

**LOOKING BEYOND POSTMODERNISM:
ART AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

Since the nineteenth century there have been a series of 'isms' in the art world that have taken the artist further into a territory that non-artists often view with disdain and derision. These 'isms' such as late modernism, seem designed to keep out non-artists. This self-contained stance has estranged the arts from the rest of society to the point that it has rendered the artist socially impotent. Even though postmodernism offers new perspectives and relationships between artists and the culture they inhabit, non-artists seem especially wary of it. Ironically though, postmodernism in some form, may be the vehicle that could re-integrate art with everyday life.

Research for this thesis probes the following questions: Can postmodernism lead us to a model of art making that is at once aesthetic and socially integrated? And if so, what are the implications for the artist, art education and the community at large?

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis
to David, Danny and Roz with love and appreciation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Bringing Art Back to Life	5
Introduction	5
The Aesthetic Crisis	5
Art as a Discourse	10
Connecting with the Divine	12
What Has Lead to the Dead Blank in the Arts?	14
The Collapse of Object Based Art	17
Filling in the Blank	22
Chapter Two: Using Art to Build Community	28
Introduction	28
Unloading the Myth of the 'Solitary Genius'	28
Art Outside the Museum: New Genre Public Art	29
Changing Role of the Audience	30
The Changing Role of the Artist	33
Whose Art Is It?	35
But Is It Art?	36
Chapter Three: Re-drawing the Line	40
Introduction	40
<i>Who Gets to Make Art?</i>	41
Art as Communication	43
Inclusion Through the Arts	44
Interdisciplinary Art	48
Skills, Knowledge and Rules	50
Moving from Process to Product	53
Re-membering Our Place	55

Chapter Four: The Importance of Dream-time: The Artist as Visionary	61
Introduction	61
Dream-time	61
Art for Art's Sake	63
Ritual in Art Making: Anna Halprin	64
Artist as Shaman: Joseph Beuys	66
Concentric Circles of Education	69
Chapter Five: Collaboration Begins with Education	72
Introduction	72
Postmodernism: Whose Background? Who's Meanings?	72
Art as an Antidote for Apathy	75
Art as Inquiry	77
Creating a Third Strand: Integrating the Best of the Reconstructive and the Deconstructive Strands of Postmodernism	81
Discussion and Conclusion	85
References	87

INTRODUCTION

In our society today, persons are becoming increasingly removed from being an 'active agent' in their own lives. A number of factors including technology, the media, global mobility, and fragmentation of society have resulted in people becoming disconnected from their cultural, natural and personal roots. This is especially evident in the typical person's relationship or 'non-relationship' with the arts. In general, non-artists have very little conscious connection to the arts. Indeed, if they stopped to think about it, most people would probably consider the arts a 'spectator sport', rather than a meaningful process in which they could engage. However, as the poet Audre Lorde states, "art is a necessity, not a luxury" (Majozo, 1995, p.89). I strongly agree with Lorde, and would argue that the arts are particularly necessary today because they offer us ways of connecting directly to our selves, each other and our culture. In my view, the arts could provide an antidote to the sense of apathy and hopelessness that is evident in our schools and our communities. The arts offer both intrinsic and instrumental value, as they provide opportunities to learn new skills, while expanding our modes of expression. Above all, the arts allow opportunity for individual voice, which enlarges us as human beings.

According to Nietzsche, "the health of a culture is to be estimated in terms of the art that is produced" (1967, p.xii). If this is true, and I believe it is, then our culture has been 'out of sorts' for quite some time. As someone who has been active in the arts, both as an artist and an art educator, I have witnessed a distressing trend in the arts. This is a growing tendency to view the arts as somewhat redundant, so that in times of economic restraint, the arts are one of the first areas to be cut. What I find disturbing is

not so much the cuts themselves, but the rationalization behind them. These cuts are allowed to take place because we do not see the arts as being central to learning, and our quality of life. What does it mean to our culture that we care so little about the eroding state of the arts? How have we arrived at this place, where art is at best viewed with neutrality, and at worst viewed with contempt?

There was a time when "art was not a category set apart: the aesthetic dimension permeated all human skills; the potential space was held open within the everyday pursuits of men and women" (Fuller, 1989, p.132). In Ancient Greece for example, art was seen as being integral to everyday life. The idea that an art form, or an artist could exist in isolation was inconceivable. The Athenian view held that art "can evoke and be a vehicle for the expression of the sublime in every man" (Aspin, 1989, p.254). The Athenian tradition is based on the premise that the whole population is educated and well informed about the arts. In order for this to happen an atmosphere that encourages and facilitates the arts must be in place. This is why it is so troubling to see support for artists and art education being decreased, for without an environment that encourages the arts, none of this is possible.

I would argue that postmodernism could offer a new direction for artists and their communities; a direction that could lead us to a more inclusive model of creating art; a socially responsible model of art making that is reminiscent of the Athenian tradition. However, unlike the Greeks, who excluded women and slaves from the group deemed worthy of participating, this new model could and should include all layers of society; disenfranchised and historically marginalized groups such as women, the impoverished and people with intellectual and physical limitations.

I believe that the Athenian model of art has been lying dormant but could prosper again given the right cultural conditions. I would argue that our current cultural conditions are ripe for the Athenian model to not only take root, but to flourish. I believe this to be true for a few reasons. One reason is that many people are expressing a growing dissatisfaction with their passive lifestyles and are looking for ways to reconnect and contribute to their communities. The second reason is that there are an increasing number of artists who are seeking ways to use their art to build socially meaningful relationships in their communities. In order to successfully re-engage with society, these artists are finding ways of working that are both socially and aesthetically accountable. David Diamond of *Headlines Theatre* and Jil. P. Weaving are good examples of artists who are currently working this way.

In this thesis I will look at fresh approaches to art making; ways of working that place individual expression alongside social responsibility. In my view, this innovative direction in the arts is possible only by the artist taking on the dual roles of citizen and visionary. In this way, the artist may be able to generate a model of art making that is not only capable of *responding* to the culture it is rooted in, but is capable of *transforming* it. In order to fully realize this new direction, it is imperative that artists not only participate in our culture, but also display the courage to lead.

Throughout this thesis I will look at how art has come to be seen as being a 'category set apart', and how it can once again take a more pivotal role in our culture and our communities. Chapter One will look at the role that postmodernism could play in re-integrating art into everyday life. In Chapter Two, I will look at ways that artists are working successfully within their communities to facilitate socially meaningful relationships. In Chapter Three, I will explore how art can be used as a form of

communication for individuals with cognitive disabilities, and the implications that this carries for these individual and the larger community. Chapter Four will look at the notion of the 'artist as visionary' and will focus on the artists Joseph Beuys and Anna Halprin. In Chapter Five, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of modernist and postmodern perspectives in art education.

CHAPTER ONE:

BRINGING ART BACK TO LIFE

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. (Chief Seattle, Campbell, 1988, p.34)

Introduction

This chapter will examine the questions “How has art come to be seen as a category set apart from other areas of life?” and “What role could postmodernism play in re-integrating art back into everyday life?”

The Aesthetic Crisis

Before we can talk about a ‘crisis in the arts’ I need to describe what I imagine an aesthetically healthy society would look like. In my ideal society, the arts would be a vehicle with which to express and interpret our individual experience of being alive. As well, the arts would be used to create meaningful dialogue and relationships in the community. An aesthetically healthy culture would be one in which each member would be able to simultaneously express their individuality, while confirming their identity with a shared horizon of meaning (Taylor, 1991).

For a society such as this to exist, it would need to have the arts at the centre of learning. Each child would learn the ‘language of art’ with the same level of instruction and consistency that students now learn science or math. Just as we recognize that it takes years to master a subject such as math, we would allow for the same amount of

time and study in order for students to come to a full understanding of art. This would allow each member of our culture to have a functional level of art literacy. Students who are gifted could go on to become great artists, and students who were less so, would still acquire the ability to actively engage in and appreciate the arts.

In my ideal of an aesthetically healthy culture, art would be valued for both its intrinsic and its instrumental value. Art could still be used to sell cars, but it could also be experienced for the pure joy of it. It would be enough to write a poem, or paint a picture, for no other reason than the direct experience of it.

According to Peter Fuller in his article, "Aesthetics After Modernism", in an aesthetically healthy society, art would be a dimension of everyone's life. We see examples of this in First Nations' culture, where there is no clear boundary between art and other forms of work. Everyday objects such as paddles, eating utensils, and tools were decorated with designs and images that hold meaning. Fuller states, "This did not mean the aesthetic dimension sank to the lowest common denominator. Unevenness of ability was recognized and those with exceptional artistic talent were acknowledged" (1989, p.132).

In our current era, we see that the arts have been marginalized to the point where we see the arts as being enjoyable, but not really necessary. This is demonstrated by how the arts are relegated to the category of 'electives' in school. When there are cuts to the budget in schools, the arts are the first to go, because we do not view them as being central to education. The thinking of art as being in a category separate from the rest of life is at the heart of the 'aesthetic crisis' of which I am speaking. This notion is not unique to our contemporary culture. Fuller points out that even though the Renaissance is seen as a time when artists were more central to

society, the split between art and other areas of life had clearly begun to take hold. This was due in part to the split between science and art. Early scientists believed that art could never define reality in the way that science could. Art was seen as *imitating* reality, and science was seen as *defining* reality. This split led artists to theorize about their art as an attempt to be seen as being 'objective' about their work. Despite these efforts, art was still seen as being inferior to rational, scientific ways of seeing the world. Art became a 'category set apart' and the 'potential space' that Fuller refers to, began to shrink for artist and non-artist alike.

The Romantics reacted against the tyranny of scientific thought, by stressing individual experience and the value of feeling. What is interesting to note, is that the artist claimed only his individual emotional experience, and did not attempt to speak for the rest of society. Rather, the artist claimed to be uninterested in the society he lived in. This stance resulted in the artist emphasizing his individual experience over society's concerns. In this way, the arts became "the special reserve for a dimension of imaginative creativity which had once pervaded all cultural activities" (Fuller, 1989, p.134). The artist believed he was protecting the arts by taking a 'disinterested' position outside of society. However, as we have seen in the last century, this stance has rendered the artist somewhat ineffectual in our culture.

When discussing the aesthetic crisis, Fuller refers to William Morris, the nineteenth century poet and writer. Fuller states:

William Morris predicted that the divorce of the High Arts from a living tradition of creative work in the crafts would lead to the death of architecture, sculpture, painting, and the crowd of lesser arts that belong to them. He [Morris] foresaw what he called 'this dead blank of the arts'. If the blank must happen', he wrote, 'it must and amidst its darkness the new seed must sprout. (p.135)

Fuller argues that the 'death of painting' that Morris is referring to was in fact realized in late modernism. Specifically, Fuller is referring to the monochromatic paintings that were created in the late nineteen sixties, works by artists such as Ad Reinhardt. Reinhardt reduced colour, drawing, and imagery until he had refined his art to what he believed was its essence. His piece titled, *Abstract Painting* is a good example of minimalism. Painted in 1960, it is a five-foot by five-foot square of black paint with very subtle geometric shapes underneath. The painting offers the viewer a sense of bleakness, with no reference to pictorial space or nature (Hunter/Jacobus, 1992). Fuller finds this trend in the arts distressing because "art was no longer a 'transitional object', a mediator between the real and the cosmos, but rather a mere *thing*" (1989, p.138). The reducing of art to an object, along with the feeling that art is no longer connected to 'real life', is what Fuller is referring to when he describes the 'aesthetic crisis'. Fuller proposes that the 'dead blank of the arts' was realized in late modernism, and that "postmodernism could be the sprouting of a new seed" (p.135).

I agree with Fuller that postmodernism could be the sprouting of a new seed, but births of art movements do not occur without some tension and controversy. It is now more than thirty years since Reinhardt painted *Abstract Painting*, and postmodernism has yet to be clearly defined in our culture. In my view, this is because we are still caught in the uneasy transition between late modernism and postmodernism. When we speak of 'art movements', it is important to keep in mind that the development of art movements and trends of thought are not rigid, but rather they are a result of an ongoing interplay of ideas. It is also worth noting, that art movements themselves are not fixed in time and space, for in a sense, all of the movements overlap and exist simultaneously.

I do not believe we are experiencing an actual 'crisis' in the arts, but in speaking with artistic peers and other members of the professional community, it is evident to me that there are real frustrations and problems facing working artists and art educators today. One of the most pressing problems is a lack of recognition that the arts are essential to our culture. This is demonstrated in shrinking budgets and the competitive atmosphere that exists in the art world due to reduction in funding for art institutions and grants. Many students graduate from art school, only to find that within a few years, they have compromised their artistic vision to the point where they are no longer practicing art. Consequently, it is very difficult for artists to believe they can sustain an art practice over the course of a lifetime. This contributes to a sense of cynicism among artists and non-artists alike, that our society does not value the arts and the artist. Having said that, it is important to note that artists continue to search for, and find ways of working that overcome these obstacles. It is my hope that as art becomes more integrated into our communities, non-artists will recognize the value of it and support for the arts will grow.

We are living in a time where there are many interpretations of what art should, and could be in our culture. This brings a certain amount of discomfort, but it also offers a sense of possibility. One of the most positive aspects of postmodernism is that every kind of art can be considered and produced simultaneously. Within a city such as Vancouver for instance, one can see art works that range from highly conceptual works at the Western Front, to contemporary paintings at the Bau-Xi Gallery. One can also visit community art projects throughout the city, such as the *Mount Pleasant Community Fence* at Fraser and Eighth Avenue, or visit public art at Library Square. In many ways, the contemporary art world has never been more diverse or vibrant. There are many

hopeful signs that the arts *are* being reintegrated with everyday life. The challenge is to sustain this vibrancy and build on the momentum.

Art as a Discourse

One of the major concerns I have as an artist and art educator is how art can be used to act as a discourse to connect individuals with their larger community. I believe that art could be an important element in unifying members of our fragmented society. Taylor describes fragmentation as “growing to the extent that people no longer identify with their political community” (1991, p.118). One of the most disturbing consequences of fragmentation is that people transfer their sense of belonging to corporations, or the sense of belonging disappears altogether. This is clearly evident in secondary schools, where students sometimes identify more strongly with a name brand, such as *Nike* or *Adidas*, than they do with any local activities or school group.

Fragmentation is part of the “malaise of modernity” (1991, p.1) that Taylor describes. This ‘malaise’ is experienced as a sense of loss or disenchantment with our current era. Even though modernity brought with it a sense of fragmentation and hopelessness, it also brought freedom from the “great chain of being” (p.3).

Taylor describes the “great chain of being” in the following passage:

This hierarchical order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society. People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate. Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders. (p.3)

A positive consequence of breaking from this order was that groups such as women, people with lower incomes and people from diverse ethnic groups, now had the freedom to make their own choices. Taylor goes on to point out that at the same time

these orders restricted us, they also gave meaning to the world and to the activities of social life.

One of the results of the loss of the hierarchal order is that members of our society no longer have 'shared values', so it is difficult to form a common definition of community. Taylor outlines two types of individuality. One is the 'dark' side of individualism, which is centered on the self. This type of self-absorbed individual cares little about others and society. The second type is the authentic, or positive side of individualism, which is manifested by being true to our own uniqueness. According to Taylor, we can only achieve the authentic side of individualism by recognizing we are connected to a larger whole.

It is unfortunate that art is generally seen as imitating rather than making sense of reality, because as Taylor points out, in this time of instrumental thinking, we tend to "seek technological solutions even when something very different is called for" (1991, p.6). I would argue that 'the something very different' is a type of art that is based on *experiencing* life rather than *imitating* life. The arts offer us subtler languages. Taylor states, "The poem is finding the words for us. In this 'subtler language' – the term is borrowed from Shelley- something is defined and created as well as manifested" (p.85). Taylor offers the example of a poem finding the words for us, but it could be a painting, a song or a dance, or any other form of artistic expression. What is important is that through the process of creating art, we are able to express something previously hidden from us and make it visible. The arts could provide a forum for the unique voice of the individual to be discovered and articulated. The arts could also provide spaces for individuals to come together in order to demonstrate and define a shared meaning of community.

Connecting with the Divine

As a culture, we do not look to the transcendent quality of art as a way to connect our everyday lives with a sense of the divine. In our modern age we do not believe in the power of imagination, creativity, and vision unless it is for the purpose of making a profit. It is interesting that imagination and creativity, once firmly anchored in the realms of spirituality and art, are now being re-packaged and sold as part of the 'creativity industry'. Imagination and creativity once viewed as having their own intrinsic value have been taken over by 'creativity experts' such as Edward de Bono. In my view, this instrumental way of thinking about creativity and imagination has resulted in diminishment of our 'sacred spaces'. 'Creativity salespeople' have been able to re-package and sell imagination and creativity back to people, because as a culture we have lost faith in the domains of art, spirituality and religion to encourage these qualities. This sentiment is reflected well in John Berger's book, *A Painter of Our Times*. The painter Janos writes in his journal, "A bourgeois society increasingly destroys and corrupts the general, popular creative spirit, the experience of imaginative creation becomes rarer and rarer till in the end people think there is some magical secret for creativity" (1996, p.101).

It is clear that the dissatisfaction facing our modern era is far reaching and affects almost every aspect of our society. For the purposes of this thesis, however I will focus on the arts and what might effectively make a difference in this domain. Interestingly enough, science seems to be an area that has been undergoing a kind of paradigm shift. This is evident by the way that science has begun to embrace theories of interconnectedness such as quantum physics. According to Suzi Gablik (1995) in her

book *Conversations Before the End of Time*, the shift in thinking that is becoming apparent in science has yet to penetrate the way we think about art. It may be fruitful to look at some of the reasons why scientists have been able to move forward with a sense of hopefulness about the future, while artists have not. Richard Shusterman presents the perspective that "aesthetic subjectivism is really the flip side of scientific objectivism" (Gablik, p.157). He posits that art and science emerge from the same general logic of modernity, which is concerned with liberating the individual from the limits of tradition and nature. Shusterman goes on to draw a further connection between science and the arts, pointing out that both domains are tied into capitalism and its constant thirst for innovation. There is a pressure in both art and science to continually produce new products because the economy of capitalism depends on new products to consume. In my view, one of the reasons that scientists are proceeding with optimism is because they are so well rewarded for their new products and innovations in a way that artists clearly are not. This is apparent not just in monetary terms, but also in the amount of respect and social status that is bestowed on scientists. In some ways, scientists have been assigned the role of hero in our culture, as they are often perceived as being driven, self-sacrificing and visionary. Conversely, artists are more often than not, viewed as being lazy, self indulgent and unreliable. Even though many scientists must pursue their chosen career because they are passionate about it, no one expects that it should be reward enough in itself. Whereas with art, the commonly held view is that artists 'love' to do what they do, therefore, that is all the payment they should need. As well, new discoveries in art are not seen as a breakthrough in the way that we view new discoveries in science.

There are many examples of artists whose work is having a 'breakthrough' effect in their communities. In Vancouver, David Diamond of *Headlines Theatre* is known for using interactive theatre presentations to explore and find resolutions to political, social, and personal issues that have an impact people's everyday lives. Diamond invites members of the community to participate in what he calls *Theatre of the Living*. Some of the forums they have hosted are *Out of the Silence*, which explores family violence in First Nations' homes, and *The Gagged Voice*, which investigates the issues of racism and violence. They have also produced the play *Squeegee* that deals with the exploitation of youth. For *Squeegee*, actual street kids were employed as actors in the play, and some of them have continued to work in theatre as a result of the experience. The innovative work that Diamond is doing is a good example of how artists are partnering with non-artists to create positive social change in their communities. I discuss this work in Chapter Two.

What Has Lead to the Dead Blank in the Arts?

There is much that is written about the 'death of modernism', but it is important to keep in mind that modernism has not disappeared. On the contrary, modernist art is still very much a part of the contemporary mix. Art created in the modernist period is strongly tied in with the notion of individual expression. In the modernist period, artists tended to reject the traditions that came before them, as they sought new approaches to art making. Modernism placed emphasis on innovation, originality and autonomy. Art at this time became highly individualistic, and not only was there little consensus among modernist artists to what style should predominate, there was also little consensus to what role art should play in society. By not having to adhere to convention, artists

seemed to have unlimited choices in what art they wanted to make. While some artists like Kathe Kollwitz, created art with strong political content, other artists such as Jackson Pollock, chose to focus more exclusively on aesthetics. Even though artists were working in a variety of ways, society came to view the artist as being 'a solitary genius'. Jackson Pollock typified this view, and even today, many people think that artists such as Pollock represent what it means to be an artist in our culture.

It is interesting to note that modernism actually emerged as a means to resist capitalism and materialism. According to Kandinsky, "The phrase 'art for art's sake' was in fact a protest against materialism" (Gablik, 1984, p.21). Through rejecting the values of capitalism, artists believed they were preserving the spiritual purity of art. Mark Rothko the well-known colour field painter is an example of an artist who sought a transcendental quality in his work. Rothko states, "The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you say you are moved only by the colour relationships, then you miss the point!" (Hunter/Jaobus, 1992, p.277).

As honourable as the early modernist's intentions were, there have been serious consequences to this stance. For, by rejecting society because of materialism, early modernists also rejected the artistic traditions that had come before them. Set adrift from tradition, art began to lose its moral and spiritual authority. However, early modernists still reaped the benefits of tradition, because without it they would have had nothing to resist, and movements such as the avant-garde would not have been possible. In some ways it seems ironic that the identity of early modernists was based on rejecting capitalism, because by the 1960's and 70's, many artists had become complicit with commodity culture. This is evident in the Pop Art Movement, which was

made up of artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselmann. These artists explored everyday images that were part of the contemporary consumer culture. Andy Warhol's piece *Green Coca Cola Bottles* (1962) illustrates the merging of mass culture with aesthetics. The large canvas is a lifelike painting of two hundred and ten green *Coca Cola* bottles. Works such as these were meant to allow the viewer to respond to the piece directly without the influence of the artist's personality. Even though these pieces were intended to be an ironic comment on our consumer society, viewers often took them at face value. In this way art began to merge with advertising.

In my estimation, one of the most serious consequences of this move away from tradition, is that long-established skills and knowledge were not passed on to future generations of artists. This is due in part to the fact that there was no consensus among modernists of what that style could be. Until the modern period, knowledge, skills and style were passed from one generation of artists to another, and it was up to the new generation of artists to embrace or adapt these conventions. In my view, this is one of the most devastating outcomes of the modernist period; the fact that we are now left in the uneasy position of having to redefine and justify the practice of art making.

Unmentored and untutored, young artists today are left on their own to map out their own artistic pathways, often in the absence of skill and knowledge. Many art schools today do not even offer subjects like figure drawing as part of their core curriculum.

During my own art training in the nineties, I was very much discouraged from doing traditional painting, and was even told by one of my instructors that "Painting, as an art form is dead".

In our current era, there are no clear guidelines of what it means to be an artist in our society. The only measure we have of what constitutes a 'successful' artist is

whether their art sells and for how much, and we have no substantive idea why some art sells and some does not. Generally, we value art not for its intrinsic value but it's instrumental value. We do not ask what the artist is contributing *to* our culture; we only ask how much money they are making *from* the culture. It is left up to individual artists to rebuild bridges to past traditions. Ironically, artists who are revisiting traditions such as realism are seen as being radical. Not surprisingly, this move away from tradition has had far reaching effects on how students are being educated in the arts, namely students are not being given a 'background of meaning' that allows them to link up with previous concepts of knowledge. I will discuss what this loss means from an educational perspective in Chapter Five.

The Collapse of Object Based Art

In my view, one of the most positive things that could fill the space left by late modernism is a renewed belief in the transformative power of the arts. In my career as an artist I am aware of a certain amount of skepticism surrounding the idea of using art as a tool for social change. This cynicism is not exclusive to non-artists; it is also present in some extent in the artistic community. It becomes clear that before we can expect our culture to believe that art can act as an agent for change, more artists need to embrace this notion first.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when some artists began to lose faith in the power of art. In retrospect, the seed of this cynicism may have taken root in the 1930's when Marcel Duchamp put forward the belief that "artists' intentions were enough" (Gablik, 1984, 56). Duchamp demonstrated this statement by overturning a common latrine and calling it art. What began as a gesture filled with conviction, eventually led to the

somewhat arrogant stance taken by artists in the sixties and seventies of 'if I say it is art, it is art'. In my view, this almost god like power of artists to decide what is and isn't art, is a result of artists believing they no longer had to adhere to a traditional way of perceiving art. For because artists no longer believed in the hierarchy of the Old Masters, they adopted the philosophy that aesthetic value can be based on a purely subjective point of view. Consequently, free to create anything and call it art, artists lost their spiritual and social moorings. What began as a burning involvement of artists in the future of their societies had subsided by the mid-seventies. There was a strong impression among many artists that art was becoming something of a fraud. The rest of the culture quickly agreed with this perspective, especially since they increasingly felt that they were part of a joke they didn't understand.

The public was justified in their anger at being excluded, as a great deal of art produced at this time was not intended for them. As often as not, art pieces were created in response to other art objects and movements. An example of this is Allen McCollum's 1983 piece, *Plaster Surrogates*. McCollum crowded the walls of a large New York gallery with hundreds of Surrogates, "small plaster stand-ins for monochromatic paintings, that varied only in their dimensions, and sometimes the colour of their absolutely blank pictures" (Hunter/ Jacobus, 1992, p.415). This work relied on a theory-based subtext that non-artists couldn't possibly reference. Understandably, the public felt hostility and suspicion towards art objects that seemed to have no connection to them or their lives. Gablik uses the term "anxious object" (1984, p.36) to describe the kind of art work that makes the viewer uneasy because of the uncertainty as to whether they are in the presence of a genuine work of art or not. Originally artists such as Duchamp used these kinds of objects, also known as 'ready-mades' to shake up

people's assumptions about what could or couldn't constitute art. However, in my view, the function of 'anxious objects' has moved past the point of serving their original purpose, and now seems to only serve the purpose of alienating the public even further from art.

Currently there are many examples of how art has been reduced to a mere 'thing' that is detached from the world it exists in. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is in 1998, when the National Gallery of Canada purchased the controversial painting *Voice of Fire* from the American artist Barnett Newman. The Canadian public was not happy over the 2.2 million dollar purchase. There was a lot of coverage in the media, reporting how upset the average Canadian was that their tax dollars were being spent on a painting they felt had no connection to them. The fact that the National Gallery felt little responsibility, fiscally or otherwise to the public is a prime example of how this kind of art is cut off from the emotional and everyday life of non-artists. In my view, *Voice of Fire* does have merit, and it is a shame that the National Gallery did not see the controversy over the piece as an opportunity to inform and educate the public. The polarized thinking of 'us' and 'them' on the part of publicly funded institutions only further entrenches the thinking that art is for an elite few who are bright and talented enough to 'get it'.

The media plays a significant role in distancing the public from controversial works of art, by portraying some art works as 'anxious objects'. An example of this is the piece, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* by Jana Sterbak. Sterbak also received funding from the Federal government, and like *Voice of Fire*, there was a great deal of controversy surrounding it. *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* was comprised of two dresses made from fifty pounds of flank steak. The 'meat dresses'

were put on display to decompose over time during their exhibition. The piece is a social commentary on our culture's preoccupation with glamour, beauty, fashion, food, and the notion of 'women as consumption'. I think it is important to note, that the artist provided context for the work, and for people who actually saw the piece, there was no doubt that the installation held political and social meaning. The press sensationalized elements of the work, while failing to communicate the appropriate context. Consequently, there was a great deal of controversy in the media about the value of art.

In our current era, we increasingly see that many of our high profile art objects are viewed as commodities without meaning or social significance. An example of this is Picasso's painting, *Garçon a la Pipe*, which recently sold for \$104,168,000 U.S. This is an example of how artworks can become separated off from their original meaning and context, to become objects valued primarily for their monetary value. In many ways the 'art market' is not unlike the stock market. The artwork's relation to social meaning seems to be diminished in almost direct proportion to their value in relation to the market. We also see the opposite, as with artworks that are political documents with little spiritual or aesthetic value. It would seem that we are at a crossroads with how to proceed with institutionalized art. Some museums are making an effort to include groups previously marginalized by the Western Canon. The 1993 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art held an exhibit which was hailed as the first multicultural and political Biennial in which racial and ethnic minorities were given reign to speak for themselves. In Leo Castelli's article, "Farewell to Modernism", the well-known art dealer describes the Biennial exhibition as a "sea change" (Gablik, 1995, p.461) in the art world because, to his mind, it signalled the beginning of a strong shift away from the autonomous art of modernism to a more socially conscious art.

We have seen examples of this on a local level as well; in the late nineties, the Vancouver Art Gallery held the exhibit *Topographies* in which artists such as Jin Me Yoon and First Nations' artist Teresa Marshall were exhibited. Many of these works dealt with issues of diaspora and 'otherness', topics not typically explored in the museum context. Since that show, the VAG has continued to exhibit artists whose voices have been traditionally positioned outside of the Western Canon. The art works of Yuxwelupton, a First Nations' artist have been hung alongside of Emily Carr's paintings, raising the question, "Who should speak for First Nations' people?" These examples illustrate how institutions such as museums are beginning to respond to what is happening socially and politically in our communities. In my opinion, exhibits such as *Topographies* signal a departure because they are opening spaces for dialogue between the institution and the community, instead of a didactic monologue on the part of the museum. We are beginning to see an attempt on the part of institutions to listen and to tentatively let in artists typically seen as being on the 'outside'. This could be a hopeful sign that art is beginning to leak back into the larger community. It may even be possible that through empathetic listening and opening up spaces for new conversations to take place, museums could become a type of 'sacred space'. Instead of containing and suffocating art, museums could be a type of cultural blood bank ready to infuse the public's bloodstream with meaningful art. I know this is somewhat idealistic, but it is part of imagining new realities.

I believe strongly that it is possible to create art that can serve to unify rather than alienate. This new aesthetic depends on the artist's connecting to a social and spiritual horizon larger than his or her highly individualized point of view. Artists who take the time to listen to and collaborate with the community are providing spaces to build the

“horizons of significance” (1991, p.4) that Taylor speaks of. I will discuss this more at length in Chapter Two.

In my view, it is imperative that the artist includes both *praxis* and *poesis*, in their practice while striving toward a balance between the two. In order to achieve this balance, artists need to focus on the intangible relationship between themselves and larger community, as well as the object created. This new model of working calls on the artist to have the confidence to present a different version of what constitutes a ‘successful artist’. It is interesting that the first question most artists are asked is “have you ever sold anything?” If the answer is “yes” then the artist is validated as being a ‘real’ artist, and if the answer is “no” then the artist is seen as having no worth. I feel it is vital that artists display the confidence to offer more than one model of what it means to be an artist in our culture. For ideally, it should be the artist, not the public who defines what it means to have value as an artist.

Filling in the Blank

In our present era, it seems that we are left with the uneasy tension of not really knowing what will fill in the blank left by late modernism. The simple answer is postmodernism, but postmodernism is not a simple concept. Postmodernism brings with it a shift away from the idea there can be only ‘one truth’ and brings with it the concept of ‘pluralism’; the belief that art is a social product that can elicit multiple meanings or interpretations. In contrast to modernist philosophy, postmodernist thinking proposes that there are a ‘multitude of truths’, which are equal in value and are based on subjective opinions. The thinking that there is no ‘universal truth’ and that culture is not subject to development and improvement radically challenges the very notion of Western

Art. For if we no longer believe that society can be ethically advanced, what do we believe? The confusion and uncertainty attached to no longer believing that there is 'one essential truth' opens up potential spaces for new definitions of art. Postmodernism offers both opportunities and challenges for artists because it brings with it the freedom to re-define art's purpose in our culture. With the loss of the old hierarchy of meanings, comes the choice to either further diminish or reconstruct our sacred spaces.

According to Gablik, there are two strands of postmodernism, a deconstructive and a reconstructive version. The deconstructive strand of postmodernism is grounded in the concepts of mimicry, imitation, recycling of previous aesthetic styles, appropriation of someone else's work as one's own, simulation, camouflage and counterfeiting. In stark contrast to the deep-rooted cynicism of deconstructive postmodernism, reconstructive postmodernism is based on the aesthetics of interconnectedness, social responsibility and ecological attunement.

The deconstructive strand of postmodernism initially emerged as a form of resistance against modernism's relentless thirst for innovation and originality. By refusing the notion of originality, certain artists created a movement referred to as 'rear-guard' or 'hovering'. Peter Halley describes this movement as "not only the rejection of revolution, but also a deconstruction of the very idea of revolution" (Gablik, 1991 p.18). By repeating and appropriating images created by other artists, and calling them their own, these artists are refusing the modernist notion of novelty. Artists such as Sherrie Levine illustrate this way of working. Levine re-photographed the work of Edward Weston and Walker Evans and called it her own work. Levine defends her work by saying it is about the "uneasy death of modernism" (Gablik, p.16); it only has meaning in relation to someone else's work.

Deconstructive postmodernism appears to be the opposite of the avant-garde, for it is grounded in the *negation* of progress and its purpose seems to be about having no purpose. This strand of postmodernism is also about the alliance between capitalism and art. As a consequence of this alliance, art is valued primarily in terms of its worth as a commodity. Our culture has been quick to embrace the notion of deconstructionist postmodernism. Nowhere is this clearer than in the world of advertising where the boundary between commercialism and art is blurred. Artists, who have adopted the deconstructive postmodernism stance, subscribe to the belief that there is no escaping our capitalistic system and the art can only act as a subversive element within it. An example of an artist working this way is Barbara Kruger. Kruger is an artist who employs graphic media styles to critique and disrupt our heavily mediated culture. Her work addresses the cultural representations of power, identity and sexuality. Her well-known piece, *I Shop Therefore I Am* uses the conventions of glamour photography to make a bold statement about our consumer society. Kruger states, "I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't" (Kruger, 2004, p.1).

At the very heart of deconstructive postmodernism is a sense of fatalism. This in turn breeds the attitude that there is no point in trying to change the world, because change is impossible. This strand of postmodernism appears to be stuck in neutral, as it refuses to offer tangible goals, direction, position or a future of art beyond deconstructionism. Even though I agree with Gablik, that our culture urgently needs the uplifting energy of reconstructive postmodernism, I feel that the deconstructive strand also has something to offer us. In my estimation, one of the most worthwhile effects deconstructive postmodernism offers is the critical tools that are necessary in order to

read and make sense of our heavily meditated culture. I feel that this is especially valuable in terms of art education. I will discuss this at more length in Chapter Five.

At the core of reconstructive postmodernism is the belief that individuals *can* make a difference, not just in terms of their own lives, but also in terms of the larger social and spiritual order. I agree with Gablik, that artists can be a positive force in transforming the paradigm of estrangement that has pervaded our culture, and that being an artist and working for social change do not have to be at odds. I believe that the re-awakening of hope may be linked to serving something larger than our individual desires. By becoming active agents in our culture, artists may be able to reactivate the sense of hope that has been missing in recent decades. In the words of Joseph Beuys, it may be by “making our secrets productive” (Tisdalle, 1998, p.104) that artists will be able to recover their sense of hope, along with their place in the social order.

In direct contrast to deconstructive postmodernism, reconstructive postmodernism views the ‘dead blank’ of the arts as a space that could be used to recover our lost sense of divinity, myth, and vision. Reconstructionists believe that the collapse of the ‘grand narrative’ doesn’t have to necessarily signal the death of meaningful art, but rather, it can offer openings for new stories to be told. The flip side of ‘nothing has value’ is the conviction that ‘everything has value’. In reconstructionist terms, the flattening of the old hierarchy means that voices previously outside of the Western Canon can learn to speak for themselves and be taken seriously. In a sense, the dead blank could be the ground on which to re-build sacred structures.

In many ways, ‘the dead blank of the arts’ described by Fuller, still seems to be ‘up for grabs’. In my view, late modernism will continue to linger until a more compelling version comes along. It is interesting that neither the reconstructionist or

deconstructionist strands of postmodernism have been able to completely banish the lasting residue of late modernism. There may be a few reasons for this; the deconstructive strand of postmodernism can never really fill in the blank left by modernism, because a position based on non-commitment ultimately holds no weight. It follows then, that the deconstructionist strand simply doesn't have enough substance to fill this space. I believe that the reconstructive strand of postmodernism has more potential to fill the space left behind by modernism, but realistically, I don't believe it can garner enough support in our capitalistic society. The 'new aesthetics' is often met with resistance and hostility. The art critic Hilton Kramer voices an example of this thinking, when he states "art is incapable of solving any problems other than aesthetic ones" (Gablik, 1995, p.108). Kramer is hardly alone in his judgment, for many critics and the public alike, view any 'politicization' of art as a reason to categorically dismiss it as art.

The split between the two strands is at the heart of why late modernism continues to linger. A healthy integration of the two strands may be part of the solution. For in my estimation, there needs to be a balance between the cynicism of deconstructive and the optimism of reconstructive threads of postmodernism. True integration is very difficult though, because the two strands are not viewed as equal in our culture. As a society, we tend to see the deconstructive strand as being 'high art' that is sanctioned by institutions, and the reconstructive strand as being 'low art' that is practiced by artists who have a compromised sense of aesthetic. I strongly disagree with this point of view and would argue that reconstructive postmodernism can have a highly developed sense of aesthetic. In my view the reconstructive strand of postmodernism is a hard sell, primarily because at the heart of it is a sense of hopefulness and our society is inherently mistrustful of anything that is based on

something as irrational as faith. How then can the reconstructive strand be viewed as being viable?

Just as artists are partnering with non-artists to create fresh approaches to art, it may be possible for artists to effectively weave the deconstructive strand with the reconstructive strands of postmodernism. For I believe that only through the two strands of postmodernism joining together to become something larger, will there be a movement substantial enough to fill in the blank left by late modernism. The idea of believing in something that is not based on instrumental reasoning is an uncomfortable concept for both artists and non-artists alike. In order for true integration to occur though, there needs to be more balance between the two stands. This is why, in my view, it is so important for artists who *do* believe in the reconstructive interpretation of postmodernism to *act* on it, and in a sense become 'practical visionaries'. For it is only through visible, tangible acts in the world, that we can build on the belief that art can be used as a tool to transform our culture of apathy into a vibrant, participatory society.

CHAPTER TWO: USING ART TO BUILD COMMUNITY

To search for the good and make it matter: this is the real challenge for the artist. Not simply to transform ideas or revelations into matter, but to make those revelations actually matter. (Estella Conwill Majozo, Majozo, 1995, p.88)

Introduction

I believe as Taylor does, that “each of us has an original way of being human” (1991, p.61). Taylor points out that this authentic self cannot be formed in isolation; it can only be formed in dialogue with others. This chapter will look at how art can be used to express individual points of view, as well as act as a vehicle to voice shared values. This chapter will explore the following questions, “In what ways can art be used to build community?” And “How does this way of making art affect how we view the role of the artist, audience and aesthetics in our culture?”

Unloading the Myth of the ‘Solitary Genius’

Perhaps one of the most positive implications of reconstructive postmodernism is that artists from previously marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities and members of the gay community are using the arts as a tool for social change. These groups, traditionally seen as being outside of the ‘grand narrative’ of Western Art, are beginning to claim their place in the canon. One of the most crucial ways that artists who advocate social responsibility are asserting their presence is through their committed relationship to the public or community. This ‘new breed’ of artists resists the

idea that art should be created separate from the culture that we live in. Increasingly, artists are subscribing to the philosophy, that 'it is not enough to just make art'. There is a growing conviction among some artists, that art can be used to not only communicate our deepest beliefs, but can also be used as a tool for social transformation within our culture. In her book, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Suzanne Lacy states "increasingly more and more artists are unloading the myth of the 'artist as solitary genius" (1995, p.40). This view is a challenge to the long-standing perception that an artist's work is 'created in solitude and stands outside of society and is responsible to no one'. This perspective is summarized well by the painter George Baselitz, "the artist is not responsible to anyone. His social role is asocial; his only responsibility consists in an attitude to the work he does. There is no communication with any public whatsoever" (Gablick, 1984, p. 77). Just as the limits of 'objective science' are becoming more obvious, we are also beginning to see how the reductive effects of thinking that 'art is only for art's sake' have dramatically removed art from 'real life' and the very real needs of society.

Art Outside the Museum: New Genre Public Art

On a local level, there are a number of artists collaborating with members of the community, in order to create art projects that deal with social and political issues. People such as David Diamond of *Headlines Theatre*, Jil P. Weaving, Pat Beaton, and Haruko Onuko are just some of the artists who have been successfully collaborating with non-artists in their community. Their work deals with subjects that hold relevance and meaning for the community, issues like racism, the environment, and poverty.

These 'works' are neither exclusively political, nor exclusively art based, but rather 'work' that have emerged through the artist's collaboration with their audience or community.

Community based public art is often referred to as New Genre Public Art (NGPA). It is identified with the label 'new genre' in order to distinguish it from 'public art'. Traditionally, public art has been monument based, and often amounts to little more than moving 'museum art' into public spaces. Suzanne Lacy, one of the pioneers of this new form, describes it as, "visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives - it is based on *engagement*" (p.33). NGPA uses a wide range of media and form, which includes murals, 'performance art', interactive multi-media practices, print based material and ceramics. Even though Lacy describes NGPA as being visual, it is important to note that artists from a wide range of disciplines including theatre, dance, and music have adopted this form as a way of producing more socially responsible art. Place plays a key role, whether the piece is based in a small local neighborhood or enacted throughout the world. This way of working is different from the 'site-specific' pieces that emerged in the late sixties. Those pieces were very much shaped by the individual artist, and then inserted into a community. The intention of artists working with NGPA is to create works that emerge from the concerns of the specific communities and place.

Changing Role of the Audience

One of the most crucial components in this way of working is the artist's *engagement* with his or her audience. Artists working in the field of NGPA are addressing a different audience than the traditional museum going audience, as their art

is being made for non-art audiences rather than institutions. Suzanne Lacy describes the role of audience in the following ways.

“The audience may originate or be responsible for the work, they may co-develop or collaborate with the artist, or they may be volunteers or performers. But even if they are ‘only’ attending, they will most likely be more deeply engaged than the conventional audience, because of their relationship to the issues, community and the artist” (1995, p.21).

What stands out in Lacy’s description of audience is that the public is making the shift from being a *passive spectator* to being an *active participant*.

This new relationship with the audience places the artist in a more integrated role with society. Often artists have the audience in mind when they are conceiving their piece, and audience participation both forms and informs the work. As well, this new role requires the artist to listen to, and take note of what members of the community are saying. In a sense, the artist has to be both a visionary and a citizen. The French writer, Albert Camus wrote, “ art is not a monologue. Contrary to the current presumption if there is any man who has no right to solitude it is the artist” (Gablick, 1991, p.77). Artists who choose to work in this way are taking this perspective to heart. NGPA requires that the artist play an innovative role in relationship to his audience. Rather than performing a monologue through his work, the artist is holding a dialogue with his intended community or audience. This way of working requires that the artist take risks by learning to focus on ‘listening’, rather ‘seeing’. In order to work this way, the artist must use ‘empathetic listening’ to form a relationship that is based on trust and respect. The idea that art can be used to build community by providing spaces for previously inarticulate voices to be heard is key.

As discussed in Chapter One, David Diamond, the artistic director of *Headlines Theatre*, utilizes theatre as a way to give audience members an 'active voice' in their community. Diamond's approach to theatre, which he refers to as *Theatre for the Living* is based on the work of Augusto Boal the author of *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Having trained with David Diamond, I know from personal experience that this innovative form of theatre is highly effective. It offers audience members an entertaining and engaging way to express their point of view about issues that affect them deeply. It also offers participants a means to form shared horizons of meaning, as people discover and define issues that are of common concern to them (Taylor, 1991).

In his essay, *Creating Community Based Dialogue* Diamond states,

"Artists have a central role to play globally today, because cultural work that originates in community expression is the very heart of dialogue-creation on local, regional and international levels" (2003, p.2). Diamond sees this work as being vital on a number of levels, as it facilitates transformation for the participant, the local community as well as our global community. This work can act as motivation for people to become more politically involved in their communities. An example of this is the series of pieces that *Headlines Theatre* is currently producing titled, *Practicing Democracy*. These interactive pieces ask Vancouver residents what they think should be done about the problems of increased panhandling, homelessness, and poverty. Based on the audience's recommendations, a legal consultant will create a report for Vancouver City Council. Council has agreed to read the report and use it in their policy deliberations.

Headlines Theatre has been criticized for using people not trained in acting to perform in theatrical productions. Diamond believes that non-actors are able to meet high theatrical standards because they are committed to the issues being explored on

stage. He states, "One reason group members engage so deeply and work so hard, is that they know the potential exists for real change. Those of us with leadership roles in these moments must do all we can do to help them make the best art possible under the circumstances" (2003, p.5). The work *Headlines Theatre* is doing illustrates how art can be utilized to encourage people to make the shift from being passive observers to being active participants in our culture.

The Changing Role of the Artist

For artists, one of the most demanding challenges in working this way is how to successfully collaborate with non-artists without losing aesthetic ground. One of the ways to overcome this challenge is for the artist to be articulate and instructive in their artistic point of view, so that along with requiring new art skills, non-artists are also being given an opportunity to raise their aesthetic awareness. In my view, it is vital that high standards of aesthetic quality not be sacrificed when working this way, for I believe that including non-artists in the work, does not have to mean a slackening or lessening of aesthetic standards.

As well as taking on the role of 'facilitator' or 'educator', artists who choose to work this way will most likely have to take on a range of duties that include learning new non-art skills. Some of these non-art skills are community organizing, writing grants, and fund raising. It is important that the artist wear the 'non-art skills' hat, because then they have to rely less on institutions to provide administrative guidance. In my view, one of the reasons artists have become somewhat ineffectual in our culture, is because they have relied too heavily on institutions to administer their projects. By developing these

'non art' skills, artists are increasing their ability to facilitate social change in their communities.

The *Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project* is an excellent example of an art project that has been successful in promoting both aesthetic awareness and a strong sense of community. Pat Beaton and Haruko Okano, two artists who are closely associated with the Grunt Gallery, coordinated this project. The aim of the project was to construct a fence to surround the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Gardens at Fraser and 8th Avenue in Vancouver. The cooperatively run garden has been in existence since 1988. It provides the opportunity for many apartment dwellers to grow their own food, flowers, and medicinal plants. The fence is a work of art, as each of the pickets is carved with a unique design created by members of the community.

Inspiration for the project came as a result of Beaton and Okano participating in a series of workshops given by Suzanne Lacy and Marla Guppy. The workshops sponsored by the Vancouver Parks Board, focused on how to use art as a means to foster community development. The project had three stages of development: design of individual pickets, construction of the pickets and installing the fence on the site. The first step of the project was to invite participation from members of the community. As the Mt. Pleasant area is made up of many new immigrants, the artists had their fliers translated into eight different languages. Workshops for the public were held free of charge at the Grunt Gallery (which is located in the neighbourhood). For many of the participants, it was their first time visiting a gallery. During the workshops, participants created personal symbols and images that were eventually carved along the tops of the pickets. There are diverse ranges of images, which include a family 'coat of arms', a fertility symbol, and a carving of a whale. Participants were made up of a diverse mix of

residents, including children, seniors and people with mental and physical handicaps. The project has become an integrated part of the community. Even though this project is not as overtly political as the work that *Headlines Theatre* is doing, it still serves to illustrate how art can be used to redefine our sense of self, along with our sense of community.

There are other examples of artists who are working in the field of NGPA. Jil P. Weaving has been working as a community artist for many years. Along with Pat Beaton and Spike McKinley, Weaving has facilitated the project *Banners on Broadway*. This project invites community members to create hand painted banners based on the themes of safety and community. The banners are displayed throughout the Broadway corridor. Besides 'beautifying' the neighbourhood, the process of making the banners also promotes strong social relationships in the community.

David Diamond, Haruko Okano and Jil P. Weaving illustrate how each artist has their own unique approach to collaborating with their community. Each of these artists shows the value of using art as a way to build community. The work they are doing holds merit, as it is providing opportunities for individuals to express their unique point of view in relationship with others in their community.

Whose Art Is It?

This way of working brings a distinct challenge for the artist, and that is the issue of 'authorship'. "Whose art is it?" is a question that is frequently asked. This way of working is not for all artists, as there inevitably comes a point when the artist has to let go of their private vision of the project, and allow it to be shaped by the community they are working with. For no matter how much the artist has planned and prepared the

project to move in a certain aesthetic direction, there will come a point when it will take its own course. The process of involving and engaging members of the community needs to be fluid and open-ended. If the artist resists the inevitable changes that will occur and evolve in the work, true collaboration cannot take place. Communication is crucial. There needs to be respectful listening on the part of the artist, but the artist must also not be afraid to share their artistic vision. One of the key benefits to this way of working is that the artist is able to share their knowledge of art and aesthetics with the non-artistic community. In this way, the aesthetic awareness and sensitivity of the whole community is enhanced and enriched. For in a sense, all artists are educators.

But Is It Art?

Critics of NGPA generally assert that art should only be used to solve aesthetic problems, not social or political problems. For more traditional artists and critics, it is hard for them to assign value to art that is based on relationships rather than objects. Many critics have refused to write about this form of art, dismissing it as 'low art'. Mary Jane Jacob outlines in her essay *An "Unfashionable Audience"*, the ways in which community public art offends the art world and its critics,

It's offences are its connectedness to the actual (not just the artifice); its practical function (not just aesthetic experience); its transitory or temporary nature (rather than permanence and collectibility); its public aims and issues as well as public location; its inclusiveness (reaching beyond the predefined museum going audience; and its involvement of others as active viewers, participants coauthors, or owners (1995, p.56).

Perhaps a key reason this new kind of art is so easily dismissed by critics is because of how it is 'framed'. Mary Jane Jacobs argues that critics are quick to discount

art outside the legitimizing frame of museums, because of our dependency on institutions to tell us what art is. Museums and galleries are anything but socially or politically neutral spaces; they are key to determining our definitions of art. If something appears in the context of a museum, we will usually accept that it as art, even though we may not like it. NGPA departs from the museum model because it generally takes place outside of traditional gallery spaces, and often it is not intended for the usual museum going audience. This brings up the notion of *who* is making art for *whom*. The act of taking art outside the sanctified walls of museum, and displaying it for a different kind of audience, challenges the modernist thinking that art is made by a specialized group of artists for an elite audience. This kind of art is not about making art for *art's* sake, it is about making art for *life's* sake.

The question of "But is it art?" is a highly loaded one, because if the answer is "No it is not art" (and that is usually the answer when this question is posed) it serves to dismiss the work. I feel strongly that works outside of the mainstream art world should be take seriously, but there is a danger in accepting everything as art. The question "Should art that carries a political or social message be evaluated in terms of its aesthetic worth?" needs to be asked. I would have to answer yes, for if art doesn't contain a developed aesthetic sense, it is exists on the political and social level only. However, I don't believe that the definition of what constitutes aesthetic value needs to be a narrow one. Even if we agree that aesthetic worth is based on the notion of beauty, it raises the question of *whose* notion of beauty? The concept of beauty does not have to be a limited one, as there can be more than one definition. A range of influences, including cultural and personal ones, can define our concept of beauty. Beauty can be as traditional as form and colour, or in can be perceived in more subtle ways that do not

depend solely on the disembodied eye. As Taylor states, "Beauty gives its own intrinsic fulfillment. Its goal is internal" (1991, p.64).

I believe that it is crucial for artists who are choosing to work in this genre to give a lot of care and attention to the aesthetic quality of their pieces. For in my view, it is unnecessary for works that carry worthwhile political and social messages to be rejected because of a perceived lack of aesthetic quality.

Having been an artist, a participant as well and an audience member, in a number of community art projects, I have witnessed first hand some of the challenges to working this way. To illustrate some of the challenges I am referring to, I will describe an experience I had as an audience member. A few years ago, the Vancouver Art Gallery invited Suzanne Lacy to come to Vancouver in order to create a collaborative piece with a group of teenage girls. Lacy met with the teens through a series of workshops, posing the question, "What does it mean to be a young female in our culture?" The piece was presented in a construction site in downtown Vancouver. The audience was guided through the site, while we listened to a twenty-minute recording of conversations that the participants had discussing the aforementioned topic. The participants were seated at tables in the construction site, and as we were quite a distance from them we couldn't hear what they were saying. I remember feeling very disappointed, because I had expected the work to be moving and engaging. Instead, I felt frustrated because I didn't feel included in the piece. The next day, there was a review in the Vancouver Sun Newspaper that described the piece, without giving any real feedback or criticism. This example serves to illustrate that there is a need for critical discourse in this area; because the genre is still so new it is inevitable that there will be areas that need improvement.

In my view, the work being done in the area of NGPA is of real worth to our culture, as it offers us ways to define and form unique identities in dialogue with other members of our community (Taylor, 1991). Therefore, I feel it is essential that this kind of art be taken seriously, and given considered criticism from 'art experts', as this art form is still very much in the experimental stages and needs to grow and develop critically.

CHAPTER THREE: RE-DRAWING THE LINE

And so each venture
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate.
(T. S. Eliot, Greene, 1995, p.59)

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most radical ways to restore 'sacred spaces' in our culture is to utilize art as a means to let in the sound of previously unarticulated voices. One of the keys to reinstating hope and belief in our culture may be to listen and respond to groups who have traditionally been marginalized, such as individuals who are cognitively challenged. In my view, one of the most significant aspects of involving individuals who are cognitively challenged in art activities is that it offers them the opportunity to learn a new form of communication. As humans, we possess a strong need for expression, that in turn communicates our innermost thoughts and feelings. It is an exciting possibility that art making could provide an alternate form of expression for individuals who are not able to articulate freely using language. This chapter will ask the questions "Can individuals who are cognitively challenged benefit by being given opportunities to participate in art making activities?" and if so "What are the implications for the individual who is cognitively challenged, our communities and our larger culture?"

Who Gets to Make Art?

There is a great deal that has been written about the connection between being highly creative and being intellectually gifted. However, there is substantially less material written on the connection between low intelligence, creativity and the benefits that could follow. Why is that? If as a culture we value creativity, why do we seem not to value creativity in persons with low intelligence? Perhaps it is because when we think of the stereotype of a highly creative person, we think of someone who is madly inventing and producing ideas and products that will enhance society as a whole. In short, the stereotype of a highly creative person is someone who is contributing to moving us all toward a more idealized view of society. In a sense, they are 'leading the way' so that the rest of us may follow. This stereotype may very well have some truth in it. However, what about individuals whose place is at the other end of the intellectual spectrum; can they contribute creatively as well?

Through my experience working with this group of individuals, I would have to respond that yes, this group does have something to offer. I agree strongly with Joseph Beuys that "creativity is the key to change and evolution and that it cannot be restricted to a narrow group of specialists called artists" (Borer, 1996, p.13). I believe as Beuys does, that there is creative potential in all human beings, but unless we are offered the appropriate skills, knowledge and rules and an environment to explore and expand upon them, we may never get an opportunity to experience and express that creativity. This viewpoint is especially crucial in relationship to individuals who are cognitively challenged, as they are the unlikeliest candidates to be given these opportunities. The implications of the thinking that 'everyone has the potential to be creative' are far

reaching, because “unarticulated creativity can lead to apathy and boredom” (Beuys, 1994, p.151). I feel that this is particularly relevant to the group I am focusing on, for traditionally, individuals with low IQ are seen as being helpless, passive and having little to contribute to our culture.

Before these questions can be fully explored, the term ‘low intelligence’ needs to be defined. The American Association on Mental Retardation defines mental retardation or mental handicap as “intelligence test performance two or more standard deviations below the mean, accompanied by limitations in adaptive functioning” (Zigler, 2000, p.1414). In general, less than normal intelligence is an IQ of 70 or less. For the purpose of this chapter I will be focusing on adolescents with developmental disabilities with an IQ between 50 and 70. This group is generally labeled ‘mildly mentally handicapped’.

I have chosen to focus on this group for a number of reasons. The foremost reason is that I have worked extensively on a range of art activities and projects in both segregated and integrated settings that involve adults, youth and children who are labeled as being mildly mentally handicapped. These individuals have generally been given this diagnosis because they either have Down Syndrome or mild brain damage. An additional reason I am focusing on this group, is because in general, they have restricted expressive and receptive language abilities. This in turn affects their ability to process information, as well as articulate their experiences. These factors are significant, because it is primarily through the use of language that we are able to participate in our culture. To this end, I will examine the possibility that art making could act as a conduit for communicating; that it could in fact become a type of language when verbal and written communication is impaired. In this way art could act as a tool to give expression to previously unspoken perspectives; perspectives that I believe have value.

Art as Communication

By providing an alternate language of art making, there may be a way to break silences. But what is the value of breaking silences, of speaking through art? The benefits to the person who has been silent are that they now have voice; they are able to communicate a deeper sense of who they are. They may be able to use art as a way of both giving meaning to, and making sense of the world around them. As well, participating in art activities and thereby increasing knowledge of art contributes to an increased aesthetic sense, which enhances both how one perceives their world and how one is perceived by others.

Claire Golomb (2002) proposes in her book, *Child Art in Context, A Cultural Comparative Perspective*, that “linguistic skills and art making skills may be independent of one another” (p.137). Golomb carried out a study that examined drawing and copying skills of nine children with autism, eight with mental handicaps and matched them for mental age on five drawing and copying tasks. The tasks were administered over eight consecutive sessions yielding twenty drawings and sixteen copies per child. The findings of the study were that the drawings and copies were on par with their non-disabled counterparts and in some cases were even ahead. What the findings from this study seem to suggest is that art-making skills could develop along a path that is independent of general IQ.

Like Golomb, Gardner makes the point that skills in musical and visual tasks could be at least partially disassociated from linguistic skills. Gardner proposes that like language, the arts contain a unique symbol system, which can be organized to communicate sense and meaning. As Gardner states in *Art, Mind and Brain*,

The arts are integrally and uniquely involved with symbol systems- with the manipulation and understanding of various sounds, lines, colours, shapes, objects, forms, patterns- all of which have the potential to refer, to exemplify, or to express some aspect of the world. (1982, p.211)

The idea that the arts could act as a type of language having their own effective voice holds exciting possibilities for individuals who struggle with verbal and written communication. Gardner goes on to suggest, "such shared capacities might be marshaled to aid individuals communicating with other persons" (p. 216). I would offer that akin to learning a language, participation in art activities can increase the individual's ability to make logical, orderly, abstract, subtle and humorous sense of the world. It could be that by becoming more proficient in the language of art and art making, individuals with low IQ are better able to communicate and co-exist with people of diverse IQ. Art making activities could offer an opportunity for true integration to take place, as participants have the opportunity to participate and contribute to their culture in a more equitable manner.

Inclusion Through the Arts

In my view, one of the most positive aspects of the arts is that they offer a wide range of entry points, which in turn makes this domain more accessible for individuals with diverse needs and abilities. Through participation in art activities, individuals can be engaged on a number of levels; which include the cognitive, sensory, physical and emotional aspects of the individual. Once engaged, the individual can begin to move between levels of understanding. These levels of understanding can eventually form a basis of knowledge and experience that can be expanded upon. Along with providing an alternate form of language I believe that the arts can also provide tools for changing

perceptions. Maxine Greene states in *Releasing the Imagination*, "participatory encounters with particular works may demand as much cognitive rigor and analysis as they do affective response" (1995, p.27). I concur with Greene that the arts can provide a forum for both problem solving and problem finding. In my view, the arts are an ideal forum for individuals with low IQ to build their perceptual skills.

In his essay *Towards a Theory of Creativity*, Carl Rogers describes creativity as "the emergence in action of a novel relational product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, peoples, or circumstances of his life on the other" (1976, p.297). Rogers gives us three conditions that he feels are necessary in order for creativity to occur. His first condition for creativity is "openness to experience" (p.299). Rogers describes this condition as the ability to be open to the moment without displaying defensiveness. In my view, art activities offer the perfect opportunity to become more open because by its very nature art is less rigid than other domains. There is no clear right or wrong, winner or loser. This can be very freeing for the individual who is used to failing. However, there are definitely rules, skills and knowledge that need to be imparted for creativity to occur, but if an open environment is established the participant will be less defensive about learning these skills.

Participation in art activities promotes what Rogers describes as "a tolerance for ambiguity" (1976, p.300). Individuals who are cognitively challenged often exhibit less than flexible thinking towards their environment, which may be accounted for by the need to order the world in a structure that is easy to follow and understand. The ability to perceive many possibilities without having to decide which one is right, promotes flexibility of thinking that can be transferred into areas outside of art activities. The ability to accept conflict and even enjoy the uncertainty of the moment encourages the

participant to take risks both with their thinking and their body. The decrease of fear and anxiety contributes to a sense of well-being that eventually translates into increased self-confidence. Increased self-confidence is especially relevant to individuals with low IQ, as they often have decreased academic and social standing.

I agree with Rogers that the advantage of 'being in the moment' is that one cannot stand back and become defensive. The experience of tolerating a certain amount of uncertainty is especially advantageous to individuals with low IQ, because often these individuals are less comfortable with changes to routine. Art activities that offer students the opportunity to become absorbed in the 'flow' may increase the student's ability to concentrate. As well, the ability to tolerate ambiguity may increase the individual's capacity to adapt to new and stressful environments and situations outside of the art realm.

Roger's second condition is an "internal locus of evaluation" (p.300). The shift to basing your judgment on what *you* think rather than what you think others think of you is subtle yet crucial. I would argue that art is one of the few activities that can facilitate this shift from outer to inner evaluation. In this way, the world is less of a mirror and one can begin to form an identity that is not so dependant on our consumer culture. In order for this shift to occur, creative process and product must work together. Process is vital because it offers the individual the opportunity to learn the skills, rules and knowledge that are necessary in order to create a product that he can look upon and feel a sense of accomplishment. The shift from external to internal evaluation has implications far beyond participating in creative art activities. The ability to make choices and decisions for oneself is especially important for this group as they often fall into the category of

'followers'. By developing a stronger sense of self, these individuals are more likely to develop a sense of agency and the capacity to lead.

It may seem ironic, but I believe that this 'internal shift' in evaluation comes about through outside stimuli. As with all students, individuals who are cognitively challenged need to be exposed to traditions and history of art. In this way, students can develop a vocabulary and appreciation of art while learning about and engaging in the domains of their culture (Gardner, 1993). Through exposure to traditions of art, these individuals are better able to develop a critical eye that they can use to evaluate their own and other's art processes. It is important that these students be brought into the 'know', for in this way, they can be given the opportunity to become creative contributors. There exists an assumption that students who are cognitively challenged cannot grasp aesthetic and artistic concepts, when in fact I believe that they may benefit the most because these concepts can offer them another way of communicating and making sense of the world. There are challenges of course, one of which is to design activities that are both accessible and challenging.

The third condition for creativity that Roger's outline is "the ability to toy with elements and concepts" (1976, p.301). As with the first two conditions, I believe that art activities offer an ideal opportunity for participants to play spontaneously with disparate ideas and concepts. Koestler describes this process as the "bisociation of unconnected matrices" which is essentially "a coming together of two realms of thought that had previously been considered incompatible" (Bailin, 1994, p.65). Drama games in particular, provide a forum for making unlikely connections and relationships. However, all of the arts invite this playful approach. In painting there is the juxtaposition of shapes, colours and textures. In dance there is the chance to experiment with unlikely

relationships, such as, “tiptoeing loudly” or “running slowly”. There is also the element of humour that emerges from these unlikely connections. I feel it is essential that we do not under challenge these students by our assumption that they are not capable of more sophisticated thought. In my own experience, I have observed students with very low IQ not only ‘get’ the humour that arises from incongruous combinations, but go on to create their own absurd relationships.

I concur with Rogers that these conditions are necessary in order for creativity to occur. I would however, like to offer a further condition, and that is an attitude of openness on the part of the educator facilitating the activities. All too often as educators, we have expectations that can act as a defense line against the openness that Rogers describes. Sometimes this comes from concentrating too much on the final product, which may be a fixed idea that we have in our minds. This rigidity on our part can prevent the students from making their own discoveries and truly possessing an ‘internal locus of evaluation’. We have to be careful that we don’t insert our internal locus of evaluation onto our students, but that we encourage students to build and monitor their own sense of aesthetic judgment and preferences.

Interdisciplinary Art

I would agree with Gardner that, “creative processes and lives require a combination of disciplines and perspectives” (1993, p.307). I would suggest that interdisciplinary art activities are an ideal vehicle to explore these ‘combinations’. I have found it both exciting and provocative to use an interdisciplinary approach to the arts when working with students who are cognitively challenged, as it is particularly useful for these individuals to see concretely how different ideas are linked. This is one of the

reasons why Gardner's work on multiple intelligences is important in relation to these students and that is because the polygenic view of intelligence is more inclusive.

To illustrate how using an interdisciplinary approach to art activities relates to Gardner's multiple intelligences I will describe an activity I facilitated with a group of adolescents with developmental disabilities. This particular activity was part of a larger unit that focused on an exploration of the emotions through visual art, dance, drama, and music. The initial emotion we explored was 'sadness'. The first step in the investigation was to identify where sadness resides in the body, and for this step we used a sound and movement activity. The participants then used drawing to record their movement paths, as well as the sounds and words that emerged from the improvisation. We proceeded to look at the drawings and talk about what was experienced during the activities. In the next part of the activity participants chose a piece of music that signified 'sadness' to them. From there, students worked in small groups to create a piece that used the skills of movement and mime to enact a scene that held the essence of this emotion for them. Students once again drew images of what they had enacted and then talked about their own experience as well as discussing what they had seen the others perform. The next step was to paint an image that related to this theme. For this part they needed to decide on what shapes and colours represented this concept (students were also encouraged to include words as part of their image). After painting, participants were asked to write about the concept. The writing could be as simple as a few words or as complex as a whole story. During these activities participants were engaged in linguistic, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and musical intelligences. The pieces that grew out of this project were very rich and contained the elements of uniqueness, discovery, imagination, creative process and creative product.

Through using an interdisciplinary approach in art, a number of worthwhile things can take place. First, these activities encouraged the participant to make choices and undertake a process of selection. This process of selection is central, because through evaluating and choosing, the individual is developing their ability to think critically about their own work and the work of others. There are, however, some drawbacks to an interdisciplinary approach to art making. One of the most noticeable disadvantages to exploring the arts through an interdisciplinary approach is that the instruction of the individual art forms can become diluted. The danger is that concepts may be explored in a very surface way and the participants may not receive the skills and knowledge that they need to go into any kind of depth with the subject matter. The risk from an educational point of view is that participants may be given the illusion that they have acquired specific knowledge, when in reality they have not. Therefore, I believe as Gardner does that the interdisciplinary approach to art making is very useful, but it might be most valuable as an approach that offers an introduction to more in depth exploration, or an approach that alternates with more in depth exploration. For ideally, skills should be developed to a high enough degree so that the creative process can move towards creating observable product that holds merit both for the individual and their larger community.

Skills, Knowledge and Rules

If we see art making as holding the possibility of providing an alternate form of communication for individuals who are cognitively challenged, how do we impart this new set of symbols? Perhaps one of the most vital things we can do is to give these students the tools, which will link them up with traditions of art and art making. I feel it is

important that this group is offered skills and knowledge, because they are the least likely to take the initiative to learn and experiment with skills on their own. It is especially vital to give these students the opportunity to acquire pertinent skills, knowledge and rules, for as Gardner states, "it is certainly possible that effective training methods might allow even individuals with relatively modest initial endowments to attain very high levels of accomplishment" (1982, p.302).

In my estimation, it is too easy to under challenge individuals with low IQ by making the assumption that they can't acquire the needed skills, for they are the group that stands to benefit the most from learning a new form of communication. In some ways these students are at an advantage, as they are often more tolerant of the familiar than students with higher IQ. Therefore they often display more patience and are more able to spend extended periods of time in order to learn new skills. In my experience, I have observed that time is a key element in teaching skills. A relaxed atmosphere also contributes to learning, as does an attitude that recognizes and rewards small progressions.

One of the essential components of creating an environment that fosters creativity is the role of the educator. The educator can serve as both a role model and an inspiration. If the attitude of the educator is an open one, this will naturally transfer to the participants. Along with an attitude that supports the unexpected, it is equally important that the educator nurtures her own imagination, as Greene writes, "imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of students" (1995, p.36). This is especially important in working with this group, because the instructor needs to imagine what it would be like to have a limited IQ. I agree with Greene that empathy is crucial for creativity to occur, because without it we are not really listening and allowing

others to form their own unique voice. Empathy allows us to appreciate and encourage diversity of thought, expression and creative product. By modelling compassion, the educator is promoting an environment where creativity can occur without the restriction of censure. As well, a supportive environment allows the instructor to give criticism and suggestions because the participant knows they are accepted and encouraged. An environment of understanding also encourages the students to participate in constructive self-criticism, as they are not overly concerned with being perceived as 'right' or 'wrong'. In this way, the process of evaluation can be a positive experience that both the facilitator and the student collaborate on.

The acquisition of appropriate skills, rules and knowledge can act as a type of passport for the individuals who are cognitively challenged. The attainment of skills and knowledge helps to build bridges between convergent and divergent thinking. Experiencing the creative process through many forms of art making builds divergent thinking, and consequently channeling that process through knowledge and skills increases convergent thinking. The interplay between the creative process and building product forges a route between the two types of thinking. This ability to move fluidly from convergent to divergent thinking and back again is an ability that may transfer to areas outside of the arts.

Art may provide a forum for individuals who are not able to exist fully in areas that require more stringent following of rules, but that does not mean that art making does not come with rules. Rules can be viewed as being restrictive or freeing, depending on how they are presented. If rules are presented as a long list of do's and don'ts, then of course they will be hard to follow. However, if they are presented through the experience of art making itself, then the rules can be relatively easy to learn.

In most areas, we are quick to offer a template of how something is done. For example in cooking we offer the template of a recipe. We would never just set out the ingredients for a cake and expect students to guess at the amounts. It follows, then, that we need to provide templates of how art is created. Gardner offers the concept of the "schema" (1982, p.133) as a model for how creativity can be built. By providing the schema for composition, storytelling, choreography and so on, we are offering students a way to integrate long-standing traditions of knowledge into their personal experience. Once they have learned the template or 'schema', then they can add in the unique ingredients of their own lives.

In my view, it is essential that we offer templates that can be accessed and built upon. For without the schema, there are no building blocks. I would strenuously disagree with the thinking that creativity somehow magically happens, for without giving the tools of skills, rules and knowledge nothing can be built and everything remains in the realm of possibility. It is important, especially for individuals with low IQ, that there is concrete evidence of creativity. In my view it is imperative that we try to teach basic concepts in art such as composition, for if we don't provide the most fundamental concepts there is no chance of increasing knowledge and allowing for the unpredictable to occur. This is because all learners, regardless of IQ need concepts in order to build further concepts. By assuming that concepts can't be understood we are denying the opportunity for growth and further marginalizing this group.

Moving from Process to Product

Art activities can facilitate opportunities for the individual who are cognitively challenged to experience a sense of accomplishment, and creative product can become

a symbol of this success. I believe that the creative product can also act as a source of motivation to continue the creative process. I would argue that an identifiable product is necessary in terms of the individual's self-confidence and identity as a person capable of being creative. This is because I believe that product can act as a type of mirror, reflecting the message back to the individual that they are capable of creating something of worth.

Creative product in the arts can take many forms; it may take the form of a painting, a poem, a mural or a performance piece. All of these artistic products serve as great motivators for the individual who has created them. One of the most significant reasons to produce is that it has the circular effect of the more creative product you produce the more creative product you *want* to produce. The energy, drive, and motivation derived from creating product should not be underestimated, for it is these very qualities that need fostering in individuals with low IQ (Zigler, 2000). The experience of success is particularly significant for these individuals, as meeting with consistent failure erodes motivation and contributes to lowered aspirations and diminished engagement. As Zigler states, "Motivation [for mentally handicapped individuals] may prove to be the more important factor, especially for those who have experienced a long string of failures" (p.1418). It is important to note that the product should have merit, and that is why it is important that individuals who are cognitively challenged to develop an inner locus of evaluation that contains the ability to look critically at what they have done in order to select what has merit.

The second reason that creative product is important, is that it serves as a form of communication with the larger community. The creative product communicates to others the creative and critical inner workings of the individual. Creative product with

merit also gives the larger community an opportunity to communicate their approval and appreciation to the individual with low IQ. This recognition from an outside audience can definitely encourage the students to continue to try new skills and take risks. All of these factors add up to an increase in self-esteem and enthusiasm.

When we speak of creative product, I think it is worth noting that creative product is not fixed. By this I mean that creative product is in fact fluid, in that it invites response and further interaction with others. This response may take the form of dialogue or further art making. I would argue that art making can serve as a form of language and therefore creative product may act as a type of message that resonates with it's audience. I would even go so far as to say that without creative product there could be no real communication between the creator and the larger community.

Re-membering Our Place

One of the most valuable aspects of participating in art activities is that the outcome can reach beyond the individual and extend to the larger community. One of the most important outcomes that could emerge from individuals with low IQ participating in art activities and creating artistic product, is the way these individuals are perceived by the larger community. Through witnessing and participating along side this group, we can come to know them as unique individuals who are capable of telling their distinct stories. We can begin to question the stereotype of the mentally challenged person as someone who is not whole. We need to raise our expectations, as we all stand to benefit by these individuals moving from being perceived as 'helpless' members of society to being viewed as contributors.

In my view, the notion of *contributing* is key to becoming an active rather than a passive participant in our culture, and applies to each one of us. By becoming active participants in the telling of our individual stories, there is possibility that we can feel less fragmented and disenchanting. From a personal point of view, I feel that it is vital that I find ways to merge my artistic abilities with political and social issues that I care about deeply. To this end, I have worked for years as an artist on a number of projects that have used art as a tool for integration of special needs students into their larger school environment. Through this ongoing process, a few things have come to my attention. One is that art is indeed a useful means for integration, but the way in which integration is taking place is not as effective as it could be. This has become apparent for a number of reasons. The primary reason being, that the students with special needs are invariably seen as being 'helpless' and the students without disabilities are viewed as being 'helpers'. What has become clear to me is that even though all of the students were reaping the benefits of participating in the arts on an individual level, the students with special needs were benefiting less, as they were taking a passive role in the activities. On a larger scale, I saw that through this assignment of roles, the stereotype of people with disabilities as being helpless was being perpetuated.

Through my work in this area, it has become evident to me that imagination is useful not only in terms of art making, but also in terms of how one imagines oneself in our culture. I feel that it is essential that we remain open to what Maxine Greene describes as the "untapped possibility of previously unarticulated voices and sensibilities" (1995, p.43). Greene proposes that imagination can nurture a sense of worthiness and agency. She states that "at the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to *hear* more on

normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (p.123). Greene speaks of participation in the arts as a way of overcoming passivity and is in fact a way to “attend actively” (p.148). The idea of ‘attending actively’ is particularly relevant to individuals with low IQ, as this group is generally viewed as being passive. Greene states:

The stigma of “disabled” or “low IQ” too frequently forces young people to be seen as recipients of treatment, sometimes from the most benevolent motives on the part of those hoping to “help”. Far too seldom are such young people looked upon as being capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibility. The supporting structures that exist are not used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter. (p.41)

I concur with Greene that imagination can act as a crucial opening for individual voice and perspective to occur. I would add however that some level of skill is necessary for the imaginative process to truly take root and develop toward some sort of recognizable aesthetic product. Indeed, I would strongly state that it is the interplay of imagination and skill, which promotes growth both personally and culturally. Along with this growth, comes a sense of agency that is promoted through both the satisfying process of art making and the evidence of product. As Bailin points in out in her book, *Achieving Extraordinary Ends*, the work of art may provide a new perspective and it may also provide expression for something previously unarticulated (1994, p.111). I would expand on the concept of expressing what has been previously unarticulated by referring to Eliot’s “raid on the inarticulate” (Greene, p.108). Eliot proposes that we have a deep need to express our personal identity through narrative. As Taylor points out, art provides a way to develop ‘subtler languages’, because we are able to define, express, and make visible, parts of our rarer selves that have gone previously undiscovered. Through participating in art activities with others, we are able to define our own original

way of being human and articulate and give form to that uniqueness (Taylor, 1991). The key is active participation in telling your own story, along with developing an alternate form of language when verbal language fails us.

With these perspectives in mind, I took on the challenge of finding a way to use art as a tool to not only promote inclusion, but to challenge the stereotype of what it means to be a person with disabilities. When becoming involved with making art in the community it is advantageous to work with a group that you are already connected to, as the foundations for a positive relationship are already in place. For this reason, I decided to develop a project with a group of teens with developmental disabilities that I had previously met with on a number of occasions to facilitate art activities. The group was very open to exploring the question of “who are you, and what do you bring to your community that is uniquely you?” On a pragmatic level, the goal of the project was to teach the teens art making skills, that they would eventually utilize in order to lead to banner making workshops in the community. In this way, the teens with disabilities, would be contributing to their community. The theme of the project was about how each of us is a member of our culture, but sometimes this may take a shifting of position, and perception in order to be a member who has voice and agency. In a sense, the project was about ‘re-membering’ our place.

The first steps of this project had very little to do with art making, but a lot to do with finding ways to partner with groups in the community. As discussed in Chapter Two, in order to work with the community, the artist often has to wear a number of hats. One of the hats I wore was to become project manager and apply for funding. This meant that I had to take on a number of administrative tasks. During this phase I had to meet with the different members of the community to identify common goals.

Once the practical elements were in place, the art making aspects of the project could begin. I worked with the group of teens with developmental disabilities for a period of three months. We began with the same question that the teens had explored, "who am I and what do I bring to my community that is uniquely me?" We explored this concept through movement, drama, music, and visual art. A significant part of the process was the ongoing discussions that we had surrounding this question. The work eventually evolved to creating self-portraits that showed how we saw ourselves in the community. We explored these images through drawing, collage, clay, and painting. Going through a process of selection, participants chose their favorite image and hand painted the images on to banners. The self-portraits were painted with images of the community as the background. By this point, the teens had acquired a number of art making skills, as well as the confidence to talk about the process. Over a period of time, the teens gained experience, which gradually grew into expertise. They were also able to build a vocabulary of art making techniques, which eventually they were able to teach to others. In this way the process held both intrinsic and instrumental worth for the participants.

Accompanied by youth workers, and myself, the teens ventured out into the community to lead banner-making sessions for young people. We would begin our sessions with the teens showing their banners and saying a few words about them. For some of the teens though, they had very little language, so they simply showed their banner to the group, and the banners themselves acted as effective tools of communication. We began by asking the participants the same question we had asked the teens, "Who are you, and what do you bring to the community that is distinctly you?" The teens then assisted in the banner making workshops. They were able to take on a

leadership role because they were very familiar and confident with the process. The response from the children who were taking the workshops was very positive, and they were very appreciative of the help they received from the teens. The teens took a lot of pride in their role as teachers. We paid repeated visits to a number of centers and eventually we ended up with a large assortment of banners. Each person who participated in the project, created a banner depicting a unique self-portrait that included images of the community.

The final stage of the project was to share what we had been doing with the larger community. The banners were first displayed at a local theatre and were eventually moved to the lobby of a new community centre. The banners created a highly colourful and arresting array of portraits of young people in the community. They were displayed in such a way, that there was no way of knowing which banners were created by the teens with disabilities, and which ones were created by 'typical' children. The banners stayed up in the community for over two years, and their visual presence, along with the story of why and how they were created, became part of the daily lives of people who encountered them. In a small way this project illustrates how art can be used to give form to individual uniqueness while providing a forum to build a communal vision. It also shows how we can "become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through the acquisition of rich human languages of expression" (Taylor, 1991, p.33).

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE IMPORTANCE OF DREAM-TIME:

THE ARTIST AS VISIONARY

Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mytholization of the environment and the world. (Joseph Campbell, Campbell, 1988, p.32)

Introduction

This chapter explores the notion of 'the artist as visionary'. Estella Conwill Majozo writes, "The dream space of the world is the real terrain that we should map. If not then nothing else that we are fighting for or against has any possibility of transformation" (1995, p.88). I agree with Majozo that simultaneous to facilitating change on social levels, artists need to develop and nurture a strong sense of their own artistic vision.

Dream-time

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed at length, the importance of artists collaborating and working alongside non-artists, in order to create art that holds meaning in our communities. In my view, it is equally important that artists take the time to explore their own unique sense and vision of life. In this way, the artist has a deeper level of understanding and insight to offer their community. Majozo writes "to be able to make truly visionary art, we artists must have in our lives the crucial element called

dream-time, that is, time when we leave this world and go into our own sacred space, seeking the grace needed to create our work" (1995, p.119).

Joseph Campbell describes dream-time as a place "where there is 'no time', a place where eternity and time come together. Unlike our visible world, in dreamtime there is no duality" (1988, p.17). Both Campbell and Majozo believe that mythology exists in dreamtime, and that one of the primary roles of the artist is to visit this realm in order to bring the needed myth back to society. I believe as Campbell does, that myths must be kept alive and that the people, who can keep them alive, are the artists in any given society. In our modern culture, we often refer to myth without really understanding its function. According to Campbell, the purpose of myth is to link the individual to their social group, and to see that society, itself, is an organ of a larger organism. Myth also has the pedagogical purpose of teaching us how to be human under any circumstances. Campbell states "every mythology has to do with the wisdom of life as related to a specific culture at a specific time" (p.73). For this reason, it is impossible to predict which myths are needed at which time.

It is vital that artists seek out the sacred space of dream-time for as Campbell states, "myths are so intimately bound to the culture, time and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, the life just slips away from them" (1988, p.59). Further to seeking out this vision, the artist needs to find ways to communicate their private experience of the myth, in order to create a public dream that all of society can participate in. By creating meaningful rituals that can include all members of society, the artist is inviting the larger culture to participate in the myth. Participation in the ritual or 'public dream' is crucial because it links the individual's physical body up to a larger morphological structure. The individual

is then able to become a member of their modern tribe or community. Through participating in a ritual, artists and non-artists alike are able to weave the wisdom of the 'invisible plane' into the fabric of our everyday lives.

It can be a challenge for contemporary artists to move deeper into their subconscious. There may be a fair amount of discomfort involved, but the result could be the difference between art that is visionary, and art that is merely creative. Majozo states, "the visionary artist has not merely sight but vision, the light the soul makes to illuminate the path for us all. If you are feeling the discomfort, and taking the discomfort into the terrain where the truth exposes you - then you are quite possibly in the territory of vision" (1995, p.93). In my view, it takes a great deal of courage to immerse oneself in dream-time and communicate the vision to the rest of society. One of the keys to being able to do this is having the confidence to articulate and relay the insights we have gained. This is no easy task, especially in our culture, where we do not expect the artist to take on a visionary role. One of the ways to build confidence may be to collaborate with other artists who share a similar view. A group such as *Public Dreams Society* is a good example of artists who are finding ways to create large-scale pieces, which invite the whole community to participate in. Their pieces such as *Illuminares* and *Night of the Lost Souls* have a very strong element of ritual and procession.

Art for Art's Sake

Along with finding ways to listen to, and collaborate with the larger community, I believe that artists still very much need to find the time and space to create 'art for art's sake'. At first glance, the idea of a socially responsible artist sequestered away in their studio, may appear to be a contradiction in terms, but I feel it is important that the artist

does not lose sight of the essence or purity of art. It is essential that the intrinsic value of creating art is not lost in the quest to create art that is socially meaningful. In my own experience as an artist, I have often experienced guilt when I am creating art solely for the pleasure that comes from that. Working in a solitary manner can sometimes feel like I am wasting precious time that could be spent using art to better the world. What I have come to believe though, is that creating 'art for art's sake' is just as important as creating art for social change. In some ways the modernist notion that art should not be soiled by political or social agendas has validity. The notion of the 'solitary genius' is not without some merit, for in order for artists to gain vision; they need solitude and separation from everyday life.

As artists, we need to be careful that we do not carry the weight of the world into our art making practice. Giving ourselves the freedom to play with materials, as well as allowing ourselves enough time, are both key to making 'art for arts sake'. 'Dream-time' can also act as a metaphor to describe the experience of being outside the pressures of everyday life. It is giving yourself the luxury of contemplation. For it may be through the seemingly frivolous activity of daydreaming, that the most intuitive insights are able to emerge. In my view, it is vital that as artists and art educators, we do not deny ourselves the very experiences, we are trying to facilitate in our communities.

Ritual in Art Making: Anna Halprin

As reconstructive postmodern art practice is 'relationship based' rather than 'object based', the element of performance becomes a key factor. Even though pieces may involve a range of media, the emphasis of the work is on the process, rather than the 'end product'. The end product can take the form of more traditional artwork, like

paintings or murals, or it may be a performance where there is no clear division between spectator and performer. One of the central components to this way of working is the idea of 'ritual'. Ritual differs from performance, in that one is not separate from the piece that is being performed. The audience takes on the role of witness, rather than spectator, and every person present is vital to the process that is taking place.

One of the most influential artists working in the field of ritual today is the dancer and choreographer, Anna Halprin. She has been involved in the field of NGPA since its inception in the seventies. Halprin writes in her book *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance*, "the chief intention of my works at this time was to understand how the process of creation and performance could be used to accomplish concrete results: social change, personal growth, physical alignment, and spiritual attunement" (1995, p.228). Halprin is a prime example of an artist whose impulse to create socially meaningful art grew out of a personal desire for healing. In 1972, Halprin discovered she had cancer, and consequently, sought ways in which art could be used for healing. Through this process, Halprin became keenly aware of the connection between the body, art making, and healing. After she recovered, Halprin had a strong desire to share what she had learned with both artists and non-artists alike. What emerged was a large-scale group dance eventually known as *Planetary Dance*. The sessions for these dances contained upwards of one hundred people, and the use of ritual was a strong component of the work. Halprin states, "we were learning how to return to performers and spectators power which in this culture had often been taken from them and placed in the hands of scientific experts and official artists" (p.229).

Halprin illustrates how artists are able to impart new ways of knowing to other artists. Having had the opportunity to train with Anna Halprin at her studio in Marin

County, as well as perform in pieces presented in San Francisco, I have experienced first hand, her unique way of working. Her work is very much rooted in forming relationships with the social, natural and spiritual worlds that we inhabit.

Halprin's philosophy is built on the belief that the body communicates to the mind through images. She facilitates her work, by having participants explore specific parts of their bodies through meditation, visualization, movement, and voice. After the physical exploration is complete, participants then draw and paint what they have just experienced. This work is done in silence, and the experience is not verbalized until the artwork is complete.

Participants are encouraged to create personally meaningful rituals that are an outgrowth of their individual research and images. These rituals are often enacted outside in nature, with the other members of the group acting as witnesses. The final stage of this process is to move the work into the community. As well as overseeing the pieces in the community, Halprin also talks directly to the public about the process. To my mind, she is a leading example of an artist who takes the role of 'artist as educator' very seriously, as she goes to great lengths to bring the larger community into the 'know'. Taking the time and effort to share their insightful experiences with the rest of society, may be one of the primary differences between artists who are merely creative, and artists who are visionary.

Artist as Shaman: Joseph Beuys

Like Halprin, Joseph Beuys is an artist who created work that was both deeply social and strongly personal. He is perhaps best known for his unconventional artistic style, an approach to art making that incorporates ritualized movement with materials

that have profound personal meaning to him. His influence is still with us today, and many artists and critics alike, believe that his art has had a significant impact on many aspects of contemporary art, especially in the areas of installation, performance and environmental art.

Beuys believed strongly that art is a powerful tool for communication, teaching, and social change. Like Halprin, he was very concerned with the connection between the social, natural, and spiritual worlds. However, unlike Halprin who believes the body informs the mind, he approaches his work through the intellect first. Beuys states, "the energy of the mental process gives the energy for physical actions" (1994, p.51). It is interesting that the two artists offer such diverse entry points, because both approaches lead to the same in depth exploration of the connection between our physical, emotional and spiritual selves. Throughout his life Beuys referred to himself as a shaman. He took deeply personal aspects of himself, and retold them through ritualized performance pieces, which he called 'actions'. He called his pieces 'actions', because he saw them as active agents of change within our culture (Borer, 1996). Beuys' work is built on the philosophy that 'art is a conversation' and that it can function as an ongoing discourse between the individual and their culture. Like artists today who are working in the area of NGPA, Beuys believed that the exchange between the artist and the audience was key.

Even though he is not commonly credited with it, I think that his 'actions' laid the groundwork for what we refer to as New Genre Community Art pieces today. By bringing his performance piece *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* to New York in 1974, Beuys showed artists in North America that "an artist could be an activist, as well as a theorist and a showman as well as a shaman" (Borer, 1996, p.5). This

piece linked animal rights with American Indian persecution. His entire visit was an 'action', an ambulance with lights flashing met his airplane and he was carried on a stretcher to a downtown Manhattan gallery wrapped in gray felt. The felt held significance for Beuys because it was linked to his near death experience in the Second World War, when he fell from an airplane and was rescued by the Tartars. The Tartars nursed Beuys back to health using felt and fat to keep him from freezing to death. After arriving at the Manhattan gallery by ambulance, the 'attendants' carried Beuys into the gallery. The exhibition area was sectioned off with industrial chain link fencing and inside the fence was a live coyote, a mound of hay, fifty copies of the *Wall Street Journal*, two felt blankets and a water dish. He shared his space for three days and nights and engaged in 'total communication' with the coyote (Borer, 1996). We can see from this description, how Beuys used his pieces to link intimate aspects of himself with what was happening politically and socially in his society.

Halprin and Beuys are excellent examples of artists who balance the introspective aspects of dream-time, with the complex demands of being a socially responsible artist. Using deeply personal experiences as starting points, both artists are able to forge a link between individual healing and social transformation. It is worth having a closer look at how the two artists work, to see if there are common elements in their approach to art making from which we could learn. One of the most striking similarities between Halprin and Beuys, is that their work is based on a strong relationship between the social, natural and spiritual worlds. The two artists engage in what can best be described as 'serious play' and, to this purpose, they both create environments where art making is based on investigation and discovery. Materials play a key role in the research. Beuys uses materials like fat and felt that come from his past,

and hold deep personal meaning for him. For Halprin, her materials are the body, memory and imagination. As well, the use of ritual is central in both their work.

Another strong similarity between the two artists is their dedication to educating others. Beuys states, "To be a teacher is my greatest work of art" (Borer, 1996, p.26). Halprin is also a dedicated educator, and spends a great deal of her time training other artists and students, in her Marin County studio. Speaking from a strictly personal point of view, training with Halprin has had a major influence on my ability as an artist to connect the elements of dream-time, myth, and ritual to both my personal practice, and my work in the community

Concentric Circles of Education

Halprin and Beuys show us that art can be used as a vehicle to heal both our selves and our communities. I think it is unlikely that all artists can take on the role of shaman in the way that Halprin and Beuys have. There may well be a connection between having a near death experience, and being able to travel between the 'visible' and 'invisible' worlds that Campbell refers to.

Even though all artists may not be able to act as an artist/shaman, it doesn't mean that they cannot partake in visionary art. I am using the term 'artist/shaman' to refer to artists like Beuys and Halprin, who take on the dual roles of artist and shaman in our culture. I would propose that all artists could have a role to play in transmitting the insights gained through visiting the 'invisible' realm of dream-time. One possibility is that we can move closer to the artist who has the ability to directly experience the vision. There are a number of ways to partake in the artist/shaman's knowledge; it could be

through direct experience such as collaboration, training or conversation, but it could also be through reading, discussion, and contemplation.

It is vital that the artists who have a deeper understanding of the connection between the spiritual, physical, and social realms of our being, find ways to communicate their vision to our larger culture. For in this way, a circle of 'concentric education' can be formed. When I imagine this model, I see the artist/shaman as being in the center of the circle. It is interesting that when describing the shamanic journey, a number of cultures refer to a 'tunnel' or 'hole' (Harner, 1980). It may be possible that this center could also function as a tunnel that the shaman/artist uses to travel back and forth between dream-time and 'real' time. Through partaking in the 'subtler languages' of art, the artist/shaman is then able to give form to their insights. Through the tangible form of artwork, writing, or conversation, this new way of knowing can resonate out toward the next circle. I imagine that on the circle closest to the center are the artists and art educators who are seeking ways to use art to heal our selves and our communities. The artists and educators are then able to propel the vision to the next circle. The next circle is made up of students and members of our communities that artists work with directly. This knowledge can be conveyed further through both formal and informal education, such as classes, projects, performances and exhibits in the community. The possibility exists, that students will carry what they have experienced to the next circle and so on.

The point I am trying to make is that each one of us does not need to have a spiritually profound experience, in order to use art as a tool for personal and social transformation. As artists, we need to move closer to the center, both in terms of our artistic practice, and our work in the community. It is important that we take the time to pause, and to look more closely at what really matters to us. I believe that it is only by

becoming more connected to the deepest level of our beings, that we are truly able to impart fresh ways of knowing to our culture.

CHAPTER FIVE: COLLABORATION BEGINS WITH EDUCATION

Art is the teacher.
(Joseph Beuys, Borer, 1996, p.37)

Introduction

David Aspin states "The Athenian tradition presupposes the existence of a widely and well educated populace to observe and appreciate artistic display; the Greeks perhaps even more than the Romans scorned the Barbarians beyond the gates" (1989, p.255). This statement points to the importance of 'educating the masses', and in my view, art education is the most important component to re-integrating art with everyday life.

This chapter will examine the strengths and weaknesses of modernist and postmodern strands of art education. I will also look at the possibility of integrating the best of both models, in order to move towards a notion of social responsibility and aesthetic awareness, on both the part of the student and the teacher.

Postmodernism: Whose Background? Who's Meanings?

Just as contemporary art is caught in the uneasy transition between late modernism and postmodernism, so too, is the practice of art education. As mentioned in Chapter One, because the focus of modernist artists was on creating art that was continually new and innovative; there was no consensus on how art should be defined stylistically or socially. Consequently, traditions in art were not passed along to the next

generation of artists and art educators. Today, it seems that the choice to link up with previous art movements and styles, is left entirely up to the individual artist and art educator. For unlike previous generations, art no longer has to link up to a 'universal truth', as it is believed that there is a 'multitude of truths', and each of these truths is equal to each other in value.

To better understand what is happening now, it is necessary to take a look at the modernist model of art education. In the modernist model, there was uniformity in art education, as all students studied the Western history of art. Teachers presented this 'grand narrative' as the truth, and students accepted it unquestionably as knowledge. This approach to art education breeds a certain amount of passivity on the part of the student, for in some ways the student is viewed as an empty vessel waiting to have the Western Canon of art poured into them. Modernist perspectives proposed that there was the power of reason over ignorance, and order over disorder, culture was seen as moving upwards and onwards. There was believed to be an unseen driving force within society, and art history was seen as a progression of ideas and styles.

The onset of postmodernism in the early seventies brought with it, a shift away from the modernist way of thinking that works of art communicated essential truths through the purity of form. Postmodernism acknowledges the social and cultural contexts that influence and shape our notions of art and art making. Postmodernist thinking puts forth the idea, that art is a cultural product, which elicits multiple interpretations of meanings. All art, including modern art, is seen as a social construct.

The postmodernist view of art education sees art as an *active* rather than passive ingredient in society. The postmodern perspective of 'giving voice to the voiceless' means there exists the possibility that 'little narratives' could replace the notion of a

'grand narrative'. These 'little narratives' can be based on the student's own personal experience and insights, thus assigning value to student's voices.

Postmodernist thinking does not subscribe to old hierarchies of meaning, and believes that meaning is subjective and detachable. By subscribing to this point of view, educators are left with a significant gap in how meaning is imparted to students.

As educators, how do we impart a background of meanings, without presenting it as the only truth? One solution might be to go further with our research, find out more about what was happening politically and culturally at the time the art was created. It is important for students to know that there is a tradition in art that artists have adhered to or adapted. We need to provide students with the knowledge of the historical context in which the art was created in, so that students can see that in reality there are a 'multitude of truths'. Once it is recognized that there is a range of 'truths', students can go further, and look at why some truths are chosen as *the* truth. In this way, students can see that art is not created in separation from the culture it comes from, but in fact, art *is* the culture.

If we wish for students to engage actively with the material presented, it becomes clear that knowledge must be given along with information. In my view, the educator needs to provide the crucial pieces that enable students to link up with previous concepts of knowledge in order to build further concepts. For without some kind of agreed upon foundation, all meanings are detachable and ultimately meaningless. Without a shared background of meanings (Taylor, 1991), our students can never hope to appreciate and make sense of art and the culture we live in.

Postmodern perspectives in art education can be liberating because they free educators from having to subscribe to a rigid model, but we have to be careful not to

lose what was valuable in the old hierarchy of meanings. It is important that educators do not reject everything to do with modernism; rather it is essential that educators take the time to reflect on what is valuable in the modernist model, and try to integrate it into the current model. In order to do this, we need to find critical tools that cannot only deconstruct information, but can also be used to strengthen links with previous concepts of knowledge.

Art as an Antidote for Apathy

We live in a culture where we often feel anonymous, and in my view, this sense of 'not being known' allows people to sometimes act in a disinterested and destructive manner. Joseph Beuys states, "In the consumer society, creativity, imagination and intelligence, not articulated, their expression prevented, become defective, harmful and damaging" (Borer, 1996, p.151). I concur with Beuys that *inarticulated* creativity can lead to apathy, boredom and even criminal activity. At a time when society is faced with increasing violence, and apparent apathy on the parts of youth, the arts could form part of the antidote. The arts could facilitate not only a stronger sense of self and community, but could also help to develop empathy for people whom we perceive as being different from ourselves. For it is only through really knowing ourselves that we can come to accept and know others (Eagleton, 2000, p.4).

In my view, one important way in which we articulate who we are is through the means of artistic expression. I agree with Joseph Beuys, that everyone has the *potential* to be an artist (Borer, 1996). By this, Beuys did not necessarily mean that everyone could become a traditional painter, but rather he meant that each one of us has the creative ability to express ourselves through art. Borer states, "pedagogy is the first

circle of an implicit doctrinal corpus, the hub of Beuys thinking – art as teaching, and not the teaching of art” (1996, p.14). For me personally, this is a pedagogical ‘aha’ moment, because I feel it really is what art education should and could be. The idea of using *art to teach*, rather than *teaching art*, is an exciting concept, and relates well to the notion of “subtler languages” (1991, p.85) that Taylor speaks of. Through the direct experience of art making we are able to express, define, and give form to something that was previously hidden to us.

One of the most potent things that we can offer students is this ‘direct experience of art making’. The challenge however, is to find effective ways to offer this experience within the parameters of teaching. At times this can appear onerous, as our culture is not particularly comfortable with acquiring understanding through experience. As a society, we are much more content to passively receive information. One of the most effective ways to offset this passivity is to give our students enough freedom and time to play with concepts and materials, while investigating ideas and issues that hold meaning for them.

As educators, how can we create an atmosphere that offers students both freedom and acceptance? This question is particularly relevant in terms of secondary students, as there is a distinct difference between elementary and secondary school environments. For much of their elementary school experience, students witness their artwork being displayed and showcased throughout the classroom and school. Their art work is displayed not so much on the basis of how ‘good’ it is, but rather it is showcased because they are a member of the school, and therefore their artwork deserves to be shown. In secondary schools, there is a noticeable lack of artwork adorning the halls, and when it is put on view, there is usually a very small amount of it. The pieces that are

showcased are chosen on the basis of which artwork is the 'best'. The equanimity found in elementary school is gone. Another smaller but still significant difference between the two settings is that in elementary school student's birthdays are celebrated. This seemingly small occasion is indicative of the underlying sentiment that once our students become more independent, they are no longer valued for their uniqueness. In elementary school, students are celebrated for who they *are*, whereas in secondary settings students are celebrated for what they *do*. The message for secondary students is that in order to be recognized, they must achieve. This may be satisfying for the student who is naturally gifted with a supportive family, but what about the students who are struggling both academically and personally?

When a student enters secondary school there is a dramatic shift between being affectionately 'known' and appreciated to the sense that one is now more or less anonymous. Far too often the secondary student is perceived as someone who needs to be 'controlled'. Unfortunately this withdrawal of 'affectionate knowing' comes at a time when students need to be mentored by caring and responsible adults.

Art as Inquiry

As art educators, we cannot change the entire atmosphere of secondary schools, but we can create a more compassionate and open-minded environment in our classrooms. I believe one of the most positive aspects of the arts, is that they can expand to include new ways of knowing and being known. This 'knowing' can be both self-knowledge, as well as a greater understanding between the individual and their culture.

Joseph Beuys believed that art was an ongoing conversation between the artist and his or her larger community, and that through participating in this conversation, non-artists can become artists (Borer, 1996). I believe one of the most potent ways to immerse students in the conversation is to offer them powerful examples of artists whose unique ways of working have shaped how we perceive art today. I also think it is important not to shy away from artists such as Beuys, because at first glance we might think the students will find him too outrageous or weird.

By studying the works and philosophy of an artist such as Joseph Beuys, students are better able to see that art is a discourse between the individual and their culture; and that this discourse is very much alive, fluid and shifting. It is important to emphasize that this discourse is not only in the past or elsewhere, but that it is *right here, right now*. One of the most exciting aspects of Beuys work is the questions he asked and how he proceeded to fully investigate them. Knowing which questions to ask, is key to research and, in this way, the art room can act as a laboratory. Along with introducing students to Beuys' philosophy and work, it is important to offer students the opportunity to investigate ideas and images that matter to them. An important part of this process is to encourage students to form a question or hypothesis that they would research in depth through writing, drawing, collecting images and materials. It would be instructive to emphasize how Beuys used both man made and natural materials to assemble his pieces. Through showing examples of his pieces, it can be stressed that Beuys believed in a strong relationship between the spiritual, social and natural worlds. A compelling example for students is the story of how Beuys fell from an airplane during the second world war and was rescued by the Tartars, and how they nursed Beuys back

to health using materials such as felt and fat. Students can be shown the relationship between Beuys personal history and the materials that he chose to make art with.

I am now going to describe an activity that I lead with a group of senior secondary students. This unit was based on the idea of creating an installation piece that has elements of performance within it. For this activity, I gave students the choice of working alone, in pairs or in small groups. At first glance, it could seem daunting to ask secondary students to perform in their pieces, but in my experience as both a drama and art teacher, I have found that it is indeed feasible. In some ways it is unfortunate that the arts are so clearly divided into 'performing' and 'visual' arts, because in my view, this is a somewhat false and restricting delineation. For in a sense, the body is present in every form of art, either physically or by implication.

One of the challenges for the educator is to create an environment where students feel comfortable with taking risks. For this reason, it might be easier to approach performance art through drama, as it does seem easier for drama students to incorporate materials into their pieces than for art students to incorporate performance. However, I think given a well thought out introduction by the instructor, art students are more than capable of meeting the challenge. The key lies in appropriate preparation and clear examples. Once the process has begun, it is crucial to give students enough time to assemble the pieces in a thoughtful way. This is where the aspect of 'play' enters into the equation. If students feel that they can experiment and take the time to really investigate their ideas in a safe environment, they will be more inclined to take risks. As educators, one way we can encourage this approach is to have a large part of the mark based on process. Teachers can evaluate progress through individual meetings with the students, as well as by having the students hand in their sketchbooks.

Along with evaluation by the teacher, the students should also be involved in self-evaluation. All of these steps are contingent on the instructor outlining the evaluation criteria in as clear a manner as possible from the onset of the project.

Process is important, but it is equally valuable for students to be working towards some kind of presentation or creative product. Students should be encouraged to consider their audience. Students can be asked to consider the whole notion of 'place', and how presentation is 'read' differently, depending on where it is performed. The pieces could be presented outside the classroom, whether that means outside in nature or in another part of the building. The audience could be invited members only, another class, or family and friends.

The pieces created by the students I taught were presented as part of an "Arts Night" at our school. The installations used a wide variety of materials from 'found objects' to video equipment. Each piece focused on a specific issue such as 'the media and body image', 'noise pollution' or 'gender'. On the evening of their presentations, students were on hand to answer questions and interact with their 'audience'. This gave the students an excellent opportunity to experience first hand how art can be utilized to open up dialogue between members of the community.

Even though I find Beuys to be an inspiration, both in terms of my art practice and my teaching, there are some areas of Beuys approach with which I do not agree. In reviewing Beuys proposed curriculum for a "Free International School for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research" (Beuys, 1994, p.149). I find it curious that Beuys has barely included the performing arts. At the very end of his description of interdisciplinary art, he has written 'the stage' and 'presentation'. In most likelihood, Beuys relegates 'performing art' to such a limited category because to him ideas and materials are the

starting point, and the body is more of an afterthought. In my ideal curriculum, the areas of art that center on the body such as theatre, dance and voice would carry equal weight with the visual art areas. For I believe that in order to create high quality 'performance art', artists need to expand their knowledge of the body and performance.

Creating a Third Strand: Integrating the Best of the Reconstructive and the Deconstructive Strands of Postmodernism

In my view, both the deconstructionist and the reconstructionist strand of postmodernism are valuable in terms of art education. The reconstructive strand offers the perspective that art can be used to build a stronger sense of self and community, whereas the deconstructive strand offers the view that art can be used to critically access and decode our culture. To my mind, the two versions hold merit, as they both offer students a way to invest in their local and global communities.

Educators can present the reconstructive viewpoint that 'the artist is the activist' by having students take a closer look at how art can be utilized to create positive changes in our culture. The best way for students to gain these perspectives is through active participation in the arts. Art projects that allow for the student's own perspective to emerge is ideal. As well, collaborative projects that focus on local and community issues, such as 'teen violence', can be an excellent way for students to experience art as an adverb rather than a noun. Art projects that partner with the community are also a worthwhile way for students to experience first hand the communicative value of art. An example of students partnering with the community might be students interviewing seniors and creating monologues, which are then performed in the community. In this

way, students can experience first hand, how art can be used to build empathy and understanding. I agree with Rex Gibson that “the arts can provide both a language and a vehicle to build compassionate relationships with others” (1989, p.61). It is also instructive for students to look for, and find examples in their own communities, of how art is being used to speak to social and political issues.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are many local artists who are creating meaningful work in the community, and it would be worthwhile inviting these artists into the classroom to share their projects and ideas with students. Groups such as *Headlines Theatre*, frequently partner with schools to co-produce productions on themes such as bullying and racism. As well, students can be encouraged to design projects that could make positive changes on a local, national or international level. In this way, students can come to see that art can be used to re-imagine how we see our culture and ourselves. Giving students the freedom to imagine communities transformed through art making, is key to imparting the belief that art can be an active ingredient in our social and cultural mix.

By looking to the deconstructionist strand of postmodernism, educators can put forth the idea that art can be used to analyze and deconstruct the culture we live in. Our students are growing up in a culture where nearly every aspect of their lives involves some form of technology. They are bombarded with images that often have no context or meaning beyond how they appear. The media plays a tremendous role in shaping our sense of identity and culture. In many ways, the media doesn't so much communicate reality, as construct it. By looking at artists such as Barbara Kruger and Andy Warhol, and how they used art to critique popular culture, students can become more aware of how art can be used to deconstruct the media.

As educators, we need to encourage our students to look beyond the obvious image, and question meanings. One of the most important tools that deconstructive postmodernism offers us is the ability to look critically at the images in our culture. There are many excellent resources such as *Adbusters* that are designed to help students use art as way of investigating how the media uses images to manipulate us. A simple and effective way for students to critique the media is to parody an ad. We cannot return to a simpler era, but we can offer our students the critical tools they need in order to successfully navigate our heavily mediated society.

At first glance, it may seem that the reconstructive and deconstructive strands of postmodernism are at odds with each other. Even though there are distinct differences between the two versions, they both encourage a sense of agency. The reconstructive strand promotes agency through active participation in our culture. Deconstructive postmodernism encourages students to look more critically at the media. This also encourages a sense of agency, because the student is no longer passively digesting what the media feeds them. As students become aware of the pervasive influence of the media they are more able to decide what to accept and what to reject.

The two strands of postmodernism are united in their rejection of modernist concepts. Neither version of postmodernism subscribes to the 'old hierarchy of meanings'. Consequently one of the most significant perspectives that postmodernism has brought to the realm of art education is the blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art. This poses challenges for the art educator, for a number of reasons. In some ways, it may be freeing for the teacher to choose art that she knows the students will readily relate to and enjoy. For example, she could use *The Simpsons* as a way of hooking students on art. The students would most certainly enjoy it, and the teacher

could present it as a way of using art to critique the culture we live in. However, problems arise because students do not necessarily pick up on references in the work. They may miss out because they haven't been taught the relevant concepts, therefore they cannot make the connections needed to understand the references. For without a solid, knowledge-based introduction, students have no way of entering into the world of 'high art'. In my view, this is one of the pitfalls of rejecting the modernist perspective in art education. For if students are not given a structured introduction to the higher arts they will only feel comfortable in the realm of the lower arts.

As artists and educators, we need to keep searching for critical tools that can not only deconstruct information, but can also be used to strengthen links with previous concepts of knowledge. We need to create "new subtler languages" (Taylor, 1991, p.85), languages that allow us to include past concepts of knowledge, while building new ways of understanding. Students can then see that they are not merely passive receptacles of information, but are active co-creators of their culture and their futures. In this way we are not only creating art that mirrors who we are, but art that opens doors to who we could be.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to look beyond the restrictive categories of deconstructive and reconstructive postmodernism and look to a model of art making that is both socially responsible and aesthetically accountable. Along with an integration of the two strands of postmodernism, I am arguing for a model of art making that strengthens links to previous concepts of knowledge, and traditions in art. In a sense, I haven't so much been looking *beyond* postmodernism but *to* it, in order to see if there are ways of working that can successfully integrate the compassionate, inclusive aspects of reconstructive postmodernism with the more critical, aesthetically distanced traits of deconstructive postmodernism. I feel strongly that both are needed in order to move towards a model of art making that combines seeing with believing, technology with nature and individuality with wholeness. In this way, the arts can provide a means to define and express our unique way of being human. The arts can also be utilized as a tool for social change in our culture. This can be accomplished through forming a more authentic sense of who we are through meaningful dialogue in our communities (Taylor, 1991).

I believe that renewed hope and belief in the transformative power of the arts, is key to restoring sacred spaces in our culture and our selves. Participation in the arts can infuse us with a sense of possibility; of possibilities that include creating art that is based on listening, responding, making and doing. One of the possibilities that art can offer us is the chance to create new openings to provide spaces for previously unarticulated voices to be heard. As discussed throughout this thesis, there are many

ways that the artist can act as a catalyst in the community in order to facilitate opportunities for new dialogues and stories.

If it is true, and I believe it is, that 'every voice has value', then we cannot afford to assume that some stories are not worth hearing. We need to expand our idea of whose dreams and images matter, for it may be the unlikeliest voice that offers the most potent vision. In my view, one of the most exciting aspects of postmodernism is that it can 'give voice to the voiceless'. This inclusive model of art making could provide space for each unique voice in our culture to communicate their deepest hopes, fears and dreams. Such a wide-open concept of art making requires raising the level of aesthetic awareness of every member of our society. The key is education. For if people are not offered the tools that they need in order to communicate these aspects of themselves, there is little chance they will speak.

This new model of art making calls on the artist to integrate emotion with reason, listening with seeing, and values with art. In this way, art could once again be the connective tissue between the dreams of the individual and the dreams of the community. For without the breath, thought, and body of art, we can never truly realize our humanity, much less our divinity.

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