"JUST JO": IMAGE AND IDENTITY IN SELF-STUDY

"Just Jo": Image and Identity in Self-Study

Johanna Visser

Department of Educational Studies

McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, Aline Rahal Visser, who took me to see *The Dinner Party*, all those years ago, and whose energy, strength, love, and integrity never cease to amaze me. As well, this thesis is dedicated in loving memory of Dorothy (Dot) Visser whose presence, however absent, is still greatly felt.

Acknowledgments

I feel very blessed to have had the privilege of having my autobiography touched by the auto/biographies of the following people — some of whom appear in these pages, and others who do not but who have been an integral part of my life. Because the nature of this work is a personal narrative, I feel there are many people to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude.

First of all, I am very grateful to my thesis committee — Claudia Mitchell, Lynn Butler-Kisber, Sandra Weber, Jacqui Reid-Walsh — for their undying patience, guidance, and direction. I would also like to thank some of the other wonderful teachers I have encountered on my academic travels, especially Ann Beer whose course Gender and Autobiography provided the space where the conception of the thesis "took". I owe a tremendous amount of thanks to Lewis Wosu at the Education Media Centre, who, without his photographic artistry, the artistry of this thesis would not come alive. Thank you, as well, to Sanjeev Panigerahy for printing miracles. I would also like to thank the dynamic people I work with at McGill for their last-minute-thesis-crisis-intervention: Kaisa McCandless, Monica Mac, Scott Dziewirz, Jennifer Hrazdil, Peter Wallet. Warm thanks to Faith Butler, Valerie Free, Rae Shepp for their friendship and shared-experience; to Barbara Pyontka for her earthy humour and laughter — a perfect tonic for thesis anxiety.

During the process of the last few years, significant people have seemed to come in three's, like points of a triangle. I like to think of them as my own "holy trinities":

- Academic Mothers and Midwives —Claudia Mitchell, Sandra Weber, Lynn Butler-Kisber — thank you for your wisdom, unwavering encouragement, openness, and warmth. And for your own creative research, modeling, and determination to create a space for this kind of work within the Academy. To Claudia, especially, I am truly indebted for so much that I don't know where to begin — thank you, "Miss C", for providing exciting work opportunities (during and post-thesis, especially), space (physical, intellectual, artistic), your time and availability, breakfast at The Head Office, much laughter, your friendship, and, most of all, for making this experience a joyful one.

- Trail Blazers — Lorri Neilsen, Anne-Louise, Brookes, bell hooks. I am indebted to these women academics for helping to pave a way/raising the bar so that the rest of us can get on with the business of just doing this.
- Writing Women — Linda Anderson, Charlotte Hussey, Susan Allnutt — the lunch and support "consoeurs". Though we probably spent more time lunching than writing, your insight and experience were crucial in helping to shine a brighter light on The Wall and giving me the sense that I was on the right track.
- The Borrelli Women — Honore, Andrea, Heather Borrelli — for your generosity, friendship, and knowledge. I'd especially like to thank Andrea; your formatting skills, tenacity, and creativity have been a life saver. This is an understatement. I'm truly indebted to you for your time and talents.
- Artists and Insight — Donna Davis, Thea Jones, Jill Robinson — as artists, colleagues, and friends your insight and close reading of the Living Research Wall has been invaluable. Donna, without your own academic research, an integral part of my thesis would not exist. I am also forever grateful for the gift of letting me rediscover the lost little girl passion of my artistic self. Thea, thank you for passionate conversations about body, teaching, art and their inter-connectedness, and for the simple, but challenging, question, "When are you going to do just you, Jo?". And to Jill, my god-sister who has known me all my life: I treasure your friendship, your understanding and appreciation of little girl passions, and for instilling in me at a very early age, a love of the ocean.

A particularly special thanks goes to Ingrid Hojnik for being the keeper of my story, in all its many fragments. Aleksandra Zivanovic, many thanks for the last-minute translations, of course, but especially for your friendship, shared dreams, and flare for living. Finally, to Carolyn Sturge Sparkes and Michele Wright, chosen sisters, I am forever grateful for your enduring friendship, love, laughter, and passion for life. May the tears of laughter continue to stain our cheeks!

Although this work and much of my life is woman-centred, I'd like to acknowledge some of the many wonderful men and "honorary girls" I've known, those

who feel most at home in the company of women: Yves Trudeau, Vladimir Spicanovic, and particularly to Michael Jackson for the illumination that it was perfectly fine to be myself as a teacher in a classroom. And to Murray Forman for your enduring warmth and steadfast appreciation, for bearing witness, and for accompanying me on part of the journey.

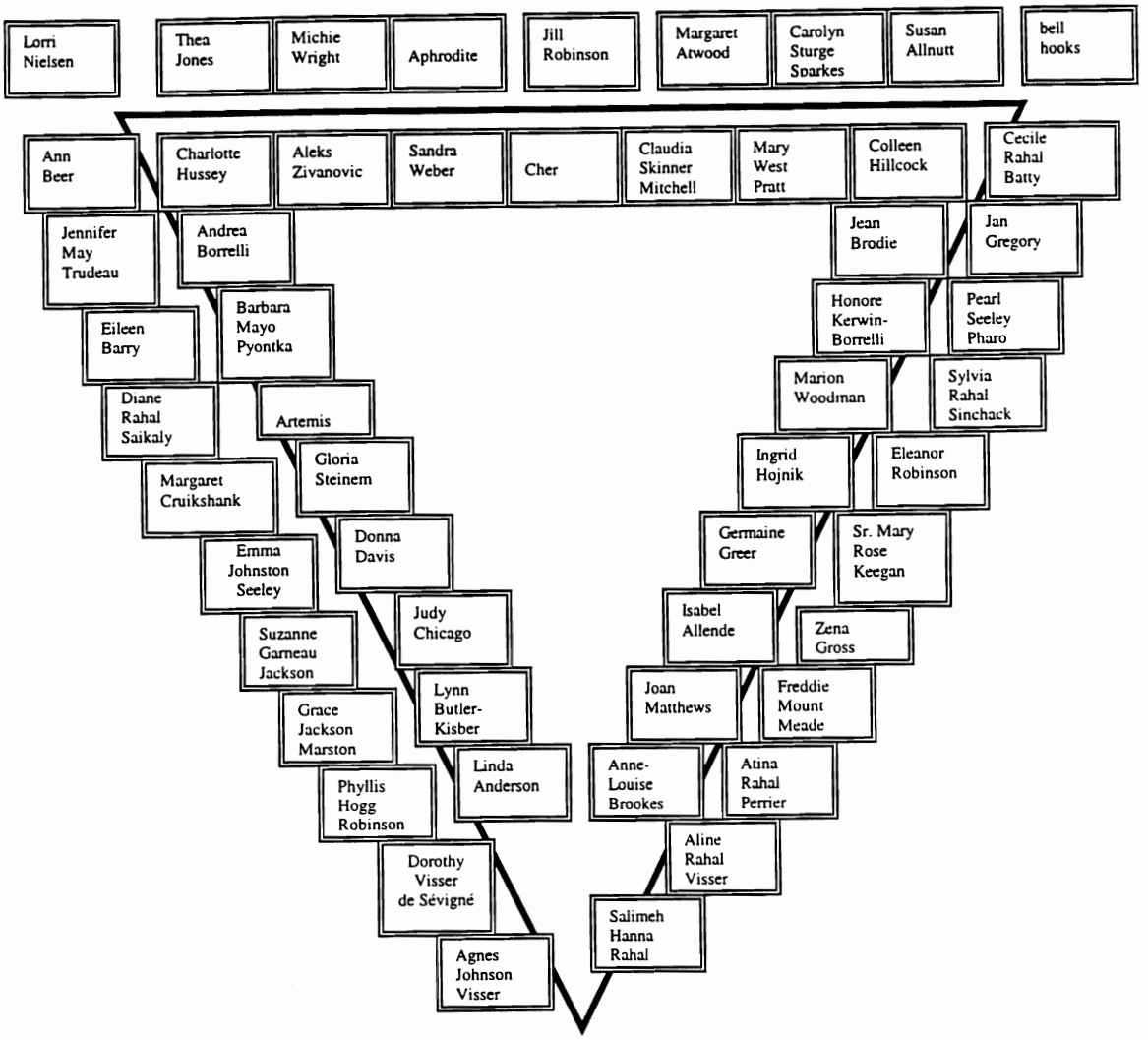
Finally, to my parents — educators as well as the primary story tellers about the women in my family — there aren't words enough to express how grateful I am for your unconditional love, unwavering support, and extreme generosity you have given me, not only throughout this academic process, but throughout my whole life. To my mother, thank you for your always reassuring presence, the early-morning phone calls, and for raising me to "be my own woman". And to my father — the quintessential "honorary girl" who has spent his life very comfortably in the company of women — thank you for passing on your love of the aesthetic, and, because you'd secretly hoped I'd be a concert pianist, for always seeing and nourishing the artist in me.

I also cannot forget the reassuring companionship and soothing comfort of furry creatures sprawled out in the sun, across my desk.

If you believe that "it takes a village to raise a child", then I have been incredibly fortunate to have been raised in the community I was. And although I have physically left my community of origin, I am never far from it. In fact, my "village", like my extended family, continues to grow in the rich fabric of other life stories and I can continue to be raised.

Dinner for fifty-four

If I were to create my own *Dinner Party* installation, I do not know how I would limit it to thirty-nine plates. Below is my table setting — somewhat whimsical, given a few of the guests — for the incredible women in my life. Their wisdom and inspiration continue to nourish me.



IF A WRITER DOES NOT PRODUCE WHAT IS CONSISTENT
WITH THE IDEOLOGY OF THE DOMINANT CULTURE,
NO ONE WILL HEAR HER VOICE.
IF A WRITER PRODUCES WHAT IS CONSISTENT
WITH THE IDEOLOGY OF THE DOMINANT CULTURE,
SHE MAY CHOKE ON HER WORDS.
(From "Silencing" by Sharon H. Nelson)

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Abstract

The personal narrative nature of my work is rooted in qualitative research methodology and feminist inquiry, in general, and in autobiographical self-study, in particular. In my thesis, I draw on Mitchell and Weber's (1999) self-study work which explores using images as memory prompts and as visual *texts* which can be read, interpreted, and reconstructed. Engaging in my own self-study, I use memory work and the construction and analysis of visual texts as a way to explore women's identity and the ways in which women resist or accommodate the people and systems around them (including, but not limited to, the educational system).

Exploring the social construction of women's identity through autobiographical self-study and memory work, I blend a variety of tools as a practical approach to creating what I come to regard as my own specific methodology for doing self-study: the creation of a Living Research Wall. Collectively and aesthetically arranged, the image texts create one large, wall-size collage which I use in my analysis and interpretation of women's identity. However, my image texts — my Wall — are not simply research tools and data, but form an artistic creation in and of itself. The Living Research Wall has a life beyond this study.

This study has implications for teacher education, reflective practice, curriculum design, and work with students at all levels. I am interested in how this self-study process can have an impact on the field of education, especially on the students (particularly the children and young adults) in our care. Self-study is not just how we look at ourselves as practitioners, but how we see and interpret all aspects of our life. I would argue that the most important thing we "bring into the classroom" is our Self and that it is vital that we have an understanding of who that Self is.

Résumé

La nature narrative personnelle de mon travail est enracinée dans la méthodologie qualitative de recherche et l'enquête féministe en général, et dans la refléxion autobiographique, en particulier. Dans ma thèse, je m'inspire de la refléxion autobiographique de Mitchell et Weber (1999) qui l'explore en utilisant des images pour inciter la mémoire ainsi en tant que textes visuels qui peuvent être lus, interprétés, et reconstruits. S'engageant dans ma propre réflexion autobiographique, j'emploi le travail de mémoire et la construction et l'analyse des textes visuels comme manière d'explorer l'identité des femmes et les moyens dont les femmes résistent ou adaptent au peuple et aux systèmes autour d'eux (y compris mais non limité à, le système d'éducation).

Explorant la construction sociale de l'identité des femmes par le travail de la réflexion autobiographique et de mémoire, je mélange une variété d'outils comme approche pratique à créer ce que je viens de considérer comme ma propre méthodologie spécifique pour faire la réflexion autobiographique: la création d'un *Mur vivant de recherche.* Collectivement et esthétiquement disposés, les textes d'image créent un grand collage la taille d'un mur dont j'emploi dans mon analyse et interprétation de l'identité des femmes. Cependant, mes textes d'image - mon mur - ne sont pas simplement des outils et des données de recherches, mais forment une création artistique. Le Mur vivant de recherche a une vie au delà de cette étude.

Cette étude a des implications pour l'éducation des enseignants, la pratique réflective, et le travail avec et le curriculum pour les étudiants à tous les niveaux. Je suis intéressée par la façon dont ce processus de réflexion autobiographique peut avoir un impact dans le domaine d'éducation, particulièrement envers les étudiants (surtout les enfants et les jeunes adultes) dans notre soin. La réflection autobiographique n'est pas simplement comment nous voyons nous-mêmes comme praticiens mais comment nous voyons et interprétons tous les aspects de notre vie. J'argumenterai le fait que la chose la plus importante que nous introduisons dans la salle de classe soit "l'être-même" et qu'il est essentiel que nous avons une compréhension de cette personne.

PETIT "MEZZA": PROLOGUE

> *These were copious feasts that daily united and extended family in the leisurely ceremony of the meal. On those tables, always laid with cloths of starched damask, glittered crystal goblets, cruets of purest olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and vases of flowers and silver candelabra, mute witnesses to several centuries of excellent cuisine*
> (Isabel Allende, ***Aphrodite: A memoire of the senses***, 1998, p. 35).

Food, the preparation of food, and table settings have played significant roles in my family. My grandmothers, Agnes and Salimeh, were excellent cooks; both knew the importance of food preparation and presentation. For Salimeh, food preparation was almost spiritual, and you did it with love. You never swore over food, even if something went disastrously wrong. (The root of my maternal grandmother's name, "Salim", is from the word "salem", which means blessed. In Arabic, when you want to compliment the chef, you would say, "Salem dayatic...." which translates as "Bless those hands"... which made the food). Food was always in abundance in my mother's childhood home; though they had little money, meals were always a feast. Although Agnes had cooks in her household, she would often prepare meals for her family. When my father reminisces about the meals he ate as a child and as a young man, he recounts the food his mother prepared. Agnes' table was tasteful and elegant, decorated with fresh flowers and fine china, linen and sterling silver, crystal and candlelight, while Salimeh's table was beautiful in a very sensual way — everything bursting from bowls and plates, colourful and rich, food meant to be eaten with your fingers. It was, I imagine, a very sensual — if not sexy — table.

Figure 1 Salimeh's sensual abundance

From my grandmothers, I have inherited a great love of food and a creative flare for its preparation and presentation. I have inherited the best from my grandmothers: Agnes' exquisite taste for things beautiful — some of her dishes, linen, and candlesticks now grace my table. And Salimeh's sense of the sacred, her bohemian nothing-measured-always-gained techniques and abundance, and a love of exotic flavours.

Cooking is my greatest creative outlet; my kitchen and my table are sacred spaces. Preparing food for family and friends, and breaking bread with them, is a gesture of love. This was part of my childhood experience. My parents still spend a great deal of time and energy preparing food and welcoming friends into their home. The dinner table has not only been a place of love and friendship, it has always been a site of learning — a space for lively socio-political, feminist, and theological discussion. It is not surprising that I must make room for the kitchen table in my work.

In undertaking her book on aphrodisiacs, *Aphrodite: A memoir of the senses*, Isabel Allende also reminisces and marvels at her mother's artistry with food:

> *The moment the word **food** came up, I thought of Panchita Llona, the best cook I know...a sorceress with all the paraphernalia attending the witchcraft of cuisine and love potions...In the many years of my friendship with this splendid woman, I have never seen her serve the same dish twice; she always introduces some variation and garnishes her creations with such originality that in her hands a common cabbage is transformed into a work of art, like an ikebana, one of those Japanese floral arrangements with two chrysanthemums and a twisted branch. Triumph of aesthetics over paucity* (1998, p. 21).

As I think about my "inheritance" and my creative passions, I see how wrapped up they are in "women's craft" — food preparation, table settings, eating, nurturing. Cooking, typically the domain of women, can also be seen as the art of magic; the weaving of spells and concocting of aphrodisiacs to charm loved ones...or not! The kitchen table is also the realm of the healer, the wise woman, the apothecary, and midwife. Woman's craft.

*Witch*craft. It is the home front, the domestic realm, the traditional domain of women. From place of power to genteel domesticity to domestic violence. It is the private — a place of "passion, emotion, gritty details, unpleasant smells, pillow-biting mistakes, sensuality and sexuality, sharp noises, and messy processes" — and, very much like the "academy of the kitchen table" Lorri Neilsen (1998, p. 269) describes. It is also taboo, and not the place of "great" thinkers, adventurers, warriors, scientists, historians, academics, men.

In the work which follows, I set the table for a self-study — a life story, so far — dotted with a few "gritty details" and "pillow-biting mistakes", many "messy processes", several "sharp noises" and a dash of "sensuality and sexuality". I invite you to dinner.

CHAPTER 1

Appetizers: Navel-gazing at *The Dinner Party* — The autobiography of a self-study

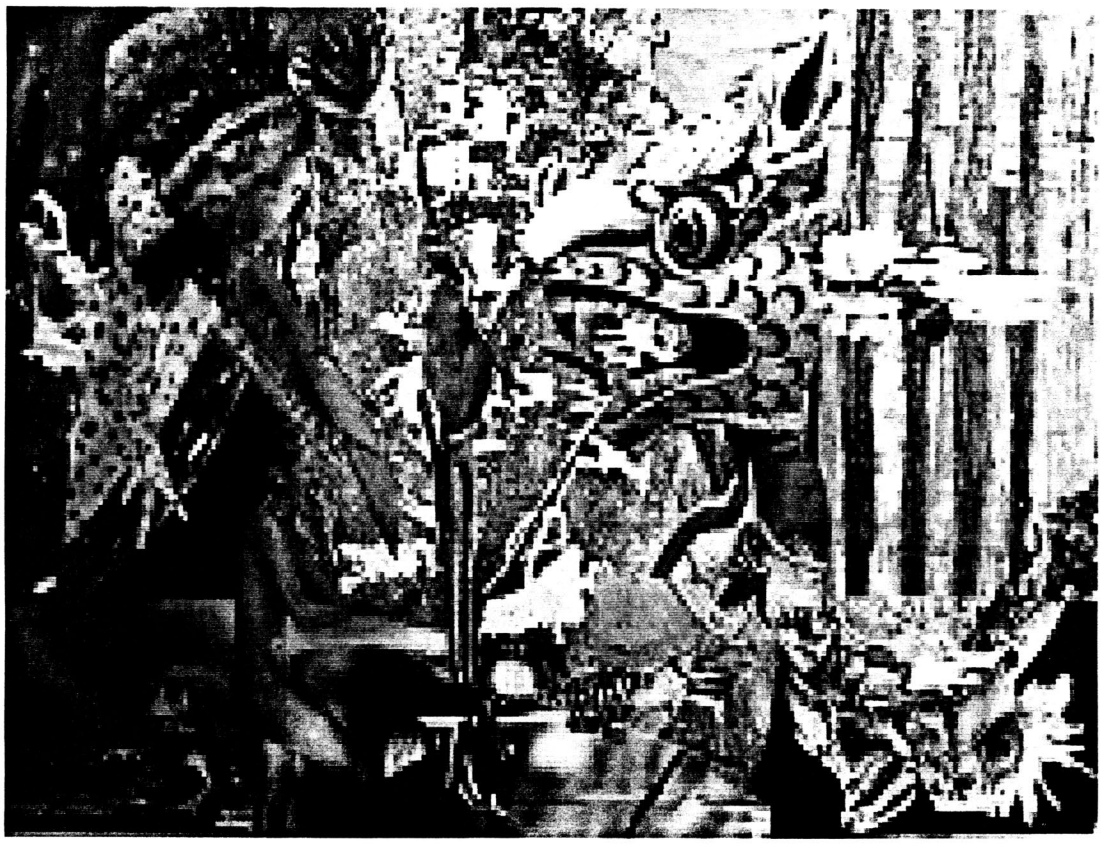

Figure 2 "Dragon" Collage

> *...I suggest that autobiographical reflection and analysis is an effective way to begin breaking the social taboos which produce and reproduce such dichotomies as private and public. In making transparent, through story-telling, the divisions of socially constructed dualities, I think it is possible to better understand how our collective and individual identities are culturally produced. Importantly, through memory-work and the re-construction of our everyday experience, we can begin to challenge the worth of such separations, and thus disrupt those academic canons which dismiss experience as a basis for knowledge* (Anne-Louise Brookes, 1992, p. 31).

> *For many years I have...encouraged those of our students who are embarking on any sort of long essay or dissertation to start from what we have come to call "the autobiography of the question". We suggest that they start by telling the story of their interest in the question, and that they then begin to map out the relation of their own developing sense of the question's interest to the history of more public kinds of attention to it. We justify this to our students...as a way of setting their lives and educational history within contexts more capacious than their own...*
> (Jane Miller, 1995, p. 23).

Several years ago, in my second year of teaching, when I toyed with the idea of graduate studies and exploring the need for feminist curriculum in schools, I purchased a book called *Feminist pedagogy: An autobiographical approach*, by Anne-Louise Brookes (1992). At the time, I picked it up only for the "feminist pedagogy" half of the title, practically ignoring the second half. As it turned out, I decided not to pursue a Master's degree in Education and the book remained unopened on a shelf at home. Some years later, finally embarking on graduate studies, a thesis on self-study, my advisor suggested I read a book by Anne-Louise Brookes — someone who used autobiography in her own graduate work. Excited about this "autobiographical approach", it never occurred to me that this was the very book which had been sitting on my shelf, right under my nose, for almost eight

years. In the library, I located the familiar purple, soft-covered book with the white, stylized anhk on the front. Rather embarrassed, but delightfully fascinated with how life works, I devoured Brookes' manuscript, contented to have finally "discovered" the "other half"of the title. Anne-Louise Brookes, in writing her dissertation, bravely uses autobiography and her own story of sexual abuse to examine the social construction of knowledge, authority, identity, and how present educational practices further contribute to the abusive treatment of women in society. She writes: "...I have attempted to identify some of the values, aims and assumptions which underlie and motivate my work. In particular, implicit in my story is the assumption that I can examine the construction of my identity in order to get inside the less obvious fabric of ideologies which shape 'the history my body has lived' (Rockhill, 1987:2), by the (re)construction of my social history through autobiographical narration" (p. 31).

Increasingly used in the literature (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Taylor, Gilligan, Sullivan, 1997) about women's psychological development and identity, are terms such as "resistance" or "psychological resistance". Popular language around women is in the relational world — do women "lose Voice", "accommodate", "conform", "sacrifice relationship with Self for the sake of relationship with others" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), "become addicted" (Schaef, 1986,1987, 1989) to the people and systems around them? Or, do they —take risks —"get angry", "rebel", "go against the status quo", "put relationship with the Self before relationship with others","recover", "resist" the socially constructed norms in which they live and interact? How might some of these issues be explored or "(re)constructed" through autobiographical narration?

In *Between voice and silence: Women and girls, race and relationship*, Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy M. Sullivan (1997) describe resistance in girls as "...a process in which girls consciously or unconsciously resist psychological and relational *disconnection* that can impede development and threaten psychological health" (p. 18). My own understanding of this is that it is desirable and healthy, then, to resist that which keeps us psychologically disconnected from others and, especially, from our self. I see

accommodation[1] as the way we disguise and shut out our inner voice from the outside world so that we can stay connected/stay in relationship with the people, systems and institutions around us — the listening audience. It is what makes us "good girls".

In keeping with Jane Miller's "autobiography of the question", the purpose of this chapter is to examine the autobiography of my thesis, which uses self-study and memory work as a way to explore women's identity and the ways in which women resist or accommodate the people and systems around them. Here I trace the roots of my thesis and various questions regarding the social construction of women's identity. In undertaking the autobiography of this self-study, this chapter is about remembering at a *subconscious* as well as *conscious* level.

The subconscious autobiography: Little girl passions

Remembering an evening of conversation with two close friends on the topic of "women's work" — the healing and educating of a society's citizens, and it's devalued status in our culture — I was taken back to my "first love": women's psychology, spirituality, and sexuality. The three of us had just seen the National Film Board's (NFB) *The Burning Times*, a documentary about the burning of so-called witches between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is a film I have seen numerous times. Afterward, I dug out *Crossing to Avalon*, by Jungian analyst, Jean Shinoda Bolen (1994), a book about one woman's pilgrimage to sacred places (inner as well as geographical). With the book in hand, and the film fresh in my mind, I was reminded, in part, of what it was that first brought me to where I am now. I had first seen *The Burning Times* in my twenties, when I was either married or engaged — oddly enough, I cannot remember which. I vaguely recall my ex-husband saying negative things about the film and basically reducing it to "dangerous" New

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1

Using "accommodation" as a comparison to "resistance" came out of a conversation with Susan Allnutt. It spontaneously came out of Susan's mouth as a group of us were discussing the various ways women either resist or give in to — accommodate — people, systems, situations. It has been my experience that women intuitively understand what is meant by "accommodation" in these circumstances (I see heads nod in unison whenever I talk about it). When I try to explain it, men, on the other hand, do not understand.

Age propaganda. A few years later, as a secondary school Language Arts teacher, I would show it to my grade eight students in the weeks leading up to Hallowe'en. It was my way of challenging the status quo. I wanted to get students to think critically about their world and what I think of his-story; to expose the young women to some feminist ideas and to another life and time for women. In the world of conventional schooling I wanted to be what is often called a "shit-disturber". It is only now, in my recent readings of Ann-Louise Brookes, that I see what I was attempting to do was to bring some form of critical feminist pedagogy into my classroom, to get my students to question power and gender dynamics, not only of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but of the present day, as well. I sensed that what I was doing was somehow subversive; this was my professional/public resistance. One time, a student asked me if I would have been burned at the stake for the crime of witchcraft, given what she had just learned from the film and what she knew of me. I told her that I probably would have. In fact, I had often thought my ex-husband would have been the first to throw on the kindling and strike the match. At that point in my life, resistance was non-existent in my private life.

Looking back on the types of books I read and continue to be drawn to, they all have a similar theme: women's psychology, sexuality, spirituality — body and soul and the stuff of women's stories. I grew up reading the feminist literature in my mother's library: Gloria Steinem, Germain Greer, Susan Brownmiller. Steinem, in particular, was a favourite because she writes from a more personal place/space. Some of the literature I read in my twenties I can sheepishly classify as New Age/self-help. And, like the women who "only read novels" (Mitchell, 1982), I too apologize for what I read. However, it inspired passion and purpose; I knew my mission in life was somehow tied to this. Whether it was *Outrageous acts and everyday rebellions* or Anne Wilson Schaef's work on process addictions and the Recovery Movement, much of it appeared to have its roots in feminism and, more importantly, suggested a paradigm shift from the patriarchal, capitalistic, addictive, work-obsessed society — which Schaef refers to as "the White Male System because the power and influence in it are held by white males, and it is perpetuated by white males -- with the help of all of us" (1987, p. 7) — to a matriarchal, holistic, "Emerging Female System [which] is life supporting and life-producing" (Schaef, 1987, p. 11). Schaef renamed these systems the

"Addictive" and the "Living Process" Systems, respectively. This left me to wonder what the world — past and present — would look like if it were turned on its head. I wanted to help turn it on its head.

I have always found women's struggles and successes, women's stories — collective and personal — inspiring and moving. Women's auto/biographies have made me feel less alone and, more importantly, made me believe that I am part of something greater and of something great. That, in and of itself, is tremendously empowering and healing. So, the question is, could I do that too? I knew I could empower and heal others as a nurse and a teacher, but could adding my story to a "women's canon" — to herstory — help others in some small way? Why is it we believe other people's stories are more important, more powerful than our own? In *Crossing to Avalon*, Bolen concludes her book with a quote from Badger in Barry Lopez's fable, Crow and weasel: "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away when they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive" (Cited in Bolen, 1994, p. 273).

A way of exploring my own story came in the guise of someone else's academic research — that of artist and fellow graduate student, Donna Davis. I turned to my own artistry and participated in Donna's arts-based qualitative study on the type research memos graduate students would create using collage in their own research process. Once a week for about seven weeks, she guided me along with another student in engaging in collage work. The nature of this collage work was such that we were asked to keep our own academic research in mind, to see what analytic memo[2] would surface through collage. We were encouraged not to "think" too much, but to go with our intuitions. This was easy for me because the collage-making was far too pleasurable to have to think about anything. There was an element of play and sheer joy that took me back to my childhood and Saturday

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2

According to Donna Davis and Lynn Butler-Kisber (1999), an analytic memo is an analytic tool for the reflective purposes for the researcher, which can be used during any part of the research process. It helps to provide an holistic understanding, not just of the material, but of the research process. "Traditionally...memos have been in written form as have most dimensions of qualitative research. More recently, there has been a burgeoning interest in alternative forms of representation (Butler-Kisber & Borgerson, 1997; Eisner, 1991) centering most frequently on how and why research reports can be presented in more arts-based ways (Eisner & Barone, 1997)" (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999).

afternoons spent painting and drawing. I went for what spoke to me aesthetically, having some faith that my research memo would somehow link to *The Dinner Party*. I soon found "my image": breasts, ocean waves, sweeps of white icing, billowing sheets and veils, parts of flowing gowns — circles and curves. In total, I created five collages: "Swirls", "Beaches", "Dragon", "Breast Plates", and "Birth", all of which are incorporated in this thesis. My own, as well as Donna's, insights and analysis of my collages appear in the chapters which follow this one.

In the dragon's mouth

This exercise of exploring "the autobiography of the question" has lead me back to my little girl passions. I had forgotten what I was about. I have needed to remember what it was that drove me, inspired me, impassioned me, in order to move forward in the writing process. In delving into the subconscious autobiography of my work, I am going to tell a story. I tell it with some fear and self-consciousness because it is my story, and no matter how strong or confident we may appear on the surface, it is often not the case on the inside.

In Donna Davis' (2000) analysis of my "Dragon" collage *(fig. 2)*, she observes:

> *...Like the well-known example of peeling the onion, the layers of Jo's images are stripped away only to reveal an irreducible essence, provocative shapes, grounded deep in the female body. Perhaps what is important is the addition and elaboration of layers...once the essential character of the creative problem — **how shall I offer myself and still have a self to offer?** — is recognized. Serving and sharing as opposed to eat and being eaten?* (2000)

I am amazed she picked this up from that collage — it was the one that, I thought, had nothing to do with my academic work. Yet, it is that "essential character", that question —*"how shall I offer myself and still have a self to offer?"* — which is central to what I am engaging in. In doing self-study, do I have much of a self to offer? What/how much self do I want to offer? If I do, will there still be a self left? Referring to the potential for academic skepticism in relation to doing self-study, if one's work is rejected, is one's self implicitly

rejected as well? How do we manage to remain objective, making a clear distinction from our work and our self? Should we? How does this play itself out in women, as we tend to place great importance on living and working in relationship? In her book, *Sexing the self: Gendered positions in cultural studies*, Elspeth Probyn (1993) says at the end of her chapter on "Materializing locations: Images and selves":

> *At the beginning of this chapter I spoke of how the difficulty of speaking, of an image being stranded out on a limb with nowhere to go and nothing below, as the spectre of emotionality haunted and taunted me. Both the feeling of speaking into a void — that no one can hear you — and the feeling that what one is saying is merely emotional drivel — that you are saying nothing (new) — are obvious impediments to speaking as a woman. No one wants to consciously fall into a personal abyss (p. 106).*

So, at the risk of "falling into a personal abyss", what follows is Jo at *The Dinner Party*.

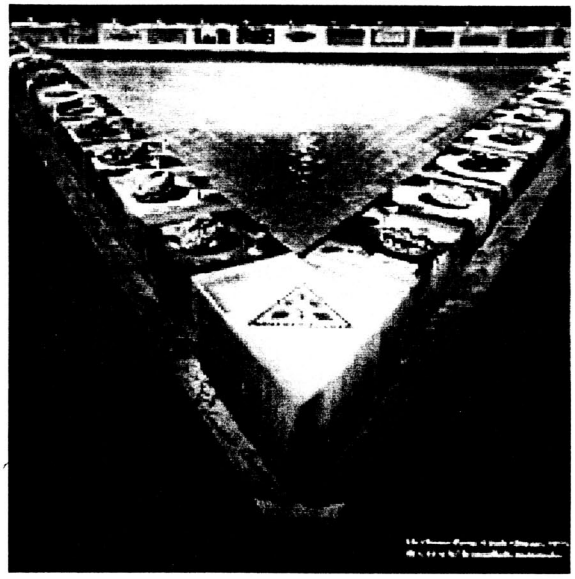

Figure 3 ***The Dinner Party,*** *© Judy Chicago 1979, mixed media, 48'x42'x3'. Photo: © Donald Woodman*

Remembering Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*: Symbolic representation of the subconscious autobiography

I am in the cafeteria at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and I am having lunch with my mother. I am having lobster salad (or is it crab?). I am almost twelve years old and I am feeling terribly grown up. It is the Spring of 1979 and my mother has decided to take the two of us to Sacramento to visit her cousins. On the way through we have a few days in San Francisco. I do not know if Mom has planned the trip with the intention of seeing Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, or if it is her friend, Jan — already in San Francisco visiting friends — who suggested the timing and the occasion. Looking back, I know that we were part of the thousands of people who flocked to see the premiere of Judy Chicago's art installation, that year *(fig. 3)*.

It is soon time to get into line for the exhibit. The line-up is immense, and it is taking forever to get in to see the exhibit. Thankfully, there are these beautiful woven banners suspended from the ceiling that I can look at while I wait. Finally, I am in the exhibition room which is very dark, except for this glowing, white light emanating from an enormous, triangular dinner table in the centre. The beauty is overwhelming; the thirty-nine plates on the table look like huge flowers. I know they tell a specific woman's story. I know these women had done something or were someone important. I understand the instant I walk into the room that there is something meaningful and very important being conveyed to me about women, and about myself. I am in awe. The table sits on top of an iridescent white floor, where the names of 999 women are painted in gold. I look for my own name, my middle name, on the floor; Athena must surely be there. I am looking for some evidence of myself.

I am especially drawn to the first set of plates; to the first wing of the table where the mythical women, the goddesses sit — the Primordial and Fertile Goddesses. I am drawn to the time when women had power, some of it super-human. I am still little girl enough to remember, as Marianne Williamson (1993) would say, a time when we knew we were goddesses:

> *"What?" you say. "Me, a goddess?" Yes, I say, and don't act so surprised. You knew when you were little that you were born for something special and*

> *no matter what happened to you, that could not be erased. The magic could not be drained from your heart...Sorry to tell you, but you had it right years ago, and then you forgot. You were born with a mystical purpose* (1993, p. 6).

At age eleven, I had not quite lost the notion that I was powerful and connected to something that is ultimately greater, ultimately female. I will be drawn to these images, to this installation and my memories of it — conscious and subconscious — for the rest of my life. I find my name on the Heritage Floor.

Figure 4 *Primordial Goddess plate and placesetting from* ***The Dinner Party****, © Judy Chicago 1979, 14" in diameter.*
Photo: © Donald Woodman
Chicago's Primordial Goddess surrounded by more earthly goddesses.

"History is written by the winners" — *The Burning Times*

> *"I firmly believe that the absence of visual images from a female perspective attests to a more significant absence, one that impacts heavily upon women's sense of self. Whereas for men there is* presence *in the public arena, for women there is primarily* absence*: an* absence *of political leaders on the highest level of world governments; an* absence *of public monuments honoring women heroes and leaders; and, mirroring this, an* absence *in our museums of images that extend our personal experiences into the cultural dialogue and, most important, convey our sense of ourselves as subjects rather than as objects*" (Chicago, 1996, p. 5).

In the early 1970's, artist Judy Chicago took her personal feelings of empowerment and inspiration regarding women and women's history, to a social level when she created *The Dinner Party*, an art installation which is a symbolic representation of women in Western Civilization. Today she describes it as "a multi-media tribute to women — to those who've done the cooking throughout history" (Judy Chicago in an interview with Michael Enright, CBC Radio, 99/10/31). In moving from the personal to the social, Chicago, through *The Dinner Party,* hoped to "teach women's history through a work of art that can convey the long struggle for freedom and justice that women have waged since the advent of male-dominated society, and to break the cycle of history that *The Dinner Party* describes" (1996, p. 3).

The fact that *The Dinner Party*, twenty years later, still does not have permanent housing, seems ironic. Who would have thought the very thing Chicago conveyed so publically and so powerfully and which touched so many people, would also fall victim to this historic erasure of women's art, and women's history at the end of the twentieth Century. Chicago, herself, writes "...even though I learned that so many other women's important achievements had been excised from history, I did not believe that the same thing could happen to me" (1996, p. 224). More recently in her interview with Michael Enright, Chicago explains that *The Dinner Party* was about the erasure of women in history, and that we have not disengaged from that part of history when women's achievements are not

recognized. Chicago observes that although there is a great movement of women artists in the world today, institutions have not changed; they still do not preserve the symbols of women's culture, and women (of wealth) have not taken it upon themselves to create institutions that will preserve our symbols. According to Chicago, the issues of women artists have not changed. Women still do not know their history nor their art history. There is a startling absence of women's images in museums and institutions. Erasure is alive and well.

But why should this be so surprising? In 1979, I did not realize that what I was witnessing was a significant moment for women, and especially for women artists. I had no idea, as I made my way around the great table, that what I was seeing, loving, and *identifying with* was going to send shock waves throughout the art world and American politics. This work of art was going to create a major scandal in North America. Back home in Canada, I remember the fall-out from the exhibit; it made the evening news: *The Dinner Party* was "pornographic". I could not understand why (the plates looked like flowers to me), but somehow I was able to intuit that this was about power and sex — women's power and sex — and men not liking it. In her book *The Dinner Party*, Chicago writes of that time:

> *In both the art world and Congress, the plates were described in terms of female sexuality, as if there was something inherently evil about images that alluded to women's sexual power...although the imagery is rooted in a vulval form, the plates are actually transmuted and layered images. However, I have become convinced that no matter* ***how*** *I describe the plates, this perception of the images* ***as vaginas*** *will continue, so I must ask: What is wrong with that?* (1996, p. 223)

Looking back, I think I understood the hypocrisy of the "pornography" argument. I could imagine what was in the sock drawers of these politicians, and yet they had the audacity to label Chicago's work — art that moves me and hundreds of thousands of other women — sick and pornographic. As well, I was not blind to the images of women portrayed all around me in this society; images which objectified and demeaned women and

women's sexuality; images which were constructed by men for men. Chicago goes on to recall:

> *Why this obsession with the plates? Perhaps because they suggest that female sexuality can be assertive, powerful, and transformative. What I believe is being revealed in this assertion that the plate images are somehow pornographic or obscene is something very real about our culture's view of women and women's sexuality: that it is, at its base, detestable or at the very least shameful and not to be publicly revealed* (1996, p. 223).

I remember feeling angry. I think it contributed to my resolve to turn the world on its head. I called myself "feminist" from a very early age. One world I wanted to turn on its head was the world of obstetrics and gynecology. In my early teens I wanted to be a midwife — not for any love of children or babies, as was assumed by most people (after all, aren't girls and women supposed to be "naturally" maternal?) — but because of my observations of a patriarchal medical profession that treated pregnant and labouring women as diseased bodies which needed to be controlled by (male) doctors. I believed (and still do) that all matters affecting women's reproductive lives should be left solely in the hands of women. Did the place setting I saw for Mary Wollstonecraft, contribute to this desire? This image certainly imprinted itself on my psyche. The runner for Mary Wollstonecraft *(fig. 5)* depicts a woman dying in childbirth, her body splayed on the bed, loosely draped with a sheet and lying in a pool of blood. The male physician stands to one side, holding Mary's daughter (Mary Shelly), the baby he has delivered. Only now do I notice the woman or girl standing to the right of Mary. Who is she? The midwife? A child? At what point in my life did I decide I wanted to be a midwife? At what point in my life did I sense that there is something systemically abusive about the way women are treated left in the hands of the medical profession? When and how did I understand the politics of power and women's reproduction? Did this runner trigger something in my subconscious or had I already known this, decided this?

After high school, I studied nursing as a first step toward becoming a midwife. I am

a member of the "pink collar ghetto" on two counts: as a nurse, as well as a teacher. It is important to note that the majority of women burned at the stake for the crime of witchcraft were midwives and counselors — healers and educators. It is no wonder, then, why today our systems of education, health and social services are in such crisis. Why the people who work in them — primarily women — are underpaid and over burdened. We burn our witches a little differently, more palatably, at the end of the Twentieth Century.

> *At a witch trial in 1593, the investigating lawyer (a married man) apparently discovered a clitoris for the first time; [he] identified it as a devil's teat, sure proof of the witch's guilt. It was "a little lump of flesh, in the manner sticking out as if it had been a teat, to the length of half an inch," which the gaoler, "perceiving at the first sight thereof, meant not to disclose, because it was adjoining to so secret a place which was not decent to be seen. Yet in the end, not willing to conceal so strange a matter," he showed it to various bystanders. The bystanders had never seen anything like it. The witch was convicted.* — The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets (as cited in Ensler, 1998)

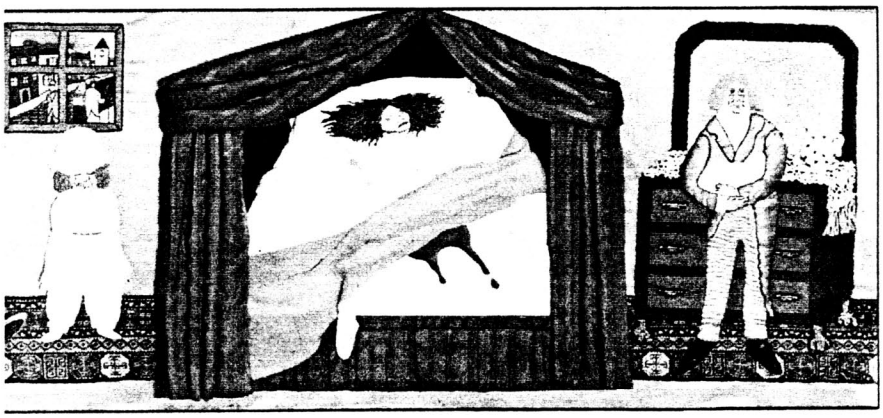

Figure 5 ***Mary Wollstonecraft*** *runner back from* ***The Dinner Party,*** *© Judy Chicago 1979*
Photo: © Donald Woodman

"Powerful, wise, vagina-talking women"

At age eleven, and well into my adolescence, I did not fit Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan's (1992) profile of a voiceless, self-less girl. In *Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development*, they observe that as girls journey from girlhood into adolescence, adolescence becomes:

> *a time of disconnection, sometimes of dissociation or repression in women's lives, so that women often do not remember — and tend to forget or to cover over — what as girls they have experienced and known. As the phrase 'I don't know' enters our interviews with girls at this development juncture, we observe girls struggling over speaking and not speaking, knowing and not knowing, feeling and not feeling, and we see the inner division as girls come to a place where they feel they cannot say or feel or know what they have experienced — what they have felt and known* (1992, p. 4).

I do not recall a sense of disconnection or repression during my adolescence. I remember feeling very empowered and self-assured. I knew, I felt, I spoke. I have no idea if my experience of *The Dinner Party* — on the cusp of adolescence — had anything to do with this. Perhaps it did. Looking back, I think what an amazing gift it was my mother gave me. Such strong, powerful images of women's struggle and of their survival. What might those images do for girls' development and women's psychology? For society's treatment of women? I am reminded, in part, of Naomi Wolf's *Promiscuities: The secret struggle for womanhood* (1997), in which she devotes a chapter to other ancient cultures' view of women's sexual desire and power. In "Cheap or precious", she writes about the Taoists' beautiful and poetic descriptions of women's genitalia: "the Open Peony Blossom", "the Golden Lotus", "the Receptive Vase", "the Cinnabar Gate". She muses about how young women today might feel with such reverent terms used to describe their genitals: "Just imagine how differently a young girl today might feel about her developing womanhood if every routine slang description she heard of female genitalia used metaphors of preciousness and beauty, and every account of sex was centered on **her** pleasure — pleasure on which

general harmony depended" (p. 183). Just imagine how differently a society might feel about womanhood? With poignancy and humour, Eve Ensler (1998), in *The vagina monologues* also voices her concern with society's attitudes towards women's genitalia and how that impacts on women and girls' well-being and sense of self, including her own. Like Brookes, Ensler writes of being a survivor of sexual abuse. In her introduction, Ensler says:

> *"Vagina." There, I've said it...I've been saying that word over and over for the last three years. I've been saying it in theaters, at colleges, in living rooms, in cafés, at dinner parties, on radio programs all over the country. I would say it on TV if someone would let me...I say it in my sleep. I say it because I'm not supposed to say it. I say it because it is an invisible word — a word that stirs up anxiety, awkwardness, contempt, and disgust...( )I say it because I believe that what we don't say we don't see, acknowledge, or remember. What we don't say becomes a secret, and secrets often create shame and fear and myths...( ) And as more women say the word, saying it becomes less of a big deal; it becomes part of our language, part of our lives. Our vaginas become integrated and respected and sacred. They become part of our bodies, connected to our minds, fueling our spirits. And the shame leaves and the violence stops, because vaginas are visible and real, and they are connected to powerful, wise, vagina-talking women* (1998, pp. xix-xxiv).

No, society is still not prepared to permanently house *The Dinner Party*. The world is still not ready for "powerful, wise, vagina-talking women" — even if its very existence depends on it.

The conscious autobiography: Skimming the surface

As noted in the vast body of literature that has emerged over the last several decades on women's lives, many women spend a vast part of their lives conforming to or accommodating the needs, perceptions, and expectations of the individuals and the world around them, which often results in a loss of Voice or Self (Taylor, et al., 1997; Brown and

Gilligan, 1992; Steinem, 1992; Schaef, 1986, 1987, 1989). My own life is no different. My loss of voice and of psychological resistance did not hit me until I turned twenty. The decade between my twenties and thirties was a far more precarious juncture for me than adolescence. Certainly, they were years of *public* resistance — my public and professional persona has always been one of "shit-disturber". However, my twenties were defined by private accommodation. Somehow, my little girl passions disappeared with university, teaching, and marriage. Spaces where the goddess did not dwell, or had to go underground.

What has *consciously* lead me to examine this loss of Voice, has been my own history of accommodation; of being the "good" daughter, student, partner, employee — elements which contribute to my loss of Voice. It was in my twenties — my years of undergraduate studies, teacher training, teaching, marriage, divorce, and other "love" relationships — that my loss of a sense of Self was so pronounced. In relationship with others (men, teachers, my parents, colleagues) I kept a constant vigil on what was expected of me, and second-guessed the will and desires of the people and systems around me. All my life I had been a good daughter — never worrying my parents; doing as I was told; being a good student. Not much had changed by the time I entered university. It was not until my early twenties, in my year of teacher education and in, yet another, disastrous relationship, that I realized I was angry. This was a new and totally foreign emotion for me. It was an emotion that followed me into my marriage (the worst and most "dangerous" of any of my "bad" relationships) where it festered and manifested itself as weight gain, loss of libido, and chronic yeast infections, until I left the marriage thirteen months later.

As an undergraduate in English literature, I felt like a fish out of water. Not only had I come from a primarily female "helping profession", licenced as a Registered Nurse, I had also come from a science background, only to find myself having to wade through the usual university canonical texts of "Dead White European Males". Three years later, my year of teacher education was fraught with anxiety, fear of failure, feeling like a fraud, with a broken heart thrown in for good measure. Had it not been for my professor, who simply gave me permission to be myself in a classroom — something I was shocked I was allowed to be — I would not have survived. Suffice to say, I never felt stupid until I went to university. Anne-Louise Brookes (1992) explores how women's learning is affected by abuse and how the

education system further contributes to that abuse by teaching us that such personal experiences are unimportant or inappropriate by not allowing them space or voice, leading to further disconnection from the Self. As Brookes writes, "...I had begun to suspect that there was a theoretical relationship between the kind of fixed academic practices which I had been subject to for most of my schooling experience and my inability to write or speak about abuse" (1992, p. 3). Through reading these autobiographical writings of Brookes I, too, am starting to suspect the system, and that maybe my feelings of inadequacy and fraud were not totally my fault, after all.

I did manage, however, to survive the system long enough to actually become certified as a teacher. In my second year of teaching, I became a union representative. Later, I was told new teachers without tenure tended not to participate in such things. I just thought it part of my professionalism, and far more interesting than coaching basketball. Unionism was in my blood; absorbed by osmosis while in the womb. In 1965-66, my mother was one of the founding members of the Eastern Townships Association of Teachers and when pregnant with me in 1966, she "burned up the highway", as she describes it, back and forth, to union meetings. She continued to be involved in union work until she retired in 1992. However, although I felt less accommodating and more resistant in my professional life, as a teacher, I was constantly plagued with feeling like a fraud, that somehow, someone, would "find out". But, find out what? That I did not do things the way other teachers did. That I did not control my classes the same way other teachers controlled theirs. That I did not really mind if all my students were not "on task". That I said and did things that were probably seen as unorthodox. That I let students know me. That I smiled — even before Christmas. I believed that in the eyes of the system (administrators, many of my colleagues, perhaps some parents) I was not a "good teacher", whatever that was.

Yet, it was my unorthodoxy that sustained me, as well as being a source of anxiety. I fell that I was not like the others, and I liked that. And even though I remember struggling with feeling fraudulent, it was in my classroom, with my students, where I felt most myself. They seemed far more accepting and open to something/someone who was not the status quo, and who was humanly flawed and who tried to empathize with their own struggle. I had finally been able to give myself permission to be me. It is in the remembering of what I tried

to accomplish as a teacher (creating a safe learning environment, attempting some semblance of feminist pedagogy and critical thought, and adapting work so that it had relevance to their lives), as well as my relationship with my students, and *their* invaluable feedback on my life as an educator, that I have finally come to see myself as a good teacher — passionate and compassionate. After four and a half years in the regular school system, I left teaching. I hated the system and how I felt in it. I still despise how it takes individuals — students and educators — and institutionalizes them; taking away their individuality, their creativity, their spirit. It is what bell hooks (1994) refers to as the "banking system" of education. Often I feel tremendous sadness at having left; I feel as if I abandoned my students. Sometimes guilt accompanies this: I had the privilege and the freedom to walk away, and they did not/do not. I left a sinking ship; I abandoned "the cause". (Do I have a Jesus Complex?) I still feel I have a responsibility to make the system different, better. It does not matter that "my" students have long graduated. In a way, they are all still my students — those I taught, those I did not, and the ones still to come — and I feel a sense of responsibility to them. It is only now — seventeen years after high school, ten years after university, five years after having left teaching — that I have started to wonder why it is every time I go past a school, I shudder. I have a visceral reaction. I imagine it is a similar experience to the one some people have when they get near a hospital (oddly, I love hospitals). It is only in remembering that I discover I have never really liked school when I was a student, though I always "did well". I now find myself envying friends who say they hated school and had the luxury of *being aware of it* at the time. I was a "good student": I got top marks, I was well-behaved, I was involved in school activities, I was class valedictorian. It was what was expected of me, especially as I was the daughter of two teachers. My unquestioned conformity had a dual role: not only was it part of my duties as the "good student", but it was also my duty as the "good daughter". I did what was expected, but I was not aware of not liking it, or that I could question what was expected of me.

Drug of Choice

It was not until I was twenty-six that I became a rebellious adolescent. At age twenty-six, I was first able to stand back and see my story, my loss of Self, my "dis-ease", through

the writings on *process addictions* by psychologist and feminist, Anne Wilson Schaef. I was in my third year of teaching and I had just left a poisonous marriage and was beginning a new relationship. At the time, I was trying to sort out the pain, difficulty, and loss of Self that always accompanied my "love" relationships with men. My therapist recommended I read *Escape from intimacy: Untangling the "love" addictions: sex, romance, relationships*, by Anne Wilson Schaef (1989). From that point on, I began exploring not only my own addiction to relationships, but examining how process addictions were alive and well in society and how they played themselves out on various levels. Schaef (1987), in *When society becomes an addict*, defines a process addiction, as an addiction where "one becomes hooked on a process — a specific series of actions or interactions" (e.g. accumulating money, work, sex, romance, gambling, worry, care-taking) (1987, p. 22). As with any addiction — whether it be substance (alcohol, drugs) or process — it:

> *takes control of us, causing us to do and think things that are inconsistent with our personal values and leading us to become progressively more compulsive and obsessive...An addiction keeps us unaware of what is going on inside us...We stop relying on our knowledge and our senses and start relying on our confused perceptions to tell us what we know and sense* (1987, p. 18).

According to Schaef, most of us live and work in organizations and systems which perpetuate process addictions because the systems themselves are addictive: "the system in which we live is an addictive system. It has all the characteristics and exhibits all the processes of the individual alcoholic or addict. It functions in precisely the same ways" (1987, p. 4). She goes on to say that an addictive system is "a system that calls forth addictive behaviors. The individual begins to operate out of an addictive process. An addictive system is a *closed* system in that it presents few choices to individuals in terms of roles they may take and directions they may pursue" (1987, p. 25). Reading Schaef's words was like putting on a new pair of glasses; I could not help but look at the world through these "addiction" lenses. Everywhere I turned, I could see the addictive process at work. One

place it seemed glaring was in education, particularly in the school I taught and the board for which I worked. The key piece for me and my work, in Schaef's definition of addiction, is how an addiction "keeps us *unaware* of what is going on *inside us*...We stop relying on *our knowledge* and *our senses* and start relying on our confused perceptions to tell us what we know and sense" (1987, p. 18, emphasis added). According to Schaef, when we engage in the addictive process, we become out of touch with the Self, with what we feel, what we know, what we value. We stop relying on an internal barometer to guide us; our experiences, our knowledge, our feelings are no longer our referents. We begin seeing, defining, and valuing ourselves through external sources, often through other people. In *Co-Dependence Misunderstood-Mistreated* (1986), Schaef states, "Persons who are so completely externally referented will do almost anything to be in a relationship, regardless of how awful the relationship is" (p. 48). We look for knowledge, value, approval, happiness, well being, acceptance, definition, etc. from the outside world, even if that world is itself dysfunctional and dis-eased. It seems to me that our education system reinforces this behaviour.

It is interesting to note that in her first book, *Women's reality: An emerging female system in a white male society*, Schaef (1985) refers the system in which we live (western, patriarchal) as the White Male System; the system she now calls The Addictive System. Later, in *Co-dependence: Misunderstood-mistreated*, she notes: "When we talk about the addictive process, we are talking about civilization as we know it" (Schaef, 1986, p. 71). For Schaef, this White Male/Addictive System is "the prevailing system within our culture [which] runs our government, our courts, our churches, our schools, our economy, and our society...a system that all of us have learned and in which we participate...a worldview" (1987, p. 7). I started noticing "addictive behaviour" in my students. I realized that as "the teacher"("the expert", the one who evaluates), they would externally referent themselves *in relationship* to me. They would look to me for approval and sense of Self. For example, when working on a writing assignment, an all too common conversation with a student would go like this:

"Is this OK, Miss?"

"You tell me; this is your own work. How do you feel about it?"

"I don't know. You tell me; you're the teacher."

After ten years of schooling — ten years of formative and summative evaluation, "important subject matter", reward and punishment, and conformity — most of my students could not express what they knew or how they felt about their own work, even when it was a piece of creative writing. They often could not tell me *why* they liked or detested a piece of literature. It was as if their internal barometer did not exist, or they were not able to tap into it. They seemed cut off from what they knew, felt, valued. I am not sure if they were afraid to voice their experience of their work — afraid that there was supposed to be some "right answer", and that they might not have it . And, if they did not have it, something was at risk. What? Our relationship? Reward or punishment from the teacher? It seemed to me that children in school — if they are to be successful — quickly learn to conform to the standards and expectations that others set for them; they become dependent/addicted to a system of rewards and punishments. Their creativity, ideas, experiences, work, and Self are externally evaluated by the "experts" in the system. Children soon become dependent upon the "experts" in the system — teachers, principals — and quickly lose their ability to define and value their self-worth. I see this as classic co-dependent behaviour as defined by Schaef:

> *The lives of co-dependents are structured by the question, 'What will others think?' Co-dependents are insecure and have such low self-esteem that they must depend on others to prove their worth. Their main goal in life is to try to figure out what others want and then deliver that to them, for co-dependents are people-pleasers* (1986, p. 52).

This behaviour appears to be what is supported and perpetuated by our education system — or at least what I know and see around me of conventional North American schooling. It is standard and normal. As Schaef attests:

> *Our society tends to accept the abnormal as normal when it is common.*

> *Clearly, the addictive process is common in this society, and so it is accepted as normal...We live in a society whose institutions are built upon and exacerbate some of the chief characteristics of the addictive process* (1986, p. 71).

I see the education system as a pathological model. If our present education system is 'normal', then it is pathologically normalizing. It is part of the addictive process, and a major cog in the wheel of our addictive society.

It was the continual "Is this OK?", my students' constant search for external affirmation, their fear of risking relationship with an external authority, that sadly reminded me of my own experience in relationships with men. Underneath the superficial "Is this OK?" was an unspoken "Am ***I*** OK?", "Am I worthy?". I started to wonder how this behaviour in the education system might contribute specifically to relationship addiction in adult women. How had my own good girl/good student schooling played a part in my own relationship addiction? I became interested in the development of co-dependency and process addictions in women and the role the education system plays in contributing to these 'dis-eases', and in supporting the addictive system. It seemed logical. Schools are places of conformity, and girls and women — because we are not the dominant culture — spend their life conforming to someone else's, or some system's, image of what girls and women should be. We become preoccupied with complying and accommodating, rather than being (thinking, doing, feeling) what we want to be.

According to Schaef (1989) a relationship addict can be someone who is addicted to the concept of relationship and is obsessed with having any relationship (real or fantasy), or is someone who is addicted to a particular relationship (p. 75). In either case, both types of addicts will do all they can — including silencing or repressing wants, needs, values, morals, even putting themselves in danger — in order to maintain a relationship (1989, pp. 102-103). Relationship addicts "look to the relationship to tell them who they are. They have no concept of establishing an identity *of* their own, *on* their own...Since they have made the relationship the source of their validity, meaning, and security, they *must* hold on to it" (1989, pp. 77-78). Through my own experience, observations, and readings, it became clear

to me that many women accommodate because we believe it will keep us connected to others — to the listening audience. We are reluctant to risk losing relationships so we silence our voice; we do not say what we know, what we feel is right or true for our Self. We skim the surface of our life, afraid to delve too deep into the substance of our Self for fear of upsetting the status quo.

Making Connections

> *And since part of what we know as women has to do with the pervasiveness of androcentric and patriarchal norms, values, and societal structures, such a practice would be both responsive to others' voices and yet resistant to the dominant voices, the cultural overlays that serve to drown out, mute, or distort the voices of those with less power or authority* (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p. 15).

When I eventually came across the various works of Carol Gilligan and "consoeurs", and their work with the girls at Laurel School and loss of voice, I noticed a strong connection to what Schaef had been saying. It seemed to me that what Brown and Gilligan (1992) refer to as sacrificing Self "for the sake of relationships" was the same as what Anne Wilson Schaef saw as relationship addiction. Brown and Gilligan observed that the older the girls at Laurel School got, the more unsure of themselves they became. Of most interest to me was their observation of how the girls would "give up relationship" (with the Self; with what they knew, valued, felt, believed) in order to save their relationships with others:

> *The girls...as they approached adolescence, were finding themselves at a relational impasse; in response they were sometimes making, sometimes resisting a series of disconnections that seem at once adaptive and psychologically wounding: between psyche and body, voice and desire, thoughts and feelings, self and relationships. The central paradox... — the giving up of relationship for the sake of 'Relationships' — is a paradox of which the girls themselves are aware* (1992, p. 7).

The girls' focus was less on the Self and more on others — what to say and do to please others and preserve relationships, even if what they said and did went against their inner beliefs and values. They started to question their values and ideas and feelings. According to Brown and Gilligan,"I don't know" became a significantly large part of their vocabulary as the girls headed into adolescence.

I believe the "disease" Schaef describes in relation to adults, is the same kind of psychological harm Brown and Gilligan describe in adolescent women. That disease being the inability to resist psychological disconnection, particularly disconnection with Self. As Schaef writes of Barbara, a woman who is suffering from relationship addiction:

> *She realized that she so fully had tried to be what she thought (her husband) wanted that over the years she had completely lost contact with herself. In fact, she felt she had no self. She believed that she had already killed her being, and her depression was a result of the loss of her self. It was only her body that survived* (1989, p. 88).

Schaef takes the danger of this psychological disconnection further than Brown and Gilligan when she warns that the prognosis for all additive behaviours, including relationship addiction, if not treated will inevitably lead to insanity and/or death:

> *Because of the mood-altering, insane, illusionary aspect of relationship addiction, addicts lose contact with the awareness that they have options, and they often stay in situations that are physically dangerous...relationship addiction is difficult to see as fatal. Yet to those...who have been working with it for sometime recognize that it follows the same course as any other addiction and is progressive and fatal. Dead relationships can be literally that — dead relationships* (Schaef, 1989, p. 82).

Epiphany

Sometime during the winter in 1995, I walked out of my vice principal's office feeling angry and disillusioned. We had just had a somewhat confrontational conversation in which she challenged my decision to indicate "pleasure to teach" on all my students' report cards, regardless of their mark. She said it sent a confusing message to the child who received a failing grade, and that she herself could not understand how a teacher could find any pleasure teaching a student who did not work or did not learn. Her words went to my very core, to what I was all about as a teacher. I explained to her, that those marks, those numbers on a page, were merely that, just numbers. But numbers that had the power to make or break a student's self-esteem. I felt it vital to convey to all my students that, regardless of their mark, I was honoured to have them in my class; it was a pleasure to teach them, to enter into relationship with them. I stood firm in my resolve: I would not change the comments, and I would continue putting the same comments on report cards to come. She was totally baffled and unnerved. It concretized what I had always known: she and I were philosophically at opposite ends of a spectrum when it came to teaching and what it means to be an educator. After our meeting, I decided I no longer wanted to continue working in this kind of system. That afternoon, I composed a letter asking my board for a leave of absence, effective for the winter of 1996.

The Reluctant Teacher

However, I must confess that when I entered graduate school, I had no intension of exploring teacher education, teaching, students, or any aspect of education in any *direct* way. I was a practitioner who had left school behind, sick of a dysfunctional institution and a soul-less system which appears to be more concerned with creating producers and consumers for a capitalistic society than with developing healthy, happy, critically thinking citizens who are more interested in "being" instead of "doing". I wanted no part of it. Ironically, I found myself "doing school" again — this time as a student — in yet another educational institution. Perhaps it is not so ironic, as human beings tend to "resort to type" and fall back on their old habits. I have come to learn that though it may be easy to take the teacher out of the classroom, it's not so easy to take the classroom out of the teacher. As Mitchell and

Weber write in *Reinventing ourselves*: "Leave school? It would be hard to leave it totally behind, even if we wanted to. We may physically leave the school building that we work or learn in, but once outside, school is ever-present, whether we notice it or not" (1999, p. 3).

When I began graduate studies I had originally planned to examine process addictions in the lives of some of my former, female students. I was curious to find out whether or not relationship addiction had manifested itself in their adult life with men, and what role their schooling may have played in this. Somehow, in the space of a year, the focus shifted to my own life, my own experience of process addictions. I began reading the works of Jo Spence (1986) and Annette Kuhn (1995) on photography, family photos, and autobiography, and Mitchell and Weber's work on self-study and memory work. I became more and more fascinated with the idea of self-study, memory work and autobiography; with using photos and art and other visual prompts to remember, reflect, and reinvent one's Self. The artistic element was extremely attractive — working with family photos, collage, and art installations would allow me to nourish my creative spirit and fulfill my need to produce a piece of work which is unique and more than words on paper. I eventually decided to develop my thesis as a self-study using various visual and artistic memory prompts as a way to explore women's identity/my identity and the ways in which women/I resist or accommodate the people and systems around them/me.

Although I have chosen to explore the social construction of women's identity, by using my own story I've discovered that "teacher" is a significant part of my (woman) identity. I'm a practitioner who left school, but I remain an educator. Whether or not I wanted or intended it, I find my teaching self very evident in my work. I am not certain this could have been a conscious choice, when my conscious decision was precisely to leave that part of my identity behind. To my own surprise and amazement, I do not easily relinquish the title "teacher". Then, after reading bell hooks' *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, I felt vindicated as a teacher. What struck me most is how she sees the teacher as healer and teaching as a sacred act; that, as educators, part of our job — or perhaps the essence of our job — is the spiritual development of our students and not solely the intellectual. *Teaching to transgress* resonates most with me as a teacher, even more so than as a graduate student. As a student, her work certainly speaks to me as someone who

is engaged in critical thought, the social construction of identity, feminist inquiry. However, I realize, as a teacher, what I valued most within myself — what I *intuitively* hoped to accomplish with my students and the learning environment I tried to create — was along the lines of feminist, critical, and even engaged pedagogy. As someone who felt stifled and who never liked to follow the rules in the oppressive, banking system of education, I felt vindicated reading hooks' words. *It wasn't just me.*

bell hooks' work in feminist and critical pedagogy (along with Brookes and Neilsen) argues for the rightful place of embodied knowledge and different voices in academic research; for less hierarchical and androcentric, to more qualitative, alternative, personal, poetic, earthy, often more "female" voices. In her chapter, "Confronting class" hooks writes, "Feminist and critical pedagogy are two alternative paradigms for teaching which have really emphasized the issue of coming to voice. That focus emerged as central, precisely because it was so evident that race, sex, and class privilege empower some students more than others, granting 'authority' to some voices more than others" (1994, p. 185).

hooks emphasizes that feminist and critical pedagogy alone are not enough if education is to be the practice of freedom. We can be very liberal in our ideology, but if we do not put it into practice (i.e. in the classroom), our words and theories are empty. For education to be truly liberatory, to challenge the "banking system", we must develop and practice "engaged pedagogy". Engaged pedagogy takes into consideration the teacher as healer and that to do this one has to be self-actualized (so that students can become self-actualized). And, self-actualization includes an element of well-being. As hooks explains:

> *Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy", is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students* (1994, p. 15).

In my work as a teacher and as a graduate student engaged in studying myself in a

Faculty of Education, hooks' work helps to support my argument for the need for all educators — especially those working at the primary and secondary levels — to engage in autobiographical reflection. Students, particularly children, have the right to interact with whole and present adults in their lives, especially if they are not getting this at home. Sadly, very often this is not the case at school, either. And, "[i]f professors are wounded, damaged individuals, people who are not self-actualized, then they will seek asylum in the academy rather than seek to make the academy a place of challenge, dialectical interchange, and growth" (hooks, 1994, p. 165).

Overview: *The Dinner Party* as resistance

Recalling Donna Davis' analysis of my "Dragon" collage and her uncanny observation of "serving and sharing as opposed to eat and being eaten", I have organized my thesis in such a way that it revolves around food imagery. Not only does her comment reflect a fear of my being devoured or a fear of a loss of voice and accommodation, it also points to my love of food (devouring), its preparation, and table setting as an artistic outlet. Food and table settings have become the organizing principal for my work. Donna's insight also draws attention to my interest in Judy Chicago's "multi-media tribute...to those who've done the cooking throughout history". *The Dinner Party* as The Metaphor for my thesis came quite by accident. It stemmed innocently out of a discussion with, Claudia, my advisor. I had been to another art exhibit, one on table settings organized around various themes. Since table settings seemed to be the prevailing image that came up in my work, I wanted to change my thesis to table settings. The answer was a resounding "No!" from Claudia. However, it lead to a conversation about art, food, table settings as organizing principles. And then, suddenly, there was Chicago's work. I cannot remember who brought it up first — the ultimate table setting, *The Dinner Party*.

Chicago's *Dinner Party* not only functions as an organizing principle or metaphor for my work, but it also serves as an example of resistance, and Judy Chicago as resister. Chicago and her installation rocked the art world and American sensibilities by making quite a political statement:

> *Many people do not realize the symbolic importance of art in that it embodies a perspective that either enhances or challenges the prevailing values. Nor is it widely understood that the art that is preserved in our museums attests to a particular world view, one that basically reflects the male-dominated society in which we live. Housing* ***The Dinner Party*** *would mean the preservation of a visual symbol that asserts the importance of women's lives, experiences, contributions, and achievements, thereby calling into question the generally assumed primacy of male experience along with the underlying presumption that* ***what men do is important while what women do does not count*** (1996, pp. 222-223).

The Dinner Party was also a statement about women's art, and women artists. In *Through the flower*, Chicago (1975) discusses her struggle, in her early career, with having to leave her woman-ness out of her art in order to be taken seriously. She writes of "trying to 'slip by' in the male world and express myself without losing validation from men..." and to work with images "the professional art community allowed 'serious' artists to use" (1975, pp. 52-53). With *The Dinner Party*, her use of china-painting and needlework were "intended to pay homage to women's too-often unacknowledged creative contributions while calling into question some of the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art" (1996, p. 12). As noted earlier, in the art world, there was a great deal of negativity and antagonism surrounding *The Dinner Party*: a great turning-up of noses; this was women's "craft", not art. According to Chicago (1996), one critic "deemed it grotesque 'kitsh'" (p. 215). Reviewer Thomas Albright described the exhibit in 1979 "as overdone and overripe as a Russian Easter egg...a display of gay, rather gaudy and sometimes downright schlocky ceramic ware and stitchery..." (p. 157).

Autobiography, like art, in some circles can be seen as a man's realm — that women's stories are not "autobiographable", worthy of being recorded, or may even be seen as "downright schlocky". As Elspeth Probyn writes:

> *Some recent perspectives on women's autobiography within literary criticism*

> *expand upon the correlation of woman within the text and woman as writer of the text. For Sidonie Smith the genre of autobiography is especially interesting because of its 'maleness'...Smith describes women's struggles against the dictates of the autobiographical cannon. 'I am' becomes, for Smith, an impossible statement for women writers. As she argues:*
>
> > *Since the ideology of gender makes of woman's life script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture, the ideal woman is self-effacing rather than self-promoting, and her 'natural' story shapes itself not around the public, heroic life but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that, according to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not of autobiography*
>
> *Thus women's stories of their lives are canceled out by the larger narrative of gender. 'Self-effacing' and 'self-promoting' become two poles around which gender is articulated. There is, however, little movement here* ***as women's lives are described as a state of being and not the stuff of art*** (1993, p. 94, emphasis added).

As women and as academic researchers experimenting with alternative research methodologies, we are resisters of a sort. Qualitative research, self-study, autobiography, artistic representation of research still butt heads with the traditional status quo in many circles — such work may be seen as scandalous academic witchcraft at best; flaky fluff at worst. In their article, "The self-study of teacher education practices and the reform of teacher education", in which they discuss the academic pitfalls of engaging in self-study, Cole and Knowles (1998) suggest, "...that because the self-study of teacher education practices represents a challenge to the status quo, those who engage in self-study work might...be considered radical riff-raff" (p. 227).

We have to work twice as hard at legitimizing these (more female/feminist) ways of

doing research. Marilyn Chandler (1990), in writing about Adrienne Rich, observes, "that the motive of her writing, and much of women's writing in our time, is a 'drive to self-knowledge' which for a woman is 'more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society'". As Judy Chicago emphasized, although times have changed, institutions have not; women's symbols, achievement, histories, ways of being are still not valued in our society. "Looking at *The Dinner Party* one sees the level of (erasure) in our history, and how it is still going on in our lives. The challenge of our time is to make sure women's art, women's history is not erased in the future. We must come to consciousness" (Chicago, 1999). We have a long way to go before women's lives are "the stuff of art"...or of academic rigor.

The Menu

The chapters are arranged using food imagery or rituals of eating. In this first chapter , "Appetizers", I started with the autobiography of the question and what got me started on this academic journey. In chapter two, I "Set the table" by drawing on the methodology of using photographs and material culture in memory work, as well as the artistic representation of these visual texts, as forms of self-study. I discuss my own methodology and artistic representation of my self-study — the construction, purpose, and analysis of my Living Research Wall upon which I house my multi-media visual texts/memory prompts. The third chapter, "Eating ethnic", explores the notion of resistence and accommodation and how they might pertain to class and culture. Finally, because every meal needs a pièce de résistance, I hope to, in chapter four, satisfy my readers with "Aphrodisiacs and just desserts", by delving into the identity of "just Jo" through photographs and collages. In an epilogue, "Les digestifs: Spirits and Epicurean delights" I discuss the validity of the aesthetic, the sensual, and the spiritual and interconnectedness to the field of self-study and education.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the table: A Living Research Wall

Figure 6 "The Living Research Wall"

> *At one level, I feared that I would not be taken seriously if I were to tell my story. And even if I were taken seriously, I worried that I would be judged and condemned* (Brookes, 1992, p. 13).

> *I am worthless sounds compared to all your perfect words.*
> (Jann Arden, *"Could I be your girl"*, 1994)

This chapter looks at my own methodology for this self-study, and, in so doing, weaves in the methodologies of others who have incorporated visual texts and material culture into memory work and self-study. The personal narrative nature of my work is rooted in qualitative research methodology and feminist inquiry in general, and in autobiographical self-study, in particular. At no time during this whole process have I given myself permission to **not** do this; to stop; to quit; or even to fail. Perhaps I should have (though it is never too late), because now I am stuck with this — too far gone to give up, and too much of a perfectionist to surrender to defeat. When people ask about my work I tell them that I am examining resistance and accommodation in women through self-study. If they do not actually look too aghast that someone might be so self-absorbed as to use one's self as academic territory for graduate work, they comment that it must be a rather difficult and uncomfortable process to closely examine and write about one's life. I am constantly taken aback by this, because I have always been able to talk about my life — forever the performer; forever the ham. Why would this endeavour be any different? But it is. I must confess, I think part of the difficulty is that there are times when I cannot help but think this is a tremendously self-indulgent act. And who the hell wants to read it, anyway? Then there is the skepticism and the raising of academic eyebrows — "What, exactly, does this contribute to the field?". Finally, there is my life-long battle with laziness and sheer procrastination.

At one point I had difficulty remembering why I took all this on in the first place. I seemed to remember that the reason was rooted in some personal — dare I say, spiritual — desire to heal. To heal who or what, was not always clear at first. What started out as a need to look at my own foibles and "dis-ease" (safely camouflaged through the experiences of my female students), somehow got turned on its head, and somewhere along the way, I found myself looking at me; wanting to know and, more importantly, wanting to be known. This process has been exciting, enlightening, fulfilling, and even fun. However, it has also felt cumbersome, daunting, foreign, and embarrassing. At times I found myself wishing I had the courage to pack it all in. But I did not. Passion, pride, and the ever-present curse of the "good girl" being more persistent than courage.

In writing this chapter, I must confess from the outset, that it has been a struggle to find my voice. It has been a process that has been fraught with fear: the fear of not being

able to find my voice; or finding it and not being able to remain true to it; or finding it and remaining true to it only to result in "worthless sounds compared to perfect [academic] words". Like Elspeth Probyn (1993), I have the fear of "consciously fall[ing] into a personal abyss".

Self-study and methodology

> *According to critics, self-study research lacks methodology...While there are those researchers that do not follow a traditional research paradigm, all self-study scholars use extant research methods drawn from a number of traditions and chosen for their ability to provide insight into the question of practice under consideration...Self-study research is a research methodology in which researchers and practitioners use whatever methods will provide the needed evidence and context for understanding their practice* (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 240).

In *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self-study in teacher education*, editors Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar (1998) define self-study as "the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and it draws on one's life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered" (p. 236). In the same volume, Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (1998) simply state, "In essence, self-study research is qualitative research focused inward" (p. 229). Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999) investigate the use of memory work as a means of doing self-study by examining how the past influences not only our present, but also impacts on our future, and how this process of self-study can contribute to academic research and teaching practice. Anne-Louise Brookes (1992) emphasizes the importance of critical autobiography in educational practice and in academic research as a way of approaching feminist pedagogy. Cole and Knowles (1998) also relate the importance of autobiographical self-study to teacher education. As they note: "We believe that professional self-study, which leads to self-

knowledge and informed practice, is part of our moral responsibility as teachers of teachers" (p. 233). In fact, Cole and Knowles "up the ante" by implicating the moral or ethical responsibility teachers have to know themselves in order to be effective educators.

In their concluding essay, Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar (1998) argue that those engaging in self-study do indeed use rigorous methodology. Moreover, although, as they note, self-study is a relatively new term to refer to a particular body of autobiographical work, it is important to note that some researchers use more common and traditional research methods, as well as seemingly more experimental methodology. At the same time those engaging in self-study are still faced with criticism about its legitimacy. Cole and Knowles (1998), for example, in this same volume, write about the institutional responses to self-study research and the marginalization of academics doing reflective inquiry. According to Cole and Knowles, many such researchers are often non-tenured academics, are denied tenure, or are unable to publish their research in peer-reviewed journals. They write, "In many presented and published accounts and, even moreso, in informal conversation, self-study researchers themselves voice concerns about the perceived legitimacy or validity of their work within the context of the academy" (1998, p. 255).

This marginalization may also be part of the androcentric notions of academic research. In *Knowing her place: Research literacies and feminist occasions*, Lorri Neilsen (1998) talks of the struggle to bring about a paradigm shift within the academy. She regards *Knowing her place* as a "research autobiography" in which she chronologically traces her "research travels" in her life as an academic: from experimental research in literacy to qualitative feminist inquiry in education. As she notes:

> *Narrative inquiry in literacy research, for example, is considered "soft" inquiry, feminine, not "hard science" like the studies of experimental researchers employing statistical tools and controlled settings. Reflexivity, telling the stories about our researcher roles, is often considered to be self-serving, arrogant, even irresponsible. And yet, it is worth asking whether the charge of narcissistic self-absorption against such inquiry is, in large part, a function of an academic culture which is fearful of passion, emotion, gritty*

> *details, unpleasant smells, pillow-biting mistakes, sensuality and sexuality, sharp noises, and messy processes...To many, telling stories that account for why we research and what really happens in the process of research is beyond the boundaries of good taste: it is tantamount to flashing in a faculty meeting, or having to explain away one's tipsy aunt in the hallway* (Neilsen, 1998, p 269).

Neilsen feels passionately about breaking down the androcentirc hierarchies that exist in academia. One way to do this is through personal narrative in academic research. She believes it is vital that we discuss research perspectives through personal narrative in order to make visible two issues in research: the life of the researcher and research process (1998, p. 10). According to Neilsen, by making these things explicit, we are practicing "responsible scholarship", and helping to get rid of "the vestiges of Cartesian thought and Western scientism" (1998, p. 10) which contribute to the dichotomy between the personal and the public, the mind and the body. By getting rid of the dichotomy — or at least by drawing attention to it — we can engage in a less fragmented and less compartmentalized approach to education instead of one based on a notion of The Truth (as it pertains to the dominant group). Neilsen's work is part of an academic movement that supports and practices a more holistic process in research, a process that values the importance of *personal* lived experience and embodied knowledge as "real" knowledge. It is also one that sees the universal in the particular; that connects the body, mind, and spirit and does not value one over the other; that allows the artistic and the poetic to stand on its own. Finally, it is a process and a practice that is taking its rightful place in the academy and is challenging the androcentirc notions and assumptions of theory and methodology.

Working with visual texts and autobiography

In my approach to self-study, I draw on Mitchell and Weber's (1999) work which explores using visual images as a memory prompt and as *texts* which can be read, interpreted, and reconstructed. In exploring visual texts as a way of approaching personal narrative in

Reinventing ourselves as teachers: Beyond nostalgia, they write: "Throughout this book we explore the use of a variety of forms (for example, photography, written memoirs, movies and video) to focus on specific aspects of the teaching self...much of our work explores using the creative power of images, memories, everyday details, technology, and nostalgia in unexpected and unconventional ways. Through stories about our own and other teachers' struggles for self-knowledge and identity, we suggest ways to investigate and reinvent teacher identity and practice" (p. 2).

Within my self-study research, then, I use photographs, art installations, collage, and artefacts as a way to analyze women's identity and sense of self. A recurring visual text that I incorporate in my work is Judy Chicago's art installation, *The Dinner Party*. My memories of these powerful images, their connection to food, the domestic sphere, women's artistry, women's story, and feminism have impacted on my life and influenced my work. Judy Chicago's installation figures prominently in my thesis. My original table setting metaphor transformed itself into the ultimate table setting: *The Dinner Party*. Both the exhibit and the artist became a metaphor of resistance to the status quo. The powerful images of *The Dinner Party* were burned into my psyche and became part of the image texts, along with my family photos and other artefacts, as a way to read and interpret a life.

As well as Mitchell and Weber, I also look to Jo Spence (1986) and Annette Kuhn (1995) who use photographs as a way of exploring the social construction of identity and as a way of interpreting, remembering, and reconstructing the self. Because my own research crosses over into arts-based research, I also include the methodology of some authors, artists, and academics who have incorporated visual texts and artifacts into artistic representations of self-study and the question of identity. Spence's *Putting myself in the picture: A political, personal and photographic autobiography* (1986) and Kuhn's *Family secrets*: *Acts of memory and imagination* (1995) have been useful in helping me think about my methodology and are resources to draw on for producing, using, and interpreting visual texts (key to my work). Jo Spence, has been useful to me on many levels: the social construction of women's identity; visual texts as a way to do psychological analysis/memory work; artistic representation of research; and, finally, discovering an interesting link between alternative medicine and qualitative research. Spence explores her life — "does" autobiography —

through photographs and self-portraits as a way to make a statement about society and women's identity. Her exhibition, *Beyond the Family Album*, was a photographic-autobiographical art installation in 1979 (coincidentally the same year as Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*) in which she chronologically documents her life in pictures and words. This multi-media method of using personal photographs and written texts as a way to do autobiography supports my own thesis work in self-study. Another element to Spence's work that ties in with mine is the artistic component. She does not simply use the images and words ("data") to tell a story, but she arranges them in such a way that they become a form of artistic expression. As a photographer and social historian, she makes a personal and political statement through her art (again, getting rid of the dichotomy between private and public). As she notes, "I was...beginning to understand that we should use photos to ask questions rather than to try to show facts" (1986, p. 98).

Kuhn's work has been particularly helpful for me in exploring the significance of family photos and in thinking about how the past (even one which never involved us) can influence our present as well as our future. Regarding the interpretation of photos, Kuhn writes:

> *"Photographs are evidence... Not that they are to be taken for only at face value, nor that they mirror the real, nor even that a photograph offers any self-evident relationship between itself and what it shows. Simply that a photograph can be material for interpretation — evidence in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of a crime. Evidence of this sort, though, can conceal, even as it purports to reveal what it is evidence of"* (Kuhn, 1995, p. 12).

Kuhn is a proponent of memory work as a way of understanding our lives and the society in which we live. It is a way to examine the link between historical events and "family dramas" and to explore issues of gender, class, and national and personal identity (Kuhn, 1995, p. 4). Perhaps, as for Neilsen and Brookes, memory work can be a way to disrupt the dichotomy between public and private.

Constructing a Living Research Wall (*fig.* 6)

While I draw on the work of these various researchers, I blend a variety of tools as a *practical approach* to creating what I come to regard as my own specific methodology for doing self-study: creating a Living Research Wall: conducting interviews with my parents, conversations with friends and colleagues, my experience as an analysand in Gestalt therapy, working with image texts as memory prompts, creating my own visual texts.

I conducted a separate, "formal" interview with each of my parents, in which I asked them to discuss their memories of the women in their family (mothers, sisters, aunts). I recorded our interviews. I asked each of them to discuss their earliest, as well as their most significant, memories of their mother. In each interview we also discussed these women's relationships with men. I asked my mother questions about her own mother and how her mother's life, beliefs and worldview influenced her own. I asked her in what ways does she think she is like or unlike her mother. I asked her to describe what it means to her to be a woman. I also wanted to know what messages or advice my grandmother had given to my mother about being a woman, and how that impacted on her life. An indirect part of the interviewing process with my mother involved copies of letters she had written about her mother, to a friend. My mother gave me access to her personal correspondence in which she discussed her memories of my grandmother, her relationship with her, and my grandmother's philosophy on life.

In the formal interview with my father, I used similar questions that I had used with my mother, but asked him to focus more on his sister, Dorothy (Dot), and the relationship he had observed between her and his mother. I asked him to tell me about his relationship with Dot, as well as his earliest and significant memories of her. I also wanted to know, in my father's eyes, what ways Dot was like or unlike their mother, and what messages did she receive about being a woman.

The stories that emerged from the interviews were not new stories for me; I had heard them, known them, most of my life. For the purposes of my work, however, I wanted a more formal way to capture them. To illustrate the kind of discussions I had with my parents and the ease at which my mother, in particular, discussed the women in her family, I have

included a transcribed exert from the interview I conducted with her on Easter Day, 1998. It was very easy to transcribe my mother's interview, especially when I asked her what messages or advice she received from the women in her life. On this Easter Sunday, she spoke of three women who played significant roles in her life: her mother, Salimeh, her Aunt Catherine (wife of her father's brother), and her Aunt Mary (her father's only sister) — "three facets of womanhood, at the time. [They] all learned to survive by their personalities". Just as they profoundly influenced my mother's life, I can see how, two generations later, they have indirectly influenced my own. This is what my mother had to say about this powerful trinity:

> Of Salimeh: *"Her message was always very clear: you have to stand on your own two feet. But, don't forget, in order to do that you need the where-with-all...property, material, money. You've got to be able to substantiate your life with something concrete...if you do not have a material support, you're done...poverty means somewhere or other you're dependent...you don't ever want to be dependant for your daily livelihood on anything but yourself....even though she was not educated herself, my mother understood, very clearly, that with an education was a humongous step toward being able to acquire these material things. So, I've used my education — not necessarily to acquire — but...I know that with an education you can, at any moment, do something to support yourself, even if it's to wash the floor with an M.A., that's fine...you know what to do in order to support yourself. It doesn't matter what the job is, you're going to do it...So that was the message that was very clear — you do anything you have to do. And she did...She did anything in order to make money to support her family well. Money which was not squandered on things that were perishable. Her big message was property...she was dead-on. If you've got a piece of property, someday you can sell it when the need comes...I own property...and I've made sure I invest well...[and], if you have an education...if you have the opportunity to an education you owe somebody out there something and that's what you have*

to balance. And so, I can feel very free about giving my money to help causes. I'm not always very comfortable about spending it all on myself, however...[because my mother fought for me to go to university] I owe big-time. I owe my family. I owe all my other sisters. Really. I don't owe them in kind, but I owe them spiritually and morally. Whatever I can do, especially the ones...the more disfavoured they are, the more I feel I owe. And to others who are more deprived because I was able to get my university education, not because my parents could afford it, but because I was sponsored by my school, by a family foundation...I never felt deprived, not even as a child."

Of Catherine: *I am reminded that Easter was always the best season, the best feast day. It was much nicer than Christmas in a way, because in the Greek Orthodox Church, they always made such [a big deal] about Easter, the Resurrection. And, somehow or other, because it was in the Spring, it was always the whole notion of hope and resurrection and that it brings to it. And that's the time of year when I saw all these women together: my cousins, my sisters, my aunts — my favourite aunts, in particular. Catherine was a sweet-tempered lady....Over the years I've often thought of her. She always went to get a part of me that was...I always felt very tender towards her and very protective of her. She always got that part of me. Although I always felt Mother thought her to be weak and a bit of a wimp, I admired the fact that she could read. Despite everything, she was one of the few women who could read. And whether she did anything or not with it, was not the issue. I suppose, objectively speaking, she didn't do anything with her capacity to read and it didn't seem to have altered her life exteriorly. But, maybe interiorly, she was able to put up with all that nonsense of having a husband who was absolutely macho and who, I'm sure, kept her under his thumb and treated her like a naive, ignorant, stupid woman. I realize with hindsight she couldn't have possibly been that naive, ignorant, or stupid, the fact of her*

being able to read. And to read the Holy Book must have influenced her whole outlook on life. And I realize, perhaps, that part of her sweet disposition was her capacity to deal with a very difficult situation. So, she probably had far more to her than meets the eye...It's an afterthought, I'd say. At the time I couldn't have said that."

Of Mary: *The advice she gave was certainly you don't have to wait hand-and-foot on any man. She definitely made it very clear that she was not going to do any man's bidding, but men were going to do her bidding. So, she played with their emotions — successfully so. And I think she had a raw deal at a very young age, at the hand of her brothers who didn't want to have her on their hands [they married her off at age fifteen to a man in his fifties, whom she divorced years later]. And, so, I guess, she more or less said, "fooey on you guys. I'll do my own". And she proceeded to do her very own bidding and was no longer under the thumb of her brothers, or of her husband, for that matter...I think I quite admired her for having the guts. And, here again, looking over the life that she had had, I can quite understand that she was able to get away from beneath the yoke of this oppressiveness of her four brothers and a very old husband. She succeeded in getting away from it. And she became a bit of a party girl for a little while. But I imagine it was her rebelliousness and she just said, "the heck with everything". In her own way, she was her own woman. Just as in her own way — with hindsight— my Aunt Catherine was her own woman, too. She found a little niche of her own where she could be comfortable; where she could, in her head, get away from all this oppressiveness.*

I think that was the message that these elderly ladies in my life must have given me. There was an oppression and you had different mechanisms by which you could escape it. Either you fought it aggressively, as my mother did. Or you ran away from it, as my aunt [Mary] did and you did your own damn thing. Or, somewhere in your head, you found a place to be on your

own, like Catherine...But they did not break under it.

Conversations with friends and colleagues — some who have known me since childhood, many who are educators, and several who are artists, in their own right — were key in this self-study process. While these discussions have been on-going for the past several years, there have been some key conversations that sparked significant areas to explore in my work. For example, one particular discussion with Thea Jones — a close friend and artist I met while we were both substitute teaching — has been invaluable to exploring "Just Jo" in chapter four. Another evening, sitting in front of my Wall in the living room with friends Charlotte Hussey, Linda Anderson, Susan Allnutt, and Donna Lee Smith, got me to look at "what was under the veils" which appear in my collages. As well, Lynn Butler-Kisber's suggestion that I go on to create another wall that is a more final artistic representation of the essence of my self-study was very much in keeping with Thea's insistence that I make a wall that is "just Jo", absent of family members and even photographs. Under ideal circumstances (i.e. unlimited time) I would go on to do this. Perhaps, some day I will. Discussions with my god sister and dear friend, Jill Robinson, who has known me all my life, also helped draw my attention to some areas for exploration — particularly recognizing the aquatic part of my identity. Through our many discussions (often over food or standing in front of my wall of images) came suggestions and insights that I may not have seen. To say that they brought a different perspective that enriched my own, would be an understatement. Sometimes a simple comment would take me in a direction that I had not initially considered — chapter four is a prime example of that. After these key conversations, I made notes so that I could remember the rich content.

My experience as an analysand in Gestalt therapy has been an integral part of this process. Therapy, in and of itself, is self-study. Most of what appears on these pages, either germinated or was fleshed-out within the four walls of my therapist's office. Sometimes those sessions were ones in which I discussed my fear of failure and agonized over writing the thesis, worried that I was not "the good student" and questioning why was I "still doing school". But, through the academic self-study process, I was able to shed more light on

myself as an analysand, specifically, and on my identity, generally. One process nurtured the other and the boundaries were able to blur, finally making my "work life" and personal life an integrated whole — something I yearned for but could never attain when I was married and a teacher. Finally, there no longer was this chasm between my private self and my public self.

Working with image texts (family photographs, collages, Judy Chicago's art installation, ***The Dinner Party****, and various artefacts) as memory prompts* I explore in more detail in chapter three. As I discuss in there, I worked with the literary method that poet and educator Charlotte Hussey refers to as "Sit With", whereby I draw on the exploration of key words/key images analysis. I "sit with" individual images — photographs, collages — for a period of ten minutes and free-associate and free-write to see what memories and patterns emerge with each image.

Finally *The creation of my own visual texts (my collages)*, as I discussed in chapter one, were made in workshops with Donna Davis over a seven week period. The interpretation and analysis of these collages — Donna's as well as my own — appear primarily in chapters three and four.

An "ethical" question that arises for me is how to write autobiographically and still maintain some sort of anonymity for the members of my family. In writing about my life, how do I protect the lives of others, especially when there are some "not-so-nice" events in their own? Granted, some of these people are dead, but their children (my cousins) are still alive. Yet, it is impossible to leave out those stories when they impact on my own. They are crucial elements in my own identity formation. Anne Louise Brookes tries to address a similar issue in her dissertation as she explains, "I do not assume that the stories I construct constitute any form of the truth, though they are for me a 'kind' of truth...undoubtedly the people of whom I speak would tell another version of these stories" (1992, p. 4). Then there is the ethical dilemma of using private photos in a public arena such as a thesis. Anonymity is rendered impossible. How does one engage in self-study and autobiography, using family

photographs as memory prompts, especially for academic research? How do you do this *without* including the photos, as they are vital to the study? — they *are* the data. If I were attempting to write a best seller — some sort of "fictional autobiography" — I probably would not have to worry so much about the ethics involved. Though rumour has it that some of Anne Marie MacDonald's (of *Fall on your knees fame*) aunties in Cape Breton are no longer speaking to her. So you ruffle a few feathers and are conspicuously absent at family reunions. You are a best-selling author and get to host your very own CBC prime time televison show. The reality is, most of us are not best-selling Canadian authors. Many of us are graduate students, teachers, academics having to write within the guidelines of university ethics committees. That and the fact that there is nothing like coming face to face with your "ethical dilemma" in the lobby of the Centaur Theatre on a Friday evening. A cousin you rarely see, except for weddings and funerals, but whose mother figures quite prominently (quite literally) in your thesis (unbeknownst to him), asks you what you have been doing the last few years.

When I started into the thesis, I did not know that I would be creating a Living Research Wall. However, I did know that something creative or artistic had to come out of this process; that I needed to produce something beyond the written text of the thesis, an aesthetic need that had to be fulfilled. At the time I did not know what visual form this "piece" would take. Given my interest in food, table settings, the body, and Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, I thought it might involve a seven course meal served on breast plates (as a response to Chicago's vaginal imagery and to the recurring breast imagery in my collages).

Looking to Mitchell and Weber (1999), I decided to use family photos as a way of exploring the relationship between race, class, resistance and accommodation within my own family and as a way to begin self-study. "Studying ourselves is a form of research, and our own accounts of 'how we got here' can contribute to a body of knowledge about teaching, learning, and *adult identity*. Studying ourselves might be regarded as research-in-action" (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p. 9.; emphasis added).

Throughout this process, I have been interested in ways of representing the data artistically. Regarding artistic and cultural artifacts as artistic forms of representation and academic research, I draw on the works of Lorri Neilsen (1998), Judy Chicago (1996), Donna

Davis (2000), and Charlotte Hussey (1999). This part of the process feeds my desire for and the need to honor the aesthetic in my life. Thus, not only are my visual prompts research tools and data, but they also serve an artistic or aesthetic purpose. While the umbrella term that I use for my method is self-study, I coin the term "Living Research Wall" to refer to the particularized use of visual text. Collectively and aesthetically arranged, the images create one large, wall-size collage which, in turn, is analyzed and interpreted as to what it might say about my identity, my story. This wall collage, however, is not the "end product", but a "work in progress". Through the analysis of the data, I pull out the essence of The Wall: what does it say about women's identity? What does it say about me? Ideally, a more finite "end product" could then be the construction of another wall, or some other form of artistic expression, as representation of this essence.

Key in this process has been the work of and collaboration with Donna Davis. Donna's arts-based research has been integral to my self-study. Through the collage making process, our conversations about the collages and our research, by presenting our experiences to graduate students in research methods classes, and through her analysis of my collages, I have gained an invaluable wealth of information about myself and my identity. The collages, and Donna's analysis of them, are an integral part of The Wall and of my research. I have been able to study my self through the eyes, work, and artistry of another. In the following chapters, I draw extensively on Donna's analysis of my collages.

"Taking" pictures

One weekend while visiting my parents, I went to the photo drawer in the "Chinese room" in their home. It is a drawer I have visited many times over the years. I began rummaging through the mess of loose pictures, looking for images of myself, the women in my family, and my father (the "honorary girl"). Having poured over these photos dozens of time in my life, there were several images I already had in mind. I also haphazardly selected other photos, letting myself see what appealed to me. I then went to the cupboard in the basement where my father keeps the old black photo albums from his family; antiques I have perused many times, as well. After my "stroll down memory lane", often into a past which pre-dates my own, I ended up with a collection of several black and white pictures from my

paternal family, old Polaroids from the 1970's, and some more recent coloured photos.

I selected pictures of myself, my mother, my father, and of the women on both sides of my family — grandmothers, aunts. The old Polariods and the more recent colour photos I took from the drawer in the Chinese room range from 1968 — the year after my birth when my father finally figured out how to work his new Polaroid instant camera — to ones taken of me by my friend, Jill, on New Year's Eve, 1999. I realize the pictures I chose are all very flattering of the people in them. The ones of me depict a flamboyant little girl or a tongue-in-cheek dramatic young woman. The black and white ones of my father and of his sister, Dot, are glamourous — they are depicted smoking cigarettes, wearing sunglasses, army uniforms, bathing suits. I am a hopeless romantic at heart and the photos I selected show this. As a child, I remember being quite taken with the pictures, these old black and white photos so immaculately arranged, but in no particular order. I would often look for my father, and a young and beautiful Dot. In fact, the only photos I have of Dot are as young woman, up to and including her wedding photos. I have not found other, later pictures of her in our collection at home.

I was hesitant to take the black and white family photos out of the lovely, old black books, for fear of losing them or forgetting what order they were in. However, Dad mentioned (with a hint of a perfectionist's frustration?) that his father never really arranged pictures in any order — they span several years and jump around from one event to another, without rhyme or reason. Howard, my grandfather, was in charge of capturing and arranging family images. He was always taking pictures, making family movies, and was the keeper of the family photo album, an activity most often reserved for women (Mitchell and Weber, 1999).

When I first started collecting family photos, I found fewer photos of my mother's people. I found practically no pictures of my mother as simply, "Aline"— as a young, single woman — before my father and before me. At the time, the earliest photo I had of her was taken when she was in her mid-thirties. There are no soft black and white "romantic" photos like the ones of Dot. When I began gathering the pictures, what I had of my mother and her sisters were mostly recent photos or ones taken during the 1970's. I can only speculate that as working class immigrants, my maternal family did not record family events the way my

paternal grandfather did because they would not have had the means for such a luxury (camera equipment, leisure time, etc.). Even now, and only thanks to my mother's rummaging through long-forgotten boxes and cupboards, I still have few photos of my maternal grandparents. The ones that I do have depict hard working, "earthy" people: my grandparents in their garden; or sitting on their veranda,"sitto"(my grandmother) peeling potatoes; or surrounded by their daughters. Most often, the setting is outside. Salimeh, my sitto, was an avid gardener. Perhaps being born in her mother's garden in Lebanon, in the Spring of the year, might have had something to do with it.

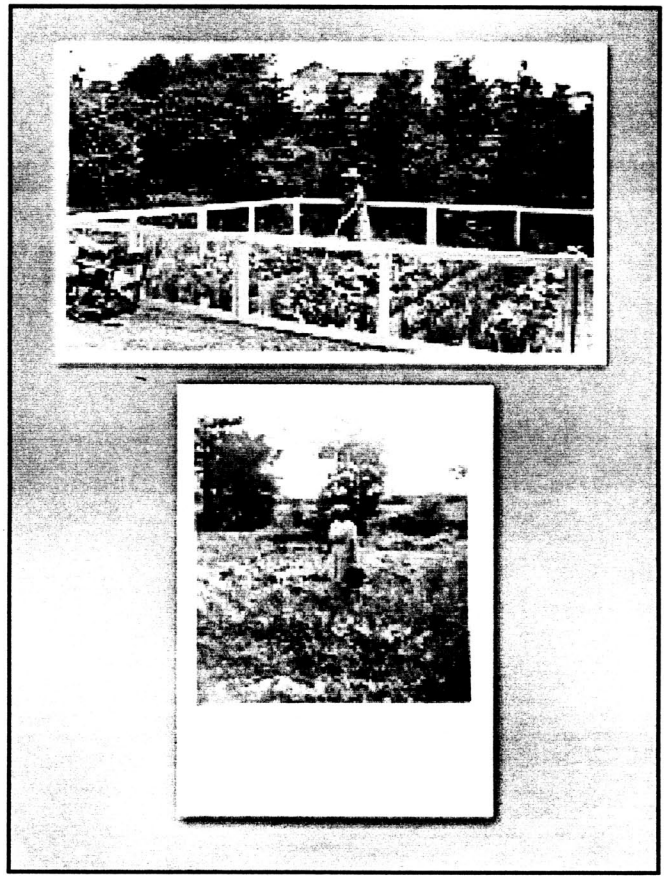

Figure 7 Agnes' Victory Garden and Salimeh's Field

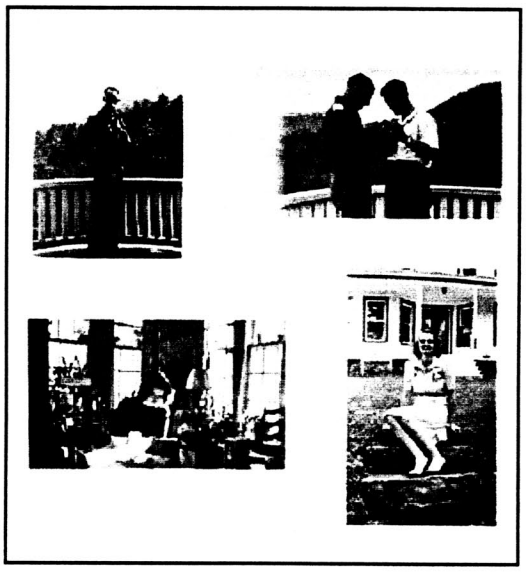

Figure 8 "Romantic" black and white photos of my father and his siblings

Figure 9 Less glamorous photos of my mother and her family, blending in with the "Swirls" collage

It was this initial self-study and memory work with family photos that I presented to the Association for Bibliotherapy in Canada at the Congress of Social Sciences and the Humanities, in Ottawa (Visser, 1998). In that presentation I was interested in examining the ways in which resistance and accommodation could be explored through visual texts. For the presentation, I needed to display the photos and/or arrange them in some meaningful way — a way that might depict accommodation and resistance in a family. The only "conscious" decision I made was to separate the "matriarchal" (my mother and the women in her family) pictures from the "patriarchal" (my father and the women on his side of the family). From then on, I let myself go and arranged the photos in a way that felt like they fit. The pictures of me, I placed beside family members whose photos seemed to somehow fit the "tone", mood, or image of my own. For example, a recent shot of me at the beach I placed near one of Dot sunbathing in the back yard (a back yard in which I, too, used to sun-worship); or a picture of my father in his army kilt on the streets of London during World War II and one of me at age four in a pink crinoline dress; or a Polaroid of me at age two or three sitting uncomfortably in my mother's lap— both of us looking a little stiff — and a candid shot of us, circa 1995, in black evening dresses, backs to one another, leaning in opposite directions, me facing the camera and Mom turned away.

Figure 10 Pictures of me juxtaposed with members of my family

Once I had arranged the images on my table, I had to decide how I was going to mount them for display. I did not want to simply stick the photos on bristle board — that felt too much like primary school "show and tell". And I did not want people to have photocopied sheets of my family photographs. There were so many pictures that I needed to put them on a large surface, but one that I could easily transport. I finally decided on cloth — something that was easily folded and transportable. The material I choose was a magenta Damask table cloth that belonged to my paternal grandmother, Agnes, and one which I love and I always used when I set the table at my parents' home. My father had given it to me, for my own home, about a year before this project. It felt appropriate to use my paternal grandmother's table cloth, as Agnes was a fine cook and always one for setting a lovely table. The Damask material is also representative of the ancestral home of my Middle Eastern grandmother, also a woman who felt good food was an integral part of life. The table settings and food metaphor for my work was beginning to take shape.

The Research Wall comes alive

For many months after the presentation, the table cloth with the photos sat on a table in my bedroom/study. I eventually dismantled the display — exactly when and why, I cannot remember. I placed the pictures loosely inside one of the old family albums, not knowing exactly what I would do with them, but knowing that I would be doing something with them in the near future for my thesis. I knew that the reading of photo texts was at the heart of my self-study and that some visual, non-verbal product would be part of my work. I did not revisit these images until the winter 2000, in my new home. During that winter I decided to place some of my family photos on the wall in the study of my new home so that I could "get a look at my life" and gather some inspiration for the writing process. At this juncture, I moved from the dining room table to the livingroom wall, needing a larger and more permanent place to house my image texts.

Already on the wall was a Mexican blanket in the centre; a framed picture I inherited, of a roughly sketched portrait drawn on an old theatre program; two pairs of shoes; and a long, woven belt from Nicaragua. On the floor, at the base of the wall, is a small turtle-shaped Indian stool and a low, square Indian table with a candle, incense in a small bowl of

rice, Rune stones, and a silver dish containing sea shells, small stones, and dried flowers. This space serves as my meditation area. To the right of this, is a small chair; to the left, two plants and a grey, stone fish. Behind my altar, on the wall just above the base-board, are three postcards with Buddhist and Tibetan images. From the wall, I removed everything but the belt and the shoes, each of which are near either edge of the wall. I draped the Mexican blanket over the back of the small chair. The first photo texts I put on the wall were two Internet images from the (maternal) family website my cousin set up. One was of my maternal grandparents' wedding and the other one was of my mother, her sisters, and my grandmother, at my parents' wedding. These are images I have seen before in their "original form" as photographs. Seeing these pictures in such a public space, as some sort of "computer version"/ "several-times-removed" images, seemed rather odd yet intriguing. I briefly wondered how this family website might contribute to my research — a thought that was only fleeting and never acted upon, other than to print these two images and place them on my living room wall, with my grandparents' wedding photo positioned above my parents'. Over a period of a few weeks, I gradually added other photos — several of these are the ones from the table cloth display. And, like the table cloth display, there emerged a maternal and paternal side to the wall display. I chose more black and white photos from my father's family albums — more pictures of him and Dot and Agnes — and put them on the wall, to the left of the website pictures. I dug up photos of myself, at all ages, and made a chronological line, placing them below the maternal/paternal top sections of the wall.

In the spring, after Donna Davis had finished analyzing the collages that I describe in chapter one, I put them up as well. Then I added the colour photocopies of various place settings from Chicago's *Dinner Party* and interspersed them with the collages so that together they acted as a colourful border around the photographs. A little while after this, my mother found a stash of old black and white photos from her youth — the kind of photos I had been wanting and missing for the table cloth display: photos of mom and her sisters as young women, her parents, some formal "teacher" photos of her and my father. I had not realized how pretty my mother and my aunts were, sitting by the water in their bathing suits. With these, my mother sent along a few Polaroids of her with Dad on their wedding day. I spent an afternoon going through this treasure trove and selected more image texts and added

them to what has come to be known as The Wall.

It was important for me, at this point, to try to work out what meaning I *could* make of the images. In essence I had to work out some potential meanings to see if constructing a Living Wall could be a viable approach to self-study. From the beginning, looking at The Wall, there are some recurring images which stand out. The most prominent is the nature and water imagery. For example, almost twice as many of the photographs were taken outdoors; the setting tends to be in a garden or back yard, or by the water. Many of the pictures of my maternal grandmother and her daughters are of them working in her garden, standing beside her flowers, or sunbathing by a lake. The wedding photos of my mother's sisters are all outdoor shots. The same is true for the photos from my father's family: Agnes lounging on her swing, Dot sunbathing in the back yard, and the many vacation pictures of the great outdoors in the wilderness of the fishing camp at Stadacona. The artefacts at the base of the Wall, on and around my meditation area, also pick up on this aquatic-nature trend through a small collection of seashells and sea weed, the stone fish and large plant near my altar. As I explore in depth in the following chapters, the aquatic imagery in my collages is very evident, from the flowing sea foam-like veils and swirls, to the tropical ocean blues and sepia-sand tones, to green stagnant water and amphibious creatures, to the more obvious images of rocks, beaches, fish, turtles, and shells.

Also apparent on The Wall, is the religious, spiritual and mythical symbolism — sometimes resembling a play between the sacred and the profane — which is most evident in the collages and in the images from Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*. There are Chicago's faux-altar place settings for the thirty-nine women, including the Fertile and Primordial goddesses, in her own feminist response to The Last Supper. In the more three-dimensional realm at the base of my Wall, there is my meditation area and altar, complete with burning incense. As I explore more extensively in subsequent chapter, there are depictions of various spiritual leaders on my Wall (Buddha, Hildegarde of Bingen, Elizabeth I) as well as images of ancient Greek and fertility goddesses, a Catholic priest, and wedding photos taken at St. Mark's Chapel at Bishop's University and St. John the Divine Anglican Church in Thetford Mines.

There is also a blending of these two recurring themes; a mixing of the religious,

spiritual realm with the natural realm. Looking at the photographs, I notice a few contemplative or meditative pictures. Always a nature lover, I am not surprise to find a picture of my father, sitting alone in a lawn chair, staring into the fish pond in the rock garden. I obviously have no idea what was going on in his head or heart at the time, but the fact that he is a young man in uniform, I wonder if this was taken before he went off to basic training or if he has finally returned home to his parents. In either case, it would be cause to *sit* alone and ponder one's life. There is too lonely a feeling in this photo for him to be merely looking at fish. Close to this picture, I have placed a photo of Dot in her late teens, walking alone along the shore at the fishing camp in Stadacona. Although she is far off in the distance, I can see that she appears to be looking down the beach as she walks toward the camera.

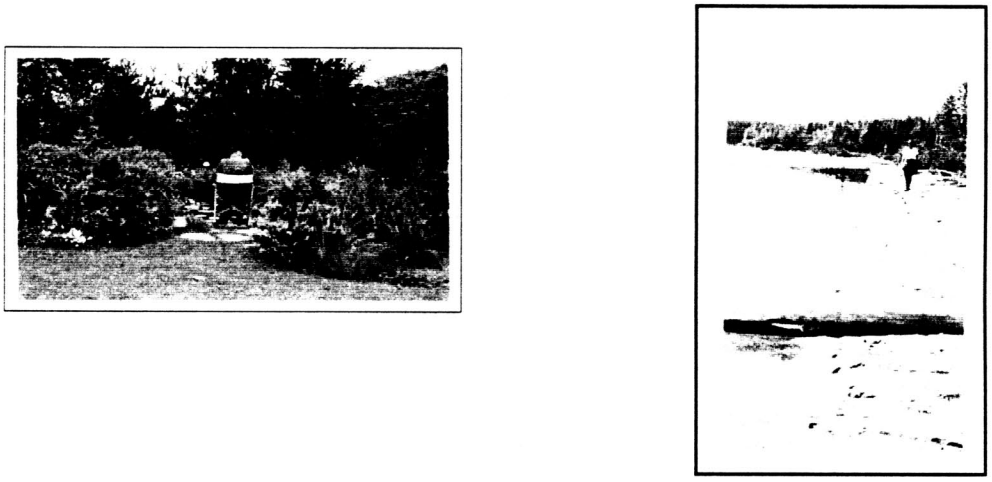

Figure 11 Pictures of my father and Dot

Because of the contemplative "feel" of these two photos, I placed them very near the row of photos of me, directly above a picture that was taken a few years ago while on a camping trip. In it, I am sitting on some rocks, looking out at a lake. And just like the other two photos, the setting for this picture was near water. I call this photo *Morning Meditation.* My friend, Susan, who craves the solitude and rugged wilderness of the rocks and beaches of BC, calls the picture *"No Enemies in Sight"* because there is no one else around — I am alone,

contemplating nature. It is safe to be vulnerable; there are no judging gazes. It has been my experience and observation that women's spirituality is closely related to the natural realm. My own spiritually is deeply rooted in the aquatic. This photograph was taken in the summer of 1996 by a former boyfriend when we were camping on a little island campsite in a provincial park, not far from my parents' home. It's a magical spot, especially when no one is around. In this picture, I am in my element, able to do one of the things I love most: sunbathing naked on the rocks, by the water. It is early morning and the lake is still, like a mirror. I am sitting on the warm rocks, my cup of coffee beside me, and I am looking out over the water: a morning meditation. It is one of my favorite photos because it is so calm and peaceful. This space, this landscape, this state of mind is where I long to be. It is very much who I am. Again, I am in my element. This and the ocean are my preferred spots; places where I feel most complete, most empowered, most serene, and most connected to myself and a greater Self. Everything seems right with the world. Sitting in this spot in the early morning summer sun, looking out at the water, with not a stitch of clothing on, is the closest thing to perfection. Indeed, there are "no enemies in sight".

Figure 12 "Morning Meditation: 'No Enemies in Sight'"

The visual texts of my Living Research Wall radiate out like a mandala: the family photos in the centre of the wall, bordered by the collages and the images from *The Dinner*

Party, my meditation area, the shoes, the plants, chair, and Nicaraguan wall hanging, form the outer-most circle of the mandala. This collection of visual texts are pieces that come together to form one large collage, or quilt. I call this a *living* wall because it started from something small and grew over time. It is a living wall because it changes and evolves. In the process of working on this thesis, I add a visual text here and there; on occasion I take down a pair of shoes and wear them; I go to the base of The Wall and use the meditation area; sometimes I have a need to rearrange the furniture, and the chair or plants get moved. Finally, it is a living wall because it is an autobiographical wall. It is about a life influenced by many lives, many biographies. As I explore in the next two chapters, it is a Wall, a life, made up of many fragments — the many identities of a self, and fragments of other people's multiple and complex selves.

CHAPTER 3

Eating ethnic: Resisting class and culture

A self is always rooted in its past (Griffiths, 1995, p. 185).

*In **[Beyond the Family Album]** I turned to an investigation of my own family and my class background, and what it meant to be a woman. The cross fertilization between class and sexuality has informed all my work since this period* (Spence, 1986, p. 83).

Figure 13 A photographic autobiography: "Centerfold Girl"

There are many themes I could explore, as I look at The Wall. After all, as with any artistic creation, a person can see, interpret, or experience — even project — a variety of responses regardless of what the artist may have had in mind at the time of its creation. Nonetheless, what is clear to me (and, I believe, for many people who experience my Wall) is a dichotomy. Most obvious is the conscious, physical split between the paternal and maternal, as depicted by the photos: pictures of my father and his family on the viewer's right; pictures of my mother and her family on the viewer's left. But this duality is, for me, symbolic of the dichotomies between upper-middle class and the working class; the dominant culture and immigrant experience; the conventional (what my friend, artist and educator, Thea Jones calls "the traditional") and the sensual; the domestic sphere and the natural realm; the patriarchal and the matriarchal; the "good girl" and the bohemian. This chapter is about these seeming dualities and how they come together to form an integral part of a whole identity. This fragmentation is not necessarily a bad (sic) state. In fact, according to Mowreena Griffiths (1995), "...the self is made of a number of different, sometimes incompatible 'selves', all of which, taken together, make up the self as a whole"(p. 181). She goes on to explain that, "Fragmentation is an ordinary condition of human selves. The question then arises what response the self should make to its own fragmentation. It may feel as though the different fragments of the being are at war with themselves...the differences may cause pain and discomfort, and require resolution of some kind" (p. 183). For the purpose of this chapter, and drawing from my interest in the ways in which the theme of resistance and accommodation might link to fragmentation, I examine the ways this theme plays itself out in issues of class and culture.

This chapter is about dichotomies and fragmentation as expressed through resistance and accommodation in a family with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, and how I see myself in relation to this family. I use the photo texts, collages, and artefacts as a context — as a way to tell about women's resistance and accommodation as introduced in chapter one in relation to the work of Carol Gilligan, Anne Wilson Schaef, and others. As noted in chapter one, when I first began my graduate work, I wanted to explore how women lost their sense of self within their relationships with men. This interest was based on my readings of process addictions (specifically relationship and work addictions) by Anne

Wilson Schaef (1987, 1989). Then, after looking at Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan's (1992) work on girls and resistance, and Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy M. Sullivan's (1997) work on voice and race, I began to see how I might explore the ways in which resistance and accommodation is manifested in the women in my family. Over time, I became more and more interested in how women, myself in particular, either resisted or accommodated, not only men, but systems and organizations. As I delved into self-study and memory work and became very excited about using visual texts as memory prompts, and as my personal life became free of men and romantic (often draining) attachments for the first time in my adult life, I put aside the conscious exploration of accommodation and resistance, only to find it appearing on my Wall. I feel as if I have come full circle, which seems appropriate given the images I create and the circular themes that are found in my collages.

In this chapter I draw extensively on Mowreena Griffiths'(1995) *Feminisms and the self: The web of identity*, specifically on her idea of the fragmented self. Looking over this chapter and feeling queasy hearing/seeing myself so narcissistically exposed on paper, I wanted to hide behind more theory. I felt I needed to "save" the chapter. Rummaging through papers, I discovered an e-mail message from Linda Anderson, a friend and former graduate student, who incorporated Griffiths' work on a fragmented self in her doctoral dissertation on identity, authority, and writing from the perspective of "re-entry" women returning to university to pursue graduate studies (2000). In her message, Linda wrote to me about the many, sometimes conflicting, identities we create in a lifetime (the wife, the graduate student, the girl from...) and the baggage from our past that helped construct those identities and continues to influence present and future identities. She went on to say that my Wall "can be that new and different identity that is now being constructed...in part because of your new understanding of past identities and how they were constructed...perhaps the woman [in your collages] behind the screen or behind the veil will reveal her part in your current or becoming self" (June 18, 2000, personal correspondence). It was after this correspondence that I turned to Griffiths. Reading Griffiths, I found that her ideas on fragmentation provided a framework for analyzing the dichotomies that I was seeing on my wall in that I was seeing myself as fragmented, as being "made up" of several cultures and coming from two distinct socio-economic classes. In terms of autobiography, I see my

story as a story influenced by the biographies of others — those who have come before and from whom I come and of whom I am a part. When I found myself too visible, too vulnerable, I wanted to bury myself in theory. I am not sure if it was because it was me on the page, or the kind of me that I was reflected back. Not an ideal picture? A textual "bad hair" day? What exactly was I wanting to hide? Me or the me that I was presenting? I felt the need to legitimate my work, my self — to make it/me appear more academic. Griffiths' work on fragmentation provided me with a background upon which to build.

Facing The Wall: Analyzing the self

> *I put rows of dreams on the floor of my studio, organized and reorganized by theme. I marvel at the overwhelming power of the unconscious and, at the same time, the intensity of its drive toward healing* (Woodman, 1998, p. 3).

As I look around my environment, I can see that the aesthetic has always played an important, almost central role, in anything I have done or in how I live. When it comes to food, my father always says, "It must first appeal to the eye; then to the sense of smell; then, finally, to taste". In all things, this is how I have lived my life — all senses must be appealed to. Why should this research endeavour be any different? Throughout my thesis, and particularly, throughout this chapter and the next, I have incorporated many visual texts. My wish is that they not only provide a key/central explanation of my work, but that they also add an aesthetic quality — that they "appeal to the eye" and, perhaps, other senses as well.

My analysis of The Wall comes from a mélange of various approaches: As I referred to in chapter two, I use Charlotte Hussey's "Sit With" as an analytic approach. I engage in memory work. I conduct interviews with my parents. I engage in informal discussions with friends and colleagues. I incorporate artist Donna Davis' analysis of my collages. Finally, there is my experience as an analysand in Gestalt therapy. Although I have focused more on the memory work and "Sit With" approaches, I have not zeroed in on one particular methodology, nor have I compartmentalized each approach (this would not be very Gestalt of me). Rather, they flow into one another: a "Sit With" session often led to memory work,

which sometimes brought me back to conversations with friends about my Wall, which could trigger something in a therapy session (or vice versa). Finally, this made for a more natural and organic methodology. And, one could argue, a more woman-centred methodology; one more appropriate for the "academy of the kitchen table" or a dinner party — where topics tend to flow one from the other. When explaining the "Sit With" approach, Hussey says, "Key word analysis has been used by many writers such as Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Anne Louise Brookes, Adrienne Rich, and Marilyn Chandler as a diagnostic tool. Like a Geiger counter, key word analysis can detect emotionally-charged images and ideas radiating out from underneath the surface of an emerging text. Once such key words have been detected, a number of strategies can be used to unpack their mother lode of connotations." (personal e-mail from Charlotte, June 18, 2000). I have used a similar method that Charlotte uses to work with words and poetry, but instead of doing key *word* analysis, I have done key *image* analysis that brought forth key words. I used this approach with The Wall as a whole, as well as with the collages and some of the artefacts. From the Sit With sessions, I was able to find patterns or recurring themes in my work, and that there was congruity between the whole Wall and it's various parts. But, like the subjectivity of ink blot tests, did I see what I wished to see/interpret — especially since I am the artist?

I have included an example of the August 5 "Sit With" session of my Living Research Wall in order to illustrate some of the key words that came out of the exercise:

The Living Research Wall

see many faces in one
opposite forces at play
same, yet different
two sides of a coin
opposites without animosity
fat women in gardens
stepping into the past
blurring the lines
genteel life; harsh existence
the line that divides?
silver string/common thread
that runs throughout
outside/nature/water
prayers for the ancestors
East meets West
fresh supply of flowers
incense drifting into wall
which looks more fun?
"these (shoes) are made for walkin'..."
fluid

At the beginning of this chapter, there is a series of twelve photographs of myself *(fig. 13),*that are arranged, more or less, in chronological order. Each picture has a title: *"First Birthday", "Still-life With Stuffed Animal", "Party Girl", "Garbage Can", "Little Aphrodite", "Rising from the Sea", "Surgical Greens", "Toss of the Head", "Convocation", "Autumn Brunch at the Garrison Club", "Morning Meditation: No Enemies in Sight", "Marabou".* Regarding the "reading" of these visual texts in this chapter and the following one, I turn to Mitchell and Weber's (1999) self-study and memory work and their chapter "Working Chronologically: Laying out Photographs" (pp. 102-105). Referring to the work of Jo Spence, they describe a process of "Reworking the family album" (Jo Spence (1995)) — a relatively straightforward and practical approach to engaging in "self-history" (1999, p. 103). This "practical work", as Kuhn, Mitchell and Weber call it, involves placing pictures of yourself in chronological order and seeing what they trigger (e.g: what memories? who took it? what was the occasion? how you felt? what social-political issues are brought forward?) I invoked this process for each of my twelve pictures, that were, for the most part, already in chronological order on the lower half of The Wall. I recorded my thoughts, memories and feelings associated with the photos, into a hand-held tape recorder, and then transcribed my words. It was a process that I engaged in over a period of approximately two weeks.

Below is the transcription for *"Surgical Greens"(*bottom left *fig. 13)*, a photograph which was taken of me in residence, during my undergraduate studies*:*

"Surgical greens", Bishop's University, age 20-21

This was taken in either my first or second year of university. I'm wearing my surgical greens which I confiscated from the hospital during my student-nursing years. They became my study/writing clothes; I still wear them today. I'm stretched out at my work station: my bed. I spent a good part of my time writing essays from bed. I'm posing for the camera, one hand over my head, the other arm outstretched, bracing the wall. I like my hair and face — my eyes are closed and I look calm, though I shouldn't as I'm probably getting ready to write an essay which is no doubt due the following day. This is most likely going to be an all-nighter. I'm in my combat-wear

for the task — my surgical greens. They represent part of my identity as a nurse, or healer. Certainly, at the time this photo was taken, being an RN was very much how I identified. I felt like a fish-out-of-water in my English Literature classes during my first year of undergraduate studies. A nurse cum English Lit student. Now I find myself far less scientific and far more literary and creative. (The struggle of wanting to be a doctor vs an actress)

Class and Culture: Resistance and Accommodation

"Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (Kuhn, 1995, p. 98).

Figure 14 "Sitting in the Garden"

Figure 15 "(Simple?) Abundance"

I have chosen the photos *(figs. 14 & 15)* above because they epitomize the class and cultural differences in my family. Certainly in *"(Simple?) Abundance"(fig. 15)*, there is the obvious difference of material wealth: the mounds of Christmas paper and many gifts spread out in the foreground of the photo of my paternal grandparents versus my maternal grandparents sitting on their porch, peeling vegetables from their garden. I call this photo grouping *"(Simple?) Abundance"* because I am not so sure the abundance of Howard and Agnes, my paternal grandparents, is so simple — neither one of them look very happy in this picture, for all the gifts. Likewise, one can refer euphemistically to poverty and/or not having much maternal wealth as a "simple" life; an esthetic life. I am not so sure poor, working class immigrants really enjoy such simplicity — although, my mother's parents do look very happy and content. In the photo grouping *"Sitting in the Garden"(fig. 14)*, each picture is taken outdoors in the back or side yard; each has five people in it, all related; each has a background of trees and some garage-like building; both appear to be taken during the summer; both, more or less, have a leisurely feel to them. However, the building in the background of the photo of my father's family is a three-car garage, whereas in the photo of my mother's family, it is a shed. Looking closely at the chairs, I notice everyone sitting in

a semi-circle on matched sets of Adirondack chairs and on canvas and wood rockers in the paternal shot, but only my maternal grandparents siting on and amongst a mish-mash of old wooden chairs and mis-matched kitchen chairs. Although there is a Ralph Lauren sense of total leisure in the photo of my father and his family (Sunday bests, crisp white shirts, turbans, uniforms, and the family black Lab); and although members of my mother's family seem to be busy with various activities (tending to needs of grandchildren, a barrel of vegetables that will need to be peeled or hollowed, discussing the camera in the right foreground, scrutinizing the garden, wearing work boots and aprons), this latter photo seems more relaxed. It is totally a candid shot, unlike the other, which feels somewhat stiff and resembles movie actors posing on the set of some 1940's film. Yet, it is this one of my father's family that appeals more to me — on an aesthetic level — right down to the strong sepia tones and the romantic "Vaseline lense" effect. There is something surreal about it (e.g. who actually lives like this?) in comparison to the straightforward, clear, crisp black and white of the maternal shot.

I am the granddaughter of working class, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants and of white, affluent "Anglo-Québecers". On my mother's side, I am only second generation Canadian-born, but fifth or sixth generation on my father's side. Externally, these may seem like opposing realities, but neither one is foreign to me. And although each side comes with its own issues or set of baggage, I cannot deny either side; nor do I choose to. As Griffiths writes,

> *The acceptance of fragmentation is the relinquishing of an inappropriate dream of purity, as well as a relinquishing of the wish for the unity of the subject. It implies a celebration of 'hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes from new and unexpected combinations of human beings' (Richardson, 1991: 8)...We are all hybrids* (1995, p. 182).

A long line

I am a survivor with a passion for life. Our mother was our great model.
(Aline Visser, personal correspondence, 1991)

I've got a good mother
And her voice is what keeps me here
Feet on ground
Heart in hand
Facing forward
Be yourself
(Jann Arden & Robert Foster, "Good Mother", 1994)

My mother tells me I come from a line of strong women. Included in this line is my paternal grandmother, but I also know my mother is referring primarily to the women on her side of the family: her mother, her father's sister, her own sisters. It still seems ironic to me that the women in my family who had money, status, and white skin did not (or were not permitted to) take advantage of the things the dominant society had to offer. Neither my father's mother nor his sister went to university; they went to finishing school. They were not financially independent, nor did they have property in their own name — even when that money and property were theirs to begin with. On the other hand, most of the women from my working class, Lebanese immigrant family own their own homes; have had careers and earn their own money; (two) went to university; most married supportive and loving husbands; all are very strong-willed.

For me, Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1997) offer an explanation of this paradox. Their research indicates that working class African American adolescent women have a greater sense of resistance than do Latina or white working class adolescent females. Adolescent women from the dominant white culture seem the least resistant and have a weaker sense of self. "Black women...spoke about being socialized to work to be independent, not as an alternative in terms of relationships with men, but as a reality of their

lives" (p. 71). Reading this sentence was like hearing my mother's and my grandmother's voice: "Be your own woman!". My mother's "immigrant experience" seems parallel with this "black experience". The chapter, "Cultural stories: Daughters and mothers", was strikingly similar to the messages my mother received from her mother, and I, in turn, received. Taylor, et al. write:

> *Black mothers, often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective, raise daughters to be self-reliant and assertive [Wilson, 1986; Greene, 1990a]. As Gloria Wade-Gayles says...: "Black mothers ...socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident. Black mothers are suffocatingly protective precisely because they are determined to mold their daughters into whole and self-actualized persons in a racist society" [1984, p. 12]* (1997, p. 78).

My mother often describes her mother as having been a very strong disciplinarian and, in her younger years, a frightening woman standing at five-ten and weighing in at 175 pounds ("Mother had anger — lots of anger") . As an immigrant in a strange country, my grandmother was extremely wary of other people and, therefore, very protective of her children. In a letter to a friend, my mother writes: "I was raised by a very strong woman...who actually was able to downplay the influences of society. She did this by throwing a wall around her family. i.e. no friends allowed...the world out there was not a very kind place; better not to try to join it... 'don't trust those people. They're not like us'." My grandmother wanted to make sure her daughters would survive — thrive — in this new world; to take their rightful place in it, but not be *of* it. She saw to it they were educated, hard working, and had a strong sense of who they were. She would say things like "knowledge is power" and "I didn't send you to school to socialize". Being an immigrant in the dominant culture, meant having to struggle, to resist, that much more in order to survive. "It was 'us women' against the outside world. It isolated us; made us lonely in spots, but it kept a lot of 'current modes' out of our lives". According to my mother, my grandmother believed that education "was a key to freedom and power. It was our way out."

Strangers — men in particular — could upset this process.

I grew up with my grandmother and my mother's mantra, "Be your own woman". I could never seem to shake the sense that there was an unspoken "or else" that accompanied that statement. Was that the vestiges of my grandmother's anger and punishment or was it real impending doom if we/I did not live up to being "our own woman"? What did it *mean* to "be your own woman"?

I've always known it had to do with education, emotional well-being and *men*. As my mother writes:

> *Mother never spoke of "falling in love" with someone. Her idea was that you could marry a GOOD man without knowing him beforehand, and make a "good life" for yourself. For mother, marriage, husband, children, home — these were "her possessions" and this was "her career". A woman had complete control and ownership of these. Her home was her castle! If the husband died you did not remarry! What for?! You had all you wanted — the first husband was simply to help a woman acquire family — so why would you need another man? For sex? Good grief! Only men were searchers after sex. A man would lose his head over sex but a woman was far too superior to act this way!* (1991)

Being "your own woman" also had everything to do with financial independence in regards to men. In her letter, my mother continues writing about her mother's view on life:

> *All women should have a source of income. If you couldn't earn money outside the home, you ran some kind of business at home. Of course, in those days, she did. She practiced what she preached. No woman should be destitute, in her eyes. If a woman wanted to survive on her own, she could, but only if she was willing to roll up her sleeves to work hard! And she did that too. If Dad had died early in his life, we all knew that mother would have found ways of supporting us. She would never have remarried!* (1991)

For me the above passages resonate so clearly with what Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan observed with the adolescent African American women in their study: "Teaching black girls to be 'strong, economically independent and responsible for family' is thus an integral part of the roles of mothers and other women in black communities [Bell-Scott and Guy-Sheftall, 1992]" (1997, p. 79).

June 24, 1967: An auspicious birthday

> *"Memory work makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and 'personal' memory"* (Kuhn, 1995, p. 4).

I was born in the first year of Generation X. Being born in Québec to upper-middle class, university-educated professionals, and growing up in the same house in which my father grew up, I have had a very privileged, charmed childhood, much like my father's. Likewise, I have always identified more with the dominant culture of my paternal side. In the last five to ten years, however, I have become more able to identify with, appreciate, and reclaim my immigrant heritage. Jo Spence (1986) and Annette Kuhn (1995) write about being born into white, working class, British families during the 1940's and 1950's. While very aware that it is more problematic to write about and define class in Canada, I need to explore some of the finer points of being born a privileged Anglophone in Québec, into a Liberal household, during the Quiet Revolution, on the eve of "Trudeau Mania"[3].

1967 marked "the year of Expo" when Canada and the city of Montréal hosted the World's Fair. It was also the year before a young, sophisticated, handsome, single, controversial, French Canadian Liberal Member of Parliament, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, took Canada and the world by storm by becoming Canada's sixteenth Prime Minister. Trudeau, along with Jean Marchand and Gerard Pelletier, had been one of The Three Wise Men who

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3 This term refers to the public craze over the newly elected Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in 1968. The frenzy continues well beyond his death, at the age of 81, in September 2000.

went to Ottawa in 1965 to join Federal politics in order to gain greater powers for Québec, as a way to change the system from inside under Lester B. Pearson. 1967 also marked the seventh year of the La Revolution Tranquille (the Quiet Revolution) in Québec, all these events finally putting Montréal, the province of Québec, and Canada on the world stage. The Quiet Revolution marks a heady time of significant political and social changes in the history of Québec and Canada. In 1960 came the defeat of the stringent and corrupt Union Nationale government, lead for decades by the despotic Maurice Duplessis until his death in 1959. It was a repressive government strongly associated with the Roman Catholic Church and the odd bedfellow of English big business. It was at this time that a new leader, Jean Lesage, and his Liberal Party came to power, thereby beginning a new era in Quebec politics: the start of The Quiet Revolution. Lesage was a highly cultured, well-educated man who understood that if Québec was to come out of the Nineteenth Century and into the Twentieth, it had to improve on two things: education for the masses and the creation of a strong economy. The keystone for this was education, and in 1960, the Québec Ministry of Education was created, taking the responsibility of education out of the hands of the Church and putting it into the hands of the people through government (the first of many Ministries that were to follow).

For French Canada this was like shedding light on a society that had been living in the past and had not evolved with the rest of Canada. Convinced that fellow Québecers — a large minority group within the sea of English majority in Canada and the United States — had to take themselves in hand because the rest of Canada was not going to do it, Lesage's rallying cry became "maitre chez nous" — "masters in our own home". To help bring the province into the Twentieth Century and to make Québecers "masters in their own home", Lesage brought on board René Lévesque, a young political journalist, former war correspondent, and Radio Canada host of "Pointe de Mire". Writing about these times in his autobiography, *René Lévesque: My Québec*, Lévesque (1978) emphasized, "French Canadians must use the state to pull themselves up from their position of servitude" (p. 12). In 1962, as Minister of Energy, Lévesque nationalized all the small electrical power companies (the most famous being Shawinigan Water Power) under one company with the creation of Hydro Québec. In 1967, feeling dissatisfied that Lesage's government was not

going far enough with its nationalist efforts, Lévesque left the Liberal government and founded the Sovereignty Association Movement, later to become the Rassemblement Pour l'Indépendence Nationale. This group eventually formed the Parti Québecois in the 1970's and came to power — much to Lévesque's surprise — on November 15, 1976. According to Lévesque (1978), the "Quiet" of the Quiet Revolution, lead people to believe that Québec could not change radically. As he observes in his autobiography, "The Quiet Revolution was eventually nothing more than a mass of measures passed to suit the immediate circumstances, but which nonetheless served to dislodge Quebec from its passivity" (Lévesque, 1978, p. 18). It ceased to be "quiet" in October of 1970[4].

I am not necessarily one to call on oracles and soothsayers in order to find out how the planets and stars have lined up to influence my destiny in the Universe (though such ancient practices cannot simply be dismissed as "flaky" superstition just because they are not part of the everyday rituals of our own society). There is no denying that where and when we come into this world obviously influences how we live and who we are, if merely from a socio-economic perspective. This is especially true for those of us who believe that there is no such thing as coincidence and that there is a purpose for all things. Politically speaking, June 24, 1967 was an auspicious birthday. Not only is June 24 Saint Jean Baptiste Day, a Québec Nationalist holiday, but 1967 marked Canada's Centennial birthday — one hundred years of Confederation. June 24, 1967 can be a small representation of a dichotomy that highlights this province's and this country's identity: Nationalist vs. Federalist. A month after my birth, on July 24, 1967, the visiting president of France, Charles de Gaulle, declared from the balcony of Montréal's City Hall: "Vive le Québec! Vive le Québec *libre*!" Quebec nationalists took this hot little ball and ran with it, while Mayor Drapeau was dumbfounded and Prime Minister Pearson quickly put de Gaulle on the next plane back to France. Those

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4

A dark time in Quebec and Canada's recent history, it is known as The October Crisis. After many bombings in Montreal between 1963-70 (including the bombing of the Montreal stock exchange in 1969) by the Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ) — a radical, nationalist, "terrorist" group — the FLQ kidnapped English diplomat, James Cross and kidnapped and murdered Liberal Deputy Premier, Pierre Laport, in the hopes of negotiating the release of terrorist prisoners. As a result, on October 16, 1970, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked The War Measures Act. The question as to whether or not this act was necessary is still a matter of great debate in Québec and Canada.

dates, those times are rife with the all complexities and dualities of a nation's history and identity. Much like myself, they are filled with dichotomies and fragmented identities.

"Ethnic... with money?"

Historically, to be Anglophone and come from privilege was like waving a red flag in Québec. Being born with this status, yet identifying as Québcoise (a word that was coined in the 1970's with the Parti Québecois) and possessing the audacity to consider myself "de souche"[5] is an act of resistance that comes with its own controversy on both sides of the nationalist-federalist divide. Coming from privileged "Anglo" stock ("Thetford Mines aristocracy") and from "Allophone" (that which is neither Francophone nor Anglophone) immigrants, one tends *not* to be grouped in with "nous autres", the dominant Québecois culture — certainly not by Francophone Québecers, nor by Anglophones and non-Francophone immigrants (of which my heritage counts for both). Therefore, to consider myself an Anglo-Québecoise "de souche" might be regarded as blasphemous by some. However, because my family settled and has remained here in "la belle province" for many generations, I feel I have the right to consider myself as "de souche" as anyone. Perhaps equally blasphemous to my privileged Anglo and immigrant federalist heritage, I identify more as Québecoise rather than as Canadian. Although "my Canada includes Québec", I have a far greater affinity to my province — its people, its culture/s — than I do with my country. It is also a way to differentiate myself from the vociferous Anglo minority, within the English community, who refuse to speak French (though they have been here for generations, and insist on elitist French Immersion programs in English schools for their children rather than send them — God forbid — to the French system) and who stage political temper tantrums in parking lots by cutting up their Eaton department store credit cards because the store will not display signs in English.[6] I may be Anglophone, but not *one*

5

The term "de souche" refers to "origins". It is a term Francophone Québecois reserve for themselves, particularly those who are direct descendants of the French colonialists.

6

Law 101 is the Québec language law which restricts the public use of languages, other than French, in certain settings and situations. One very symbolic example is the "Sign Law" which states that languages, other than French, on commercial signs, must either be prohibited or displayed in a smaller font. Some

of those. Yet, even though I claim to be an Anglo-Québecoise "de souche", I am aware that I can never truly be "de souche" precisely because of the "Anglo" prefix, my Lebanese nose, and dark curly hair. I am very much a hybrid.

Economic status plays a significant role in this. To be Anglophone in Québec automatically used to mean to have money; to come from the professional class; to be business owners and managers: White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, monied. This was the case in my father's family, who were asbestos mine owners from the late 1800's to the mid 1900's. French Canadians, for the most part, were labourers (until the Quiet Revolution) who worked for poor wages under poor working conditions, usually for English Canadian bosses. My family's role in this became shockingly clear to me, one day, as I stood in the mineralogical museum in Thetford Mines and came face to face with a "family" photo. It was very strange to see photographs of a few family members — great uncles — in such a public domain. It was especially embarrassing to see the faces and the names preserved in time as the mine owners and managers — Anglo establishment — who were profiting to the detriment of the French Canadian miners. It was taken during the 1950's, during the turbulent and necessary rise of unionism in Québec. Never proud, I had always known that some of my relatives, as mine owners, were part of an abusive establishment. But to see it captured in a photo, in black and white — like hard core evidence — and classed as those opposing the workers, thoroughly upset my unionist, feminist sensibilities. Though I never knew these people, there was, nonetheless, a certain amount of shame and embarrassment to know I was related to "the oppressor". As someone who believes in and works for social justice, I could not identify with the mine owners, my own flesh and blood.

Mowreena Griffiths' work on fragmentation helped to assuage some shame and guilt. As she writes:

> *....authenticity is more likely to be reached by an acceptance of the fragmentary nature of the self, than by clinging hopelessly to a dream of unity. In order to see this argument, it is necessary to look again at the fragmentation of self. Some of the fragmentation comes from political*

Eaton stores in Québec did not print English signs — in smaller font — to display inside their stores.

> *structures of oppression: fragments of the self can be described in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and so forth. So, I look first at fragmentation using the categories of the oppressor and the oppressed. Almost every human being falls on* ***both*** *sides of these divides, depending on what kind of oppression is at issue....Thus it is normal for any one individual to build up habits which reflect that they are oppressed, in some contexts, while they have other habits which reflect that they are oppressors in others* (Griffiths, 1995, p. 181).

I was interested in discovering what Griffiths has to say about fragmentation and oppression and how we can be both the oppressor and the oppressed, depending on the context. I was able to connect it to my own identity and family history.

Figure 16 "Convocation", Diploma in Education, 1991: age 24

> *....because I can describe myself as both oppressed and oppressor, it is easier for me to overlap in experiences with others who are also both oppressed and oppressor, even if their areas of oppression are different* (Griffiths, 1995, p. 183).

This photo *(fig. 16)* was taken at my convocation for my Diploma in Education from Bishop's University. I realize I am very thin in this picture. The year leading up to convocation was a difficult one and the weight loss was due to the intensive graduate, one-year teacher education program, some stressful student-teaching placements, and heartache over a man. I could not eat much and I used to "swim for sanity" at the university pool to keep from going under with a broken heart and the stress of student teaching. Slightly anorexic, I suppose, sadly, at the time I did not "appreciate" how thin I was at only 108 pounds. I still could only see myself with my childhood pudgy belly; an image well ingrained in my psyche and sense of identity.

Both my parents went to Bishop's and, growing up, I had no desire nor intention to attend my parents' alma mater in what I, still, affectionately regard as "the cow fields of Lennoxville". I felt no need to carry on any kind of family tradition and with a sense of rebelliousness I claimed I was Montréal bound. All this changed, however, when I made regular visits to Bishop's one year to visit a boyfriend there. The small, friendly, and highly social atmosphere ("a 4-day weekend and a big bar bill in Lennoxville") and beautiful campus had me hooked. In the spring of that year, I attended my god-sister's convocation, and as much as I cringe at pomp and circumstance, I was sucked in by the intimate ceremony at Jill's convocation. So, following in my parents' footsteps, I did my undergraduate studies and teacher education at Bishop's University.

My mother, having won scholarships from Cowansville High School, had gone to Bishop's University to study sciences with the hopes of becoming a doctor. After her science degree, when there was not enough money to go on to medical school, she settled on a career in teaching and so took her healing talents and her desire to fix things into the classroom where she worked with children. Entering into an environment that was intimidating to a sixteen-year-old Lebanese girl of working class origins from Farnham, my mother went to university with Emily Post's book on etiquette in tow. She was concerned that she would not fit in with the monied "Westmount crowd"who attended the small, English university. Though they were/are a minority, in Québec during the 1950's, it was these "monied Anglos" who represented the dominant culture. This paradox is part and parcel of Québec's cultural and political history: those in the majority — French Québecois — were not considered the

dominant culture but, instead, saw themselves as a conquered nation by the English. Up until the Quiet Revolution, it behooved the Anglophone minority, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Duplessis government — those who possessed a great deal of power — to allow the Francophone majority to continue to believe in and participate in its own victimization. Growing up as an Allophone immigrant, my mother fell outside either category. As a child she said she was ignored by the Scottish Presbyterian children and beaten up and called "Juif" by the French Canadian children. Her parents, seeing who had monetary success, sent their children to English schools. As my mother's sister, Atina, says about the Golden Rule: "The guy who's got the gold makes the rules."

In a similar way, bell hooks, in *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, recounts her own experience of post-secondary education and the racial and class divide that exists in universities:

> *When I first entered university settings I felt estranged from this new environment. Like most of my peers and professors, I initially believed those feelings were there because of differences in racial and cultural background. However, as time passed it was more evident that this estrangement was in part a reflection of class difference. At Stanford, I was often asked by peers and professors if I was there on scholarship. Underlying this question was the implication that receiving financial aid "diminished" one in some way. It was not just this experience that intensified my awareness of class difference, it was the constant evocation of materially privileged class experience (usually that of the middle class) as a universal norm that not only set those of us from working class backgrounds apart but effectively excluded those who were not privileged from discussions, from social activities.* ***To avoid feelings of estrangement, students from working-class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a nonmaterially privileged background*** (hooks, 1994, p. 181. Emphasis added).

It is with great sadness that I think of my mother going off to Bishop's University at age sixteen, with a copy of Emily Post's *Etiquette: The blue book of social usage* so that she could learn to fit in with the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants that she saw around her. Interestingly, she managed to assimilate so well that for most of my childhood, I did not know that English was my mother's third language after Arabic and French. Nor, that her "Arabness" had much to do with my own identity. The life of my maternal grandparents and aunts seemed so different from my own, and did not appear to be very glamourous or desirable. At the time, I could not see anything exotic about being Lebanese. Not only did it seem foreign to me, but I could not make the connection to my mother — wasn't she more like me (middle-class, white, Anglophone) than them? It was with some horror that, in my early twenties, while at university, I became aware of the likelihood that my mother would have felt intimidated by young women such as myself. When I was a girl, I suppose it was the classic case of the egocentric child not realizing her mother has a past, an identity that preceded her own. However, as a young woman of twenty, it was my own middle class privilege that allowed me the luxury of not seeing my mother, or even myself. My privilege allowed me to "pass" as a member of the dominant culture; to even "pass" as white. And I had never read Emily Post.

By the time I was born — well after Emily Post, a teaching career in the English Protestant School system, and marrying my father — my mother was well-assimilated into the dominant Anglo culture. This is not to say that my mother gave in to the culture completely and abandoned her own. It was more that I was never very aware of it. One of my mother's small but significant acts of defiance and rebellion is the way she dresses. An on-going, inside joke in our family is what Aline wears when she is not at meetings. Always teased about her green velour pants, old denim shirt, or her striped polyester turtleneck sweater, my mother has stood fast in her determination to wear her uniform, her "work clothes". I remember after a teasing session, ten or fifteen years ago, that something dawned on me. While I did not put it in so many words, I asked her a version of: "I know you have good taste and like to wear nice clothes, but you choose not to when you really don't have to. Is this a form of rebellion? A way of saying, 'I don't want to have to fit in. I will fit in, be assimilated in many ways that society deems, but this is my one little defiant act. I won't

dress the way you expect me to.'" I asked her if this was her act of rebellion. She smiled and said, "Yes". I could finally appreciate why my mother dresses as she does. To no longer "dress", unless she absolutely has to, is her symbolic way of differentiating herself from the dominant culture, her way of refusing to give in completely to a middle class, professional, "WASP" life — what I would regard as a form of resistance. Over the years, especially during the summer, my mother looks more and more like her own mother and father in their back yard.

Looking, again, at the photo of my maternal grandparents (*"Sitting in the Garden"*), I see my grandfather looking off in the distance. His gaze seems to indicate that he is overlooking their huge vegetable garden at the back of their house. As a child, I regarded that garden as going on for miles, stretching to the railroad tracks at the back of their property. When my mother talks about taking the train from Lennoxville back home to Farnham for the odd weekend away from Bishop's, I imagine her hopping off the train on a Friday evening, at the foot of her parents' garden and making the long walk up to the house. I have no idea why. In reality, I assume she got off at the train station in Farnham, but I have never verified this with her and I would rather not. I prefer the image of my mother walking through the garden — of leaving the dominant culture behind and re-entering her own world; somehow cleansed by the walk through her mother's garden.

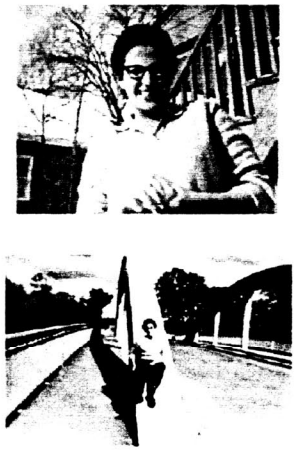


Figure 17 Aline at Bishop's University, 1950's.

My mother hides behind her humour (she might say her "big smile and big nose") — which can be black in times of crisis, or self-deprecating. I know it well and recognize it in myself

Figure 18 "Autumn Brunch at the Garrison Club"
"Gee, Jo, you look like your boyfriend just got married."

This picture *(fig. 18)* of me was taken by my friend Jill during the reception at our friends' wedding in October, 1998. Now I think I do look somewhat sad and wistful in this photo, but, in fact, I remember feeling quite happy and content. I cannot remember whether or not I was aware Jill was taking the picture; I knew she was circulating with her camera, circulating among the guests. When people look at my Wall, many of them comment that they like this photo of me best. Both the groom and Jill, apart from being close childhood friends, were part of the lure to Bishop's University — the groom was my first love and the boy friend I visited at Bishop's in 1986. There was certainly no sense of loss or nostalgia for a childhood sweetheart, which makes Jill's comment about this photo — *"Gee, Jo, you look like your boyfriend just got married"* — so comical and ironic. Yes, he got married, but there have been many loves and relationships since (for all three of us) that, although I cherish my memories and my continuing friendship with L., I cannot imagine myself with him. It sounds trite and obvious, but I am no longer the same person I once was.

As I sat at the wedding reception, enjoying brunch with some people I had known from university, I could not help but feel different from them and from who I used to be with them. It was the conservativism of the men, in particular, that struck me; gone were the wild undergraduate males (thankfully) with their crazy, sometimes dangerous, risky antics. Not that I could identify with them when I was twenty, but to see them now was even more foreign. As alumni are wont to do when they gather, those of us "who were there" told stories out of school. Others around the table — especially the young wives — could not recognize these men in their past incarnation as reckless Bishop's undergraduates. Transformed over the decade, they had become so...settled...in conservative jobs (many financial), real estate, marriage and children, and what seemed like a nice middle class life style. Then, suddenly, it became crystal clear: they had always been this conservative. It was just less obvious when hidden behind the destructive and self-destructive activities of white, middle class, twenty-year-old males. Their colour, socio-economic status, gender, and declared (hetero)sexual orientation, allowed them the security to indulge in crazy Frat-boy antics. These were not great progressive acts of social and political resistance, but crazy, destructive, dare-devil antics privileged youth seem to engage in. I had prided myself on distancing myself from the usual, conservative activities of Bishop's students. For instance, I had absolutely no desire to join a sorority. To me they seemed to be made up of blond girls from Southern Ontario (the Toronto crowd had, by the 1980's, replaced the Westmount types of my mother's generation) with their sweater sets and matching pearl earrings and necklaces (although I admit to owning pearls, as well) who thought feminism was a bad word and who were going to be CEO of daddy's company when they finished their B.A. in Business Administration[7].

I joined organizations and participated in activities of the more "alternative" crowd: the radio station, the student newspaper. In my last year, I was part of the newspaper editorial board that resurrected a Pink Triangle issue dedicated to gay and lesbian concerns and lifestyle (many university student newspapers do this in February, as a matter of course)

7

In the 1980's Bishop's was fast becoming a business school and no longer the liberal arts institution it once prided itself on, as in my mother's generation. And, the days of being a school of theology to train Anglican ministers — my father's generation and before — was long gone.

— a decade after the last issue lead to threats against the editor, beatings of openly gay students and the burning of the student handbook that contained pro-gay and lesbian information.

Thankfully with maturity, life experience, lower levels of alcohol and testosterone, we/they tend to "come out all right". My mother's father used to look at his small grandchildren and muse, "Imaginez. Un jour ça va faire du monde" (Imagine, one day they will become real people). And I guess we do. In fact, many of my male contemporaries there turned out to be fine men. But I still could not get over the conservatism, or that, at one time, I was part of it or attracted to it, living vicariously through these young men. None of them resemble the type of man I have been drawn to and involved with in the last ten years. Rethinking this, it was not the conservatism I was attracted to, but the freedom that it bought: the fearlessness, recklessness that I was too cowardly to initiate (or directly partake in) on my own. I envied the young men their sense of adventure and their security. Ten years later, what struck me was, that with some loss of hair and a bit more girth, there did not appear to be any question or reflection on how they got there, what they thought about being there, or consideration of those who did not — either by choice or circumstance — end up there. It was just the natural progression from university.

It was privilege at its best as we wined and dined at the Garrison Club on this wonderful October morning. One could say that the Garrison Club embodies such conservatism. It smacks of old Québec money — French Canadian as well as English. A beautiful building just inside the Saint Louis gates of old Québec City, it is still home to a very old and conservative organization. Once meant for top military brass, prominent Québec politicians, and French and English elite, it is now primarily a lavish social club. In fact, it was a Québec politician, Lise Payette, a former cabinet minister in René Lévesque's Parti Québecois, who put an end to one of the club's vestiges of patriarchal conservatism when she was not allowed in through the front door. It was not until the late 1970's — thanks, in part, to Madam Payette's vociferous indignation and resistance — that women were permitted to come in through the front door of the Garrison Club, instead of having to use a side entrance that was once reserved for wives, mistresses (and prostitutes, I imagine). So, it was in this historic and beautifully decadent setting that we gathered to enjoy and celebrate

our friends' wedding. All guests arrived through the front door.

I admit — with no apology — how entertaining and sumptuous it was to slip into this old, aristocratic world for the day. It appealed to all my senses and my appreciation for the aesthetic. At one time in my life, during my adolescence and early twenties, this environment, and partly what it represented, would have been something I wanted to aspire to. But it no longer represents who I am or what I am about, or truly value. It is no longer part of my present identity — although, a sensual, aesthetic life is still central to who I am. This is not to say that I do not enjoy such an extravagant experience. I recognize and accept my own privilege and good fortune that allows for such appreciation. In the afternoon, after brunch, we congregated downstairs in the conservatory to sample single-malt Scotch, some Port, and smoke cigars. The grey, drizzly weather of the morning had cleared up and given way to a lovely autumn afternoon and many of us wandered out onto the back lawn of the club, which is situated just below the Plains of Abraham. What was very ironic about this scene, was the fact that just above the wedding guests, on the Plains, was a provincial teachers' rally and demonstration. Teachers from both the French and English sectors were demonstrating over working conditions, pay, and equity issues, within the public sector. We could hear them rallying on the Plains of Abraham as we mingled below, sipping Port. It was another surreal moment, to say the least. Here I was, a former teacher and union representative (in fact, many of us at the wedding were teachers — my parents, the groom at one time, and his parents, other friends and guests) sitting around drinking Scotch and smoking cigars, while my/our colleagues were out on the Plains of Abraham fighting "our" fight. The irony that this demonstration was taking place on historically sensitive battle grounds where New France was lost to the English; that the majority of those teachers demonstrating were Francophone from a very powerful union; and that while they were defending the rights of workers, we, "les maudits Anglais", were drinking Scotch at a club that, at one time, would have catered to rich Anglos, did not go unnoticed. Part of me kept thinking, "I should really be up there on the Plains of Abraham, and not here". That is more what I am about. But where I was, was filled with loving friends and family. It was also very comfortable in all its luxuriousness, and I was enjoying my flirtation with the seduction of this other world and identity.

Costly footwear: Artefacts of resistance and accommodation

"When a woman marries, she becomes a semi non-person."

— Gloria Steinem

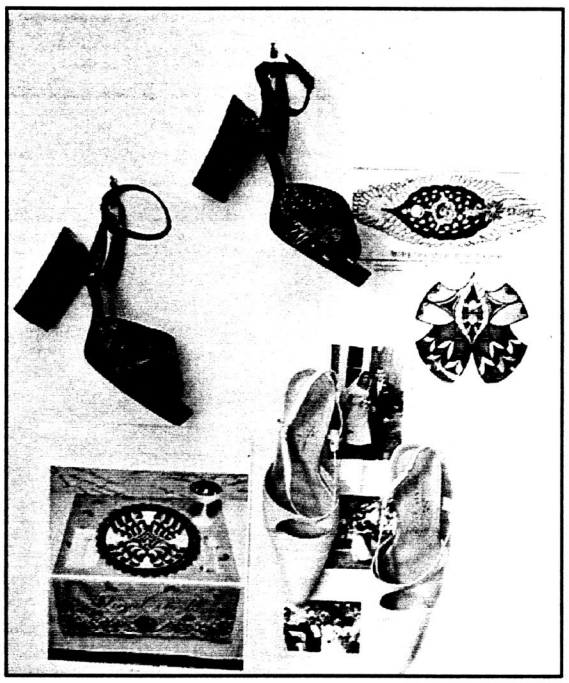


Figure 19 "Costly Footwear"

Elizabeth I placesetting from ***The Dinner Party***, © Judy Chicago 1979.
Photo: ©Donald Woodman
Hildegarde of Bingen plate and runner from ***The Dinner Party***, © Judy Chicago 1979.
Photo: ©Donald Woodman

Weddings are generally costly events, financially speaking: shoes, dresses, flowers, tuxedos, rings, receptions, etc. But so are marriages costly. Weddings represent the high price of initiation into a repressive institution. Traditionally, for many women, with marriage comes a loss of name, of identity, of voice. On a social-historical level, what I have come to think of as "the costly footwear" on my Wall represents, for me, the confines of the institution of marriage — an institution which traditionally has benefitted men and not women — a symbolic form of foot-binding, if you like. On the top, left corner of my Wall are two pairs of shoes(*fig. 19*) : ivory leather sling-backs with a very pointed toe, and high-

heeled sandals in a blue fabric with colourful oriental designs. They hung on my wall before it ever became "The Wall". They were shoes I really liked (they have aesthetic appeal) but rarely wore, and my artistic side felt sad that they were sitting in my closet collecting dust. So, I put them on the wall in my living room with a few other artefacts in order to create a kind of textured wall of odd "objets d'arts". The ivory sling-backs were my wedding shoes. I think of this little installation as, *"The only thing I liked about my marriage"*. Today, almost eight years after the end of my marriage, I hardly wear the shoes, not because I have any sentimental attachment to them (I do not) but because I have few occasions to sport pale-coloured footwear. This is a little unfortunate as, not only do I love the look of them, but they were expensive. However, the cost they represent is not simply monetary. They symbolize the price of a miserable marriage and the cost of what it meant to be married to a man who was controlling and jealous and, who, in the end, I despised as passionately as I had first been attracted to.

In contrast to my wedding shoes, and hanging at an angle just above them, are my "hooker shoes". I love how their flamboyant colours and ridiculous heels contrast with the more sedate ivory wedding shoes. Hanging together, they represent a sense of freedom and confinement. The hooker shoes are whimsical, sexy, fun — the antithesis of my married life. Ironically, I find my wedding shoes physically more comfortable and, of either pair, the ones I wear more often. The carefree hooker shoes confine. They are difficult to walk in and are not terribly comfortable for any length of time. I only wear them in the house, for fun, when friends come over. Like the ancient practice of foot-binding, they restrict my movement so I resort to small, mincing steps. The fact that I refer to them as "hooker shoes", signals another representation of confinement: selling sex for money; being at the mercy of pimps and "johns"; stuck in a life of submission. Loss of freedom. At times marriage, too, can be a form of prostitution.

Dot: An absent presence

> *...sometimes love is conditional upon certain conditions being met. A small child may gain the impression that she has to be 'good' in order to feel loved and accepted. While all children — and adults — need to accommodate*

> *themselves to the wishes of others some of the time, a requirement to do so all the time leads to what are described as feelings of being inauthentic, or of a loss of a real self* (Griffiths, 1995, p. 87).

On my Wall, there are many wedding photos: my grandparents', parents', aunts'. But there is one set of wedding photos which fascinate me most: the ones of my Aunt Dot's wedding. The following wedding pictures of my father's sister *(figs. 20 &21)*, were taken in the chancel and office at St. Mark's chapel at Bishop's University during the 1940's. Surprisingly, for the only daughter of an affluent family, she had a very small wedding with only her immediate family in attendance. I do not know if this was what she wanted or if it was because her father was not terribly thrilled that she was marrying this man (my father tells me that on the day of her engagement, my grandfather notified Dot's fiancé that she was "only on loan" to him. Whatever his loving intent and fatherly concern for her well-being, she was still someone's property). What Dot did not wear is just as curious to me as what she did wear: Dot chose a short dress, a wide-brimmed hat with a veil, and gloves. She did not wear white, and I have never thought to ask my father why. Given the times, perhaps it was not "appropriate" that she wear white. Or, perhaps, this is the very statement she intended to imply.

I have titled the picture of Dot and her groom embracing, "*The Kiss of Death*" *(fig. 20)*, and the photo of Dot signing the marriage registry as "*Signing Your Life Away*"*(fig. 21)*. I find it difficult to not get caught up in the romance of these black and white pictures. Sometimes I think I could give Hallmark and Robert Doisneau a run for their money if I blew up *"The Kiss of Death"* and made greeting cards out of it, they are so classically beautiful and romantic. This photo, in particular, has that wonderful 1940's, Hollywood World War II, *Casablanca* feel to it. The young couple, caught in an embrace, their faces hidden by the bride's elegant wide-brimmed hat, her fine leather gloves clutched in her hand as she wraps her arms around her lover. However, the image they depict does not really fit the sad story behind them. To me, Dot lost her Voice on this day (she may well have lost it earlier); she sacrificed her self to stay in relationship with an abusive man. She married a husband who kept her prisoner in her own home; who didn't allow her to see friends; who liked to have

her as a pretty object on his arm to show off to other men, but so help her if she paid any man any attention.

On my Wall all the photos of Dot are of the young and beautiful, sometimes playful Dot (I could not find any photos of Dot as an older woman; few after she married; certainly none after I was born). Along with her wedding photos, there are pictures of Dot in the sun (Dad said she loved to sunbathe, "just like you"); Dot lifting her skirt in a pseudo-moon for whoever is taking the photo; Dot sitting at the breakfast room table in the morning — the table at which I sit (could that be me reading, eating?) These photos of Dot represent, for me, a "before" and "after" her Fall Into Accommodation; before and after she married. I see Dot falling into accommodation as this beautiful young woman who was full of life, who had only gone to finishing school, and who married at the age of eighteen. There is a romantic aura of tragedy that surrounds Dot. The beautiful black and white photos capture a glamourous-looking young woman who got lost and who died young. Dot died at the age of fifty-four from a rare form of lung cancer; the last years of her life must have been especially miserable. For me, the real tragedy of Dot's life is that I think she really "died" at the tender age of eighteen — somewhere in that precarious space between adolescence and womanhood.

My father's sister has fascinated me my whole life — a woman I so desperately wanted to know, but never had access to. Even when she was alive, Dot seemed absent to me; always inaccessible; a small, dark figure behind a screen door, shutting me out. From the time I was born until the day she died, Dot was never very present in my life, yet she was very much a presence. I have always been fascinated by this mysterious woman. This was a woman who grew up in the same house as I did — the first daughter in the home I was/am a daughter. She is a woman with whom I share a genetic code and a family history. For whatever reason, I have longed to know her, perhaps as a way to better know myself.

Looking through the pictures of Dot is like trying to catch a fleeting glimpse of a ghost. What am I looking for as I look at her and for her? Am I looking for parts of myself; clues to my own life? How much am I like Dot? My father often smiles and reminds me how much I am like her, sometimes accidentally referring to her as "Jo". My mother thinks that perhaps I fill a void for my father that was left by Dot, his sister, his friend, his ally, his

"Fin". I feel there is a hidden treasure I cannot get at. All I have of her are these black and white images and a home movie, and I cannot interact with the living, breathing Dot. But it was always hard to pin her down or try to see her when she was alive. I remember her as a dark, shadowy figure standing behind a screen door, rarely letting me inside. When I look at the photos I feel a sense of urgency in me: catch her quick before she goes away; she will

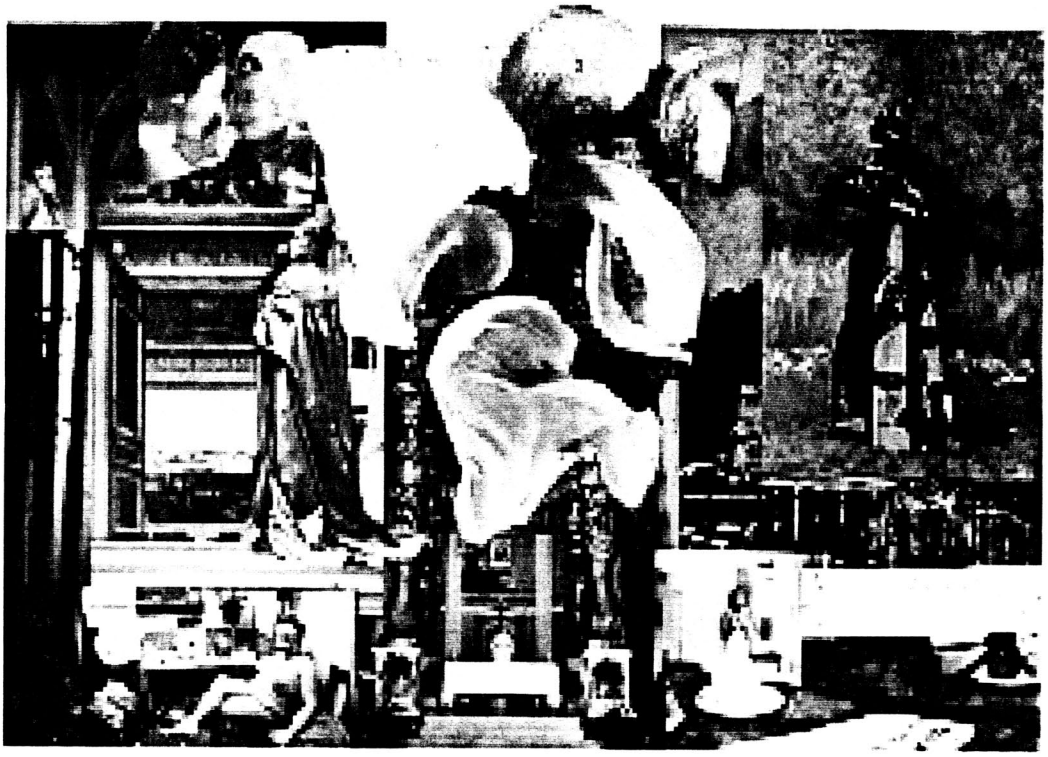
disappear again before I am done knowing her and understanding me.

Figures 20 & 21 *Dot's Wedding: "Signing your life away" and "The kiss of death"*

When people look at my Wall and at my collages, in particular, they remark on what they see as a great deal of wedding imagery (e.g.: "Swirls" and "Beaches" collages, *figs. 22 & 23*) — imagery I had not consciously intended (other than the wedding photos of family members). For her own research, Donna Davis, in her analysis of my "Swirls" collage, observes:

> *Prior to creating this collage, Jo had talked...about the "Wedding Dress" exhibit as well as The Dinner Party, and images that may be linked to marriage and Jo's feelings about subjugation appear at centre. Jo says in assembling the collage she first thinks of cakes (layering) and establishing*

a food metaphor, and she uses the top centre swirls as icing. {Below} are columns, the celebrating priest; and the white-robed woman who hovers above him. These carry associations of wedding veils/dresses, ceremonies, and cakes, and so could chronologically refer to Jo's marriage, as the right-



hand side might connote her early {girlhood} attraction to goddess figures, and the left her later entry into academia (Davis, 2000).

Figure 22 "Swirls" Collage

Likewise, in relation to my fourth collage, "Beaches" *(fig. 23)*, Donna writes:

The threefold life division appears again; there is a central area, an image on the right which could be taken to describe either the past or something Jo wants to "put behind her", and a left-hand image in which the future may be depicted as a restoration of a significant past. The woman in the centre

apparently is "turning her back" on the young revelers to the right. This inward-turned woman has an elaborate headdress of white gauze which extends into the billowing material in the black-and-white picture above. These may again be derived from the subject of marriage and brides, all the more so because there were some bridal magazines available that evening, emphasizing the connection of these swirling, billowing fabrics to the veil, folds, and train of the bridal gown. The black-and-white photo is an interesting inclusion since the image is one of an old woman with a mound of collected clothing or plastic bags, her German Shepherd sitting beside her in a shabby tenement. Jo later tells me that she inverts the picture to "get rid of" the dog (as signifier) although she has not cut him away but used him as

a dark shape; the image itself is already a stark inversion of the bridal dream of abundance and eternal beauty (Davis, 2000).

Figure 23 "Beaches" Collage

Seeing the collages somewhat differently, Thea, another artist and friend, sees a "struggle" between what she refers to as "tradition" and "sensuality". As she observes: " I see 'Jo' in the colour and flare [of the collages] amongst tradition [the family photos and wedding pictures]." She sees the traditional realm, depicted by the photos, as diametrically opposed to the sensual, which she finds depicted in the collages. Thea interprets this as my struggle to break free of the former and that I am, finally, more present in the latter. She suggests I make another wall of "just of Jo" and that I "leave parents and past behind". "What would come out if it were just Jo?", she asks. It is the question I explore in the next chapter, as I delve deeper into my collages, looking for what they might reveal about "just Jo" and her sense of self and identity. I am curious about what identities we choose to keep or discard. Which identities are confining or liberating? What layers do we peel away and cast off? Which fragments do we prefer to sweep away? Can we? And where, when, or how do we find them manifesting/recurring in our lives?

CHAPTER 4

Aphrodisiacs and just desserts: Just Jo

"When are you going to do just you, Jo?" (Thea Jones, May 28, 2000).

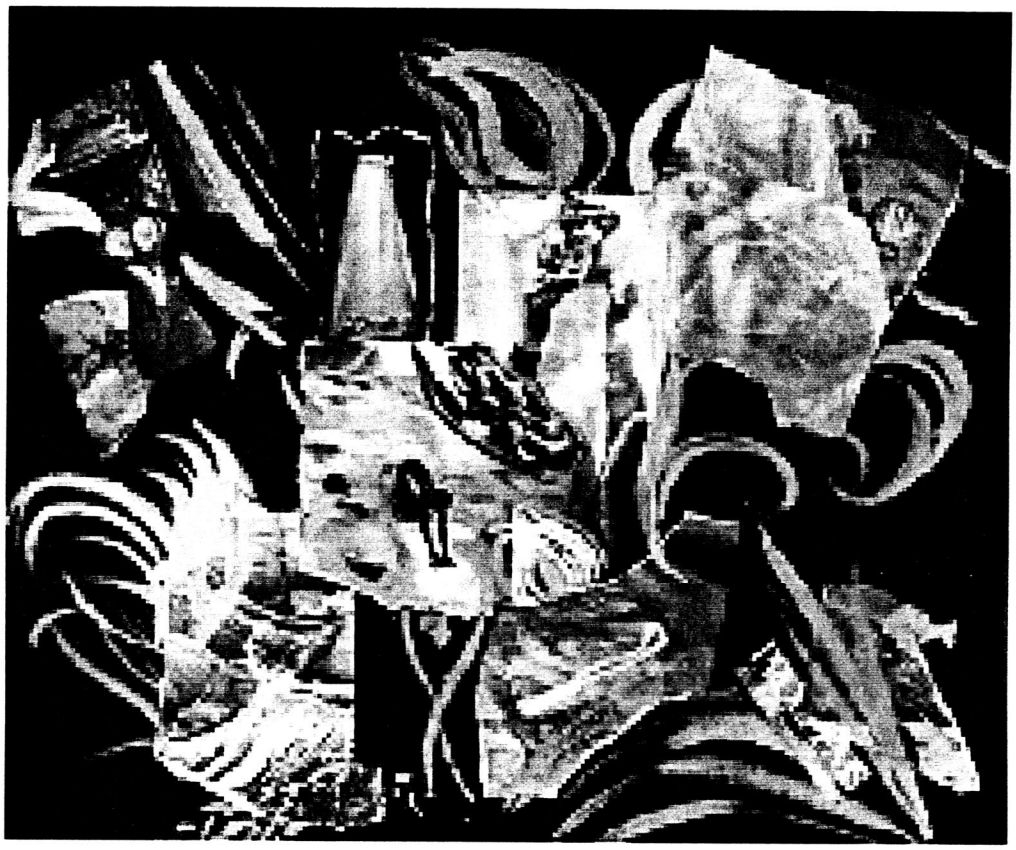


Figure 24 "Birth" Collage

Thea's question threw me — I thought I **was** doing "just Jo"; this is a self-study, after all. She wanted to know when/if I was going to talk solely about me, "now, in the present"; "letting go of the past". Just when I think I'm comfortable with the self-study genre, someone asks: "Where are *you*?" or "Aren't you going to talk about just you?" This chapter attempts to be "just Jo": an unveiling of an identity that is rooted in a past, is composed of many fragments, and is continually in a state of evolution. This chapter gazes back at little girl passions — their origins, their loss, and their discovery/recovery. It tries to peek behind the gauzy veils — a recurring image in several of my collages — to see what lies underneath. Throughout is the dance and the struggle for balance between resistance and accommodation, seemingly opposing fragments that are part of this identity. A drama which has primarily played itself out most significantly in my personal relationships, especially in my relationships with men.

Looking at my Wall, Thea was drawn in by the sensuality of the collages. She tells me: "I like the swirls...they're very erotic". But it was the "Birth" collage *(fig. 24)* that she was most drawn to: "the Birth collage is the beginning of more...so much happening; lots of stuff here....what needs to come out *singularly*?". The final collage exercise that produced "Birth" was an attempt to experiment with multi-media (paint and cut-out magazine images) and the use of space. We were to depict a significant moment in our life. In this session, researcher/artist Donna Davis asked us to create a collage that represented an experience or interaction, an important day, or the month of our birth. I chose to create a collage that depicted the story of my birth — a story for which I have no conscious memory, only memories of my father (more so than of my mother) recounting the day of my arrival. My parents, of course, are the ones who remember this event, and although I obviously lived it, I have no recollection of it. It is a personal memory several times removed, filtered through the memories of my parents.

My birth was a difficult one. A procrastinator since conception, I was not ready to be born and refused to make my entrance into the world. My mother was in labour for thirty-four hours. It was the late 1960's and throughout the whole birthing process, my father was not by my mother's side. Even when the doctor permitted my father to see my mother, she says she would wave him away (this detail of the story my mother tells). My distressed

father spent the long hours of labour out in the waiting-room with the other expectant fathers ("who were in and out of there"). The obstetrician eventually performed an emergency Cesarian section — a surgery my mother and I nearly did not survive. It is my father who seems most connected to this memory, even though it was my mother and I who were actually present for it. Perhaps it was being kept at arms' length by the hospital and by my mother; or perhaps it was because he was the most "aware" of the situation (my mother in too great pain and I, a foetus being born) that the experience was most traumatic for him on a conscious level.

In the "Birth" collage I did not depict my own memories of my parents' stories of my birth. Nor did I put myself in my father's shoes and represent his remembered experience of my birth. Instead I created an imagined memory of what I/my mother might have experienced. A reinvention of my birth story. In it, my mother and I are one being — a shared body experience; a most intimate bond. As I look closely at the collage, she and I are also one in connection to all women and the birth experience, as well as to the subjection of our bodies to a patriarchal medical system. It is the water images which connect us. In analyzing "Birth" as part of her own research data, Donna Davis notes the following:

> *Jo's last collage, a representation of the family story of her difficult birth, led her to discuss with me her vital identification with her mother in this traumatic event, and the empathy with the labouring and suffering women that prompted her decision to work as a midwife and nurse as well as a teacher. Jo's realization of her deep involvement with issues of women's biology may have prompted her to recast her central metaphor of The Dinner Party in a larger and more inclusive context* (2000).

I think because the event is so removed from my conscious memory, there is a floating softness to the collage; a disconnection from the actual fear and trauma. Even the image of the two women "drowning" in the gauzy cream veils, which I used to depict the near-death experience of my mother and me, has a gentle feeling of surrender. As well, the soft blue brush strokes make the collage watery and other-worldly. While visiting me, Jill,

comments, "the soft, curve brush strokes soften the collage. It doesn't make it look as stark, scary, cold". On a similar note, in reviewing the video tape of the last collage session which produced "Birth", Donna writes about the soft, almost healing, blue paint strokes: "Jo applies her paint like salve or balm to the image fragments as she unites them, with soothing, caressing strokes..." (2000)

What's in a name?: *Johanna Athena Visser*

> *...And even though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way! Maybe it is because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way* (Amy Tan, 1989).

As I see these names running together over the page, I can see the various components of my own name: ***Joh****anna* ***Visser***, J***ohanna Visser***, ***Johanna Visser***. My mother gave me life, but my father gave me my name. Like the Greek myth of the birth of Athena — born of her father, Zeus —I too, in a way, sprung from my father's head. My name is my father's unique creation. It is a combination of my maternal grandmother's maiden name (*Hanna*) and my father's Christian name (*John*). I wonder if he realized, when he named me, that the *John* of his own name is the root of his mother's maiden name (*Johnson*). My name is also a combination of both my grandmothers' maiden names.

I am so much a "product" of these names (*Hanna/Rahal*, *Johnson/Visser*), of these families — genetically and behaviourally. I am also "the product" of two cultural, socio-economic backgrounds. Reading *Between voice and silence* I also identified with what Taylor, et al. observed about middle class white girls:

> *For middle-class white girls, under cultural pressure to conform to the dominant conventional image of the ideal, perfect girl — who is always nice and good, who never hurts other people's feelings, who either lacks or can*

> *control hunger and sexual desire, who contains her feelings, especially anger — healthy resistance to disconnection in childhood can become at adolescence a resistance to knowing one's feelings, to knowing one's body, and to being in an authentic relationship with oneself and others [Tolman and Debold, 1994]* (1997, p. 25).

Five years before *Between Voice and Silence*, Lyn Mikel Brown & Carol Gilligan (1992), in their research with the girls at Laurel School, found that coming from a middle to upper-middle class household did not guarantee a healthy psychological development:

> *Given their fortunate and privileged status in many respects, one might expect that these girls would be flourishing. And according to standard measures of psychological development and educational progress, they are doing extremely well...Yet we found that this developmental progress goes hand in hand with evidence of a loss of voice, a struggle to authorize or take seriously their own experience — to listen to their own voices in conversation and respond to their feelings and thoughts — increased confusion, sometimes defensiveness, as well as the evidence for the replacement of real with inauthentic or idealized relationships* (1992, p. 6).

I am the image of both my parents; my characteristics and mannerisms are equally those of my mother and my father. There is no doubt in my mind about my heritage. Being a product of both a working class immigrant family and of a white upper-middle class family, I am able to identify with both of Taylor, et al's and Brown and Gilligan's "profiles". They are fragments of my "hybrid" self. I am, at once, the educated, self-reliant, financially independent, property-owning woman who is evolving into her "own woman" and I am the "good girl" who needs to please and who still struggles to maintain her voice. Even at that, it feels ironic, given the strength and longevity of my grandmother's and mother's words and counsel (as I describe in chapter three), that a significant part of my identity for most of my life has been that of the glamour girl and the unrequited lover. Childhood pictures of me

depict a little sex-pot who longed to have a feather boa and who wanted to be a movie star. Most photos, throughout my life, catch me posing for the camera, always aware of the gaze. And, though it is not clear to the naked eye, the photos show a girl forever with a crush or a broken heart. Is it any wonder that I am drawn to the "romantic" black and white photos of Dot that I describe in the previous chapter? For all my feminist politics, my up-bringing, and my long line of strong women, for most of my life, I have accommodated people, especially men.

Memory of a marriage: Surviving accommodation

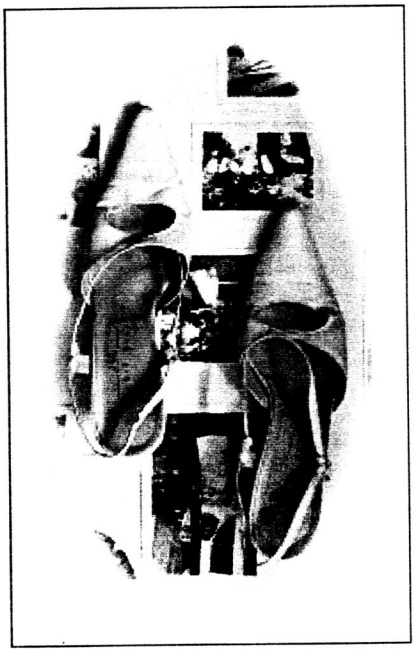


Figure 25 Wedding Shoes: The only thing I liked about my marriage
"The shoes, just alone, could be worth some writing..." -Thea Jones, May 28, 2000

An identity that I discard, like poorly fitting clothes, is the identity of married and divorced. It is not an identity I wear very well. To my friends, colleagues, even to my therapist, married/divorced is not an identity they associate with me. It is such an odd and

far away "blip" in my life; people who know me — post marriage/divorce — find it as bizarre as I do. As a teenager, I was voted the least likely to marry before age thirty. I should have listened. Marriage was an identity I tried on, but it did not feel comfortable or right. Looking back, even as romantic and love-sick as I always seemed to find myself, marriage never really figured into my little girl passions: goddesses were not married — at least the goddesses I liked. Nor were my feminist heroes, until lately, when I discovered with a twinge of betrayal, that Gloria Steinem decided to marry for the first time.

On my Living Research Wall there are no overt symbols or traces of my short-lived (thirteen months) distasteful marriage, other than my wedding shoes (*fig. 25).* I have included no pictures from my own wedding, though I have of my aunts', my parents', and grandparents' weddings. I do not own a single photo of my wedding; for the past seven years the wedding photos have sat in a drawer in a guest room in my parents' home. I have absolutely no desire to be connected in any way to my ex-husband nor to be personally identified with the institution of marriage. There are still vestiges of the visceral repulsion I had for him. So why marry and why marry him? I always say that at age twenty-four I was old enough to have known better. Pathetically, I believed my ex-husband was the only man who was ever going to love me. In my denial, I tried to convince myself I was in love with him. I cannot even say I liked the man I married. I suppressed any feelings of doubt; I was unaware of how I was feeling about entering a marriage with this human being. As the day loomed near, it seemed impossible to stop a wedding, so I consoled myself with the thought that I could always get a divorce if things were really awful. I have no recollection of this, but my father tells me that on the day of my wedding, standing outside the church before walking me down the aisle, he turned to me and said, "We don't have to do this. We could just go home and have a scotch."

We had a very short courtship and from the time we were engaged, and the relationship took a dive, to the time I left my husband (almost two years in total), I suffered from chronic yeast infections. My body knew, even if my mind refused to acknowledge what I felt. It was my protection and it kept my husband away from me. Throughout all the anti-candida diets, treatments, rice cakes, and yogurt douches, somewhere at the back of my mind I knew that the yeast infections would disappear when I got a divorce. Even though I joked

about this cure, and cursed my husband and our marriage — giving voice to my displeasure and my resentment — I continued to stay. To date, my marriage is what I regard as my biggest act of accommodation.

After almost two years of being accused of looking at other men (to avoid confrontation, I would walk in public with my eyes glued to the pavement), of being told my clothes were inappropriate or too revealing, of the insinuations that I was "a slut", of being told my spiritual beliefs were "evil", of constant fighting, I decided to leave my husband. When I told my husband that I no longer wanted to be married to him — or married at all — I felt as if the hand that had been holding my head under water had suddenly released its grip and I was able to come to the surface and gasp for air for the first time in two years. When my mother asked me if I were sure of my decision, from somewhere deep inside my subconscious came my answer: "This is a matter of my survival". Leaving my marriage was my first truly significant act of resistance.

Although my marriage is part of my life story and contributes to who I am at this moment, I resent that I find myself including it here. It is not the academic space that I am minding, rather I resent that I have devoted time, energy, and paper to recount this part of my life. Why do I think it is necessary to reflect and remember? Why do I choose to recount it if it keeps me connected to or identified with that short-lived period of my life that I have no desire for, nor affinity with? I choose not to identify with this "fragment" as a continued way to resist the man, the marriage, and the institution. Likewise, being divorced is not part of my identity, either, as I think of myself as "single". To consider myself divorced is to continue to be connected to a marriage I hated; to a man I disliked; and to an institution I hold in little regard. Married/divorced is no longer something I consider as part of my identity; it is hard to imagine that I was/am either. Yet, to leave out this "fragment" is to deny a key element in the personal narrative that contributes to who/where I am at this moment. I like who and where I am. And who and where I am has gleefully inspired another image and identity installation: I have recently nailed — crucified — my wedding dress to another wall in my living room. I cannot begin to describe the intense diabolical pleasure I derived in this act as I drove large nails into the ivory linen. Part of the process of this installation will be to, eventually, splatter the dress with red paint (menstrual blood would

be ideal if only I could collect enough!). A symbolic representation of my resistance to the institution of marriage and to my own.

Resisting marriage: Elizabeth I and Hildegarde of Bingen

Revisiting *"Costly Footwear" (fig.19)*, beside the wedding shoes and the hooker shoes, are two place settings from Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*: Elizabeth I, to the left of the wedding shoes and Hildegarde of Bingen, to the right of the hooker shoes. Originally, I placed them there for aesthetic reasons: the blues, reds, and golds in Hildegarde's vision of the universe complimented the colourful hooker shoes, while the lace, subdued tones, and elegance of Elizabeth's place setting seemed fitting for the wedding shoes. However, upon reflection, there is some irony in where they appear on my Wall, beside these shoes: these were women who remained celibate and/or unmarried. As well, neither of them had to succumb to forms of prostitution — of their bodies, their beliefs, their principles. As Queen of England, Elizabeth I established the Church of England, and her reign was the most prosperous England has ever seen. In her book about *The Dinner Party*, when describing the place setting for ERI, Chicago writes:

> *The opulent place setting for Elizabeth I honors a great queen who, in response to the counselors who pressured her to wed, stated: "I am already bound unto a husband, which is the Kingdom of England, and a marble stone should hereafter declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin." (She referred to herself as a virgin in the traditional rather than the modern sense of that word — that is, an independent woman, not dictated to by any man.)* (1996, p. 93)

Hildegarde of Bingen was an abbess, a visionary, a leading medical woman, a composer and musician, "[i]n addition to being one of the greatest and most original thinkers of medieval Europe" (Chicago, 1996, p. 79). Her writings include books on medicine, descriptions of her revelations from God, commentaries on the Scriptures and the Trinity, as well as a theory of the universe. "Like Dante, Hildegarde conceived the universe holistically,

emphasizing the inseparability of the physical and the spiritual" (Chicago, 1996, p. 79).

Elizabeth I and Hildegarde of Bingen were resisters. They challenged the thinking of their day and the assumptions about women and women's roles. Elizabeth dared to refute the Pope; she went against her counselors' wishes; she refused to marry. Hildegarde insisted on the establishment of a monastery for women, although she was refused repeatedly by the Church fathers. She was finally able to convince them that her directives came in a vision from God and, when she became gravely ill, was granted permission to found her monastery. Both women held prominent positions within extremely traditional, patriarchal institutions in which men answered to them. They were some of the most successful political and spiritual leaders in of their times.

I have a memory of Hildegarde — a memory of hearing about her life and her work: I am standing in my kitchen in Knowlton. It is a summer afternoon, about a month or two before leaving my husband. I am fixing myself yet another yeast-free, sugar-free snack and listening to the radio. CBC is broadcasting something on the life and music of Hildegarde of Bingen — visionary, mystic, artist, healer. I stand at the kitchen counter and cry. I know something inside me has been lost.

A longing gaze: Peering through the banister railings

> *The child Annette urges the adult to reach back into childhood, to trust the naive responses and admit it to analysis; to understand that if she lets it, the film...can return her, with an adult's understanding, to the child's world of possibility and loss...( )This detour through the world of childhood, with my own childhood self as guide, heals and teaches. It heals because it allows the child and adult to speak to one another, lets the adult recapture the child's spirit of bravery and possibility. It teaches because it shows that understanding may be gained by routes other than that of intellectual detachment* (Kuhn, 1995, p. 38).

Some of the following photos represent a time when my little girl passions were not yet lost, but were in formation. Others depict the years after I stood in my kitchen and cried — a time of rediscovering and regaining my lost passions. They are times marked by a gaze: being looked at by others; *wanting* to be looked at; the *fear* of being looked at; my own observation of the photographs; and, finally, leaving myself open to the academic gaze in this research endeavour.

Accompanied by the gaze is a sensation that I can only describe as a longing. Mostly a longing to belong or to be part of something — of what, I am not always sure. It varies over the years. It is an ache I have known most of my life, since early childhood. It is very familiar, and as I sit here, I can conjure up the emotion and feel it course through my body, swirling around my heart and belly. It is a sensation I associate with childhood and a memory of sitting at the top of the front stairs in my parents' house, peering through the banister railings and watching the adults at the party below. I so longed to join them. There is some envy that is attached to this longing: life looks so much nicer down there, in that world. This aching desire feels like being on the wrong side of the fish bowl. There is also an odd sense of loss that accompanies the longing. A loss of something that I fear may never come to pass — might I never be part of the adults' party below? As an adolescent, and even as an adult, it is a feeling I associated with relationships with men and unrequited love. Most recently, I am learning to associate it with a sense of mission and my little girl passions, and the fear that I might never be able to realize them. The focus is no longer outward. I realize that it has always been within — the need to honour my own demons, wants and desire. Sometimes I still feel like the little girl peeking through the railings, staring down from above, unable to gain access to the world below.

Figure 26 "Party Girl": age 3

"Party Girl" (fig. 26) is the visual representation of my longing. I associate my first memory of that emotion with this picture. When I was little and my parents had dinner parties, after dinner I always hated when it was time for me to go to bed. I wanted to be up with the adults. I always wanted to stay up with everybody. After Mom would put me to bed, I would sneak out and crawl over to the top of the front stairs and look through the banister railings. I would have a bird's-eye view of the front hall between the dining-room and living-room and could watch people come and go. I could always hear laughter; I especially remember June Smith's raspy voice and boisterous laugh. I would listen to the clinking of dishes and ice cubes in glasses and see people walking by with their cigarettes. I wanted to join the adults so desperately; they seemed to be having more fun than I. I could hardly wait to be an adult; to slip downstairs and be part of it all, part of the adult world.

I hardly recognize myself in such a pink, frilly dress and a goofy bow in my hair. It

is the longest I have known my hair to be, as a child; my mother always kept it cut boy-short, which I hated. I always wanted to have long hair. I have my left hand up to my mouth (such a coy look), and my right hand is out, holding on to the dining-room chair. In most of the photos of me, I always have an arm out-stretched and/or a hand on my hip. I am wearing a charm bracelet on the out-stretched arm. I remember my father always bought me charm bracelets, and whenever he went away, he would always bring back a charm from wherever he had been. My eye keeps going to that charm bracelet — I had never noticed it before or how pretty it is. I really like the small pearls and shell-like dangly things.

I am looking up at whoever is taking the picture — my father, I assume. I cannot really put myself back there. I look at my three-year-old arms and legs and think, "Oh yes, I recognize those as my arms and legs." But it is the face I cannot recognize (is this any connection to the many headless women in my collages?). This little girl seems so innocent, here, in the pink dress with the crisp, white, square collar with lacy scalloped edges. I have never pictured myself as all pink and innocent. Nor do I recognize the shy gaze at the camera and the coy gesture of the hand up to the mouth as if to say, "Hmmm....I don't know" — although, insecurity and loss of voice I have known all too well. Paradoxically, although I have a hard time seeing "Jo" in this photo, I have placed it on my Wall because it stands out in my memory. Whenever I think of the pictures of me, loosely scattered in the drawer in the Chinese room, this one automatically comes to mind. I think it is summer time, given my bare legs under the short pink dress. As well, the flower arrangement in the background on the dining-room table, the green table cloth, the white serving dishes, and the ivory or pale pink candles depict the kind of summer table my father would have set. I know that dinning-room so well and all that is involved in setting it up. I used to help my father set it up; now I have taken over the honours. It looks like the prelude to a Visser dinner party. Dad must have had some time to take my picture before anybody arrived.

I like to contrast this picture with the most recent one of me, dressed up at the beginning of the evening, on New Year's Eve 1999 (*fig. 27*) — the start of another Visser gathering of family and friends. These parties and my parents' generosity have filled my life with much laughter, warmth, and love. Like my Sitto's kitchen table it is a house full of abundance.

Figure 27 "Marabou": age 32

These are the railings I used to peer through

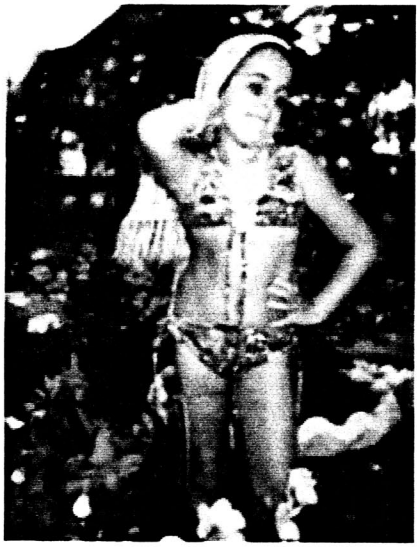


Figure 28 "Little Aphrodite": age 6

This photo (*fig. 28)* is fundamental to how I see/have seen myself. It burns an image in my mind. When I think of a picture of me, this one inevitably is the first one to come to mind. I am not sure how old I am, in this shot. I could be anywhere between the ages of six and nine; I could also be thirty! I remember that bikini very well, with the strings on either hip and in the middle of the bikini top. And I remember the plastic jewelry and the skipping rope tied around my thigh like a garter. I always wanted a garter and a feather boa. I used to wear my poncho tossed back on my head so I looked as if I had long hair. I was dying to have long, straight hair like Cher — a personal icon in the sea of popular culture I devoured in the 1970's. I am standing in the rock garden, in front of the birdbath, surrounded by the tuberous begonias my parents grew. Little Aphrodite rising up from the sea — or the birdbath, in this case. The scalloped bowl of the bath looks like a giant clam shell. Every

time I see this photo I think, "Ooo, I recognize that belly! It has not changed one little bit — except to get bigger!" I am still a little pudgy belly. I even notice the little fold of flesh up under my armpit; that little crease is still there. Again, I recognize the body but not the face. My fingernails are painted and I have padded the bikini top, because I always wanted to have "boobs". Now I cannot remember a time when I did not have breasts, they have become such a large part of my identity in more ways than one[8]. I am posing with my left hand on my hip, and the right at my neck under my poncho-hair. This was back in the days when I believed that being a goddess was a viable career option for young women — or at least I could be an actress. When I was little, and people asked me what I wanted to be, I would tell them "a sex symbol, movie star, and ballet dancer". My cousins used to tease me and say I should be a stripper.

This is how I know myself to be "princess"; not the Jo in the pink, frilly dress. Somehow, to be this sex symbol goes back to my longing to be grown up. But even then, being strongly influenced by popular culture, I knew that my pudgy body was not the right type of body to be a sex symbol (Cher did not look like this). But I could pretend, or hope that my body would change when I got older. I think I knew that this was not going to be the body that turned heads or launched acting careers, let alone ships. It did not fit the norm nor was it what I believed men considered beautiful. (I think I see a little cellulite on my right side.) I still feel I am in that pudgy little body (I can easily put myself back there); that it still does not fit North American beauty standards. Although I have come to accept and appreciate my body with all its curves and soft, fleshiness, I still cannot help but feel, when I look in the mirror, like that pudgy little girl wanting desperately to look like Cher.

8

I explore this in more detail in "Breasts and Jangly Jewelry" in chapter two of *Reinventing ourselves as teachers: Beyond nostalgia*, by Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999).

Figure 29 "Rising from the Sea": age 31

> *"Whether...coming in from a swim in the ocean, or half in the sea and half out if it, Aphrodite has been evoked in a classic pose"* (Moore, 1998, p. 50).

This picture (*fig. 29*)of me wading into the Gulf of Mexico was taken by my friend, Anne. It was taken when I decided on a spur-of-the-moment visit to Florida to see her. I like this image because I am rising out of, or going into the water. I also find this image key to who I am — of wanting to be in the water, by the ocean. As I stated in chapter two, this is where I feel most empowered. I am, quite literally, in my element when I am in sea water. Because water is central to my identity and to my spirituality — the place where I feel most at home; the place where many ideas come to me; the place where I feel most connected to a divine presence — I wanted this aquatic image of me in the centre of the row of twelve photos of me. This picture breaks the chronological order of the other photos. When I began the chronological row of photos, this one was the most recent, and so, theoretically, it should have come at the end, however, because it is key to how I see myself, I wanted it as a central image. I also placed it above the image of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (*fig. 3)*, which is positioned just over the Buddha images near my meditation area. Placing it where I have, the photo looks like it is rising up out of the picture of Chicago's installation. Visually, I like

how the shimmering ocean is a continuation of the iridescent blue/white Heritage Floor on which *The Dinner Party* rests. During this self-study process of the past two years, I have felt myself and my ideas for the thesis emerge out of *The Dinner Party*.

On a more playful note, I placed this seaside photo of me beside *"Little Aphrodite"(fig. 28)*. (How the bellies look the same!) Ever since I was a child, I have had a strong desire to challenge the status quo; to resist — sometimes only out of the desire to shock. Perhaps I would tell adults who asked that I wanted to be "a movie star and a sex symbol" because I sensed that it would unnerve them as a precocious child wanting to flaunt her not-yet-developed sexuality. So, is this the little girl who finally grew into the bikini, her jewelry, her breasts, and long hair? Did she finally get to be what she wanted to be when she grew up? She is certainly not the sex symbol nor movie star, though, deep down, there is still the longing to perform which accompanies the (conflicting?) need to heal. Has teaching fulfilled that/those desire/s?

I have a love-hate relationship with the gaze. In my twenties, someone at university remarked to me that I always looked and moved as if someone might be watching me. I cringed, thinking there was/is a bit too much truth to that. I am always aware of the gaze. I look at other people, so I assume others look at me. I am not totally comfortable with the gaze; I am conscious that someone will find a flaw. There is the struggle of wanting to be looked at — of being deemed attractive enough, worth looking at (by whose standards of beauty?) — and of actually being looked at, and all the hassles and harassment that it can involve. I think it is wrapped up in wanting acknowledgment, of being known, being deemed acceptable — or of accommodating to some sort of "norm", and even to an ideal, not only on a physical, but on a social/relational level. It is riddled with insecurities. And as I engage in this project, there are the professional, academic insecurities I have of putting myself out there to be scrutinized and criticized. There is a shift from "Am I any good?" to "Is this work any good?", which, inevitably brings me back to "Am I any good?". It is a struggle of wanting to be known, to be seen, of wanting to be in the public eye — thus, a desire to act, and teaching as a way to placate that desire — and the very real fear of the criticism. There is a tension between *wanting* to put myself out there and then the *actual* putting myself out there. I may be devoured. There is a tug-of-war between the discomfort of being seen, of

being "found out", and the thrill of wanting to be seen and known. I move back and forth from wanting to be visible and wanting to be invisible, only never to be truly satisfied with remaining invisible.

Connecting these photos and the collages: What lies behind the veils?

How much do your collages have to do with your photos? They've got lots to do with you!" (Thea Jones, May 28, 2000)

In chapter three I referred to Thea's interpretation of my Wall as an internal struggle between the conventional/ "traditional" and the sensual. The traditional is depicted by the family photos and wedding pictures, and the sensual is represented by my collages. Thea felt that the Jo she knows is situated in the collages more so than in the photographs, and that an emergent Jo — as artist — was wanting to break through/free from the rest of The Wall. I do not know if Thea saw this struggle in the row of twelve pictures of me, alone, as she commented on tradition, my family history, and "the past".

Other friends were quite taken with the collages, as well. In an e-mail correspondence, one friend, Charlotte, expressed, "Your turquoise blues and sheer whites and watery emergent forms are still haunting me". Some were curious about the recurring veil images in the collages. They suggested that perhaps they represent some connection to my Middle Eastern background. More importantly, they felt the veils were hiding something about me and were curious as to what I would discover lying beneath.

I think my collages appear to be more connected to who I am because they are my own creations. I have created the montage of images; I have set up the picture, whereas the photos of me were constructed by whomever was taking the picture, even if I did pose for the camera. The collages are also the most recent visual texts, created after all the photographs (except for *"Marabou" fig. 27*) were taken. It is not surprising that Charlotte picked up on the colours; those watery blues and sheer whites are very much in keeping with who I am. These sea images and hues I am drawn to. My home is filled with them, mostly in the form of cobalt blue glass vessels. As a child I had a shell collection and used to love

summer vacations in Maine where I would play in the ocean, walk the beach, and look for shells in tidal pools with Jill. I now keep a mini beach — a collection of sand, shells, stones, and seaweed from various sea sides — in a large, cobalt blue, Moroccan bowl in the middle of my dining room table. On my desk, along side a pewter witch's purse (a little sea creature), is a poor sand dollar I dug up with my toes from the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. Propped on the window sill and stuck to the walls around my work space, are cards with pictures of seascapes or luscious fruits and vegetables. It makes sense that the central image of me (*fig. 29*) is the photograph taken on the beach in Florida (just before I hauled up the sand dollar). It is also significant that the adjacent photo (*fig. 28*) is called *"Little Aphrodite"*. According to the Greek myth, the goddess Aphrodite was born from the sea foam (representing semen from Zeus), arriving to shore on a giant clam shell. The most famous image of this story being Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus.*

"Oysters, anyone?": A*potheosis*, aphrodisiacs, and Marilyn Monroe

My interest in Greek goddesses has fascinated me since the age of ten or eleven (well before Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*). My own name, Athena, was what sparked my interest. I liked that she is the goddess of war and wisdom; born from her father's head. Although it was empowering, I never thought I lived up to this archetype. Hardly Athenian, I was far too concerned with love, sex, boys, heart-ache, and the aesthetic, than this rational, warring, chaste goddess. Many years later, reading Jean Shinoda Bolen's (1984) book on the embodiment of goddess archetypes, *Goddesses in every woman: A new psychology of women* it seemed more apparent to me that the Aphrodite archetype is better fit for me. What is interesting about the incongruity of the name I was given and the archetype to which I feel a greater affinity, is how they are representative of the dichotomy of The Wall, and the fragmented identities that make me who I am. These goddess archetypes can be seen as representatives of the tension between the conventional/traditional and the sensual — Athena vs. Aphrodite; chastity vs. sexuality; war vs. love; intellect vs. emotion; reason vs. passion; the academy vs. the kitchen table/dining room/boudoir. They are, however, dichotomies (and deities) which share a common source. According to Homeric legend, both goddesses have a similar origin, their father Zeus. How they came into existence is

revealing: Athena sprang, in full armor, from her father's head, (a birth story told from the father's point of view, in a way, like my own), while Aphrodite came from her father's genitalia (the sea foam, which was Zeus' semen. In some legends, it is Uranus'). I can interpret in these birth stories, the duality of the head vs. the body.

As I explored these photos, connecting them to the collages and my little girl passions, I found that Thomas Moore's (1998) book *The soul of sex: Cultivating life as an act of love* resonated to a greater degree with me. In his book, Moore, a theologian and psychologist, writes about the implicit connection between our spirituality and our sexuality, and how our eroticism is part of our daily lives. In his chapter "Archetypal patterns in sex: Myths, saints, and celebrities", Moore — somewhat like Bolen — draws our attention to the erotic archetypes (primarily Greek and Roman deities) which dwell within us and surround us in the everyday. He begins, "On the scent of the soul of sex we have seen that the nymph we are looking for in our sexual curiosity, passion, and longing is felt as a presence in ordinary life" (p. 61). Often the embodiment of these archetypes are those famous and highly visible public figures — actors, politicians like Trudeau or JFK (or royalty, such as Princess Diana) — and our need to see them (or ourselves?) as such. He explains:

> *In ancient times people talked about apotheosis, the transformation of a human being into a god, hero, or celestial constellation. Today ordinary mortals, through some twist of fate, sometimes become stars. We still use celestial imagery to describe this transformation, and we still mean apotheosis. A person can become a myth, a great figure of the community's imagination made up of some factual biography and a great deal of fantasy. The political arena and the movie or television screen offer sufficient translation into fiction that a person can be a star and a myth even as they live and breathe and have an ordinary life off-screen* (Moore, 1998, p. 79)

Moore goes on to draw a comparison between the Greek love goddess, Aphrodite, and Hollywood actress and sex symbol, Marilyn Monroe. According to Moore, no one embodied this archetype as much as Marilyn Monroe, referring to her as a "priestess of

Venus". Moore describes a typical Aphroditic image of Monroe: the classic pose of her standing over a grate in New York City, with her white skirt billowing up around her legs "in the ancient pose of anasyrma [any gesture of shifting the dress or clothing to reveal the private parts]". It is an image which "intensifies the connection between goddess and movie star, and the fact that this photograph, this ancient gesture we see today in museums in the form of tiny amulets, has become so identified with her and has been reproduced countless times..." (p. 82).

What really struck a chord, for me, was when Moore writes that even as a young woman, Monroe, remembers "daydreaming about her future: 'I dreamed of myself walking proudly in beautiful clothes and being admired by everyone and overhearing words of praise'" (p. 80). These are daydreams familiar to my own little girl passions and probably to the passions of many little girls. But this certainly connects to my desire to be an actress, "sex symbol" or goddess. Monroe was always aware of the gaze and her public's need for her image and what she represented. Like a deity, she belonged to the people and, according to Moore, she believed that was her mission. "Collected into a pagan gospel unfamiliar to a Judeo-Christian culture, her reflections make a kind of sacred text in the religion of Aphrodite, so close was she to the spirit that inspired her" (p. 80)

I can also take comfort in how Moore addresses the accusations of narcissism directed at Monroe. Part of my concern with doing self-study is that I will be exposed as the narcissist I have been told I am and that I believe myself to be. I am not called "Princess" for nothing. I am well aware of my own narcissistic, egocentric tendencies ever since I was a child, telling dirty jokes at my parents' dinner parties, or as the little girl posing for the camera, an arm outstretched, hand on hip. The photos are living proof. Although Monroe's biographers accused her of being narcissistic, Moore writes:

> *her words suggest something different. Her concern for her image is part of her myth.* ***It may have taken more courage from her to remain focused on her self*** *and her image than it takes to complain about her narcissism. I believe that narcissism is due, anyway, to neglect of our persons, and so in reaction we insist on ourselves or display ourselves ineffectively* (pp. 83-84,

emphasis added).

His observation reinforcing how, especially as women, it is difficult for us to stay connected to and concerned with our self and identity.

"Say hello to Jo. She's a goddess" (Joan Armatrading, "My Family", 1973)

I remember hearing those lyrics when I was only eight years old — incredulous that someone could sing such a thing invoking the name of a chubby little girl like me, secretly thrilled that "Jo" could "be a goddess". Fundamentally, the collages are representations of myself — my own identity creation. The watery, goddess images, the curves and swirls, and the blues and sepia tones are the image texts most representative of who I am. When I initially became involved in Donna Davis' collage research, I wanted to explore how Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* could serve as a metaphor for my thesis. My search for *Dinner Party*-related imagery quickly evolved into my gravitating toward the swirls/curves/breast images. After some frustration with my second collage ("Swirls", *fig. 22*) playing with and moving the cut images over and over, Donna suggested that we should try to find the subject or hero of our collage. A light dawned, and I found my hero: the woman in the white robe, bowing against the wind. Like Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, the subject of my collages and my research, is women and women's stories. Donna observes:

> *...Jo ponders Judy Chicago's response to a central problem: If a woman cannot be an "individual", and must necessarily identify with the archetype of "Woman", what form can her creative expression assume? How can she honour her essential rootedness in biology, in the body, and yet still wear the mantle of the Artist/Hero(ine)? The path leads, as in Judy Chicago's case, to the collective, to the community or family of women and their shared life stories. All role models for this Hero must somehow embrace the inevitable duality, if not multiplicity, of experiencing one's Self as Other(s)* (2000).

Women are my heroes, just as they had always been since I was a little girl. Given

the autobiographic nature of my work, the heroines of my collages represent me. Because my work is in self-study, it makes sense that I should figure in my collages. After all, in self-study, are we not the hero(ine)s of our own stories? The collages are me; my expression of self-identity. Amazingly it is a year and a half after Donna's workshop/study, that I realize this; that I see this in my collages.

Donna's statement of how the Hero "must somehow embrace the inevitable duality, if not multiplicity, of experiencing one's Self as Other(s)" links back to Griffiths' notion of the fragmented self. As in a dream where we play all the parts, I am all the characters in the collages — the bowing woman, the woman on the rocks with the white head dress, the woman dancing on the beach, the baby, the goddess and siren figures, the drag queen, the headless women holding their breasts, Annie Liebowitz, the green tree frogs, the woman kneeling and crushing grain, the women drowning in tulle, and the dragon. A small detail, perhaps, but in the "Beaches"collage, the woman dancing in the sand, *arms outstretched* and spread wide is much like my own recurring pose in photographs. In observing the overall structure of my collages, Donna refers to the "three scenes" or "screens" that persists in three of the five collages. Using a technique that Donna demonstrated, I selected larger images as a backdrop on which to build a more cohesive collage. Because of the large size of the supporting paper, I often ended up selecting three corresponding images to cover the paper, thus creating three vertical panels which "often...read like three narrative scenes, perhaps from a film" (Davis, 2000). Donna's analysis of my use of this technique is quite interesting as she relates it to how I view my life in three stages: "(Jo's) energetic, assertive childhood and adolescence; the years of her twenties as a period of accommodation defined by her marriage; and her re-emergence as researcher/academic in her thirties." I had not made this connection initially, but in her interpretation of the "Swirls" collage *(fig. 22)*, I understand what she sees. Donna even touches on my little girl passions when she notes, "In this story, (Jo) attributes her sense of mission in life to a childhood intuition that must be repeatedly recovered and ultimately realized". In a more detailed deconstruction of the three-paneled "Swirls" collage, Donna "reads" this collage narrative from right to left: from the goddess image associated with my childhood, superimposed on the Greek pillars; to the woman in white who stands above the priest; and on through to the Streisand figure standing on the

steps of an Italian museum or court house (which Donna interprets as representative of academia). She writes:

> *Glazed white swirls, chosen at first to depict icing, float at top centre of the collage above a hovering white-robed woman superimposed on a background picture of an ornate Catholic nave where a priest celebrates Communion...If I associate the image with the stages of Jo's life, the resemblances here to wedding dresses, ceremonies, and cakes could possibly refer to Jo's marriage, as the right-hand side might connote her early attraction to goddess figures and the left her later entry into academia. The bent woman in billowing white is self-abnegating, perhaps a disciple, but she bows toward the Pagan goddess, and a bare foot 'steps on' the priest* (2000).

The "Swirls" collage, positioned at the top of the matriarchal side of my Living Research Wall (*fig. 6*), has a very feminist feel to it. I see the background images as the pillars of patriarchy (Greek columns, Christian Church, European law/art/academia) from which our Western civilization emerged — a civilization in which women and other groups are marginalized; a civilization in need of a paradigm shift. And it is the silent history of women from this civilization that Judy Chicago honours in *The Dinner Party*. The thin column of old-growth trees to the far left of the collage creates a very small, but significant fourth panel. These pillars of nature represent the matriarchal presence that existed long before the pillars of Western civilization. The female figures superimposed on these patriarchal columns represent women's re-emergence and reassertion in society and the movement toward social, political, economic, artistic, and academic change. The female images stand on and hover over the patriarchal images, resisting the status quo, as forces of change to be reckoned with. They are like the long line of women in my family.

"My grandmother used to call me 'farbrent,' which means 'on fire'" — Barbara Streisand

From the piles of loose papers and magazine pages Donna brought to our collage

sessions, I found this headline/quote from a clipping on Barbra Streisand, and included it in the "Swirls" collage. Creating this collage I somehow felt connected to my grandmother (perhaps it was the Semitic link between Arabs and Jews) and wondered if it would have been something she would have said about me if she had lived long enough to know me as an adult woman. They are certainly words I identify with her. The image of the white-robed woman "stepping on" the priest, as she bows in devotion to another, reminds me of the story my mother tells about her mother's argument with the Roman Catholic Bishop of Montréal over the legitimacy of Syrian Orthodox baptism and her eldest daughter's right to participate in First Communion with her Catholic school mates. A woman of principle, my grandmother went to the Bishop when the local priest told her that her daughter could not receive First Communion because she had not been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. My grandmother's first point to the Bishop of Montréal was that when you are baptized in the Orthodox Church, you are automatically confirmed and can receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, regardless whether or not you are baptized a Roman Catholic. Her final point was to remind the Bishop that the Orthodox Church was in existence long before the Church of Rome. Thus spoke my "firey" grandmother.

Donna describes "Swirls" as having a "narrative flow". A key observation given the personal narrative nature of my research, as she continues: "The passage from past to present to future is narrative-like, but it is a narrative that runs backward from right to left, as if to imply a link between past and future..." (Davis, 2000). Donna's interpretation is very much in keeping with Mitchell and Weber's (1999) work on self-study through memory; how exploring and reclaiming our past not only affects our present but can influence our future, allowing us to "reinvent ourselves". Donna's observation is also tied to my re-discovery/re-covering of little girl passions — a return to my past to bring the essence of that past into my present and through to my future.

Unbeknownst to Donna, throughout the collage process is my little girl passion of wanting to be an actress. She sees my "Swirls" collage as "dream-like or cinematic", sometimes referring to it as a "movie" and part of a narrative flow. She also interprets my cut-out images of photographer Annie Liebowitz and drag queen Divine as "an 'audience' sit[ing] in the bottom foreground row, as if taking a more immediate and grounded critical

outlook on the idealized 'movie' running above." This cinematic form seems to creep into my other collages, as Donna observes:

> *One of the prominent formal characteristics of Jo's collages is that they extend to the very boundaries of the supporting paper — she leaves no white border around them. Since the images extend to the very edge, suggesting they might invade real-world space, they again take the conventional form of cinema* (2000).

The sepia tones in my collages also lend an old movie feel to them. Donna is unaware of how I have always been drawn to the sepia images of the black and white family photos on my father and his family. There is a romantic 1940's Hollywood quality to them that draws me in. I find this a little disturbing, given the fact that, as I alluded to in chapter three, some of the stories behind those photos are not always happy, nor terribly romantic.

The metaphor for the women are the swirls, and curves — like the waves and foam of the ocean. Because of their roundedness and their relation to women's bodies, they are somewhat like Chicago's plates. However, they are more breast-like in comparison to Chicago's vaginal motif. Looking at the curves of "Swirls" and "Beaches" (*fig. 23*), in particular, they exude sensuality and strength that I think of as particularly female. They are very aquatic and fertile — birth images. I do not connect them to wedding imagery that others may see. I see them as empowering, life-giving images, associated with my little girl passion for goddesses and my oceanic location of spiritual connection. In all five collages, including "Breast Plates" (*fig. 30*), there is the recurring image of water (stagnant ponds, turquoise oceans), beach (sandy, rocky) and aquatic life (fish, turtles, chocolate shells and starfish). The sea as origin of all life, a primordial goddess calling us back to our beginnings. Although human bodies return to ashes and dust, they originate from liquid; we are seventy-five percent water. Like water, human beings are moving, changing, never static. Like the swirls and curves in my collages, I have come full circle, seemingly ending up in the same spot, but actually having spiraled up to another level. I have moved on from where I first began. My identity taking on more dimensions, like the dinner plates at Judy Chicago's

Dinner Party.

Oddly enough, I am very comfortable identifying with "archetypal woman". It helps dissipate my fears of narcissism; if I can hide behind Woman, then it is more difficult to be devoured. Does it bring "validity" and "generalizabiltiy" to my work? Perhaps it is a false sense of security in this business, as Woman has been marginalized and the individual (male) exalted. From one of our earlier collage sessions, Donna recounts:

> *As she describes her intentions in self-study, Jo explains that her confidence to tell her story meaningfully, to overcome the threat of egocentricity, lies in her identification of the details of her individual with the more encompassing themes that unite women's life experiences. Her longing "to do something creative with this academic stuff" expresses her desire to signify something new, to find or invent a representational/aesthetic form that will "make sense" (and public) the content of her life story, renewing it as a personal embodiment of her inner sense if value and purpose* (2000).

Well before I conceived the "Birth" collage (*fig. 24*), birthing images were emerging in the "Beaches" collage (*fig. 23*): the fertilized ovum and the baby in its father's arm. The baby's gaze goes past his/her father's right shoulder to the newly formed embryo, as if looking back at his/her origins — hints to memory work and self-study. In her own analysis of "Beaches" Donna writes:

> *The fertilized ovum to which Jo refers balances in tandem with the circular mouth of the pail, the towel-wrapped figure of the central seated woman then pivoting on the apex of an implied inverted triangle. The illuminated profile of the child can be read within this configuration as a manifest close-up of the profile of the sunbather which is shadowed and concealed within the mound of wrappings; she looks into the depths of the sea to discover her own clairvoyant alter-ego* (2000).

This is as if asking the question, "From where did I come?" It is also very much in keeping with Griffiths' rhetorical question, *How I got to be like this?* The sunbather/child could be interpreted, then, as representing self-study — representing me. Through memory work and self-study, we have the opportunity to "reinvent ourselves"; to reflect on our past, to examine how that past impacts on our present, and to then alter our future; to "look into the depths of the sea to discover [our] own clairvoyant alter-ego". In a way, it is a chance to give birth to ourselves; to deliver ourselves from a previously constructed identity (by our family, our society, ourselves) into, ideally, a more spiritually aware and socio-politically conscious being. All the while exploring and coming to terms with our many fragmented selves.

As educators, I believe this state of awareness is what aids us in our profession. The reading of visual texts can be a type of "birthing method" to help accomplish this. Donna looking at the "Birth" collage writes: *The wave is a repeated cycle extending through time as well as space; the substance of the body is also this wave-motion or contraction. The seamless union of opposites, even life and death, within one body* (2000). In memory work and self-study, not only are we the hero(ine) of our own narrative, but we can be the midwife attending our own re-birth/reinvention.

Discomfort in disclosure

> *It takes courage to instigate self-reflection which calls oneself into question. Openness to ourselves is not always a comfortable process, any more than is the process of openness to others. There may be tension, anger, shame and defensiveness in discussion with oneself, too* (Griffiths, p. 187).

As with most birth stories, there is pain and discomfort, sometimes even danger and death. Metaphorically giving birth to oneself can be a very uncomfortable and possibly dangerous thing to do. (Perhaps it is best done with the "soothing, caressing strokes" of a midwife.) Not only does it involve exposure — to yourself and to others, as in this case — but it also involves change. Speaking as an artist, Thea encourages me to go on and create

another wall that is "just Jo". She says, "We have a tendency to hang on to what we've already done; of what's already been done". From a psychological stand point, might this also be said of our habits and reactions (e.g.: addictive behaviours, situations in which we accommodate), as well as how we see ourselves? It is actually quite difficult to let go of old behaviours that keep us trapped in old patterns, even when they are no longer beneficial and can be harmful to us. Tied into this is our sense of identity, who we think we are. There can be pain and discomfort when we examine the self and try to "recover" a new identity, especially when it is seen to fly in the face of the expectations of the dominant culture and status quo.

From an academic point of view, I have feared that this process of self-study is a totally self-indulgent, narcissistic endeavour — gratuitous navel-gazing. The challenge of justifying or "validating" my work (let alone the question of "generalizability") has seemed daunting. The doubts and worries of "so what?" and "who cares?" have continually fed my insecurities as someone doing academic research. I have often spoken of this work with a certain amount of self-deprecating humour in order to cover up my insecurities and discomfort with being the focus of my study. A running inside joke is that this thesis is "all about *me, me, me*". I couch the seriousness of it in humour because I fear that it will be seen as fluff. Here is a woman pouring over photographs of herself, writing about her childhood memories and her little girl passions of wanting to be an actress, a "sex symbol", a doctor, a midwife, or a goddess. It would appear to be the height of narcissism in all its glory. And with some of my little girl passions, there is the added fear that I might unwittingly contradict my own feminist politics: "Who *is* this silly woman — who considers herself a *feminist*, for god's sake — talking about feather boas, her "boobs" and wanting to turn heads, and still be taken seriously in an academic milieu!"

There is discomfort in doing self-study and memory work, and there is even greater discomfort in public disclosure. We will not always like the various fragments of our identity, and to "air" them, especially in an academic venue, seems crazy. However, I have to believe that at an academic, as well as on a personal level, such an endeavour is important for social change and spiritual well-being. As Griffiths (1995) writes:

> *...authenticity requires acting at one's own behest both at a feeling level and also at an intellectual, reflective one, and that authenticity has to be achieved and re-achieved. Fragmentation helps this process of achieving authenticity. Not only does it show us difference, but also it impels re-assessment and change as we both act in the present, as we are now, and at the same time reflect on our own incoherence. This dual process of action and reflection is a source of insight and future change. The acknowledgment of the complexity of ourselves is a pre-condition for self-transformation....* (p. 183)

Nonetheless, it is with tongue-in-cheek, as well as in keeping with my food/dinner table metaphor, that I have called this chapter "Just Desserts". But these "just desserts" are also "just Jo"; serving myself up to be devoured, (like the "Dragon" collage in chapter one): an Edible Woman. Am I getting what I "justly" deserve? Jill's final observation to me about my "Birth" collage was that "the incense in 'Birth', looks like an offering, a sacrifice".

CHAPTER 5

Les digestifs: Education, Spirits and Epicurean delights

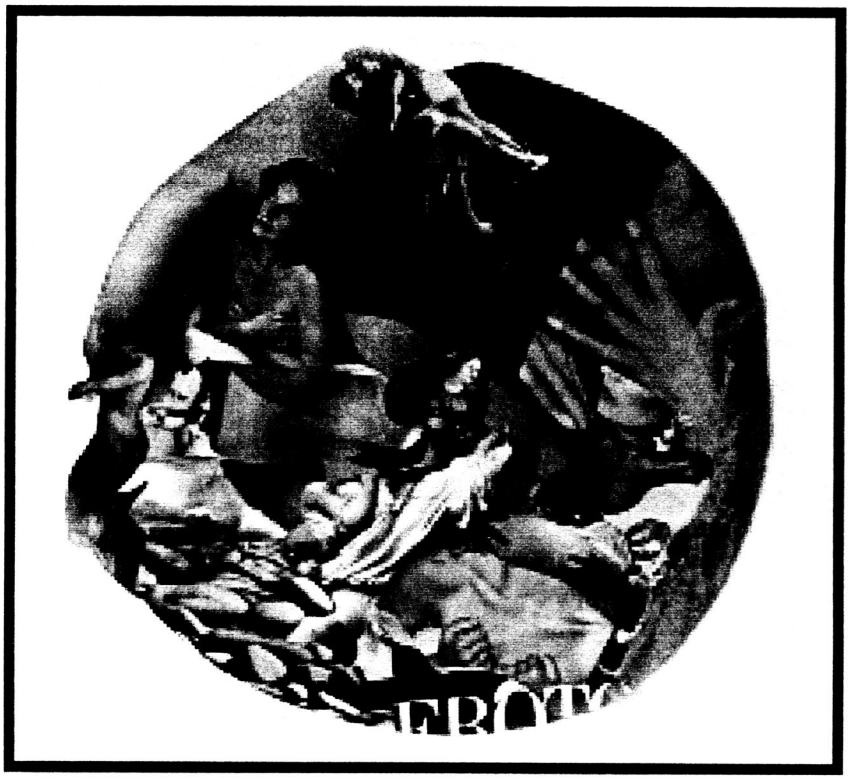


Figure 30 "Breast Plates" Collage

"The soul knows who we are from the beginning" — Plato

Artful living, artful writing, connecting with a purpose to help each other transcend and to grow through inquiry. Connection, embodiment, transformation, transcendence. All these expressions tap spiritual chords. A friend cautions me that my words may sound more like they belong in a crystal workshop than in the research community, and he may be right, at least for now. But if inquiry is to transcend the destructive circumstances of our lifeworlds, if its purpose is to make a difference not make a career, we cannot avoid using words such as vision, spirit, humanity, soul (Neilsen, 1998, p. 280).

Neilsen's quote about the soul and academic inquiry resonates within my very being, particularly when applied to the art of teaching. We need only to substitute the word "education" for "inquiry". To survive in this increasingly fast, diverse world, we cannot avoid talking about the importance of the spiritual, the soul, in education — that place where we help prepare citizens for this world. As well, within self-study, I do not see how we can leave out the spiritual, since it is a constant and permanent part of who we are. Hooks, as well as Neilsen, dares mention the spirit and the soul as crucial elements in education if it is to be the practice of freedom. I think hooks would argue that the spirit is a key element for our own self-knowledge and self-actualization if we are responsible for the spiritual development and self-actualization of our students.

Soul food: "Artful living"

It is hard for me to talk about the spirit/soul without mentioning the aesthetic, and vice versa. My own personal belief is that the key to exploring the self and to looking after the soul is through the aesthetic. This self-study journey has been through engaging with the aesthetic. Just as Lorri Neilsen, Anne-Louise Brookes, and bell hooks have ignited my intellectual and spiritual self, authors Thomas Moore, and Isabel Allende have nourished my senses and my soul. Moore's *Soul of sex: Cultivating life as an act of love* and Alllende's *Aphrodite: A memoire of the senses* relate the soul to the aesthetic, sensual pleasures (particularly food, in Allende's case), and sexuality. Both would argue that our spiritual self is wrapped up in the aesthetic and the sensual, as well as in the intellectual. One might say that I am advocating self-study —primarily as a vehicle for emotional, psychological, and spiritual development, leading to professional development — via an aesthetic experience. It is a method that worked for me, and obviously may not be suitable for others. It is, however, an area of great interest for me, and one for further development and exploration in the area of self-study.

Leading Jungian analyst (and former high school drama and literature teacher), Marion Woodman, in an interview with Pamela Wallin (Jan. 25, 2000) says that the soul always speaks in metaphor, and that art, dance, music, literature are the soul's metaphor, its light. She believes we human beings need to get our fill of the arts in order to nourish the

soul. Woodman says that the problem with our concrete, "patriarchal" world is that we ignore what the soul needs and desires. Similar to Anne Wilson Schaef, Woodman explains that as a society we are caught up in patriarchy as a power concept and that this concept is addictive. We are all on a tread mill, living only in the addictive, concrete realm. We are constantly working more and more, needing more and more and we do not know what that "more" is, but it is all consuming. Woodman believes this is the soul craving and longing desperately for something else. It is the soul longing for light, for metaphor, and that our destiny resides in our soul's longing.

Thomas Moore has written several books about caring for the soul. In his book *The soul of sex: Cultivating life as an act of love*, he writes about sex as an experience of the soul. He explains that whether celibate or sexually active, we are all erotic beings and that our eroticism is implicitly connected to our spirituality. In the final chapter, "Earthly pleasures: The Epicurean life", Moore expresses the importance of sensual pleasures in our life as a way of tending to the soul, but that this is often met with some difficulty or contradiction in our present North American society:

> *It may appear that our culture is dedicated to pleasure, because we seem so preoccupied with entertainment and convenience, but these are shallow substitutes for the abiding rewards Epicurus described over two thousand years ago. The pleasures he recommends are those deep-seated satisfactions that arise from friendship, family, and creative work and that lead to tranquillity — not passivity, but to a calming of anxiety and craving...( )The suggestion to resurrect Epicureanism is radical because our culture places a high value on immediate gratifications rather than on pleasures that slowly take form as though they were growing from the earth. Modern life is fundamentally impatient. It sets aside those soul-soothing delights like thoughtful gardening and traditional cooking because they take time away from the job and from the many activities that cram a calendar* (1998, pp. 296-7).

Moore's interpretation of Epicureanism is very much in keeping with the part of my identity that enjoys sensual pleasures. It is this part of my identity that takes me back to *The Dinner Party*, to the ritual of food and breaking bread with others, as well as to the creative art of food preparation. It is from my father that I inherit my Epicurean tastes, a love of the aesthetic and of ritual. However, like Schaef and Woodman, Moore's criticism of North American society is also similar to my own laments and frustrations with living in a highly industrialized, Western nation at the turn of the Twenty-first Century. Long ago I was labeled "princess" because I enjoy creature comforts: good food, fine wine, physical comfort, engaging conversation, laughter, friends and family, reading, music, art. For many years I have been accused of being lazy because I hate to be rushed and prefer to take my time, and because I do not, and choose not to, put in a twelve hour work day. I feel a significant amount of guilt and shame in not buying into the obsessive work hysteria of a North American society where we worship at the altar of speed and product.

I feel I must acknowledge that I am well aware that I write about a desire for such Epicureanism from a position of privilege. Acknowledging my "Thetford Mines aristocracy" it is not surprising that I feel that I have inherited an appreciation for such things from my father. However, the "artful living" Neilsen emphasizes, the soul-care Moore writes about, and the delight in sensual pleasures Allende expresses are not about money. They are about time. I know we live in a world that cries "but time *is* money", and the notion of anything that smacks of leisure is seen as something for the well-off. The fact of the matter is that even those people with money still have no time. As Marion Woodman says, we are all stuck on the all-consuming tread mill. I am suggesting (as, I think, are Moore, Neilsen, Allende, and Woodman) that an artful, sensual, or Epicurean life is not bound by class, nor is it a matter of money. I believe my maternal grandmother was an Epicure in her own right when it came to food and gardening. And as Moore explains, Epicurus was not advocating extravagance or hedonism but simplicity and, ultimately, responsibility toward the people in our lives and toward our community.

Isabel Allende's *Aphrodite: A memoire of the senses*, in particular, rings true with my life-long interests and passions for food, the body, spirituality, and sexuality. It was the title of her book which first caught my eye: *Aphrodite*. Allende's semi-autobiographical book on

the history and charm of aphrodisiacs, as well as the inclusion of recipes, seems very appropriate given my exploration of memory work, my love of food and the rituals associated with it. So many of my memories are associated with food and the rituals of meals. Food is the metaphorical thread that runs, not only throughout this work, but throughout my life. As Allende muses:

> *...From nursing to death, food and sex go hand in hand...Is there a relationship between creativity and eroticism? I hope there is. The deep joy I feel after eating well and making love loving is invariably reflected in my work, as if my body, gratified, destines the best of its energy to lend wings to my writing...( ) And that when I can no longer make love — not because of any indifference of my own, but perhaps from the difficulty of finding someone willing to frolic with a great-grandmother — I hope at least to continue enjoying food and memories* (1998, p. 201).

Allende, also makes a delightful and tantalizing reference to Epicueanism and the soul when she writes: "We cannot resist a man who knows how to cook...epicures who lovingly choose the freshest and most arousing ingredients, prepare them with art, and offer them as a gift to the senses and the soul...." (1998, pp. 42-43).

In contemplating Moore's critique of Western society and Allende's sensual wit and bawdy humour, I am reminded of an anecdote from my adolescence which involves an off-hand but, very astute comment from my high school Phys. Ed. teacher. During training for track and field, after my attempt at the relay race, my teacher shook his head, chuckled and said, "Jo, you've got style but no speed". I cannot say I was terribly insulted. In fact, I was pleased that someone thought I "had style". Years later, I still remember this incident vividly and with satisfaction. It is very much in keeping with my identity as procrastinator, perfectionist, artist, "princess", epicure, etc. I am definitely not about speed, but I have a sense of and a love for the aesthetic in my life. Such things take more time, not haste. It is about style not speed. For this, with tongue-in-cheek, I must beg the question: Which would you prefer to have at your dinner table and in your bed?

There is no doubt that I much prefer the contemplative and soul-full pleasures found around the kitchen table or at the dinner party; sites where we "cultivate friendships, we write letters, we invite friends and family into our homes, we play music and paint, we make good food, *and we contribute to society*" (Moore, 1998, p. 299. Emphasis added). I cannot help but wonder what the social ramifications are if we do not engage in this sort of *collective* activity, this *communion.* What does it say about a so-called civilized society if this kind of "artful living" or soul-care is seen as the exception or "special occasion", and not part of the quotidian? Or, worse, is seen as lazy or hedonistic? We live in an addictive society that no longer remembers how to feed the body — let alone the soul — and it permeates all our systems and organizations, including education. So why self-study? Why "just Jo"? It is essential that we take time to nourish the Epicure in us. This self-study has been my attempt at bringing the private and public domains together, not only for the benefit of self-study and alternative qualitative research methodologies, but for my own personal growth and sense of satisfaction — artistic, as well as intellectual. I have chosen to do this through my love of the aesthetic — using visual images and artistic representation, not only as a way to analyze and interpret a life story, but also to depict it.

Regardless of my struggle in my profession as an educator, I am most interested in how this self-study process can have an impact on the field of education, especially on the students (particularly the children and young adults) in our care. Clearly it is something that requires more research. It is not just how we look at ourselves as practitioners, but how we see and interpret all aspects of our life. I would argue that the most important thing we "bring into the classroom" is our Self. I am adamant about the importance of our responsibility of being fully present and aware beings in the lives of our students. It is vital that we bring our *whole* Self — body and soul, as well as intellect — to the classroom, and that we have an understanding of who that whole Self is. As educators, we wield a great deal of power and influence by virtue of our position. If our Self is not reflective and aware of its various fragments and identities, privileges and biases — or that we even need to consider that we should be in the process of becoming self-aware— then I have an ethical problem with that. How can we create open, safe, and holistic learning environments? How do we practice engaged pedagogy? How does education become the practice of freedom if we remain

prisoners to our own lack of self-awareness and acceptance?

I am not advocating that we have to have "finally arrived" before we set foot into the classroom, or that we must master Jungian psycho-analysis and spend our lives in a therapist's office before becoming teachers. However, we must at least be open to the importance of the *process* of better understanding ourselves if we are in the "helping professions" (whether we like that term or not, it is a reality of the nature of our work). Even beyond the call of duty, we have an obligation to ourselves to tend to our own well-being and happiness. There are many ways of becoming more self-aware. There are many ways to engage in self-study — it can be through formal talk-therapy; it can be through writing; it can be through other artistic endeavours; it can be through kinesthetics; it can be through pouring over personal and family photographs; it can be through meditation or prayer; it can be as simple as through open conversations with close friends and family. My own self-study work has been through exploring a variety of these paths. While self-study can be done through many informal ways, the approach I have taken is a more formal, in-depth, and systematic one. The fact that there is now a special interest group, S-STEP (Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices), within the American Educational Research Association devoted to self-study, as well as the Herstmonceux Castle Conference which S-STEP holds every two years in the UK, offer academics and practitioners opportunities to explore approaches to self-study. My own approach has been to point a telephoto lens at my life — and not simply my life as a practitioner — but at the many personal, "kitchen table" aspects of my story, which, inevitably, have an impact on my identity as an educator.

Arguably, such formal processes take time — our most precious commodity, it seems, these days. Nonetheless, we must allow ourselves (*society* must allow us to *allow ourselves*) the time for reflection, memory work, self-knowledge, understanding and acceptance. We need the time to examine the many fragments of our identity; a time for self-study. Within this thesis I am arguing that there is critical need for dedicated self-study, especially in teacher education and practice. We need to make time and room for more in-depth self-study within the academy, especially if teaching is to evolve into the "practice of freedom". Such soul-full and aesthetic acts help us move into the reinvention that Mitchell and Weber explore, and the self-actualization bell hooks espouses. Only out of our own

artful soul-care and self-actualization can we be agents of change and help others (our students, for example) to do the same for themselves, so that they may then craft their own identity and tend to the care of their own soul and that of society's.

Remaining true

> *In fiction, investigative reporting, and biography, writers never stop trying to understand [Marilyn Monroe's] mystery. I suspect it has to do with her loyalty to the spirit that early in her life she found dwelling within her* (Moore, 1998, p. 80).

There is a vital need for the aesthetic in our lives; for "artful living" and "artful writing". It is necessary that my own work incorporates the aesthetic and feeds my deep desire to "do something creative with this academic stuff". It is how I bring my intellectual, political, social, physical, emotional, spiritual, and sensual self to the academy, to the classroom. And so, as with any of my culinary or other creations, this academic endeavour has to appeal to the senses. I hope that my dinner guests, my readers, leave my table with the glow that comes from all the senses feeling satisfied. I hope I have been able to contribute to this realm, as well, for it is part of remaining true to my creative, aesthetic self within the academy. It is also how I resist the status quo and stay true to my self. Finally, it is how I honour the little girl who spent hours on weekends dancing in her parents' basement, drawing and painting at the breakfast room table, playing in the ocean, and dreaming of what it might be like to be a goddess.

Figure 31 "Smoke"

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