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**Generating a New Interdisciplinary Feminist Framework for Contemporary
Canadian Women's Art: The Critical Practices of Renee Baert and Joan Borsa**

by

Cindy Stelmackowich, B.A. (Honours), Advanced Certificate Studio Art

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

School of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April 20, 1995

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submitted by Cindy Stelmackowich, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Thesis Supervisor

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Ottawa, Ontario

May 1995

Abstract

This thesis explores the potential for a new feminist framework in which to analyze the work of contemporary Canadian women artists. It examines the writings of two Canadian art critics, Renee Baert and Joan Borsa, who are generating new concepts for the analysis of women's art. By interfacing feminist theory and feminist art practices, the work of Borsa and Baert redefines the female artist/subject/critic as a willing, active, desiring subject, rather than a passive recipient of patriarchal discourse. New ways of knowing, being and acting are articulated in critical practices through interdisciplinary methodologies that are reflected in the new working methods of emerging contemporary women artists. Based on utilizing concepts of agency and by focusing on the spaces where feminist struggles over representation are taking place, sites of resistance are conceptualized into liberating sites. This thesis articulates empowering positions for Canadian feminist cultural producers and investigates the critical spaces that feminist art criticism is evolving into.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

My intention in this thesis is to generate a new, interdisciplinary feminist framework in which to analyze contemporary Canadian women's visual art. My thesis is based on the transformation I have noticed that is taking place in feminist criticism and artistic practices. Feminist artists and critics are finding new, more positive ways to fight back against the systematic repression of women in patriarchal Western culture. They are creating and articulating new ways of knowing, new ways of being and new ways of acting. Feminists are attempting to redefine the female subject/artist as a willing, active, desiring subject, rather than a passive recipient of patriarchal or androcentric discourse. As feminists and Canadians, speaking about the social, cultural, political as well as geographical, women are claiming their right to speak and name the world according to how it looks and feels from their particular social, political and geographical locations.

My focus is on the writings of two Canadian critics, Renee Baert and Joan Borsa. Both of these women's work appears in exhibition catalogues on contemporary women's art and in journals about art, theory, and contemporary art practices.¹ As free-lance writers and curators, they bring alternative curatorial practices and strategies to routine exhibition and curatorial programming in contemporary art galleries. Their writings, which work dialectically between the artwork they are analyzing and their ideas as critics, also work dialectically with my proposal to articulate a new feminist framework for analyzing contemporary art.

¹Biographies on Joan Borsa and Renee Baert can be found in Appendix A and B.

I will argue that Borsa and Baert are creating places for positive and liberating subject positions for the female subject/artist. These subject positions spawn new critical terms to describe artistic expression and women's experiences. The key terms that they are using are *agency*, the process of women becoming speaking subjects, and *self-knowledge*, a personal self-generating process of knowing. By utilizing these concepts, I believe that Borsa and Baert provide new theoretical strategies through which contemporary art can be discussed. Focusing on the space where struggles over representation are taking place, they construct new critical investigations.

To contextualize the work of Borsa and Baert, it is important to understand the historical and theoretical factors that have affected and influenced the feminist inquiry in art discourse. Feminists' dissatisfaction with the dominant paradigm used to describe artistic practices and art criticism during the late 1960s and 1970s, known as Modernism,² led them to critique the discipline of art history -- its ideologies, discursive frameworks and patriarchal inscriptions. Borsa and Baert are successors of these initial feminist art historians. In the early 1980s, Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker³ questioned why art by women is frequently excluded in the discourse of art, why and how women's artwork often gets

²Modernism refers to the style of painting that relies on abstract and formalist characteristics, and, is a theory that was outlined in the criticism of American art critic Clement Greenberg. A feminist critique of Modernism and Modernist art practices and ideologies can be found in Chapter 2 of Griselda Pollock's Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art, (London and New York: Routledge), 1988, p. 79-122.

³ See: Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in her book Art, Women and Power and Other Essays, (New York: Harper and Row), 1988, p. 145-175; Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London: Routledge &

misrepresented or "feminized" through art discourse, and what this treatment of women in art reveals about the writing and teaching of art history. These initial feminist interventions of art history are based on the premise that art history's concepts and habitual practices and procedures constitute an ideological practice. This practice is structured around certain stereotypes of masculine and feminine, and wedded to concepts of art and artist that systematically exclude women and their contributions.⁴ This initial feminist scholarship formulated crucial questions about the discipline of art history, and exposed the ideological underpinnings of patriarchal practices that have affected the production and reception of women's cultural activities.

Pollock and Parker have said feminists must not only intervene upon traditional art historical frameworks, but should be articulating women's cultural activities according to "... women's (own) particular contexts."⁵ I will argue that Borsa and Baert strategize critical responses to this initial call for feminist interventions. Their attempts to expand, evolve and move beyond the traditional paradigms of art history, offer alternative perspectives which not only intervene upon art discourse, but generates new strategies that are

Kegan Paul Ltd.), 1981, and Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art (London and New York: Routledge), 1988.

⁴For a review of these comments made by Griselda Pollock, see "Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock: In Conversation," Judith Mastai, (ed.), Parachute #62, (Spring 1991), p. 24-31. The article was published in conjunction with the seminar entitled *Different Perspectives: Perspectives on Difference*, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery, June 12-16, 1989.

⁵Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1981, p. 49.

different from those of earlier feminist writings. These strategies establish connections between Canadian art history, Women's Studies and Canadian Studies.

In relation to Women's Studies and feminist scholarship, Borsa and Baert are advancing strategies that are making visible the lives and experiences of the formerly unrepresentable -- women as social subjects. Grounded in the theoretical and conceptual issues evident in feminism and literary studies, their writings reconstruct the ways the female subject has been framed through psychoanalytic and poststructuralist models. I will argue that their writings give critical consideration to women's ways of knowing and ways of being in the world that have otherwise been silenced. They create female identities that are not "in relation to" or "in opposition to" patriarchal culture, but in and for ourselves.

Canadian women artists have, historically and today, been under-represented in exhibitions, both at privately-run and publicly-funded venues,⁶ as well as in historical and archival documentation. Besides helping to fill a void in Canadian art scholarship,⁷ Borsa and Baert contribute to the scholarship in Canadian Studies by discussing the fragmented cultural narratives and social landscape of Canadian discourse. In her article "Towards a Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality," (1990) Borsa states that

⁶Two articles that address the status of Canadian women in the arts are: Penelope Stewart's "Who Counts and Who's Counting?" and Judith Baldwin's "Gender Representation in Canadian Commercial Galleries." Both of these articles are published in Matriart: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, (1993), p. 12-19.

⁷Monika Gagnon, in her article "Work in Progress: Canadian Women in the Visual Arts, 1975-1987," comments on the lack of scholarship on Canadian women artists. The article is published in Rhea Tregebov, (ed.), Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture, (Toronto: The Women's Press), 1987, p. 101-128.

reconciling the importance of discourses and concerns that are localized and specific to Canadian communities of cultural producers is vital. Borsa states that in Canada, a politics of location will provide:

...a critical positioning which provides a sense of place, a context from which to develop our insights, ideas and responses, a strategic site that allows sufficient grounding for specific forms of thought, speech and representation to emerge and gain meaning.⁸

The concept of location for Borsa and Baert is not just a geographic notion, but a psychological one as well. By recognizing that place, position and identity are concepts that are created and produced, they articulate place and identity differently from colonial articulations that express space in totalizing notions based on universal assumptions and on the disregard of contextual conditions. By using alternative spatial metaphors, I will argue that Borsa's and Baert's strategies move beyond colonial theories of space to postcolonial articulations.⁹ As a result, their strategies address aspects of history and difference evident in Canadian society and the heterogeneity reflected in the feminist community.

The creation of a new, psychological space or position is also relevant to feminist cultural politics. In their attempt to recognize struggle and female agency, Borsa and Baert position feminist struggles in spaces that are critically positioned. This process, transforming sites of resistance to sites of liberation,

⁸Joan Borsa, "Towards a Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 39.

⁹I will be using a similar postcolonial theoretical framework that has been recently proposed by Richard Cavell in his essay "Theorizing Canadian Space: Postcolonial Articulations," in Terry Goldie et. al. (eds.), Canada: Theoretical Discourse, (Montreal: Association of Canadian Studies), 1994, p. 75-104.

defines feminist identity and concepts of place as creatively and imaginatively produced -- where a process of identification, articulation and representation can occur.

In my opinion, any feminist interpretive framework must be grounded in an interdisciplinary methodology. I will argue that Borsa and Baert, in their attempts to understand the inner workings of artistic innovation, employ an interdisciplinary methodology. I believe that interdisciplinarity allows them to concentrate on generative processes rather than discourses on art and epistemology that are more concerned with finished products and formal tendencies. By asking crucial questions about and searching for links within paradigms in other fields, disciplines and knowledge systems, their strategies cross over many disciplinary centres. Interdisciplinary practice allows them not only to confront the systems of power and domination within the discipline of art history, but also to challenge assumptions that inform Western ideas, concepts and narratives.

Interdisciplinary critiques and investigations are also extremely appropriate to the study of contemporary art, since many of the art practices discussed in this thesis, installation, performance art and video art for example, can not be considered as belonging to a definite discipline. According to Danielle Boutet, "[i]nterdisciplinarity can effectively be understood as the proto-language of art, the language from which all others originate and to which they return to evolve."¹⁰ By exploring the new elements in contemporary women's art practices, Borsa and Baert discuss the

¹⁰Danielle Boutet, "Interdisciplinary Practice: A Challenge to Art Discourse," *Parallélogramme*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (1995), p. 42.

relevance of new innovations in contemporary Canadian art. Their work establishes the necessary inter-related links that position art, feminism and culture as practices and processes that over time, evolve and transform.

In Chapter one, I will discuss Borsa's and Baert's critical approaches towards epistemology and knowledge structures. The chapter is framed around their critique of a Western heritage of knowledge, how and why feminist artists reference epistemological narratives, and what alternative "ways of knowing" exist that have not been legitimated. My analysis begins with the article "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," written by Baert for the journal Canadian Woman Studies.¹¹ Combined with an interview that I conducted,¹² this article helped me to define Baert's interpretive framework, and to assess the relevance of feminism on her critical practice.

Stating that epistemology is a process that, for her, has been reshaped by feminism, Baert often questions the assumptions of knowledge claims evident within any of her curatorial projects. She states that questioning *who* is seen as "knowing," from feminist perspectives, has allowed her to uncover the politics of "what it even means *to* reason or know."¹³ Rendering problematic and provisional many assumptions concerning gendered subjectivity and cultural centrality, Baert often extends her critique of

¹¹Renee Baert, "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 9.

¹²Unpublished interview with Renee Baert for this thesis, Montreal, October 26, 1994.

¹³Renee Baert, "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," p. 9.

epistemology to an arena that leads her to question fields of representational relations. Placing her personal experiences alongside the contingencies of knowledge, Baert describes her curatorial practice as a political practice which operates as an alternative to dominant structures of knowledge.

In one of her curatorial projects, Legitimation,¹⁴ Baert examines the work of three installation artists who are questioning the 'social text' of three conservative academic disciplines. Her critique not only questions and contextualizes the epistemological assumptions that the artist's are examining, but Baert also builds on the concept of women's *self-knowledge*. She bases her strategy on the belief that new forms of consciousness about women as producers are needed. Insisting on the possibilities of a woman-identified definition of the subject/artist, her framework involves reinventing the world of knowledge from the position of woman as subject.

Like Baert, Borsa participates in creating frameworks that identify women's participation in creating knowledge and producing new forms of knowledge through the alternative ways of being and ways of knowing that women bring to their art practices. The two artists Borsa writes about, in relation to how women actively negotiate a better future, are Irene Xanthos¹⁵ and Eleanor Bond.¹⁶ Both of these women propose new relationships with

¹⁴Renee Baert, Legitimation, (Montreal: Powerhouse Gallery), Nov. 4 - 26, 1989.

¹⁵Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots," in Irene Xanthos: Cicada Talk, (Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge), Sept. 10 - Oct. 16, 1988.

¹⁶Joan Borsa, "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights," in Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 33-40.

the environment through work which questions our present post-industrial condition. Their work reflects on past events, the loss of human agency, and trust within community. Borsa's examination of these two artists, allows her to build a concept of feminist self-knowledge which asserts a relationship between knowing and being that is an alternative to the patriarchal heritage of knowledge.

In chapter two, I examine how Borsa and Baert are framing the concept of identity and the female subject/artist. In Baert's article "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns,"¹⁷ Baert tracks moments within the women's movement that relate to specific Canadian feminist videos. By drawing attention to the relationship between feminist theory and video practices, Baert illustrates how feminist art practices "...have helped feminism to constitute a new social being: women as subjects rather than objects, speakers rather than spoken."¹⁸ Baert tracks how the problems with the pronouns that exist in feminist theory (using the pronouns "I," "we," or "she"), have influenced feminist video art, and in turn, have created self-affirming visual strategies.

Feminist critiques of authorship have resulted in the examination of how women are implicated within, or subjected to, the production and

¹⁷Renee Baert, "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," *Parachute*, No. 69, (Spring 1994), p. 14-21.

¹⁸*Ibid*, p. 15.

consumption of master "texts."¹⁹ Joan Borsa's work on Mexican artist Frida Kahlo²⁰ does not center on Kahlo's work, but rather on how Kahlo constructed her own history -- how she resisted the spaces designated female and artist as laid out by patriarchal and hegemonic systems. Borsa builds a conceptual framework that emphasizes the notion of structural difference as it relates to women's relation to certain "texts," authorities, action and speech. Through her work on Frida Kahlo, Borsa rethinks how issues of marginality relate to feminist subjectivity and reworks canonized notions of centers and margins, inside and outside, male and female. Her strategy works toward creating an alternative study on authorial subject positioning that articulates a new social being -- woman as artist, author, subject and active agent.

The ways in which the artists in the exhibition Making Space²¹ represent their relationship to the social, the private and the political, allow Borsa to redefine the female subject/artist according to definitions that she believes women are creating. This exhibition examines the work of four Canadian photographers who challenge certain assumptions that structure women's "everyday experiences" -- motherhood, aging, women's unpaid

¹⁹See: Janine Marchessault, "Is the Dead Author a Woman? Some Thoughts on Feminist Authorship," Parallélogramme, Vol. 15, No. 4, (Spring 1990), p. 10-18.

²⁰Besides completing her graduate thesis on Frida Kahlo, Frida Kahlo. Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject, (Leeds: University of Leeds), 1989, Borsa has written a couple of articles on Frida Kahlo that I refer to. They are: "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," Third Text, No. 12, (Autumn 1990), p. 104-123 and "Towards A Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 36-39.

²¹Joan Borsa, Making Space, (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery), Nov. 15 - Dec. 10, 1988.

labour and economic relations simultaneously in the private and social spheres. Borsa believes that like Frida Kahlo, the photographers break down and cross over "... the boundaries that have overpowered and overshadowed the processes and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of seeing."²² Borsa believes that the 'new ways of seeing' presented in this exhibition must translate into new languages; into a new vocabulary that opens a space for transformations of consciousness.

The act of constructing and reconstructing identity operates in relation to the way women are suggesting the possibilities of new subjectivities. In her article on contemporary Canadian feminist videos, "Desiring Daughters,"²³ Baert refers to the active and willing female subject as a *desiring subject*. According to the artists' reworking of the mother-daughter relations, Baert articulates a feminist definition of the female subject/artist based on female desire. The videos, which attempt to reclaim and reinvestigate the maternal figure as object of desire and as desiring subject, allows Baert to introduce a new dialogue and enter into an otherwise silent territory -- theorizing a feminist relationship outside of the father/husband/patriarchal figure.

Chapter three explores how Borsa and Baert are articulating the relationship that exists between place, politics and identity. In this chapter, the discourse and concepts of Canada, like the concepts of identity described in chapter two, are viewed as "imagined," yet concrete in political terms. In

²²Ibid, p. 7.

²³Renee Baert, "Desiring Daughters," *Screen*, Vol. 34, No. 2, (Summer 1993), p. 109-123.

Margins of Memory,²⁴ Baert focuses on the relationship between the subjective (identity) and location (Canada) in the work of six installation artists. Articulating how dominant Canadian cultural narratives often silence or marginalize certain voices or experiences, Baert questions if Canadian identity can be thought of in different ways -- according to a politics grounded in affinities and coalition, rather than some pristine, coherent consciousness. It is through creating new ways in which to conceptualize space, both geographically and psychologically, that Baert addresses the concept of cultural memory and the aspects of history and difference within the artists' work.

On personal and theoretical levels, Borsa offers a regional perspective and critique of discourses that frame our Canadian cultural narratives. Her work on Prairie artists, which responds to the social and ideological disadvantages Prairie artists face, stems from her own personal history of being raised in Saskatchewan and having similar, personal engagements with the issues that Prairie art addresses. Borsa stated in our interview,²⁵ that being labeled as "marginal" -- according to where (and in certain ways how) she lived -- gave her the ability to assess how relational and multi-dimensional effects influence understandings of a cultural self on political and personal levels. Her work develops a framework to address a politics of location which examines various autobiographical elements of an artist's biography and

²⁴Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor), Nov. 20 - Jan. 9, 1994.

²⁵Unpublished interview with Joan Borsa in Saskatoon on Dec. 31, 1993, for this thesis.

work. For example, her essay on Ann Newdigate²⁶ positions the artist's work within the polarities of Newdigate's own geographical, artistic, familial, and cultural history. As a result, Borsa accounts for a 'new' psychological location or space which recognizes struggle as an active constitutive component in which feminist identities can be creatively positioned.

In focusing on the spaces where struggles over representation are taking place in feminist art practices and feminist art criticism, this thesis generates a new feminist framework. The critical strategies and interventions of Borsa and Baert provide empowering concepts from which to define and discuss the female subject/artist/writer. Through this examination of their writings, a significantly rich form in which to consider the new languages that are unfolding in feminist art practices and the currents in feminist theory can be explored.

²⁶Joan Borsa, "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work," in Elizabeth Kidd and Kitty Scott, (eds.), Notions of Home, (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery), Oct. 10 - Dec. 11, 1992, p. 8-13.

Chapter One:

Women's Knowledge and Women's Art

Introduction:

Canadian feminists have critically examined the concepts, methodologies and interpretive frameworks within a variety of academic disciplines. By questioning the biases and assumptions underlying these disciplines, feminists have exposed certain ways of knowing and ideologies as being androcentric and as excluding the voices of women.¹ In such feminist criticism, "knowledge" -- as it is understood in a patriarchal society -- becomes a site of struggle.

This chapter will examine how Joan Borsa and Renee Baert challenge and critique our Western heritage of knowledge. Borsa and Baert insist that changes to the definitions, methodologies and understandings of epistemology are needed. Interventions by contemporary women artists are interrogating the patriarchal underpinnings of our heritage of knowledge and are engaging in a radical reconstitution of our modes of thinking and knowing through visual practices. These artists' strategies have prompted Borsa and Baert to question which individual experiences should be the basis of the beliefs we honour as knowledge. What are the discursive processes

¹Examples would include: A. Miles and G. Finn (eds.), Feminism: From Pressure to Politics, (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 1989 and Dorothy E. Smith, "Ideological Structure and How Women Are Excluded," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1975, p. 367-391.

through which knowledge is legitimated? And which alternative "ways of knowing" have not been articulated or legitimized?

Feminist inquiry in the visual arts gives a voice to some of the struggles of Canadian women to position themselves as women, as feminists and as cultural producers. Borsa and Baert attempt to identify the relations of power that both silence women's representation in the arts and deny the validity of women's work, experiences and knowledge. Responding to what has been termed by Sandra Harding as the "social practice of knowledge,"² Borsa and Baert describe epistemology as political and, hence, as ideologically *constructed*. In their criticism they generate a more desirable structure, one which involves new sets of critical terms for the writing and production of new narratives about artistic expression and women's experiences. This project, combining feminist artistic production and feminist criticism, contributes to a comprehensive understanding of feminist activism that exists "inside the aesthetic."³ Linda Abrahams, editor of MATRIART: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, notes the importance of this form of criticism in art discourse.

There is power and possibility to be seen in the personal, public and political discourse(s) of art and feminism(s). By confronting systemic oppression and exposing the pressures and relations of power, women enable themselves to inform and empower the conditions of artmaking.⁴

²Sandra, Harding, "Who Knows? Identities and Feminist Epistemology," in Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow (eds.), (En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists In Academe, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 1993, p. 100-115.

³I am using this term to describe feminist activism that is positioned within an artistic practice.

⁴Linda Abrahams, "Foreword: Feminism Facing Systemic Oppression," MATRIART: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1992, p. 3.

Borsa and Baert reflect the concerns central to feminist psychoanalytical scholarship during the 1980s⁵ which established that the organization of knowledge has historically been political and gendered. Feminist art practices were strongly influenced by psychoanalytical work produced during this time.⁶ Theorists, critics and artists examined the ways the category "woman" has been constructed and represented, the sexual investment in the "gaze" (the study of voyeurism which positions woman as an object to the male viewer/possessor)⁷ and the discourses surrounding the use of the female body in the visual arts.⁸

Psychoanalytical discourse has been used extensively to analyze the role of representations, language (structural linguistics) and sexual identity in art criticism. This body of literature examines the semiotics of gender stratification -- how categories of gender are constructed and gender differences become instituted. It has exposed the multitude of inadequate labels for women, and deconstructed an androcentric "logic of identity" that

⁵Psychoanalytic examples include; Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," in Linda Nicholson, (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge), 1990, p. 324-340, and Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," Feminist Issues, Vol. 5, No. 2, (Fall 1985), p. 1- 28.

⁶For further information see: Monika Gagnon, "Work in Progress: Canadian Women in the Visual Arts, 1975 - 1987," in Rhea Tregebov, (ed.), Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture, (Toronto: The Women's Press), 1987, p. 101-128.

⁷Theorizing about "the gaze" from a feminist perspective was first published in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1975.

⁸For a study on feminist art practices that reference the body, see: Jane McGregor, New Metaphors for the Body as Self in the Art of Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak, unpublished M.A. thesis, Canadian Studies, (Ottawa: Carleton University), Dec. 1990.

operates as a mechanism of social control over women. The objectives of and analysis from this discourse has provided a theoretical ground on which Baert, in particular, bases much of her scholarship. The importance of feminist interventions informed by psychoanalytical perspectives in art and art criticism in Canada, has been summarized by Nell Tenhaaf in her article, "A History or Way of Knowing." Tenhaaf states:

In the 1980's, feminist artists ...virtually dominated a field of contemporary art practice which emphasizes knowledge and theory and how they operate, breaking open representational codes and exposing the shell games of androcentric discourses.⁹

The feminist project in the field of knowledge involves numerous strategies in addition to psychoanalysis.^{10, 11} The strategies of negotiation and agency are most relevant to this thesis, as they address how feminists can consciously represent the female subject, the subject of feminism and begin to tell our own experiences from empowered positions.¹² Emphasizing the

⁹Nell Tenhaaf, "A History or a Way of Knowing," MATRIART: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1993, p. 9.

¹⁰See Harding, Sandra. "Overview: Toward a Philosophy of Perspectives: Who Knows? Identities and Feminist Epistemology," in Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, (eds.), (En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists In Academe, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), p. 100-115, and Mary Hawkesworth's "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1989, p. 533-557.

¹¹Feminist articles generated against the conceptual limits of psychoanalysis are numerous. An excellent example is Caterina Pizanias, "Feminist Art: Issues & Agendas," Artichoke: Writings about the Visual Arts, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Spring 1994), p. 40-43.

¹²A couple of examples include: Joan Hartman, "Telling Stories: The Construction of Women's Agency," in Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, (eds.), (En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists In Academe, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 1991, p. 11-34, and Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis, (eds.), Negotiating At The Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistances, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press), 1993.

active role of women in the making and remaking of knowledge, these strategies reposition women's "ways of knowing." The writings of Joan Borsa reflect these strategies.

Legitimation and Feminist "Ways of Knowing":

Feminism, as an intellectual, social, artistic and activist-based inquiry, offers a critique of knowledge. Classic texts handed down through Western philosophy, literature, anthropology and science are riddled with phallogentric assumptions and, yet, continue to be considered "sacred truths." Feminist critics have challenged the adequacy of such texts and the "objective male reasoning" that informs the traditions and the lineage of Western epistemology.¹³ Recognition that cultural discourses have marginalized women's experiences and defined women only in terms of their absence(s), has resulted in feminists' focus on the sources of knowledge -- its production and dissemination.

To begin my examination of how and where Borsa and Baert deconstruct and reconstruct claims of knowledge, I want to refer to an article by Baert for the journal Canadian Woman Studies.¹⁴ The article, "Feminism

¹³Many accounts from a multitude of disciplines and generations of feminist work can serve as examples here, including: Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, (trans. and ed.), H.M. Parshley (New York: Bantam), 1960, and, Sandra Harding's The Science Question in Feminism, (London: Cornell University Press), 1986, and Susan Bordo's article "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Skepticism," in Linda Nicholson, (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge), 1990, p. 133-156.

¹⁴Renee Baert, "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 9.

and Art Curatorial Practice," combined with the interview I conducted,¹⁵ gave me insights into the processes and politics of Baert's critiques and strategies. These sources provide an interpretive framework that contextualizes the relevance of feminist theory to her work.

In the article and interview, Baert states that she chooses her pattern of researching according to feminist principles. She feels that epistemology is a process that, for her, has been reshaped by feminism. Her alliance with feminism has prompted her to question the very assumptions of knowledge. Questioning *who* is seen as "knowing," has also uncovered another inquiry for her -- the politics of "what it even means *to* reason or know." In "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice" she expresses this inquiry:

To grow up female in a patriarchal society is to be encouraged to perceive oneself as one who never "knows", since one's knowledge, experience and insight are not socially valorized. God is male, the Father is the Law, and knowledge is ever someplace else. ...In such a social structure, to be "the one who does not know" becomes a virtual ontological condition of femaleness.¹⁶

Baert's critical practice rests on establishing what she terms "a framework of meaning" for interpreting a particular artist's work. She believes this framework is a two-pronged project. The first is to render problematic and provisional many assumptions contained in gendered subjectivity and cultural centrality based on patriarchal narratives. The second part of the feminist project is the process of constructing a practice that honours 'woman' as a subject. Baert believes that considering the possibilities

¹⁵Unpublished interview with Renee Baert for this thesis, Montreal, October 26, 1994.

¹⁶Renee Baert, "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," p. 9.

of a woman-identified definition of the artist, is the more radical part of the feminist project. By being informed and influenced by the currents of feminist theory and feminist practice, she states that feminist discourse informs and influences her writing because:

...(i)t has provided a social ground from which to develop a positive concept of female 'difference.' And it has provided a space in which to invent and enact symbolic, theoretical and material practices that are alternatives to the dominant codes.¹⁷

Baert states that her insights about an artist's work lie not in a space that "contains the work" but rather extends to an arena which leads her to question fields of representational relations. By moving back and forth between the dominant representations of gender and what these representations leave out or make unrepresentable, Baert constructs an effective politics upon which to base her curatorial practice. She realizes that the interpretive framework that she maps out for an artists' work is not the only framework in which a work of art can be located, just as her curatorial practice is not the only curatorial approach. Her belief is that we live in a society where alternatives must be produced, alternatives that treat women as subjects rather than objects.¹⁸

In "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," Baert describes her critical practice as a practice in process.

Prior to the emergence of a feminist discourse, I was a person who did not "know." With feminism, I am still a person who does not "know." But there is a world of difference between the experiences. In the

¹⁷Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁸Renee Baert's comment from our interview.

former, it was ever that the centre of knowledge lay, by definition, elsewhere. Through feminism, I am critically aware of the contingencies of knowledge, and of the necessity of interrogating, as women, what we are led to "know," and of actively engaging in producing other forms of knowledge.¹⁹

Baert's methodology is part of an evolving feminist framework that has been voiced by a number of feminist cultural critics. Griselda Pollock, for example, has stated similar sentiments. Pollock has stated that feminists must become:

... aware of the depths and complexities of the structures that we are struggling to comprehend -- and by comprehending [them], devise some means of displacing and overthrowing.²⁰

Both women have obviously recognized that new forms of consciousness about women as producers in curatorial projects are needed to counter patriarchy. They believe that new forms of curatorial practices question how claims of knowledge actually reflect complex and competing political agendas -- agendas that are exclusionary towards women. As feminist cultural critics, their project brings awareness to the levels of investment in these political agendas and attempts to reinvent the world of knowledge from the position of woman as subject.

In the exhibition entitled Legitimation (1989),²¹ Baert focused on the work of feminist artists who are proposing alternative readings of traditional

¹⁹Renee Baert, "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice," p. 9.

²⁰Griselda Pollock quoted in: "Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock in Conversation," Judith Mastai, (ed.), Parachute, No. 62, (Spring 1991), p. 27.

²¹Renee Baert, Legitimation, (Montreal: Powerhouse Gallery), Nov. 4 - 26, 1989.

claims to knowledge. Baert curated this exhibition and wrote the essay for the catalogue. Legitimation was an exhibition of three installations that examined the disciplines of anthropology, museology and science. The exhibition included the work of three Canadian artists: Jamelie Hassan, Anne Ramsden and Nell Tenhaaf. The format of the installations was mixed media, of which most were computer images, bookworks, photographs and reproduced images from popular culture. All of the images or texts in the installations were deeply political, in content and usage. The references in the images or texts question how claims to knowledge are constructed and the patriarchal assumptions underlying these claims.

Baert's essay in the catalogue questions the politics of "legitimation" -- what we are led to believe is "knowledge." Her strategy not only questions 'knowledge' but also asserts the concept of women's self-knowledge. More specifically, she states that there are alternative ways of knowing. Her investigation focuses on what or whose experience is privileged and is considered "knowledge." She therefore critiques the disciplines investigated in the exhibition and examines the effect of this inquiry on understanding institutionalized modes of thinking and knowing.

Baert addresses the disciplines of natural science, anthropology and museology, and their politics of legitimation and epistemology. The framework that Baert generates not only critiques patriarchal discourse but also develops alternative interpretive frameworks. These frameworks, she believes, can better describe women's experiences. The premise that she proceeds from, is the fact that women have been "excluded from, erased from

and marginalized within the production of culture and knowledge."²² This leads to her analysis of the political agendas instrumental to constructing discourse.

Her essay sets out to expose the gendered sub-text of knowledge and explore what alternative 'ways of knowing' could be possible. In this context, it is useful to examine Baert's approach to one of the installations in the exhibition. Nell Tenhaaf's work, entitled *Species Life* (1989, Figs. 1-3), questions the claims to knowledge in science and technology. The installation consists of two rows of light boxes that contain illuminated, computer-fabricated models of DNA strands and cell division. Strands of the DNA loops are also reproduced and presented in a second line of light boxes. On an adjacent wall, a third row contains a repeated silhouette image of a couple standing on a hill, holding hands, surrounded by a romantic setting. The base of the hill contains the image of the DNA loops and cells. Superimposed on one row of boxed images of DNA are quotations from French feminist psychoanalyst Lucé Irigaray and 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Both of these quotations question the philosophical basis of human existence; however, they are fundamentally incompatible in their ethical approach.²³

²²Ibid, p. 5.

²³The complete quote used in the installation by Friedrich Nietzsche states: "It is even less a question of a 'will to live'; for life is merely a special case of the will to power: ... it is quite arbitrary to assert that everything strives to enter into this form of the will to power." The quote by Lucé Irigaray states: "And the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground ... When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you Mother, was this: That in giving me life, you still remain alive."

The excerpted quotations are crucial to the formation of what Baert terms a 'feminist narrativity' -- a narrative that presents a dialogue from a gender perspective, questions methodology and presents an alternative expression. The dialogue Tenhaaf creates by purposely contrasting Nietzsche's philosophy to Irigaray's is an example of what Baert considers to be a feminist narrativity. This dimension of Tenhaaf's work brings into question the ethical approach of scientific inquiry. In this way, Baert believes Tenhaaf disrupts the credibility of claims for scientific rationalism. Nietzsche's quotation, "... life is merely a special case of the will to power...", presents an ideology that Baert sees as being "uncontaminated by conscience and rationality," privileging "strength of will" and embodying "Nietzsche's idealized image of masculinity."²⁴ Baert adds that there is no place in his philosophy for "...weakness: pity, remorse, failure, or such social movements as democracy, socialism, or feminism."

Conversely, Irigaray's writings produce a new form of discourse by transforming *female desire* into language. Baert believes that Irigaray's writings and Tenhaaf's feminist intervention not only make "...a claim for a female imaginary [sic] and consciousness" but also produce "...a figure of multiple subjectivities and of complex inter-relations with a cultural surround."²⁵

Tenhaaf's narrative fosters the notion that science must be read as a 'social' text. Baert's analysis focuses on the objectives and supposed neutrality of science by discussing the influences of social values on: what is studied,

²⁴Ibid, p. 25.

²⁵Ibid, p. 25.

how methodologies are framed, and what effects these methodologies and ideologies exert on the study of genetic engineering. By probing the epistemological underpinnings of scientific 'models' -- the framing devices of scientific research -- Baert uses Tenhaaf's work to question the claims of scientific reasoning.

The feminist framework concerning scientific rationalism developed by Sandra Harding is relevant to Baert's analysis. Baert quotes Harding to support her challenge to the notions of 'neutral' and 'value-free' methods in the application of the natural sciences. Harding states:

The concern to define and maintain a series of rigid dichotomies in science and epistemology no longer appears to be a reflection of the progressive character of scientific inquiry; rather, it is inextricably connected with specifically masculine -- and perhaps uniquely Western and bourgeois -- needs and desires.²⁶

By insisting on an inextricable link between scientific inquiry and social values, Baert considers the concept of 'objectivity' to actually be a subtle form of subjectivity. Tenhaaf's questioning of scientific 'objectivity' therefore, runs parallel with Baert's questioning of the process of legitimation.

Tenhaaf's use of the computer-manipulated DNA loops brings into question what Baert terms the 'imperatives' of science and technology. Tenhaaf's layering of text (quotations by Irigaray and Nietzsche) onto the DNA models, shows how the personal is directly connected to the political and hence the social. Baert believes this intervention acts as a form of 're-inscribing' the biological gene loop with a social "text." That is, the artwork is

²⁶Sandra Harding, The Science Question in Feminism, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 1986, p. 23.

expressing the idea that biological aspects become infused with social ideology and that all science is affected by perceptions and culture. Baert draws a parallel between this form of critique with questions concerning current genetic engineering practices and reproductive technologies from feminist perspectives.²⁷

Another installation in Legitimation, Anne Ramsden's *Scent* (1989, Fig. 4-7), is once again endowed with strong political references and metaphors. Images taken from popular sources in this work include a line engraving depicting a view of the Cesnola galleries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a photographic image of Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten entitled *Fragment of a Royal Head*, and a photograph of the Temple of Dendur, which was a gift of the Government of Egypt to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian Temple Hall.²⁸ Between the walls where the photographs and engravings hang are thin mirror strips cut to human size. The mirrors serve the purpose of reflecting human presence and motion when visitors enter the installation. Three bottles of expensive "Eternity" perfume are placed along a glass shelf on the gallery wall. White cards, also mounted on the wall, carry evocative words, such as "fascination,"

²⁷Baert references the article by Renata Duelli Klein, "What's 'new' about the 'new' reproductive technologies," *Man-Made Women*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 67. This particular article states very direct questions society should be asking about technological practices and the female body.

²⁸All of the reproductions are from the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This particular museum has one of the most influential collections, in terms of economic and colonial power. Renee Baert notes that the Temple of Dendur can be rented, possessed for private parties to the sufficiently wealthy -- resulting in what she terms as the "temporary ownership of the Temple of Dendur."

"seduction," "enchantment," "spectacle," and "desire," that allude to the trends in contemporary museum display.

The elements of Ramsden's installation are obviously rooted in the political, and they refer to the 'imaginary' nature of images, icons and knowledge itself. Baert's essay on *Scent* questions how spectatorship and representation are organized and constructed in the public presentation of art and artifacts in museums. Baert contends that Ramsden emphasizes the politics inherent in museology by capturing fragments of 'evidence' (i.e., artifacts). These artifacts, and Ramsden's use of them, reflect complex and often competing social, political and imperialist fields. Ramsden and Baert investigate what these processes tell us about spectatorship and museum display.

Keeping in mind her curatorial objective in Legitimation -- to dislodge the familiar and privileged codes by which knowledge and rationality are represented -- Baert uses Ramsden's work to develop her ideas on cultural understanding within museum display. Baert sees commodities (i.e., the perfume bottles of "Eternity") as playing the role of icons in our society. These icons, she reminds us, are socially created rather than representing individual or viewers' desires. Baert comments that they serve as "... prizes of knowledge, [that] seduce desire but can never fully or finally satisfy it."²⁹

Baert not only comments that Ramsden's installation contains icons which wield profound political influence, but that these icons represent ideologies considered normative and, in fact, the only ones available. For example, Ramsden's references to artifacts and posters from the Metropolitan

²⁹Ibid, p. 17.

Museum of Art bring into question the ways institutions foster social agendas. Baert interrogates the legitimacy of these imperialistic and capitalistic agendas. She examines how art and artifacts are popularized, for example in posters, or not popularized by institutions and museums.

Concerning the Metropolitan Museum of Art print which depicts the inside of the Cesnola galleries, Baert comments on how the images represent: "...the spirit of the 19th-century bourgeois ideal of self-knowledge and self-education." All of Baert's comments in fact, refer to the Museum's mandate to "produce totalizing [sic] claims of knowing." The Metropolitan Museum:

... speaks to a modern mode of colonial power, one of economic, rather than military might: the power of the institution to own the monuments of another culture, to capture an ancient culture in one's own, to possess it.³⁰

Baert refers these imperialist and patriarchal critiques back to the individual. She believes that one's individual consciousness or reasoning about desire can be understood in a way other than that dictated by the common culture. Baert believes that Ramsden emphasizes this idea by constructing the wall of mirror strips. Bringing Lacanian philosophy into her analysis, Baert discusses Jacques Lacan's concept of "the mirror stage."³¹ She explains that, according to Lacan, during the mirror stage of psychic development, an infant begins to form identity through an imaginary relationship to images. This imaginary processing produces not truth, but 'truth-effects.' Babies 'mis-recognize' their own identity in images; similarly,

³⁰Renee Baert, Legitimation, p. 15.

³¹Baert does go into detail about Lacan's focus upon the Ideal-I, the imaginary register of Oedipal and pre-verbal, and the ego in her essay.

Baert contends, viewers mis-recognize their identities in the presentation of museum artifacts. She states that *Scent's* representations also lead to "an act of recognition and mis-recognition"³² on the part of the viewer. The mirrors in *Scent* reverse this process of mis-recognition and " ...act to disrupt imaginary processes and insist upon a consciousness of place, movement, presence and history."³³

In her catalogue essay, Baert uses Ramsden's display of objects as a basis for new interpretations of how knowledge claims operate. She integrates her hypothesis about the historical and provisional nature of museological knowledge with a critique of cultural icons and institutional referents. Baert not only exposes the ideological subtext of museological representations, but also situates Ramsden's work in an interpretive framework that questions the modes of representation and spectatorship.

Ethnographic study and museum discourse is also scrutinized by the third artist in *Legitimation*, Jamelie Hassan. In *Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Levi-Strauss* visual images once again serve as politicized representations (1988, Figs. 8-12). They include a poster from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris displaying a pregnant and nude female torso and a photograph of a display case containing Brazilian objects collected by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Hassan has either enlarged or manipulated some of the photographs and card files of Lévi-Strauss. The enlarged photographs are positioned between four Victorian architectural fragments. Card files with photographs from Lévi-Strauss' files form a bookwork that rests on a reading table, with a

³²Renee Baert, *Legitimation*, p. 17.

³³*Ibid*, p. 17.

chair placed next to it. Gold lettering on the wall quotes directly from text belonging to the frontispiece at the Musée de l'Homme. It reads: "Choses rares ou choses belles ici savamment assemblées instruisent l'oeil à regarder comme jamais encore vues toutes choses qui sont au monde."³⁴

This installation contains many signs and metaphors that Baert references as imperialistic tendencies. Her essay cross-examines intellectual and social approaches to ethnography, structural linguistics and anthropology. She traces political partialities of various nations' traditions and agendas in the discipline of anthropology, from the historical period of European Enlightenment, to Eurocentric structures and discourses such as colonialism and Orientalism.³⁵ She tracks these movements in order to study the ideological assumptions evident in scientific and museological study. Baert views Hassan's interventions, as those of a woman of colour, posing questions that challenge imperialistic discourse.

There are three moments in time that overlap in Hassan's work. The founding moment is the construction of the Musée de l'Homme in 1938 (The Musée de l'Homme was built on the razed site of the earlier, Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro). This moment signified a shift in approach in ethnographic study from the collection of colonial booty to a more culturally

³⁴"Rare and beautiful things wisely collected herein instruct the eye to see as never before seen all the things that are in the world." (My translation)

³⁵Orientalism relates to a body of theory and practices that defined the Islamic Orient from Western perspectives. It was a theory that presumed the Orient to be culturally inferior, and because it was designed to justify and perpetuate European dominance, was used as a controlling mechanism of colonial rule. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1978.

relativistic approach that characterizes modernity.³⁶ The second moment that Hassan cites as significant was the placement of Lévi-Strauss' *Vitrine 448* in an alcove of the museum. This moment represented a shift to a structural approach to anthropology and human behavior -- one predicated on binary models and hierarchies. The third moment is when Hassan stood before 'Vitrine 448' in the Musée de l'Homme and, in a forbidden act, photographed her own image, reflected in the display case of artifacts.

The work and times of Lévi-Strauss are of particular significance in Baert's essay. She chooses to question his principles of classification, coding and interpretation. Lévi-Strauss concentrated on structural linguistics in the field of anthropology. As a cultural relativist, he applied the principles of linguistic theory to cultural behavior. Baert discusses his distinctive system of categorizing and referencing, especially in regard to what he believed the role of women should be:

In Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the structure of kinship systems, man is the fixed term, and woman is the object of exchange between men, the mobile term through which kinship systems are structured. Though a subject, by virtue of her participation within culture, her role is that of object and sign.³⁷

Baert believes Hassan set up a narrative that presented an ironic parallel to Lévi-Strauss' distinctive system of information-gathering. By superimposing photographs of her family, friends and community onto Lévi-Strauss' documents, Hassan parodies his methodology. Baert believes that

³⁶Refer to James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press), 1988.

³⁷Ibid, p. 7.

Hassan "...bring[s] into presence the repressed registers of Western discourse" by taking her position of "difference" and turning it into a position of self-representation. When Hassan places herself in this position, Baert states:

The "I" of Hassan is that of the female subject, object of exchange among men, the "I" of the non-Western subject, object of study by Western science, the "I" who, so long looked at and spoken for, looks back at the looker and mimes his speech.³⁸

Hassan's strategy of usurping the privileged position of Lévi-Strauss, making his study "the object of her scrutinizing gaze," is of particular interest to Baert. Representing what Baert considers "...a 'return of the repressed' within Lévi-Strauss' orderly formation," the interventions of Hassan reject objectification and assert her own agency. Baert states that this intervention suggests that the "disempowered" are able to re-articulate the conditions of their existence. The act of exposing the "positioning of the anthropologist as an objective 'knower' of other cultures,"³⁹ not only deconstructs the practices of Lévi-Strauss, but also examines the effect of cultural traditions on identity.⁴⁰ Baert notes that Hassan:

... inscribes the presence of an Other onto the narratives of culture and history; it also points to a perception of culture as mobile rather than static, with processes of syncretism that counterpose Lévi-Strauss' narrative closure of a fatal lost innocence.⁴¹

³⁸Ibid, p. 7.

³⁹Renee Baert, Legitimation, p. 9.

⁴⁰As Christopher Dewdney states "... away from Canada [Jamelie Hassan] realized her own sense of cultural displacement, not quite Canadian, not quite Arabic, was in some way a natural state for most of the world's inhabitants." Quoted by Esther Lee Dietch in "The Art of Jamelie Hassan," MATRIART: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1994, p. 8.

⁴¹Renee Baert, Legitimation, p. 9.

Hassan's installation speaks to a cultural politics versed in history. Her practice, which interrogates power relations amongst nations, is strongly rooted in postcolonial practice and theory. Baert develops these ideas by consciously incorporating the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous contexts that Hassan -- as an artist, a woman, and a Canadian of Lebanese ancestry -- develops in her work and which derive from her traveling experiences.⁴² In a recent article, Hassan labels this position as the "inherently inhospitable nature of the State towards women."⁴³ Hassan states that this State-imposed positioning results in her never separating issues that relate to her gender from her ethnicity, as it is so central to the way that others have represented her.

In her catalogue essay, Baert's method is sensitive to the historical particularities of anthropology and ethnography. Her close attention to the habitual practices of colonial history allows her to examine the processes by which identity and "difference" are demarcated, territorialized and patrolled. In this way, she links the politics of feminism to a diverse range of women's experience and uncovers a broad range of social meanings attached to the study of gender.

Baert's critical essay and the installations included in Legitimation, insist on links between the subjective, the political and the cultural. The

⁴²As Esther Lee Deitch notes: "In her travels Hassan has always attempted to do more than locate her own cultural roots; her concerns have transcended national boundaries to embrace a solidarity with all victims of cultural colonialism and military oppression." From "The Art of Jamelie Hassan," MATRIART: A Canadian Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1994, p. 8.

⁴³Jamelie Hassan, "Women and the State," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 25.

feminist slogan "the personal is political" is pervasive in the exhibition. The work of all of the artists implies the political by making specific references to patriarchal narratives. In Tenhaaf's work, DNA loops and cell division inscribed with social commentary condemn the patriarchal narratives in science. In Ramsden's installation, references to the Museum of Modern Art and the "Eternity" perfume bottles critique the politics of museum display, and question the selection process whereby something or someone is made an object of study. Hassan questions the narratives of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, she believes, practised a form of anthropological study based upon colonial and patriarchal assumptions.

Baert's inquiry starts, as do these artists' critiques of patriarchal narratives, by examining our Western heritage of knowledge. But then she goes a step further, addressing many feminist issues by examining the discursive procedures through which knowledge gets legitimated *as* knowledge. In her essay, she exposes the gendered sub-text of knowledge and the power relations evident within discourse through her examination of concepts, such as reason, rationality and "truth." She questions claims of objectivity, as well as universal and "value-free" assumptions by exposing the political interests that hide behind ideas about order and knowledge. In this regard, her essay finds a productive and critical link to a diverse range of contemporary intellectual movements.

I believe Baert's methodology is not just multidisciplinary, but is interdisciplinary. In her examination of the methodologies within disciplines such as science, museology and anthropology, she rejects "totalizing" theories of knowledge and dualistic conceptual models. She insists that discussions

generated by disparate disciplines often reflect competing and contradictory claims of truth, knowledge and experience. Instead of separating disciplines into discrete areas of study, Baert's objective is to reconnect disciplinary scholarship in such a way as to reveal new areas of investigation and knowledge. In her conclusion for Legitimation, Baert notes the relevance of her and the artists' methodology in the exhibition:

It is work which proposes a closer consideration of the profound relationships between art, science, politics and culture. [They] suggest the possibility of ways of knowing that would reconnect physical and mental life, that would identify a social text within science, that would recognize the reason of emotion and that would evacuate the barren borderlands of Otherness.⁴⁴

Interdisciplinarity is an approach that Baert herself does not name, but I feel it is relevant to her framework and analysis of contemporary feminist art discourse. It is precisely because concepts and working methods of feminist art are grounded in the social and the cultural, that Baert's interdisciplinary approach is especially meaningful for positive exchanges across disciplines and for the study of feminist work.⁴⁵ I believe that Baert's proposition to reconnect the relationships between art, science, politics and culture suggests possibilities for new or different methodologies and new approaches to understanding knowledge.

Baert's preface to her essay in the catalogue Legitimation is framed by a quote from Dorothy Smith:

⁴⁴Renee Baert, Legitimation, p. 25.

⁴⁵For a further examination of interdisciplinarity as an approach in which to base art education and art criticism, see: Danielle Boutet, "Interdisciplinarity in the Arts," HARBOUR: Magazine of Art & Everyday Life, Vol. 2, No. 2, (Winter 1993), p. 66-72.

We are confronted with the problem of reinventing the world of knowledge, of thought, of symbols and images. Not of course by repudiating everything that has been done, but by subjecting it to exacting scrutiny and criticism from the position of women as subject ... or knower.⁴⁶

I believe that the artists in Legitimation demonstrate and respond to the need prefacing the catalogue for new terms and meanings to describe alternative ways of knowing. Their work attempts to shift the boundaries that limit women's access to the production of meanings (knowledge), according to multiple sites of resistance. These acts of resistance -- of subverting the structures in which traditional epistemology operates -- shows us alternative ways of knowing. It implies a relationship between knowing and being that is an alternative to traditional approaches, such as "knowledge-seeking", which have been developed to justify modes of thinking and knowing in disciplines such as science. This relationship, or way of knowing, I will refer to as self-knowledge.

Women's Agency: Self-Knowledge

Like Baert, Borsa often prefaces her catalogues and articles with quotes from feminist writers that encourage new forms of consciousness regarding new ways of knowing. In her catalogue Making Space,⁴⁷ Borsa begins her

⁴⁶The source is Dorothy E. Smith, "Ideological Structure and How Women Are Excluded," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1975), p. 36, and reproduced in Renee Baert, Legitimation, (Montreal: Powerhouse Gallery), 1989, p. 3.

⁴⁷The quote is taken from Carolyn Kay Steedam, Landscape For a Good Woman, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press), 1987, p. 6, and reproduced in Joan Borsa, Making Space, (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery), 1988, p. 5.

essay by asking; "How do we make space for stories and lives for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don't quite work?" Obviously, Borsa bases her question on recognizing that feminist narratives in contemporary women's art are resisting and breaking down traditional notions of masculine and feminine. The investigation that Borsa's work generates, produces new forms of knowledge through the ways of knowing that, she, and women artists bring to their practices.

The quotes Borsa and Baert reference, allude to the search by feminists for ways to transform modes of thinking and knowing. I believe the quotes that they choose to frame their essays, map the processes of Borsa and Baert -- examining the production of knowledge and exploring the concepts of female agency in contemporary artwork. Most importantly, these quotes cite the possibility for women to articulate new strategies that would allow women to claim the right to speak, and to represent and name the world according to how it looks and feels from our particular social and political locations as producers and conveyors of knowledge. I believe Borsa and Baert are generating new ways of identifying new languages that embrace women's participation in producing new knowledge. Their work, correlating with Dorothy Smith's sociological perspective on social knowledge, suggests that our thinking and behaviors become "...the properties of individuals and their personal and familial relationships"⁴⁸ rather than products of standardized representations and hierarchies.

⁴⁸Dorothy Smith, The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1987, p. 3.

Part of Borsa's and Baert's generation of a new feminist framework which invents new languages, is based on a belief in women's agency. Recent feminist theories of agency, oriented towards opening up discussion of women's knowledge, are based on a definition of agency that "refers to doing ...to the act and, moreover, to act otherwise, to intervene in the world, to have an effect."⁴⁹ Women who consciously choose to use a voice of resistance -- to push away oppressive boundaries by conscious decision -- redefine facts and theories. Borsa, for instance, has commented that feminist work which demonstrates signs of female agency is integral to the creation of alternative subject positions and alternative forms of knowing. She believes that agency reflects the ability to take on master texts without subscribing to their ideological agenda:

It is this constant search for ways to play with the relations of history, culture and power, to parody or deconstruct and reconstruct meaning in a way that speaks of structural difference that much feminist work seems to explore productively.⁵⁰

By working in the visual arts and in the field of knowledge, Borsa and Baert are revealing how concepts of female agency and self-knowledge reveal themselves inside of the aesthetic. I believe that they generate strategies which validate women's way of knowing by responding to women's needs/desires to act as subjects with history, knowledge, biography and

⁴⁹Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Introduction: A Position Statement," in their book (En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists In Academe, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 1991, p. 2.

⁵⁰Joan Borsa, "Towards A Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 39.

psychology.⁵¹ This strategy of generating new ways of speaking, writing and visualizing about concepts such as self-knowledge do not reflect but effect discourse. Borsa states that the potential of "choosing a site of radical openness"⁵² is a "process of becoming," which suggests:

The more difficult and confusing part of dealing with the suppressed is accepting the challenge of the search without a tangible map in mind; that is, moving into new territory but accepting the uncertainty of what one will discover.⁵³

In the catalogue Irene Xanthos: Cicada Talk (1988), Borsa's essay titled "Tying Knots"⁵⁴ emphasizes Irene Xanthos as a person who is in the process of uncovering and recovering a way of life, a way of knowing. Xanthos is reworking a relationship that she believes has been suppressed and has gone unrecognized. Her work consists of gnarled and weathered chestnut tree sections, adorned and bound with strips of recycled cloth. (1987-88, Figs. 13 and 14) Xanthos retrieves the North American chestnut tree sections from around her studio in the West Virginia woodlands. The specific history of the chestnut tree is a significant component of her work. North American chestnut trees started dying off in the early 1900s, and are now extinct.

⁵¹Joan Borsa has referred to a quote by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1951 in respect to feminist vision that I feel is relevant: "Until we can see what we are, we cannot take steps to become what we should be."

⁵²This phrase was termed by bell hooks in the article "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, (Toronto: Between the Lines), 1990, p. 145-154.

⁵³Joan Borsa, "Will Her Desires, Her Aesthetics Be Different From Ours," in The Creation of Desire: An Exhibition by Susan McEachern, (Halifax: Eye Level Gallery), 1992, p. 51.

⁵⁴Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots" in the solo exhibition Irene Xanthos: Cicada Talk, (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery), Sept. 10 - Oct. 16, 1988.

"Protruding above the ground like markers, the blackened remains now function as the only reminders of this once vigorous species."⁵⁵ Xanthos' method of recycling the chestnut fragments by draping and binding them with old bedsheets from the Salvation Army, signifies what Borsa terms "a ceremony of conservation." Borsa refers to the tree sections as "sacred-looking objects" which, when placed in a contemporary urban setting, "look like remnants from some ancient site."⁵⁶

Borsa focuses upon the importance of Xanthos' process of hunting for wooden pieces, her selection and cleansing of the wood, and the wrapping and knotting of cloth around the pieces. She refers to this process as similar to the act of physically and spiritually caring for another.

Clearly rituals of healing, they are also extremely playful and sensual in a way reminiscent of dressing dolls, bathing babies and caring for a loved one's (or one's own) body. The pleasure and eroticism within the physical activity of caring so intensely for another in this case cannot be reciprocated; but in the decision to actively engage, to authentically represent one's desire in the physical world, lies a great source of fulfillment and power.⁵⁷

Borsa tells of Xanthos' discovery process, of how her art-making occurs simultaneously in the abandoned cabin that she is restoring and in the garden that she is revitalizing. Drawing attention to Western culture's "severed" relationship with the natural environment, Borsa believes Xanthos' sculptures attempt to reorder the rigid boundaries that have separated culture

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁶Ibid, p. 2.

⁵⁷Ibid, p. 6.

from nature. She believes that the rituals that are enacted in the making of Xanthos' work are reflective of an individual's direct interaction with the natural environment and working in harmony with the cycles of the land. For Borsa this activity represents: "...the reclaiming and reordering of abandoned fragments, the preservation of something lost and the process of regeneration."⁵⁸

Borsa closely surveys the influences of the feminist research which examines the relationship between ecology and women. She not only attempts to disrupt the claims of male-biased society that "regard and treat women and nature in the same way,"⁵⁹ but also challenges eco-feminist claims that would view Xanthos as an essentialist.⁶⁰ Borsa moves away from the ways in which nature-versus-culture debates have been framed. Rather than considering Xanthos' work as extensions of femininity or "femaleness," she sees them as "rituals of healing."⁶¹

Borsa refers to other female artists who have enacted rituals of tying, wrapping and knotting in their work. She cites the performance work of Donna Henes to make a link between Xanthos' work and an historical tradition of women completing similar projects. For three weeks Donna Henes tied a total of 4,159 knots from old clothing on the wire fence of the

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 2.

⁵⁹For an introduction to this feminist critique see: Sherry Ortner, "If Female to Male as Nature is to Culture," in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, (eds.), Women, Culture, Society, (Stanford: University Press), 1974, p. 67-87.

⁶⁰The reference Joan Borsa uses in her essay is: Susan Griffin, "Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her," Chrysalis, No. 1, 1977, p. 51-57.

⁶¹Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots," p. 3.

Ward's Island Psychiatric Centre in New York for a performance piece titled *Dressing Our Wounds in Warm Clothes: Ward's Island Energy Trance Mission*.⁶² Borsa also notes similar rituals of wrapping and tying knots which appear in earlier generations of women artists such as Eva Hesse, Jackie Windsor and Irene Whittome.

By situating Xanthos' work alongside the work of an earlier generation of women artists who are committed to connecting their art with the physical environment, Borsa reveals the process of a woman's journey into the spirituality of nature; a journey into self-reliance. Her essay reveals a process which tells how women's living and learning can be told productively and harmoniously. Borsa states that Xanthos' exploration can be compared to being on "... some ancient pilgrimage ... determined to remove the masks and barriers that keep us severed from our truths."⁶³ Her essay generates a new dialogue to account for women's interaction with the land and with ritual, an interaction that generates new forms of consciousness and redefines and resymbolizes participation in ritual -- establishing a link between culture and history.

Xanthos' process of working *with* the land (instead of against or in opposition to the environment's natural harmonies) is something Borsa finds significant. She believes Xanthos' approach signals a willingness to explore the nurturing, living aspects of the land and acts as "a healer of the

⁶²Borsa notes in her essay that Xanthos gave her an article on Donna Henes which described in detail this particular performance. Borsa also states that Xanthos felt Henes' work has made an important impact on her artwork.

⁶³Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots," p. 7.

fragile state of our natural and living environment."⁶⁴ By asking new questions about the relationship between an artist and the landscape, Borsa challenges discourses which are grounded in patriarchal, capitalistic or fatalistic understandings.⁶⁵ She believes that Xanthos' approach to the natural environment is to not treat it as an object that must be tamed or controlled, but rather as a living organism that must be preserved and regenerated. Borsa's and Xanthos' conceptual and practical approach moves away from what is known about imperialistic relations with the land, and towards trying to understand what relationships with the land could be further developed and explored.

Borsa believes Xanthos is asking new questions and moving towards new levels of understanding about the relationship between life and death, between preservation and regeneration. Borsa remarks:

In her direct interaction with the natural environment ... there are tracks and traces of someone like a warrior looking for clues about contemporary life, art and culture.⁶⁶

By establishing a critique of the dichotomous relationship between the rigid boundaries that separate nature from culture, Xanthos and Borsa both challenge dichotomous propositions. They generate a way of knowing that

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 5.

⁶⁵ According to Johanne Sloane, traditional landscape artists, (the Group of Seven), can be perceived as reflecting a relationship that is based on a "heroic confrontation with nature." She believes this privileged relationship secures and reinforces certain canonized social and economic morphologies -- such as patriarchy and capitalism. For more information see: Johanne, Sloane, "Eleanor Bond's Social Centres: Natural Sights and Millenial Landscapes," in Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 41-45.

⁶⁶Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots," p. 8.

begins to build on what Borsa terms "the process of becoming" -- a process that I believe can be compared to a transformative state, one that reflects on past events and yet returns us to a desire for the future. Situating women as subjects and knowers, Borsa's critical framework serves to describe women's ability to produce self-generating and self-renewing positions.

Borsa adopts a similar narrative in her essay on Eleanor Bond's landscape and cityscape paintings.⁶⁷ Bond's images present dystopic images that evoke the ecological crisis and the capitalistic and technological nature of society. (1989-1991, Figs. 15-17). Bond's paintings in the exhibition Social Centres were large panoramas that were painted with vivid blues, luscious greens and brilliant reds. These large-scale works are unstretched canvases that hang flush against the wall and stretch from floor to ceiling. They depict fictional landscapes from a bird's eye view or titled perspective. This point of view, which is distorted and unbalanced, creates a dynamic that purposefully presents a feeling of instability to the viewer and that Borsa refers to as vertigo. As a result of Bond's use of fictitious and discomfoting elements, her work has been referred to as "current-day instances of ecological metamorphosis...,"⁶⁸ and " ...landscapes of modernity [that] are alternatively disneyfied, commodified, gentrified, and museumized."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Joan Borsa, "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights," in the solo exhibition Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 33-40.

⁶⁸Johanne Sloane, "Eleanor Bond's Social Centres: Natural Sights and Millenial Landscapes," in Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 44.

⁶⁹Anne Brydon, "Notes Towards Situating Social Centres," in Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 49.

Borsa's article for Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (1993), is titled "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights". She unravels, through descriptive accounts of environmental phenomena and social crisis,⁷⁰ the apocalyptic elements of Eleanor Bond's staged narratives. These narratives represent, in Borsa's words:

.. dislocated groups of people, fabricated communities, alienated relationships with our physical environment, projected survival strategies -- in short, visual scripts detailing colonized environments and disenfranchised subjects.⁷¹

Borsa's focus is to question the mechanisms of societal control and group conformity within Bond's landscapes. Imperialistic practices, patriarchy and capitalism are the values that she examines. She is interested in what makes Bond's landscapes feel as if they have no occupants. (Urban landmarks, such as architectural monuments and industrial sites, and cultural icons like wedding rings seem to be the only subject matter in view.) She questions where the indigenous culture and local communities have vanished to, and what their invisibility can tell us about the relevance of severing human agency. Borsa states:

What I respond to is the missing human text, the sets with no action, a sort of mummified state of archival perfection -- no one to interrupt the master plan or disrupt the system's flow.⁷²

⁷⁰The impact of industrialism, environmental crisis and homelessness in contemporary visual art, are concerns that Joan Borsa has addressed before in her article "Living the Impact: Squatters, Refugees and Nomads," in Industrial Impact: Various Points of View, (Windsor: Artcite Gallery), 1988, p. 46-51.

⁷¹Joan Borsa, "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights," p. 33.

⁷²Ibid, p. 36.

The first painting Borsa examines is *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade*. (1989, Fig. 15) The painting depicts a redesigned urban parkade that proposes a new organic form of urban architecture. In this particular painting, nature and architecture are harmonized to form one collective living environment. Two distinctly different and competing social groups (displaced mobile home dwellers and naturalists) are forced to share an urban site. Shirley Madill has commented that Bond purposely stages tensions by clashing renewal schemes with environmental concerns in her work.⁷³

The painting's primary response is detailed by Borsa as one that responds to urban development, unemployment and environmental unrest. It is however, what and whom seems to be threatened in these new environments that interests Borsa. She describes this dynamic as follows:

... evocative of transition ... a reverberation that speaks of a disenfranchised or colonized spirit -- a form of dislocation that comes closer to what we know about marginalized people, bodies in exile, bodies who do not find conditions conducive to their most rudimentary needs.⁷⁴

Borsa contemplates the values and effectiveness of these new community centers created by Bond's fictions, by asking; what happened to people's sense of community, what forced them to inhabit these uninhabitable landscapes, and did they do so willingly? The invisibility of human presence in Bond's paintings, prompts Borsa to question whether or

⁷³Shirley Madill, "Eleanor Bond: Future Fictions," in Social Centres: Eleanor Bond, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery), 1993, p. 12.

⁷⁴Joan Borsa, "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights," p. 34.

not agency (as resistance) makes a difference. Borsa states that agency could be the means to transform social "realities" at times of pending cultural and social disasters. She believes that agent-initiated responses can act as a necessary critical positioning and lead to productive and conscious decision-making.

Borsa's examination is not built on questioning the finished and constructed quality of Bond's paintings, but rather on what these presentations mean or could mean for political action -- for political movements that are attempting to produce tools necessary for liberation. Her response is guided by the belief that we must insist on our own agency, make certain narratives our own and if necessary, turn them into sites of resistance. Borsa believes agendas and discourses that attempt to structure our lives and create inhumane conditions in which to live, like the representations within Bond's images do, must be challenged. Borsa comments on how they interfere with our quality of life, and on the conditions of our environment. After all, as she pointedly asks:

-- do we want to live in mobile trailers stacked in layers within a fabricated spiraling mountain to compensate for a deterioration of natural resources, diversified economies and viable housing?⁷⁵

In her discussion of two other paintings; *The Women's Park at Fish Lake Provides Hostels, Hotels and Housing* (1991, Fig. 16) and *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area* (1991, Fig. 17), Borsa addresses the denouncement of how women and the female body have been separated from themselves and the rest of society. In both of

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 35.

these paintings, Bond pictorially fuses women with nature by painting land masses that resemble women's body parts and female reproductive organs. In *The Women's Park at Fish Lake Provides Hostels, Hotels and Housing* a womb-like land mass with housing complexes is depicted below a hill that is in the form of a rib cage. In *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area* an island is situated in a large lake that is in the shape of a uterus. Rather than nature being in actual opposition to culture, Bond depicts nature as a product (fused) from culture.

By juxtaposing Bond's interwoven images of "Mother Nature" with debates about reproductive technology research practices that deny women control of their own bodies, Borsa's examination focuses on the social, scientific and technological inscriptions that are performed on the female body. She comments on how Bond's fusing of the landscape with the female body makes a significant parallel -- as both have been colonized, oppressed, territorialized and exploited. She believes women and nature have historically and currently been treated as objects -- open to law-governed discourses and bio-technological manipulation. Although she believes these images take into consideration women's needs for an "unmediated physical/psychological space," she also believes the exaggerated isolation in which women (refugees) are placed (marginalized), functions to underline the oppression, violence and fear facing women in their everyday realities.

... [T]he implied containment of women to specific physical environments, fortified by the paintings towering perspective ...carries a concentrated quality of menacing surveillance: again an eerie reminder of displaced subjects, which in [these] cases, like the land they

occupy, might be reduced to territory, separated from the history in process, as if a neutral space to be acted upon.⁷⁶

In interesting and creative ways, Bond and Xanthos bring the viewer to full awareness of current and historical conditions pertaining to our widespread environmental crisis. Both women propose a radical re-examination of our relationship with nature, urging people to take action and make strong arguments for social change. Within both of their practices is the recognition that "true nature" -- nature existing in a state untampered with and unmediated by human hands -- will cease to exist.

Borsa suggests the investigations of past and current events explored by Bond and Xanthos, articulate new and alternative ways of knowing. She claims Xanthos and Bond are providing new strategies which contemplate about the past, the present and the future. Borsa states Xanthos' attempt to connect current "realities" (using materials that are extinct) by "reckoning with the way that things are"⁷⁷ (conserving and regenerating), is based on her desire to actively negotiate a better future. Bond's artwork similarly signals a desire for activism and resistance to be declared in the present and the future.

Borsa's intervening on the 'idea' of women's 'possible' negotiation within conflicting and contested discourses, is built on a feminist theory of agency. Her writings transform past events and past representations in order to articulate female desires for the future. Her practice is a way of working

⁷⁶Joan Borsa, "Peopling Uninhabitable Sights," p. 36.

⁷⁷Joan Borsa used this phrase when describing Irene Xanthos' process in "Tying Knots."

that generates new forms of knowledge through the alternative ways of being and ways of knowing that women bring to their art practices.

Conclusion:

The feminist project in the field of knowledge articulated in this chapter calls into question the discourses which claim to be value-free, gender neutral and capitalistic. By examining and challenging the epistemological assumptions of various disciplinary centers, Borsa and Baert render the concept of knowledge a site of struggle for feminist cultural politics.

To arrive at a larger critical understanding of knowledge allows for a larger critical understanding of other knowledges. One of the projects implicit in the work of Borsa and Baert is the framing of concepts of agency and self-knowledge. Their methodologies offer new possibilities and new strategies which begin to reconstitute modes of thinking and knowing -- empowering women as active producers of cultural meaning. Their examinations and writings recognize that women are involved daily in displaying acts of resistance to discourses that otherwise circulate as censors to their experiences. In the attempt to render possible the emergence of this 'marginal' and suppressed knowledge that circulates outside of the "true" and the "scientific," Borsa and Baert demonstrate new ways of writing about feminist cultural politics and new ways of writing about art.

The relationship between knowing and being (self-knowledge), is a form of critical awareness that many of the artists mentioned in this chapter bring to their artwork. Feminist artists offer a new epistemology that has not

been recognized in patriarchy,⁷⁸ based on rearranging, reworking and transforming the signs and codes specific to their practice. This work plays a vital role in suggesting creative ways to project new practices of speaking and visualizing for the future. Borsa and Baert respond to this process of emancipation by articulating these feminist ways of knowing and ways of being into methodologies, theories, practices and histories.

⁷⁸Nell Tenhaaf reminds us: "...feminists are continuously put on the defensive by having to justify our every claim to knowledge, including self-knowledge, that is different from, if not counter to, what constitutes official knowledge." In her article "A History or a Way of Knowing," p. 6.

Chapter Two: **Framing Identity**

Introduction:

In feminist theory and contemporary feminist art practices, formulating an empowering concept of female identity has been a central and continual struggle. Feminist critiques of identity politics have had a significant effect on contemporary Canadian feminist art practices. The result has been a dynamic inter-play between the domains of theory and practice. In this chapter, I will examine how Borsa and Baert frame the concept of female identity and how they articulate a woman-identified definition of the female subject/artist in their writings.

Theoretical models and art practices from feminist perspectives position female identity as personal and political. Borsa and Baert believe the issues surrounding identity (discourse, ideology) need to be interrogated. Therefore, their writings question the power relations that are compounded in the subjective and the social aspects of identity, in the debates of authorship, as well as in cultural and linguistic difference. This process of deconstructing the dominant discourses of patriarchy is a necessary step because women have been " ...defined, delineated, captured -- understood, explained, and diagnosed -- to a level of determination never accorded to man himself."¹ As well, how the female subject/artist has been represented,

¹Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 13, No. 31, 1988, p. 405-436.

formulated and displayed in the past, influences how female identity can be represented in contemporary practice.

One of the major influences on how theories of identity have been formulated were the debates about authorship in literary criticism.² A multitude of feminist academics and artists have critiqued postmodern theories and have stressed their shortcomings. Janine Marchessault, in her article "Is the Dead Author a Woman? Some Thoughts on Feminist Authorship," summarizes the debates on authorship by citing the androcentric biases of postmodernism, criticizing its' lack of recognition towards the social and historical factors imposed upon women artists, and commenting on the failure of these theories to provide a successful "passage" for women artists from the margins of the art world to the centre.³

In this chapter I will argue that Borsa and Baert not only deconstruct the theoretical boundaries upon which many of these phallogentric frameworks are based, but transform and transcend them by providing a potential framework in which to reconstruct the female author/subject. By redefining the female subject in ways which represent women the way women *want* to represent themselves, they utilize concepts introduced in chapter one, *agency and self-knowledge*. Their critical approaches explore if an empowering concept of the woman artist and the female subject can be

²I am referring to the intellectual debates conducted by literary critics in France, starting in 1968. Two key figures in these debates were Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-Text, (New York: Hill and Wang), 1977 and Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in Don Bouchard, (ed.), Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1980.

³See: Janine Marchessault, "Is the Dead Author a Woman? Some Thoughts on Feminist Authorship," Parallélogramme, Vol. 15, No. 4, (Spring 1990), p. 10-18.

built. If it is possible for feminists to generate "new" identities? And what these "new" identities tell us about women's lives and women's experiences?

Redefining the Female Subject/Artist:

Feminists from many disciplines have noted that the definition of the female subject position is grounded in concepts that must be deconstructed and de-essentialized.⁴ In the visual arts, the conglomeration of attributes that have historically defined the woman artist have been characterized by Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker as "...extensions of their domestic and refining role in society -- quintessentially feminine, graceful, delicate and decorative."⁵ In their study of the discourses in the art historical canon, Pollock and Parker further note that women are "...characterized as the antithesis of cultural creativity, making the notion of a woman artist a contradiction in terms." Mary Kelly, a prominent feminist artist, has also posed similar critiques connected with Modernist critiques that have defined the female artist.

Feminist art has been problematic for criticism; how does the critic authenticate the work of art when the author is sexed and 'his' truth is no longer universal?⁶

⁴ A couple examples of this critique include: Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge), 1990 and Carol Laing, "Autobiographical Acts, and the Difficulty of Saying 'I,'" in Towards the Slaughterhouse of History: Working Papers on Culture, (Toronto: YYZ Books), 1992, p. 24-35.

⁵ Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1981, p. 9.

⁶ Mary Kelly, "Reviewing Modernist Criticism," Screen, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1981, p. 55.

As mentioned in the introduction, Borsa's and Baert's writings identify with and correspond to the *process* of building an empowering concept of the female subject. In her article "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," (1994) Baert works through the problems relating to identity politics that feminists face by phrasing her critical approach to feminist cultural politics in semiological terms that links questions of feminism to problems with pronouns. Baert believes that the feminist search for a "voice of one's own" can be tracked at particular moments within feminist art. She considers what feminist theory calls the "crisis of enunciation" in relation to specific interventions and practices in Canadian women's videos. By drawing attention to the relationship between feminist theory and art practices, Baert attempts to illustrate how feminist art practices "... have helped feminism to constitute a new social being: women as subjects rather than objects, speakers rather than spoken."⁷

Feminist video art in Canada has been given some, albeit marginal, attention in art journals and exhibition programming.⁸ In all of these accounts, feminists are cited as using video to confront and expose the misogynist claims and representational assumptions of media, such as film, television and advertising. The medium of video enables women to produce an alternative message to the dominant patriarchal representations of

⁷Ibid, p. 15.

⁸A few articles include; Dot Tuer, "Screens of Resistance: Feminism and Video Art," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 73-74; Shonagh Adelman, "Redefining the Female Subject - The Woman on Screen: Getting Caught with her Pants Down," C Magazine, 28, (Winter, 1991), p. 24-32 and Jennifer Blair, "Smashing Icons: Vancouver Feminist Video Art and the Female Body," C Magazine, issue #43, (Fall 1994), p.43-50.

women on the mainstream networks. Dot Tuer, who has written extensively on video production in Canada, states:

Women have recognized the potential of this medium to subvert and recreate an alternative cultural base of production. The intimacy of video production becomes not a marginalized activity but a political act. ...It is a history of grass-roots struggles, battles and influences largely ignored by the mass media and the art world traditions.⁹

Many of the feminist interventions presented through the medium of video have theoretically and conceptually engaged with debates that are attempting to re-define the female subject. Baert, in "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," explores the ways a few of these feminist artists are framing and displaying these interventions by tracking the strategies of feminist video practices.¹⁰ Her inquiry distinguishes between what she considers to be the three waves of feminists' work in video -- waves that Baert believes are more discursive than chronological. This first wave of feminist work often featured women using their own bodies as the medium of expression. Baert states that many artists used their own bodies in order to "...transform the historical subordination of the female body from a masculine sexual and linguistic economy."¹¹ Jennifer Blair, a curator of feminist video, has mentioned that feminists quite often choose to confront the stereotypes that surround the "feminine" body by "... suggesting various

⁹Dot Tuer, "Screens of Resistance: Feminism and Video Art," p. 74.

¹⁰It is worthy to note that Renee Baert was a video officer at the Canada Council for a number of years.

¹¹Renee Baert, "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 15.

possibilities that might empower women and allow them to consciously and comfortably occupy their own bodies."¹²

To illustrate this first wave of feminist video art involving women referencing their bodies, Baert references Lisa Steele's *Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects* (1974). In this video Steele kneels naked in front of a stationary camera, announces to the camera: "In honour of my birthday, I'm going to show you my birthday suit," and proceeds to openly describe each imperfection that marks her body. She circles her scars and describes, in detail, what the cause of each scar has been. "1953: Stubbed toe on rock while running barefoot. Permanently discoloured nail," she announces, holding her big toe up to the camera's lens. "1960: Knife dropped on foot while making eggs goldenrod in Home Economics class, 13 years old!" The tape develops an inventory of 17 injuries that she recounts in chronological order. After describing her body's total number of imperfections, Steele moves back from the camera, puts her clothes on, and sings a full chorus of "*Happy Birthday to me.*"

Baert believes *Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects* announces the female artist as subject, while exploding the ideology of art and artist as categories that are non-political and gender-neutral. By Steele valorizing her "flawed" body, she produces a different representation of the female body than that which exists in popular culture.¹³ Baert states:

¹²Jennifer Blair, "Smashing Icons: Vancouver Feminist Video Art and the Female Body," *C Magazine*, No. 43, (Fall 1994), p.50.

¹³For further information regarding a feminist critique of "the feminine body image," see: Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Toronto: Vintage Books), 1990.

Steele's favoring of her "scars and defects" flaunts the imperative of beauty as the governing standard for women's social measure and refuses the cultural framing of women's lives in primarily sexual terms.¹⁴

Baert also examines the linguistic, social and literary structures that mediate the passage of the self through the world and through time. In the case of the female body, Baert states it must go through a gendered socialization process that positions women in very specific, marginalized ways. Detailing this "engendering" process through a feminist analysis of the socialization process, was Teresa de Lauretis' scholarship produced in the 1980s. By providing critiques of discursive relations related to the study of female subjectivity, de Lauretis defined notions like experience, not as politically neutral occurrences that people encounter, but rather, "...as one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world."¹⁵

Baert's approach to Steele's video acknowledges and builds upon the analysis of feminist theorists, like de Lauretis, and insists on the influences mediated by linguistic, social and literary structures. In regards to pronouns, Baert reveals that "...the female 'I' cannot be simply or transparently spoken: it is a marked term, and in the first instance by gender."¹⁶

In the video *Chaperons rouges* by Hélène Bourgault and Helen Doyle (1979), the central issue is female rape. Women offer testimonials that

¹⁴Renee Baert, "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 16.

¹⁵Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1984, p. 159.

¹⁶Renee Baert, "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 16.

describe the processes by which women are culturally solicited into positions of victimization and passivity. The undercurrent of sexual threat in the everyday lives of women is developed in the video, and is conveyed through a range of styles from dramatization to documentation to testimonial. Scenes of friendship and solidarity are suggested by the producers as the place in which to develop alternative ways of being. The idea of creating a sense of community among women marks a shift from earlier feminist documentary, which focused on the individual. However, how a community of women can be adequately defined has become a major issue for feminism in the 1980s.¹⁷ In response to this problem, Baert points to how the pronouns "I" and "we" function in relation to the topic of violence against women in this video.

The self as "I" remains intact but is besieged and denied. Here the subject experience is not only individual: it is collective. The female body is a social body and the subject position is "we."

Baert notes that although *Chaperons rouges* does encourage women to position themselves as agents -- to fight against being placed as passive victims of patriarchal power -- there are problems with works of collective self-representation. She believes the problems lie with individual voices claiming to speak with the pronoun "we."

Feminists have long argued against many of the tendencies that speak in a collective voice. These critiques condemn behaviors such as generating universal statements, speaking on others' behalf, conflating the issue of

¹⁷For more information, see: Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective," *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (Spring 1994), p. 713-738.

subjectivity, and not taking into consideration differences among women.¹⁸ Attentively, Baert investigates who is authorized to speak for whom in the collective voice represented in feminist videos and what relevance these critiques have on the pronouns. She quotes Adrienne Rich when citing the difficulty of saying 'we.'

You cannot speak for me. I cannot speak for us. Two thoughts: there is no liberation that only knows how to say 'I'; there is no collective moment that speaks for each of us all the way through. And so even ordinary pronouns become a political problem.¹⁹

Produced during the 1980s, this second wave of feminist videos that Baert examines, interrogates the linguistic and social construction of gender. Her inquiry begins with the video *Working the Double Shift* (1984) by Kim Tomczak and Lisa Steele. This video critiques images from the mass media and popular culture. As Baert notes, it is "an appropriation of, and intervention within, images culled from mass media."²⁰ The tape is divided into three sections. The first involves using advertising images, labeled "man," "woman," "the family," which are repeated, and labeled anew "this is a construction of masculinity," "this is a construction of femininity," and "this is an idealized image of a family." The second section consists of television footage from a parliamentary vote and television advertisements that are re-scripted in a voice-over that mimicks CBC commentary to

¹⁸An excellent source is: Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatmen, (eds.), Feminism and the Politics of Difference, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing), 1993.

¹⁹Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," in Blood, Bread, and Poetry, (New York and London: W.W. Norton), p. 224. Cited in "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 17.

²⁰Renee Baert, "Subjects On The Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 17.

construct a political and utopian, alternative. The third section interrogates the effects on children, and adults, of the discrepancies between their own lived experiences and mass media representations of gender roles and family life. In all of the sections, representations of masculinity, femininity and the family are situated in relation to ideology, economics and society through the use of verbal, written and visual interventions.

In regards to the pronoun "I" in this video, "I" is presented as a mere convention of ideology and narrative history. "I" functions as an artifice inside of language making identity only a linguistic subject: a function, and not a person at all. Baert comments that the people in *Working the Double Shift* represent these functions. She states they are:

...no longer women (or men) as speaking subjects but gender as a representation, no longer an "I" or "we" (or "he" or "they") but a depersonalized entity, perhaps an "it": media, discourse, ideology.²¹

The second video in the second wave, responds to postmodern and poststructural critiques of authorship, in which women are addressed as non-subjects and "woman-as-effect."²² By Su Rynard, the video is titled *Absence* (1986). The video begins with a close-up of a woman's mouth, painted with black lipstick. Her mouth opens to speak, but no sound is heard. Across her lips appears the word of the title: "Absence." Scenes in the video are of the woman walking through the streets and empty rooms, silent and alone. The spaces are devoid of other people, of connection and relation. In a telling

²¹Ibid, p. 18.

²²This term used to describe the position of 'woman' in regards to modernist male artists was first used by Alice Jardín in her book *Gynesis/Configurations of Woman and Modernity*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press), 1985.

scene, she looks into the mirror and she cannot see her reflection. Absence is, once again, written on the mirror.

Baert's analysis of *Absence* and *Working the Double Shift* focuses on the theoretical strategies of psychoanalysis, Lacanian theory and poststructuralism. She critiques these theories in order to "unfix" the female sign -- to examine the language of representation: its form, apparatuses, and "technologies." She notes that in each of these theories, the female subject is not defined in positive terms but " ...as the Other through whom male subjectivity is constituted; guaranteeing the masculine subject but not the female."²³ Baert states that it is precisely this "differential logic" of psychoanalytic theory that results in "...the feminine counterpole being defined as lack, absence and non-being."²⁴

The problems of enunciation that Baert notes -- that the female subject position cannot be represented from these theoretical positions -- are similarly reflected in the artists' videos. The subject of feminism embracing a theoretical paradigm which marks women in terms of negation and absence, has been noted by a number of art historians and feminist critics as problematic. According to Caterina Pizanias, postmodern and poststructuralist theories of authorship cannot map a long-range course for the subject of feminism and do not offer a solution to empower women as social subjects.²⁵ Another critic, Linda Klinger, argues that postmodern

²³Renee Baert, "Subjects On The Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 18.

²⁴Ibid, p. 18.

²⁵Caterina Pizanias in a recent article addresses the theories of authorship that have been popularized as postmodern and poststructuralist theories in relation to feminist art and states: "We need to provoke each other in examining our own grasp and/or complicity in perpetuating the habits of consumption and the political structures which sustain a decontextualized center,

feminist art practices do not accommodate the intricate sociology of feminist art, nor the woman artist.

They neutralize the full identity of women artists within the interplay of social, critical, and representational systems, privileging the image as a text. Conceptually postulating the artists as a critical trope, poststructuralist theories of authorship reify her as an abstraction, and return that abstraction to us as the subject of art.²⁶

By positioning herself alongside these interventions by other feminists, Baert re-reads and re-writes patriarchal texts. She believes the deeply motivated efforts by artists and activists to destabilize, disclaim and dismantle patriarchal value systems provide a critique that at times, ignores the social reality of spaces and presences that women, over the decades, have inaugurated within culture -- sites of voice, agency, knowledge and effective political will. In an effort to account for these conditions, Baert states:

... the task at hand is no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centered vision but rather determining how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject.²⁷

Baert says it is in this search for another vision, one that "... explores the question of female subjectivity as an unfixed construct that is also an

so efficiently portable, that keeps women artists from becoming the authors of our own work and from forming alliances with each other and locate sites that are not so slippery as those of postmodernity, i.e. everywhere and nowhere." In: "Feminist Art: Issues & Agendas," Artichoke: Writings about the Visual Arts, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Spring 1994), p. 43.

²⁶Linda Klinger, "Where's the Artist?: Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theories of Authorship," Art Journal, Vol. 50, No. 2, (Summer 1991), p. 39-47.

²⁷Renee Baert, "Subjects On The Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 19.

embodied positioning, embedded in social relations,"²⁸ that the third wave of feminist videos present.

Baert places the two videos, *Heroics* (1984) by Sara Diamond and *India Hearts Beat* (1989) by Leila Sujir's into this third category. Diamond's *Heroics* is a series of thirty-five interviews, detailing women's acts of bravery.

Heroism in Diamond's video is not defined according to the masculine story of mastery or completion, but privileges an understanding of heroism through a variety of women's personal gestures of bravery, like leaving abusive situations. The women in the video come from different classes, different ethnic backgrounds, different races; their ages differentiate, as do their accents and appearances. In Sujir's *India Hearts Beat* (1989), stories of India from three women of different races, generations and cultural backgrounds are told. The stories are conveyed through texts and in performances by the narrators. In Baert's analysis of the videos, she focuses on the multiple and dispersed voices that speak *across* borders of age, race and class. She believes that the differences between the three narrators are threefold, resulting in the use of multiple pronouns -- "I," "she," "we." Baert believes that the use of the three pronouns signifies:

...a triangulation of voice in which three women, each reciting a narrative of the self, are brought together, their differences maintained through a polyvocal articulation of specificity.²⁹

The last video that Baert examines is Janine Marchessault's *The Act of Seeing with Another Eye* (1990). The video is narrated by a man who attempts

²⁸Ibid, p. 19.

²⁹Ibid, p. 20.

to disclaim the relationship between two women. His jealous discomfort presents a persona that is unreliable and contradictory. The result is that his narration is measured against the women's voice, thus conveying a double, gendered set of stories and desires. The title of the tape refers to Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, a film in which the eye/I is an omniscient, disembodied shaper of vision. In Marchessault's video, she presents an alternative to the patriarchal discipline that inscribes women as objects of surveillance and pornography, as an alternative to the patriarchal inscriptions which constructs the female subject through fashion and reconstructs her through cosmetic surgery. In Marchessault's narrative it is the active gaze of women, the gaze based on female desires that directs itself from one woman to the other women, that Baert notes " ...sets under siege the possibility of seeing with another eye."³⁰

Feminist video practices that reflect alternative views towards spectatorial positions mark significant progress towards redefining the female subject. They make women's self-representations not merely reflective of a social identity fraught with phallogentric labels, but posit woman as the subject of another history, where the boundaries of the self have not yet been defined. It is positioning oneself within this strategy, this un-theorized terrain within the politics of female agency, that Beth Seaton refers to as the process that allows the female subject position to "pass into a more wide-open space" and "...leave the regulatory imperatives of identity behind."³¹ Baert builds on

³⁰Ibid, p. 20.

³¹Beth Seaton develops these ideas in her article "Choosing Blindness: Certain Subjects and Photographic Criticism," *Parachute* 60, 1993, p. 41-43, as well as in the paper she gave at the conference "Art as Theory: Theory as Art," University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Nov. 29 - Dec. 1, 1991.

this approach of redefinition that challenges and, at times, contradicts what is known about the the female subject by insisting that the subject of feminism engage in the realm of possibility.

Baert believes that *The Act of Seeing with Another Eye* consciously places women in the position of author and object and renders possible a re-reading and re-writing of patriarchal texts. This possibility is based on the disruption of the discourse pertaining to compulsory heterosexuality which is based solely on male needs and desires, and geared to male pleasures. Baert notes that representing women and the female subject in positions as subjects of desire, signals a shift from the first wave of the feminist movement in video during the 1970s. Instrumental to this shift has been the second wave that Baert explains as being instrumental in constituting a feminist nexus with diverse strategies and a multitude of sites in which women have been able to " ...reclaim a lost heritage, challenge the structures of every domain, and articulate different forms of social and personal desire."³²

Baert states that the answers to the questions presented in the third wave of feminist videos still relates to a problem with the pronouns.

With the dismantling of the authority of the unified "I" and the fragmentation of the collective "we", in what collectivity, or even ontology, can "women," or "the subject of feminism," be grounded?³³

Baert concludes that the only pronoun that can be used to describe the subject of feminism is a verb, what she terms "pronouns-in-process." By

³²Renee Baert, "Subjects On The Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," p. 20.

³³*Ibid*, p. 20.

stating that the subject of feminism remains on the threshold, Baert perceives the subject of feminism as a subject in process, a subject without a solution to the problem with the pronouns. She compares this threshold to a horizon -- ever receding as it is approached.

Baert's staging of the dynamic inter-play between feminist video practices and feminist theory, results in tracking a series of strategic feminist interventions into an unfolding cultural narrative. Baert examines the many ways the debates outside and within feminism have attempted to define and frame the female subject and the female artist. Working through the quest outlined by feminist theory for a redefinition of the female subject, Baert recognizes that feminist art criticism must speak in a way that mirrors the self-affirming visual strategies displayed in feminist art works.

Building Frameworks for a Feminist Definition of the Subject/Artist:

In many of the art practices discussed so far in this thesis, acts of resistance and struggle against patriarchal discourses and structures have been staged and performed. These acts of agency must be accounted for in feminist art criticism and cultural politics and not willed away, disguised or denied. As the problem with the pronouns concludes, feminists need new ways in which to define the female subject/artist based upon a woman-identified definition of the subject/artist. These "new" strategies must produce "new" ways of articulating female identity from the position of woman as subject and artist.

Borsa's article "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject" (1990)³⁴ is particularly relevant to the study of female identity from agent-centered perspectives. Borsa completed her research for this topic while attending the University of Leeds, England.³⁵ She stated in the interview I conducted³⁶ that researching on Frida Kahlo allowed her the opportunity to study a female artist who obviously operated outside of the canonical, institutional and hegemonic structures. Borsa added that focusing on the debates around authorship in regards to Kahlo's work, gave her the understanding of how and where femin'st identity politics can begin to locate signs of resistance and female agency for a redefinition of the female subject/artist.

Kahlo (1907-1954) was a Mexican artist who produced many self-portraits that are intimate in scale and personal in nature. (1940, 1937, Figs. 18 and 19) She began painting in her early twenties, and was completely self-taught; it is apparent that she admired and incorporated popular Mexican art traditions. She painted portraits of herself in contexts and situations that suggests vulnerability, self-doubt and female suffering. Events in Kahlo's life have obviously influenced her art, including her long-term marriage to Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and her subjection to intense and continuous physical trauma (her legs were paralyzed in a severe bus accident).

³⁴Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," Third Text, No. 12, (Autumn 1990), p. 104-123.

³⁵Joan Borsa, Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Leeds: England, 1989. Borsa's graduate supervisor was Griselda Pollock.

³⁶Unpublished interview with Joan Borsa, December 31, 1993 in Saskatoon for this thesis.

Borsa states that according to well-known biographies on Kahlo,³⁷ Kahlo's production is only explained in relation to how volatile her love affairs have been while presenting the woman artist as victim -- as if irreconcilably outside and other. Borsa believes these secondary sources "...all too frequently deny or de-emphasize the politics involved in examining one's own location, inheritances and social conditions."³⁸ Borsa states that these narratives have been problematic for numerous reasons. First, they explain the identity of Kahlo through a heterosexual lens, de-emphasizing the number and significance of Kahlo's same-sex relationships (which may or may not have been sexual). Second, they focus as much on Rivera as they do on Kahlo, and reduce Kahlo to those spaces where her subject matter is regarded as a "fixed text," --confirming the traditional spaces assigned woman, woman's body and the private sphere.

Borsa's primary investigation is based on Kahlo's personal and political location to discourse. She is interested in how Kahlo constructed her own history, and how she resisted the spaces designated female and artist as laid out by patriarchal and hegemonic systems.³⁹ I believe that her inquiries directed at the politics of the female artist/authorial positioning challenges

³⁷The most assessable biography in English on Frida Kahlo's life and work is Haydi Herrera's book Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo, first published in North America (Harper & Row) in 1983 and is now available through Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., London, 1989.

³⁸Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," p. 109.

³⁹Borsa does recognize the proliferation of material about Kahlo that has been produced over the past couple of years. The most obvious example that Borsa cites as promoting 'Frida' and her art as cultural fetiches, exotic symbols, etc., was in the May 1989 issue of the British fashion magazine *Elle* which featured 16 pages on the life, art and fashion of Frida Kahlo. Frida look-a-likes wore designer items and emphasized the exotic, beautiful and sexually desirable persona of Frida Kahlo -- even though the narrative stressed Kahlo's tormented life of medical and marital complications.

the authority of history that has kept certain stories and certain reading positions marginalized. By building on earlier feminist writings which convey the specific ways women have made art under different constraints than men, Borsa's framework stresses the connection between women's art practice and discourse.⁴⁰

Borsa distinguishes between the pedigree of Authors (producers) and readers (consumers) by reviewing Roland Barthes' article, "The Death of the Author."⁴¹ In her critique of this "significant Eurocentric text,"⁴² she describes the many sites which remain outside of the boundaries he designates where authors, texts and readers are to be located. By exploring the work of Kahlo, whom Borsa considers to fall outside of Barthes' theoretical boundaries, Borsa considers the power relations that "marginalize" women and women artists.

Borsa's interest is in examining the circumstance of women not having the same historical relation to identity of origin, institution and production that men have had. She investigates how an individual is implicated within, or subjected to, the production and consumption of master "texts." Her theory agrees with literary critic Nancy Miller.⁴³ Miller insists

⁴⁰I am referring to art historians Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, whose comments in Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1981, encouraged feminist writings in art to establish as political the boundaries of the art historical canon that situate women's production as working outside of ideological and gendered positions of authority, genius and power.

⁴¹Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", (trans.) Stephen Heath's Image, Music, Text, (New York: Hill and Waig), 1977, p. 142-8.

⁴²This is Borsa's description. In chapter three, I discuss the politics of location as it relates to issues of Canadian identity.

⁴³Nancy Miller, "Changing The Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader," in Teresa de Lauretis, (ed.), Feminist Studies: Critical Studies, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington), 1986, p. 102-120.

that women have always been "disoriginated, decentered and deinstitutionalized" and that their relation to the text, to authority and to speech remains "structurally different." Borsa believes only a willingness to open up personal and political margins " ...shift[s] the directional flow between Authors (producers) and readers (consumers) where an exchange between positions and a negotiation of who occupies what function can begin to dismantle the fixed postures now in place."⁴⁴

Borsa's work on Kahlo provides a way to understand feminist acts of negotiation -- how the female subject can negotiate a more empowering position. Her article acknowledges the "gaps" between the author (subject, producer) and the text (consumer, reader) in the consideration of feminist subjectivity. Describing the paintings as " ... bringing forward and pushing away the familiar, the known, as if there is a layer of disguised speech,"⁴⁵ Borsa presents Kahlo as an artist that created her own identity by creating her own language. Borsa states: "In Kahlo's work the body and assigned feminine spaces are taken on not to celebrate or glorify them but to *parody and invert* the ways they are represented."⁴⁶

Borsa describes Kahlo as an artist who *chose* to rework the signification of signs and symbols both of the feminine sphere and Mexican politics. She regards Kahlo's self-portraits as images that reveal a reworking of the conditions and margins she has been forced to inherit. Borsa demonstrates, through Kahlo's work, how one can take on master "texts" without

⁴⁴Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," p. 107.

⁴⁵Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," p. 116.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 114.

subscribing to them, without reproducing their meaning. The act of women *negotiating* their history leads to a new interpretive framework in which to talk about female identity, female experiences, and author/reader positions.

Borsa states:

Kahlo acknowledges and manages to image both the 'structure that contains her', that codifies her existence and asks her to 'perform' in particular ways and simultaneously suggests her awareness and discomfort in carrying this codification.⁴⁷

The feminist strategy of reworking the conditions and margins that a woman "inherits" dismantles the security of author and reader positions. Cultural critic Judith Butler believes that to disrupt the categories which 'contain' the body, sex, gender, and sexuality one must "...describe and propose a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts," where "culture and discourse mire the subject, but do not constitute that subject."⁴⁸ Butler's influential work explores the ways subjects can enable themselves to assert alternative modes of being within the domains of cultural intelligibility. Borsa, like Butler, works toward generating an alternative mode that articulates a new social being -- woman as artist, author, subject and active agent.

In describing Kahlo's display of resistances in her paintings and in her personal life, Borsa radically reworks canonized notions of centers and margins, inside and outside, normative and other. She believes the

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 114

⁴⁸Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge), 1990, p. 143.

boundaries of authorship that are being critiqued in recent intellectual circles were pursued by Kahlo 50 years ago.

Frida Kahlo's relationship to art parallels much contemporary cultural production: a political articulation in a discourse capable of re-symbolizing the fractures of desire -- a form of communication that holds the potential for larger personal and political intervention.⁴⁹

Borsa's interest in how contemporary Canadian women artists have also explored, from feminist perspectives, their everyday experiences, was realized in her curatorial examination for the exhibition Making Space (1988).⁵⁰ Borsa believes that the four artists in the exhibition, like Kahlo, visibly break down and cross over "... the boundaries that have overpowered and overshadowed the processes and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of seeing."⁵¹ The artists' work in the exhibition included Honor Kever Rogers' seven large panoramic assemblages called *The Brooding Rooms: Mother-and-Childhood Reassembled*, Susan McEachern's four-part installation of photographs, media appropriations and text titled *On Living at Home*, Frances Robson's silverpoint horizontal panoramas of women's groups, and Suzanne Lacy's photo-and-text documentation of her *Crystal Quilt* performance. Examples from each of these artists can be found in the illustrations (Figs. 20-26).

All of the artists in Making Space are photographers. Two, Kever Rogers and McEachern, place their work in the domestic sphere -- the social

⁴⁹Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," p. 123.

⁵⁰Joan Borsa, Making Space, (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery), Nov. 15 - Dec. 10, 1988.

⁵¹Ibid, p. 7.

space most frequently associated with women. The issues raised in these works are women's unpaid labour, isolation, motherhood, and the economic relationships between the private and public spheres. The other two artists, Robson and Lacy, physically locate women in the traditionally male public realm.

In Kever Roger's large panoramas of deserted domestic settings, she addresses what is considered a woman's primary emotional role -- motherhood. Her montaged images are made up of between 24 and 56 photographs of the domestic space (Fig. 20). Although the reassembled photographs form a perfect grid system, the images they contain are slightly distorted. Clues are deposited throughout the rooms in the photographs to let the viewer know everything is not right; in the kitchen the tap is left running and the oven door is left open; in the living room a game of *Sorry!* has been left in progress, and in the bathroom the tub is about to overflow. According to Kever Rogers, the distorted images that contain the layers and clues suggest fragments of memories of raising her child. More specifically, they relate to her son moving away from home. Kever Rogers states:

...suddenly I was faced with the proverbial empty nest. It hit hard. In reaction, I started assembling in our house [an] archaeological dig, creating "mother-and-childhood reassembled." I use the term 'archaeological dig' because these sites consist of layers of artifacts deposited over time by their inhabitants. Each abandoned layer is a fragment of time. ⁵²

Borsa states that Kever Rogers' panoramas stage narratives that parallel the complexity of motherhood -- how the role of motherhood can be as much

⁵²Honor Kever Rogers, Artist Statement for Making Space, p. 10.

about labour and anxiety as it is about love and fulfillment. The event of Kever Roger's son moving away from home signals in Kever Roger what Borsa calls 'maternal loss and pain.' Although people are absent in the images, Borsa believes we know them through the "in-process" rituals that the photographs contain. Borsa comments:

When Rogers reassembles fragments of interior, domestic space, she stages narratives that piece together units of physical and emotional time – as if by arranging household objects, toys and domestic rituals, she can re-enact, and so come to terms with the details and patterns of experience.⁵³

Susan McEachern's installation *On Living at Home* (Figs. 21 and 22) is a four-part installation of color photographs, text, illustrations from fairy tales and black-and-white media images.⁵⁴ McEachern contrasts her own photographs (taken in her home) with images and text from popular sources to look at notions of the home as a retreat and a haven from the external world. The conflict between public and private, external and internal, the collectivity and the individual, vulnerability and safety are central to her work. Borsa has commented that McEachern's "...'domestic use' of photography plays with the established conventions of the medium as neutral instrument of reality, recorder of truth and history."⁵⁵

⁵³Joan Borsa, *Making Space*, p. 7.

⁵⁴Susan McEachern's installation is a project that builds on her earlier work which exposed the link between the division of labor and sexual inequality. For an example of this body of work, see Marilynne Bell's article: "The Family in the Context of Childrearing," *Vanguard*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (April/May 1986), p. 45-46.

⁵⁵Joan Borsa, "Will Her Desires, Her Aesthetics Be Different From Ours," in McEachern's solo exhibition *The Creation of Desire: An Exhibition by Susan McEachern*, (Halifax: Eye Level Gallery), 1992, p. 49.

Part one deals with the reality of agoraphobia, a disease common to women that is characterized by a profound fear of the outside world (Fig. 21). McEachern displaces the myth that the home always provides emotional security and comfort. Borsa notes McEachern shows us "the other side of the safety of the home" that has a negative effect on women.

In Parts two, three, and four, *Domestic Immersion*, *Media Consumption*, and *The World*, McEachern focuses on how domestic ideology wields "real" power in terms of consumption for the home and its potential to provide emotional security and comfort. McEachern explores how our homes reinforce traditional definitions of the division of labour, and signify material forms of class division. In *Media Consumption* images from television, popular magazines and Harlequin romances are juxtaposed with text that examines the attempts to "cover up" women's anxieties and desires.⁵⁶ Borsa believes this juxtaposition:

... confronts us with the way the media impacts on daily life by reinforcing fantasies of happy housewives and perfect relationships while all around us marriages are ending and violence in the home escalates.⁵⁷

In part four, *The World Outside*, McEachern confronts how our own North American place of privilege is represented by the luxuries of our everyday home life. For example, her photograph depicting the "perfect" green apples in her kitchen (Fig. 22) is given political significance that speaks to acts of cultural imperialism and greed when the text -- "The status-quo can

⁵⁶The text that Susan McEachern uses in this piece is from Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*.

⁵⁷Joan Borsa, *Making Space*, p. 7.

also kill, often by hunger rather than by bullets" -- is positioned on top of the image.

Borsa states McEachern illustrates the complex relationship between the security and comfort enjoyed at home and the political and economic realities of the external world. She believes McEachern's series suggests that we need to look more closely at how we are all implicated in the complex web of processes that determine our everyday experience. More specifically, the modes of production and reproduction within a political economy are textualized as patriarchal and capitalistic.

In contrast to unveiling the discourses and politics inherent in the domestic sphere, Suzanne Lacy and Frances Robson question the power and influence of the public realm. Their work documents women outside of the home in contexts that are representative of a community of women. Robson's work addresses the importance of women as vital, yet often invisible, forces within society. Her black-and-white panoramas show women's groups ranging from the *"Over Age 65" Exercise Class* to the *Saskatoon Women's Motorcycle Club*. (Figs. 23 and 24) Her panoramic format allows each woman present in the group to be close to the camera and therefore more apt to be seen as individuals by viewers. Her portraits reshape the stereotypes of women as powerless and inactive, creating a female social history that Borsa describes as an active and "highly organized and complex political underground."⁵⁸ In Robson's opinion:

The rituals of meeting with, working with other women, is very important -- the process involved in making the portrait may be the

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 8.

most significant aspect of the project -- the photograph itself is likely secondary.⁵⁹

The work of Suzanne Lacy consists of photographs which document the 1987 collective performance piece she organized titled *The Crystal Quilt* (Figs. 25 and 26). The performance took place on Mother's Day at the I.D.S. Crystal Court in Minneapolis, Minnesota. More than 430 elderly women, dressed in black, participated in the performance, while an audience of 3,000 people gathered around the balconies. Over the course of an hour, the 430 women rearranged layers of cloth positioned onto tables. This process of rearranging and unfolding pieces of cloth displaying bright red and yellow splashes of color was a process that was constantly evolving. Utilizing the traditional spatial designs of a quilt, Borsa metaphorically describes the performance as women who are creating a "living quilt" of "human patterns."

In Lacy's work the performance is the most visible event. However, the importance of the work rests on the development of structures to facilitate social change and to bring together elderly women. In the case of *The Crystal Quilt*, the hour-long performance gave women time to talk to each other, create new friendships and create awareness as to the position of older women in society. Lacy believes the purpose of these meetings/performances organized by the Whisper Project⁶⁰ is to: express the dignity, beauty and worth

⁵⁹Frances Robson, *Making Space*, p. 8.

⁶⁰The Whisper Project is involved in many consciousness raising activities, including sending members to organize panels, art exhibits and leadership seminars for older women. Their latest project has been to travel across the country on a Winnebago tour and speak, as their project states, "to every older woman who will talk to them."

of the aging individual to the community; set in motion networks from which women can grow; and recreate the spirit of a midwestern quilting party on a long summer afternoon.⁶¹

Highlighted in Borsa's critique is the idea of the quilt as a metaphor for change. She believes the ritualistic making of a living quilt communicates the healing power that is acted out through many of the daily rituals common to women's experience. Borsa states:

Lacy takes a symbol associated with women's culture -- the quilt -- and through the performance process allows the stereotypes surrounding old age, old women and women's relationship to culture to be exorcised and restated.⁶²

All of the photographers in Making Space challenge the political agendas that are hidden in daily routines and rituals -- the everyday. Borsa's essay distinguishes between popular notions of the feminine sphere and women's own exploration of their lived experiences. Her analysis of traditional distinctions between male and female spheres, exterior and interior space, and the assumptions of public and private space⁶³ rests on challenging these notions rather than re-affirming them. The interventions that are intricately connected to the strategies, formats and working methods that the artists use allows women, Borsa believes, to lean towards coming to terms with our everyday.

⁶¹Suzanne Lacy, Artist Statement for Making Space, p. 22.

⁶²Joan Borsa, Making Space, p. 8.

⁶³Borsa states these ideas refer to the ways that since the 19th century, male and female spheres have been designated public (male) and private (female). For a comprehensive discussion on the ways public and private reveal themselves in art, see Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London: Pantheon Books), 1981.

Self-affirming strategies are a particularly urgent issue in feminist identity politics. It is precisely *because* the problems of women's lives are directly rooted in the social, in the continuous engagement of a self in social reality, that the acts of parody and inversion must speak to the social reality. However, they must also speak to the personal, private realm. Making Space offers "new" representations, "new" ways of seeing the social and the private. These feminist perspectives cross over, what Dorothy Smith terms, "the processes and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of seeing."⁶⁴ Borsa takes special note of the creative presentations that visually represent these "new languages."

Specific words, similar formats and working methods move between the artists: fragments, clues, ritual, assembling, uncovering, working through or 'seeing' something as if for the first time -- a layering of what they know through everyday experience and placing it against the 'popular' representations that they take on. ... Their stories are different from what we usually see about these everyday situations -- a difference between communication and representation -- a difference between the integrity of lived experience and an objectified version of someone else's life.⁶⁵

Borsa's curatorial thesis for Making Space reconfirms that the political is hidden in the contradictions of lived experience, in the everyday as a *space* where the dominant relations of production are tirelessly and relentlessly reproduced. Her notion of "making space," which also involves the creation of "a new language," is based on women's ability to see beyond the immediate -- to construct a different image of the everyday. This quest to articulate a

⁶⁴Dorothy E. Smith, The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press), p. 9.

⁶⁵Joan Borsa, Making Space, p. 8.

feminist redefinition of the female subject/artist reflects the desires of the artists to be at home on their own terms.

Desire and the Female Subject/Artist:

The feminist frameworks of Borsa and Baert reveal new ways to introduce speech into otherwise silent territories. One of the silent territories that has been largely untheorized, at least from feminist perspectives, has been a willing, active female subject often referred to as a desiring subject. Baert argues for a new discursive strategy which asserts a desiring female subject in her article on contemporary Canadian feminist videos, "Desiring Daughters" (1993).⁶⁶ The two videos featured are Sara Diamond's *The Influences of My Mother* (1982), and Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988).

The Influences of My Mother is a low-budget tape made on small-format video equipment. Divided into a series of acts, the structure of the tape relies on elements of performance and self-reflection. The first frame of the video shows a portrait of Diamond's mother, probably taken in the 1940s. A female off-camera voice addresses the viewer: "It is usually the parent who constructs the identity of the child." Inserted into the camera's frame is a portrait of Sara Diamond. The voice-over continues: "In my case, it was to be the child who would construct the identity of the parent."

In Diamond's *The Influences of My Mother*, Diamond reconstructs the identity of her mother who died when she was ten years old. Diamond states,

⁶⁶Renee Baert, "Desiring Daughters," *Screen* 34. 2 (Summer 1993), p. 109-123.

2 of/de 2

PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

before her mother's death, she had very fleeting memories of her family.⁶⁷ Therefore, the character of her mother is based upon Diamond's imagination, fantasies, and memories. The combination of autobiography, fantasy, memory and interpretation divides the six chronological acts of the video⁶⁸ into boundaries of fact and fiction, the personal and the social.

The search that Diamond embarks on is not to find the "truth" of her mother, but rather to find what Baert terms "the mother's meanings" and what these meanings convey to the daughter. At various points in the video, Diamond uses empirical evidence such as oral narration, documents, photographs, testimony and artifacts from the mother's personal and social history to begin to piece together the many clues that exist about her mother. In selective ways, these clues operate as evidence of history, of desire and of loss. They are described by Diamond as "versions" of history, as objects subjectively chosen by her to represent her mother.

Admittedly, Diamond cites the mixed emotions and disconcerted attitudes she has felt about her mother in the past. She mentions that at times the persona of her mother seemed mysterious, larger than life. At other times, all she could do was mourn the loss of affection she felt she would have received from her mother. Diamond states that when she started physically resembling her mother, around the age of 17, she had a renewed interest in her person. Diamond states: "I searched for a recognition of myself

⁶⁷From the artist's statement and interview with Marlene Creates, published in FIREWEED: A Feminist Quarterly of Writing, Politics, Art and Culture, Issue #12, 1982, p. 25-30.

⁶⁸ The titles of the five acts include: (1). Denial - No Mother At All... (2). Judgments, Anger, The Negligent Mother (3). The Emerging Mother, A Medley of Mixed Emotions (4). Definitions (5). The Reconstructed Mother, Mother As Subject.

within her image. To reconstruct her would be to locate myself." It is at this point in her life that Diamond represents herself researching her mother's personal history and situating her mother within a broader account of social and political history. Through Diamond's efforts, the mother begins to emerge at this time as a subject of history: a communist, a labour organizer, an activist. Baert believes Diamond's re-enactment of her mother allowed the mother to be "...not only remembered, but discovered and invented, not only the object of the daughter's search but the 'subject' thereby retrieved and produced."⁶⁹

In a direct address to the viewer, Diamond specifies the links between her own personal process of maternal reclamation and a larger collective feminist project to constitute an alternative, non-patriarchal term to describe the female subject. Baert notes that Diamond's inquiry does make a claim for the maternal subject, woman and mother. She believes Diamond represents and enables new discursive and relational strategies that produce "...a desire out of keeping with paternal law and phallic privilege."⁷⁰ Baert maintains Diamond presents a desiring production by consciously constructing and reconstructing both her mother's lost identity and her own.

In these representations by the daughter, the mother is transformed... to a separate being who is herself a willing, active subject -- a desiring subject. And the recognition of her as both woman and mother enables the daughter's constitution of herself as both subject and daughter -- a desiring subject, a desiring daughter.⁷¹

⁶⁹Renee Baert, "Desiring Daughters," p. 115.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 111.

Mona Hatoum's video is also based on the absence of her mother, except her mother is still alive and lives in war-torn Beirut. *Measures of Distance* is a short video, only 15 minutes. It is produced from materials provided by, and in collaboration with her mother. The dominant images are photographs of Hatoum's mother taken five years prior to the making of the video when she last visited her. The photographs are intimate images that display the mother's naked, mature body inside of the shower. Most of the images are blurred, creating an appearance that Baert describes as porous. Partially obscuring the image of the mother's body is a second image which overlays it. This image consists of Arabic writing taken from personal letters written by the mother to her daughter. These letters, which impart love and longing for her daughter, are read in English by the daughter.

On the soundtrack, Hatoum reads out loud the letters from her mother, revealing her mother's desire to communicate with her daughter about their experiences of taking the photographs together, and about the husband/father who is threatened by the intimacy and exclusion from their correspondence. The letters also reveal that the intensity of the relationship between mother and daughter is in part a new development. As the mother writes:

I suppose he [Hatoum's father] is wondering why you're not communicating with him in the same way. After all, you've always been your father's daughter and I remember that, before you and I made those tapes and photographs together during your last visit, your letters were always mainly addressing him.

Baert notes that Hatoum desires to pursue a different knowledge of and relation to her mother that represents "... a shift in the ways in which the

feminist subject might be said to 'see' and experience (and negotiate) the relation between mother and daughter."⁷² She believes the exploration that took place between Hatoum and her mother places them outside the jurisdiction of the husband/father. Baert states that one of the comments her mother makes in her letters -- "He still nags me about it, as if I had given you something which only belongs to him" -- moves their "act" into subversive terrain, into signifying a possibility of a female subject position that undermines patriarchal ordering. By stressing the significance of the mother and daughter opening up and intervening upon the terrain of the Freudian Symbolic, Baert believes they begin to effect a break from a masculinist structure.

Hatoum's mother's statement -- "To be in exile is not fun at all!" -- refers metaphorically to the relationship with her daughter, but also to the political reality of living in Beirut. The mother's exile from Palestine, and the daughter's from Lebanon, signals many losses -- the loss of family, community and identity. This litany of losses echoes distance and separation.⁷³ Baert believes the social and political forces that have placed both into exile alter their relationship.

The shadow of war presses with increasing urgency in each letter and by the last has forced an end to the possibility of further communication for an indeterminate time. ...The very circumstances which surround the writing underscore how subjectivity is determined not only in gender but in a multiplicity of determinants.⁷⁴

⁷²Ibid, p. 122.

⁷³The concept of exile, as it relates to Hatoum's "Measures of Distance", is also investigated in: Jean Gagnon, Video and Orality, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada), Dec. 10, 1992 - Feb. 28, 1993.

⁷⁴Renee Baert, "Desiring Daughters," p. 121.

Baert believes the reclaiming of and reinvestigation into the maternal figure as object of desire and as desiring subject in Hatoum's video occupies no visible place in the archives of the Freudian Symbolic. The correspondence between the mother and daughter is personal, yet political. It refuses to remain silent about sexual identity, and signifies the building of a feminist relationship outside of the father/husband figure.

As the daughter undertakes to explore a new relation to her mother, so does the mother expand the nature of her desire in relation to the daughter: thus both mother and daughter, as desiring subjects, each rework the intersubjective self-other, mother-daughter relation.⁷⁵

Baert's framework for "Desiring Daughters" sees women (both the mothers and the daughters) as willing, desiring subjects. Baert perceives that the ways that Diamond and Hatoum *construct* the identities of their mothers, constitutes a desiring production and an enabling process -- one that refutes the laws of Freudian Symbolic ordering that would otherwise confine women to play the role of a "stand-in." Baert views Freudian analysis of the mother-daughter relationship as a process that relegates women's identity to positions that only reflect patriarchal ordering -- objecthood and motherhood.⁷⁶ Baert refuses this "order of dereliction and lack" that has been demanded of female subjectivity. Her emphasis rests on describing how the two daughters seek

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 121.

⁷⁶For a review of feminist critiques of Freudian theory see: Jane Flax, Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1990.

transactions of psychic and symbolic transformations outside of these narratives to reclaim and reconstitute their relationship with their mothers.

Baert employs many arguments presented by various feminists to critique the levels of patriarchal investment in Freudian principles.⁷⁷ Besides articulating well-known feminist responses to this problem, she argues for a different economy of female desire and subjectivity. Her desire to "reclaim and reinvest" the maternal and daughter figures as subjects and agents in history explores the ways in which a feminist subject, consciously aware of displacing the masculine symbolic, negotiates and intervenes upon the psychic and social dimensions of both the mother-daughter relationship and female subjectivity. Baert states:

Central to this engagement has been the attempt to extricate the female as subject of history from her designation as Woman and Other, and further to extricate the female as subject of desire from her capture as maternal object.⁷⁸

Baert believes Diamond's and Hatoum's videos not only articulate the daughters' desires, but are "...an exploration of feminine desire in relation to the other (as) woman."⁷⁹ By examining the political and symbolic structures which keep women from forming alliances with one another, Baert (with

⁷⁷Baert examines and includes in her article; Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater," in Toril Moi (ed.), The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia University Press), 1986, Jessica Benjamin's The Bonds of Love (New York: Pantheon Books), 1988, Lucé Irigaray's Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gilian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1985, Brenda Longfellow's "Love Letters to the Mother: The Work of Chantal Akerman," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 19, No. 1-2, 1989, and Rosi Braidotti's "The Politics of Ontological Difference," in Teresa Brennan (ed.), Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis (London and New York: Routledge), 1989.

⁷⁸Renee Baert, "Desiring Daughters," p. 112.

⁷⁹Ibid, p. 122.

Diamond and Hatoum) generates new strategies to talk about these coalitions. By formulating new interpretive frameworks, based on a woman-identified redefinition of the subject, Baert expresses a process of reinterpretation and reconstruction for female identities.

Baert's investigation into the otherwise private relationship amongst members of family, re-inscribes the maternal, the mother, the father, the daughter. She resymbolizes, along with Diamond and Hatoum, the mother-daughter relationship that has otherwise been understood as absent by replacing silence with speech. Baert frames the female subject/artist position in relation to the Other as woman, instead of man through the "new" identities spoken in these two videos. Her investigation offers a willing, active and desiring female production of woman's relation to woman outside of the father/husband/patriarchal figure.

Conclusion:

The discourses and theoretical paradigms that are connected to the study of identity and art are obviously political. Borsa and Baert focus on the language, conceptual models and discourses of the political concepts within postmodern and poststructuralist models which systematically marginalize or exclude women and women's art. Arguing that the female subject/artist has been represented and defined through a patriarchal matrix of signification, they both insist upon redefinitions of the female subject/artist.

In building new frameworks for a feminist definition of the subject, Borsa and Baert incorporate concepts that produce "new" ways to articulate

the female subject/artist. In her work on Frida Kahlo, Borsa suggests Kahlo subverted and played with the margins she inherited, resulting in Kahlo creating her own language in her self-portraits. Baert, in "Desiring Daughters" articulates the concept of desire in relation to the daughters and mothers presented in feminist videos, which produces a study of female subjectivity based on willing, active, desiring female subjects. In both of Borsa's and Baert's frameworks, similar formats and working methods uncover, work through and 'see' something as if for the first time.

Articulating a woman-identified definition of the subject/artist brings forward a new social and cultural being -- woman as artist, author, subject and active agent. This redefinition of the female subject/artist that Borsa and Baert announce as necessary for feminist cultural politics, marks a shift from patriarchal frameworks that are based on concepts of women which reflect disembodiment, repression and absence.

As feminist artists are demonstrating, making art is obviously a process in which women can effect a change in the way women have and can be represented. Borsa and Baert illustrate these artists' acts of agency by positioning women artists in locations which productively articulate and represent feminists' desires for new definitions.

Chapter Three:

The Politics of Location and Canadian Feminist Art Criticism

Introduction:

Social and cultural contexts frame our lives in very specific and concrete ways. Since part of the feminist project is to politicize concepts of identity, these strategies must question where and how identity is affected by social and cultural contexts. This chapter will explore the relevance of theorizing a politics of location for feminist art criticism and how Borsa and Baert articulate notions of location that consider both physical and conceptual notions of space. I will examine what new concepts of location Borsa and Baert are stating, what these concepts mean for feminist cultural politics, and what they reveal about Canadian narratives when applied to Canadian art practices and contexts.

Through analyzing the writings of Borsa and Baert, I have noticed that their work articulates and examines two notions of location. The first notion of location refers to their citing of geographic or physical locations, both about and within Canada. The second notion of location refers to their creation of psychological positions or spaces that address social and political issues pertaining to identity. By articulating a framework which describes notions of location on two different, yet inter-connected levels, I believe Borsa and Baert describe the contexts, places and spaces women occupy according to an artists' immediate, yet culturally specific circumstance. In her article "Towards A Politics of Location," (1990) Joan Borsa has stated:

Where we live, how we live, our relationship to the social systems and structures that surround us are deeply embedded parts of everything we do and remain integral both to our identity or sense of self and to our position or status within a larger cultural and representational field.¹

A central concept in this chapter is the process of politicizing and critiquing borders or differences. These borders or differences relate to the discourses about Canada, as well as the oppressive margins that pertain to conceptual models in identity politics. Viewing place as one of the *relational* structures that informs, influences and affects the understanding of *identity*, I will examine how Borsa and Baert explore the relationship that exists between *place, politics and identity*.

The discourse and narratives about Canada, like the concepts of identity described in chapter two, are viewed by Borsa and Baert as "imagined," unstable terms. According to recent scholarship in Canadian Studies, articulating Canada's cultural products and cultural practices, must involve citing discourses surrounding nation and nationalism.² Because Canada is a country in which an official program of multiculturalism often serves only to occlude or administer the differences within its own borders, the homogeneous discourses that embody the understandings of this country need to be deconstructed, and new questions regarding the dynamic relations

¹Joan Borsa, "Towards A Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality," Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 36.

²An article that focuses on these debates in Canada is Robin Mathew's "The Implications of the Words 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' in Theoretical Discourse in the Canadian Intellectual Community," in Terry Goldie, et al. (eds.), Canada: Theoretical Discourse, (Montreal: Association of Canadian Studies), 1994, p. 273-290.

between nation, gender, race/ethnicity and class need to be posed.³ Feminist critiques of the discourses in Canadian Studies have argued that "...there is a profound and fundamental inability to comprehend our subject, Canada and the Canadian experience..." because cultural work produced by women "...remains too little considered within the dominant Canadian Studies discourse."⁴ Cultural critic Roxana Ng has insisted that "...it is not enough for feminists and ethnic historians to rewrite women's history and ethnic history," but, rather, what is also needed is to "rewrite the history of Canada."⁵

In Margins of Memory (1994)⁶, an exhibition that Renee Baert curated and for which she wrote the exhibition essay, Baert examines some of the concerns that are relevant to the lives of Canadian women artists. All of the work in the exhibition maintains that the conventional narratives by which Canada is named and imagined, are insufficient to represent their cultural experiences and personal locations. Their work prompts Baert to question what issues affect the understanding of a cultural identity in Canada? What influence do dominant discourses about Canada have on women's/feminism's cultural memory? And what is the relevance of inter-facing physical location (Canada) with personal location (identity)?

³An example would be Adrienne Shadd, "Institutionalized Racism and Canadian History," in Carl E. James, (ed.), Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Culture, (Oakville, Ontario: Sheridan College), p. 151-155.

⁴Jill Vickers, "Liberating Theory in Canadian Studies," in Terry Goldie et al.(eds.), Canada: Theoretical Discourse, (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies), 1994, p. 365.

⁵Roxana Ng, "Sexism, Racism and Canadian Nationalism," in Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatmen, (eds.), Feminism and the Politics of Difference, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing), 1993, p. 198.

⁶Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, (Windsor: Windsor Art Gallery), Nov. 20, 1993 - Jan. 9, 1994.

Baert's curatorial practice is obviously informed by postcolonial theory. The result of shifting from a postmodern to a postcolonial model has implied that feminists are asking what kind of critical position will provide a context from which to develop insights about each other as women and as feminists. By recognizing the differences that exist among women, feminists are questioning which spaces or locations women can call home. This struggle stems from confronting the exclusions and oppressions of fixed truths within the category of feminism -- challenging the dominance of a white hegemonic feminist theory which either conflates difference or renders it invisible in its claim to universality.⁷ In the visual arts, panel discussions⁸ and specific art practices have risen out of the search for new solutions, hybrid identities and communities that reassert the conscious agency of women who have been pushed to the margins as subjective voices in a permitted space.

Joan Borsa's essay on Ann Newdigate (1992)⁹ is an example that articulates the feminist struggle to name our own location and politicize our spaces. Newdigate's art, which references acts of agency and struggles of resistance, interrogates the structural and political dynamics that label her artform, her process of making her art, and her biography. Through

⁷For an example of this critique, see: Himani Bannerji, "But Who Speaks for Us? Experience and Agency in Conventional Feminist Paradigms," in H. Bannerji et al. (eds.), Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggle, (Toronto: Women's Press), 1991, p. 67-108.

⁸For a review of the conference initiated by the Women's Art Resource Centre titled *Empowerment and Marginalization* (Toronto, April 5-7, 1991), see Anne Vespry's article "What Does 'Empowerment and Marginalization' Mean Anyway?" Fuse 15. 1&2, (Fall 1991), p. 4-5.

⁹Joan Borsa, "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work," in Elizabeth Kidd and Kitty Scott, (eds.), Notions of Home, (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery), Oct. 10 - Dec. 11, 1992, p. 8-13.

Newdigate's work, Borsa suggests that *space* can be a *social and psychological* positioning. This means that the spaces which once comprised specific social processes, can no longer be seen as fixed or non-dialectical. Rather, Borsa's account for a psychological 'new' space, recognizes struggle as an active constitutive component in which feminist identities can be creatively positioned.

The emphasis on articulating alternative agendas that transgress and displace traditional notions of identity, place and history, is fundamental to the ability of challenging the dominant discourses of power in Canada. Borsa and Baert articulate, through the examination of aesthetic practices, new spaces where politicized identities could be located. They create new political possibilities by opening-up critical categories that do not suppress issues of diversity, conflict or multiplicity. Borsa and Baert represent and work with strategies already presented by bell hooks which she defines as, "...formulating counter-hegemonic cultural practices that identify the spaces where we can begin the process of re-vision."¹⁰

The Politics of Situating "Canada":

The recurring identity crisis in Canada's political and cultural history has been reflected in art that questions concepts of nation, cultural nationalism and colonial ties. In the early 1970s, Joyce Wieland attempted to affirm a unique Canadian identity as a bulwark against American cultural

¹⁰bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Difference, (London: Turnaround), 1991, p. 145.

imperialism. In her work, Wieland celebrated Canada's centennial in her plastic quilt series *Patriotism* (1966-67), she engaged with the erotic and with sexual difference in her lithograph *O Canada* (1970), and focused on images of the snow, winter and the North in films such as *Reason over Passion* (1969).¹¹ Wieland's extensive production, occurring at a time when Canadian nationalism and North American feminism were on the rise, insisted that notions of "Canada" must be situated as those in opposition to American models and themes. While this concern about Canadian cultural autonomy continues to be important, the questions about identity and Canadian cultural nationalism that feminists are presently asking have become more biographical and theoretical.

A new generation of women artists are looking at Canadian identity from multiple perspectives: from larger spheres of cultural and political imperialism, from the specificity of their geographical locations, and from the perspective of the oppression that led them to immigrate or the repression of their cultures in Canada. Borsa and Baert are working dialectically with these art practices by critiquing the dominant Canadian cultural codes and narratives that are raised in a particular artist's work.

The articulation of a politics of location in which notions of Canadian cultural narratives intersect with feminist discourse is obviously rooted in the debates over empire and colony as well as over gender. Feminist art historian Monika Gagnon has characterized the conditions Canadian women

¹¹For further reading on Joyce Wieland see: Gunda Lambton, Stealing the Show: Seven Women Artists in Canadian Public Art (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 1994 and Kass Banning's "The Mummification of Mommy: Joyce Wieland as the AGO's First Living Other," in Jessica Bradley, (ed.), Sightlines: Reading Contemporary Canadian Art, (Montreal: Artexes editions), 1994, p. 153-167.

artists face as being a "double oppression": they are the oppressed sex in a patriarchal culture, and they have a culture haunted by a history of colonization.¹² The work of Borsa and Baert addresses this dilemma by disentangling many of the issues that surround art and Canadian women's cultural identity.

In curating and writing the catalogue for the group exhibition Margins of Memory (1994), Baert focuses on the association between memory and location in the way Canadian identities and Canadian cultural narratives are presented in contemporary women's art. The artists she chose for this exhibition all disrupt and challenge the dominant mythologies about Canada -- either its historical reclamations or its state-run ideologies and policies. Baert focuses on the discourses concerning nation, nationalism(s), and representation that are explored in the exhibition, along with the complexities and instability of narratives about Canadian culture and identity. Questions asked in this exhibition include: how is "place" or location referenced, whose memory is considered marginal in our cultural narratives, and what is the relationship between the subjective (identity) and location (Canada)? According to Baert:

These works challenge any idea of the fixity of either identity or place; as identity is itself an unstable and culturally marked process, so is 'place' not contained by its borders but implicated in a far wider arena of economics, representation, and history.¹³

¹²Gagnon, Monika, "Work in Progress: Canadian Women in the Visual Arts 1975-1987," in Rhea Tregebov, (ed.), Work In Progress: Building Feminist Culture, (Toronto: The Women's Press), 1987, p. 121.

¹³Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor), Nov. 20, 1993 - Jan. 9, 1994, p. 4.

Baert points out the importance of historical and cultural retrieval as a thematic link in several of the artists' work. Sarindar Dhaliwal's installation, *Punjabi Sheets #2: Family Tree* (Fig. 27), consists of 16 rectangular slate tablets inscribed with text that outline East Indian extended-family kinship relations. The tablets are evenly-spaced from each other on the floor of the gallery. On these slate markers, Dhaliwal recites the traditional sequence of kinship terms, pivoting around the maternal term. Beside each plaque are halved coconut shells that contain piles of pigment: vivid ochre, alizarin crimson or lamp black. Besides being reminiscent of pigments used in painting, they are the vivid colours of East Indian spices. Baert believes that the shells of coloured pigments, like the many other elements in Dhaliwal's work, refer to "... a poetic evocation of the active processes of remaking."¹⁴

The sequence of familial cycles that Dhaliwal cites on the slate tablets (i.e. "My sister's son is my bhanja and her daughter is my bhanji. I call my sister behanji ...") marks out 52 kinship terms, many of which have no Western equivalent. The kinship terms identify gender, paternal or maternal lineage, whether they are ties by blood or marriage, and even age or position within the family hierarchy. Baert notes that Dhaliwal's sequencing emphasizes not only traditional East Indian naming systems, but an elaborate "... process of social learning -- at once unconscious yet fully ritualized -- by which cultures are reproduced."¹⁵

Baert focuses on the processes of "re-investment" and the "attempt at recapture" in Dhaliwal's work. Stating that *Punjabi Sheets #2: Family Tree* is

¹⁴Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 4.

suggestive of "...a knowledge which must be 'learned' because, in important ways, it is no longer 'lived',"¹⁶ Baert believes Dhaliwal's piece is not just a presentation of an archaic system no longer in use but reflects, rather, on loss and recapture. Dhaliwal's emphasis on rituals, so fundamentally significant to an East Indian way of life and thinking, stands in contrast to the lack of recognition of the place of rituals in Canadian life. Baert believes the built-in circularity of the naming system's sequences offers Dhaliwal a route to explore issues of continuity and community. Baert comments that "...the circularity of the sequence, its potentially endless repetition, suggests an obsessive attempt at recapture,"¹⁷ of East Indian traditions.

Kinship relations and historical and cultural retrieval issues are also reflected in Marlene Creates' *Places of Presence: Newfoundland kin and ancestral land, Newfoundland, 1989-91* (Figs. 28 and 29). Creates worked on this project when she returned to her family's homeland in Newfoundland to explore the history of her ancestors who sailed up the Labrador coast each summer for the fishing season. The two works from the series in the show are sub-titled *where my grandmother was born* and *where my grandfather was born*. The installations consist of "assemblages" composed of multiple media. Various individuals' stories unfold in texts, photographs, hand-drawn maps and found objects. The text, from the interviews Creates conducted, describes where people lived. The intimate photographs are of the storytellers, and on the gallery floor are carefully selected landmarks -- objects such as stones or wood Creates collected from particular sites in which her

¹⁶Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 4.

relatives lived. Each assemblage or story is accompanied by a "memory map", a drawing of the location completed by each relative who told his or her story. The maps consist of personalized interpretations, some referring to the physical aspects of the land and others providing evidence of locations or buildings that no longer exist (an example is Creates' grandmother's house). Creates has stated:

I'm not interested in what is actually fact or fiction, I'm interested in peoples' memories. That's why the memory maps they drew for me are so interesting. I'm interested in what the perceptual things are that stand out in someone's mind when they're thinking about a place.¹⁸

Material links, stories (visual and written) and images emphasize the interrelations between people and place, between human culture and human nature. Besides giving the viewer a portrait of the small, rural, island community, Creates' installation depicts a living culture and the natural and social forces that shape the people and the land. Her choice of found objects, which act as sensual visual markers, portraits and hand-drawn maps allows different points of entry into her work.

Baert believes that Creates' tracing of a family history, although very specific to a "place" (Newfoundland), uses the literal as a path to the metaphoric. Baert says that, in *Places of Presence: kin and ancestral land, Newfoundland 1989-1991*, Creates presents a yearning for a reclamation of a dispossessed heritage. She believes Creates' process does not imply that there can be a complete return to "origins", to "place", but, rather, that "home" can

¹⁸This quote by Marlene Creates was cited in a review by Randy Burton regarding an exhibition Creates participated in, titled "Environment," held at The Photographers Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in March, 1992. It was reproduced in *Blackflash*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (Spring 1992), p. 11.

come to mean a psychological connection.¹⁹ This connection can be to a kinship system, as we see in Dhaliwal's piece, or to the place and ways that compose a lived environment. Baert believes that Creates' tracing of her early family history is evidence of a lived environment that no longer exists.

...[T]he narratives provide an experiential, and often gender-inflected, account of a 'place' at once utterly specific yet part of a broader pattern over time of cultural, historical and economic transformation within the island.²⁰

Sharyn Yuen and Jin-me Yoon address how narratives of Canadian history have been shaped by the ideologies of the dominant cultural identity in their installations for Margins of Memory. Yoon is a first-generation immigrant of Korean descent. Yuen is a second-generation Canadian of Chinese descent. Both of these artists address the cultural dislocations and dissonances produced through immigration.

In her installation, Sharyn Yuen retraces fragments of Chinese immigration to Canada at the turn of the century. Her work is *John Chinaman* (Fig. 30) and it bears an imaginary, yet coded, title that addresses the seldom-voiced Chinese-Canadian immigration experience. As Baert notes, the title "...may stand as the generic Chinese everyman, the nameless, faceless, voiceless figure of an untold history."²¹

Yuen's work consists of eight life-size suit jackets of hand-made paper. On top of the paper is newspaper text and photographs in English and

¹⁹Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, p. 5.

²⁰Ibid, p. 5.

²¹Ibid, p.6.

Chinese about Chinese immigration during 1885-1947. The paper suit jackets are suspended from the ceiling with a single, dimly-lit light bulb placed inside of each jacket. Although the jackets are empty, Yuen has shaped them into assumed shapes of absent, yet animated, figures -- possibly the material embodiment of ghosts.

The predominant text that she uses is an official receipt, a \$500 "head tax" certificate issued by the Dominion of Canada. This tax was intended to restrict Chinese immigration from 1885 to 1923 following the building, primarily by Chinese labour, of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The Exclusion Act, in force from 1923-1947, banned Chinese immigration altogether and kept Sharyn Yuen's father separated from his wife and first-born child for 13 years.

Baert believes Yuen, by mounting work that responds to and interacts with the "storytelling" about Chinese immigration through the use of newspaper text, re-tells and intervenes in dominant assumptions and mythologies that perpetuate systemic racist policies. By examining the formation and dispersal of memory -- especially in relation to which groups are included in and excluded from canonized Canadian historical and popular discourse -- Baert reveals the incompleteness of cultural narratives. Baert writes: "Yuen restores the severed links of a history so absent from the stories, myths and schoolbooks of Canada that it requires special research to uncover."²² She believes that *John Chinaman*, the faceless, voiceless figure of

²²Ibid, p. 6.

an untold history, "...loses some of [his] anonymity as it enters into a reclaimed and retold account of history"²³ through Yuen's presentation.

Jin-me Yoon uses the title of a Korean Buddhist song for her installation *body a thread dis ease a mountain*. (Fig. 31) In her piece, Yoon connects autobiographical narratives she and her family have experienced through the process of immigrating to Canada, to wider geopolitical, social and historical events and cultural displacement. Like many of the other installations in the exhibition, the work foregrounds issues of cultural displacement and assigns an abiding value to kinship relations.

The dominant image of the installation is a life sized framed photograph that is propped against the wall of the gallery. The upper half of the black and white image is a framed photograph of Yoon's mother and three daughters, taken in 1967. (Baert refers to this photograph as a passport photograph -- possibly to acknowledge that it was taken shortly after the mother and three daughters immigrated to Canada). The lower half mirrors the top image with a contemporary photograph taken in 1993. Baert notes that the father's absence from the 'family' photo points to the condition of the family's prior separation common to immigration and that "...the repetition of this grouping in the later photo serves to emphasize the maternal lineage."²⁴

Another element of Yoon's installation are the triple cords of bright red electrical wire, or 'bloodlines', that extend from the photograph to each of 13 lightboxes. Inside of the lightboxes are photographic mylar images; a scar, a

²³Ibid, p. 6.

²⁴Ibid, p. 6.

hair, immigration documents and maps of a divided Korea. Baert believes that these images "...invoke the processes of desire, projection and identification which circulate within the work."²⁵ In relation to the construction of memory and personal history, Baert suggests Yoon's installation functions through fragmented links that are connected to political and cultural chains of associations.

Historically and presently, Canada has acted as a colonizer of aboriginal peoples. Canadian history attempts to "naturalize" this unequal, colonial relationship by disregarding the issue all together. Rebecca Belmore, an artist with Ojibway ancestry, repossesses objects and attitudes about Canadian society in her work as a performance and visual artist. *Rising to the Occasion* (Fig. 32) is a dress that Belmore made and wore for a performance she gave to mark the ceremonial visit of Prince Andrew and Lady Sarah Ferguson to her town in 1987.²⁶ For the exhibition, the dress is presented as a full-standing object. Modeled after a Victorian tea dress, the dress has many clever adaptations and localized "Canadian" resonances. In Belmore's ironic presentation, the cliché codes are embedded in the very tissue of the garment. Representing "Canada" is the bustle constructed of a beaver nest , representing "Indianness" are the beads and braids, and representing Britain are various royal memorabilia like the 'Royal Dalton' candy-dishes made of china that are attached to the dress. By placing these objects within complex

²⁵Ibid, p. 6.

²⁶The performance, titled *Twelve Angry Crinolines*, was a silent parade by twelve women artists and activists on the streets of Thunder Bay, Ontario on July 16, 1987.

histories and into a satirical context, Belmore represents various aspects of Canada's colonial past and present. Baert comments:

Belmore not only mounts, in the words of one critic, "a synoptic history of collision between unmatchable codes," but extends this historic reference into contemporary issues of popular representation and cultural tourism.²⁷

Belmore's dress and performance transform notions that a mono-culture exists in Canada. She wittily plays out the re-visitation of colonial history (by the Royal couple) to humorous and pointed effect.²⁸ Belmore's re-working of Canada's colonial past is described by Baert as "... a restitching of the material of cultural cliché."²⁹ In contrast with the work of Yuen and Dhaliwal, in Belmore's work it is not the result of immigration or emigration that stands in disjunctive relation to the conventional narratives about Canada, but, as Baert notes, the "resident colonial past."

The last piece from Margins of Memory I want to focus on is Jan Peacock's *Reader by the Window* (Fig. 33). Her work consists of two elements. The first is a table with two small T.V. surveillance monitors sunk into it in a book-like configuration. Beside the table is a big screen, framed by black cloth

²⁷Renee Baert is referring to the article by Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Rebecca Belmore," in the exhibition catalogue by Diana Nemiroff et al.(eds.), Land, Spirit, Power, (Ottawa: National Art Gallery of Canada), 1993.

²⁸Belmore incorporates humor into many of her performances. A recent performance -- "Road Trip West: Seven Concession Stands" -- was reviewed by Beth Seaton who states that "Belmore often takes over both the movements and spaces deemed to belong to the 'traditional Indian woman stereotype'." Seaton believes "... this act throws her weight back at the feet of those who would demand this act: husband, tourists, and her predominantly white audience." See: Beth Seaton, "Review: Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes From the Frontier/Rebecca Belmore," Parachute, No. 69, (Spring 1994), p. 41-42.

²⁹Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, p. 6.

curtains. A chair accompanies the table, inviting the viewer to be a "reader" situated in front of the "window." The images on both the window and the reader screens are of landscape and cityscape walks, recorded on video by Peacock over a period of several years in Canada, the U.S., Europe and Japan. While the images alternate between the window and the reader screen, there are also variations and changes between them, so that they often appear to be the same.

Superimposed over the shifting landscape images on the reader monitors is a hand that repeatedly scrolls across the image, as if turning the page of a book, or scribbling, or scanning backwards as if reading Braille. On the window screen, a looping cycle of lush, colourful images accompanies a soundtrack layered with music and whispered narratives about the experience of traveling. Part of the soundtrack is a recurring refrain: "This place ..." "What?" "It reminds me ..." "What?" "It reminds me of another place."

Baert's comments on this work focus on how memory is intricately bound to the psyche and its investments. She situates Peacock's work as a process of desire in which the unfamiliar is linked to the known. Baert identifies the "reader" as a process of looking inward, and the "window" as one of looking outward. The dynamics or flow between the subjective (the personal) and the cultural (the social) are presented by Peacock and Baert as inseparable and intertwined. Both question the difference between image and event, especially since, "... in a world where we armchair travel, seeing almost every corner of the globe in film, in television, in mass media ...,"³⁰ the site of

³⁰Ibid, p. 7.

experience or recollection is articulated as an imaginary, constructed place. On the soundtrack of Peacock's video, a passage echoes the shuffling of desire and a vague sense of location:

...We continually imagine a point of arrival that is both anticipated and remembered, inevitable but deferred. ... It's an exemplary elsewhere -- a place that will inscribe itself in us, or did, or would have, if only...

Peacock's installation is obviously the only piece in the exhibition that does not address issues pertaining to race. I do believe, however, that *Reader by the Window* serves to strengthen Baert's curatorial statements because it questions the relationship between the personal and the cultural within the realm of imagined communities and imaginary locations.

Each of the works that Baert selected for Margins of Memory challenges the idea of the fixity of identity or place. Focusing on what she refers to as "...the desire of the artists to shift the boundaries that have otherwise silenced or structured the movement of their identit(i)es," Baert develops a politics of location that is grounded in deconstructing and reconstructing notions of identity. The spatial metaphors that she uses to describe location and identity are not based on essentialist notions. Rather, her critique of Canadian narratives is informed by conceptions of space that recognize place, position and location as produced by history and reproduced by discourse. According to feminist geographers like Liz Bondi, the question of how metaphors related to place and identity are understood must be approached critically and creatively. She notes:

It seems to me that the emphasis on where -- on position, on location -- is allowing questions of identity to be thought in different ways. For example, these metaphors appear to be encouraging a concern with the relationships between different kinds of identities and therefore with

the development of a politics grounded in affinities and coalition, rather than some pristine, coherent consciousness.³¹

To recognize the multiple constituent factors that frame a cultural memory is to recognize that new questions can offer new information. Baert believes that the histories and knowledge presented in these works have traditionally been defined as "other." She states that these histories and knowledge have operated at the "margins" of several master texts and discourses. Baert suggests that these margins are not just superfluous, but are, however, structurally integral to understandings of a nation's cultural memory. She views them as operating as "borders that demarcate and yet, contain" -- resulting in margins of memory that are not marginal, but integral.³² Relating the artists' narratives to a discussion of cultural memory, Baert states:

These works, centered in the off spaces or margins of memory and cultural narrative, re-center and reframe the whole. This is other than an adding-on to render more complete. Rather, it is more in keeping with the poststructuralist notion of 'supplementary', in which the 'add-on' to a narrative does not 'add up' to a new coherent whole.³³

Working within a framework that questions Canada's cultural and collective memory, Margins of Memory introduces "differently" positioned histories and narratives that disrupt the homogenizing effects of Canadian cultural narratives. The concept of nation, like identity, is exposed in the

³¹Liz Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics," in Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.), Place and the Politics of Identity, (London: Routledge), 1993, p. 98.

³²Renee Baert, Margins of Memory, p. 8.

³³Ibid, p. 4.

exhibition as a very specific construction that often functions to silence or appropriate the voices of the "other." The work in the exhibition, and Baert's essay, intervene upon imperialist and patriarchal notions and articulate instead contradictory, even disjunctive, social sites and personal histories.

Baert's curatorial project, which addresses the implications of real and ideological borders in Canada, explores the relevance of postcolonial theory on discussions regarding Canadian identity. Besides the relevance of this theory on issues pertaining to race in Canada, her work represents a shift from colonial to postcolonial notions of space that can be traced in recent scholarship in Canadian Studies.³⁴ In her essay, Baert argues for a concept of space or location that is oppositional and challenges the way in which space has traditionally been articulated: as an universal, exclusionary, hierarchical, abstract notion. By addressing history and difference, Baert's postcolonial articulation of space does not eliminate contextual conditions. I find that her framework could be aligned with Homi Bhabha's, where space is represented as a "...hybrid articulation of cultural differences and identification."³⁵

The political relevance of margins and centers that influence and affect Canadian identity is the focus of an earlier series of articles and exhibition catalogues written by Joan Borsa. Besides being the Prairie regional editor for *Vanguard* magazine from 1983 to 1986, Borsa curated two major

³⁴A significant article that reflects this scholarship is Richard Cavell's "Theorizing Canadian Space: Postcolonial Articulations," in Terry Goldie et al.(eds.), Canada: Theoretical Discourse, (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies), 1994, p. 75-104. Cavell states: "To reinscribe and resituate the notion of space as it has been developed in Canadian cultural production would be to substitute the notion of heterotopia for the notions of utopia which has largely governed thought about space in Canada."

³⁵Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation," in his book Nation and Narration, (London: Routledge), 1990, p. 292.

exhibitions on Prairie art: Out of Saskatchewan: An Exhibition of Contemporary Art, held in Vancouver to celebrate Expo 86,³⁶ and Another Prairies (September - October 1986), shown at The Art Gallery at Harbourfront in Toronto.³⁷ In these articles, Borsa addresses the impact of regionalism and its place in Canadian art. She examines the ways economic and political centralization has created power inequalities at the expense of the Prairie provinces. Borsa also looks at how the effects of power inequalities affect Prairie artists' production (the way Prairie artists' view themselves) and how art produced from the Prairies is perceived outside of the region.

Borsa's thesis for these exhibitions is based on what she views as the unequal exchange between regions -- the political, economic and ideological factors that produce the concept of regionalism. Regionalism can be defined as an ideological construction which situates the Prairie experience and history in a marginal relationship to central Canadian ideology and political centralization.³⁸ Relating these issues to discussions about art, Borsa discusses the continual policing of the art world by canons which are also formulated and decided in Central Canada. She discusses how critics often misinterpret the work of Prairie artists, accusing it of lacking "intellectual rigor," or avoid it altogether. Borsa examines why Prairie artists have been conditioned to see themselves in relation to what happens elsewhere. As a result, her

³⁶Joan Borsa, "Is There A Saskatchewan Art Tradition," in Out of Saskatchewan: An Exhibition of Contemporary Art, (Regina: SaskExpo 86 Corporation), 1986.

³⁷Joan Borsa, Another Prairies, (Toronto: The Art Gallery at Harbourfront), Sept. 12 - Oct. 26, 1986.

³⁸For an example of this form of critique regarding debates about regionalism in Canada, see Peter McCormick, "Regionalism in Canada: Disentangling the Threads," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 24, No. 2, (Summer 1989), p. 5-21.

assessment deals with the impact of difference, domination and dependency on the Prairie experience.

When living on the Prairies, one is very aware of being outside the major art centres and distant from the power bases -- it is a long way from Winnipeg, Moose Jaw or Prince Albert to the Canada Council offices, to the National Gallery, or to Queen Street. ...The west-east travel is not reciprocal -- few artists, critics, dealers, curators, etc., travel specifically to Winnipeg or Regina to see an exhibition, visit studios or participate in Prairie culture.³⁹

Borsa looks at regional issues in Canadian art criticism from a personal, insider location -- from a perspective that she "has first-hand knowledge and experience with."⁴⁰ Borsa was born and raised in a rural community in Saskatchewan. Her interest in the work of Saskatchewan artists stems from her own personal history and similar personal engagements with the issues that Prairie art addresses. In our interview, she commented that after being away from Saskatchewan for a number of years and then returning made her see how Prairie artists are victims of marginalization, regional disparities, and colonial imperialism. Borsa commented that throughout her researching process "I was no longer looking at artists, but symbols that equated aunts, uncles, family, neighbors and family."

By critiquing the pre-determined structures that circulate outside of the province (in the center) and responding to the myths of Prairie art activity (at the margins), Borsa's essays open up needed discussions of colonial practices

³⁹Joan Borsa, Another Prairies, p. 4.

⁴⁰Quoted from unpublished interview with Joan Borsa on Dec. 31, 1993, in Saskatoon for this thesis.

which operate in Canada.⁴¹ She obviously brings a more regional perspective to bear upon the dominant discourses that frame Canadian cultural narratives and cultural memory. In Borsa's work, as in Baert's Margins of Memory, interfacing of the politics of place with the politics of identity points to the relational and multi-dimensional effects that influence our understandings of a cultural self.

"Home" and the Feminist Struggles over Borders:

When describing the relationship between location and identity, the unstable territories and representations of history, nation, community, ethnicity, language, race, class, gender, and sexuality come into play. Feminism has been critical of the ways many of these concepts and ideologies have served political agendas that foster polarities of difference -- between center and margin, masculine and feminine, local and global. Since part of the feminist project of Borsa and Baert is to move beyond a model of cultural difference that fosters polarities to a new cultural politics of difference, their emphasis is on breaking boundaries that otherwise foster patriarchal agendas.

It is important to note that the border can be seen to either liberate or exclude, protect or imprison, define or obliterate. Borders can be real, metaphoric or ideological. It is in this way that borders can metaphorically be read as sites of political struggle for feminists. As Jamelie Hassan has noted,

⁴¹ An interesting feminist approach on Manitoba women artists that touches briefly on similar issues that Borsa raises on Saskatchewan artists, is Sigrid Dahle's A Multiplicity of Voices: Work by Manitoba Women Artists, (Winnipeg: Gallery 1.1.1.), March 4 - 29, 1987.

modes and methods of interfacing with a border brings one in contact with what needs to be negotiated and struggled against.⁴²

In Territories of Difference, an anthology edited by Baert, she states that contemporary art practices are tending "...to be positioned precisely in the interstices between the territories of language, culture, race and gender."⁴³ The questions that Borsa and Baert raise in their writings examine the relations of power within these interstices, these borders. Their writings question whether the definitions of certain borders can be shifted or moved in order to produce alternative positions? If feminist struggles can be positioned in spaces that can be considered their own? And, if it is possible to create new centers existing within margins and margins within centers so that women can be seen as straddling several discrete and even contradictory cultural positions?

In the exhibition Notions of Home (1992)⁴⁴, curated by Elizabeth Kidd, "home" is not seen as a stable conventional ground or a fixed residence. Rather, the notion of "home" is presented in relative terms, defined differently by each artist. This exhibition highlights the work of three contemporary Canadian artists, Joanne Tod, Ann Newdigate and Ross Muirhead. The notions of "home" that are investigated in the artists' work

⁴²Unpublished interview with Jamelie Hassan, Dec. 3, 1994, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, in conjunction with the exhibition *Disrupted Borders: An intervention in definitions of boundaries*. I conducted this interview for "Art Snack," aired on Dec. 16, CHUO-FM, The University of Ottawa.

⁴³Renee Baert, "Introduction," Territories of Difference, (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery), p. 8.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Kidd and Kitty Scott, (eds.), Notions of Home, (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery), Oct. 10 - Dec. 11, 1992.

are developed out of the artists' own experiences, as places of residence and specific art practices. The essay on Ann Newdigate was written by Joan Borsa.

Borsa's essay for Notions of Home is titled: "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work."⁴⁵ Ann Newdigate is a tapestry artist. She works with cotton, silk and wool fibers in a style of tapestry referred to as Gobelin-style tapestries (Figs. 34 - 37). The images on her tapestries are often multi-layered, and depict elaborate symbols reminiscent of 14th-century tapestries. In many of her pieces, patterns of checkerboard grids and geometric shapes are incorporated. Her work *The old lady and the Canon on a quick tour of the mythical centre / I am not a tourist are you?* is an exception to her usual method of working. It is a colour photocopy produced from one of her tapestries.

The text and images on Newdigate's tapestries reflect her experiences of living in two locations she has called home (Saskatoon and South Africa). They also question issues related to the art history canon and to feminism. In the text and titles of her work, Newdigate often alludes to being a tourist, to exploring mythical centers and to "escaping old haunts."⁴⁶

Borsa focuses on the "dualistic position of insider and outsider" in Newdigate's tapestries -- the many ways in which Newdigate's life

⁴⁵Joan Borsa, "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work," in Elizabeth Kidd and Kitty Scott (eds.), Notions of Home, (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery), Oct. 10 - Dec. 11, 1992, p. 8-13.

⁴⁶An instance of this cross-referencing of identity and place can be found in the following couple of lines: *Looking for a good ancestor, The Nomad lit a candle and waited ...Look at it this way, National Identity Borders and the Time Factor or Wee Mannie, and I am not a tourist are you?* These titles and texts are from works included in Notions of Home, as well as in Newdigate's solo exhibition Ann Newdigate Mills: Look At It This Way, (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery), October 1988.

experiences model nomadic traditions, while at the same time suggest a sense of security and belonging. Borsa's essay develops alongside two articles which she acknowledges as instrumental to formulating the two parts of her title, "If You Knew Ann" and "Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work." The first is an article written by Susan Crean on Emily Carr, "If You Knew Emily: A Reevaluation of Carr's Painting and Writing," which investigates the largely unaddressed territory that misaligns Emily Carr's archive.⁴⁷ Crean takes into account Emily Carr's specific politics of location to redraw the artist's biography from a feminist perspective.

The second is from a recent exhibition of Allyson Clay's work titled "Traces of a City in the Spaces Between Some People."⁴⁸ Borsa states that Newdigate's practice acknowledges an "uninhabitable space" similar to the place Clay's arguments occupy. For Borsa, the work of Allison Clay presents similar arguments against male Modernist art traditions and an unsettled association with abstraction and painting.⁴⁹

Borsa commented in our interview that she needed to address the obviously, "missed" areas of Ann Newdigate's production, those that have gone unrecognized and unformulated.⁵⁰ The feminist scholarship on Newdigate has generally focused on her choice of medium, tapestry, and how

⁴⁷Susan Crean, "If You Knew Emily: A Reevaluation of Carr's Painting and Writing," Canadian Art, (Spring 1991), p. 16-21.

⁴⁸Allyson Clay, "A New City," Traces of a City in the Spaces Between Some People, (Vancouver: Charles S. Scott Gallery), June 4 - July 12, 1992.

⁴⁹Joan Borsa, "'If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work,'" p. 10.

⁵⁰Unpublished interview with Joan Borsa on Dec. 31, 1993, in Saskatoon for this thesis.

it has been often marginalized or ignored in fine art territory.⁵¹ Maintaining that tapestry has been associated with the subordinate domain of the decorative arts and crafts and the "feminine," Lynne Bell notes that it is "...a medium that suffered further devaluation through its association with middle-class women's 'artwork' produced in the home."⁵² This analysis of Newdigate's work is key to understanding the medium, and the divisive constructions and assumptions of art versus craft that permeate the art hierarchy.⁵³ However, Borsa believes Newdigate's *maneuvering* between traditional fine art and craft designations needs to be explored.

Metaphorically, Borsa states her aims in her introduction:

Displacing rather than being displaced. Suspending categories, setting uncomfortable designations adrift. Clearing the tangled roots and dense underbrush so that something else has space to take form, to be seen, to make its presence known. Yet the archives, as she finds her way to them, frequently hold less than what she imagined.⁵⁴

Borsa points to the many locations that intersect Newdigate's life and artwork, and argues against the concept of a traditional, essentialised notion of "home." The first location that Borsa cites is geographic and refers to the places where Ann Newdigate has lived. Borsa notes that Newdigate spent her first thirty years near Cape Town, South Africa, immigrated to Canada in 1966

⁵¹The most recent example is Lynne Bell's essay for the exhibition Ann Newdigate Mills: Look At It This Way, (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery), Oct. 27 - Dec. 4, 1988.

⁵²Ibid, p. 6.

⁵³This analysis was completed at the same time influential books on feminist critiques of the art/craft dichotomy were being conducted, such as Rozsika Parker's The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine, (New York: Routledge), 1984.

⁵⁴Joan Borsa, "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work," p. 8.

and moved to the Canadian Prairies -- Saskatoon -- where she now resides. Borsa states that the contrast between these two opposite geographical locations is referenced in her work through concepts of "...belonging, not belonging; having a home, being homeless, feeling nomadic, transplanted, uprooted, yet oddly enough, located, liberated, positioned."⁵⁵

The second location Borsa investigates relates to the discourses that surround tapestry and Newdigate's acts of resistance. Borsa notes that Newdigate's choice of working in tapestry, at a time "...when artistic practices were heavily situated upon Modernist painting done by men,"⁵⁶ obviously demonstrates signs of a subversive practice. And even in relation to the tapestry tradition, Newdigate prefers not to work within aristocratic notions that link preciousness with class, aesthetic value and economic status,⁵⁷ but prefers processes borrowed from non-traditional Gobelin and kilim methods. Borsa sees many of Newdigate's choices as what "...underlines what she and her offspring accomplished when they moved to the Canadian Prairies --

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 10.

⁵⁶Modernism is and continues to be a popular phenomenon in Saskatchewan from the 1960's to the present. Various reasons attribute to this, ranging from the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops instructed by Barnett Newman and Clement Greenberg, to the influence of male abstract painters known as 'The Regina Five.' For further information see the exhibition catalogue by Jonh O'Brian, The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshop, (Saskatoon: The Mendel Art Gallery), Oct. 5 - Nov. 19, 1989.

⁵⁷While attending the M.F.A. program at the University of Saskatchewan in the 1970s, Newdigate investigated the assumptions and values that led to the marginalization of tapestry in her thesis "Love, Labour and Tapestry: Unraveling a Victorian Legacy." In order to acquire tapestry instruction, she did a year of study at the Tapestry Department of the Edinburgh College of Art. For further information about the training Newdigate received as an artist, and an analysis of the contexts in which she has worked, see Lynne Bell's exhibition catalogue.

when they abandoned their rights to authenticity and inheritance by displacing their South African aristocratic lineage."⁵⁸

The way in which Newdigate "moves between locations" relates to the uninhabitable spaces that Borsa believes Allison Clay's work also references. Borsa refers to the article on Allison Clay in order to demonstrate the scholarship that needs to be written on how women artists have attempted to work against Modernist principles and Modernist aesthetic traditions. The model of "belonging, not belonging, having a home, and being homeless" are nomadic notions. Borsa believes they are dichotomies that Newdigate's work seeks to resolve. Borsa states:

It is as if she is most familiar, most at home with the dichotomy of resolution ... more 'at home' with spaces-in-transition than with the assurance of existing traditions and contexts that surround her.⁵⁹

Newdigate's identification with a hybrid personality, a migrant, a nomad -- never feeling at home wherever she is -- also evokes a feeling of being located, liberated from restrictive positions. For example, in the piece *Some nomads never stop yearning for a bed of roses*, (Fig. 36), a figure sits in the center of a flower bed on an island. Borsa refers to the figure as being "Buddha-like or Venus-like."⁶⁰ No clear reference is given as to where the composition can be located. The person sits comfortably, "holding its space." Borsa concludes:

⁵⁸Joan Borsa, "If You Knew Ann: Traces of an Artist in the Spaces Between Some Work," p. 12.

⁵⁹Ibid, p. 12.

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 12.

The home or location here is not an inherited or easily identifiable one -- it is somewhere between here and there -- an elsewhere that I believe [Ann Newdigate] now calls home.⁶¹

Both Newdigate and Borsa struggle against narratives that attempt to position identity and place as 'already determined' through patriarchal inscription. Issues of time and mythical constructs become focal to their investigations. They insist that cultural productions are intrinsically linked to the politics surrounding artistic medium and aesthetics, and to the never fully stable boundaries of history, nation, community, class and gender. Newdigate and Borsa present visual and written questions about the notion of one's own imagined history and an imagined homeland. Notions of "home" in this regard can only be definable in relation to the individual, to circumstance and to the particular. Transforming sites of resistance into sites of liberation, the boundaries of fact and fiction, of personal and social, blurs the notions of neutrality -- filling "spaces" with imagination, resistance and creativity. This process of transformation, defines identity and place not in the realm of a real essence, nor in the realm of a received mythology, but in the realm of creative and imaginative acts.

The notion of liberating borders, which is especially relevant to feminist theories of agency, can be viewed as a choice to consciously shift the boundaries that determine who can or cannot speak, think, or act. The position in which Borsa places the work of Newdigate is between the polarities of Newdigate's own geographical, cultural, artistic and biographical

⁶¹Ibid, p. 13.

history. In this way, "home" is defined as a state of mind, a place that is directly linked to Newdigate's own identity.

Feminist theorists Bidy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have suggested "home" is a category that, especially for women, is extremely problematic because any articulation of female identity must account for the construction of a multiply placed and a multiply linked subjectivity.⁶² Borsa's approach to Newdigate's work articulates a politics of location based on "intersubjective relations."⁶³ Her analysis fractures the designation of margin and center or any other dualistic relationship in order to disrupt the hierarchies that perpetuate power and privilege on the one side and exploitation on the other. As a result, Borsa produces a situated, yet shifting and contingent understanding of the female subject position which emphasizes the possibilities of women to move across (sexual and political) borders.

Conclusion:

New cultural models resonating from Canadian artistic production and critical writings challenge the configurations of identities, of politics, of history, of knowledge. Questioning the cultural and social values of our Canadian narratives and discourses, various autobiographical elements in

⁶²Bidy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It?" in Teresa de Lauretis, (ed.), Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1986, 191-212.

⁶³This term is borrowed from Liz Bondi, used in her article: "Locating Identity Politics," in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, (eds.), Place and the Politics of Identity, (London: Routledge), 1993, p. 84-101.

contemporary artists' work are brought into view. Borsa and Baert are responding to these practices by acknowledging the role of power relations and dominant cultural codes in the constitution of cultural identity.

Articulating the relationship that exists between *place, politics and identity*, they focus on those spaces where struggles over meaning and representation are taking place.

Both Borsa and Baert challenge the essentialist notions that attempt to define identity and place in colonial and postmodern terms. Their projects involve contextualizing the aspects of ideology, history and discourse that frame artists' work. For example, in Margins of Memory, Baert deconstructs and re-constructs cultural narratives on and about Canada, by focusing on the intersections of cultural memory and the sense of place in the formation of a cultural self. Discourses around the concept of nation in Canada, as well as our complex roots in colonialism, are viewed by Baert as social processes that influence and define identity in specific and often debilitating ways. Borsa's essays on Prairie art and the discourses that surround Prairie art production define the social and political conditions that operate inside Canada. By considering the significance of Canada's discursive and political margins, and how and where these margins intersect with artists' personal locations, Borsa and Baert stress the interconnection of geographic locations to the larger fields and frameworks of gender, colonial history and cultural narration.

Besides articulating the factors that need to be contextualized in relation to geographic locations, Borsa's article on Ann Newdigate identifies a psychological location in which to position feminist identity. Newdigate's alliance with feminism, allows Borsa to link Newdigate's state of

consciousness to a liberating psychological instance. This feminist location, based on the desire of women to shift and imagine their own identity and position, presents possibilities for the female subject (the female artist and critic). It is a concept of location that is based on feminist acts of resistance which fills psychological spaces with imagination, resistances and creativity. And it is a strategy that allows women the capacity to transform vision -- to see beyond immediate circumstances.

The spatial metaphors that Borsa and Baert employ are concepts that do not necessarily connect in a patriarchally-defined 'self-evident' manner, but, reveal the process of unfolding, unraveling and re-positioning. Borsa's and Baert's frameworks create multiple spatialities which create new spaces for discussion and articulation of cultural knowledge. Borsa believes that basing a critical politics on questioning location is:

...not to desire a final resting place, an essence that we can comfortably attach ourselves to, but a 'position' that works against disembodiment, immobilization and silence.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," Third Text, No. 12, (Autumn 1990), p. 123.

Conclusion

The feminist inquiry into the discourse of art is, as Renee Baert has noted, "a subject in process." Based on the premise that the initial feminist interventions in art history¹ have evolved, this thesis has engaged with the theoretical and conceptual issues relevant to contemporary trends in feminist art practices, art discourse and feminist theory. By analyzing the writings of two art critics, Renee Baert and Joan Borsa, I have argued that they have formulated new concepts and working methods through which the work of Canadian woman artists can be analyzed. These new concepts produce new ways of knowing, being and acting by establishing critical positions that articulate liberating spaces where women can begin to represent and identify their own social and political locations.

The framework that has been mapped out in this thesis is relevant to feminist art historians and artists. Borsa and Baert establish in their writings links that are a result of the dynamic inter-play between the domains of feminist theory and feminist art practices. By responding to the feminist challenge of formulating a social subject outside of patriarchal inscription and dominant critical theories, such as postmodernism and poststructuralism,² Borsa and Baert have generated new critical terms to describe feminist art practices and women's experiences. Their strategies, which build upon an

¹I am referring here to the work of Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker. See either their first book, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (New York: Pantheon Books), 1981 or Griselda Pollock's Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art, (London and New York: Routledge), 1988.

²See: Caterina Pizanias, "Feminist Art: Issues & Agendas," Artichoke: Writings about the Visual Arts, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Spring 1994), p. 40-43.

empowering concept of the female artist/subject, are answers to a call by feminist theorists who believe that "...feminism must render the local into something workable, somewhere to be worked upon."³

The importance of Borsa's and Baert's work can be located within two distinct sites. The first site touches upon the possibility and potential of describing understandings of the female subject/artist that have otherwise been silenced by patriarchy. The concepts used in their work -- agency, desire, self-definition and self-knowledge -- redefine the subject/artist from a woman-identified perspective. As I have argued, their work not only critiques and challenges the patriarchal underpinnings of epistemological and ideological assumptions, but, is a complex challenging undertaking that, guided by a desire to transform rather than reform, seeks as Baert states to "...engage in a radical reconstitution of our modes of thinking and knowing."⁴ Their strategies of positioning woman as willing, active subjects have resulted in articulating the multiple ways women have asserted acts of resistance and female desire. Their work produces alternative ways of knowing within their creation of a new social being -- woman as artist, author, subject and active agent.

The second site relates to disclosing feminist art practices that are reworking and articulating previously suppressed terrain which has not been represented or perhaps been censored from dominant discourse. The interdisciplinary methods used by artists discussed in this thesis, have

³Elspeth Probyn, "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local," in Linda Nicholson, (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York and London: Routledge), 1990, p. 189.

⁴Renee Baert, *Legitimation*, p. 5.

allowed artists to establish new forms of representational vision which Borsa and Baert respond to with interdisciplinary investigations. Their invention of new languages -- languages that have the potential to touch women's experiences more closely -- redefine women's identity, women's right to knowledge and claim to create meaning. This emergence of new meanings, wherein women position themselves in transformative sites of vision, is part of a wider effort to remap theoretical and personal locations. Borsa has commented on the process of representing the utopian desires envisioned by feminists as follows:

The more difficult and confusing part of dealing with the suppressed is accepting the challenge of the search without a tangible map in mind; that is, moving into new territory but accepting the uncertainty of what one will discover. ... In part then, what is required ... is a willingness to explore the unknown, to let imagination, dreams and desires offer new information by challenging and contradicting what is known, what is visible.⁵

Although their work is aimed at similar resolutions, Borsa's and Baert's method for exploring new forms of consciousness in feminist art practices are different. Baert's work explores the intervening upon theoretical structures and creating new forms of representation and signification. In her investigation of feminist video art for "Desiring Daughters," Baert frames the female subject/artist position in relation to the Other as woman, instead of man, through the "new" identities spoken in feminist videos. Her investigation of female subjectivity within the archives of the Freudian Symbolic allows her to theorize a willing, active and desiring female subject that reclaims and reconstitutes female identity outside of the

⁵Joan Borsa, "Will Her Desires, Her Aesthetics Be Different From Ours," p. 51.

father/husband/patriarchal figure. In her article "Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with the Pronouns," patriarchal inscriptions which have defined 'woman' and 'femininity,' motivates her to track the theoretical paradigms which inconsistently contain many of the specificities within feminist video practices.

Borsa tends to incorporate a more metaphoric language and biographic approach into her analysis. For example, in her essay on Irene Xanthos, Borsa compares the artist to "...a warrior, looking for clues about contemporary life, art and culture."⁶ By uncovering a way of life and way of being that has been neglected or misunderstood, Borsa describes the critical awareness that Xanthos brings to her artwork as self-knowledge that offers itself as a new epistemology. In her essay on Ann Newdigate, Borsa recognizes struggle as an active and constitutive component for the creative positioning of feminist identities that transforms acts of resistance into sites of liberation. Newdigate's identification with hybridity, allows Borsa to explore how notions of locations can be based on the desire to shift and imagine women's own identity. In most of Borsa's articles, she seems most committed to the generation of new concepts and stories, and to the framing and validating of "new" knowledges.

Borsa and Baert have employed an interdisciplinary and intertextual methodology to reveal new working methods and areas of investigation in the projects of emerging artists. An example would be Baert's essay in Legitimation which considers the relationship between art, science, politics and culture. I believe that part of using interdisciplinarity has been a result of

⁶Joan Borsa, "Tying Knots," p. 10.

feminists' search for new beginnings and new connections that establish new relationships. Since "...interdisciplinarity is the turbulent space where the most radical and boundary-blurring experiments are attempted,"⁷ Borsa and Baert position their writings in a methodology where new knowledges are emerging.

The emphasis on articulating alternative agendas that transgress and displace patriarchal and hegemonic notions of identity, place and history, is fundamental to the ability of challenging the dominant discourses of power in Canada. The discourses and narratives about Canada are unstable terms and like the concepts of identity, are viewed by Borsa and Baert as "imagined." By inter-facing physical location (Canada) with personal location (identity) both Borsa and Baert open up critical categories that emphasize issues of race, diversity, conflict and multiplicity within Canadian society. Their writings suggest the multiple and complex possibilities of identity negotiation within social narratives that recognize place as one of the relational factors which influence and effect identity. For example, in the catalogue essay for Margins of Memory, Baert articulates individual artists' locations as spaces that are "...integral and not marginal" to this country's cultural memory. By unraveling the hierarchical order and structure of Canada's dominant cultural codes and racist policies, Baert has begun to conceptualize a politics of location that articulates cultural identities according to the concerns that are localized and specific to particular Canadian communities. Baert states:

⁷Danielle Boutet, "Interdisciplinary Practice: A Challenge to Art Discourse," p. 42.

We are placed, perhaps in an interregnum, where inherited models of knowledge and identity are insufficient to the needs and understandings of our time, while new models that answer to new imperatives are still in the process of becoming.⁸

Baert's model follows a similar framework to work Borsa has mapped out regarding the need for awareness and discussion surrounding the specificities of a Canadian form of feminist art criticism.⁹ Borsa has questioned how adopting theoretical frameworks produced outside of Canada, as a method in which to discursively map the local, can at times diminish the power of Canadian feminist art criticism to make meaningful interventions in theory and practice. Borsa states that as a Canadian theorist who occupies a decentered location to the production of meaning, as was the case with artist Frida Kahlo, she is also implicated in this disembodied experience of 'naturalized' forms of authority and exclusion to the structural difference of how the consumption of "texts" becomes legitimated. Borsa believes that by addressing the wider and more immediate concerns of the colonial relationship that Canada has to the larger field of theory, art and representation, Canadian critics must be generate theories from their own locations.

In the interview I conducted with Borsa, she stated that her goal is to "... proceed with a style of [her] own that allows for [her] everyday

⁸Renee Baert, "Introduction," Territories of Difference, (Banff: Walter Philips Gallery), 1993, p. 16.

⁹Joan Borsa, "Towards A Politics of Location: Rethinking Marginality", Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring 1990), p. 36-39, and "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject", Third Text, No. 12, (Autumn 1990), p. 104-123.

experience."¹⁰ To "let or allow herself to come into the text"¹¹ in such a way that keeps a critical distance from the theoretical as a wider effort to remap the theoretical. In regards to accounting for personal or biographical spaces where critics can negotiate this style of writing, she states:

Certainly there is room in our work for our personal lives, for the everyday, for experience, where parables and politics intersect with history and location.¹²

To bring the personal into their writing, signifies the possibilities of connecting inquires to unforeseen elements, to other: people and to community. I believe that Borsa and Baert are generating new conceptual models and critical terms through which a "process of becoming" for the female subject, artist and critic can be articulated. By allowing their writings to shift beyond the immediate -- to see space and identity in new arrangements -- they embrace an imaginative approach to analyze the work of women artists who are creating new forms of representational vision.

¹⁰Joan Borsa, "Will Her Desires, Her Aesthetics Be Different From Ours," p. 55.

¹¹These comments were made by Joan Borsa during our interview.

¹²Joan Borsa, "Will Her Desires, Her Aesthetics Be Different From Ours," p. 43.

Appendix A

Biographical Information:

Joan Borsa was born in Melfort, Saskatchewan and currently lives in Saskatoon where she teaches Art History at the University of Saskatchewan and works as an independent curator. She has been actively involved in the visual arts throughout Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Saskatoon) where she has taught, organized exhibitions, lectured and written about art. From 1983-1986 she was Prairie regional editor for *Vanguard* magazine. Joan studied at the University of Alberta, Edmonton (M.Ed., Art Ed.); at O.I.S.E., the University of Toronto (Women Studies); and has completed a post-graduate program in the Social History of Art at the University of Leeds, England.

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Appendix B

Biographical Information

Renee Baert is a writer and independent curator who lives in Montreal. She has written on contemporary art for numerous Canadian and international magazines, catalogues and anthologies. She has been involved with numerous Canada Council projects and was a video officer at Canada Council for a number of years. Renee received her M.A. in Communications at McGill University in Montreal and is presently finishing her Doctorate program, also at McGill. She has taught at Concordia University in the Visual Arts Department, as well as at McGill. Renee has frequently edited and written for publications on Canadian art and art theory, and acted as a guest editor for a recent edition of *C Magazine*. She has organized and chaired conferences, the most recent being *Territories of Difference* held at The Banff Centre for the Arts.

Works by and about Renee Baert:

Baert, Renee. "Abandonment and Grace: The Architectural interventions of Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe." Canadian Art 7. 1 (Spring 1990): 7-78.

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Figure 1 **Nell Tenhaaf *Species Life* 1989**
 367 x 95 cm for large lightbox
 150 x 29 cm each, for smaller lightboxes
 Installation: 4 lightboxes, Duratran transparencies
 with computer manipulated images.

Figure 2 **Nell Tenhaaf *Species Life* 1989**
 Installation detail: 2 lightboxes, Duratran
 transparencies with computer manipulated
 images.

Figure 3

Nell Tenhaaf Species Life 1989
Installation detail: lightbox, Duratran transfer,
transparencies with computer manipulated images.

Figure 4

Anne Ramsden *Scent* 1989
Installation detail: lithograph, 2 photographs,
3 perfume bottles, mirror strips, postcard/text,
labels.

Figure 5

Anne Ramsden Scent 1989

Installation detail: lithograph - *View of the Cesnola Galleries* in The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 1882,

***Fragment of a Royal Head* (c.1397 -1362 B.C.)**

Excavated by Howard Carter and Flinders Petrie (1891 - 92) . It is now generally agreed that the

fragment is a representation of the iconoclastic king Akhenaten. Initially the fragment was thought to represent Nefertiti, Akhenaten's queen.

Postcards/texts.

Figure 6

Anne Ramsden *Scent* 1989

Installation detail: *View of the Temple of Dendur*, 1988

Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of the Government of Egypt to the United States, 1965.

Figure 7

Anne Ramsden *Scent* 1989

Installation detail: *Eternity*, Calvin Klein perfume bottles.

Figure 8

Jamelie Hassan *Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Lévi-Strauss* 1988

Installation: 4 architectural fragments, reading table and chair, 3 enlarged photographs, 20 file cards (with photos), poster, letraset text, and bookwork.

Figure 9 Jamelie Hassan *Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Lévi-Strauss* 1988
Installation detail: reading table and bookwork.

Figure 10

Jamelle Hassan *Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Lévi-Strauss* 1988
Installation detail: file cards inside of bookwork.

Figure 11 *Jamelie Hassan Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Lévi-Strauss 1988*
Installation detail: enlarged photograph.

Figure 12

Jamelie Hassan *Vitrine 448: The Cabinet of Dr. Lévi-Strauss* 1988
Installation detail: poster.

Figure 13

Irene Xanthos *Double Stump* 1988

66 x 77 x 48 cm

North American chestnut, cloth, pigment

Figure 14

Irene Xanthos *Cicada Talk II* 1987 - 88

74 x 104 x 73 cm

North American chestnut, cloth, pigment

Figure 15

**Eleanor Bond Rock Climbers Meet with
Naturalists on the Residential Parkade 1989
246 x 373 cm
Oil on canvas
Collection of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina**

Figure 16

Eleanor Bond The Woman's Park at Fish
Lake Provides Hostels, Hotels and Housing
1990
244 x 372 cm
Oil on canvas

Figure 17

Eleanor Bond The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area 1991
244 x 372 cm
Oil on canvas
Collection of the MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph

Figure 18

Frida Kahlo *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)* 1939

173 x 173 cm

Oil on canvas

Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City

Figure 19

Frida Kahlo *My Nurse And I (Mi nana y yo)* 1937

30 x 35 cm

Oil on metal

Collection of Dolores Olmedo, New Mexico

Figure 20

Honor Kever Rogers *The Brooding Rooms: Mother- and -
childhood Reassembled Kitchen* 1986

190.5 x 198 cm

1 panel consisting of 48 black and white photographs.

"Studies of the marital systems of agrophobic women suggest that the agrophobic adjustment is often supported or reinforced by a spouse with complimentary problems and with an unconscious investment in the continuation of the symptoms."

Figure 21

**Susan McEachern *Part One - Agrophobia Image #6*
1987**

From the series *On Living At Home*

40.6 x 50.8 cm

One of eight photographs, colour photograph with text.

Figure 22

Susan McEachern *Part Four - The World Outside*
Image #6 1987

From the series *On Living At Home*

40.6 x 50.8 cm

One of seven photographs, colour photograph
with text.

Figure 23
Frances Robson Women And Community: "Over Age 65" Exercise
Class, Chicago, Illinois 1985
40.6 x 129.5 cm
Silverprint

Figure 24
**Frances Robson Women And Community: Saskatoon Women's
Motorcycle Club 1987**
40.6 x 152.4 cm
Silverprint

Figure 25

**Suzanne Lacy *The Crystal Quilt - Whisper*
Minnesota Project 1987**

40.6 x 50.8 cm

Photograph of performance by Ann Mardsen.

Figure 26

Suzanne Lacy The Crystal Quilt - Whisper
Minnesota Project 1987

35.6 x 28 cm

Photograph of performance by Terry
Gydesen.

Figure 28

Marlene Creates *where my grandmother was born* 1989 - 91

1 of 3 assemblages from the series *Places of Presence*:

Newfoundland Kin and Ancestral Land, Newfoundland.

Installation: 13 b&w photographs, Selenium toned prints, 1 colour photograph, Cibachrome print, each framed (20.3 x 25.4 cm), 6 "memory map" drawings, pencil on paper, each framed (27.9 x 35.5 cm), 6 story panels and 1 title page, screen printed on plexi, framed (27.9 x 35.5 cm), aspen leaves, framed (40.6 x 50.8 cm), beach stone.

Figure 29 Marlene Creates where my grandmother was born 1989 - 91
 From the series *Places of Presence: Newfoundland Kin and Ancestral Land, Newfoundland*.
 Installation detail: 3 b&w photographs, 1 "memory map" drawing, pencil on paper.

Figure 30

Sharon Yuen *John Chinaman* 1991
Installation detail: three of eight lifesize suit
jackets of handmade paper with photo emulsion
images, tubular lightbulbs, wire.

Figure 31

Jin-me Yoon body a thread dis ease a mountain 1993
Installation detail: one framed image on photographic mylar (213.3 x 124.4 cm), 13 wooden lightboxes of varying sizes containing Duratrans and photographic mylar images, red electrical wire.

Figure 32

**Rebecca Belmore *Rising To The Occasion* 1991
213 x 122 x 122 cm
Mixed media (chicken wire, various fabrics,
beads, saucers, sticks, "Royal souvenirs",
electrical cord, metal, feather).**

Figure 33

Jan Peacock *Reader by the Window* 1993

Installation: video projector, rear projection screen, (183 x 242 cm), pair of black curtains, 2 b&w monitors, three videotapes, wooden table (84 x 122.2 cm) with photo-mural silkscreened on table surface, wooden chair.

Figure 34

*Ann Newdigate The old lady and the Canon on
a quick tour of the mythical centre. I am not a
tourist are you? 1992*

84 x 127 cm

Colour photocopy of tapestry

Figure 35

*Ann Newdigate Northern Cross/Southern Haunt
1988*

63.8 x 173.8 cm

Tapestry

Collection of the Regina Public Library

Figure 36 Ann Newdigate *Some nomads never stop yearning for a bed of roses* 1987
157 x 102 cm
Tapestry

Figure 37 Ann Newdigate *The nomad lit a candle and waited /
Look at it this way* (from the *Look At It This Way*
series) 1987
182.2 x 97.8 cm
Tapestry
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Edward Busse, Regina.

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