC in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry, I presented three particular branches: cultural diversity, arts policy, and the small city. I argued that these three apparently separate elements had interdependencies that not only made this research possible, but laddered such research into critical areas of inquiry. First, by investigating the machinations of multi-culturalism (as policy and driving aesthetic behind Canadian art practices), I wanted to show how, through the spaces that have opened within and at the limits of national culture, many artists from diverse social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds have begun to see

themselves functioning as public intellectuals or cultural critics, using their various forms of expression as vehicles for social change. Second, by analyzing and critiquing those same elements of 'multiculturalism' through the lens of postsecondary arts education, I expressed a cautious optimism in the potential for progressive change brought about through equity activism. And third, in tandem with the Small Cities Community-University Research Alliances program initiated in Kamloops and Thompson Rivers University, I addressed the need to develop a discourse of cultural diversity outside of large urban centres, a critical inclusivity that recognized the reality of small urban and rural spaces. These three branches – already supported in part by various grants from SSHRC's Research/Creation program and its joint initiative (with Canadian Heritage) on Multiculturalism – allowed me to develop a unique research chair, one that is undeniably constituted by and grounded in artistic research, but which has a critical output that can look toward development of policy and the institution of programming (curriculum, theoretical arts residencies). Amorphous by necessity, for an overdetermined definition of 'artistic research' can limit experimental possibilities, this research chair allows for a great degree of latitude while configuring a space that is both useful and productive for those of us doing progressive work through the auspices of The Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada (CiCAC), a theoretical proposal that is now a corporeal (and virtual) reality.

With this specific project conceived of through my CRC in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry, such a trajectory might be mapped out, for The Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada is not a research lab per se, a petri dish of art and creativity, but a space to inhabit, to dwell within, such that artists and public intellectuals, covering a wide spectrum, will find themselves exploring in a supportive environment, find themselves taking risks or trying new angles in an environment that does not merely tolerate, but advocates. This is, and will remain, a tenuous project continuously subject to 'failure' in that many of our projects will result in artistic cul-de-sacs, and others will be denoted by administrative bodies used to empirical research production as too ephemeral, too imprecise, and too 'artistic' to be viewed as 'research.' However, our task at hand is to resist the impulse to conform, to continue along a path of

resistance and progressive research in a manner that can foment particular change inside and outside a variety of institutions.

One recent example was a project predicated on notions of the 'interior,' from geographic to social to political to personal spheres. We were able to gather a group of artists, mostly writers/performers/cultural critics, at specific sites in Kamloops and Banff to foster an investigative space. Swimming against the current of artist-as-producer, we wanted to explore how these notions of interiority might function if we brought critically-minded individuals together for a relatively agenda free gathering. What transpired was a fascinating combination of brainstorming, peripatetic wanderings and reflections, and communal insight – this, not a means to itself, but an opening of possibilities for future work. Indeed, the projects that saw their genesis there were multiple and exciting, and in time there is no doubt that this work will rise up and take us forward to new places of reflection, contemplation, and action.

To return to the idea of placing the statement at the centre of the exhibition, it is, from a writerly point-of-view, like building a novel around a précis to the larger work. Moreover, the novel's premise becomes the précis. And if, for example, in such a novel, a dog licks a table leg, insistently and annoyingly, in order to reveal a hidden clue, then perhaps this slowly revealing clue and the précis are related. They are both harbingers of a future which is about to unfold. Similarly, an artist's statement portends a future narrative story that is about to unfold in the reader's or seer's imagination. In many ways, this is about the gestural. Consider the scenario of another dog, Rex, being fed by Monsieur Gingras who splits a single slice of bread and places a piece on each of Rex's paws, making him wait – "arrêt"– and then eat when he says "mange." Such a star, a dogstar, and such language can embed itself in the imagery so as to be lost among the pixels. It is the gestural inflections in the photographs, these specificities, that speak of the deeper structures.

It seems the gestural has captured our collective imaginations. In order to act, we are reflecting, watching ourselves, and seeing how we behave in the world. Indeed, we are watching each other, not as an act of paternal surveillance (as is happening in all kinds of landscapes today) but with a familial care and compassion and a

pedagogical imperative of "what might we learn from this?" Perhaps this is the essence of collaboration, not so much a working-together as a working-toward-each-other – the gesture of that movement toward each other is simultaneously a gesture toward ourselves, as individuals, and our ways of being in the world with others. This, too, became an expressed mandate of The Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada. The key to its success, to mapping out trajectories and not being overwhelmed by externally imposed vectors, is to understand the institutional process without being overtaken by it. That is, how can CiCAC resist the temptation to institutionalize even as it becomes part of an institutional process?

Sometimes structures of control, subordination, and repression so condense the text that when it is released, random acts of the imagination and eros erupt into futures as diverse as possible readerships – audiences within and without are vast, complex, contradictory and endlessly engaging. To frame this fanciful flight in the context of the artist statement, we have chosen to play with interdimensional gestures, three-dimensionalizing two-dimensional media, taking text far away from customary black print on a flatwhite surface – far away but speaking nearby. Not only are we contemplating our visual work in a textual manner; we are re-imagining text in a visual way. Literally pushing and reconfiguring words in a visual form, we are conceiving a new, physically tangible way of considering the alphabet and the infinite nuances its various combinations produce. Where the normative artist statement points back to the exhibition, the artist-statement-as-exhibition points to itself.

Re-imagination is an often tiresome task, as it entails not just learning new models and patterns, but unlearning old ones. How do we move between dimensions, so to speak, and how do we retain notions of intentionality and communicative direction? That is, it is fine and well to play with trajectories, but how can we shape them such that others can trace the same path, understand the same vector? Of course, such transparency of meaning is not always necessary, can be less than desirable when we work toward creating a space for critical inquiry – whether that be a personal space (via the artist statement) or an institutional space (such as the Centre I'm constructing). But at other times, to have others follow along, if only to create

new offshoots from traced trajectories, can put new spins, new meanings, to old directions. This is the challenge before us, and it will take collective efforts of risk-taking and resistance, led along most importantly, I would suggest, by a constant and consistent internal critique, an inward-looking awareness of what we are, what we might become.

This is the self-reflexivity, the meta-quality of the project that we talked about at various points in the project's genesis. Now, add to the mix a proprioceptive quality, a responding directly from the body (instead of mediating through the senses), and we reach the crux of our collaborative process. We're starting to develop a picture (so to speak) concerning dependence on the notion of the gestural, since that is, after all, what an artist statement is about – gesturing to the work. In this case, we create such a gesture by gesturing. We three have worked with each other before, as teachers, as students, as colleagues on union and social justice issues, but, ironically, we haven't worked together on our primary artistic practices. This is a chance for that and also a chance to creatively misunderstand each other, to challenge and disagree with each other's social and political gesturing – to acknowledge how this translation / transliteration process can be as desirously infectious as it can be distressingly displacing.

Finally, then, there's this whole notion of the body and communicating directly through such an entity, proprioceptively, plainly if not transparently. One critical element of collaborative principles is that it not be an easy, like-minded transition, but that it trouble, complicate, and thereby enhance the various vectors, the tenuous trajectories. We might strive to understand each other, but unless we can work through our misunderstandings, we might never approach anything close to that true understanding. The social and political worlds we inhabit are rife with that misunderstanding and, arguably, the *assumption* of understanding – how another works, thinks, lives.

I suspect that CiCAC will operate under an umbrella of such assumptions, ones we must constantly interrogate, and that the notion of a research chair (which I now hold) that catapults itself into creativity-as-research is also something to be examined, neither to be embraced whole-heartedly nor refuted out of hand. So, in the end, we

must stay alert to the various paths not just before us, but behind us, how our possibilities are multiple but contained, and most importantly, how not to fall into the complacency that all too often accompanies degrees of comfort. To struggle with these concepts, to throw ourselves into the abyss, to complicate the pretense of simplicity and to simplify the unnecessarily complex, all of this is the collateral learning that comes from artistic research. So we put ourselves on these trajectories, measure ourselves on these vectors, yet the goal is not such unidirectionality, but the delight and wisdom that comes from falling away, falling off, and discovering new modes, new methods, new means.

Re/Searching with Art/Ists: Praxis, Practice, and Social Justice

Si Transken

> What we do know is that artistic inquiry often challenges disciplinary thinking and employs multimodal representational strategies. Often described as 'hybrid,' 'mixed,' or 'alternative' discourse, multimodal writing, for example, seems intimately connected to changing notions of authorship, new media technologies, challenges to education posed by multicultural classes, feminization of the academy, national funding strategies tied to collaborative and interdisciplinary research, and a renewed interest in the role of the personal, especially the personal essay and creative nonfiction as legitimate vehicles for academic inquiry. Alternative forms of academic discourse reflect changes in, and the growing diversity of, the academic community. Coming to terms with and understanding 'artistic research' – its limitations and potential – has become a crucial challenge to the academic community at large.
> – W. F. Garrett-Petts and Rachel Nash. Introductory remarks from the *Artist Statement* workshop, Kamloops, B.C., Nov. 23, 2005.

As I prepared for the November 2005 workshop "Artist Statement: Artistic Inquiry and the Role of the Artist in Academe," I felt like a multi-winged duck at the edge of the pond watching swans and wondering how to start a conversation with them. I fretted over what to write for this workshop and tried to identify how the label 'artist-researcher' might connect with my own personal and professional life. While sitting at the edge of that pond I heard the song "Bread and Roses" [1] as it is sung during marches: the song itself, as well as its lyrics, reminding me of the connection between art and activism, beauty and social struggle. As a white bush-trash woman with an eclectic and chaotic academic background – who has ended up teaching for the last nine years in two different universities – it's a challenge to know where to begin. I don't define myself as an artist. I don't define myself as an artist-wannabe. I am an activist who is

anxious to use art – or any other resources – to fight for the causes I care about. As a multi-winged duck, I felt welcomed by the comments from conference organizers Will Garrett-Petts and Rachel Nash that "collaborative and interdisciplinary research, and a renewed interest in the role of the personal, especially the personal essay and creative non-fiction [are] legitimate vehicles for academic inquiry" and that "alternative forms of academic discourse reflect changes in, and the growing diversity of, the academic community."

While fretting about what to write for this workshop, another problem wove through my life. That problem, the preparation of my tenure and promotion package in my academic discipline, social work, was an effort that caused me to search differently through my life and see forms of art in surprising places. Preparing that package crystallized and deepened my respect for the arts and their possibilities in regard to finding, displaying, sharing and integrating knowledge. As an academic, I am trying to convince an assortment of audiences of the value of the arts – even in their most casual forms and contexts. That conviction is a necessary prerequisite, it seems, to persuading an audience that *arts-research* and *artist-researchers* make valuable contributions to academia.

My co-participants at the *Artist Statement* workshop did not need convincing. As a working group, one of our tasks was constructing document trails that will convince the unconverted (SSHRC, foundations, managers in academia, ethics committees, etc.). In this paper I argue that artist-researchers have the unique potential to connect with other professionals, activists, or disciplines in ways which can access funding and support both social justice causes and communities outside the academy. While academic workers who focus on social justice don't all agree on what interdisciplinarity is and how to 'do' it, and we don't all agree on what constitutes 'excellent' research,[2] there is support from some, such as Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, Fyre Jean Graveline, and Nancy A. Naples and Karen Bojar for the position of scholars such as Smith who emphasize that no research should take place unless community has been developed, trust is accomplished, and the products or consequences of the research somehow enhance the lives of the people who contributed to making the project happen. The simple diagram below illustrates an everyday ongoing cycle of connectivity,

creativity, interdisciplinarity, and engagement with the teaching, learning, living, and sharing of knowledge.

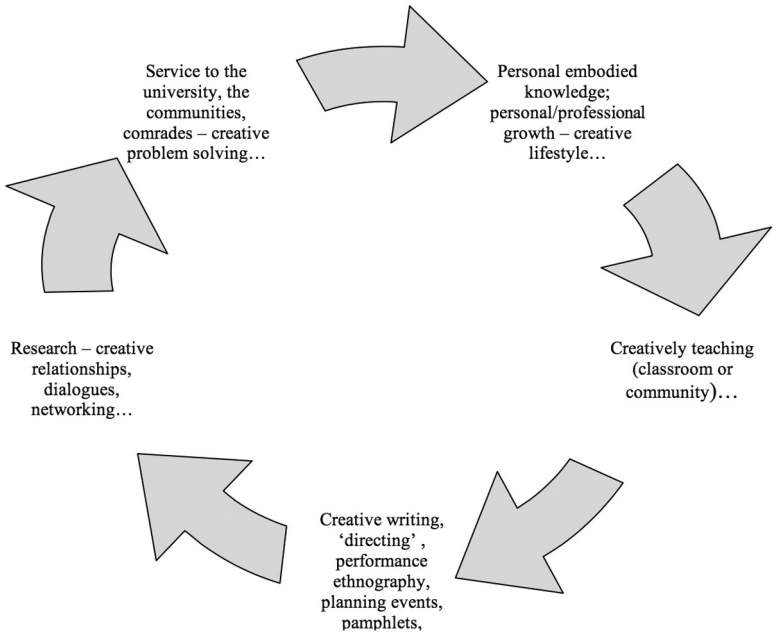


Figure 1

As I put together my tenure package, I realized that this circular flow is what I have been trying to create in my life as an activist, researcher, academic, and citizen. Sometimes I've been successful. This type of integration is very much in harmony with what I understand a First Nations and/or feminist way to be. This is also the kind of flow which cultural studies scholars/activists such as Denzin and hooks propose we strive for.

Sociologist Norman Denzin suggests a list of "performative criteria" we might try to meet when we "perform" our scholarship/artivism:[3]

> … I value those autoethnographic texts that do the following things:
>
> 1. Unsettle, criticize, and challenge taken-for-granted, repressed meanings

2. Invite moral and ethical dialogue while reflexively clarifying their own moral positions
3. Engender resistance and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different
4. Demonstrate that they care, that they are kind
5. Show, instead of tell, using the rule that less is more
6. Exhibit interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy
7. Present political, functional, collective, and committed viewpoints (123-124)

Although I wouldn't have always been able to express those thoughts so concisely or richly, my sentiments, intentions, and intellectual curiosities have always been in those directions. The social workers' Code of Ethics, as I interpret it, also agrees with Denzin.

Social Workers and Artistic Practices?

During the tenure and promotion process, I had to describe what I had been doing, the purposefulness of it all, the ways I had been contributing to the field of social work, and where I wanted to go next. I've always been a somewhat fraudulent social worker in that I identify more as a feminist activist. Since most social workers receive their kibbles directly or indirectly from the State, most of us wear a tight collar on a short leash. My true mentors might be defined as living their lives on the edge of this profession (Bridget Moran, Dorothy Livesay, Robert P. Mullaly, Sheila M. Neysmith) or outside of it (Emma Goldman, bell hooks, Lee Maracle). All of my 'evidence' for promotion and tenure had to be compiled in a three-and-a-half-inch thick binder. Letters of reference and support had to be added. I included various documents, transcripts, and articles I've written. Media pictures and clippings of my activism got added to the binder. These documents became 'proof' that could be counted and compared to the 'work' of other scholars. Students' responses to what I have been teaching had to be in a separate section. Like a near-death – or near-reincarnation – experience, my whole journey kept recycling before my eyes.

This tenure/promotion binder production experience was a major interdisciplinary research project. All my claims (or boasts) of 'excellence' had to be assessed and affirmed by the Chair of my department, by three anonymous experts in my field, and then by a

committee of nine academics from an array of fields and disciplines – none from social work. Although one or two of them might be closet artists or closet art lovers, none of them were 'out' artists. The creative projects I've been involved in had to be translated for these judges to appreciate their value.

One of the major ways that translation happened was through the support letters community activists and other academics wrote on my behalf. These 55 letters came from executive directors of community groups, previous students who were now doing either graduate work or significant activities in our field of social work/social justice. Some of the letters included in my binder were from significant academic voices in the field of sociology, women's studies, and social work. This was part of what we talked about at the Kamloops-based *Artist Statement* workshop: the *translation* of struggle into knowledge, into visible, fundable, credible projects, into creative ways to enhance real people's lives, and translation again into struggle…

Collecting all those documents and writing the introductions for the multiple sections in that binder reminded me of what I both love and hate about social work. We are an elegantly chaotic, ever-shifting profession in that we embody strips of insight and intelligence from sociology, history/herstory, First Nations studies, economics, political science, medicine, women's studies, geography, etc. An effective social worker should also be an effective communicator, thus journalism and English also inform our work. From my perspective we are the ultimate transdisciplinarians. Art and creativity inform our practice and praxis, too, although not all social workers can see clearly how these resources enrich our effectiveness. Not all social workers make it part of their mission to bring art into their activities in every way possible.

As I re-viewed my life, I came to realize that *art and creativity have always been there as an adhesive* connecting the other domains of knowledge and practice. Julia Cameron, whose popular books demonstrate how non-artists can access their creativity, figures in my everyday and in all my course outlines. I've also rejoiced in reading about the ways creativity and artistic expression were used to energize the various projects and conversations in *The Small Cities Book* (Garrett-Petts, 2005). This book captures how graffiti is used

by First Nations youth to explore their aboriginal/urban identity (Ignace and Ignace); how children experience their world (Duckworth; MacDonald-Carlson; MacLennan et al); how women walking alone along a river might feel safe or afraid (Hargrave); or how people perceive their town and wish to make changes to that town's landscape (Nash).

Pauline Butling defines *radicality* as "a wide-ranging, historiographic project to reconfigure existing domains, reterritorialize colonized spaces, and recuperate suppressed histories" (19). She explores how creative voice has been used to establish community and connect people to various social justice efforts. Although she identifies herself as a writer and scholar, Butling would be my kind of social worker. Butling discusses how various clusters of writers and artists have helped each other to take risks, to grow into their radicality and use their imaginations to raise community and community consciousness. She celebrates how these writers use their creativity as researchers and activists, doing "investigations and interventions" (34). As examples, she cites people like Lillian Allen, Rita Wong, and Ashok Mathur, artist-researchers who create community through and with their creativity (Butling and Rudy). The communities these people help develop are connected, webbed, linked to social change causes, and bridge some space between academia and the grassroots. These communities teach and do 'research,' and all these flows enrich and deepen each other. Butling makes a case for artists, activists and academics to be allies with each other and to bring those alliances to grassroots causes. Creating and maintaining community is a part of the artist-researcher/researcher-artist endeavour. These voices are 'knowledge translators,' using art as a form of bridge.

Definitions of Art/ists

Before I go further in this discussion I should define the term *art*. I want to draw attention to the contextual nature of this word: *art* is a cultural or class-based construct, existing in the eye/ear/mind of the beholder. Sociologist Howard S. Becker discussed "art worlds" as those places in which a community of people and their activities produce and give meaning to art. *Arts* can include all the modes and mediums of human expression (singing, dance, choreography, directing, poetry, storytelling, acting, drumming, quilting, etc.). What

gets defined as art is often more about who the victor is in some power contest. *The Raging Grannies* and the *Guerrilla Girls* are artists in the world I inhabit. Like Julia Cameron and others such as Colin Rhodes, bell hooks, and Nina Felshin, I define art as belonging to all of us (i.e., not just art school graduates and insanely talented, rugged individualists); and believe that all humans are artistic, though some of us have had our creativity stolen from us. Elsewhere I have discussed the potential of creativity in healing, teaching, activism – even in feminist utopia ("Creativity," "Expressive Arts")! Artist-researchers may help people reclaim their artistry.

Guidance from First Nations Researchers/Activists

In the world I choose to inhabit, First Nations storytellers – even if they have not published, and even if they do not have a degree in English, creative writing, or First Nations studies – are artists. I feel fortunate to have been welcomed into so many conversations and projects over the years with First Nations scholars, artivists, and friends. Lee Maracle, a First Nations re/searcher, activist, and writer, compares Western and First Nations research models:

> My knowledge is traditional, theirs is academic, my designation is mentor/elder, theirs is doctor of philosophy/professor, my leadership are chiefs and grand chiefs, theirs are mayors, premiers. They are intellectuals, intelligentsia, I am wise and powerful. They are literati, sociologists and medical professionals. I am a story teller, an orator, a healer and a shaman. My research is wisdom, theirs is science. (36-37)

While referring to her own role as a First Nations teacher who is trying to be authentic and effective, Fyre Graveline talks about her approach to research, which includes her resistance to:

> Eurocentric teaching methods [which] practice separation of teacher from learners, healers from 'patients,' worker from 'clients.' Traditionalists are expected to be engaging with others in the teaching-healing cycle and working on ourselves first and foremost. In the Traditional worldview, as teacher/healer, it is our responsibility to courageously share our own personal' journeys. As Aboriginal educators, we need to know – acknowledge and communicate – our own past pains, our present struggles and our visions for the future in order to assist others on their own paths. (217)

Graveline wants us to be multiply connected to each other and the projects we research. That approach is also part of my own understanding of feminist theory and method. Battiste describes the fundamental shift in consciousness that would be necessary for First Nations epistemologies to be uniformly valued in academia:

> ...self-styled guardians of academic 'excellence' feel obligated to exclude or depreciate the possibility of Aboriginal knowledge, Aboriginal understanding and power, accountability and leadership. For these guardians, who are found in all disciplines as well as in the ranks of senior administrators and remain key to the ongoing marginalization and/or assimilation of Aboriginal students and scholars, to think otherwise would be to bring thinking itself into question. It would be tantamount to seeing academic rationality as in part a Euro-imperial, historically specific construct and therefore not a neutral, 'human' universal. (xi)

Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran share the concerns of Battiste regarding the frequent lack of understanding and respect for First Nations epistemologies:

> In Western experience, it is common to separate the mind from the body and the spirit and the spirit from the mind and the body. Most Native American people experience their being in the world as a totality of personality and not as separate systems within the person. Thus, the Native American worldview is one in which the individual is a part of all creation, living life as one system and not in separate units that are objectively relating with each other. The idea of the world or creation existing for the purposes of human domination and exploitation – the core of most Western ideology – is absent in Native American thinking. (Battiste 91)

Duran and Duran also link Jungian and First Nations approaches to creativity and healing. Other First Nations scholars/teachers like Roxana Hesch, and Linda Smith share the concerns of Battiste and Duran and Duran. As I write this paper, students from the First Nations Art and Material Culture course are displaying their work in our University of Northern British Columbia Atrium. The advertisement for their event is a poem:

OUTside[4]
Outside the margins. Outside the frame,
framing the margins.

Outside the border, beyond the border.
On the out side or other side,
to be out.
Outside of the box. Outside the lines,
out of line, outer lines.
Outdoors, the out door
Out of the building, out of the room,
out of this world.
Outside in, Outside looking in.
Outside the center.
Outside the academic/ social/ epistemology
OUTside.

I want to be a supportive comrade and participant with this kind of artist-research. As at the First Nations Writers' Festival recently held at UNBC[5], the OUTside organizing students want to do multimodal multigenre multidisciplinary education and consciousness raising for/to themselves but also for/to the Settler communities. One of the goals in these activities is to bring about more social justice.

Artivist Re-Searching/Performative Autoethnography

Akin to the life bell hooks describes in her writing about art and the lives of working class people, art was not something discussed, celebrated, understood, or even recognized in the rural northern Ontario blue collar world I inhabited as a child. In fact, even being someone who loved books meant that you were a sissy, a freak, pretentious – trying to get out of doing your duties as a farmhand or responsible housecleaning daughter. When I was fifteen I left my birth home. That home was a place of extreme violence, poverty, deprivation, and unpredictability. In the thirty years since leaving, I have often been asked about how I got from there to a path of relative positivity and accomplishment. Part of it is just sweet, sweet luck. And, part of the answer is: I never forget who brung me to the dance. In fact, I remember precisely what I was wearing and where I was sitting when I first heard a professor quote Karl Marx's idea that the point isn't just to describe and understand the world around us – the point is to change it! While not all scholars would agree that there should be a moral alliance between our scholarly activity and the outcomes we're hoping for, I knew the proposition was true for me in all my bones and in my whole heart before I heard the

quotation from Marx. Reflecting upon all this during my process of packaging, marketing, and spinning my life into a tenure and promotion pitch, I pondered: *how* did I manage to avoid the many dreary dangers that fifteen-year-olds fall prey to when they are alone in a difficult world?

One of the gifts the world threw in front of that shy nervous girl thirty years ago was a place, a process, a group, and an event called *Northern Lights Festival Boreal*. Googling it recently, I found out that the Northern Lights Festival Boreal is Canada's "longest running festival of music and the arts," and prides itself on inclusion of First Nations artists and Francophones. At the time I didn't identify the full *meaning* of this exposure to arts, artists, and multiple modes of teaching and learning that I'd fallen into and in with.

I met people at that festival – *festies* – from all over the world; the woman who had a booth and who sold Jamaican vegetarian patties was one of the first African-Canadian women with whom I ever had a conversation. The money she helped raise through that booth helped fund anti-racist activities in our town. I met Lillian Allen at one of these festivals. I saw Inuit throat singers at the festival. Through festies' stories and songs, I learned about the cultural sensibilities of people from our various provinces. All kinds of crafts and arts were sold and displayed at these events. In a mining town that had a lot of meanness in it, these gentle creative festies were a minority. To earn money all those years, I waitressed in greasy spoons and strip clubs. Those places did *not* teach me a great deal that was positive about our species and about creatively searching (or 'researching') my world. Had I only had exposure to the practices and beliefs of my birth family and the 'culture' of the places I was working in, I might have become and remained a small bitter person with homophobia, racism, classism, and sexism seeping through my pores.

As a young 'researcher' I was hungry to learn from these festival people. It was magical for me to be around these festival peace-love-wow people who played flute, sang folk songs, sold crafts, promoted folk arts and story telling, and introduced me to vegetarianism and poetry. I'm sure those circles were the first to teach me a few snippets about Buddhism, First Nations spirituality, and feminism. Now that I have worked as a therapist in an acute care sexual assault

crisis centre, as a community organizer with various women's organizations, and as a fundraiser for an array of causes that research and respond to abuses of girls and women, *I know* how vulnerable I was at that time. The men and women from the festival crowd demonstrated an alternative life style and an alternative value and meaning structure that I was enchanted by and which I clung to. Through hanging out with (observing, analyzing and interviewing?) that circle of people, I met teachers, activists, small business people, and labourers who were non-impositional and non-exploitive. Their noticing and valuing of my creativity (and of each others') is part of what led me to return to school, complete my upgrading, begin college and later go to university. In my career as a social worker/academic/researcher/activist I want to help bring more people into that kind of creative community. My hope, in being involved with this circle of creatives in this publication (and the related conference, network, and research adventure) on artistic inquiry, is that I will find a supportive circle of people who will do creative equality-seeking re-searching with me in the years ahead.

Although the festival itself only ran for a few days each summer, those few days helped me make contacts and friendships that nurtured me during the rest of the year. Because I couldn't afford my entrance fee to the festival events, I volunteered in various ways. One year I volunteered to be a hat-and-guitar check at the stage, and I met every one of the performers. The festival, as a non-profit organization, also held fundraising events at various times of the year, events through which I learned many things. There was a restaurant where those same folks hung out during the other months of the year. I recognized their faces and would feel open to them if I met them in another context.

Now that I have travelled all around Canada and attended dozens of conferences and perhaps hundreds of speakers' events and protests, I know that this festival crowd exists in every community. They usually have a special carrot juice bar or organic food place where they hang out. They usually have a place on the wall in the entrance that advertises upcoming events. They also have an affinity for social justice issues. Many of them ride bikes rather than drive cars; they wear recycled clothes. Through their songs, painting, dance, crafts, arts, food, and through the ways they spend their

money and conduct their day-to-day lives, they present alternative world views. They continuously re-search the community they live in, and they summarize their 'results' into songs, rap, graffiti, and other creative formats. That world view is the one that I have come to understand analytically, sociologically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally. *Their art is what drew me in* and changed me. Festies from the oldest multicultural arts festival in Canada helped enrich and embolden my life. People like these festies were among those who wrote the 55 support letters that I had the privilege of including in my tenure binder. I also was able to include a few dozen pamphlets, flyers, photographs and other pieces of 'data' that publicly linked my scholarly activism with their causes and projects. They ongoingly educate me about grassroots realities.

Garrett-Petts and Nash ponder points of consensus shared by and about creative researchers:

> These researchers and their practices are introducing new modes and methods of inquiry, and new challenges to traditional academic notions of research. At present, however, although the academic climate seems especially warm toward notions of 'creative research' in general, we have no clear consensus about the definition, value, and impact of these modes and methods of artistic inquiry.

I doubt we will reach consensus on much. My thoughts and energies are directed toward linking with like-minded 'cultural creatives' and doing the important work we need to do together. I believe some of us will form fluid temporary alliances which will be challenging and, perhaps, uncomfortable but worthwhile. Through these creative alliances we might support each other and support some causes that often don't count for much in the mainstream world.

Not Counting

During the first years of my career as a social worker, I did immigrant settlement work, adjudication assistance with Workers' Compensation, research and coordination for women's organizations, and therapy in an eating disorders clinic – and I worked with those who had experienced sexual abuse. In those contexts I was also taught to *count*: How many rapes happened in this year? How many orifices were penetrated? How many perpetrators were arrested? How many cases 'won' in court? How many dollars go to this employee who

was injured on the job? How much is it worth if a man's arm is cut off at his work site? How many dollars does a single person on welfare receive? How many fifty-five-minute counselling sessions does an incest victim qualify for if she is sponsored by the Ministry and is being seen at the Crisis Unit in the hospital? The state wants to investigate (infiltrate?) our social justice work, and not always just to insure that we are accountable. All of this counting also has an implicit immoral intention – to judge, blame, shame, and exile the poor or the oppressed.

All of this counting exhausted and depressed me. It *is* important to count the specifics and particulars of horror that humans inflict upon each other. More important to me now, however, are the questions of how to heal such hurts: How do we get people to understand, respect, and treat each other differently? Mainstream academic research has often been about counting and then just moving on. Government-funded research has often been about counting out the minimal resources that could be condescendingly allocated to vulnerable populations – and withholding the roses or substantive resources. This is a type of research I refuse to collude in. I'm not interested in blaming the victims of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, etc.

As a scholar and researcher-activist, I can tell you that designing pamphlets with numbers on them doesn't always change the world from hurting people. Doing a PowerPoint presentation at a conference that costs $500 to get in the door doesn't change much for oppressed and violated people. The people who answered your questionnaire or survey so that you could get the grant and do the research and do the PowerPoint so you could get another grant and do another conference and … well, the people who contributed to your CV-building often don't get much. Many researchers and formats for research perpetuate processes for elegant theft from the oppressed.

In some ways I have been returning to those then unwritten but known truths that I found when I was welcomed into the Festies' artistic community in northern Ontario. Healing and consciousness-raising and popular education can come about through songs, dance, crafts, arts, the sharing of food, and from sitting together in a big group on the grass and listening to a story from an elder or a comedian. In addition to counting, for your work to count *for*

something, it has to get back to the people who need it the most and it has to be presented to them/from them/with them in palatable, accessible ways. Accountable research should also go one step further and consult with the community about what it wants done with this new or re-membered knowledge. What makes a difference for its people in their ordinary lives? Sometimes the process of consciousness-raising is more important than the 'final' product for which a funder has contracted. All of this is much more so in small northern communities. In these contexts, trust, a web of contacts, a particular kind of integrity, a longitudinal depthful knowledge of who's who and what's what – all this makes a difference. As an academic, I am trusted among grassroots people who don't always trust someone who shows up at their door wanting some 'data.'

Finding appropriate labels and names for people who do this kind of work is difficult. Lately, I have begun defining myself as an 'organic intellectual.' The label of 'social worker' has a foul ring to it for some people (see, for example, Waterfall). My definition of an organic intellectual is someone who remembers who brung them to the dance, someone who attempts to take the best of academia and bring that to the street/road/greasy spoon/strip club and then takes the wisdom of those places and brings that back to academia – and the places where the State might be forced to change. An organic intellectual locates herself in an ongoing loop of contact and practice among various locations, disciplines, audiences, and intentions. As I've already noted, cultural studies scholar-activists such as Denzin, Giroux, Smith and Sosnoski, and hooks guide some aspects of my path. Their ideas seem to parallel many First Nations scholar-activists and feminist scholar-activists. An effective artist-researcher would have to honour the flow of community, knowledge and creativity depicted in my earlier diagram. For example, asking young women who are incest and violence survivors what *they* have done to survive and what *they* think needs to change in the world will often give you more brilliant insights into that issue than statistical data alone. Indeed, as Louise Wisechild reports, many of them will have 'naturally' used art as one of their healing resources.

For organic intellectuals, the point of doing research is to change the world. 'Artivism' research reaches people who are hungry for change by using the modes of expression that have meaning and

vibrancy for *them*. Changing the world for incest survivors may involve helping them author a book of poems and stories and then helping them publish it. It may also involve helping them read from those poems at public events. It may involve helping them find money to distribute (for free) that book of poems to many women's shelters and women's resource centers so the book can be given free to any girl or woman who wants to read it. I have helped facilitate these kinds of circles (but not yet one exclusively for incest victims). The tenure binder ended up proving to me that I had been practising a particular robust kind of artivism for most of my adult life. And I am not alone, for many of us in the Ivory Tower are already doing this – or have a longing to know where and how to begin doing this type of research/artivism.

I sometimes try to imagine the amazing things that could be accomplished if Judy Rebick and Martha Stewart created a child together. Their daughter would organize rallies and protests that were so sparkling and fun! Their child would grow up and know how to put together the most memorable and dynamic protest and fundraiser ever! If their daughter wanted to assist survival sex workers to unionize or protect themselves through some kind of innovative work-to-rule campaign, she'd do it with them in such an effective and graceful way that all kinds of people would want to volunteer to assist. She would know how to artistically research and respond to various types of oppression. That's part of what an organic intellectual is.

We need to know how to creatively use the media and make media moments so our causes get into the six o'clock news in order to educate and change people's ways of conducting themselves. Artists help us get the messages out in ways that are palatable and desirable. Using artistic ways to discover knowledge(s) is innovative, necessary, and complexly human. Academia, for me, is just a complicated – and often cumbersome – tool to serve the cause of changing the world. Oppression and violence have been with us as a species since forever. They may be with us forever. To alter the terrain we live in, our communities must not only have statistical information (numbers of rapes, numbers of beaten children, the percent of humans falling below the poverty level), they need to *feel* an urge to *do* something about it. They also then need to be effective

in how they channel their energies. Arts can help us integrate the various ways of knowing and the various content or factual knowledges.

Research isn't complete, in my opinion, until the information has been brought back usefully to the people who need the information the most. I think this is especially so when I remember that most research is funded through citizens' tax dollars. Research isn't complete until it has had positive, pragmatic consequences for a wide array of citizens (not just the academics and publishers building CVs and scholarly journal sales). For example, child poverty has probably been with us since the first children were born on this planet. Millions of dollars and millions of pages of reports have been invested in describing child poverty. We know indisputably that child poverty is 'caused' by parental poverty, an absence of access to affordable housing, a low minimum wage, barriers to parental educational achievement, troubles finding affordable transportation, unemployment, disability or health care issues. There's really nothing new to know: some children's poverty is caused by some other children's parents' wealth. All of these causes are socially understood and structurally embedded in our capitalist, patriarchal, racist society. There is no mystery in any of this; nothing vexing in comprehending exactly what is going on. The vexation exists in *changing* any of these flows and patterns in a substantial way. The barrier to change is that people vote against the provincial, federal and municipal choices which could change child poverty. In the moments when people *do* vote for empathetic compassionate change, they have done so not just because they've suddenly been given access to new quantitative data. Rather, it is because they have also been emotionally, spiritually, and morally *moved to do something* new and different and fair. Arts move hearts. Public will moves politicians.

Projects or activities such as the Live 8 concerts to raise awareness about inadequate western support for reducing poverty in the developing world may make a difference. The walks for AIDS, cancer, and MS make people part with their dollars and do something different. Terry Fox with his run across Canada still raises millions of dollars, even years after his death. Take Back the Night marches and December 6th ceremonies invite people to participate in an 'arts'

event, in that these experiences usually have a singer, poet, or story teller at the front of the event, sharing the results of her research into the issues of violence against women. The drama, costumes, and playful choreography of Gay Pride events have opened people's hearts and changed their ways of voting. Those who produce these events have also known that their audience is not just the person on the sidewalk or elsewhere and watching the news at home. The designers and directors of such performances and communications have known that their audience also consists of the others *in* the event. We develop and enrich our solidarity by being co-performers and co-audience members. We re-fortify for another round of resistance and healing when we see each other at these *shows* of concern.

Partnering and En/circling

Now that I have described what I mean by the term *organic intellectual* and the vital role I see for arts in the translation and distribution of research, I will explain why the professions of social work and artist naturally partner. During my construction of that tenure package, I reviewed all the thousands and thousands of dollars I've helped cull from the world through participating in fundraising events[6]. I have acted as an organizer, an MC, a facilitator, a hostess, and a reader of poetry. I've worn an assortment of costumes. I've helped decorate stages and design banners and protest signs. I've helped design buttons for lapels. I've sung protest songs. All of these roles require creativity and artistry. While constructing that tenure package, I received letters of support and photographs from many people that I have engaged with for these purposes. Their words of appreciation and recognition reminded me that I want to continue being my most brave imaginative self. This is social work. This is also art. And research. These are flows of encirclings and searching talks. These are natural modes for connections. The tough part sometimes is to communicate all these connections and significances to the gatekeepers, judges, committees, funders in academia and in the 'evidence based,' quantitative research world. Perhaps the very natural effectiveness of these artivist research cycles and circles is why they are so resisted in mainstream academia.

The profession of social work has been using expressive arts in

our work with individuals and groups for many decades. A social work dictionary offers this explanation of art therapy and when to use it:

> *The use of paintings, sculpture, and other creative expressions in the treatment of people with emotional problems.* Art therapy is often used in social group work and in group psychotherapy. Often used with institutionalized people or inpatients, it is also considered to be effective with healthy people who wish to share art as a means of enhancing personal growth and development. In some forms of art therapy, clients create their own works and discuss the results with the therapist or with other members of an art therapy group. In other forms, the clients are exposed to works of art by a variety of artists and asked to assess how the works affect their own feelings and understandings. (Barker 31, italics in original)

While working with abused children or women, we social workers have frequently invited clients to use drawing, painting, clay work, and sand trays to explicate what has happened and to find healing. We have used mural painting as a way for teens to develop a sense of belonging in the world and ownership of their authentic piece of the world. We have used quilt-making in seniors' centers and crafts classes with new, non, or minimally English-speaking immigrants as a way to help individuals find friendship and a self-help circle. Dance classes have helped many people with physical problems. I argue that we need to take these creative techniques and comprehensions to the next level: the wider political domain and the research domain. And, by making our abusers into our clients as well (i.e., the taxpayers who vote against social justice and resource equalizations), we apply the arts for healing purposes in a new way. BC Premier Gordon Campbell, for example, needs some bold art therapy inflicted on him! The definition offered above in the social work dictionary does *not* include any political or large-scale applications. I think that it should.

As I was preparing the tenure package, I realized that most of my students (and peers) *have* substantively appreciated and supported the inclusion of artistic ways in the classroom. This affirmed and deepened my gratitude for them. Most of my students have attended at least one event at which I read poetry or told stories. They've seen others on those stages and at those events using their artistic talents

to translate our theory, research, and visions for a different world into something that could be given to our audiences. The students have nominated me three times for a teaching excellence award. My former graduate students who have now written letters on my behalf and/or sent emails along the way to confirm that the artistic 'permission' I gave them through role modeling and, for example, bringing art books to class, has proven useful to them in their practice and praxis. They are using art as a way to reach out to their clients, communities and enemies. They are using art to heal themselves and to purge themselves of the bitterness and rage they might come to feel saturated with from witnessing what they witness. All of this has been especially so for First Nations students and practitioners I have engaged with over the years.

Also, I am presently supervising Master's students whose research topics connect art and social work: for example, how watching and/or acting in *The Vagina Monologues* can be a healing experience; how social workers are portrayed in Hollywood; how watching such images can strengthen or deplete the sense of efficacy and belonging of a social worker in a place like Prince George. I have a student who is researching how social workers of settler heritage and social workers of First Nations heritage use art and creativity in their personal and professional practices in Fort St. John. One of my Métis students is interviewing First Nations women who are HIV/AIDS infected and asking them how they use their creativity to cope.

Some of my students (and peers) have published poetry and stories with me in one or more of the seven self-publishing collectives we've created. Cumulatively, over the last eight years, we have published six books, printed more than 6,000 copies, redistributed about $60,000, and raised funds for causes as varied as women's shelters, animal rights, and travel money for a man who had cancer and needed plane trips from a northern community to Vancouver and back. The Appendix lists other creative projects in process; one already has 23 women contributors who have written poems and stories about their experiences of in/visible dis/ability and caring in northern communities.

Much of the traditional academic community does not know how to appreciate or 'count' these manifestations of research and

scholarship. However, through translating the students' and the professional community's appreciation of these forms of research and scholarship, I provide documentation that has meaning to traditionalists in the Ivory Tower. Recently, two events I was involved in produced DVDs which could be used as educational resources in classrooms in the future. The end result of one of these projects was a script, a DVD, and a handout about sexual harassment. Thus, the project was made visible for my CV, for the purposes of funding, and for the purposes of praxis and community. I feel very proud of the people who have helped make this research and these artistic practices manifest. I feel grateful for all they've taught me. The people from Northern Lights Festival Boreal who have been in my life in peripheral or central ways for over thirty years would appreciate that I've come this far and that I have kept myself this busy. They brung me to a fabulously interesting dance – in many ways as much as the people who violated me brung me to those appreciations of what I *did not* want to see anymore of in the world.

The festival people, like the anarchist activist Emma Goldman, knew that you have to dance at the revolution or few folks will stick around and make it all happen. If you can't dance at the revolution, no one is going to want to do the ongoing and often tedious and frightening work of tearing down old structures and building new ones. Knowing that there's going to be a dance and some good food and music after a hard day's work or a hard way through a trouble – well, now that is something more and more people want to be part of. My wish is that the people I met at the *Artist Statement/Artist Researcher* workshop will continue to help each other construct a caring community in which/through which we can do artist-research and participate in social justice causes in useful and beautiful ways.

The artivist scholar swans at the *Artist Statement* workshop enriched and deepened my commitments and confidence. Although not all of the artivist scholars explicitly stated their intentions to make the world a better place for vulnerable populations, most of them implicitly displayed that intention. Laura Hargrave's work implicitly declared an affection for nature (and Mother Nature is one of the most oppressed souls these days!); Alan Brandoli and Helen MacDonald-Carlson's work expresses and celebrates the views of children; Donald Lawrence positions us to acknowledge and value

the labour of blue collar men/craftsmen and what they have built for our use and comfort as citizens; Brenda Pelkey focused our minds on emotional geographies of space/place; and Marsha Bryant helped us see and feel how anthologies of women's poetry come into existence and have meaning. Many of the artivist scholars offered us new ways to use new tools (for example, John Craig Freeman's high-tech way of mapping and displaying geographies could be used by survival sex trade workers to tell the stories of where they feel most safe/least safe in a community. Police already use a similar method for tracking and displaying crime rates). In conclusion, this group of people have substantively furthered the learning journey that the festies first helped direct.

Oh. And, yes, I did get tenure and promotion. Yes, a multi-winged duck can fly. And, I hope I've just helped start a robust and caring conversation. It is possible that the tenure reviewers at the various stages and in their various moral stances only *counted* the 55 letters of support, the dozens of newspaper articles or flyers that quoted or noted my participation in social justice events, the high ratings students gave me on my end-of-semester assessments, the dollars I raised for/with causes and non-profit organizations. Probably not all of the reviewers were effectively moved on an emotional or spiritual level. The translation process was effective, though. And now that I have this somewhat more protected space – tenure and promotion to Associate Professor – from which to take risks and fly, I plan to do so with kindness, creativity, a moral alliance with vulnerable populations, and as much artivism as I can find time for in the 20 years left before my retirement. I am energized and delighted by this turn of events and I hope to have the courage and lucidity to continue trying to do useful things with those who brung me to the dance.

Notes

1 The song *Bread and Roses* emerged in response to a strike in 1912. Lines from the song include "As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days. The rising of the women means the rising of the [human] race. No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where one reposes – but a sharing of life's glories: Bread and Roses! Bread and Roses!"

2 Note that there is even diversity among "outsider" researchers (Bochner

and Ellis; Brown and Strega; Denzin; Maracle; Madison; Reinharz; Holt).

3 An emerging term, "artivism" denotes the fusion of "art" and "activism."

4 This is a flyer that was received through email November 13, 2005. The poem doesn't have an author assigned to it.

5 I was, and am, on the organizing committee and I attended almost every hour of the events so I can speak to what the intentions were for this event. We hope to offer this kind of First Nations Writers' Festival every second year.

6 See the Appendix for a sample of some current artivism projects I'm involved in.

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Appendix: Additional Creative Re/Search and Artivism Projects

The following projects – in various states of proposal and enactment – provide further detail as to how artivism works on the ground in my experience.

The CHEERR Project, which I direct with Rob Budde, has secured $217, 000 to facilitate the production of creative writing in the process of health education and personal healing. This interdisciplinary project involves artists (primarily creative writers), academics and students from a variety of academic disciplines and organic intellectuals (grassroots leaders, elders, women's organizations and networks) from Northern BC communities. Performance and sharing of creative writing and other art forms on themes of health and healing are at the centre of this project. The writing will be - read/performed by traveling established artists and by local untrained citizens.

The CHEERR project plans to produce the following pedagogical resources:

1. a web page that displays all the learning, the contacts of people who

want to continue engaging on health and healing topics, and community resources in each geographical area;

2. a book of poems, stories, testimony, and art;

3. a video documentary of the whole three years of the project, both the readings and other meeting interactions;

4. a script of a play / performance piece (somewhat like *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Laramie Project*, or *Spare Change* which are collages of text from people who experienced vulnerability, trauma, healing, and resiliency).

We hope to strengthen the capacity of students and teachers to validate and use the knowledge created in their own ongoing community enrichment campaigns. We also hope enhance people's comfort in discussing taboo health issues (for example, HIV/AIDS, FAS, breast cancer, prostate cancer, obesity, abortion, clinical depression, and schizophrenia are topics which are especially stigmatized in small communities). This project opens the possibility for whole groups of people to discover new ways of thinking about their bodies, health, and coping mechanisms specific to the North.

One of the novel aspects of the CHEERR project is that it will engage in a continual feedback loop from scholars in health sciences and rural realities to the wider community of writers/artists to the scholars and back to the community of writers/artists and back again and again.

In *Mobilizing From Strength: Assisting Young Women Through Participatory Action Research and Community Involvement*, the Northern Women's Wellness and Information Centre and Community and I have acquired $48 000 to work on a series of theatre workshops, focus groups, and discussion sessions with 19- to 25-year-old women in northern BC regarding health and self-care practices.

Lynn Box, Rob Budde and I are working toward producing an anthology entitled *Making Noise, Northern Women, Caring About In/visible Dis/abilities*. This book includes the poetry and prose of more than 20 women from northern BC who are responding to cancer, schizophrenia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and other illnesses which aren't effectively recognized or responded to by the communities, organizations, family networks, and governmental structures which could or should provide for the well-being of vulnerable populations.

Another writing project I am involved in brings together writing from various activists and scholars in northern BC who offered their material for both the *Conversations with Bridget Moran* collection and *The messies and multiplicities of teaching and learning in northern BC* into a special edition of *Reflections on Water* entitled "Activists keeping it all together – in spite of the struggles!" As these two previous projects unfolded, there were many pieces that didn't quite fit for either project but which deserve to be published

in some forum. All of these writings will then be available on the web to our students. My experience is that students deeply appreciate seeing others from northern contexts talk about their perspectives. These articles, poems, and prose pieces make excellent teaching and research resources.

Tools for Making Sense

Adelheid Mers

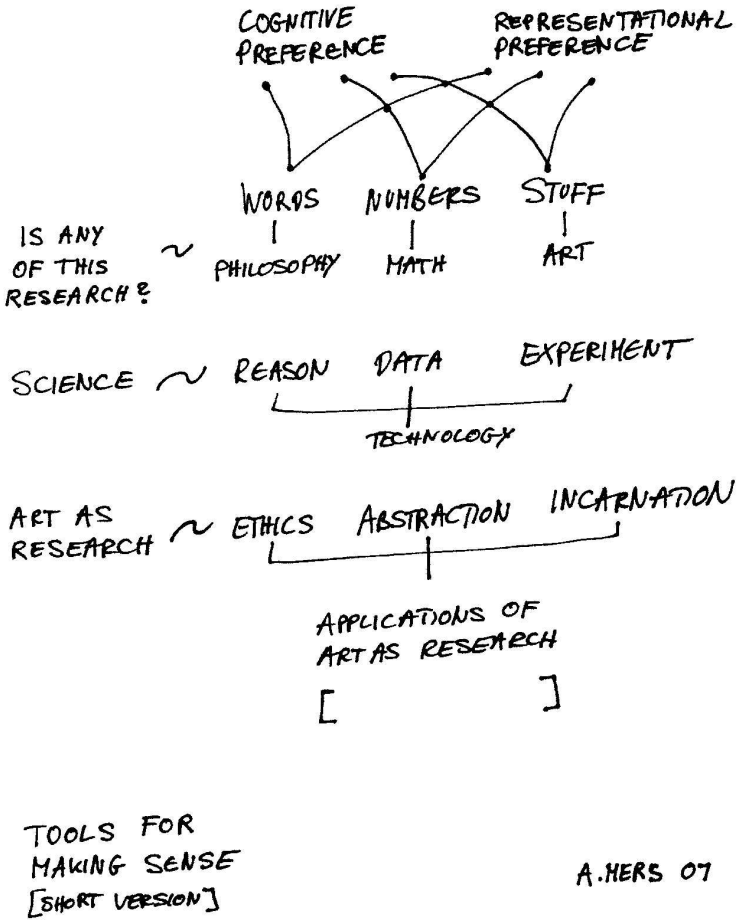
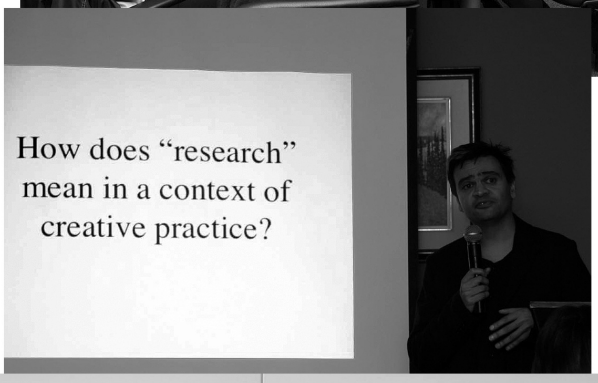
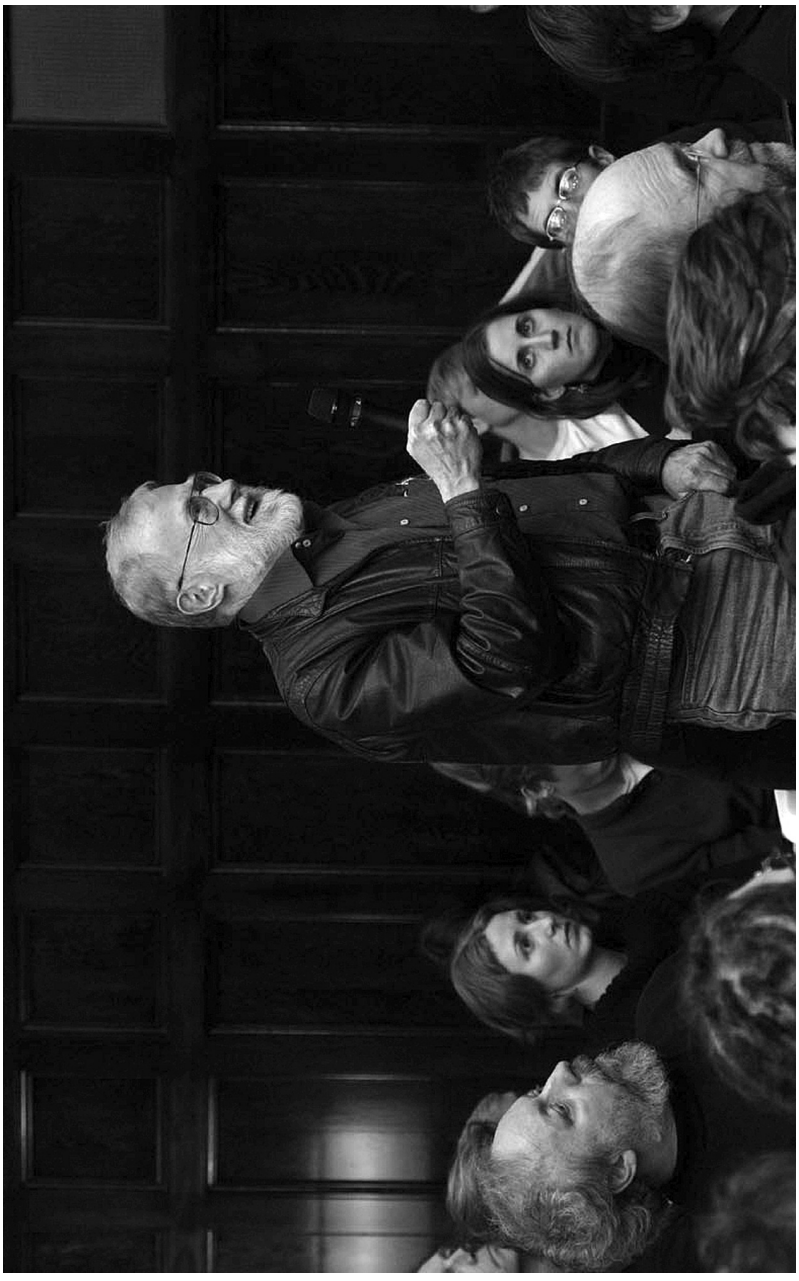


Photo Essay from the Artist Statement Conference

Dana Novak



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Contributors

ALAN BRANDOLI teaches in the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Thompson Rivers University. He is interested in critical and creative issues related to art and art education, including the relationships between visual and verbal literacy.

MARSHA BRYANT researches relationships between poetry and visual culture. She has published a book on W. H. Auden and documentary, as well as an anthology on literature and photography. Currently she is completing a book on women's poetry and popular culture. She is an associate professor of English at the University of Florida.

FRANK DAVEY has been a poet, editor, small magazine publisher, literary critic, and cultural critic in Canada since 1961. He is editor and co-founder of the notorious poetry newsletter *Tish* (1961-63) and since 1965 editor of *Open Letter*, the Canadian journal of writing and theory.With Fred Wah in 1984, he founded *SwiftCurrent,* the world's first on-line literary magazine, and operated it until 1990.

JOHN CRAIG FREEMAN is an artist and educator exploring practices that challenge the function of art and the role of the artist. An associate professor of New Media at Emerson College, Craig has a substantial background in public art working with monumental sequential computer generated image/text roadside installations. These site specific works sometime span miles of highway and individual images have been as large as 400 square feet. Freeman appropriates the strategies of mass media in order to explore the power and impact of new technology used in service of individual artistic expression.

W.F. GARRETT-PETTS is professor of English at Thompson Rivers University, where he directs The Centre for the Study of Multiple Literacies and Mapping Quality of Life and the Culture of Small Cities (a national community-university research alliance). His recent books include *The Small Cities Book* (New Star), *PhotoGraphic Encounters: The Edges and Edginess of Reading Prose Pictures and Visual Fictions* (University of Alberta Press), *Writing about Literature* (Broadview), and *Integrating Visual and Verbal Literacies* (Inkshed Press).

MICHAEL JARRETT is professor of English at Penn State University, York Campus. He is the author of *Drifting on a Read: Jazz as a Model for Writing* (SUNY Press) and *Sound Tracks: A Musical ABC* (Temple University Press).

ERNIE KROEGER is an assistant professor in the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Thompson Rivers University. He teaches photography and his

artwork has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Canada and in Europe.

DONALD LAWRENCE is an associate professor of visual arts at Thompson Rivers University, where he teaches photography and sculpture, and special topics courses in photography and literature and gallery studies. His artwork takes an interdisciplinary approach to personal interests in the wilderness landscape (especially sea kayaking), where the idea of 'wilderness' intersects histories of representation and contemporary culture (especially histories of illusion and museum display). As Principle Investigator for a SSHRC-funded Research/Creation project, he is leading an international team of artists/researchers in an investigation of 'vernacular based inquiry.'

EILEEN LEIER is an associate professor of visual arts at Thompson Rivers University, where she also teaches History of Photography, History and Theory of Art, and Special Topics in Alternate Photographic Processes. Photography is her primary subject area and specialization.

PAULA LEVINE is a visual artist working in digital media and emerging technologies. Her work is informed by theoretical, conceptual and historical ideas and approaches to space coupled with forces that shape fabrics of daily life. She is currently exploring ways to translate the invisible body of information that flows around us (such as signals from Global Positioning satellites) into perceptible forms that then become part of the particularized experiences of place.

HELEN MACDONALD-CARLSON is an assistant professor in the Early Childhood Education Program at Thompson Rivers University. Given her work with young children, her research interests involve making the (thinking, creative, research, learning) process more visible. All her projects are done in collaboration with a community partner so that the jointly constructed research is beneficial to both the academic's and the practitioner's perspectives.

ASHOK MATHUR is a writer, artist-researcher, and director of the Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada (CiCAC). He currently holds a Canada Research Chair in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry at Thompson Rivers University.

ADELHEID MERS is an associate professor in the Arts Administration and Policy program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She represents texts, ideas and institutions through maps and diagrams, pairing visual and linear modes of making sense.

RACHEL NASH teaches, researches, and writes in Kamloops, BC, where she is an assistant professor of English at Thompson Rivers University. She comes to the question of artistic inquiry from language and discourse theory and is training herself not to read didactics until she's looked at the images.

DANA NOVAK is a graduate student in visual arts, currently studying and teaching at Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design. She is well known for her sensuous photographs of water, ice, and other natural elements. Her recent work was exhibited in *Frozen Passage*, Kamloops Art Gallery, April 9–May 28, 2006, and explores the Canadian landscape and culture in relation to her own perspective developed during her formative years in the Czech Republic.

HENK SLAGER is Dean of the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design and holds the position of professor of Artistic Research. He is on the Board of EARN (European Artistic Research Network) and General Editor of *MaHKUzine, Journal of Artistic Research* (www.mahk u.nl).

SI TRANSKEN is an associate professor in the Social Work/Women's Studies Programs at UNBC. She teaches web courses in sociological theory for Laurentian. Additionally, she works part-time at a Women's Crisis Shelter called AWAC. These are some of the reasons why she doesn't write more and publish more – but she intends to in the years ahead. She's grateful for all the creative folks and sentient beings in her life.

TRACY WHALEN is an associate professor in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications at the University of Winnipeg. She is interested in rhetorics of excess and intensity (melodrama, the sublime, and moments of wonder), the body and rhetoric, the public reception of popular novels, and the rhetoric of place. She has analyzed such things as tourism ads, novels (like E. Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*), and visual artefacts (illustrations in children's school textbooks, for example) to determine how they invite identification and aestheticize experience, especially in connection with Newfoundland, her birthplace and home of her heart.

OPEN LETTER

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