

School of Art

**Rethinking the Body – Spaces for Change: A Qualitative Analysis of
Textual and Visual Representations of Menopause**

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FOR MY MOTHER

JESSIE

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me and that any help I have received in its preparation, and all sources used, have been acknowledged herein.

Rosemary Alison McLaren

I wish to advise the research was conducted under the name of Rosemary Whittaker. I changed my name by deed pole to McLaren in March 1999.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the exploration and interpretation of women's visual and textual experiences of menopause. It is a conversational mapping of embodied space and time as they re-imagine memories and actual experiences which have informed their changing sense of self during the transitional stages of menopause. The research examines the ways in which artwork, visual diaries, journals, creative writing and poetry make visible a fresh perception of their female sense of the lived body. The project examines the contemporary cultural meanings of femininity, sexuality and identity which have informed women's understanding of their bodies and gender during the transformative years of menopause, and it explores the ways in which these forms of knowledge have influenced their artistic modes of self-representation.

In the first chapter I acquaint the reader with the context of the research, and outline my understandings of the human body and social theories. I direct the exploration of texts towards a range of feminist theoretical perspectives which suggest women's biological and reproductive bodies provide spaces for re-visioning personal and social change.

The next two chapters explain how I develop theoretical and methodological arts-based approaches enabling an innovative and appropriate investigation of the phenomenon in question. I explain how I have blended various textual expressive genres with interpretive research methodologies and philosophical viewpoints. In these chapters I recount the imaginative strategies and techniques used to portray the ontological, phenomenological and epistemological perspectives of the lived experience of menopause.

Following this, I present seven stories. Each story portrays how artistic genres grasp particular experiences and transform them into imaginative expressive inter-textual representations. The stories also demonstrate how this type of research is done, and how the meaning-making processes of collaborative research draw out resonances towards real and imagined, and internal and external sites of personal and political significance.

Accompanying the stories is a fourth chapter entitled *Menopause Perspecta X 5*. In writing this section, I adopt a different narrational approach and voice as I move from the realm of storyteller to that of art curator presenting a series of visual images and the poetic writings of five women. As well as portraying different voices speaking at

different levels, each presentation continues the task of opening spaces for translation between word and image.

The thesis concludes with a reflective overview of the menopausal body, image and text. In the coda, *Notes Towards A Work In Progress*, I express my thoughts on creating alternative spatial practices, and tell another story. Through its poetic and lyrical content, I attempt to offer possibilities for restoring a sense of menopausal self, love, hope, and a meaningful relationship with the world.

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NO CLEAR DESTINATION

*Sounds within silence
whisper and echo*

*Between words –
Forms
Lines
Colours
Shapes*

*delicately trace the milestones
back through women's deep rememberings*

*Silent voices –
unarticulated questions and
unspoken desires –
ask something more
than this illusion of reality can provide*

*Our longing
for a knowing
for a freeing of self
for our truth
Reaches out beyond our bodies and*

EXPANDS

Circulates

Connects

*- with the energy of the universe
- through each other
- down into the sign-world of the psyche*

*Our yearning
feels the symbols*

*Our bodies
interrogate memories*

*first in images, and now
in words
for ways to restore
and reclaim connection
on a journey
with No Clear Destination*

*We search for clues
to name and interpret
the mysteries
of this person we
have come to know as Self*

Reflecting on our imaginary re-visions

*that lie between the lines
and in the margins
and sometimes off the page*

*i ponder
do we carry in our psyche
traces of a language long forgotten
buried deep beneath acculturation?
Are we so anaesthetized by binary oppositions
that the body's inner promptings
only serve to fuel the flame of alienation?*

Who calls?

*i read again our stories
my body sighs*

*i struggle with our questions
of why –
and who –
and when –*

*i hear the poverty of language
to describe how words have shaped our thinking
and how our thinking shapes our lives*

*Does the transformation ask
a different language
wordless – a softer wiser tongue
with warm moist lips
and gentle hands*

to touch

to point the way

*i wonder
will it be the Daughters of Hysteria
who carry the seeds of new awakenings
to transform these illusive fragments*

the stories of our lives?

INTRODUCTION

IN RESTAURO – MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

About communication; its perils and joys

*To communicate to another, with another
We word ideas, images, thoughts.
If our universe is subjective
Created by us, individually
How does one universe communicate with another?
And when is the image/communication truly shared?*

*To communicate
One soul to another, with another
We plunge into touch, dreams, seeing, taste, smell and silence.
Being with.
Time/space/location dissolving.
Hearts warm
And the universe sings.
(Fanny – from letter June 11 1998)*

Reflexivity, telling the stories about our researcher roles, is often considered to be self-serving, arrogant, even irresponsible. And yet, it is worth asking whether the charge of narcissistic self-absorption against such inquiry is, in large part, a function of an academic culture which is fearful of passion, emotion, gritty details, unpleasant smells, pillow-biting mistakes, sensuality and sexuality, sharp noises, and messy processes... To many, telling the stories that account for why we research and what really happens in the process of research is beyond the boundaries of good taste: it is akin to flashing in a faculty meeting, or having to explain away one's tipsy aunt in the hallway.
(Neilsen, 1998, p.269)

I begin writing the introduction to this thesis in far north tropical Queensland. I have travelled across this vast continent to take part in a workshop on collective biography or 'memory work' organised by Professor Bronwyn Davies at James Cook University.¹ I

¹ Memory work was developed by Frigga Haug (1987). It is a method used for the unraveling of gender socialisation. By taking their own bodies as subjects of study, women recall memories of past events that focus in specific physical areas. As a research strategy it offers the participants ways of understanding how their bodies are shaped by language and how they can work with these same words to reconstitute alternative forms of speaking and writing.

am on Magnetic Island, a large, but sparsely populated tropical island lying off the north east coast of Australia. For the past 12 days I have worked with a group of 23 women devoted to holistic literacy inquiry and the disseminating of re-defined knowledge. We have come from Canada, the United States and from far-flung parts of Australia to tell stories of embodiment, and then to re-write those same stories. They are stories that make visible the ways in which our embodied beings inhabit the different landscapes of our personal and social lives. We have come also to examine and write of the ways in which the reflexive narratives are connected to our theoretical knowledge and to our particular areas of academic interest.

Dappled sunlight dances in crazy steps over bare skin. I am sitting, legs outstretched on the floor of the verandah of my island home. Rising on wooden stilts, it reaches out into the lushness of coconut palms, avocado trees, poincennas and giant tree ferns. Shadows flicker in and out of dark green leafy spaces. There are hibiscus here as large as dinner plates in white and pink and orange, and lots of frangipani. A rampant bougainvillea, in shades of watermelon pink and deep crimson weaves through, and cascades down the branches of a tall paper bark. A tree hugging creeper, the Brazilian allamander, thrusts rope like tentacles towards the green roof of its home. The flowers, trumpet shaped lobes of deep purple, sing their ivory throats out. This verdant jungle is alive and vibrant with the sounds of multi-coloured birds, curious possums and butterflies. The air is heavy with the sweet smell of jasmine. Further away, glimpsed through a window framed by the wide curving leaves of banana trees, the sun is dancing and glistening on the water. It shimmers as blue satin sheets rhythmically caress the shoreline. There is a heavenly perfection in this tropical fruit salad.

Before the magic of this island disappears, and my inspiration and courage to re-describe a self-reflexive storied and poetic account of my arts-based inquiry fades, I write these words to provide both an anchor and a space of freedom. Although I have been writing about embodiment for four years, it was only on this island that I reached in to my own body and truly tasted it.

Through the process of 'memory work,' our interaction with the environment, playing with silk and canvas and paint, and through movement analysis and dance notation, I have gained an increased understanding of the ways in which my embodied being has been discursively constructed in relation to temporal and spatial external landscapes, to the story lines in which I have lived out my life. Bronwyn Davies (1992) tells us, 'collective biography makes visible the liberal humanist myth of oneself as unique and distinct and enables you to see the collective (usually discursive) processes through which we become embodied as human'.²

While sitting in the rainforest, on the rocks cradling Nellie Bay, or around the kitchen tables in the wooden shuttered holiday cottages, I have written wonderfully rich, evocative stories about my earliest memories of embodied being in place: being in the landscape. As my body awareness and attunement to both interior and exterior landscapes has grown, I have written of my embodied memories of water, forest, and bush, and of my relationships with others. I have rejoiced in these stories of situated inquiry, and in hearing the stories told by the other women. This freedom to write without cliches and explanation, has until now eluded me as I crafted the words for the beginning chapters of my research project.

The study investigates how 12 women artists articulate the lived experience of menopause. It is a conversational mapping of embodied space and time as they re-imagine memories and actual experiences that have informed their changing sense of sexuality, femininity, and self during the transitional stages of this biological process. I explore how women experience the absence of blood, and how this disruption to their cyclical and fertile bodies impacts on the ways in which they then use their bodies to express their creativity, and sense of embodied female self.

The women were aware that they were taking part in a participatory process that would contribute to other women naming and giving voice to their real experience. The study became a collective experience. By sharing their stories, they were conscious that their involvement would expand the knowledge about women and women's bodies. As a

² Quote taken from the worksheet at the writing workshop on Magnetic Island, Day 1.

result of this personal interaction, not only did they describe and reflect upon their flesh and muted parts of their anatomy through visual imagery, they also offered poetry, shared their personal journals and diaries, creatively re-invented short stories and wrote long letters in their attempts to speak into existence a fresh perception of their female sense of the lived body.

I have chosen as the primary frame of reference for this study, van Manen's (1990) semiotic employment of the methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is informed by feminist theory. With my background as an artist, I was creatively challenged by van Manen's suggestion that a researcher may need to invent, or discover a methodological approach that will enable an energetic response, and appropriate investigation of the phenomenon in question.

Throughout the ages, human beings, van Manen (1990) tells us, 'have invented artistic, philosophic, communal, mimetic and poetic languages that have sought to (re)unite them with the ground of their lived experience' (p.9). According to van Manen, phenomenology is interested in anything that presents itself to consciousness, whether real, imagined, subjectively felt or empirically measured. He points out, that because our only access to the world, to others, and to ourselves, is through consciousness, phenomenological research recognises that the study of consciousness cannot be made without reference to the embodied experiencing person. Furthermore, phenomenological research is a reflection on our own thinking processes, and on the structures of meaning which have formed and shaped our cultural and personal history.

In linking phenomenology to feminist writings on consciousness, I recall the words of Adrienne Rich (1980). She reminds us that women have internalised an ideology, a set of beliefs stemming from false consciousness. These externally referenced beliefs, through which we identify ourselves to ourselves, have been generated by a complex system of patriarchal social practices. They exert political significance and effect, in, and upon the private and public lives of women. According to Rich, 'the awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step and you are in another country' (p.48). In having grasped or seen with fresh eyes a different comprehension of

our reality, Rich urges women to relate these fresh understandings back into the situated context of our lives. As she points out, 'it's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness, but it can also be confusing, disorienting, and plainful' (p.34). Referring to the re-visionist writing of women, she says, 'much of woman's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction,' and that the sources of this anger and pain are real (p.48). These sources Rich claims, 'are everywhere in the environment, built into society, language, the structures of thought, and we must continue to question everything so as to understand how we have been led to imagine ourselves' (p.49).

In the same way that writers and poets are using words to re-vision and transform the world, artists are also depicting our restriction to being fashioned by existing ideologies of femininity and sexuality. And so it has been important that I find a blend of textual genres that would creatively, and imaginatively represent the personal, the political, the artistic and the poetic, as well as the theoretical material which is necessarily contained within this multidimensional project of inquiry. I wanted to create a methodology that maintained a certain harmony and resonance with my own ontological experiences of 'being' and 'seeking', and with feminists' understandings of the research process, as well as one that would reflect my own writing decisions and processes.

Although I have been gathering material about the women's unique and individual embodied responses, until now, I have felt disembodied in the writing of these texts. I am aware of my internal critic. It continually sabotages my creative imagination, and pollutes my vision. I have completed in draft form the first four chapters, and a lengthy appendix on the genealogy of menopause. But the writing lacks life and the concrete sensuous details of this incredibly complex and rich experience remain unspoken. I have hidden behind the role of academic researcher. In making the transition from artist to qualitative researcher, I have, almost by osmosis, it would seem, learned the language of academia. It is a language of thinking which is distancing and formal.

Research is not only the creation of products to market at the academic ideology fair: research is the process of learning through the words, actions, and re-visionings of our daily life. Inquiry is praxis that cannot be boxed up and delivered; it is a story with no ending.
(Neilsen, 1998, p.8)

In our daily gatherings here on the island I have shared my research experiences. I have read my academic writing; shown the images I have collected, read my poetry and the short stories that accompany these visual narratives. I tell the women, my new friends, I am here on this island, 'the rock' as the locals call it, the home of the Wulgarukabba tribe, because I am stuck with the writing. I don't know how to weave together the collective story lines, theirs and mine, so that they have meaning and response-ability. I want to feel impassioned by the writing. I tell these wise and supportive women that I don't want to construct 'our' story in conventional essay form, or in a linear logical sequence. I am seeking a way to make imaginable the nomadic traversing of the terrain of the research journey. I tell them that in the pursuit to uncover fresh perceptions on subjectivity and desire, revealing the silent and hidden voices contained within artistic forms has required that we immerse ourselves in words. We have had to learn to rethink ourselves differently, through language, instead of visual metaphors and images. It was through words, first in storytelling and then in the exchange of writing, that we breathed life into our re-visionist visual and oral story lines.

The use of language in the presence of a work of art does not substitute for the work but cues us to see or hear things we would otherwise miss. (Tishman and Perkins, 1997, p.374)

And then, I tell them that in my practice as an artist, it was not the end product that gave substance, and satisfaction to the experience of making art, but the process. The act of creating. Living inside the work. A feeling of being connected. I want to re-capture the same experience during the final stages of researching, reading and playing with words. I want the creative juices to flow. I speak of my desire to write of the invisible processes of the research inquiry, the women's and mine. How words for talking about thinking became the method of inquiry (Tishman & Perkins, 1997). And I tell them that I want to write of my exploration, and sense of transportation through the language of thinking about thoughts. Searching for the self, looking for what we did not know in the gaps between what we knew in our heads, and what met us full-on in our sensory bodies, has been as much a shaping of my own life as theirs. As we attempted to disentangle ourselves from prescriptive linguistic practices in speaking of thoughts about emotions,

feelings, intuition and inspiration, we were constantly learning, and making discoveries about how words work to shape and regulate knowledge about ourselves as women.

In one of our afternoon sessions on the island, I give an outline of my methods. I read the following extract from my journal; it was from a piece of writing called *And what about language?*

Once upon a time, or so it seems now, I sat at the keyboard and constructed individual accounts of how the women in this study experienced menopause through artistic vision. They were factual descriptive records of experience. But they were sentences that lacked vivid visual imagery. The words came from my mind, and not through my body. There was precious little to portray how our lives are transfigured in that charged space of imagining, between embodied and disembodied being. And there was little to illuminate the discrepancies between my research intention and the actual outcome, or how intention and outcome interpenetrate and overlap in the telling, the listening, and the reading and writing processes. Moreover, I hadn't yet begun to embody phenomenology. The stories certainly didn't 'sing the world' or contain 'gestural meaning', as Merleau-Ponty would have them do (Merleau-Ponty, in Crotty, 1996a, p.167). I hadn't found my voice. I was experiencing what Rudolf Arnheim (1969) describes as a split between my sensory perception and thought. I was also aware that in some sense, I was manipulating the texts far too soon, with ideas about which I thought should happen.

In the beginning, I did not fully understand phenomenological description, or the notion of penetrating the texts. I hadn't got to the point where I could 'meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it, and, as well, be consumed by it' (van Manen, 1990, p.153). Furthermore, although my intention was to weave together subjective reflections of menopause, within the context of larger sociocultural and historical story lines, I was also concerned that I found some creative means to express the unsaid in elements of visual imagery. Language does not only work on the level of

word meaning. In giving meaning to our stories, we are responding bodily to associated thoughts that arise from images, or from the words. There is more to meaning than language. It is not just about finding more words to infuse new meaning into them. When we are meeting the body in new ways through imagination, there are times when there are no words to reproduce a feeling or emotive response. Art can only be lived, or as Van den Berg reminds us 'we are continually living a solution to problems that reflection cannot hope to solve' (Van den Berg, 1955, in Bachelard, 1969 p.xxiv). I was mindful of Elliot Eisner's (1993) comment that:

Not everything can be 'said' with anything. Poetic meaning requires poetic forms of thought and poetically treated form. Visual art requires forms of thought that address the import of visual imagery (p.7).

Deciding how to present these multidimensional representations has taken considerable thought. After all, the outcomes of phenomenological reflection, like that of any other inquiry, requires that it be presented as a written text. One of the dilemmas I have faced as I reflexively re-write again and again, women's lives, is the inadequacy of everyday language to explicate the meanings ascribed to various artforms. It would seem that whenever we retell our visual stories we are not in the text in the same embodied way. We tend to focus on the content, thus missing the subtleties and exquisite qualities of emotion and feeling. Although our memory may be travelling back to recall the making of the work, it does so in an objective, explanatory, distanced, or disembodied manner. Words that contain the true sense of the experience seem to resist being captured. I find myself groping for words that are at times hidden and unformed, to give voice to the intense immediacy of our sensory bodies' perceptions and feelings. I encounter incongruity in using already constituted language. I have found that traditional forms of research writing generally fail to capture the non-abstract forms of linguistic devices. They also fail to provide an account of how artistic and aesthetic experiences shape our lives, and thus

influence research practices. By presenting the processes of meaning making in the form of imaginative literature: novels, plays and poetry, as well as in artforms, metaphor can be understood differently. These non-abstract modes of representation can create spaces for differing symbol systems, each with the potential to provide a variety of divergent meanings (Greene, 1997).

Within the postmodern climate, where research incorporating mixed genres is establishing legitimacy, there are few published studies that incorporate visual images overlaid with poetising texts.³ Laurel Richardson's (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1994) detailed discussion on the various styles, metaphors and perspectives adopted in the exercise of textual interpretation have influenced my ideas in the creating of an expressive text. Throughout her various writings there runs a consistent thread. She maintains that if the researcher explores their own self-processes and self-references, the resulting writing will reflect a more honest, open engagement with the topic. This type of evocative representation she said, touches us 'where we live, in our bodies... there is no such thing as "getting it right," only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced'(1994, p.521).

I stop reading. As I fold my notes away I tell the women that the research process has changed my life. For nearly five years it has energised my living; it has given direction and substance; it is with me in my waking hours and in my dreams. I have learned to love words in the same way I once loved clay and paint. They have opened a space for self-expression and for my body's deep felt longings and desires. During this time I have been forced to confront attitudes and beliefs on earlier aspects of my embodiedness and approaches to meaning in ways I had never previously considered. The research process has had an impact on the lives of 12 women whom I have come to know intimately. I want to write about the relationship that developed between us. I

³ As I began the final draft for this introduction in March 1999, a comprehensive course bibliography with 50 references to arts-based education research was posted to subscribers of the BABETTE educational website. The bibliography was compiled by Joe Norris (1999), a fellow babettian, and although it featured alternative forms of research practice, the majority of texts focus on innovative linguistic practices.

tentatively suggest that, as well as giving poetic phenomenological accounts of artistic self-expression, I want to write about agency, the pursuit of alternative forms of agency, theirs and mine. And I tell my listening audience that I want to write this text in a manner that is accessible to the women in the study.

Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis; objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about.
(Haraway, 1981, p.588)

‘Terrific. Go for it,’ said the island women, ‘but bring your body into your writing. Make us feel this experience. Tell us how you mapped the wilderness of the research journey. Give voice to how you manipulated words to create fresh images and metaphors. Give it life.’ I hesitate. I breathe out slowly. I tell them of a pivotal incident – a moment of turning in the early stages of my masters research which continues to constrain me. It was an experience that had become an invisible barrier inhibiting the inclusion of myself in the text. I tell them of the time I was accused of narcissism. I learned early in my academic career that speaking autobiographically was not acceptable.

*Mid semester, first term.
It is hot and sultry
I am giving a tutorial to undergraduate
and masters students
on my choice of research topic.
Standing in the classroom
I note the male lecturer seated to my right.
I have brought four drawings.
Images of my tentative attempts
to make sense of my disruptive body
as I begin this journey called menopause.
I am proud of them.
I am nervous also.
They are childlike and innocent.
I have drawn myself naked – Picasso style –
with my genitals exposed.*

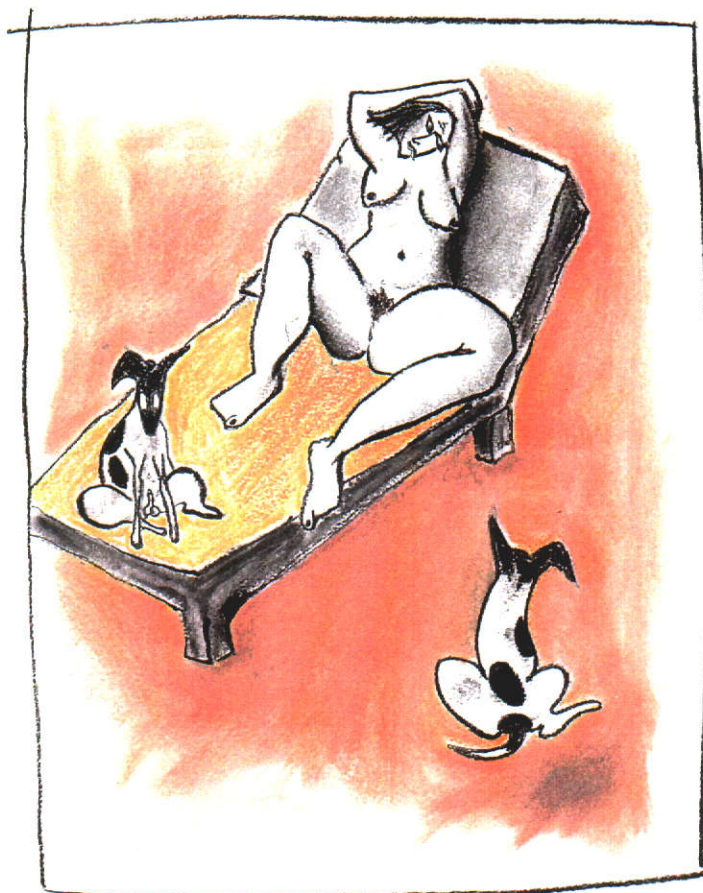


Fig. RW1 *'Is this what love is?'*

*These are drawings about my body,
about desire,
about sexuality.*

*About not knowing who I was.
I have drawn an image of myself
and my beloved dog Jimmy,
a symbol for the keeper of my soul.*

We are looking at our bodies.

At our sex.

*The caption reads
Is this what love is?*

*I tell the students of my recent reading of Germaine Greer's book
The Change, and how in part,
she examined the historical writings of women,
and the ways in which they wrote in coded metaphor to speak of menopause.*

*I explain how my interest was aroused
and how this lead me to the question:
How did women artists articulate this experience?*

*The lecturer interjects and says
Would you just get to the theory that is informing your work.
Your personal story is of no interest to anyone here.*

*I stand transfixed to the floor.
I stop breathing.
I feel a hot flush rising
I hope no one can see.
My heart races.
My tongue feels like it is moving
No sounds emerge.
I look around the room
into the eyes of women
and to the young men looking at me
and my body in the drawings.
There is silence.
My eyes implore
where are your voices?
Why don't you say
but the personal IS political?
Why are you colluding in this negation of my story?
I feel betrayed.
The heat in my body turns to rage
It tears open my tear ducts
I feel a hot stinging in my eyes.
Please God don't let me cry.
Deep breath.
I want to cry out
Why can't you people
you women who call yourselves feminists
and you young men who think you are embracing our ideals
see that my life has been given agency by my organic body.
It is the awakening of my critical consciousness.
This IS the basis for my methodology.
The absence of blood and raging hormones
has impelled me to write my life from a different space.
I am a no longer making art.
My practice has changed
I am a becoming writer struggling with words.*

*I feel my body collapsing
Spiraling down to my gut
Shrinking.
Familiar feeling this*

*Speaking out – then censure – then shame
 My utterance, my personal anecdote
 of fractures and openings
 falls like a dead leaf to the drawer of memory
 marked acts of resistance – action pending*

*I sit down,
 and with head bowed
 read text
 like dry oatmeal off the page.*

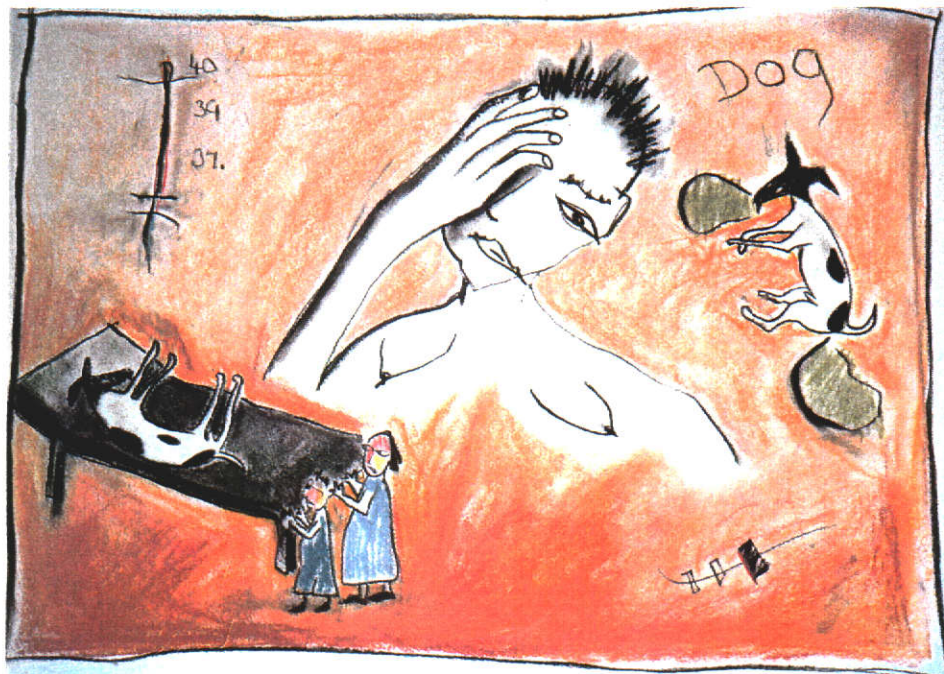


Fig. RW2

'Dog Dying'

The island women hear my story. They hold it in their bodies. Then they discuss it, examining the ways in which feminist subjectivity is impeded, by adopting a particular intentional stance. In doing so, they add their own threads of memory to a collective biography.

We discuss Lorri Neilsen's (1998) comment, that in coming to research women 'are required to wear the body of knowledge like a glove, and speak words only to make others happy' (p.205). Neilsen quotes Helene Cixous as she describes the challenge set for women and others who use a particular voice to speak for themselves.

I think we are completely crushed, especially in places like universities by the highly repressive operations of meta-language, the operation that sees to it that the moment women open their mouths – women more often than men – they are immediately asked in whose name and from what theoretical standpoint they are speaking, who is their master and where they are coming from; they have in short, to salute and show their identity papers.

(Neilsen, 1998, quoting Cixous in Trinh Minh-Ha, 1991, p.20)

We then explore my question of how, as artist turned researcher living the inquiry, I could write a woman's life – write poetically of her art practice, re-tell the fragments of her individual story lines, as well as describing the openings of critical spaces for generating new narratives. They offer ideas for weaving into the text an autobiographical account of the creation of the research product.

And so, in this island paradise, with the invitation of the facilitators to creatively explore sign systems beyond conventional written text, and with encouragement of the 20 women attending the workshop, I give imaginative re-construction to this chapter, and to the collective story in my doctoral dissertation. I have come to embody the island. I want to take the rich harvest of ideas from the sensuous and sensual transmediative 'body in the landscape' experiences, and transpose them into embodied inquiry and research practice. This disruption to the process of writing, just as I thought I was coming towards the completion of my studies, has opened a space for a new beginning. It is an unmarked, wide-open space. I enter without guidelines. It is not an easy place to be. However, as I engage in the task of generating new stories, through my attempts at demystifying the language of theory, and through critique and conversation with others, I am redefining my own approach to reflexive narrative scholarship. As the workshop comes to a close, my body-mind has already begun to create a more fluid, continuous expressive text, which is in direct contrast to my earlier objective/subjective structural writing.

The following chapters are linked to the landscape mapped out in my own life. They tell a story of the research ground on which I have wandered, and they speak of the pitfalls, of dissonance and fracture, the breaks, and of crossing borders in the renaming of the self. It is a story of becoming. It is a story of unfolding agency. In its telling, there are new understandings, the creation of re-visionist myths and rituals, the breaking down of old mythologies, continual questions and exciting possibilities.

CHAPTER 1

RE-MAPPING THE GROUND FOR QUESTION

Any inquiry, whether into the life of a teacher, student or researcher, whether set in a prairie or an inner urban classroom, remains an inadequate examination of an impossibly difficult subject. We cannot simply discover the centre of any labyrinth by always just turning left. We fabricate our illusions and may even dream the universe and ourselves within its interplay of vanishing mazes.

(Diamond, 1997, p. 9) ⁴

Introduction

As if by magic, I have been transported in a technological capsule through time and space to another country. New Zealand. I am a temporary visitor. A subject in transition. I am writing these words in a tiny grey weather-board cottage, planted amongst rampant vegetation high up in the Waitakere Ranges. Through the window I look across the tops of Pongas - giant silver tree ferns, with their brand new, tightly curled fronds vibrating in the wind, to the deep, dark, grey green undergrowth on the other side of the valley. High up on the mountain range, almost at the top, is a rectangular patch of lighter green. A paddock. What appears to be small brown and black balls, rolling in slow motion, on the green felt of a sloping billiard table, are in fact cattle. As I watch the 'balls', merge, separate and then reform into patterns and shapes, a different feeling of space and time flows over and through me, and I begin to think of how I might rewrite my earlier unsatisfying draft of chapter two. Although I am coming towards an apparent conclusion in my thesis writing, albeit a conclusion where nothing is finally answered, I feel the need at this point in the research journey to re-map the pathways I have travelled. To explain myself.

⁴ Since writing this thesis, Diamond's paper on arts-based inquiry has been published. The references I have used now appear in chapter two of *The Postmodern Educator: Arts-based inquiries and teacher development*. (Diamond & Mullen, 1999)

It is an unstable exercise, the writing of a thesis. It is not a purposive linear journey. It might appear to have a beginning, a middle and an end. But it doesn't. I have constructed it the following way. Writing that has only recently emerged has become the beginning. The beginning has moved to the end, and the earlier middle writing doesn't appear as such because it is now interspersed into each new beginning story. The whole text is not dissimilar to a continuously recurring, moving Mobius strip, or pattern of infinity, looping forward and backwards, reaching in and out of times past and futures as yet unexplained.

Yesterday I went for a walk. I began on a well sign-posted road. Then I made a decision to turn left and enter a narrow laneway. It began as a short straight line, veering sharply away from the major road. As I walked along, over water filled potholes, and through stretches of slippery mud, the path ahead began to curve. It kept on curving, first one way and then the other. There was no end to the road in sight. My vision was filled with dense impenetrable foliage. Pampas grasses, giant impatiens with their flesh-like pale pink petals, more tree ferns with their sturdy trunks covered in green moss, zamia palms, wild broom painted with splashes of buttercup yellow, and as far as my eye could see, between the ragged edges of the earth track and the wild undergrowth, lay a carpet of white snowdrops. As I placed one foot in front of the other, not being able to see to my left or to my right, nor very far in front of me, I was unsure whether I should continue with this exploration. Where would this lane take me? Was it a dead end, a No Through Road, or was it a lane that would lead to exciting possibilities? I came across a dead possum in the centre of the road. It appeared to have only recently been knocked down by a passing vehicle. So that other traffic would not hit it again, I tried to remove this obstacle from the road by holding its tail and dragging it to one side. I made three attempts, and each time it was only the fur I grasped, and not the substance of the tail. The fur came away in my hand, but the body remained. It required that I open my eyes, face its damaged body, and use both hands to cast it to one side. I walked on with traces of the wounded animal lingering on my skin.

Around the next bend I came across another dead creature. I thought it was a bird, a native Kiwi, but when I touched it my hand recoiled. It had the illusion of being soft and

yielding, but it was deceptive. What I thought were feathers were in fact sharp spines. I looked again. Was it an echidna? No, this animal was a different shape. It was curled up in a round ball. It was completely unfamiliar to me. I could not name it. I was to find out later that it was a hedgehog. This was new to my experience. We do not have hedgehogs in Australia. As I rounded the curve of the next bend, the undergrowth on the side of the road began to clear. Light filtered through the spreading, overhanging branches. A wide-open space slowly unfolded, and so too in the distance did the end of the road. I looked out across the undulating valleys, some deep in shadow, some glowing with a soft blush from the sun hidden behind the clouds, to a landscape dotted with small houses and fields, bare of vegetation. Visual evidence of man's attempt to control and manipulate a continuously evolving environment. In some parts of the valley it was sensitively done, but in other areas the land looked as though it had been raped. I turned around retracing my steps. From this angle everything looked different. I saw things I hadn't seen before. Behind a crooked finger of shrubs close to the road was a very old, small white cottage. Sitting on the front door step was a goat. It caught me by surprise. Goats don't normally grace front door porches. A dog or a cat maybe, or even a pot of brightly coloured geraniums, but not a goat. It raised its head questioningly and ehehehed at me. It made me laugh. I stood there, caught in this moment of the unexpected, and reflected on the fact that this early morning walk with its ordinary and extra ordinary everyday events, its unexpected discoveries, obstacles, illusions, differences, dead ends, and the occasional space where clarity of vision and perception emerged, was not unlike my research journey.

As I walked back down the narrow road again seeing everything afresh, I also reflected on the fact that not only was this an external journey across uncharted landscape; it also felt like an internal journey through a labyrinthine type maze. In the early years of writing this thesis, not long after having read Drusilla Modjeska's (1990) *Poppy*, a book that has guided my thinking throughout the writing, I saw myself as a modern day Ariadne, standing at the entrance to the labyrinth, holding a ball of twine containing all the threads of my existence as well as the threads of intertwining

Theseus' labyrinth ... implies a paradoxical answer to an apparently hopeless question, both of which arise out of the labyrinth's symbolism: once you have made the difficult and complicated journey, what is at the centre? – You are.
Cooper, 1995, p.8.

theoretical knowledge, that would lead me to the monster at the centre, and back out again.⁵ The monster in this instance was not just the Minotaur as described by Modjeska it also represented my doubts, fears and questions about the finished research product. Back then, I didn't fully understand what the female imaginary was, nor did I understand how the absence of maternal connections impacts on a woman's life.⁶ But, like Modjeska, I too was questioning whether it was possible to teach and write as a woman that would differentiate a feminine subjectivity as well as acknowledge the life of a soul. I was questioning whether I could move beyond the opposing forces of male and female perceptions in my writing when reflecting on the past, as well as living in present time? Was there the possibility that I might enter the imaginative labyrinth of my body-mind and decipher the indelible traces of new life through a filter that was porous, a filter that has not been eroded by the predictability of masculine thought? And echoing Modjeska again:

Was it possible that instead I could find for myself Ursula Le Guin's third term;
a native tongue, a dialect that accommodates learning with blood and heart,
father tongue perhaps with mother tongue? (p.152).

At the outset, my desire was to create a thesis that I knew would not conform to the usual expectations of the academy or sit comfortably alongside the various discourses of

⁵ Modjeska's *Poppy* is an attempt to (re)create an identity for women as women, via a psychoanalytic representation of the maternal bond. Drawing on history, memory and imagination to write the biography of her mother, Modjeska's writing represents an exploration through the silences and gaps of the semiotic and the law of the father, to a space from which women can find their voice. In reworking the myth of Ariadne via Poppy, Modjeska implies that the monster may well be the dark and shadowy side of femininity. For Poppy, the Minotaur was the shadow of the fear 'cast by the original loss' (p.314). The Minoan labyrinth, with the monster at the centre, is the metaphor for women's lost history, the absence of maternal connection. It represents the meandering journey of a female imaginary in search of a feminized soul.

Modjeska writes: 'Who was Ariadne, and who will tell her story before she was found, waiting at the mouth of the labyrinth?' *On the thread of our history as told by others*, Gaston Bachelard writes, *year by year, we end up resembling ourselves*. May [her sister] says that 'the classical labyrinth was not a maze to get lost in, but a path of 666 feet long, traversing all parts of the figure, a diagram of heaven.' She quotes Nietzsche: *If I were to outline an architecture which conforms to the structure of our soul . . . it would have to be conceived in the image of the labyrinth* (p.314).

⁶ The imaginary 'is a term used to describe the pre-Oedipal identification of the infant with its mirror image, and identification guaranteed by the gaze of the mother holding the child to the mirror' (Weedon, 1987 p.51).

power. It was important that my research question open up possibilities for others. That in its final analysis it would make a difference. That it would count. It was important also that the end product be a text that would be attended to, that would encourage further debate and research. And so I entered the maze as artist turned researcher, and began to unravel the threads and untie the knots that contained ideas and theories on methods, methodologies and research practices in an attempt to bring them to life so as to provide the appropriate setting and context for the research question. This I have done. In the process of unravelling the threads of my existence, as well as the multiplicity of different threads that hold together the women's stories, not only have I been led to question my earlier understandings of embodiedness, I have also discovered the female imaginary and the significance of maternal connections. And I have entered into the heart of myself. The task of explicating the threads to re-story their lives added support and strength to the ball of twine, and in doing so, it has enabled me to journey to the nomadic centre of my self and beyond. And then return to the outside again. Throughout the thesis I have tried to capture the essence of the going in and the coming out of this labyrinthine experience. Somehow though, words cannot contain the plurality of sensations attached to this psychic mapping. Nonetheless, I have endeavoured to place them in a metaphorical Zen bowl so that it might hold some of the magic and emotion of the intensification of consciousness that this imaginal mode of thinking has revealed.⁷ I hope that in the writing of women's experiences of menopause, of what it is, the reader will also be able to engage with the stories vicariously as I did, and transcend, if only for brief moments, the limitations of dualistic modes of thinking.

⁷ The word 'imaginal' is used by psychologist James Hillman (1990). In his book *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, he expands on Henry Corbin's theories of the 'imaginal world' to describe ways in which we might re-think, re-vision, and re-imagine ourselves and the social community in which we live and work. The word 'imaginal' differs in meaning from that of the word 'imaginary', with its implied capacity for producing fictitious mental images or spontaneous dream-like mental pictures in the mind. Hillman's use of the word 'imaginal' refers to the creative action of the heart. It is not the physical feeling heart, but rather the heart associated with soul. He sees the psyche as image and image as soul. Hillman asserts that the 'imaginal world' is neither abstract nor real. The soul, he says, expresses the mystery and the passionate engagement we have with life, and in so doing, imaginal ways of seeing can animate our view of the world and make meaning possible. Yet at the same time, these views elude reduction and definition. He sees the making of our social and personal myths, our self-narratives, stemming not only from traditional conventions, but also from our imagistic capacity – the soul, and as such they contain an unknown component which offers a viewpoint towards things, rather than providing an explanation of the thing itself.

Writing of any kind fixes the word outside time, and silences it. The written word is a shadow. Shadows are silent. The reader breathes back life into that unmortality, and maybe noise into that silence.

(Le Guin, 1989, p.180)

But before I present the stories, I need to return to re-mapping the journey, and outline for you the ground for question, and the reasons for creating my own methods and methodological framework within which to position this arts-based approach to research. Again it is not a linear re-tracing of my steps, but more a cyclical maneuvering around the subtle differences in theories and ideas, and of making points of connection at different levels.

Situating the researcher

What does it mean to say that an approach to educational research is arts based? Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing . . . its format and contents will serve to create a new vision of educational phenomena. When readers re-create that vision, they may find that new meanings are constructed and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated. When that occurs, the purposes of art have been served.

(Barone and Eisner, 1997, p.76)

For seventeen years I was a professional, self-taught potter. In my thirty-eighth year I entered university as a mature age student, embarking on a programme of art related studies. I wanted to be someone other than who I was. I wanted to study psychology, but at the time I did not have the necessary academic qualifications, so I had to settle for a BA in art. For five years I drew and painted, sculpted, worked with ceramics and glass, printmaking and textiles. I was good at all of them, and I had a lot of fun doing it, but on graduating I was left with the question: Is this all there is to life? What other possibilities are there? And where could I go and how? I was filled with a growing unease, that making art was no longer a satisfactory medium for my personal expression. Two thoughts concerned me. One was that I felt my voice remained silent behind the various artforms I was working with; unless I articulated the reasons for my chosen signs and signifiers, there was little opportunity for facilitating a deeper communication

Einstein taught us that the physical body, like all material objects, is an illusion, and trying to manipulate it can be like grasping the shadow and missing the substance. The unseen world is the real world, and when we are willing to explore the unseen levels of our bodies, we can tap in to the immense creative power that lies at our source.
(Chopra, 1993, p.10)

between the art object, the viewer and myself. Secondly, there was the desire to take art into the broader community so that it would facilitate a widening of the lens of our viewing position on how to be human in our illusory world. It was a position that I hoped would enhance the personal lives, and work practices, the life stories of those engaged in these activities. Not only did I desire that the language of art present new and diverse opportunities for ways in which

we can come to know ourselves, I wanted it to promote healing in ways that would transform existing meaning perspectives and story lines. I searched for a solution to these concerns while undertaking postgraduate study.

In the early 90s I was introduced to critical feminist theory, and contemporary philosophy. I was attracted to the rigorous debate fostered by feminist theorists concerning all aspects of the body, and in particular their theories of power and knowledge in relation to women's reproductive bodies (Burke, 1986; Butler, 1990; Code, 1991; Cook & Fonow, 1990; Currie & Raoul, 1992; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Eistenstein, 1984; Flax, 1990; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fuss, 1989; Gross, 1986; Grosz, 1990; 1993; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Haraway, 1981; Harding, 1991; Haug, 1987; Humm, 1986; Martin, 1987; Nicolson & Ussher, 1992; Oakley, 1984; 1993a; 1993b; O'Brien, 1981; Showalter, 1985; 1993; Smith, 1993; Stanley & Wise, 1983a; 1983b; Thomm, 1992; Ussher, 1989; Wolff, 1990).

In the 80s and into the early 90s, the majority of social theorists engaged in re-constructing the female body invested in poststructural interpretations of social constructionism drawing on Foucault's reformulation of the social body. Their question concerning biology's role in determining, or contributing to women's oppression/liberation prompted wide-ranging views (Weedon, 1987). Feminist writers objected to any tendency towards associating the materiality of the body with biological essentialism. They argued that the female body is not just an anatomical object. Anatomy they said, was not our destiny. Our bodily experiences have been produced

and given meaning not by nature, but by the power of historical and cultural forces. The way we act, think and feel is a historical and political construct. They maintained that describing women's bodies as natural, implied that they were stable, immutable and passive, and in need of regulation. Poststructuralist feminist theory proposes that as individuals we can learn to work against the oppressive forms of subjection. This theory suggests we can use the power of these discursive practices as a means of developing subjectivities with the capacity to reinvent ourselves in language each time we think thoughts or give voice. This is in contrast to humanist conceptions of the individual in western philosophy which presuppose an essence at the core of the individual.

I was learning that conflicting discourses constitute the individual as a thinking subject (Butler, 1990; Butler & Wintram, 1991; Kaplan & Rogers, 1990; McNay, 1993; Smith, 1990; Smith, 1988; Smith, 1993; Weedon, 1987; Wolff, 1990). I found myself immersed in these texts and the subsequent questions arising from the knowledge that discourses regulated bodies, and influenced the linguistic symbolic of self-experience. What did that mean? Why was I not a unified rational being? I was left to ponder on the fact that a postmodern writing of texts dismantled distinctions between fact and fiction, and focussed on the differences between signs and signifiers (Richardson, 1990b). We are not the creators of our reality. From this position where nothing 'is' itself, I learned that I was not the author of my life, I only thought I was. This puzzled me.

I was beginning to understand why my earlier attempts at meaning making had left me with a sense of frustration. I was living a life within contradictory discourses that did not resonate with my own sense of embodied subjectivity. But at this point in my development I had not yet found my voice to re-name or rewrite my experiences, let alone making the power of words visible. And then, by chance, I was invited to present a tutorial on Nancy Hartsock's (1990) paper *Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?* I began to read Foucault. It took a long time to work my way through his texts, to understand them, and to understand the man behind the writing.

In his genealogy of power/knowledge discourses, Foucault (1976; 1977; 1978; 1982; 1984a; 1984b; 1984c), illustrated to me the intrinsic relationship between scientific

knowledge, and our understanding of everyday self and social knowledge. I understood that the texts we produce whether visual or written are always contextualised, beyond the control of the author. They are steeped in the forces and relations of power. Foucault's focus was on our external geographic environment, and the fact that we have a shifting, plural, socially constructed body with multiple potentialities; a body that is unable to embed itself in what he calls 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1984c). He tells us that individual sexual identities and notions of the self and subjectivity are not the result of specific biological features, but rather a manifestation of socially gendered embodiment. We are formed within and by language; there is no known body outside of discourse. Meaning and awareness of consciousness are not understandable outside of language. Foucault's explanations of the oppression of women through discourses of the body significantly altered my internalised perception of gendered reality.

In the writings of theorists incorporating Foucault's theories, there is the assumption that 'woman' is a fiction in need of deconstruction because her ontological basis is rooted in a politically constructed material world (Burke, 1986; Butler, 1990; Code, 1991; Cook & Fonow, 1990; Currie & Raoul, 1992; Eisenstein, 1984; Flax, 1990; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fuss, 1989; Gross, 1986; Grosz, 1990; 1993; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Haraway, 1981; Harding, 1991; Haug, 1987; Humm, 1986; Martin, 1987; Nicolson & Ussher, 1992; Oakley, 1984; 1993a; 1993b; O'Brien, 1981; Showalter, 1985; 1993; Smith, 1993; Stanley & Wise, 1983a; 1983b; Thomm, 1992; Ussher, 1989; Wolff, 1990). In his book, *The Body and Social Theory*, Chris Schilling (1993), maintains that the human territory explored by social constructionists tends to ignore the emotional anatomy: the inner body, beneath the skin of the person. As a result, the bodies that appear in their discourses do not enjoy prolonged visibility. For these authors he says, the flesh and blood, the materiality of the body and its emotional responses were hidden from view. To admit the possibility that emotions might be integral to the construction of knowledge would see their theories surrender into notions of essentialism. The belief shared by constructionists is that emotional responses are culturally prescribed and biologically given. Brian Turner (1984), writing in *The Body and Society* argues that these texts ignore the phenomenology of the lived body:

The immediacy of personal sensuous experience of embodiment which is involved in the notion of my body receives scant attention. My authority, possession and occupation of a personalized body through sensuous experience are minimized in favour of an emphasis on the regulatory controls which are exercised from outside (p.245).

On the subject of emotion, I found myself agreeing with theorist Lorraine Code (1991), who argues the need for admitting emotion into the production of knowledge. In her discussion on *The Sex of the Knower* she observes, that from the point of view of mainstream scientific practice, the conception of emotion resides too closely to that of uncontrolled hysteria. Code notes that the idea that it is possible, and indeed more than reasonable, to feel emotional responses within the body as a consequence of certain circumstances, bears no weight in epistemological information gathering. Emotions such as wonder, joy, amazement, curiosity, and even suffering are all necessary for the creative growth of the individual. Code reminds her readers that emotion and intellect are not oppositional forces, but are in fact mutually constitutive and sustaining, and are necessary to the construction of knowledge.

All of these varying forms of scholarship, each with its own subtle differences, gave me a framework for reviewing, and critically understanding the representations of women in culture. Although I understood that our thinking practices were primarily discursively controlled, as well as embodied, ineffable, emotional and in context, at this stage in my learning process I didn't know what phenomenology meant.

Approaches to understanding the body

Coinciding with this exciting and stimulating period of theoretical engagement, were my own faltering, uncertain steps towards menopause. What had begun as an intellectual pursuit gradually changed as I engaged with feminist epistemology from the perspective of my own body. Initially drawing on Foucault's theories that the body is not only given meaning by discourse, but is wholly constituted by discourse, I explored and re-examined the ways in which women's bodies, and our reproductive cycles have

historically been observed, supervised, and controlled by a variety of social institutions.⁸ My disruptive menopausal body prompted questions from memories deeply embedded within my psyche on how my notions of identity, sexuality, femininity and self-image had been culturally shaped. It stimulated reflection on how the body's biology, its flesh and blood, received little attention by cultural and social theorists. How did the reality of their organic bodies' impact on their every day existence? Rarely did I find texts that spoke about the authors' subjectively felt embodied experiences.

Embodiment is a complicated phenomenon, marking woman with congeries of meaning. If the topography of the universal subject locates man's selfhood somewhere between the ears, it locates woman's selfhood between her thighs. The material and symbolic boundary of the female body becomes the hymen – that physical screen whose presence or absence signals so much. (Smith, 1993, p.12).

In contrast to the earlier Foucauldian poststructuralist views of power and knowledge, I now found myself exploring the ways in which other theorists were developing concepts of epistemology that, while seemingly grounded in biological essentialism, acknowledged the issues of hegemony that are implicitly implicated in essentialists' claims. From the plethora of texts on women's bodies, I was to discover that there were a number of theorists engaged in a phenomenological questioning of organic bodily transitions, and the impact they have on our sensory emotions. I read that Adrienne Rich (1986), Ruth Behar (1991), Helen Marshall (1996), Emily Martin (1987), Iris Young (1990) and Bev Thiele (1993), see the body not only as an interface, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces, but also as body with its own agenda, experiencing birth, illness, intellectual and physical disabilities, menopause, death and the associated psychic response which lie beyond the grasp of cultural geographers and traditional science. They maintain that while the body's surface may be culturally inscribed, and that it is the mediator of women's private and personal experiences, the inside of the body can also 'be seen as the symptom and mode of expression and communication of a hidden interior or depth (Grosz, 1994b, p.116). Their concern is with the lived body. For them, it is in the convergences, the boundaries between the body as inscriptive surface, and the body as biology, where neither has primacy, towards which their explorations are directed.

⁸ See Appendix A for an outline of literature that examines science, menopause and the body.

In re-theorising the body, Marshall (1996), Reinharz (1992), and Young (1990) argue that we should pursue experiential accounts of lived experience, so as to 'discern what ordinary states of embodiment mean to the embodied subject' (Marshall, 1996, p.256). They suggest we need to move beyond the deconstructionist texts of patriarchy, where language is a series of structures from which there is no escape, and engage in discourses that might be able to articulate women's experiences that are neither essentialist nor constructionist. They tell us that this kind of investigation into women's lives, where we are formulating questions about whose knowledge we're talking, requires researchers to begin from the position that:

An understanding of the integrity of being and knowing, sense and sensuality, recognises that mind cannot exist without the body, and our bodies cannot live without our mind... To make sense we have to make knowledge with our experience, and if, yes, forms matter, it is true and significant for our desires, that matter forms.

(Brodbribb, in Thiele, 1993, p.1)

In approaching the body from the point of view that biology shapes our lived experience, the commitment by these writers is to develop new ways of seeing as a means of resolving the tension between discourse and corporeality. They maintain that essentialism is not necessarily as reactionary a position as had generally been assumed. It is possible, they point out, to talk about the materiality of the body, without assuming it has a fixed essence. Elizabeth Grosz (1994b), for instance, believes that if we can present ourselves in our own terms, from our own actual lived perceptions, then we can creatively 'transform, integrate and re-categorise hitherto diverse methodologies and knowledges' (p.13). Likewise, Adrienne Rich (1986), in *Notes Towards a Politics of Location* proposes that:

Perhaps we need a moratorium on say 'the body'. For it is also possible to abstract 'the' body. When I write 'the body' I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars,

disfigurements, discolourations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me... To say 'the body' lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions (p.215).

In telling women to take the female body as the starting point from 'which to speak with authority as women', Rich reminds women that, although she believes the biological process of reproduction to be inherently female-centred, 'to locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts' (Rich, 1986, quoted in Behar, 1991 p.298). For Rich, knowledge of her body has also been created from within the colonised territory of heterosexual patriarchy. In rewriting the myths of culture, she believes women can analyse the historical paradigms of consciousness, and in doing so, they will reveal the male assumptions which have formulated the basis of women's mythological consciousness (Humm, 1986).

In a similar vein, Mary Daly's (1979) writing also attracted my attention. Daly asserts that when a woman learns to think through the body rather than through patriarchal values, she is able to feel both a deeper connection with her unconscious, as well as with her body. Daly maintains that, as a woman becomes more conscious of the Self, and sees the Selves within the Self, she creates 'new space: semantic, cognitive, symbolic, psychic, physical spaces. She moves into these spaces and finds room to breathe, to breathe forth further space' (p.340). After reading these words, I too wanted to experience the sensation of breathing forth further space. But what did she mean?

It wasn't until I read Thiele's (1993) paper of her account of pregnancy and labour and related it to my own transformational experience of menopause that I realised a body's biology is forever in process, it is not fixed, and that our task 'is the constant and daily creation of ourselves' (p.9). Drawing in part on the work of Adrienne Rich (1986), Thiele suggests reproductive processes could in fact serve as a means for understanding the interaction/interweaving between the biological and social experience. Thiele contends that recognising the body's agency and material corporeality, has the potential to disrupt our social practices. She goes on to tell us, that it 'allows the body to be

be understood not only as a source of experience and as setting agendas, but also as a resource for resistance, as a source of new meanings' (p.14). In raising the question about how matter forms, she points to the fact that we *are* biological organisms and that we are inextricably part of nature. Admitting the body's agency is important, says Thiele, because it is through the 'minutia of change and process' that the potential for new meanings lies (p.8). She emphasizes the myriad of possible ways women experience their bodies, pointing towards 'the incredible *diversity* and *uncertainties* in a biological process which both *resists* attempts to define a normative bodily experience, and *interacts* in very complex ways with the (more familiar) diversity of social contexts' (p.12). In her conclusion she highlights the importance of women's experience as against male experience, for ways in which we can begin to theorise embodiment beyond our culture's usual dualistic notions. Quoting Jane Gallop, Thiele says, in those occasions of difference we have the chance to get at 'those moments when something else occurs' (p.15).

In further articulating this stance, Adrienne Rich's (1980) writing in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, reminds women that linguistic power comes from our bodies – from syntactically drawn images contained within our biological and domestic lives. She seeks the source of metaphors and patterns in the primitive and cultural experiences concerned with blood, birthing and mothering. Like Pollock (1996a; 1996b), Kristeva (1984; 1987), Irigaray (1985; 1986) and Cixous (1981; 1991; 1997; 1986), her emphasis is on the way culture connects with the individual psyches of women, and how this then impacts on the unconscious. Rich's concern lies with changing the language that emerges from the disruptions and disturbance of the unconscious, such as hysteria and madness experienced as a consequence of phallogentric wounding. In her poetic renderings and theoretical writing, Rich reworks and re-visions mythological and contemporary texts in her desire to create a new libidinal imagery for women. She blends together bodily actions, which she then expands into the realms of magic, art and the activity of dreams to identify a feminist language from which a new type of symbolic transformation can take place. Rich says this kind of work requires a capacity 'for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages' (Rich, 1980, p.80). She asks the question: What kind of

poetry? What kind of new psychic perceptions would we have if we were able to access an 'altered state of consciousness, if we were free of the past, of the stereotypes, of the projections', and released from 'all the ways in which women have been used as aesthetic objects?' (Gelpi, in Humm, 1986, p.187).

Rich's main task in re-visioning - the act of looking back at the personal and political lives that inform a woman's psyche, is to find a new language; a language that would be spoken by and for other women, a re-invention of a vocabulary containing metaphors and images that will, through the naming of her experience, give power to her voice. According to Rich, this can only happen when women can articulate what is particular to specific self-representations defined within the complex formations of sexuality, culture, class and race, and when women can define signifying temporalities: symbolic changes to their consciousness, so that they give the work a different meaning from traditional patriarchal readings. It is then, with this new knowledge and perception that we have the potential to expand the signifying space feminism created in the early 60s. She believes that it is through the art/matrix of women's networks that the most significant changes in women's collective experiences will occur.⁹

As my knowledge base expanded I found myself turning to the later writings of Foucault (1986; 1988) and his practices of the self. In a round-about way his thoughts were ultimately to influence my decision to pursue further academic study, as well as influence my choice of methodology for this thesis. I was attracted to his ideas on 'aesthetics of existence' or techniques of the self. Towards the end of his life his writing began to reveal a 'deepening perplexity' about what this thing called 'the self' was (Miller, 1993, p.319). Foucault no longer talked of the passive body discursively constructed by history, but spoke instead of the ways in which the subject constitutes itself into an active fashion through a self-reflexive process. Foucault stressed however, that this awareness of self is not connected to the subjective individualism of modernity

⁹ Griselda Pollock (1996b) uses the term signifying systems when referring to the arguments for reinventing semiotic resources proposed by Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. Pollock says that she hears them 'calling for new semiotic relations between the corporeality of the subject and the filters or signs through which meanings that might articulate otherwise what feminine subjects now are forced to experience hysterically or psychotically because there are no metaphors to accommodate their own psychic, fantastic, and sexual lives' (p.75).

but rather they were techniques 'oriented toward the discovery and formulation of the truth concerning oneself' (Foucault, in Miller, 1993, p.322). In an effort to change his earlier beliefs about the self, he becomes interested in the 'art' of friendship, and the idea of an aesthetic re-invention of the self at the moment when art and life cross boundaries.

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialised or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? ... From the ideas that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art ...we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relations one has to oneself to a creative activity.

(Foucault, 1984b, p.350-1)

Something in what Foucault was trying to say appealed to me. It seemed that in his ideas on the 'aesthetics of existence' or techniques of the self are the practices in our daily lives that give meaning to ourselves and to the spiritual significance that we attach to these activities. Although Foucault denies that there is anything deep inside us that is not a product of the practice and discourse in which we literally and figuratively find ourselves, I was intrigued by his comments 'one writes to become someone other than who one is,' and that there is 'not a book I have written that does not grow, at least in part, out of a direct personal experience' (Foucault, in Miller, 1993, pp. 31-33). After reading James Miller's (1993) documented study of Foucault's life in *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, I realised he was a man of many masks caught between the promptings of his inner world and his intellectual mind. During his life, he too seemed to be struggling with the same questions I was trying to resolve; how did I become what I am and why do I suffer from being what I am? I found myself reflecting long on his comment:

We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life.

(Foucault, in Probyn, 1993, p.117)

In Foucault's biography, I was intrigued to find that the labyrinth has been a central emblem in Foucault's Nietzschean quest for understanding knowledge of the self; to become what one is. In his 1962 essay '*Such a Cruel Knowledge*', he reworked the original Greek story giving it his own personal interpretation. In the retelling of the old story, two mythic spaces intersect at the point where he embraces the Minotaur. The first space is 'rigid forbidden enveloping'. The second is the space of personal metamorphosis where the human being can traverse time and space back toward a 'rediscovered origin'. For Foucault, the Minotaur opened a second 'great interior labyrinth' where a person might come to 'think differently' (Foucault, in Miller, 1993, pp.145-147).

With the dawning realisation that my own body was the ground for the creation of new knowledge, I ventured into this uncharted territory to give names to things I had left unexplored and unnamed.

As previously poeticized in the introduction, during the early stages of menopause I embarked upon a series of drawings: an attempt to deconstruct my internalised views of femininity and sexual identity, as well as transcend the dualistic assumptions of male authority which, until then, had determined my sense of self. As I recorded my bodily sensations and thoughts, I gradually became aware of how powerfully and thoroughly I had absorbed society's dominant modes of thinking about the female body, and how much of my life had been lead through illusion and role playing.

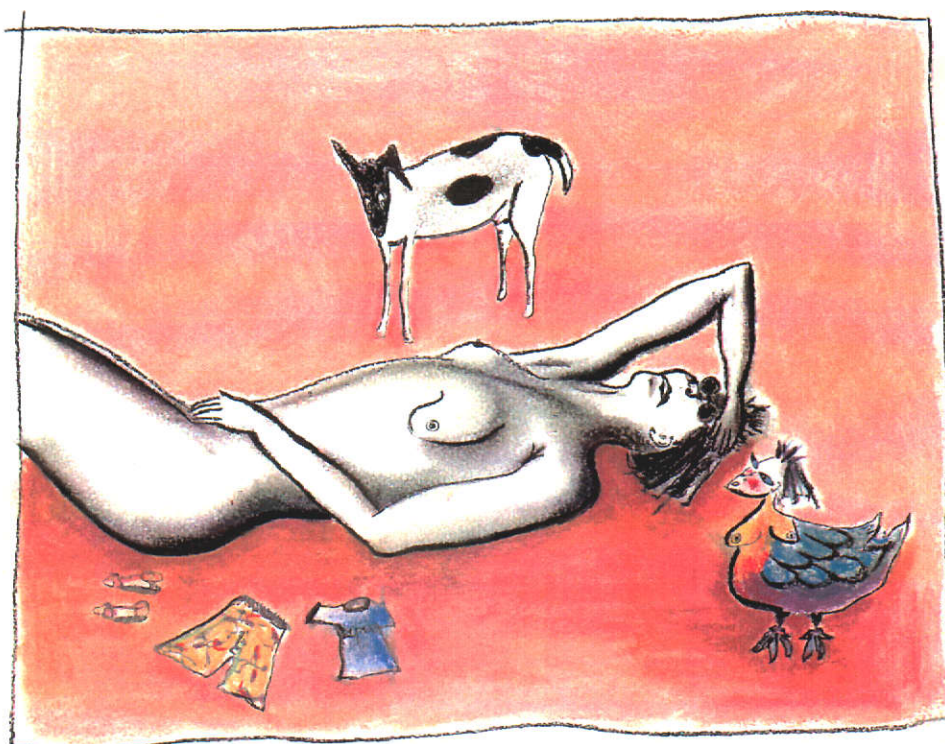


Fig. RW3 *'My mother never told me'*

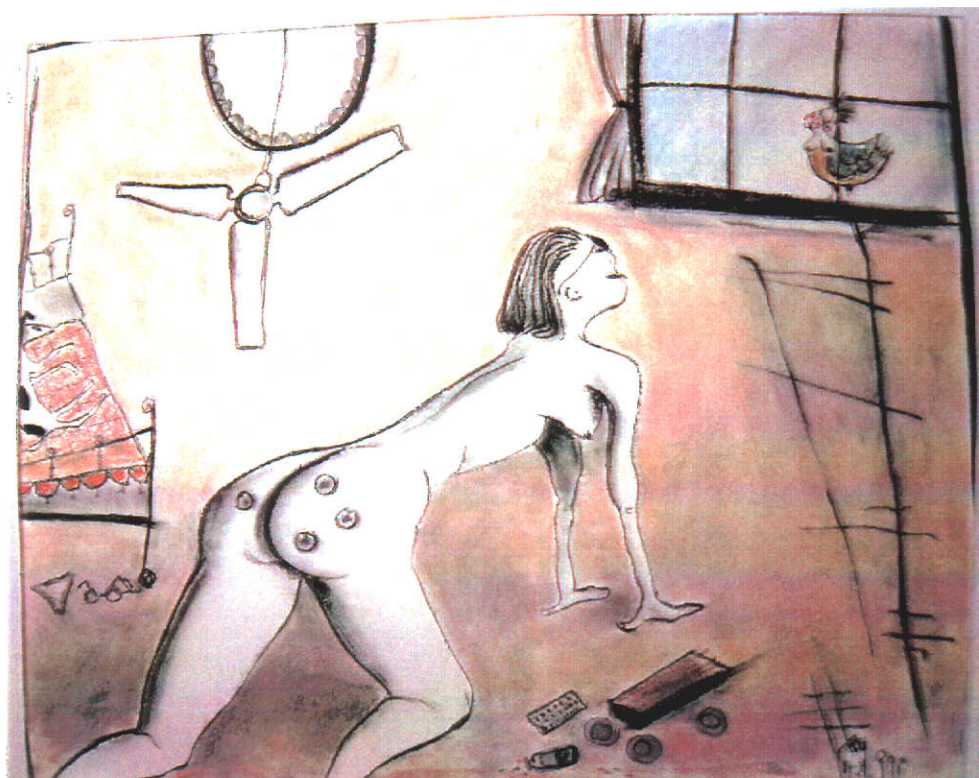


Fig. RW4 *'Can we plan a rites of passage?'*

As a child growing up during the 50s, I had unwittingly created a distorted and fragmented picture of womanhood. In Western industrial culture, images of femininity are typically associated with youth, beauty, fertility and with being sexually active (Berger, 1972; Betterton, 1987; Parker, 1987; Ussher, 1989). Historically menopause has been associated with powerful negative beliefs and interpretations, by-products of old-wives tales, social myths and medical discourses (Dickson, 1990; 1994; Martin, 1987; Oudshoorn, 1994). It has been, and still is, the subject for ridicule and cruel jokes (Davis, 1994; Ussher, 1989; Shoebridge, 1997). The cessation of bleeding is associated with the loss of femininity and sexual desire (Leroy, 1993). It represents the beginning of ageing and the decay of female flesh. Expressions such as 'behaving like an old crone,' or 'hag,' or 'there is no need to become hysterical,' and 'you're carrying on like an old woman,' roll off the tongue effortlessly. In fact, I have been guilty of using these same expressions in my younger years.

The situation of women's bodies and culture

In the closing months of my post-graduate studies, I read Germaine Greer's (1992) latest book *The Change*. It is a provocative and absorbing study of menopause in which she explores the physical, personal and social upheavals that accompany this developmental process. Greer's engagement with her own bodily processes and her subsequent fascination with fifty-year-old women led her to the biographies and memoirs of selected historical poets and authors. She began seeking out the signs that would indicate that these women were experiencing menopause. She found very little evidence of this experience. Greer writes:

... the utter invisibility of middle-aged women in English literary culture is baffling. The years of the climacteric are, even for the most vociferous of women, silent years, and this phenomenon adds not a little to our anxiety regarding them (p.21).

Greer then proceeded to 'read' between the lines, searching for clues that might disclose this event. Her passionate writing aroused my curiosity. How had artists throughout

history, and more particularly in recent times, articulated this experience? How did they re-define the self at menopause? What was their concept of self? I undertook a literature search. It was frustrating. There were entries under the maternal body and art, but information about the menopausal body and art was absent. Where were artists' menopausal voices? At this moment I realised I had found my research topic. Here was the opportunity to explore as Adrienne Rich (1980) suggested, 'the visible effects on women's lives of seeing, and hearing our wordless or negated experience affirmed and pursued further in language' (p.34). I could, through exploration of other women's artworks, continue to define a female consciousness which is 'political, aesthetic, and erotic, and which refuses to be included or contained in the culture of passivity' (p.18).

... if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming. (Rich, 1980, p.43)

I found myself deeply interested in the construction of knowledge through women's embodiment. How could the everyday world and women's subjective connection to objects of experience generate different theories of knowledge, metaphysics, politics and aesthetics? I was drawn initially to theories both poststructural and phenomenological, that suggested we engage through reflexive awareness with the ways in which discursive

practices shape selves, shape our perceived realities and desires. By involving myself in these activities, I was informed that I could explore the possibilities of re-claiming, re-writing and re-visioning desire so that I could create new versions of our life-stories.

Candidacy in a Ph.D. programme was approved. I began interviewing women, and I continued to read. Once my research project was in progress there was the realisation that I needed to find an appropriate and sensitive form of representation within which to portray women's experiences of menopause. My knowledge base expanded again. Firstly to literary theory, and then to poetry and autobiographical writing structured around the areas of a woman's life and everyday experience (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Mattuck, 1986; Chernin, 1987; Conway, 1992; 1994; 1998; Gaudelius, 1993; Goldberg, 1986; 1990; 1992; 1997; Hedges & Fishkin Fisher, 1994; Heilbrun,

1997; Holmes, 1995; hooks, 1991; Le Guin, 1989; Llewellyn, 1987; 1988; 1993; 1994; Nin, 1975; Piercy, 1995; Sarton, 1994; Stevenson, 1979; Winterson, 1989). I moved backwards and forwards between texts on art and literature. I began to read differently. I observed the way women writers lay words on a page. How they played with verbs and syntax, how they gave rhythm and space to certain words, and to their unique and individual use of metaphors and symbols. And how certain styles of writing made my heart swell and sing. These books became my teachers, my inspiration and conversational companions. Was it possible, I wondered, to write outside the law of the father?

I was to discover that the idea that women artists have been trapped within the confines of masculine ideological constructions has been a common thread throughout the writing of both literary and art theorists (Gilbert & Gubar, 1988; Benstock, 1988; Betterton, 1987; de Zegher, 1994; Deepwell, 1995; Gablik, 1991; de Lauretis, 1984; Duncan, 1988). Alicia Ostriker (1985; 1986), writing in *Stealing the Language*, claims that women artists and poets, when defining a personal identity have primarily interpreted their external reality through the medium of the body, and that their work is explicitly female in the sense that they choose to explore experiences that are central to their sex, and to the activities of their everyday lives. At the core of their work is a continuous quest for self-definition. Ostriker goes on to say, that throughout most of our history, the woman artist who felt she did not fit into the acceptable narrative of a female life has had to state her self-definition in code.

Both art and literary theorists who employ psychoanalytic insights into their ideas, claim that autobiographical visual and textual representation of women's lived experiences can be read more for their absences than their content (Cixous, 1991; Deepwell, 1995; Gubar, 1982; Heilbrun, 1997; Pollock, 1996a; 1996b; Rich, 1980). These authors suggest that women's writing and visual imagery are filled with silences that can only be read and 'got at' sideways and in the margins (Humm, 1986, p.67). Benstock (1988), suggests that the retrospective glance that initiates the artistic autobiographical act, has, by social conditioning been enmeshed in the repressive effects of language, and in being so, renders the speaking subject primordially divided. Thus, women are split between

the realms of the unconscious and our conscious reality, and as a result we are not fully known to ourselves.

With my research work well in progress, I found I was returning to the writings of the French feminists, Helene Cixous (1981; 1991; 1997; 1986), Luce Irigaray, (1985; 1986) and Julia Kristeva (1984; 1987), and to the critical reflections of art theorist, Griselda Pollock (1988; 1992; 1996a; 1996b). I had circled around some of these texts which addressed new formulations of psychoanalytic theory in my undergraduate years but I was unable at the time to absorb what they were trying to say. The position they take is one where they posit a sexuality that is independent from men, while acknowledging also the sexual differences between women, proposing that it is possible for a particular kind of writing or visual text that originates in pre-linguistic bodily experiences. This writing in the feminine escapes the dominance of patriarchal language and the rule of the Father. Pollock (1996b) writes:

Femininity stands for resistance in the text to existing stories and knowledges, to the negative face of sexual difference in a culture that either presumes to know what woman is (and wants) or utterly denies its relevance or interest. In this sense femininity or "woman" means both something specifically about women – as yet unspecified – and something about the limits of phallogentric culture as a whole that is unable to deal with difference in any form (p.82).

For these reasons, feminist psychoanalytic theory focuses on women's access to language by questioning the symbolic and linguistic codes through which embodied meaning, identity and subjectivity are formed. It explores the boundaries where culture ends and biology begins. Believing that the relationship of the body to the mind could influence the specificity of female experience, theorists explore the ways in which the 'feminine' can be articulated through women's

<p>It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (Cixous, 1981, p.72)</p>
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writing and artistic practice.¹⁰ In their thoughts on writing from the body, theorists conceptualise it as a site of transaction between the social system and the subject where personal experience might impact on changing the multiplicity of women's experiences, on female sexualities. It is not so much about being 'Woman', but more about the space of difference, rupture, diversity and dissidence. By differentiating and making connections between the body as symbol and metaphor and the physical body, they create possibilities for us to re-connect to our minds and bodies. To do this, they tell us, we need to re-image and re-invent new signifiers by exploring both internal body and external social landscapes. It is not so much that women need to invent a whole new language, but rather we need to learn to decipher women's inscriptions or story lines in culture. This requires that we look at what is real, imaginary and mythical. We need also to re-examine our subjectively felt emotions and dreams in order that women will no longer live their lives on the 'enforced blanked-out page' (Pollock, 1996b, p.75).¹¹

Griselda Pollock (1996a), asserts that as a consequence of the human subject being primarily formed in language, our emotional and intellectual expressions are constrained within the limits of our culture's imagination and understanding. According to Pollock, we attempt to image ourselves by means of subjectivities and identities which are in a continuous process of production. She reminds the reader that therefore the manner in which we choose to creatively express our voices can only ever be partially framed.

Pollock argues that art made by women is different, although not in ways that are easily recognisable. In taking the position that women's art is different from that of men's social and imaginative realities, Pollock calls for the creation of spaces within which to 'acknowledge the more durable temporalities of sexual difference, and for renewed

¹⁰ A feminist reading for 'the feminine' means that it is both the repressed of patriarchal culture and its excess. Pollock says 'it means listening for the traces of subjectivity formed in the feminine and within, and in conflict with, a phallogocentric system. Beyond that, it implies figuring out what working from that place, however unconsciously, might be *producing* as yet unarticulated, unrepresented, unsignified, unrecognised.' (Pollock, 1996b, p.74)

¹¹ Griselda Pollock says of subjectivity from a psychoanalytic perspective:

1. It consists of more than which we know through our conscious minds.
2. The question of sexuality is intrinsically bound up with our psychological make-up
3. Sexual difference is a central feature of our identity.
4. We are no longer seen to be rational, autonomous beings, or unitary selves.

intervention into deciphering the signs and symbols that mediate the dialectic between images and forms of representation available in a woman's situated reality (p.xii). She then suggests that:

The artistic practices of women require deciphering, like monuments from lost or unfamiliar cultures. There is some system to the patterning of signs into meanings. We need, however, to find the codes that lend the symbols generated there resonance and meanings, both within the context of their production and across time and space to other contexts. These codes, as I name them, are not merely semiotic signs, but those shaped in concrete and historical conditions, which in turn shape and are shaped by the psychic life of individuals framed and formed in specific trajectories of socially constituted but psychically lived subjectivity... artistic practices are a form of witness, a testimony of survival, a promise of imaginative projection as well as the commitment to honest appraisal, to stories that must be told.

(1996a, p. xv – xviii)

In a society that has constrained and restricted the ground of womanhood, the kinds of representational strategies proposed in the writing of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva offer a position from which women as artists can use knowledge of their bodies to reclaim culturally inscribed meanings. For these authors, women are the creators of knowledge about the female body, their bodies are the text, and as such, women could value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing rather than being guided by male dominated majority models which restrict our ability to see and hear.

New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it.
(Lakoff, 1980, p.145)

The discourses of hysteria

As I further explored texts that were influenced by psychoanalytic theories, I encountered references to the discourses of hysteria (Cixous & Clement, 1986; Irigaray,

1985; Robinson, 1995). To what were they referring? During my years of diagnostic testing in the early stages of menopause, I had been labelled as psychotic by a leading female gynaecologist. It was a comment that was to affect me profoundly. I began to reflect more deeply on theoretical writings concerning the hysteric. The authors tell us that for centuries women have been labelled as hysterical whenever they exhibited signs of anger, rage, frustration and despair (Code, 1991). Ussher (1989) adds to this array of 'symptoms' by including 'fainting, choking, sobbing, laughing, and paralysis, to general unhappiness, nervousness, or discontent' (p.4). Indeed, any woman who exhibited unacceptable behaviour, whether she was in puberty, experiencing the effects of pregnancy or the menopause was labelled hysterical, and as such, her 'condition' was seen as displaying the inherent essence of her femininity. The word 'hysteria', evolved from the Greek *hysteria*, meaning womb, and is defined by the Collins Dictionary as 'a mental disorder characterised by emotional outbursts' (p.491). Another current dictionary definition states that the general features of hysteria are 'an extreme degree of emotional instability and an intense craving for affection: an outbreak of wild emotionalism' (Robinson, 1995, p.19). Julia Kristeva (1987) points out that this outbreak of wild emotionalism is not the subjective narcissism that Freud was so critical of at the turn of the century. Instead, for Kristeva, the self-reflexive narcissism of the hysteric comes from the pain of 'inner contemplation, day dreaming and even hallucination' as a consequence of sublimating their otherness, 'love in the feminine', to masculine rationality (p.112-13).

Hilary Robinson (1995), writing in *Border Crossings: womanliness, body, representation*, asserts that it is difficult for women artists to find an authentic voice for the 'locating of the female and the feminine in the body and through bodily experience' within existing patriarchal linguistic practices (p.16). Echoing the thoughts of the French feminists, Robinson similarly suggests that by returning to the spaces of the margins, the edge of language, women may find the means to negotiate masculine rationality and break through existing codes of femininity. Robinson, and other literary and art theorists state that women artists have traditionally occupied a space on the margins of their profession (Betterton, 1987; Bronfen, 1996; Cixous & Clement, 1986; Deepwell, 1995; Ettinger, 1996; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1987; Pollock, 1996a; 1996b;

Trinh, 1989). They believe that it is from this marginal space, the border crossings between body and culture, that women have the potential for finding a voice.

The borderlands, these theorists suggest, are well known to the hysteric, and the sorceress, for this is where they can manoeuvre the imaginary and the symbolic signifiers that codify the self-representation of the actual bodies of women. Therefore, by attending to the borders, the margins, in the manner of the hysteric, women artists can work through their bodies, with, and in, the traces of their embodiment of gender, and create spaces where new meaning, new understanding can be produced (Bronfen, 1996). Robinson (1995) goes on further to add, that in describing women as occupying similar terrain as that of the hysteric and sorceress:

... is not to hystericise them, place them as the hysterical 'other' to masculine rationality in the present pejorative use of the word; it is rather to acknowledge the seriousness of their intent and the nature of their risk, and the origins of the modern discourse of hysteria (p.142).

Endorsing Robinson's views, Elizabeth Bronfen (1996) in her essay *The Knotted subject: hysteria, Irma and Cindy Sherman*, calls for a creative return to hysteria as a strategy of artistic self-expression.¹² Bronfen believes that in resurrecting and re-defining hysteria, the so-called 'disorder' defined at the beginning of the century by Freud, women can revision the problematic relationship between identity, gender and representation. Referring to the work of French writer, Didi Hubermann, (*Invention de l'hysterie*) to illustrate her theoretical stance, she explains that the hysteric uses her body to represent, in 'converted or displaced manner', traumas that have not been adequately dealt with, or 'belated memory traces' whose origins are unknown to her (pp.45 -50). According to Bronfen, the hysteric 'performs to excess precisely the representations of femininity her culture has ascribed to her'. Quoting Mentzos, she goes on to say that 'the hysteric's self performance is in some sense always self-reflexive in the sense that

¹² Sherman is an American photographer who uses the language of hysteria in her self-representations. Using photographs she self-consciously creates a spectacle of her body masquerading as the stereotypical heroine to deconstruct idealised western notions of femininity. Using her own unique language from the body, often incorporating masks, she demonstrates how her sense of femininity is formed within cultural codifications of signifiers. Her work addresses the crisis of representation for women in Western culture.

the hysteric is precisely one who has “the tendency to experience herself and show herself in difference to the way she is, a quasi altered self-representation” (Mentzos, 1980, in Bronfen 1996, p.45).

However, Bronfen (1996) points out that it is not sufficient to move through and beyond the self in the reconstruction of new visual and textual narratives about our lives, we need also to make sense of our genetic and cultural codes which are ‘bound together by a process of integration to the language of the body’ (p. 43). Thinking from the ‘modern discourses of hysteria’, as Robinson (1995) articulates it, allows for a stretching and recoding of women’s bodily gendered experience. She writes:

On the borders of those languages and that intelligibility at the point where either language and understanding reach their limits and end, or new understandings and new meanings have to be developed – we find the women beyond the law/s of the father/s; we find the sorceress and the hysteric; we find the disproportionate number of women who become ‘mentally ill’; we find women in political and personal struggle (p.17).

Bronfen proposes, as do Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, that in returning to the discourse of hysteria as a starting point, we can not only unravel the threads that allow us to reconstruct ourselves through new narratives, we can also move beyond a notion of the subject exclusively constructed by patriarchal representations (p.42). Despite the seemingly united front of these theorists, Bronfen’s and Robinson’s thoughts on redefining the hysteric’s voice are formulated within the system of the cultural codifications of women’s bodies and femininity. Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous discern the appropriation of hysteria from psychoanalytic accounts of psychic and social production. They all acknowledge, however, that the hysteric’s voice is the woman’s masculine language, and it is used as a point of departure into the unarticulated spaces of the unknown (Grosz, 1986).

Re-defining bodies, culture and art

In following the trail of the hysteric and the sorceress, who, the dictionary tells me is a 'person who seeks to control and use magic powers', I came finally to Suzi Gablik's (1991) *The Reenchantment of Art* (McLeod, 1987, p.954). In this book, Gablik addresses the art dilemmas of this century and explores how art can be an instrument for connection and for healing at an individual and communal level. From my reading of her work, it would seem that although Gablik incorporates the voice of the sorceress in the guise of the shaman, to challenge the dualistic consciousness of the modern world, she does not embrace the discourse of hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, or pre oedipal semiotics in the same manner as Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray. Instead, she connects the sorceress and her visionary seeing, to the unconscious and to mythical experience. With her magical powers of enchantress and incantator of rituals and creator of myths, as well as the powers of divination: the art or practice of discovering future events or unknown things, the sorceress becomes the shaman who enters the world of magical imaginative perception experientially. For Gablik, the shaman moves through non-ordinary states of consciousness, accessing time and space in a non-linear fashion where inside is not separated from outside. The shaman hears the voices 'of the stones and trees that are speaking – the voices of things unheard to us all' (p.44). Through the shaman, Gablik says, we can foster psychic mobility and get a direct hit that enables us to open to the world in fresh ways. Gablik writes:

The modern challenge is to again find sacredness within the world, to recover our lost souls, to somehow get past what George Steiner recently described as "the age of embarrassment about God, about the numinous, the collective unconscious; embarrassment about owing to our inner world, transcendental experience, mysteries and magnanimites." Our mechanistic, materialistic, deterministic traditions have eliminated any reliance on the invisible as being true or trustworthy – we only rely on what we see and know (p.53).

Much of Gablik's text is devoted to addressing ways in which it is possible to create a framework for reconstructive postmodern practice. In her view, the philosophies of the

Cartesian era with their individualist focus on aesthetic perspectives distance us from a sense of wholeness. What we as a culture need, if we are to pursue an integrative role in personal creativity and social responsibility, she says, is a participatory aesthetics that entails the dissolution of mental/rational structures of consciousness. This ecological perspective is not intended to replace the existing individual aesthetic paradigm, rather it is intended to provide a reformulation of consciousness. Quoting David Feinstein from his book *Personal Mythology*, Gablik writes: 'We need new myths; we need them urgently and separately ... Times are changing so fast that we cannot afford to stay set in our ways' (p.4).

Consider that the body itself may be a metaphor, just a way of referring to an experience we all have in common. Maybe it's that we don't have consciousness, but consciousness has us. (Perts, 1997, p.259)

In redefining art and culture through a new paradigm, Gablik's ideas are drawn from the quantum sciences. Her thoughts are not offered as a realized framework, but rather as possibilities directed towards making the transition from Cartesian dualism to a model of culture that embraces aesthetics of interconnectedness, social responsibility and ecological attunement. Unlike Pollock, who maintains we are in a continual process of semiotic production, Gablik instead, articulates the views shared by other individuals working towards a participating consciousness, that we are more than floating or mobile sets of signifiers without a unified vision of the world (Brennan, 1988; Campbell, 1988; 1991; Capra, 1975; 1996; Hillman, 1996; Macy, 1992; Perts, 1997; Sheldrake, 1981; 1996; Wellwood, 1992; Wheatley, 1994; Zohar, 1990). Gablik claims that because we have surrendered to the belief that there is no transcendental cosmic order, or that there is anything giving significance to the whole, we have lost the mythic, transpersonal ground of meaning. We have, she says, two postmodernisms – a deconstructive and a reconstructive version – each with opposing philosophical attitudes. However, what they do share is the knowledge that modernity failed to provide a sustaining cultural paradigm. In her attempts to promote a cultural, spiritual and ethical renewal, Gablik calls for 'a revitalized sense of community, an enlarged ecological perspective, and greater access to the mythic and archetypal underpinnings of spiritual life' (Frontcover). She urges artists to look at themselves as cultural healers working towards a holistic paradigm that neutralizes difference, where inner and outer worlds,

subjective and objective ways of knowing, are brought together into an ego-free integrated consciousness that is neither dichotomized or polarized. Healing, says Gablik, is the most powerful aspect of reconstructive postmodernism.

In pursuing further the imagery of relational holism and how it relates to our everyday life as well as contributing to our understanding of consciousness, I read with interest Danah Zohar's (1990) *The Quantum Self*. Here I was to find the links between quantum science and

Through quantum memory, the past is alive, open, and in dialogue with the present. As in any true dialogue, this means that not only does the past influence the present but also that the present impinges on the past, giving it new life and new meaning, at times transforming it utterly.
(Zohar, 1990, p.145)

phenomenology that I was seeking. Although writing differently from the language of quantum physics, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty seemed to saying very similar things. In his essay on aesthetics, Heidegger (1964b) uses the example of Van Gogh's painting of the peasant's shoes to illustrate that it is a thing in itself. The painting, he tells us, cannot simply be reduced to paint and canvas, but instead it reveals a whole view. We as viewers, enter into the peasant's life by creating our own story in relation to the peasant labour, the shoes, the soil and the earth. Likewise Merleau-Ponty (1962), in explaining how we can access 'direct and primitive contact with the world', says:

To return to the things themselves is to return to that world which preceded knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is (p. vii-ix).

Zohar's central argument is that as conscious human beings we are 'the natural bridge between the everyday world and the world of quantum physics', and as such, what is needed is a closer examination of the nature and role of consciousness and how it impacts on our thought patterns, and the way in which we relate to ourselves and the world in general (p.22). In explaining how reality is revealed to us through our contextualised active participation in the constitution of the self, she uses Merleau-Ponty to illustrate her ideas. In her view, quantum theory with its own distinctive

epistemological, moral and spiritual dimensions must contribute to the nature of knowledge and the question - what we mean by truth. Quoting Merleau-Ponty she writes:

So long as I keep before me the ideal of an absolute observer, of knowledge in the absence of any viewpoint, I can only see my situation as being a course of error. But once I have acknowledged that through it I am geared to all actions and all knowledge that are meaningful to me, then my contract with the social in the finitude of my situation is revealed to me as the starting point of all truth, since we are inside truth and cannot get outside it, all that I can do is define a truth within the situation (p.46).

What Merleau-Ponty is suggesting is that there is no truth, only our perception of truth. Truth does not inhabit the inner world of the individual, nor does it reside in external temporal events and experiences. The whole of life is perceived as a variety of truth games and all knowledge, 'truths', are an expression of interpretation. In pursuing further this line of thought on truth, McCleary (1964), referring to Merleau-Ponty adds:

... the speaking language which attempts to liberate the hidden meanings captive in the present world must bend itself to fit the indirections and 'allusive logic' of that world itself. In creative expression, the real and the imaginary, the public and the private, and the multiple fields of presence all coexist in the advent of truth (p.xxii).

In speaking of lies,
 we come inevitably,
 to the subject of truth.
 There is nothing simple
 or easy about this idea.
 There is no 'the truth!'
 'a truth' –
 truth is not one thing
 or even a system.
 It is an increasing
 complexity.
 The pattern of the carpet
 is the surface.
 When we look closely
 or when we become
 weavers,
 we learn of the tiny
 multiple threads
 unseen in the overall
 pattern, the knots on the
 underside of the carpet.

(Rich, in Spence, 1986
 frontispiece)

In all of the writings I explored, I was to find something that resonated with my own experiences. All of the issues I have examined here form part of the textual layering that has shaped my individual and artistic consciousness in relation to the thesis. In its writing, the task has been to find ways in which I could incorporate aspects of these theories and ideas into the women's stories and my own. The different texts have produced words like the notes of a melody on a musical score, each one separate and distinct, some soft, some loud, some silent, but all necessary to give it a soulful interplay between the body and the ear.

In the following chapter I elaborate on phenomenology and how its various approaches have been co-opted for the expressive content of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REMAPPING METHODOLOGIES

The phenomenologist is confronted with very different kinds of knowledge – all different aspects of our being in the world. The perception of a tree, the practical know-how for handling a tool, the enjoyment of a painting, the interpretation of a scriptural text, the insight into the theorem of geometry, the interpretation of the spirit of an age, or of a primitive myth, or of a dream, or of the sense of an entire historical tradition, all involve different ways of knowing, which the philosopher needs to relate one to another, if he is ultimately to inquire into the sense of it all.

(Langan, 1970, p.12)

Introduction

Thomas Langan begins his next paragraph with the question ‘but where to begin?’ This is my current question. In this chapter I return once more to the beginning of the research journey to show how various theoretical and philosophical ideas have shaped my thesis. Examples of this shaping are the impact of my philosophical framework on my work, and the way the relationship between this framework and my methods has generated a richly comprehensive mode of expression for experience.

Choosing a theoretical position

From the outset, my intention was to undertake a poststructuralist analysis of women’s experience of menopause. My feminist values called for a theoretical underpinning that offered ways of interrogating the web of power/knowledge relations that mediate women’s perceptions and experiences of menopause. In addition, my plan was to theorise how the postmodern menopausal self influenced artistic forms of self-representation. I was seeking to uncover the ways in which women might reposition themselves and make visible their deeply felt sense of body and landscape within the

linguistic practices of a society that molds and shapes our understanding of subjection and desire. As an artist, I was looking for a framework; a set of procedures and guidelines for 'doing' qualitative research that would allow me to go beyond the mapping of the discursive elements which had shaped the knowing and doing of my

The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finity subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and in silence. We – you and me, she and he, we and they – we differ in the content of the words, in the construction and weaving of sentences but most of all, I feel, in the choice and mixing of utterances, the ethos, the tones, the paces, the cuts, the pauses. (Trinh, 1989, p.2)

participants' lives. Like Louis Arnaud Reid (1989), I believed the process of artistic 'making' was a symbolic embodiment, a process where knowing and making was transformed into a fusion of existential unity, a process expressed through bodily senses and imagination where physical and spiritual dimensions dissolved the discontinuity between language, the body and landscape. Reid maintains that artistic feeling is expressed within a plural concept of knowledge. This was my feeling also. Therefore, I was seeking a mode of inquiry that would allow me to unravel and make sense of the theoretical component of the research journey, while at the same time explore the complex

nature of the primacy of feeling in aesthetic experience. I wasn't sure if this could be achieved within my (then) understanding of poststructuralism. In hindsight, and with the knowledge and experience I have gained as a consequence of my research experiences, I realise I could have 'done' the research from a poststructuralist position. However, as a novice researcher, and working within the health sciences as a part time lecturer in their qualitative research program, the imperative was to find an acceptable structure for presenting the material I was gathering.

In 1994, when I first began reading poststructural qualitative research texts in preparation for this study, I was unable to find a guiding set of procedures, or techniques that were contextually appropriate to the specific nature of my research questions. The articles and papers focused on the current conceptualizations of menopausal knowledge from a nursing or social science perspective (Darke, 1996; Dickson, 1990; Jones, 1994; Klein & Dumble, 1994; MacPherson, 1981; 1985). The authors analysed the languages of the discourses of science and explored the meaning in the everyday language of the

subjectivities of midlife women in an attempt disclose the constraining effects of the historical construction of women's bodies and how the power/knowledge discourses associated with menopause are not objective and value free. The women in these studies were not viewed as individual sources of knowledge as in a phenomenological study, rather they were seen as bodies of knowledge inscribed by history, and invested with relations of power and domination.¹³ In presenting the results of their studies, the authors' commentaries on the nature of subjection remained largely silent on how our multiple selves are constructed within the context of our lived experience. There was little discussion on the intricate entanglement between the phenomenology of embodiment and the overlapping fluid and plural world of experientially acquired knowledge, our internal biological forces and social attitudes. As social science and nurse educators, their focus understandably was not directed towards the creative deconstruction of images and forms, discourses of the soul, or of speaking/writing from the body, to portray how women might imaginatively re-position themselves within the constitutive forces of discourse.

So, although I found the writing of theorists working within a poststructuralist agenda – specifically Foucauldian – to be a useful framework for theorising the production of meaning through language, subjectivity and power and for illuminating processes by which individuals can resist the social production of knowledge, I found at times a certain poverty of style in these discourses. They failed to address the senses; the felt emotions of lived experience. To my mind, they failed to seduce, engage the spirit, capture the imagination and move the heart. They lacked life. Furthermore, they ignored that our wide, imaginative, intuitive, reflexive understanding of life might be broader and deeper than language. There were questions I wanted answers to. What if we are more than material bodies soaked through with language? What if we do have an ontological core at the heart of ourselves that is not socially constituted which enables the non-discursive nature of experience to be expressed in artistic forms? And what if the direct experiences we ascribe bodily sensory feelings to *are* knowable in other ways?

¹³ I use the word 'individual' here to make the distinction between the different research methods. A phenomenological study incorporates subjective emotional feeling responses, as well as acknowledging that the embodied individual is necessarily intersubjective and is located in an interworld of shared meanings (Crossley, 1996).

Thus, in creating a thesis towards a richer and more imaginative concept of knowledge, I wanted a flexible theoretical underpinning that would enable me to search out ways of using metaphoric language so as to open up possibilities for re-thinking our bodies beyond what we already know.

As an artist, I knew that metaphor and language could take me to an original place or space where there was no sense of psychic splitting; a space without pre-meditated vision; a space where language spoke through silence, through an intuitive bodily knowing. I had yet to find a useful way within poststructuralism that would allow me to interpret what van Manen (1990), describes as the 'active inner, cognitive or spiritual life of human beings in a social, historical or political context'(p.181).

Given then, that one of the concerns of this study was exploring notions of the self and identity and how we negotiate our way of being, seeking and becoming in the world, it was important to find methodological structures that would enable a broader examination of how our consciousness is both simultaneously directed to an 'inner' world of thoughts and feelings, while at the same time projecting externally to culturally acquired lived experience. I wanted a mode of theory that would allow me to think inner and outer as one together, outside binary logic. In 'making sense of it all', in understanding how different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge are related to one another, I wanted an holistic theoretical framework that was expansive in its philosophical viewpoints.¹⁴

Form does not follow thinking but is created from *un-thinkable feeling*. If the art is 'successful' in objectifying the subjective, it becomes an extension of language. That is, thinking follows art ... The most memorable art enters us through the loins or the guts or the heart and then travels to the brain. There it may be toyed with as Husserl's 'noematic object', keeping its visceral power as a kind of cellular memory.
(Hoffie, 1996, p.6)

Surprisingly, I found it within phenomenology.

¹⁴ I use the term holistic here in the same way it is used in health and healing. That is, moving beyond conventional forms of knowing about our bodies and reality.

Introducing phenomenology

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenology. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which the reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience.
(van Manen, 1990, p.36)

As often happens when we are searching for direction, the answer is provided by a chance encounter with a stranger we have never met before, or perhaps we happen upon a book that guides our thinking and further exploration. I did both. In searching for a qualitative research text that spoke of art as a source of lived experience, I read van Manen's (1990) *Researching Lived Experience*. I recall standing between the library shelves idly flicking through the pages. And then, I was drawn into the text. Without consciously realising it, I found I was nodding my head in affirmation as my eyes traced the outline of the following words. Paraphrasing, and then quoting Dilthey, van Manen wrote:

... lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body: 'Just as our body needs to breathe, our soul requires the fulfillment and expansion of its existence in the reverberations of emotional life'. Lived experience is the breathing of meaning (p.36).

Here then, were words that had what van Manen (1990), describes as having a 'certain harmony' with my own deeply felt sense of lived experience (p.7). My body reverberated with Dilthey's sentiments. For me, lived experience *is* the breathing of meaning. Upon reading van Manen's pedagogically grounded concept of qualitative research, where he sets out various techniques and processes for researching children's realities and lifeworlds, I knew I had found the direction I was seeking. In doing this type of research he said:

[the essence of the question] ... is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities ... To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the centre of our being (p.43).

And then, I turned to the glossary for a definition of phenomenology, and as part of the explanation I read:

Phenomenology must describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed by pre-conception and theoretical notions ... phenomenology always asks the questions of what is the nature or meaning of something ... that the work of phenomenology is as painstaking as the work of artists such as Balzac, Proust, Valery, or Cezanne... it requires of us 'the same demand for awareness and the same will to seize the meaning of the world as that meaning comes into being'.

(van Manen, 1990, p.184 quoting Merleau-Ponty, 1962)

Almost immediately following the reading of his book, I met a nurse educator engaged in a phenomenological research project who invited me to participate in a course on qualitative studies in the School of Nursing. As a consequence of my involvement with the school, and my subsequent supervision within the health sciences (until the final stages of my research), I had the opportunity to attend several workshops on phenomenology with van Manen and the late Michael Crotty (1996a; 1996b).

Definitions

In these workshops I was to learn that phenomenology is not a single unified philosophical standpoint, but rather a particular approach and method for viewing the world. Beginning with Husserl (1964), who wanted to offer an alternative to positivist scientific knowledge discourses, phenomenology as methodology has given rise to diverse movements and directions, explored and then modified in the writings of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1964a; 1964b; 1977), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1964a; 1964b; 1968; 1993), Paul Sartre (1956), Paul Ricoeur (1981) and others.

Most, if not all of these approaches and methods are concerned with consciousness, perception, embodiment, temporality and experience, with the primary focus on the nature and meaning of human experience as it is lived. In the Husserlian tradition, consciousness is described as intending towards its object, and that it is pure consciousness that constitutes the world, whereas in existential terms phenomenologists locate the lived sensory body as the first locus of intentionality towards space and time (Crotty, 1996b).

As a body of thought, phenomenological endeavour can be seen from many perspectives, with there being no one way of 'doing phenomenology'. According to van Manen (1990):

... the broad field of phenomenological scholarship can be considered as a set of guides and recommendations for a principled form of inquiry that neither simply rejects or ignores tradition, nor slavishly follows or kneels in front of it (p.30).

Drawing on the general approach of Merleau-Ponty, van Manen says the lifeworld is the world as we experience it through lived body, lived time, lived space, and through relationships with others. Existential phenomenology recognises that language is only one means humans use to bring their experiences into symbolic form within which we then interpret and find meaning in the context of our lifeworld. Thus, phenomenological research consists of reflexively bringing into consciousness corporeal and sensory relations as the body actually lives them, as well as elemental forces and meanings that are obscure, and which tend to 'evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of every day life' (p.12). They are then reflected upon and interpreted in light of their cultural context. And in the event that we are trying to gain insights from a work of art, music or poetry, we can reflect on the unspoken, the ineffable, so as to uncover 'the threads of silence that speech is mixed together with' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p.46).

From my participation at the workshops with Crotty and van Manen, I was to learn that they had differing views on phenomenology. Crotty's philosophical stance is grounded

in the objective, critical traditions of the classical phenomenological movement, while van Manen's uniquely North American style of phenomenology utilises a blend of both classical phenomenological and postmodern philosophical stances. van Manen's work is influenced by 'the spirit of the European movements', specifically the phenomenological viewpoints of Husserl, the hermeneutics of Heidegger, the experiential psychological theories of Merleau-Ponty, and it is shaped by the human science work of Bollnow, Schleiermacher, van den Berg and Dilthey, among others, whose ideas emanate from the Netherlands and North America. van Manen describes his 'expanded' semiotically inspired hermeneutic phenomenological approaches as being a 'modern extension' of these knowledge forms (p.4).¹⁵

In contrast to van Manen's 'modern' epistemological stance with its broader question base, lived experience, as it is understood from the traditional European perspective, is seen as a means of uncovering objective descriptions of the world from 'the pristine innocence of first seeing' (Spiegelberg, 1982, p.680). In proposing phenomenology as a radical alternative to viewing human knowledge, Husserl argued that the foundations or principles of modern science lay not in external objectifying views of the world, but in the roots of the human lifeworld, or *Lebenswelt*, which he describes as the original, pre-theoretical, pre-reflective natural attitude prior to any interpretation. For Husserl, meaning did not exist externally or solely as a construction of the mind. The phenomenological attitude, according to Husserlian notions, addresses what comes into being, in, and through, consciousness as expressed in everyday language (Wolff, 1984).

¹⁵ At a workshop with van Manen (1998) in Canada, he explained that hermeneutics and phenomenological research is involved in all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. With postmodern concerns centering on the primacy of language and the ways in which discourse codifies our cultural understanding, phenomenology has expanded to make space for 'an epistemology of language and text' (p.38). In van Manen's opinion, various postmodern language oriented scholars and theorists have added significantly to a broader and wider understanding of the relationship between language with its systems of signs and signifiers and lived experience. Within the contemporary discourses of phenomenology, van Manen includes the work of Derrida (1978) and Lyotard (1984) with their deconstructive analysis of texts. Gadamer (1977) and Rorty (1979) with hermeneutics. He names Ricoeur (1981), with his interest in the relationship between text, epistemology and human action. He describes Foucault (1976; 1977; 1978; 1982; 1984b; 1984c) as an historical phenomenologist. Under gender phenomenology, he includes the work of Ruddick (1989), Gilligan (1982) and de Beauvoir (1988). Within the analytical phenomenological framework he includes the work of Barthes (1982) and Lacan, as well as the psychoanalytical perspectives of Kristeva (1984; 1987) and Irigaray (1985; 1986; 1991).

All thinking in Husserl's view was linked to something, and as a consequence we cannot think of ourselves as conscious subjects without our being engaged with objects in the world.

From its inception, the catch-cry of the phenomenological enterprise has been to return attentively and receptively 'to the things themselves' to uncover and unveil knowledge in uncensored phenomena. These 'things' are the names we give to our perception and without which they could not be imagined. Within the naïve realm of experience – the life-world - knowledge lies outside the boundaries of our rational intellect. Thus, traditional hermeneutic phenomenology endeavours to elucidate through a contemplative mode what people are experiencing, what they are making sense of, *before* they begin to ascribe the phenomena with a learned cultural response. Or, as much as this is possible, before an emotional reaction or comparative assumption to a similar experience is given. Because our perception changes as we move from childhood into adulthood, we lose the capacity we once had to see the world with wonder and amazement. By the time we become adults our experience as humans has already been inscribed by a complex system of visible and invisible semiological codifications (abstract concepts and symbols) resulting in a mechanistic fragmented view of the world. This already embedded or internalised knowing stands between the knower and the particular phenomena to which we as humans attach meaning. Thus, when we construct our view of reality we are unable to consciously absorb the immensity of structures that are derived from the everyday experiences we have with objects and events. Moreover, when we do make explicit our understanding of reality, we do so with language that is limited (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). For Crotty (1996b), phenomenology is about 'redeveloping this capacity to see and feel what is there. It is an attempt to regain a childlike openness in our encounter with the world' (p.158).

Stated simply then, hermeneutic phenomenology is how persons experience the 'whatness' of things, or the 'isness' of a particular experience – the essence - and

without which it could not exist or be named.^{16 17} This is in contrast to the emotional feeling response that comes from a separate subjective inner world, from self-conscious or self-realising reflection (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991). Crotty explains, that although this form of inquiry is undertaken with the knowledge that all knowing is inseparable from history, language, culture and time, the manner in which we participate in the inquiry is with the awareness that cultural assumptions and everyday attitudes are cast aside (Crotty, 1996a, p.3). In this open dimension of seeing and looking, where awareness and attention become constant and undivided, and where we separate from thoughts and emotions that have imprisoned our usual investment in habitual thinking, we can, in letting the phenomenon declare itself, 'surrender to the phenomenon and then, like those fishing in the sea, lift our net and see what we have caught' (p.6). With a mindful presence, Crotty says, we can see afresh the dynamic and colourful experiential textures of the objects of our experiences. This then enables a reassessment of what being-in-and-to-the-world means.

Different Approaches

Crotty (1996a) writing in *Phenomenology and Nursing Research* asserts that the 'new' phenomenology with its 'excessive subjectivism' is out of step with the constructivist position of classical European phenomenological traditions (p.6). In fact, he sees it in direct opposition. In his opinion, this 'modern' approach to phenomenology is impoverished because it lacks objective reasoning and critique both on the part of the participant and the social inquirer. Instead of perpetuating the culture of narcissism by subjectively focussing on the meaning of experience, both participant and researcher must suspend already formulated meanings and engage in intensive critical reflection.

¹⁶ The term hermeneutics means the practice of interpretation. It is used as a means for restoring meaning, and for deciphering, or making visible meanings that are obscure or concealed (van Manen, 1990).

¹⁷ van Manen (1990), gives this explanation of the word 'essence'.

By essence we do not mean some kind of mysterious entity or discovery, nor some ultimate core or residue of meaning. Rather, the term 'essence' may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way (p.39).

He further states, that although contemporary phenomenology may incorporate the essential processes of mainstream phenomenology, that is description, reduction and naming themes, it does so from a personal, deeply felt, pragmatic point of view and remains focussed on 'what is' rather than striving for the 'what might be' (p.7). It was, he says, never the intention of phenomenological inquiry to pursue how 'particular people feel, perceive and understand' (p.3). A much more important consideration is to lay aside everyday meaning before we make sense of our experience. From Crotty's perspective this means that authentic phenomenology looks to the original sources of experience and pursues 'not the sense people make of things, but what they are making sense of' (p.3).

However, unlike Husserl, who failed to acknowledge that subjective life has an 'affective component which is crucial to our relations with others', and that it is necessary to account for the use of language in informing and elevating our imaginary, perceptual and linguistic aspects of our subjectivities, Crotty does concede that in certain 'situated' knowledge positions, it is important to investigate how an individual acquires renewed understanding of their lives (Crossley 1996, p.9). Although critical of the new more subjective examination of phenomenon, which have evolved from the American and North American philosophers, he advocates that in 'some perspectives' it is 'important' that it should happen. Devoting a paragraph in his book to the culturally repressed elements of female identity, Crotty says, 'language has trapped women as well as liberated them. The very act of naming has been until now the prerogative of males' (p.156). Quoting Adrienne Rich (1980) he writes:

we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold on us (p.156).

van Manen's (1990) approach differs from Crotty's, in that he specifically sets out to introduce interpretive phenomenology into the human science arena as a means of engaging more deeply with qualitative research methods. Given that it was never the intention of Husserl nor Heidegger to utilise phenomenology or hermeneutics as a means of 'doing research', the challenge for van Manen has been to adapt the work of European

philosophers and other influential scholars and take it beyond presuppositionless description of immediate experience. van Manen explains what it means to study the human being as it engages with the world.

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world (p.5).

In light of these comments, van Manen asserts that the challenge of contemporary phenomenology is to offer methodological explications that, while acknowledging the need for a rational foundation, also work to re-define our understanding of concepts such as ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’. In calling for alternate approaches, he refers to Gadamer’s argument that the preoccupation of classical phenomenology with objective knowing was antithetical to the ‘spirit’ of gathering knowledge forms about the human condition. van Manen goes on to say that, because human experience is complex and mysterious and cannot be defined by any one account, the way we come to know ourselves necessarily involves the intermingling of both subjective and objective elements. He adds, that with this view of reality, the boundaries between the dualistic distinctions of objective and subjective discourses become blurred and are less easily defined. Furthermore, experience must be recognised as partial and perspectival.

Although both phenomenologies do share a common core, in that they are attempting to ‘return to the things themselves’, it would seem that the major difference between the phenomenologies rests on the notion of contextualised subjectivity and how it influences experience. Because the sense of who we are results from multiple subjectivities and voices, some of which are unknowable to ourselves, the multidimensional nature of our experiences, and the inaccuracy and ambiguity of our abstract language to describe and understand our reality, van Manen argues that we cannot assume or postulate universal normative meanings. Moreover, with the knowledge that the boundaries between

unconscious and conscious thought are undefined, and that we receive information of, and from the world by being/having a body that is beyond language, these 'new' methodological structures have been expanded to admit experiential dimensions of 'truth values' and understanding as a means of rendering human experience intelligible.

In pursuing this line of thought, van Manen's approach and methods have been developed to allow for both reductive reflections as well as emotionally felt thoughts and interpretations. He says, on being asked the question 'is this what the experience is really like?' the human knower requires both reflection and thought to make the subjective, embodied experience of the self intelligible to itself, before they can engage in finding out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced.

Creating a phenomenological body of knowledge and insights

Drawing on the work of van Manen (1990), I selected the hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this study for several reasons. Firstly, van Manen's semiotic approach to phenomenology acknowledges that subjectivity is not eternally fixed or deterministic. It is always partial, limited and contextual. For van Manen, subjectivity was not that of the narcissistic self-occupied and self-absorbed subject. He puts it this way:

Subjectivity means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth (p.20).

Secondly, his comment that 'the questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such' appealed to my imaginative senses (p.6). Using his framework, I could invent or combine a number of approaches and methods for textually organising and analysing the material I had gathered. Furthermore, I believed that by working within and against phenomenological discourses I could offer alternative integrated points of view to the rapidly growing body

of researchers utilising phenomenology as methodology in education, health and social sciences.

Thirdly, there was van Manen's invitation to search for what it means to be human. Hermeneutic phenomenological research he asserts, 'is a search for the fullness of living, for the ways a woman can possibly experience the world, as a woman, for what it is to be woman' (p.12). With issues of identity politics remaining unresolved, feminist theory continues to investigate how selves are constructed within the overlapping areas of personal and social experience. Recovering the self from the shrouds of conditioning and making the subjective experience of the self intelligible is an ongoing task (Griffiths, 1995). Mowenna Griffiths (1995), writing in *Feminisms and the Self*, contends, that issues of embodiment, especially those that surround menstruation, conception, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause are constitutive of a changing sense of self and as such generate potential problems relating to identify and self-concept. van Manen's stance is not unlike that of all good feminist inquiry which has developed in response to the silencing, devaluation, and oppression of girls and women. He suggests that if we are to understand the constrictions of language, and the subsequent meaning structures that have negatively influenced 'the ways in which a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman' then a particular situated subjective position is a necessary starting point for insightful research (p.12).

Fourthly, as an artist I am aware that visual images powerfully express psychic situations beyond that of written and verbal words. Like van Manen (1990) and Merleau-Ponty (1968; 1993), I knew that 'beyond the range of ordinary speaking and writing there is the rich domain of the unspeakable' which could be represented metaphorically as a visual process. (van Manen, 1990, p.113). van Manen's assertion that the truth-experience might be considerably wider and deeper than our linguistic competency appealed to my interpretive senses. He gives the example of how the often inexpressible feelings that we call the experience of love are knowable in other ways when it is portrayed through the language of fine arts, poetry and music, however incomplete. These ways of knowing, he says, can be reflected upon and subsequently imported into

phenomenological writing (p.114). He also points out that what may be unspeakable in one person's life may well be put into words by another (p.113).

Upon reflection, the deciding factor in choosing a phenomenological framework was Crotty's (1996b) and van Manen's (1990) recognition that in certain situated contexts critical evaluation of the relationship between experience and knowledge was necessary. Their acknowledgement, although fleeting, of the constraining and coercive effects of an

The goal of deconstruction is to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to demystify continuously the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal.
(Lather, 1991, p.5)

implicitly masculine language upon women, opened the space in what has been an historically male dominated disembodied philosophy to explore a female centred embodied awareness. In addition, their comments allow for the inclusion of poststructuralist questionings about the social production of knowledge in relation to subjectivity and gender. van Manen's (1990) version of

phenomenology provides the opportunity for breaking through the boundaries of dichotomous thought to something new, or, at the very least, it allows a stretching back and forth between oppositional ways of thinking without valorising one or the other side of the binaries. I believe it allows for both a traditional objective, and a subjective, examination of women's specific sense of embodied menopause. Furthermore, it can provide a depth and sophistication that will capture the particularity of women's experience from both a political and personal evaluation.

Phenomenology as textual expression

In an endeavour to comprehend the phenomenological project both intellectually and 'from the inside' as van Manen (1990) suggests, in writing this thesis I have returned to the full mind-body sensations of my years as a practicing artist (p.8). Following van Manen's advice, I have attempted to not only comprehend and demonstrate my intellectual understanding of phenomenology, but also to show a thoughtful awareness of its implications to the research process and to my own personal disposition which has shaped my ontological and imagistic processes of being, knowing and becoming. Therefore, in drawing on the ideas of van Manen and the philosophical viewpoints of

Merleau-Ponty (1962), this process has required that I contextualise phenomenology as a methodology within my various roles as woman, feminist poststructuralist, artist, and becoming writer. Ultimately all aspects of the research have become embodied and situational.

From my reading of phenomenology, it was Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1964a; 1964b; 1968; 1993) who offered the most crucial insights into the way in which I could bring the complementary nature of the intuitive and the rational into the realm of the intellect. It was Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the importance of the body as a dimension of intentionality, that is, the body's inseparable connection to the world, as well as the manner in which our embodied selves experience lived space-time and relationships, that was to provide the kind of emphasis I needed to explore the primacy of feeling in artistic understanding.¹⁸ I also found in his work points of connection between modern physics (quantum theories) and eastern mysticism. These two fields of knowledge which address the transformation of our world-views have long been of interest to me.¹⁹ By

¹⁸ The word embodiment from an existential phenomenological perspective means that '(we are in the world as bodies)' and through our engagement with the world '(we act upon the world and, in turn, are acted upon)'. (Crotty, 1996b, p.68)

¹⁹ This sense that phenomenology is connected to the quantum sciences and mysticism was further enhanced by reading Fritjof Capra's (1975) *The Tao of Physics*. Although van Manen (1990, p.23) claims that phenomenological human science is a western research method which should not be confused with certain 'mystical' or eastern meditative techniques of achieving insights about the 'meaning of life', in some respects, I find phenomenological 'seeing', where we are urged to 'open', 'surrender', 'penetrate', or 'become that something' in order to transcend the self, not dissimilar to the thinking underlying certain eastern practices and quantum theories (Capra, 1975; Bohm, 1980). Other characteristics, such as the mutual interrelation of space-time and the unity of opposites, run parallel to the concepts of modern physics and philosophical and religious traditions of the Far East. There are many schools of thought within eastern traditions. The difference between their respective empirical ideas is that Eastern philosophies, while pursuing a direct experience of reality are not interested in explaining what cannot be adequately described by words. Confronted with the limitation of language several of these Eastern approaches communicate phenomenological ways of self-realisation through the development of intuitive modes of consciousness. For example: poetic images, allegories, mythical languages and the classical Japanese verse *haiku* (Capra, 1975; Capra, 1996). I came to understand phenomenology more clearly through the writing of Charlotte Joko Beck (1993), Natalie Goldberg (1990; 1986; 1992), Thich Nhat Hanh (1992), Frederick Franck (1973; 1992), Rupert Sheldrake (1981; 1990) and Danah Zohar (1990) among others. From these authors I gained an embodied sense of Merleau-Ponty's 'direct and primitive contact with the world' (1962, p.vii). This contact he said, is to a world already historically embedded with the nature of human meaning, but at the same time unencumbered with prior knowledge. He puts it this way:

language is everything since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things,
the waves and the forests.
(Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.155)

immersing myself simultaneously in exploring the relationship between the concepts of modern physics and the ideas of eastern religious philosophies, there was a more embodied sense of my phenomenological knowledge unfolding. And it was his notion of body schema outlined in *The Phenomenology of Perception* that connected with my poststructuralist understanding of the world, and to the writings of the French feminists, particularly Irigaray (1985; 1986; 1991) and Cixous (1991; 1997). My body, he said, is both a 'being-to-the-world' and a 'being-in-the-world', and as such, is the conduit through which patterns of organisation, sensuous experience and meaning are generated into knowledge; a knowledge however, that will never be fully realisable because my intellectual map of reality can only ever reveal an approximate representation of what I think I know (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.viii).

The strength of Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body, although this was a term he seldom employed, using instead the term 'our body' or 'my body', is that the describer of the phenomenon is simultaneously located in the world as both a biological and socially embodied being. What enables me to identify my body as uniquely my own, results from the interrelationship between my mind and body and the various knowledges and social practices that shape my lived existence. As individuals we are wholly dependent on the matrix we create within the world. Bodily experience, he says forces us to acknowledge that our biological functions and subsequent intentional acts are not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, rather they result from a complex interplay of elements. For these reasons, I have adopted his four existential co-ordinates: a *bodily experience*, an experience in *time*, a *spatial* experience and a *relational* experience. Through the process of weaving, layering and spiraling I have incorporated these elements into the stories.

van Manen (1990), an exponent of the use of Merleau-Ponty's lifeworld co-ordinates, maintains they are an intricate unity of our lived world, and as such are productive categories for the phenomenological process of questioning, listening, reflection and writing. They form the foundation within which we as humans interrelate with everyday situations and relationships. He points out, that in addition there are multiple lifeworlds which we inhabit at varying parts of our day, and that there are multiple lifeworlds

existing between different people. In laying out the parameters of these four modes of interpretation as guides to reflection, he says of *lived space*:

[spatiality] is felt space ... the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel ... to understand [the phenomenon] it is helpful to inquire into the nature of lived space that renders that particular experience its quality of meaning ... There are cultural and social conventions associated with the space that give the space a certain qualitative dimension...lived space is a category for inquiring into the ways we experience the affairs of our day to day existence (p.103).

In asking questions of the *lived body (corporeality)*, he states that our subjectivity is oriented in the body. Our body moves out towards its surroundings and other humans in a fluid open action, a continuous extension of its own being. In this seamless activity our body's self-awareness becomes 'subject-object' or 'perceiving thing' no longer sure of the dialectical relationship between the perceiver and the perceived or the visible and the invisible. He further states that the way in which we perceive the world is achieved from this always already intersecting awareness. For Merleau-Ponty, bodily awareness of phenomena comes not 'from the deep seated self' but rather from reflection that the body is having the experience of a particular sensory sensation. It is the body *in* the experience and not the felt feeling state of the body that he refers to when speaking of 'inner perception' (p.380). Therefore, in the listening to the women's stories during the course of this study there was the awareness that I needed to maintain a mode of questioning that focussed on how the experience presented itself as well as seeking a feeling response. This is discussed further in my chapter on methods.

Articulating how we can be both immanent in our experience, meaning entirely in our mind, and at the same time transcend it, Merleau-Ponty asserts that each individual is linked to the past, the present and the future. It is our *temporal* way of being in the world, our 'field of presence' through which we structure our understanding of ourselves and the world. Moreover, because my body is linked to past, present and future, and not in that linear order, I cannot see or grasp all the effects of my thoughts

and actions. Therefore the layers of my knowledge, or multiple horizons of our existence, as Merleau-Ponty describes them, are both known and unknown. Within these horizons is 'latent' meaning from which we have yet to constitute ourselves anew. The body is only able to constitute stable horizons of meaning, or new understandings, when it represses or forgets 'the pluridimensional ambiguity which always characterizes its field of presence' (McCLeary, 1964, p.xix). He adds:

I can be open to phenomena which go beyond me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent I take them up and live them; *how the presence to myself (Urprasenz) which defines me and conditions all alien presence is at the same de-presentation (Entgegenwartigung) and throws me outside myself.*

(Merleau-Ponty, in McCLeary 1964, p.xiv)

I take this to mean, that in order to try to find our sense of bodiliness within the sedimented or hidden meaning structures within which we live our lives, the task is to first perceive the lifeworld pre-objectively before it is overlaid with rational presumptions. At the same time we need to understand how we constitute these meaning structures through our embodied situational experience.

The theme of *relationality* for Merleau-Ponty is the way in which we develop a conversational relation with others that enables us to transfigure or transform our sense of ourselves. We can, through specific use of speech, 'linguistic incantation', give expression to a situated experience. By our intention and our choice of words, we can bring the invisible into existence. What might be unspeakable for one person may be put into words by the attentive and thoughtful listening of another. Through this mutual exchange of dialogue, we can both think new thoughts, re-vision new dimensions and create new landscapes. As he goes on to tell us:

A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I was not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself

followed in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.13)

Merleau-Ponty (1962), renders experience knowable from the position that 'we are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle', and that because of the intersubjective nature of experience the body is capable of re-inscribing and subverting existing socio-political relations (p.454). Knowledge of the body can only be understood by living it. My body is not separated from the world or from others, nor is my mind distinct from space and time. He describes this commingling of words becoming flesh in this way: 'To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world ... our body is not primarily in space: it is of it' (p.148). He further asserts:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my own past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own (p.xx).

To reiterate then, Merleau-Ponty's concern with how the body shapes experience, that consciousness is not separate from our physical existence; that the knowledge of oneself to itself is 'through and through compounded of relationships with the world', and that all reflection is situational, as well as the fact that he recognised that new fields of understanding and creative vision are best brought to consciousness through artistic sources, has considerable resonance with the project being pursued in this thesis (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xiii).

Phenomenology and art as a source of lived experience

In the painter or the speaking subject, picture and utterance respectively do not illustrate a ready-made thought, but make that thought their own ... we can still remember [originating words] with what richness they appeared to be endowed and how they were like a landscape new to us, while we engaged in

acquiring them, and while they still fulfilled the primordial function of expression...We are invited to discern beneath thinking which basks in its acquisitions, and offers merely a brief resting-place in the unending process of expression, another thought which is struggling to establish itself and succeeds only by bending the resources of constituted language to some fresh usage.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.389)

Artists and poets slip easily into the embodied depths of the 'lifeworld this side of the objective world'; into this no-space of image streaming activity in search of metaphors to capture what can't be named and to give shape to incoherent energies. In my own experience, my artist's mind is different to my writer's mind. I connect more physically and spiritually to the object being drawn or the pot on the wheel. And when I am in this reflexive contemplative space there is no sense of being gendered or of being a subject or an object. My body slows down. Memories merge and fuse together. It is a feeling of coming home into the body, a full mind-body sensation of being present. Or, in the words of writer Natalie Goldberg (1992) it is a state of being where:

you are not carrying the burden of ego in your expression, but are riding for moments the waves of human consciousness and using your personal details to express the ride (p.91).

'Seeing' and 'making' become one. There is no sense of psychic splitting. As I work with the object without pre-mediated vision and with an open and receptive stance, somehow I find I have become the object. Outside and inside are in harmony, or perhaps it can best be described as a state of flow. Time takes on another dimension. It fills my total capacity of what I know to be the self. It expands and boundaries dissolve. There is no longer the sense of being separate from the object being created. Awareness of bodily sensations is only in relation to the form or artwork being birthed. There are simply moments of awareness as I consider line and colour, or it might be that I am moved by the soft sheen of light on the surface of a ripe pear. I listen to what my senses are telling me. In this space, as my body-mind moves down through the liquid layers of

time, I give shape to the subconscious signifying elements that structure my lived experiences, and my previously understood map of reality is abandoned in the transformation of objects into 'transcended configurations' (van Manen, 1990, p.74).

Frederick Franck (1992), writing in *The Way of Seeing*, explains that from an early age we are trained to 'look' at the world and label its phenomena from a perspective of the Me that we imagine ourselves to be, and that from this sense of being Me we impose our value judgements on others. In describing what it is like to draw with a meditative eye, Franck elaborates further:

When on the other hand, I see – suddenly I am all eyes, I forget this Me, am liberated from it and dive into the reality of what confronts me, become part of it, participate in it (p.80).

In many respects, the phenomenological project is not unlike Franck's description of *seeing drawing*. The phenomenological researcher is asked to discipline the body-mind so that it becomes constant and undivided as it simultaneously participates in, and contemplates, the experience. The mind is still thinking but in a different way. It has become more unconditional and less able to formulate predictable outcomes. The researcher's task is to rest long enough in the unknown, focusing solely on the experience or images in their mind's eye so that other worldly distractions will fall away. In these spaces, the object of our gaze can manifest itself anew. The task then is to textually portray, without analysis or explanation a comprehensive awareness of the visible and invisible components of the phenomenon.

Another way of reflexively interpreting an object or event is when the mind reaches out to something already known, and in a state of sharp concentration one is momentarily 'struck by', or 'seized by' a thought which changes one's previous understanding. In gazing intently on an art form, or focusing deeply on a situation, or even after one has temporarily let go of a worrying problem and ceased reckoning, judging and evaluating, we can suddenly be 'hit' by a sense of the 'ah ha!' In this moment of revelation we realise that we have gained a whole new understanding which differs significantly from

our already acquired idiosyncratic perception. van Manen (1990), paraphrasing and then quoting Gadamer to describe the distinction between these two senses of interpretation, said:

... in its original meaning, interpretation is a *pointing to* something: and interpretation is *pointing out* the meaning of something... The first kind of interpreting 'is not a reading in of some meaning, but clearly a revealing of what the thing itself already points to' . . . We attempt to interpret that which at the same time conceals itself (p.26).

From such a description, this second kind of interpretation can occur when we confront a work of art or poetising account of the lifeworld. In the act of description we are actually interpreting that which has already been interpreted by some other individual. The phenomenological text in this sense mediates 'between interpreted meanings and the thing toward which the interpretations point' (p.26). Here, van Manen refers to Heidegger's use of van Gogh's painting of *Shoes of the Peasant* to further illustrate this point.

Interpreting a work of art

In my own experience as an artist and recent writer of poetry, making the shift in consciousness to a still and receptive mind so that one can imaginatively see afresh, doesn't happen immediately. At first the mind is preoccupied with sorting out form, structure and shape, as well as filtering out the busy chatter of inner voices, and the distractions of everyday concerns. Slowly, as I divest myself of expectations and become more mindful to the task in hand, without realising it, I find I have entered fully into a space that I cannot name: a space where work somehow is magically produced. It is in the aftermath of creation that my sense of gender and embodiment returns, and then I stand back and attempt to re-organize the lines, marks, colours and texture into some form of coherent and authentic understanding. From this viewing position, I now begin to critically question and investigate how my chosen symbolic forms and metaphors have contextually led me to constitute myself. What am I trying to say? The story I then proceed to re-imagine from what lies in front of my eyes becomes a process of

integrating or blending together the phenomenological insights with my female experiential knowing self, my aesthetic sense of self as well as my theoretical and academic self.

Phenomenology and Feminism

In the preface to *Signs*, Richard McCleary (1964) tells us that Merleau-Ponty was a wondering philosopher searching for himself by questioning his world. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, he states that we are prompted to ask ourselves just what it means to 'be incarnate in our times and time – to have a history – and speak' (p.xiii). Not unlike the women in my study, we hear him learning 'to speak with his own voice. Across the growing distance which embodies him in history, he speaks from his time of his times – difficult times, and less and less opportunity to question them' (p.x). Merleau-Ponty, like the other traditional phenomenologists wrote from a point in history when issues of the self, sexuality and gender were not part of public discourse. Had he been writing, 'searching for himself' during the decade of the 90s, would he also have been wrestling with the complex issues of gender politics and 'finding a self which is acceptable to itself', before moving beyond the self to his world of direct and primitive contact? (Griffiths, 1995, p.77).

By and large, male phenomenologists have traditionally written from the position of the disembodied scholar. In articulating their specifically masculine points of view about consciousness they have remained silent on how women's negated experience has impacted on the ways in which they have imagined themselves as being in the world; a world that venerates rational autonomy and privileges male vision (Code, 1991). While Husserl's philosophical perspective opened the space for humans to play a part in the actual construction of their world as against rationalist views, he did not address the processes by which we as human come to understand each other, nor did he illuminate the processes by which we understand the specificity of our gendered bodies (Wolff, 1984). Merleau-Ponty likewise, failed to account for the differences in the ways in which women live in their bodies. Young (1990) points out, that a woman in our culture has learned a bodily self-reference system where she perceives her body 'as a

thing at the same time that she experiences it as capacity' (p.147). She is the object of the gaze of another. Thus, particular modalities of feminine existence affect bodily comportment and motility. This in turn means that her sense of self remains rooted in immanence and her body moves through space with an inhibited intentionality.

Feminist writers Code (1991), Grosz (1994b) and Young (1990) are critical of male phenomenological texts that exclude reference to women's gendered experience. Although Merleau-Ponty (1962) does write about the body in its 'sexual being', stating that 'there is interfusion between sexuality and existence, which means that existence permeates sexuality and vice versa', it is a generalised notion of sexuality, and one that does not address the possibility that a person's 'sexual being' would affect the orientation to their body and to their immediate environment (p. 169).

Despite criticism of Merleau-Ponty's failure to address gendered specificity, Grosz and Code suggest his viewpoints on how individuals reposition themselves in order to understand specific situations, provides the starting point for opening further dialogue that will fill the spaces currently existing between understandings of phenomenology and feminist theory. Similarly, as with feminist critique, his thoughts on how the reflexive body-subject transform themselves through speaking as they open onto, and into the external landscape, opens the space for the crossing of boundaries. In my opinion, his views on humanism also are not to be discounted. In constructing a unity of meaning, he says the only acceptable humanism today is one that works concretely to find ways of creating a common bond of universal recognition with each other. As individuals we are responsible for living and participating within an interconnected framework of humanity. He writes:

Rationality is not a *problem*. There is behind it no unknown quality which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xx).

Phenomenology as point of departure

There is little doubt that, if the world lasts, pretty soon someone will come along and understand the story as if for the first time. That person will look back and see 2000 years of somnolent fumbling with the theme. Out of that, and the collision of other things, he or she will produce, very likely, something totally new and overwhelming, some whole new direction for human life. The same possibility holds for the ancient stories of many another deity. (Hughes, 1989, p. 165)

In this section, I return to the work of Michael Crotty to explain my interest in the role of ritual and poetic myth as a phenomenological enterprise, and how I might connect mythological languages and activities to this study. Crotty (1996b) suggests that myth and ritual making are another avenue for pursuing phenomenological inquiry. He goes on to say, that phenomenology has a particular affinity with the concrete imagery captured in the myths and rituals of more earth-bound and spirit-based-cultures, where participation in life, in art, in communal living is undertaken with a spirit of unselfconscious aliveness.

My interest in Crotty's comments is twofold. On the one hand I agree with him, but on the other hand, mythical and ritualistic traditions that originally emerged from these same cultures have been distorted by patriarchal domination, and in the process have damaged women's image meaning-making capacities to see themselves as fully embodied female beings (Rich, 1980; El Saffar, 1994). As Roland Barthes (1972), points out, myth is duplicitous in both meaning and form. Within our own internalised semiological schema we have absorbed mythical stories that are simultaneously artificial or false, and understood or felt as factual and true. Therefore, I have approached the subject of myth and ritual aware of its potential for imagistic seeing, but also as a feminist interested in continuing the project of re-visionist mythmaking as described by Ostriker (1986), Le Guin (1989) and Rich (1980). Ursula Le Guin (1989), in one of her essays *The Woman Without Answers*, writes that women are 'Myth who married a History', and because of this, if we want to change the patriarchal mythological maps that have defined our truths, desires and powers, we must seize speech, and offer our

experiences as women, and from our bodies, and make it say what we mean in the creation of new myths (p.129).

The nature of this dissertation then, can be seen as a collective exercise to retrieve, interpret and then rewrite some of the myths that have been handed down over time since the creation of the Greek god, Hermes. The term 'hermeneutics' can be traced to the Greek word 'to interpret', and is said to have been derived from Hermes (van Manen, 1990). Within the many different spheres and realms in which the ingenious Hermes operated, he was known as the carrier of the divine word to mortals. However, he was not noted for stability and permanence, but rather transition, motion and exchange. He was accredited with changing the unknowable through language and writing into a form that humans could understand. Hermes may well have been attributed with having the skills to make knowledge possible through language, but he was also the god of the market place and the patron of thieves and was well known for his devious and corrupt communication, his lies, false oaths and deceptions (Willis, 1993). It seems appropriate then, that through the creation of re-visionist stories that began as myths, this study will expand on the communicative talents originally bestowed on Hermes.

Crotty (1996b) refers to the work of psychoanalyst, Rollo May, and his recognition of the ways in which myth and ritual bring us into direct contact with the primary object of our experience. In our western culture, he says, we are deprived of the primordial phenomenon that incarnates immediate experience. We have ceased to 'see', or dwell on the rawness of nature and human experience, and as a consequence we deny, or we fail to remember how to connect with the transformative potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Embedded in myth and ritual are the forgotten memories that can take us back to some primal moment of wonder where primary inspiration can resurrect a multitude of desires. They are restored to our instinctual bodies when certain music, or the beat of a drum, a wild cry, or when sensuous movement causes vibration through the sternum, through the heart. In these fleeting moments our body resonates with the primal substance of who we are. For Crotty, phenomenology is about:

redeveloping the 'capacity to see and feel what is there' ... What people in more traditional cultures do in the course of their day-to day involvements and express in myth and ritual, what poets and other aesthetes do in their artistic labours, what we have done as children in very spontaneous fashion and even now do perform in special moments of our lives – this is what phenomenology calls upon us to do in deliberate, self-conscious, painstaking fashion (p.158).

In writing about the value of ritual and myth in our lives, I am aware that I am doing what van Manen (1990) describes as the 'phenomenological nod', in that I am recognising these words as being an experience that I could aspire to, and in fact have had (p.27). I recall a recent experience in the United States when I visited a black Baptist gospel church on the outskirts of New York and took part in the ritual of their Sunday church service. I found it was a paradoxical situation. While my female sensory body was responding in a sensual primal way to the totality of this wonderful, awe-inspiring and uplifting event, I was also aware of being white, of being other and of being in a body that was inhibited and impoverished by the defining languages of western culture. I may have been tapping into the structures of ancient African culture, and my body may have been moving and making sounds of its own volition, connecting to some unseen primordial force, but my actions were mediated by my own limiting situational context. I was acutely aware I was lacking the history of the African people. I felt both full and empty at the same time. In these contradictory modalities, where I was experiencing my body both as a thing and as capacity, I was exhibiting what Iris Young (1990) describes as an ambiguous transcendence, or an inhibited intentionality. In other words, while my feminine bodily existence believed that I could engage in this activity my mind was signaling opposing points of view.

This leads me to back to Rollo May (1991) who, in his book *The Cry for Myth*, comments about the absence of myth and ritual in contemporary women's lives. What Crotty could have said, but didn't, was that May observes the lack of appropriate meaning structures for women that would give significance to their lives, apart from what they are in relation 'to a man, be he father or brother or husband' (p.290). May contends, that our culture has placed women in a difficult position, and that until new

myths are created, linking the 'uncharted seas' between the different languages men and women speak, we will continue to stifle the opportunities to develop new and significant psychological relationships between the sexes. Liberation, for women and for men May aptly observes, 'includes tapping the unconscious powers, what have generally been accorded to feminine capacities such as telepathy and intuition' (p.291). He goes on to say, that the myths on which the modern age is founded are chiefly, male, left-brain activities (p.288).

Joseph Campbell (1988; 1991) has much to say about myth. He claims ancient myths, which have been passed down to us over the years to help create meaning out of the fundamental events of our human existence, live subliminally within our unconscious. Myth and memory are inseparable. Where there is conscious thought being acted upon there will be myth. We have interiorised mythic symbology, and as a consequence our modern day existence is acted out within the indelible traces of the voices and visions of the artists/mythmakers who have gone before us (Walter, 1993). Quoting Thomas Mann, Joseph Campbell (1991) writes:

Myth is the foundation of life, the timeless *schema*, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious (p.18).

Artists and poets are modern day mythmakers. In our acts of creative self-expression we continually recreate new myths and rituals for ourselves. Myths, with their metaphors and symbols derived from the material world are our tools, our way of reaching out to new structures of life. Our visual narratives are creatively re-imagined like dreams, and they bridge the gap between our inner and external environments; between our biological bodies and our psychic selves. Sometimes when we hold a recently birthed poem in our hands, or stand before a work of art, we cannot understand it cognitively or read it literally, but somehow the metaphors and symbols speak to a part of ourselves that we might not have acknowledged before. In response to these internally felt sensations we create original images of our own, and then sounds emerge from our mouths asking questions we didn't even know we thought. These visions often time lead to some revelation about our selves, our personal relationships, or of our

relationship to our social environment. If we speak aloud these visions to others, or re-write the experience again in a reflexive phenomenological attitude, the descriptions bring forth further rich perceptions, and thus language becomes the magnifying lens of our experience.

The best things can't be told because they transcend thought. The second best are misunderstood, because those are the thoughts that are supposed to refer to that which can't be thought about. The third best are what we talk about.

(Joseph Campbell, in Smallbone & Shelkin 1997, npg)

According to Joseph Campbell new perceptions can be life empowering visions, with the power to shape and control lives. They open our body-mind, and in the present moment we see our deepest hopes, desires and fears, and the dreams we hold for realising our potential. Myths then, give us a name to touch some part of ourselves that

connects to our own immediate experience, inviting contemplation of sensory qualities without their usual meanings (Campbell, 1991). They encourage a sense of primal wonder that has been forgotten or submerged within our unconscious. Merleau-Ponty (1964) too appears to be saying this also. For him, the world is 'buried under the sedimentations of latent knowledge' (p.5).

Campbell (1991), observes that in a poem, anecdote, or visual narrative there are images brought forth from the deepest levels of the psyche and the soul that have been generated before by countless earlier performances, and that ritual and mythical stories overlap. They are both grounded or punctuated by mythical elements or metaphors of creative play connecting past, present, and future. Biologist, Rupert Sheldrake (1996), says 'in ritual we're remembering what hasn't happened yet (p.148). We're projecting ourselves forwards to experience the justice we haven't experienced yet, to experience the joy that isn't visible yet and to experience the celebration that hasn't broken through in our personal lives or in our social lives'. Because the essence of mythmaking lies in creative play with its ever-changing fluid, spontaneous nature, the meanings derived serve to entice the reader, listener or viewer rather than impose all embracing truths. Willis (1993) suggests that, because this essence is about the interconnections between all aspects of life, it never loses touch with its origins which are rooted in tribal shamanic experience.

Although Joseph Campbell (1991, p.42) tells us man 'cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth', Alicia Ostriker (1986) poet, critic and scholar, asserts that many myths circulating in patriarchal society belong to 'high' culture, and as such are handed 'down' through the ages by education, literary and religious authorities. This poses a problem for women, she says. Ostriker claims, that myths passed down over the ages have portrayed women in a negative light. They have been defined either as witch or whore, angel or monster, virgin or Madonna, or good or bad mother. In addition, woven into these stories are 'truths' about the mysterious nature and power of women's blood. Because these myths appear to exist objectively outside their knowledge of the personal, Ostriker suggests that they create a distancing effect between a woman's visible and invisible experiences. El Saffar (1994) argues that, in the absence of positive images associated with the earth and the mother, embodiment for women is experienced as disconnection because they have absorbed the projections made by a male-defined culture that women are either seductive, mesmerizing, threatening, or alternately inferior, chaotic and unreasonable. As long as women remain in this disembodied state, she says a woman 'will experience herself in structures that alienate her from herself'(p.29).

Since 1960, a major concern in feminist theory has been for women writers and artists to become 'thieves of language', and retrieve from the foundations of collective male fantasy the mythical images women have had imposed upon them (Ostriker, 1986, p.211). Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992), Jungian analyst and storyteller, writing in *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, explores how disparaging language in mythic story lines changed the message about menstrual blood. Estes argues, that over centuries, our patriarchal value system has trivialized natural bodily processes to the point where cycles of blood are associated with humiliation and shame in contrast to the wonder and mystery, and source of religious awe of more ancient times, and in so doing, turning issues of female blood into a mark of women's exclusion from acceptable public discourse. The legacy of these misconceptions, Estes says, is carried by women in their psyche. Aware that they are not speaking for all women, Gubar (1982) and El Saffar (1994), however, contend that in a society that does discriminate against women through

their womanliness, especially in relation to issues of reproduction, it leaves women with only non verbal signs, codes and gestures or the whispering voices of their oral culture as strategies for expressing their different ways of feeling and knowing about the functionings of the female body.

In an attempt to redefine their relationship to themselves and to the world, women writers, artists and feminist scholars are looking into the mirror of mythology. By restoring that which has been devalued, forbidden or silenced, they are re-interpreting the meanings of mythical narratives. Contemporary western women's mythmaking, Ostriker (1986) asserts, is achieved through personal, intuitive and subjective means. Old stories ancient myths and rituals are changed and re-written by female knowledge of female lived experience. Ostriker explains:

... they are corrections, they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves, they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival (p.214).

If, as Joseph Campbell (1991) claims, 'mythology was historically the mother of the arts and yet, like so many mythological mothers, the daughter, equally of her own birth', and that Rollo May (1991) tells us, memory is the mother of creativity which is bestowed upon us by the goddess Mnemosyne, or 'Memory' who, in her life-giving acts provides us with the materials from which new discoveries are made, new poems are imagined and great artworks are conceived, may I suggest, that the creation of new mythologies and rituals in whatever form of creative expression are invested with a female centred knowing (Campbell, 1991, p.42).

In conclusion then, the way I have used hermeneutic phenomenology as methodology to underpin this thesis is an attempt to integrate the expressive content portrayed in the stories with the theoretical components necessary to complete the research project. This has been achieved though my own embodied feminist position as artist and researcher.

CHAPTER 3

REMAPPING METHODS

Salivate, secrete the words. No water, no birth, no death, no life. No speech, no song, no story, nor force, nor power. The entire being is engaged in the act of speaking-listening-weaving-procreating. If she does not cry she will turn into stone. Utter, weep, wet, let it flow so as to break through (it). Layers of stone amidst layers of stone. Break with her own words. The interrelation of woman, water and word pervade African cosmogonies. Among the Dogon, for example, the process of regeneration which the eight ancestors of the Dogon people had to undergo was carried out in the waters of the womb of the Female Nummo (the Nummo spirits form a male and female Pair whose essence is divine) while she spoke to herself and to her own sex, accompanied by the male Nummo's voice. "The spoken Word entered into her and wound itself round her womb in a spiral of eight turns . . . the spiral of the Word gave to the womb its regenerative movement." Of the fertilizing power of words and their transmission through women, it is further said that:

The first Word had been pronounced (read 'scanned') in front of the genitalia of a woman . . . The word finally came from the ant-hill, that is from the mouth of the seventh Nummo (the seventh ancestor and master of speech), which is to say from a woman's genitalia.

The Second Word, contained in the craft of weaving, emerged from a mouth, which was also the primordial sex organ, in which the first childbirths took place.

Thus, as a wise Dogon elder (Ogotemmel) pointed out, "issuing from a woman's sexual part, the Word enters another sexual part, namely the ear." (The ear is considered to be bisexual, the auricle being male and the auditory aperture, female. From the ear, it will, continuing the cycle, go to the sexual part where it encircles the womb . . . speech is the materialization, externalization, and internalization of the vibrations of forces . . . "every manifestation of a force in any form whatever is to be regarded as its speech . . . everything in the universe speaks . . . it generates movement and rhythm and therefore life and action . . . this movement to and fro is symbolized by the weaver's feet going up and down . . . making material: spinning and weaving is a euphonious heritage of wo/mankind handed on from generation to generation of weavers within the clapping of the shuttle and the creaking of the block - which the Dogon call 'the creaking of the Word.' . . . Life is a perpetual to and fro, a dis/continuous releasing and absorbing of the self. Let her weave her story within their stories, her life amidst their lives. And while she weaves, let her whip, spur and set them on fire. Thus making them sing again. Very softly a-new a-gain.

(Trinh Minh-ha, 1989, pp.127-128)

In this chapter I continue the task of clearing the path of the research journey. I recount the strategies and techniques used to harness the reflective hermeneutic processes required to portray ontological, phenomenological and epistemological inter-textual views of the lived world.

As was pointed out in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to create an animating and evocative description on the nature and meaning of women's changing attitudes towards sexuality, femininity, identity and the self as a consequence of the experiences of menopause. In the reflective processes of writing and rewriting the material gathered, and in the subsequent presentation, it is not my intention to critically analyse, but rather, it is to present the women's visual and textual stories as expressive representations of possible ways for generating different understandings and meanings that will in turn influence existing perspectives and paradigms. In this chapter I explore the foundations of expressive arts-based research.

Introducing arts-based research

Until very recently there have been very few doctoral theses published which demonstrate how artistic forms and writing genres might be exploited or combined so as to present alternative interpretive approaches to human educative research. Towards the latter stages of this study I was given two theses to read that transgressed the boundaries of traditional structured approaches to research inquiry. They were beautifully written, evocative narratives, inspirational in their content, and neither of them included detailed analyses or extensive chapters on methodologies (Smith, 1998; Somerville, 1995). Either through fear of failure if I should take only the creative expressive path, or because I have been squeezed so tightly into the sausage skin of academia and I can't break out of it, I chose to blend experimental methods with the more formalised approaches. And so I turned to other doctoral research for guidance, and heeded the words of Jeannette Rhedding-Jones (1997) in her paper *The Writing on the Wall: doing a feminist post-structural doctorate*. Rhedding-Jones wrote that her imaginatively constructed thesis incorporated a mix of widely differing theories and disciplines. However, in its representation, which she described as 'beyond structuralism', she

followed the standard Ph.D. practice of presenting chapters based around literature reviews, methods and methodologies (p.200). She explained that while these chapters followed a prescriptive format they were highly innovative, incorporating a blend of writing genres. Before adopting an experimental rhetorical approach for the remainder of her study, she felt it was necessary to discuss thoroughly and exemplify 'the ways other researchers had gone about putting their particular theories into practice' (p.201).

I then turned to the phenomenological research project of Peter Willis (1998) and found that he also had extensively detailed, in conventional chapter form, his reasons for choosing a blend of writing genres to present his expressive arts-based thesis. Like Rhedding-Jones, his presentation of chapters was innovative and thoughtfully sympathetic to the material portrayed. Willis said that presenting alternative genres is a risk, but in his opinion, it was an approach worth pursuing. In testing out his poetic reflections on an audience prior to including them in his thesis, he found that they generated 'surprise and intensified attention' to the phenomenon under scrutiny (p.182). In his chapter on methods, he concluded that although one took the 'poetising path at one's peril', it was a path that if done with skill and sensitivity it did have the potential for opening up possibilities for intensifying personal lived experience (p.182).

Expressive and arts-based research

... works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationships and participation than our own.

(Dewey, 1956, p.333)

Bearing in mind the words of Rhedding-Jones and Willis, the process of selection of the method and techniques used to describe and portray what Spiegelberg (1970) refers to as 'uncensored data' were decided upon after I experimented with a variety of approaches. The writing methods were initially influenced by Diamond (1997), and then as a consequence of researching his references, on the work of Eisner and Barone (1997) and Laurel Richardson (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1994). In reading the abstract of

Diamond's paper *From Iron to Air*, on how postmodernism was taking an arts-based turn so as to give coherent expression to emotionally felt sensations, I was drawn to his comment that inquiry of this nature resembles a painful labyrinth or insoluble puzzle. His paper arrived at a time when I felt I was wandering in a labyrinth of artistic genres without a means of transforming them into textual representation, or more precisely, I had ground to a halt in a mire of uncertainty. I was in a quandary as to which direction I should take my writing. I couldn't see a way forward and I couldn't back out. His words gave my writing a new lease of life. Yes, he said, researchers were working with experimental voices linking education and art through inquiry that did not rely on the authority and principles of traditional social science methods. Diamond suggested that 'in giving ordered expression to internal feelings and ideas', artistic forms needed to be exploited so that researchers might more imaginatively personalize and fictionalize their participant's points of view (p.2). He went on to say that if researchers are to invent new constructs when weaving together voice of the self and the voices of others, we must learn to speak on our own behalf. Diamond maintains that by using our own words to express description and meaning, and by using imaginative artistic approaches to portray the interaction between participant and researcher, memories of experiences that normally lie beneath the surface can be uncovered to reveal fresh versions of experience.

In his paper, Diamond examines the genres of fantasy, allegory, collage, visual (my)stories, plays, narratives of self and novellas. He gives examples of educational inquiry produced using these approaches and then he explores how these different imaginative forms can extract richer and more varied responses from those who read or write the text. On the growing emergence of arts-based research and its value in uncovering direct experience he writes:

As a construct and practice, arts-based research involves the choice and use of an artistic-medium to give ordered (shaped) expression to internal feelings and ideas that are in some way unique ... and that further an inquiry. Artistic forms need to be exploited so that aesthetic meanings can be constructed that might otherwise elude us. How we feel and think is influenced not only by what (the content) we think about but also by how (the form) we chose, or are

expected to represent its content. Arts based researchers have stopped treading water, bobbing up and down in the wake of lingering positivism. Jumping in at the deep end, they seek to express and transform themselves and others in individual, unbounded ways. [In an arts based inquiry] ... the boundaries between life and art, reality and dream are questioned and crossed. As the former dissolve, the latter become tangible. The traditional research forms, even of field methods such as interviewing and participant observation, are now less easily trusted than storying or poetic encounters with self and others.

(Diamond, 1997, pp. 3-6)

Diamond points out that in the past interpretation of human lives was not only a logical, scientific course of endeavour carried out with the researcher's disembodied passive voice perpetuating the separation between body and mind, but the methods used were also designed to separate the knower from the object of the study. In contrasting the differences between science-based research and arts-based research he states:

... arts-based inquiry begins with an internal re-search of self as knower ... researchers are deeply committed to a question that remains intimately connected to their individual selves. They seek to provide not a replication of findings but an experience that is palpably present, one that is lived as attentively as possible. They then set about recovering or replotting patterns in the light of what is more fully experienced. The arts help us to find the power to expand and change lives (p.15).

From Diamond's elaborations on alternative forms of inquiry, I turned to Barone and Eisner's (1997) outline of the features and design elements which they consider to be significant in the formation of arts-based research. Their explanations on the meanings and dimensions of expressive approaches enabled me to further experiment with imaginative visual and linguistic styles. Until this stage of the research process, although it was my intention to proceed with a narrative storytelling approach, I had

been unsure of the design elements and aesthetic qualities that might infuse more insightful and richer dimensions into the stories.

As a way of clarifying what it means when we say we are engaged in arts-based research, Barone and Eisner, outline in detail seven features, which they consider characterise arts-based education inquiry. They begin their descriptions with a detailed explanation of the following: *the creation of virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualised and vernacular language, the promotion of empathy, the personal signature of the researcher/writer, and the presence of aesthetic form* (p.79). Of these seven features, it was the inclusion of the *personal signature of the research/artist/writer* and the *presence of aesthetic form* which attracted my attention.

Barone and Eisner, in elaborating on the inclusion of the *personal signature of the researcher/artist/writer*, state, that in arts-based inquiry there is the recognition that the author shapes the text according to his or her own reality, and that the author mediates what is to be excluded or included in the thesis. In this sense it is a personal statement which 'embodies the unique vision of its author', thus incorporating an artistic intuiting to the phenomenon in the text. (p.77).

In discussing the final feature, *the presence of aesthetic form*, Barone and Eisner claim that formats of arts-based research texts rarely fit the prescribed, standardized, traditional, qualitative model. Unlike those of conventional texts, they do not usually contain a methods or a methodology chapter, or include a presentation and analysis of the material secured. Nor do they incorporate a discussion and summary on findings. Barone and Eisner point out, that it is the story format with its use of metaphor, rhetorical strategies and devices, and connotative language rather than denotative language which best illustrates this aesthetic form. Quoting John Dewey on the use of imaginative language and how it expresses meaning, they write:

The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one.

(Dewey, 1934, in Barone and Eisner 1997, p.75)

Barone and Eisner go on to say, that in their opinion there are two arts-based genres that have gained prominence among credentialed researchers working within education. These are educational criticism and narrative storytelling. They are quick to point out however, that these two literary genres do not invalidate other forms of research, they have simply highlighted the fact that arts-based texts exhibit a style of vernacular language which is easily accessible to lay audiences. Referring to the earlier extensive work of Elliot Eisner, who, they claim is the brainchild behind the theoretical concepts contained within educational arts-based inquiry, they continue their discussion on the four important dimensions that contribute to the structure of educational criticism. These dimensions as described by Eisner are *description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics*.²⁰ Of these four dimensions, the two most related to artistic approaches are those of evaluation and thematics. Barone and Eisner point out that these dimensions are not separated into neat segments, nor are they independent of each other. Instead, they flow backwards and forwards, overlapping and weaving their way throughout the text.

Applying the expressive method in qualitative research

Just how does one apply expressive methods in artistically based research? For these answers I turned to the work of Noreen Garman (1996), Carolyn Heilbrun (1997) and Laurel Richardson (1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1994). Garman, writing in *Qualitative Inquiry: Meaning and Menace for Educational Researchers*, says scholars have turned away from rational/technical, emotionally neutral modes of formulating knowledge, and have moved towards heuristic understandings. This form of knowing reflects the dynamic interplay between the researcher and the participant, and it illustrates how each person's thoughts and ideas influence the other. As a consequence of this intersubjective mode of inquiry, individual thoughts expand and the boundaries between self and other become

²⁰ I discuss Barone and Eisner's views on evaluation and thematics in the section entitled *Interim Reflection on Spaces for Change*.

blurred. According to Garman, a major theme emerging in qualitative research is the need to 'create spaces for the here-to-for unheard voices and positions in human inquiry' (p.17). In giving voice to other people's lives through narrative storytelling, researchers must give consideration to what constitutes the quality of a good research project. Garman outlines eight criteria for assessing the worthiness and effort of such a project. These criteria also contain several of the features that Barone and Eisner believe are necessary for creating 'good', artistically grounded research. Thus, in formulating the expressive methods for creating the stories, I have been influenced not only by the examples suggested by Barone and Eisner but also the following:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Verite` | Does the work ring true? ... Does it fit within the discourse in the appropriate literature? Is it intellectually honest and authentic? |
| Integrity | Is the work structurally sound? Does it hang together? Is the research rational, logical, appropriate and identifiable within an inquiry tradition? |
| Rigor | Is there sufficient depth of intellect, rather than superficial or simplistic reasoning? Are the portrayals sound? |
| Utility | Is the work useful and professionally relevant? Does it have a sense of vibrancy, intensity, excitement of discovery? ... Do metaphors, images, visual communicate powerfully? |
| Aesthetics | Is it enriching, pleasing to anticipate and experience? Does it give me insight into some universal part of my educational self? Does it touch my spirit in some way? |
| Ethics | Is there evidence that privacy and dignity have been afforded all participants? Has the inquiry been conducted in a careful and honest way? |

Verisimilitude Does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognizable as ‘truly conceivable experience?’ (p.5).

Although Barone and Eisner state that arts-based qualitative research texts do not necessarily contain a description of the methodology and the design elements, I have felt the need to articulate in this chapter the various ways in which writers, philosophers, scholars and theorists have influenced my attempts to construct sensitive descriptions, which firstly resonate with my own experience and touch my spirit, and secondly represent my participants’ experiences in as real and authentic manner as possible.

The story telling method

Literary scholar, Roland Barthes (1982) points to the multiple genres that transform knowing into telling. Narratives are not only in conversation and books but are also present in myth, in gesture, in expression, in art forms and in imagery. He tells us they are written, read, sculpted, choreographed, performed, painted and spoken. These various genres allow multiple points of entry into the ‘texts’ that re-script human agency. The fragments of the stories we remember provide cohesion and direction, or they provide a structure for re-constructing our own stories and setting our inner lives in motion. We are immersed in layers of experience, and as a consequence we cannot resist the impulse to story life events into some form of order and meaning. Through temporal ordering we render our cultural and personal existence knowable. Oliver Sacks (1985) points out that:

We have, each of us, a life story, an inner narrative – whose continuity whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a narrative, and that this narrative is us, is our identities (p.105).

Le Guin (1989), writing in *Some Thoughts on Narrative*, reiterates Sack’s sentiments saying that we live our life *as* story, not just *in* story. We are both story as body and

body as story, continuously crossing boundaries, re-shaping, re-forming, re-desiring and re-mapping our personal, social and political environments. Le Guin writes:

Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origin, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story. (p.39)

We know that we all love stories. They connect us to people and to the spaces of our imagination; they satisfy our longing for romance and desire. We hunger and yearn for knowledge that will make sense of the complexity of our lives. Other people's stories mirror back to us aspects of our own daily experience and when those stories resonate and connect with our own memories we don't feel so alone. We make sense of our lives through the stories of others (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Bruner, 1988; Denzin, 1989; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sandelowski, 1991).

Storytelling as a method of research then, suits the personal experience narratives that were shared between the women and myself during the course of this study. I found also, that the story telling dimension is an appropriate modality for portraying the phenomenological reflections contained within the poetised texts. Furthermore, I found that story telling makes space for the feminist poststructuralist agenda being pursued in this research, that is, exploring existing story lines and creating new re-visionist myths and narratives.

Story telling as lived experience

... when you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological nature, you will listen in vain for the punch-line, the latest information, or the big news. As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing. So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetising project; it tries

an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in an original singing of the world.
(van Manen, 1990, p.13)

One of the major challenges in the construction of this interdisciplinary study was finding a suitable writing format that would best represent the unique material I had gathered. How was I to make comprehensible and coherent the colorful fragments of these women's personal details of history? I had texts that contained their biographical histories, extracts from personal journals, poetry, visual images, objects, poetising accounts of menopause. In addition, I had my own factual and imaginative phenomenological reflections which I could draw upon to illuminate significant insights of their actual lived reality. To help solve my dilemma I turned first to Laurel Richardson's (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1994) discussions on how various kinds of writing are accomplished, and then to van Manen (1990) and his descriptions of anecdotal writing.

In her personal reflexive accounts of contemporary writing issues, Richardson (1990b) concerns herself with how our understanding of social relations are complexly mediated by symbols. I was to read in *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*, that there is no singular correct style for presenting and doing research. I was informed once again, that in our postmodern world genres are now blurred, and that existing foundations of knowledge with their 'grand theories' are open to question. Writing in a similar vein to Diamond (1997), Richardson (1994) reminds us that there is 'no such thing "getting it right," only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced' (p.521).

In her various texts, Richardson sets out different forms of narrative and practical solutions for employing specific literary tropes. In her discussion on postmodernism and the crisis of representation, she offers her reflections on why she chose to employ the liberation narrative in her work as a sociologist. After experimenting with different narrative voices she elected to use this writing approach for retelling the story of single women and their relationships with married men. She goes on to say that a liberation narrative forms part of a larger collective story. It is a story that helps construct a

consciousness of a kind which not only enables people to understand themselves and feel connected to the other co-participants, it also gives a voice to marginalised and silenced people. According to Richardson, if a collective story deviates from standard cultural plots in its desire to provide new narratives within which to reframe, or restructure our ordinary perceptions of 'reality', it has transformative potential. When an individual hears a story that resonates with their own experience, even though they do not know each other, they bond emotionally to those whose lives are not dissimilar to their own. Richardson (1988) tells us that the collective story overcomes 'some of the isolation and alienation' of our social existence, and as a consequence a common response when an individual hears a larger story is that they are not alone (p.26).

My original intention in writing the women's stories was to emulate Richardson's (1990b) narrative stance in the writing of *The New Other Woman* and place the chapters, each with their own specific focus, within a larger social and historical context. As mentioned earlier, these specific areas of investigation had already been decided upon. However, after several unsuccessful attempts at using this narrative voice, I realised this was not going to work. There were a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, although there were unifying themes and commonalities in terms of sexuality, identity, femininity and self/identity threading their way through all the stories, each individual story had its own particular essence and flavour. I found that there was something, a quality, about each story that was uniquely different. Moreover, all the conversations that I conducted with the women over a period of three years seemed to have their own agenda. Although I endeavored to maintain an awareness regarding questions that would lead to discussion on sexuality, identity, femininity and the self, the women's bodily perceptions of menopause were influenced by other factors that were moving in and out of their lives. In gathering together the multiple threads of memory and imagination in each woman's story, it often felt as though I was turning Adrienne Rich's metaphorical carpet over so as to investigate the tiny knotted threads that held together the invisible pattern of their lives. In fact, I was to find that as the women gave voice to the 'knots' I was to intuit more deeply the fully embodied nature of their respective stories.

Secondly, I was unable to capture in thematic chapters the distinct intersubjective conversational quality that developed between the women and myself. It was in this invisible link of shared consciousness, in, and between, the listening and the telling that the meaning making of experiences occurred. It was in these spaces of silence that the filters and lenses through which we understood our 'reality' shifted and new story lines began to be imagined.

Thirdly, I hadn't told the participants of my intended writing format. When I showed several of them my initial attempts at creating a collective story, interspersed with theoretical and philosophical ideas, they politely said they didn't like it. In their opinion it lacked the feeling of the conversational intimacy that had been shared between us, it felt objective, distanced. Upon reflection I could see that I had developed a concern for theoretical rigor, letting the theory drive the story rather than letting the story express itself as it unfolded. My imaginative capacities had not engaged subjectively, nor phenomenologically with the women's stories, and thus my writing failed to evoke the rich, complex, full context of the menopause experience. And, they said, they would rather read individual stories of other women's experiences with a focus on contradiction and difference, than a formalised analytical academic approach.

Finally, there was the realisation that I wanted to communicate to others the process of doing research. I wanted to share my experience as a researcher in the creation of the product rather than tell a chronological story with a beginning, middle and an end that focussed on outcome and conclusion. I wanted to show how a research project is constructed and how my own thought processes, which were often tentative and exploratory, contributed to giving it a life. I wanted to show my mistakes and the pitfalls I encountered along the way. As I commented earlier, one of the dilemmas I faced when undertaking this study was the difficulty in finding other published research projects using multimedia that elaborated on what it was like to engage in an inquiry of this nature and the actual processes of 'doing' research.

Acknowledged here then is the personal element of myself as author in this text. My own story recurs throughout the study. I am aware that my own particular biases and interests directed me towards specific areas of the women's experiences. I was to find however, that these initial biases and interests were to change shape many times during the research journey. The process of questions and answers, mirrored self-reflections and the subsequent developing relationship between myself and the women created circulation and movement around previous internalised attitudes. This movement was to activate new sources of knowledge for all of us.

Anecdotal writing

At approximately the same time as contemplating the 'crisis of representation' in finding a writing strategy appropriate for the study, I attended a workshop on researching lived experience with van Manen. In one of his sessions he was to speak of the value of anecdote, and how it is a device for bringing to explicit awareness the conversational relation individuals maintain with the world. Or, more precisely, how they show that the human being really '*is* this relation' (van Manen, 1990, p.116). He referred to the anecdotes that occur in the phenomenological writings of Sartre, Marcel and Merleau-Ponty, which, he says, are not *mere* illustrations made to render an experience more digestible, they are in fact used to explicate or portray a vivid description of a particular kind of experience. van Manen stresses that the important feature of experiential anecdote is that it draws the reader in, then prompts them to reflect. On the significance of anecdotal writing to human sciences discourses he writes:

Anecdotes express a certain disdain from the alienated and alienating discourses of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and theoretical propositions are connected ... Thus, anecdotes possess a certain pragmatic thrust. They force us to search out the relation between living and thinking, between situation and reflection... Anecdote makes it possible to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-a-vis the meanings embedded in the experience (p.121).

The stories as they are currently presented then are a textual hybrid. In a sense they still form part of a collective story linking separate individuals into a shared consciousness with the aim of creating personal and social change, but the collection of stories now contain individual biographies blended together with social and cultural theories, as well as the methodological issues I am considering. Each story attempts to map the significant contextualised framework within which the anecdotal telling is located. Woven into the poetic narratives and more formal textual discourse are the genres of poetry and poetised text. In addition, I have experimented with a variety of typographical formats. Therefore, each of these narrative stances is typical of postmodern writing practices in that they have contributed to further dissolving the boundaries between different linguistic and typographical styles.

Telling the real story – a feminist perspective

Women will starve in silence until new stories are created which confer on them the power of naming themselves.

(Gubar and Gilbert, quoted in Heilbrun, 1989, p.33)

Carolyn Heilbrun (1997), in *Writing a Woman's Life*, explores women's access to language and the difficulty for women in perceiving alternate forms of 'reality'. She poses the question, how are women 'to imagine forms and language they have never heard' if they only have male language to create their accounts of their female experience? (p.40). Heilbrun writes:

There is a real danger that in rewriting the patriarchal text, scholars will get lost in the intellectual ramifications of their disciplines and fail to reach out to the women whose lives must be rewritten with the aid of the new intellectual constructs. ...Without intellectual and theoretical underpinnings, no movement can succeed; the failure of feminism to sustain itself in previous incarnations may well be attributable to its lack of underlying theoretical discourse. But we

are in danger of refining the theory and scholarship at the expense of the lives of the women who need to experience the fruits of research (p.20).

Heilbrun asserts that although there are an increasing number of biographies and autobiographies of women and stories that describe women's lives, they often do not reflect the real lives of women. She points out that it was not until the 60s, with the advent of feminist consciousness raising activities, that women began to know our own history and to realise that it was acceptable to talk about the self. However, Heilbrun maintains women still don't know how to speak honestly to each other. It takes courage to open to another, to begin to tell the truth. Modern feminism, she says, began with the critical tool of consciousness raising, but somehow we seem to have lost it. Perhaps, she suggests it is through fear of ridicule or shame.

Other feminist writers similarly support Heilbrun's assertions on the need to re-story women's lives. They remind their readers that women are struggling to find their way in the world, their own way, and there will only be new stories about the truth of their lives when women turn to each other and take the time to listen (Conway, 1998; Heilbrun, 1997; Ostriker, 1985; Rich, 1980; Sarton, 1994; Trinh, 1989). In Heilbrun's opinion new stories will not find their way into texts unless they begin as personal exchanges among women; exchanges where women detail the most personal accounts of their lives.

Heilbrun continues, stating that women are not used to having their stories heard publicly, nor are they encouraged to speak the truth of their lives. They have not been recognised as persons in their own right and as a consequence, their experiences have remained nameless. Others, she says have undertaken the naming of their experience. Women have been 'handed by a father to another man, the husband, they have been objects of circulation, exchanging one name for another' (p.121). Heilbrun asserts that women's acts of self-recreation in re-imagining another identity, another role, are, in many instances, negated or subsumed in male-designed scripts for living.

These comments by Heilbrun were made nearly ten years ago. Are they relevant today? Yes, and no. Certainly, women are transforming the world. They are playing critical

roles in challenging decision-making processes from politics to environmental issues. They are shaping society and the institutions within it. Daily the visual media provides evidence of activists, entrepreneurs, doctors, successful sportswomen, well known writers and artists, and so forth, whose voices are sought, but this is not the case for all women. In a letter to me, one of my participants, Fanny wrote:

I think what inhibits women from speaking from their point of truth is born out of a lack of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. A lot of strong conditioning for girls came out of post-war rural areas when Australia was rebuilding itself (via the land and industry – seen mainly as men’s business), and our primary role models, our mothers and grandmothers were silenced by a culture immune to their utterings. By the time I left school I didn’t know I had a voice, never mind one worth listening to. I never knew what I was or that I was valid, and I allowed myself to be defined by what others thought of me. (I still do now, but not to the same extent). My voice was buried in the subtle socialisation of that time; The Saturday Evening Post, Reader’s Digest, Methodist Church, the CWA, the education system, television – all of it. Junior Farmers club might have offered me a voice in my teens, but by the time I arrived I was already entombed. I never knew until recently that I wasn’t coming from my ‘centre’.

For me, one of the things that makes it possible to speak now is that people, and in particular other women, are interested, listening and hearing. In fact, you were the first ‘serious’ listener I’ve encountered. I needed to hear myself. I am overcome by the fact that someone is interested in hearing what I have to say about what I am going through, and that you are actually hearing what I am saying and taking it seriously. It is amazing. To me, it is like, well this is real, and it’s okay. It is permission to go on. That is what it is (April, 1997).

Another of my participants, Sophia, offered this opinion when I asked her why she had not spoken out publicly about her life.

The trouble is women do not have a language to describe their experiences. Our culture doesn't teach us the language of self-description. Men suffer from this too. But when you have been encased in silence you learn a language from somewhere, of 'putting up with it', of 'stoicism', of 'being good' and of 'making do'. It hasn't been until recently that I even had room in my consciousness to acknowledge that I actually have a story. I have been so busy living the world's script. The world sees you (woman) as living, for, and through other's stories, and somehow you take on the role of creators of stories for them. We do this with our children from the time they are born (3.6.98).

On another occasion, during an interview Sophia reflected:

We can tell our stories and if they are not heard or listened to, then there is no healing, there is no elimination, there is no moving forward. It is a relationship between the listener and the storyteller. It is a complementary relationship. If you listen in a way that shows that you are interested then it actually allows my story to grow bigger, and you might ask questions that allow an illumination that I hadn't been aware of before (17.3.1998).

In a large proportion of the interviews I encountered the same sentiments. In offering their reasons for not speaking out, many of the women spoke of feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, of not feeling intelligent, and of feeling a sense of inferiority. It seems as though this particular generation of women to which I belong were well practiced in the art of self-effacement. Perhaps this was because we had grown up with the idea that it was impolite to voice our opinions, or perhaps it was because we felt our opinions weren't worth listening to.

On one occasion, as I was taking my leave after an interview and with the tape-recorder still running, Artemesia unexpectedly said:

I don't know what good I am doing for your thesis, but for myself this has been a process of confirmation. I needed to hear myself. So much of what

we do is silenced. I don't know why I haven't spoken out more about what I believe to be the truth of my life. I have said a lot on a lot of subjects. I have been the mainstay of the community. I have helped in the school. I have helped in the botanical gardens. I have helped everywhere. You want a helper. You just give me a phone call and I will come along. But I have never actually spoken. I have never actually said the things that were all there just lying under the surface (18.2.1997).

All of the expressive and explanatory qualitative approaches outlined here resonate with the theoretical concerns that underpin this study. From a phenomenological perspective, analysis is not conceptual and explanatory in a critical sense, rather it points to or directs our awareness to recurring structural elements that reveal discovery and disclosure of our lived world as it is experienced. Through the process of distillation of the texts, the aim is to interpret and then elaborate on what is already there before our conscious minds ascribe accepted meaning. This process as Crotty (1996b) reminds his readers, is easier said than done.

Representing qualitative research as poetry

Poetising is not "merely" a type of poetry, a making of verses. Poetising is thinking on original experience and is thus speaking in a more primal sense. ... We must engage in language in a primal incantation or poetizing which hearkens back to the silence from which the words emanate.

(van Manen, 1990, p.13)

My concern in this section is to explore how poetic discourse might enhance the research agenda. As mentioned in the introduction, in trying to grasp what it means to be an embodied woman experiencing changes in consciousness at menopause, I have endeavoured to return to the original poetic manifestation of images, words and ideas in our stories so as to evoke colourful and vivid descriptions.

Michael Crotty (1996a), in elaborating further on Frankl's views on the 'crisis of semantic expression', says that unless we put ourselves in a 'poetic mood' so as to write in a 'poetic vein' we inevitably fall back on existing thought patterns which inhibit our ability to grasp fresh images (Frankl, 1968, in Crotty 1996a). We don't impose or make meaning, rather we allow it to stand unexplained. Alternatively, we strive to make what once was familiar strange so that new conceptual metaphors and therefore new coherences can be distilled through our consciousness.

Crotty puts it this way:

The difficulty does not lie merely in seeing 'what lies before our eyes' (which Husserl saw as a 'hard demand'), or knowing 'precisely what we see' (Merleau-Ponty said there was nothing more difficult to know than that). We will also experience great difficulty in actually **describing** what we have succeeded in seeing and knowing. When we attempt to describe what we have never had to describe before, language fails us. We find our descriptions incoherent, fragmentary, and not a little 'mysterious'. We find ourselves lost for words, forced to invent words and bend existing words to bear the meaning we need them to carry for us. This has always been characteristic of phenomenological description. We may have to be quite inventive and creative in this respect (p.11).

In pursuing this line of thought, I read again the writing of James Hillman (1990) on sensing images through poetic form. For Hillman, insights from images occur when he changes from his usual ways of narrational reading to a more poetic vein. 'Most poetry,' he says, with the exception of the heroic epic, 'is printed on the page in a form that forces the eye to slow itself to the cadence of the images' (p.61). Thus, by slowing down the rate of our reading, we are not so caught up in moving towards the future, 'what happened next? And then, and then,' instead, we can stay with the image and sense a quality of depth that perhaps would not be obvious in a conventional narrative sequence (p.61).

In looking further at the open receptive intuiting stance of the poetic medium to describe immediate experience, I turned again to Laurel Richardson. Richardson (1992) claims that by using poetic description we can better represent our participants' voices because the bodily quality of speech is generally absent in the production of transcripts. Moreover, Richardson says that by presenting transcripts in this alternative linguistic style, it not only touches the emotional centre in the listener or reader, it has unexpected consequences for the writer's sense of self. In Richardson's (1992) paper *The Consequences of Poetic Representation*, she focuses on the unanticipated consequences of writing society as poetry. She found that breaching traditional sociological writing methods had a transformative effect on the 'deeper, more spiritual parts' of herself (p.134). It also enabled her to unite people's subjective experiences with her own. After repeatedly speaking the words out loud from the poetising texts of one of her participant's interviews, she was to gain a deeper sense of her own inner psyche. Richardson writes that creating poems from existing words:

... is one way of decentering the unreflective 'self' to create a position for experiencing the self as a sociological knower/constructor – not just talking about it, but doing it. In writing the Other, we can (re)write the Self (p.136).

With Diamond (1997), Barone & Eisner (1997), van Manen (1990), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Crotty (1996b), Hillman (1990) and Richardson (1992) all suggesting that in various ways the poetic process served to evoke the embodied nature of lived experience and that a poetising text captures 'essence' in a manner that is markedly different from prose, I embarked on an empathetic and experiential intuitive re-construction of sections of the women's transcripts. I examined closely how Richardson re-presented one of her participants' stories so that I might similarly transform and get 'it', the story, right.²¹

²¹ My understanding of experiential intuition was derived from Reid's (1989), definition. Quoting A. R. Lacey in his *Dictionary of Philosophy*, he states intuition is: 'generally a direct relation between us and something we see unambiguously in a clear light . . . the emphasis is on the directness of the relation' (p.15). He then adds, quoting *The Concise Oxford Dictionary's* version, 'Immediate apprehension by the mind without reasoning; immediate apprehension by sense; immediate insight'.

The question of authority/authorship/appropriation

As I began to weave poetised text into the individual anecdotal stories, I was mindful of Trinh's (1989) words about letting women 'tell the story how it is', rather than imposing my 'truth values' on it. Writing on the gathering of women's stories in *Women Native Other*, Trinh (1989) urges 'that we tell it the way they tell it' rather than impose our structures of meaning onto the women's stories (p.141). Like Crotty, she says this is no simple matter. During the process of recording, gathering, deciphering and interpreting another's narrative, we unconsciously try to sort the stories into having a beginning, middle and an end. Life, says Trinh, 'is not a (Western) drama of four or five acts, it is an organic process continually shaping our life. Sometimes the story just drifts along, without definite beginnings or endings (p.143). It is rare, she says, not to take another's story and fill it with our 'own marks and markings' so as to consign meaningful content. This is true; we do layer our own story, our own experiences over another's. However, in this instance, as researcher/artist/listener and storyteller, I was endeavoring to find a writing style that would capture the qualities and content of oral story telling, the poetic qualities of artistic representation, as well as accommodate the requirements of academia. I found that it was a constant struggle to address the oppositional demands between the participants' need to tell their story as they understood and perceived it, their truth, the way I sensed or heard it, as well as giving consideration to my potential audience, which places emphasis not only on the theoretical implications of the experience, but also on the necessity to frame these forms of knowing in ways that at times may often appear far removed from everyday meanings. With these concerns in mind, when it came to condensing the many pages of individual transcripts into a representational form of conversational mapping, I endeavoured to give thoughtful consideration to retaining the essence of each story. And, like Richardson, who had questioned whether she should write from the 'Other' subject position, I too reflected on whether I had the authority to reconstitute their realities. I read that Richardson (1992), in creating a poetised text, had been accused of exploiting her participant. In presenting her poetised representation to diverse audiences, she was criticised by some for having assumed her participant's identity, and for fabricating a story that differed from its original telling. But she was also commended for using this particular writing strategy

because it touched 'an emotional centre in the listener', and because it showed 'how patriarchal strictures have controlled the writing of social science 'findings'' (p.143).

In her paper, Richardson outlines her reasons for choosing to use poetised text to tell the story of Louisa May, an unwed mother. In the first instance it was because it offered a form of writing that she as a sociologist would want to read. To her, it proffered a writing about lived experience that was 'endearing, enduring and endurable – bonded and unbounded, closed and open' (p.132). And in the second instance, it was because the task of empathic understanding - the feeling that she was capturing the essence of the story - was difficult. Louisa May spoke differently using a speech that was entirely 'devoid of images, metaphors, and poetic language', and she thought differently (p.132.) Moreover, emotionally and ideologically, she positioned herself differently. She was, as Richardson points out, her 'Other'.

My initial reason for using poetised text was not because I was the participants' 'Other', or that our sociological backgrounds and ways of thinking were different: it was because the conversational sentence structures that appeared in the transcripts were at times unwieldy, rambling and disjointed. Multiple conversations were occurring as thoughts and ideas ran off in different directions, and on totally unrelated issues. There were often whole pages and lengthy paragraphs with no pauses, no full stops, and on other occasions there were very long pauses and a great deal of uhmring and sighing and laughter. Lengthy recollections were told connecting each sentence with the word 'and', and at times the story telling was repetitious. In addition, I found that although I had asked the women to give me their embodied feeling responses when articulating their menopausal experiences, as mentioned earlier, it was not easy to put aside explanatory thoughts and clichéd ways of thinking so as to bring our feeling body, heart and soul into the story. I found that we generally spoke in the past tense. Although we were trying to give voice, to grasp with both objective and subjective responses what 'it', the remembered experience, was like, in our attempts to approach and hold 'it' in the present moment before any translation, our words were more inclined to emerge not as a vivid and colorful description, but as critical reflection or simply explanation. To verbalise phenomenologically, to restore a thing to ourselves for the first time, or to enter into the

poetic space of an image, and to attempt to describe non-knowing subjectively and objectively so as to bring language alive through our bodies, was very difficult. We are impatient, and we are attached to learned perceptions and to the power of illusory thought. In everyday conversation, our busy minds are unused to letting a phenomenon grasp and impress itself upon us at a deep, embodied level. Writing on intuiting the phenomenon, Spiegelberg (1982) directs his reader to the comments of Max Scheler:

... phenomenological philosophy is the very opposite of all quick-fix philosophy by mere talking. Here, one talks a little less, remains more silent, and sees more – even that part of the other world which perhaps can no longer be talked about (p.280).

Gaston Bachelard (1969) similarly points out that in the creation of their images, poets and painters are born phenomenologists, however when we try to understand and analyse the image from a psychoanalytic or psychological perspective we translate it into a language that is different and distanced from the poetic logos.²² Critical considerations, he says, destroy the primitivity of the imagination. Creation ‘takes place on the tenuous thread of the sentence, in the fleeting life of an expression’ (p.xxii).

Notwithstanding the linguistic obstacles the women and I encountered in disclosing subjectively lived experiences of the self, for most of us, there were rare good days when our conversations were able to reverberate with phenomenological moments of connection. On such days the ‘universe sang’, as Crotty (1996a), referring to Merleau-Ponty, said it would, and the word was ‘born of our breath’(Crotty 1996a, p.167; Bachelard, 1969, p.xvi). The task ahead of me then, was to gather these spoken words and fashion them into a fresh version of how the phenomenon presented itself in its stark immediacy. At the very least, through various writing genres I have endeavoured to reclaim existing language through metaphor and imaginal writing so as to make new connections linking image and experience, thus disclosing new meanings in our lives. In

²² Bachelard is quoting J.H. Van den Berg to illustrate his thesis.

the writing of the stories, I have been mindful of Maxine Greene's (1997) comments on reflective encounters with artforms.

In making central to our teaching the arts and the symbol systems that present them, we may render conscious the process of making meaning, a process that has much to do with the shaping of identity, the development of a sense of agency, and a commitment to a certain mode of *praxis*. Yes, we are ever on the verge. But to recognize that there is something 'out of reach' is to commit oneself to the pursuit of possibility (p.396).

I began by writing four stories, transforming parts of the transcripts into poetised text. In addition, I included my own poetised reflections. Two of these stories included the reconstruction of poetised reflection from words of the participants' personal journals. I gave them to the women to read. They accepted that as a researcher I was deploying my power as author to poetically write their lives in this manner. They said they were comfortable with this mode of re-presentation. In fact, Fanny, the participant whose letters and journal writing I had turned into poetry, thought that it looked better in this form than in prose. Given the cautionary warning from Richardson that there were risks involved in constructing poetical reflections, I tested them out on various audiences. During the course of the academic year I wrote papers and delivered several presentations incorporating these genres as a way of highlighting alternative approaches for textually presenting research. On each occasion they were positively received and affirmed. I was therefore encouraged to continue writing in this expressive style.

And then I wrote Lileth's story and I came up against all of the concerns about appropriation, authority and authorship that Richardson (Richardson, 1990b) discusses in *Writing Strategies*. Lileth differed from the other women in the study in that she lived in another state of Australia. This did not pose any real problem, except that I did not have the opportunity to develop the same familiar relationship with her as I had with the others. Over time we were to establish a good, fruitful, warm, working relationship. Our initial contact was through letters and then telephone interviews, which were transcribed, followed by two interviews during visits to Melbourne. In my first letter to

her I asked the same sorts of questions that I asked the other women. Her responses were long and detailed accounts of her personal history in relation to menopause and her subsequent artwork. They were interesting, but I felt that they did not evoke a direct and immediate response to her embodied sense of menopause. In the subsequent re-telling of her story, I not only created poetising text from the transcribed conversations, I also altered her written explanatory descriptions, moving sentences around to construct what I thought was a more poetic and descriptive story. Lileth had already seen some of these constructions in transcripts I had sent to her earlier. At the time she made no comment. However, towards the end of the study when, on a visit to her home state I showed her what I was doing with the rest of the material she had given me I encountered a negative response. To put it simply, she was most unhappy. After lengthy discussion on whether I as the author of the text could use my power to speak on her behalf, we worked together in a conciliatory manner to change a large portion of the text. I returned to Perth. I re-wrote her story and sent it to her. She returned it to me some time later with a long accompanying letter. The story contained many corrections, some of which were to the words of her original letters and to her spoken voice in the transcripts. She wrote:

By editing out certain detail, I feel you have made the facts bald and my "voice" is not in it – and some of the changes of juxtaposition – i.e. the moving of paragraphs has also changed meaning. I feel puzzled that as a source material it becomes impersonal, not universal, and not personal either. I feel I have not, in some cases, been allowed to speak for myself. Editing is a major skill and requires, in the case of personal statements, great care and respect for the individual voice...The way I write is a little like filling a cup with water – it is not full till all the water is there – it is a gestalt- layers built up, suggestions and linkages knitted together...When dealing with other people's writing it is/can be a temptation to neaten it, shorten it, translate it, but there are many dangers in this...From what you said, you felt you wanted, had a right and I had agreed to you doing what you thought right, e.g. putting it into your own words. On one level this is true but it is how it's done that makes it fair. One has to trust other women's "speaking", other women's words, and collaging them is not editing... I

don't want you to re-write my story – I feel it says what I want as I wrote it. The permission I gave was for scholarship paraphrasing, not for sub-editing, changing from “narrative voice – first person personal” to another genre – translation into poetry.

This may sound hard or unkind or not understanding of your artistic drive, vision or experimentation, but I feel a little “used” as my voice – collaged to fit some views you have, and less than mine (10 September 1998).

Lileth signed the letter affectionately yours, and added a PS:

This is not to add to your workload or to hurt you or insult you. It is to clarify my way of seeing/being and my sense of involvement in this, your project.

After reading Lileth's comments I felt suitably chastised but also in a quandary. I found myself asking the question 'If a participant has signed a consent form giving permission for you to use their material in the writing of a thesis, how much authority do they have in controlling how I as author present it?'²³ Although I did not feel overly concerned that I had edited her words to fit into a thesis framework, I was guilty, at least from her perspective, of using some of her written and spoken words to present a text that I thought poetically represented her experiences. By doing this, I was trying to grasp the immediacy of events that happened back then and bring them into a sense of a bodily present. I then spoke with her at length on the telephone to clarify my position regarding the length of a story and how it was necessary to abbreviate sections so that it would fit the requirements of a thesis. I explained also about writing from an embodied phenomenological perspective. I further explained that producing a thesis was a learning process and that it was not my intention to negate her experience. It was agreed that I would write the story again. This time, where I used her written words to illustrate her story I would indicate if I was editing, and I would leave the sentences in their original format.

²³ See Appendix B for details of consent form

The engagement between Lileth and myself was a valuable lesson in the research process. It demonstrated clearly the consequences of experimental writing where 'the author positions the Self as knower and teller'(Richardson, 1994, p.520). It taught me that although at times the women's stories did not address the direct and immediate experience in a phenomenological embodied sense, their experiences were felt at a deep emotional and cognitive level. Creating a story around another person's perceptions and emerging sense of self and identity is tenuous. As a consequence, I have become more sensitive to the invisible fine and delicate threads that hold the fabric of our lives together. The creation of the Other's sense of self needs careful negotiating. From Lileth, I also learned that my knowledge base is always partial and contextualised. Furthermore, I learned that language with its depths, its many and varied resonances leads to individual differences in thoughts and attitudes, and thus to the ways in which we as humans locate and perceive our current realities. This experience brought to my awareness the need to work more closely with each woman. I wanted them to feel as though they had fully participated in the creation of their stories, and that they understood clearly the nature of this research project. Before I proceeded with writing the other stories, I contacted the women to explain why I had chosen an expressive narrational writing style instead of a conventional objective format to document their textual and visual menopause experiences.

Encouraging the women to be more actively involved in the creation of their story has meant a lot more work. With the telling and retelling of stories continuing right up until the last moment, the word collaboration took on a whole new meaning. But it has been important for them and for me, to feel that even though my voice and the voices of theorists and philosophers were located in the text alongside theirs, it was still essentially their story. As a result, the stories were altered many times as we worked on what would be said and how. I also asked their permission whenever I used their spoken words to create poetised text.²⁴

²⁴ In each individual story there are occasions of repetition. This was difficult to avoid as many of our conversation covered similar ground. I left these moments of repeated conversation in the text because they formed part of the whole of each new story.

Observing thematic outcomes

Coming initially to this research with a limited knowledge of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological approach to embodiment, and with a feminist poststructural background driving my reading and analysis of the women's stories, the notion of gathering themes did not sit comfortably with the multivocality of their experiences. To my mind, it ran the risk of categorising or universalising what is a unique and individual experience of difference. And besides, I believed I already had four major themes to work with, the self, identity, femininity and sexuality. It was some time before I understood Merleau-Ponty's (1962) definition of essences. In looking for essences he says:

It is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization (p.xv).

I was to learn that thematic analysis could mean many different things. According to van Manen (1990), because the meaning or essence of a phenomenon is always multi-dimensional and multi-layered it can never be grasped in a single definition. van Manen points out that capturing themes is:

... the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure. As I arrive at certain thematic insights it may seem that insight is a product of all of these: *invention* (my interpretive product), *discovery* (the interpretive product of my dialogue with the text of life), *disclosure of meaning* (the interpretive product 'given' to me by the text of life itself) (p.88).

With this information, naming themes was to become twofold. In listening to, and writing the stories, I found there were unifying, but uniquely different threads that ran through the women's lives which served to give expression to what previously had been nameless. As we moved between our disembodied selves to embodied listening, breathing and telling, there were also moments of insight that touched the core or

essence of a particular set of experiences which enabled a fresh interpretation. These themes then became the structural tools for giving explicit shape to the significant and subtle experiential meanings ascribed to menopause. They became the women's individual stories. The identified moments or sub themes were to become useful points of focus around which to describe commonalities of experience. These commonalities of experience I shared with the other women in the study. In a sense it was a form of collective biography. Through the listening and the telling, reflexive awareness and the subsequent questioning, new moments of intense being in the world were then re-imagined. By using these structures of meaning making as they became visible, they were related back to, and then explored through Merleau-Ponty's (1962) existential coordinates of a bodily experience, a spatial experience, a temporal experience and a relational or socially embedded experience. Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the notion of the body as mediator of these four existential modalities of perception provided a wider framework for describing the phenomenon of lived experience. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is our means of accessing and integrating different bodily senses. He writes:

My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension' (p.235).

In defining how our comprehension weaves the body into text and then how the words become flesh, my thematic analyses work backwards and forwards between texts: experiential phenomenological, social theory and those that describe a holistic ecological point of view. The challenge of this study has been to explore 'what was menopause like as a bodily experience? 'what did you feel like?' and 'how have you expressed it?' Followed by another series of questions relating to the postmodern self of 'why?' and 'how is this so?' And then, in pursuing what Denzin (1991), and Gablik (1991) describe as the dilemma of the postmodern self: the task of finding an 'essential humanity in a forest of signs which deal only in reflection', the thematic outcomes point to possible ways for re-visioning an alternate sociological imagination (1991, p.18).

In using the expressive approaches as outlined in this chapter, my concern has been to portray a vivid description of a particular kind of artistic experience, while at the same time through the reconstruction of stories, seek to understand and make explicit lived experience within a personal historical context. In the process I have endeavoured to maintain an awareness of Trinh's (1989) comments on looking for structure in narrative. She writes:

The structural activity that does not carry on the cleavage between form and content but emphasizes the interrelation of the material and the intelligible is an activity in which structure should remain an unending question: one that speaks him/her as s/he speaks it, brings it into intelligibility (143).

The stories as they are portrayed were written sequentially. Although they were re-worked many times I have maintained this ordering so as to illuminate the gradual unfolding of our collective knowledges and my own research processes.

The women in the study

Choosing the participants was done on a process of elimination to fit my selection criteria. That is, that they defined themselves as going through the transitional stages of menopause, that their work had changed as a consequence, that they agreed to have their work documented, and that they were willing to take part in a participatory experiential process over several years. In choosing people to work with phenomenologically, I was mindful of Crotty's (1996b) comment that 'what we need to be concerned about is their ability to reflect, focus, intuit and describe as the phenomenological endeavour requires' (p.172). In our quest for seeking out the right participants, not only should we look for people with these insightful qualities, Crotty said we should also look for people:

... who can put themselves in touch with their own immediate experience – disciplined people, therefore, who can prescind from their day-to-day, taken-for-granted assumptions, understandings and commitments and open themselves to the phenomena as these present (p.172).

The women in the study range in age from 42 – 61 with the average age being 51. They are white, predominantly middle-class, and are relatively highly educated. Of the 14 women who began the study, 7 have achieved mature-age university arts degrees within the last 12 years. All but 2 of the participants have had some form of instruction or tuition in the visual arts. With the exception of 3 women, they were heterosexual. Their interest and involvement in the arts ranges from professional practicing artists, to artists who engage in creative expression part time, or as a leisure activity. At the time of the interviews only 3 of the women were producing artwork that enabled them to be financially viable. Nine women lived independently. They were either single, divorced or widowed. Three women were in marital partnerships. One lived in a de-facto relationship, another lived in shared accommodation with other women and one woman declared her same sex orientation during the course of the study.

There were between four to eight meetings with each woman (except in the case of Lileth). These unstructured conversational interviews were recorded. With the exception of two participants who elected to come to my studio space, they were conducted in their homes or studios. The interviews were between one to two hours' duration. There was also many casual conversations over cups of tea and coffee, as well as numerous phone calls, which at times were recorded with their permission. All the recorded conversations were personally transcribed. Towards the end of the research I changed my surname by deed poll to McLaren. All of the interviews were conducted using the name of Whittaker.

Each individual transcript was presented to the women prior to the next scheduled meeting. I requested that they read them and make a note of any queries or questions for future discussion. In transcribing the interviews, I would also write down my reflections, understandings, or interpretations on the ways in which they had expressed their experiences. These 'understandings' were based on a combination of my bodily processes: feelings, emotion and intuition, and the cognitive processes that make meaning of these responses. In addition, where I believed feminist poststructuralist

views and the metaphorical ideas of poets and writers might further expand a particular story, these also were shared and discussed in subsequent interviews.

As I grew to embrace phenomenological seeing and listening, especially the listening, the interviews became simply occasions for shared reflection. It was through the repeated listening to their voices, to their intonation, to the rhythm, the silences and their laughter during the transcribing of the audio-tapes, that I came, as best I could with my limited knowledge base, to know their speaking ontological, phenomenological and epistemological bodies. I was aware that during our conversations there was a multiplicity of subject positions relating to their particular experiences, and I was capturing only partial, fragmentary glimpses of their lives. Although I was trying to create a whole sense of this experience, I knew it was not possible to capture the whole. The stories they chose to share were only brief snapshots in time. I had a sense that they were captured for a brief moment through a tear in an illusory stage curtain as we rehearsed and acted out our various scripted roles, and then it was seen through the lens of a single frame.

On my first visit to the women, I rarely got to view their artwork. In some respects this is surprising given that artists usually love to share their visual stories, but then again, in a situation where they were about to reveal their inner most thoughts and feelings about their bodies, it was appropriate that they should contextualise their speaking position before they could make the shift to a more reflexive, contemplative self required for narrating their visual stories. There was also a sense of building trust. And, I was to find that for some of these women it was the first time in their lives that they had taken the opportunity, or even had the inclination, to discover that they had a self. One of the women commented: 'I don't even have a sense of self so how can I return to that self-reflexive space you describe' (Catherine, January 1996). Catherine had recently begun to explore the medium of poetry, so I asked her if she might find some words to express her sense of no self. The following week she sent me a poem.

SHE

No sense of self
 On a journey
to becoming
 -Who
-What
 -Why

Be quiet
 -Be still
 -Be good
 Behave

they said
words
 becoming her
belittling identity
Leaving its promise unfulfilled,
 broken
 this she
 this it
 this entity.

woman
 stripped bare
 stares into the mirror
 sees herself free

tentatively
 touching
 Truth.

*(Catherine, January 1996)*²⁵

²⁵ This poem was printed with Catherine's permission. She withdrew from the study within the first few months. Catherine had initially believed she was about to begin menopause but menstruation resumed.

I was to discover that in the same way that women talk subjectively about birth experiences, there was also the desire to talk in depth about this last stage of their reproductive capacity. Menopause is not something that one does separately like childbirth, nor is it an experience that is prescriptive and known. Moreover, it can continue for many years. Within these years of transition other major life events occur with the result that they can impact and influence the way a woman experiences menopause. Each different experience creates a new connection, another story, which is interwoven and intimately connected to her body.²⁶ I was to learn that as changes in consciousness occurred, it sometimes triggered an emotional response from an earlier memory. These stories needed to be heard. I sat and listened as women shared with me their recollections of suicide, murder, paedophilia, incest, rape, sexual/emotional and physical abuse, death of children and parents, love affairs and illegitimate children. I was often asked to turn the tape recorder off while they related deeply personal and intimate details about their lives. These were stories of silence that until now had been so tightly knotted into the fabric of their bodies that they were hardly visible, and yet, in many ways they were the contributing factors in their experiences of menopause. With time and patience, the knots were slowly unpicked from the depths/surfaces of their beings, and voices that had previously protected their families, their lives, and their sanity filled the interviewing space.

Whatever is unnamed, indicated in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

(Rich, 1980, p.63)

In the early days of the study, as a consequence of this naming process I had concerns for one of my participants. Her story was of great pain and trauma. I suggested to her, that perhaps before we continued with further interviews, she might like to see a counsellor or psychologist to help ease the burden she was carrying. I was not in a

²⁶ Further discussion on these stories appears in the *Postscript*.

position to give her the support she required. I gave her the names of several recommended counselors and psychologists. She followed my advice, and in time telephoned to say she was ready to resume with her participation in the study.

I was very aware of the privileged position of myself as researcher when these personal revelations were offered. In writing their stories, I was aware of maintaining a delicate balance; a fine line between what could be appropriately revealed, and what might possibly become an ethical concern. In some instances, the women left their stories intact, giving permission for intimate details to be revealed, and in other cases they went back over their texts and censored out the details that might have impacted on their families, friends and work colleagues.

I began the project with 15 participants. During the course of the study 3 participants withdrew. I fully intended to write a detailed story for the 12 remaining women. However, towards the end of the study I simply ran out of space and time. The creation of the stories and the collaborative nature of this mode of research was a bigger task than I had imagined. I explained the situation to Florence, Artemesia, Julian, Seymour, and Eileen, and with their co-operation I created a single chapter around their partial perspectives of menopause. In conversations with these women, I was to gain many valuable insights; their wisdom, their thoughtful answers to my questions, and their unique forms of self-expression were to significantly influence the ways in which the following stories are told.

The visual images

Many of the images incorporated into this text were supplied by the women. In some instances, because their work had either been sold, or they had given it away, a photograph of the object or painting was all that remained. Some of these photographs are not good reproductions. However, they have been included as visual evidence of their experiences. The photographs I took were mostly candid shots taken in their studios or at exhibitions. Several of the images are works in progress. On occasions the

images had already been framed and placed behind glass. This again impacted on the quality of the photographs.

Protection of participants: anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent

After obtaining approval from the university's ethics committee, a letter of invitation and an open-ended questionnaire were sent to women within the art community of Perth and surrounding country areas explaining the intended research project.²⁷ A letter of invitation was also placed in a newsletter published by the Women's Artist Register in Melbourne. At the end of the questionnaire there was space for comments and suggestions regarding issues they thought should be addressed. These questions were later woven into the interviews. After making my selection, an appointment was then made with each of the women. Prior to the interview, they were given a copy of the Information and Consent Form, which we both signed, and once again I outlined how I thought the study would proceed. I explained that it was a collaborative procedure, with both the participant and myself working together with the aim of presenting a conversational mapping of women's experiences of menopause. They were then given the opportunity to ask questions and were advised that they could withdraw all or part of the data at any stage. We specifically discussed issues of anonymity and confidentiality. For most women, the thought of using their real names made them feel vulnerable and exposed. Wearing someone else's name gave them a freedom to tell stories that under public scrutiny would never have seen the light of day. However, by the end of the study, the fear of revealing the self had almost dissolved. The majority of the women said they would be proud to use their real names. In fact, two of the women decided to use their own names.

In the stories to follow you will hear the voices of Caroline, Marie, Fanny, Luce, Lileth, Pauline, Sophia, Florence, Eileen, Seymour, Artemesia and Julian. I begin with Caroline's story.

²⁷ See Appendix E for details of questionnaire.

CAROLINE'S STORY

Preface

In September 1998, I was invited to participate in a project entitled *Presenting Lived Experience: Writing to Capture Imagination and Move the Heart*. It was organised by Dr. Peter Willis from the University of South Australia to bring together cultural practitioners, storytellers, poets, artists, philosophers, community workers, playwrights and educators with the intention of reflecting on alternative approaches which can be used to represent the world evocatively. The colloquium was generated as a consequence of the dearth of academic writing concerning social life and social action. It was also generated by the need to complement and resist the reductionism in contemporary rational discourse.

The colloquium's intention was to explore the nature of cultural practices that evoke feelings and memories, inspire, confound, appeal, convince, persuade, enchant, seduce, engage the spirit capture the imagination and move the heart. By engaging in the activity of reflecting on matters of the spirit and of the heart and by the creation of imagistic representational texts, it was anticipated that our responses would communicate life in ways other than through analytical and categorical texts. By using modes of knowing other than explanation or discursively reasoned ones, it was hoped that our individual texts would reveal life and urgency, thus inviting action for choice and possible change.

The objective of the colloquium was to present these different methods and genres to a publisher for inclusion in a published text. As a consequence of my involvement with this project, *Caroline's Story*, which I presented at the colloquium, and the introduction to this thesis are to be published in a book entitled *Three-dimensional inquiry: Being, seeking and telling in qualitative adult education research*.

The telling and the hearing of a story is not a simple act. The one who tells must reach down into deeper layers of the self, reviving old feelings, reviewing the past. Whatever is retrieved is reworked into a new form, one that narrates events and gives the listener a path through these events that leads to some fragment of wisdom. The one who hears takes the story in, even to a place not visible or conscious to the mind, yet there. In this inner place a story from another life suffers a subtle change. As it enters the memory of the listener it is augmented by reflection, by other memories, and even the body hearing and responding in the moment of telling. By such transmissions, consciousness is woven.

(Griffin, 1992, p.178)

Let me introduce you now to Caroline. Through the re-telling of her fragments of stories, I will explore how artistic genres grasp particular experiences and transform them into expressive textual representation. Coming to a place where I feel free to swim in a sea of words, a place where I have learned to cast my net and make them come alive, has been a slow and difficult journey. By writing from a personal self-reflexive position, this story demonstrates how the work of a researcher is done. It illustrates how words take shape, how sense is made, how new visions are constructed, and how consciousness is woven so as to draw out resonances towards real, and imagined, internal and external sites of significance. It is a story of a participatory textual encounter, charting a journey of a relationship between Caroline and myself as we engaged in the task of re-working language and generating new narratives.

My relationship with Caroline began in December 1995. It was in response to a letter of invitation I had placed in an arts based magazine. In the letter I outlined the nature of my research project and asked women if their artwork or practice had changed as a consequence of experiencing menopause, and if so would they be prepared to participate in an interview and to have their work documented.

The first interview, or conversation as I prefer to call the naming process, took place at her home around the pine kitchen table. Directing my gaze to the window, she pointed out her weather-board studio nestled amongst the tress and shrubs of her back garden. I was looking forward to seeing her work, hearing her story, but for now, we talked over a pot of tea. She was shy. I was nervous. I was very new to the role of researcher. Caroline was my second participant. I desperately wanted her to feel at ease. After all, I was an artist too, and it was important that I did not appear as an authoritative figure. I wanted her to feel comfortable with our relationship. I was aware of the power differential that exists between the 'knower who assumes the power to define in the process of the research', and how it can separate the knower from the participant. (Acker, 1991, p.140). I did not want her to feel 'other'. She was to later tell me that she *was scared to death*. I began by asking Caroline 'can you tell me how menopause presented itself to you?'

I ask for evidence but yet when I get it I am more interested in the silent, forgotten, stories, in the everyday, the ordinary, the unsystematic and unrecorded, the omissions and slippages, the ways of living that affected us quietly, their meanings accruing over the years, not exposed in a single masculine climax. (Modjeska, 1990, p.26)

I didn't get to see her artwork on this occasion. I had intended to record an interview with her about her changing attitudes towards sexuality, femininity and identity as a consequence of menopause, as well as photograph the objects. But I became absorbed in her stories. My list of questions was put to one side and I allowed our first conversation to unfold. The tellings

were fragmented and told in a looping fluid manner. They overlapped and intersected past and present histories, and they flowed into the future. As I listened to Caroline thread together the memories of her multiple selves, I realised her experiences were in many ways not dissimilar to mine. In a sense, a form of collective biography had begun. We talked for nearly two hours about issues relating to menopause and her life. I left with cuttings from her garden; a white daisy, and seeds from a plant bearing red chillies.

Caroline, like many of the women in my study grew up during the late 40s, 50s and early 60s. This was a time in our cultural history when religion and education played a significant role in determining and defining a female self. Seduced by our dreams of

perfection, and by the myths of religion, femininity, sexuality, marriage and motherhood, we have spent years constrained within institutionalised forms of knowledge and linguistic practices alien to our actual lived experiences. Culturally inscribed through various discourses from early childhood, we had assumed a collective set of images and limitations through which we lived our disconnected lives. Our experiences were often trivialized or silenced. We were caught within the patriarchal law of the father and for most of us, the silence of our own mothers.

Women studying women reveals the complex way in which women as objects of knowledge reflect back upon women as subjects of knowledge. Knowledge of the other and knowledge of self are mutually informing because self and other share a common condition of being women. (Westkott 1979, in Acker et al, 1991)

As Caroline's story continued, I found there were connections in the lives we had led as children, young women and then as wives and mothers. This sense of being in her story and in my own at the same time was an experience that was to be repeated with every woman in the study.

As a child, Caroline lived in England. She was a member of a large, working class family and went to a church school where education for girls was considered of little importance. 'It was a time,' she said, 'when working class people just accepted what happened to them. We didn't have any rights, and that was re-enforced by the school. Doctors were considered as powerful as priests, their authority was law.'²⁸

From childhood she had always known she wanted to be an artist, but had been prevented from pursuing this dream by the financial and social circumstances of her family. By the age of eight, she had internalised that she was an awkward child, not good at school, thought of by others as stupid, and not liked by other students. She describes herself as being a very lonely child. Her mother relied on her to help to support and take care of her younger brothers and sisters during her early teenage years. Her background taught her to put her family first. Caroline said, 'It is still a point of conflict that I have raging inside of me. At times I feel like two different people. It is something I can't resolve.'

²⁸ Throughout Caroline's story I have used a variety of textual formats to present direct quotations from transcripts. The story is presented in this hybrid manner to demonstrate how dialogue can be used to shape ideas and thought processes.

At the age of 48, as a consequence of developing endometriosis, she experienced a medically induced menopause. It was totally unexpected. She had both a hysterectomy and an oophorectomy.²⁹ Caroline's creative devices illustrate her struggle to find a self, a subjectivity. They were created in the search for a voice, a language to express her grief, anger, frustration, loss of creativity, sexuality and her sense of being disempowered at this point in her life. These varying forms of self-expression have also allowed her to gain a different understanding of her identity and concept of self. In addition, they have played a significant role in assisting the healing processes associated with the loss of her womb.

Caroline said:

Menopause was very, very difficult.

It is the hardest thing I have ever had to cope with grow out of.

Not just cope with, grow out of it.

Become, stronger, more educated, more interested in self.

I have had to put myself forward do what I wanted to do.

I was always in touch with my body and its routines and cycles.

Menstruation was a central part of being a woman.

I didn't really understand what was happening to my body.

Other people didn't explain it well enough,

and I didn't ask. The doctors were rude, uninterested.

They never asked questions about how I was feeling.

I had to wait many months before I could have the operation.

I didn't have any health cover.

My sense of body and self totally disappeared during this time.

I felt like I was slowly losing control of my life.

I wasn't coping. I felt inadequate a failure.

I couldn't speak about my fears to others

²⁹ Hysterectomy and oophorectomy are medical terms for the surgical removal of the womb and ovaries.

communicate to my family.

I could not tell people everything that I was feeling.

I also wanted parts of my different selves to be hidden.

*I wanted the tongue to be an image people would look at
and say, 'this woman is not to be brushed off.'*

I drew the tongue as an act of defiance.

*It is an insulting gesture to a society that does not allow woman
to express anger
or let off steam.*

The tongue is also about my sexuality.

Before the hysterectomy

my sense of being a sexual woman

was how I achieved my art.

It felt wonderful to be a woman.

I produced wonderful art.

After the operation my creativity died.

The sex part of myself was cut off.

I had no libido. I wanted to know where it had gone.

My artwork was connected to my reproductive organs.

I felt let down. I felt abused.

Without the trauma of menopause

I wouldn't have gone to university.

I would have carried on as I was

and not moved into object making.

*Exploring things on a scientific and educated
and knowledgeable basis.*

I would have remained more with the romantic image.

Caroline's first attempt at speaking out is depicted in (Fig C1). Here we can see her headless form acting as midwife as she assists in the birth of spaghetti like threads, strands of new language. Describing this piece she said:



Fig. C1

The opaque person is looking out of this sheath emerging from a seed pod. It is looking at a more masculine hand than female hand, willing things out of a ball shape, which you might call a hollow gourd or perhaps even a womb. The person is myself. I painted myself wearing black. I always wear white. It is my trademark. My identity. This is how I felt looking back at myself looking back at my trauma. Not accepting it. The seed represented the ovary. I am encapsuled. For me it is about loneliness somehow.

Following on from this painting, Caroline's imagination descends into the spaces where her womb once lived (**Fig. C2**). Unable to find a language in the soft folds of her violated flesh, she searches for a responsive medium to act as the visual metaphor for her experiences. She begins to knit. Blank pages (**Figs. C3-4**). The first page she knitted in fine crochet cotton; a signifier for the lack of a female nurturing self. The word 'knit' signifies – to bind, connect, heal, intertwine, join, link mend, unite. (The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus, p.556). The black transparent page, resembling fine delicate lace is knitted with ordinary sewing cotton. 'It is about hiding behind veils,' Caroline

said, 'it is about not saying what was going on.' For the plain back page she used binding tape. It was cut and torn into two pieces. Then frayed, re-stitched and knitted. All the pages remained blank. She had defined herself as wordless text, seemingly without a voice, and yet, the pages speak volumes. They are heavy with unanswered questions about her freedom, acceptance and validation. They are a mysterious, but radical act of resistance to patriarchal identifications of blankness and passivity. From the knitted pages, Caroline then moved into a series of paper mache body bowls (Figs. C5a- 5b).

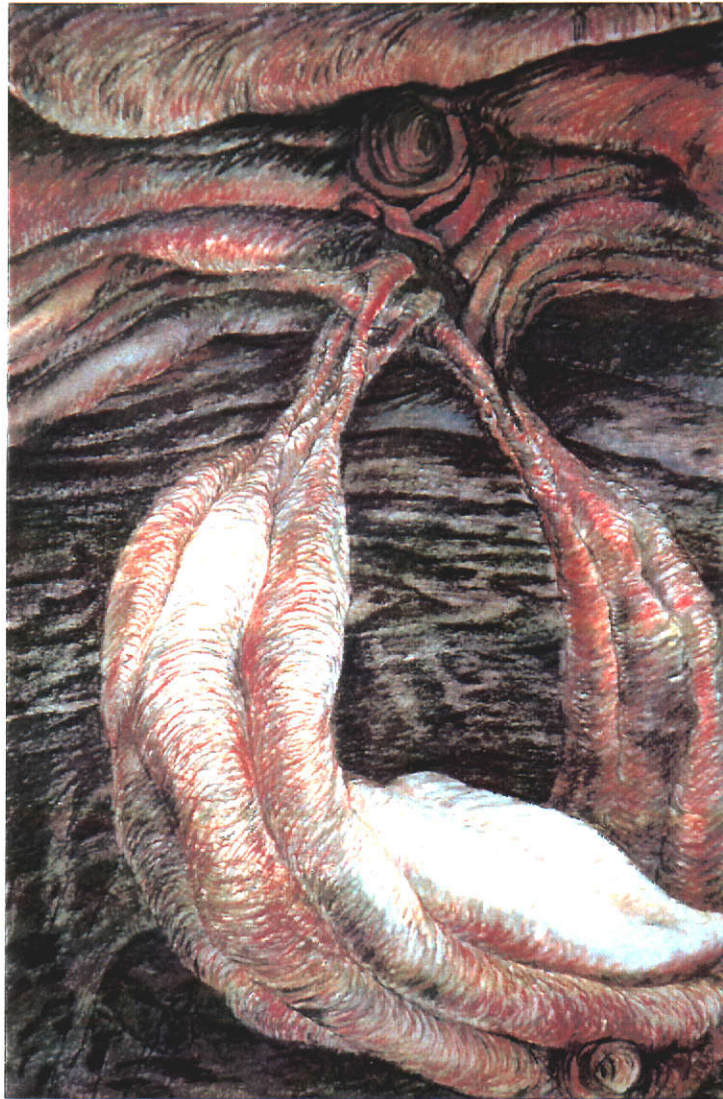


Fig. C2



Fig. C3

I had been given powerful and rich material to work with. My dilemma was in finding ways to give it expression, to capture their essence. After collecting 6 hours of recorded conversation I transcribed the tapes into 40 pages of text. I then fashioned the text into a story told in the first person by Caroline. It was divided into two sections. The first part was a descriptive account of her personal history and the events leading up to, and

immediately after, the operation. The second part contained her reflections on menopause through her artwork. It was early days in my research journey and I had not yet learned to work against the binaries. I was still thinking in dualities. The creative content was separate from her story about her actual experiences. At this point, I was still grappling with the issues of how to 'do' phenomenology from a feminist perspective. I was unsure of how to work with genres that would enable a weaving together of ontological/phenomenological/epistemological ways of seeing the world. More particularly, I had not embodied phenomenological writing or my own research practice. Although I was working within/against a phenomenological hermeneutic framework, and although I was an artist and could slip easily into the space of contemplation and undivided attention with all of my senses when making objects or painting, I had yet to learn the art required for thoughtful attention to language. I was also mindful of the accusations directed towards research of a subjective nature, that it was narcissistic, self-occupied and self-absorbed. Conventional academic scholars have been, and perhaps still are, critical of research approaches using messy texts, such as I was writing, with their intimate revelations. They are considered contradictory, unclear and ambiguous, and thus not true accounts of lived experience; a breach of sociological writing styles. (Richardson, 1994) So I left the emotion out, the fleshiness of bodies out. The subjective experience was there, but it was obscured by the objective construction of words.

For the next twelve months I made no further attempts to re-shape the text. I was busy collecting the other women's stories. I was also busy enrolling in creative short story workshops and poetry writing courses. I joined a writing group and wrote wonderful short stories. I attended workshops on phenomenology and conferences and seminars on how to 'do' research. From time to time I rang Caroline to let her know of my progress. The relationship between us was warm and friendly but still distant, respectful. One day Caroline telephoned me to say she was moving to the country. She and her partner were going their own separate ways. We talked for awhile about this next stage in her life. She told me of her plans to re-construct a new life on her own; finding a new home, making new friends and work that would enable her to be financially independent. I admired her courage, spirit and determination. Then I thanked her for participating in

the study. I was slightly anxious as I knew I still had a great deal of work to do to prepare her story. I was left wondering how I was going to make sense of her experience without further contact. I asked if I could write to her. She agreed.

In the ensuing months I made several more unsuccessful attempts to create new and imaginative stories from the transcripts. Although Caroline had shared her thoughts about the ways in which her sense of sexuality had altered since menopause, and it was a good story, this was not the major area of focus. But, then again, maybe it was about sexuality, and maybe I was just not 'seeing' the 'real' connection for making the artwork about menopause. I read the texts again and again. I went back to a question I had asked in our second recorded conversation. I reflected on it.

RW I'd like you to go back and remember the relationship you were having with your doctors prior to the hysterectomy. Could you tell me why you didn't question more their authority?

C *I think this was directed by a childhood or family situation where people of high status or learning or situation within the community were people, not friends. They were the enemy when we were children. They were not people you go to unless you had to. I think in the depressed state or shocked state that I was in, I reverted back to the childhood values. I have to fight against them . . . we were children of working class people in England, which has got different strata of society; working class people didn't do anything for themselves in those days. That was pre-union times. You just accepted what happened to you. You didn't strive to achieve anything, it was enough to go out to work, earn the money and feed and clothe your family. It was a cultural thing.*

RW Yes. You mentioned several times how you just accepted it. [not voicing feelings and opinions] You mentioned that over and over. It was as though you didn't have any rights.

C *Right. No that is how we were brought up. We didn't have rights and that was reinforced by childhood education.*

The next evening I rang long distance and said 'could you tell me again the story of why and how you made the forms to find your voice?' I thought that if I heard the story one

more time I might just hear something different. I recorded the conversation. It was brief. I transcribed it quickly, and then I sat with it on my lap. I closed my eyes and meditated. I entered the text. I entered her body. I became the knitter. I imagined what the experience of knitting these forms might have been like. On opening my eyes I wrote quickly. In the space of a few minutes I had written my first piece of poetic text. Until this moment I had not been able to get to the story underlying all of this work about menopause. Encouraged with this effort I then re-worked several paragraphs of one of the transcripts, adding lines from my own imagination. They were my embodied sense of what I thought she might have said if she could have put words into language. I was reading between the lines. Looking for the unsaid, the absence, the sounds that would give it life.

Speech points beyond itself to the silence, to the word within the word, the language buried in language, the primordial language, from before the Flood or the Tower of Babel; lost yet ready to hand, perfect for all time; present in all our words, unspoken. To hear again the primordial language is to restore to words their full significance. (Brown, in van Manen, 1990, p.131)

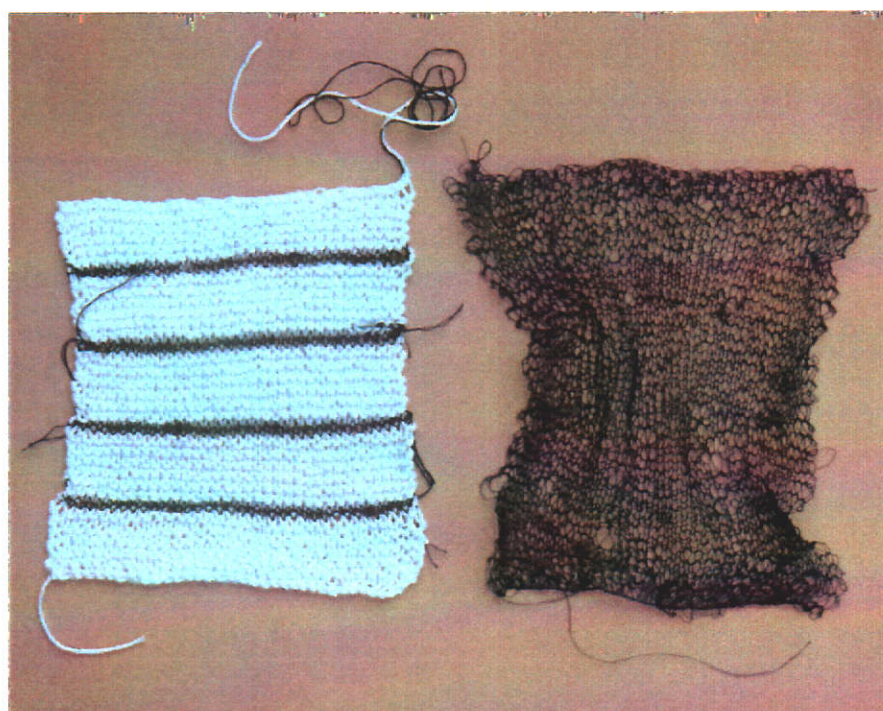


Fig. C4

Telephone Interview. 8.12.1997

- RW Tell me again about the knitted pieces. Did they take long to make?
- C *They didn't take a huge amount of time. I was pressed for time at Uni. They seemed trivial. They seemed to be a side issue.*
- RW What time of the year was it?
- C *Summer time.*
- RW Did you give them a title?
- C *I called them 'Interlacing the elemental fabric'. I made the black cotton one at home. The white and black stripy one at college. I used my own knitting needles.*
- RW What sort of knitting was it?
- C All plain knitting.
It was simply knit, knit, knit, knit, knit, knit, knit change colour, Knit, knit, knit, knit change colour. I hurried through. I took longer with the black cotton one - that took me ages. I doubted whether I should have dropped the stitches, and then I thought the dropped stitches and holes were part of the ideas of the veil because I was talking about things not being perfect. I think I probably hurried a little.
- RW In the holes and spaces are the things you wanted to express and didn't?
- C *Yes, Yes. Exactly.*
- C *Knitting is a contemplative occupation - bugger the university*
- RW Are you knitting all the things that you couldn't say?
- C *I am looking through my diary and I've actually written down 'the thread is a grid which organises opposing elements from disharmony and discord,' which is perhaps not how I put it over to you.*
- RW [Laughter]. That is not what I heard.
- C *I didn't want to work with grid. That was the exercise. It started from something very elemental. In the diary I've written down some literal associations with text, 'texture, web, knit'. I also wrote 'what is above, what is below?'*
- RW In the work there is a sense that they contain all the expression that you had held in your body about your experience of the hysterectomy. The pages came before you found the other symbols. Is that right?

C Yes. They came right at the beginning of the semester when I wasn't sure where I was going.

RW Were you trying to articulate a voice about yourself?

C Yes I was

RW You didn't have the words to say who you were and what you wanted? Like, 'but what about me?' so you began with the blank page which then led on to the bowls. You started with these threads lying in your lap and you began to knit your life. You began to knit the sounds that would become your voice?

C Yes, and then I couldn't go on with the knitting, so I went on with the bowls and then I made the large sculptural knotted body forms (Fig. C6).



Fig. C5a

RW The thread from the beginning just became the big fat thread that appears in the bowls?

C Yes it did. The thread was there all the time and I am still using thread in the work that I am doing in my workshop now.

RW It would seem that the thread is the link that we need to connect the words together.



Fig. C5b

- C I have just looked in my diary and I have found a photograph of a nude woman where the photographer had put a net somewhere that was casting shadows over the body. And I was saying which is body?, which is net?, which is shadow?. So I was talking about the woman not really knowing herself.*
- RW** Your question was ‘Who is woman? Is that you?’ As you knitted this piece what was the question you were pondering over?
- C Later on in the diary I put the black cotton on my hand and photocopied it. My response to seeing this image was kind of religious... mmm ... not quite the right word. It had a significance that was more than a hand and piece of cotton. A sort of.....[pause]*
- RW** Like a mystery?

*C Yes, because I was talking about not being a mask, but you could see through it. Not really shutting your self away. A bit like women being kept behind screens in a harem. It was kind of mystical . . . no, that's not the right word. It felt as though I was making for myself a special garment for a
.....[long pause]*

RW A ritual piece?

C YES. That is right. That's the word.

RW Was the white knotted shirt piece - the knitted knotted self? Was that your sense of identity in that piece?

C Oh most definitely.

RW I am imagining with my body-mind that you have shed your skin, and then torn and shredded it and then knotted and knitted it back together again as a way of restoring your sense of female bodily self.

*INTERLACING THE ELEMENTAL FABRIC*³⁰

the knitter
 a modern day hysteric
 sits alone
 mute
 cut off from her roots
 her silence
 practiced to an art from early childhood
 is captured in the threads
 that lay upon her lap
each thread, each strand
is a memory from the body
 tears of recognition
 prompt the knitter into action
 her strong firm hands
 grasp the needles
 and with a skill passed down
 through generations
ties a knot
casts the stitches
 checks the tension
 and begins
 the long and painful struggle
 to write
 in coded secrets
 the stories of her life
knit, knit, knit, knit change colour
plain knitting
no pattern
 no sounds
 except the clicking of the needles
knit, knit, knit, knit change colour
 a different coloured ink
 a space appears
 she dreams a question
what is above?
what is below?
knit, knit, knit, knit change colour
 eyes on knitting
 she waits for the words to appear

³⁰ Caroline's words are in bold text. The other words are my imagination.

PRACTISING CURSIVE WRITING

*Why are the memories of my childhood coming back?
 Why was i so shy and not able to make friends?
 Why didn't other children like me?*

Why does the image of my mother appear so clearly in my mind?

Why was i having to do all the work for mum?

We rarely spoke

The relationship between us was not easy

i longed for her comfort

to feel her arms around me

and to place my head against the soft curve of her breasts

She was always busy

i was kept busy taking care of my brothers and sisters

When I was a little girl i was very skinny

i believe i wasn't fed properly

i don't know why i wasn't

Obviously i was an awkward child

i was a sensitive child

i was a very lonely child

i had always wanted to be a clever student

i was terrifically good at English and art

but

people thought i was stupid

They often talked over my head

i didn't pass my exams when i went to secondary school

i was the top of the bad ones

*i can see myself lying on old floral lino on my bedroom floor*³¹
Afternoon light is soft and warm in the corner by the chimney-breast

Pencil in hand

with great care i begin

writing my name

Over and over

Caroline James, Caroline James, Caroline James

i was practicing cursive writing

Practicing Writing My Self

The hand gets into a rhythm with repeat followed by faster repeat

A pattern emerges that i am in love with

Scrolls and loose untidy marks fly across the paper

A name is powerful

i become enveloped in daydreams

³¹ The original version from my imagination read: I can see myself sitting at our old kitchen table. The underlined sentences were taken from Caroline's letter 23 July 1997.

*That year i got my first really good primary school report
 It was the middle of an English summer
 July 1949
 i was seven
 i left it on the kitchen table
 Several days later i went looking for it
 Dismay
 Mother had used my school report for her shopping list
 Writing all over the back of it
 Dirty, blotched, ink running
 Anger,
 The words no longer readable
 On the bottom the teacher wrote
 Caroline is an extremely nice child, hardworking and earnest
 I like her pleasant quiet manner and I shall be sorry to lose her
 Signed Miss Little*

*i loved her, she was gentle
 but
 she did not help me to become an academic
 At seven
 i was being assessed as to whether i was a
 nice quiet little girl
 NOT that i was going to BE anything
 or have a future
 Education for girls was of no interest:*

Why?

*These memories at fifty five
 rankle and hurt: why?*

What is it i am going to learn by asking all these questions?

With some trepidation I posted these poetic renderings to Caroline. I was worried that she would feel I had manipulated her words; given the experience a meaning that it didn't have. I was acutely aware of the delicate balance in telling another's story when entering their life. Was I imposing my reality onto hers? Was I overstepping boundaries? In the letter, I outlined briefly the nature of phenomenological 'seeing', and I asked if she could write back with her direct and immediate response on receiving the texts. To give her an idea of what I was trying to capture in my writing I also sent her

photographs and several poems I had written about another participant. At this point, a subtle change entered the relationship. Her letter writing voice became poetic. She understood what I was trying to do. Writing from the body, she entered fully into my project, to the processes of phenomenological inquiry which was to look at 'not only what words mean, but also what things mean; the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take shape' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xv).

No detail that enters the mind, nor the smallest instance of memory, ever really leaves it, and the things we had thought forgotten will arise suddenly to consciousness years later on, or, undetected, shape the course of our lives.
(Griffin, 1992, p.38).

Caroline wrote back:

I think you've captured the talking style of myself as compared to the 'shell' artist who sounds articulate and smooth. My body feels a thrill at the essence you are conveying. It is at once personal and universal. I have written an immediate response to reading 'Interlacing the Elemental Fabric'. It's about what I was visualising, how I emotionally reacted. I wonder what you will think.

*I seem to need to say the following, it's probably not relevant but I hope you can bear with me. Where you've written **and with a skill passed down through generations, ties a knot and cast the stitches** - this is accurate in that the neighbours next door taught knitting to me. My mother never sewed or knitted. Clothes were often held together with safety pins, and once I learned how to - I'd put in the new elastic, sew buttons back on, and mend holes in the socks for my brothers and sisters.*

I don't want to influence your own creation. You've asked me where I did the writing on my school report. I will tell you about the room where I used to write and play, where I probably did the cursive writing practice.

It was an upstairs bedroom almost filled with a double bed – turn right at the top stair, turn sharp right again through the doorway that pushes inward to the left banging on the side of the iron bedstead. Floor boards dark brown at first, then some floral lino. A chest of drawers facing, take a step and squeeze past – left hand on bed end, right hand on window sill – stiffen the arms lift the legs and swing them back and forth – the pear tree fills the view out the window in summer, little hard fruit with shiny red blushes – afternoon light is soft and warm in the corner by the chimney-breast. Paper dolls and cutting-out fashion house catalogues clutter the floor. Here I learn women have a chest that juts out. I practice drawing side views of women in old books and wonder if my flat jumper will fill out. Probably I am lying on my tummy on the floor writing (there's no desk, dressing table or chair) watching to make the loops and joins correctly as instructed at school, but as the hand gets into a rhythm with repeat followed by fast repeat – a pattern emerges with a sideways slant that I'm in love with, and I fancy I'm grown up and can write like adults with my own distinctive style. Scrolls and loose untidy marks fly across the paper – a name is powerful and I become enveloped in daydreams.'

*Today I applied for a license to change my name back to my maiden name. That's the name I wrote and re-wrote. Coincidences in timing?
(23 December 1997)*

And now this is my instantaneous reaction as I read **Interlacing The Elemental Fabric.**³²

³² The poem is presented in the original font styles used by Caroline

Screwed up eyes and wetted rims
 Ache in the throat neck long
 Closed pursed lips with tongue fastened hard behind

belly tight breathe in
 open mouth soundlessly sorrowful for the little girl who is pictured coming forth
 a green, dark velvety vision slides across the lens of imagination – her image –
 me – she and me know the silent crying

Stop breathe stop time stop still don't disappear dry aching emotions

I breathe I breathe love for her I sob love for her
 I'm coming back to get her and never let her go smile the tears and integrate with
 caro
Caro-love Caro caro say it, the pseudonym, so intimate, weaves back and forth
 projected there to her and back to me,
 twined and knit by the eyes of the tongue
 held fast behind the lips

Eyes Lips meld becoming fingers that enmesh the heartache and let out the pain
 so gently gently keys press permissible words into capsules on paper

words wrap, words escape, words knot,
 tumble tumble cascade and roll down a grassy slope
 bounce up and do it again across and thread
 giggle and run in and out over and under

a bed
 a hammock - breezing upward, and up higher holding safely the girlwoman
 forever going with her Safe and as One

Childwomanword

deep breathe
 sniff
 warm and pleased recovery

here I am

My next task was to create a poetising account of the black cotton page. This time I thought I would try a different approach. It is called Image Streaming.³³ On Caroline's next visit to the city we organised to meet. I ask her to hold the photograph of the black knitted page in her hands, close her eyes and tell me what images come to the surface of her mind. The next day I fashion the following text from her words.

³³ I was introduced to this way of creating text from the web site <http://www.anakin.com>. Image Streaming is a method combining Einsteinian and Socratic ways of knowing to describe inner subtle perceptions. It is a rapid flow of description, sustained without let up. It is described as a kind of continuing onrushing brainstorm of finding fresh things to say about an object. (Wenger, 1998a; Wenger, 1998b)

GARMENT FOR A RITUAL

it is like hair
it is a canopy over me
i can move it about
and yet
it is still joined to the same place
there is a presence of a man out of sight
it floats
caressing in its movement
over the breasts and belly
it is like pubic hair
not a bikini
it is real pubic hair

the veil is following my contours
it is telling me I have got a good body
that I don't really need a veil

i go inside myself
a miniature person
i can feel the texture of my insides
cut and mutilated by surgery
i can see the colour

it is empty

where am I?
i am really not there?
i have a feeling of panic
of being trapped
in the dead empty womb space

i have to go out to get my senses back
to feel normal
i am the hair
i am the veil.

have I woken up from being in another plane of consciousness?

Then I asked Caroline to step backwards in time to the occasion when she put her hand draped with cotton onto the photocopying machine 'tell me what you can see?'

MORE THAN A HAND AND A PIECE OF COTTON

*there is a reflection
a face
on the glass of the photocopier
looking back at me
which is body?
which is net?
which is shadow?*

Woman not really knowing herself

*hands and fingers move
manipulate
body language with the hands*

*we
even put them in front of our face
hiding
the real women*

*thread linking body
linking words
dropping stitches
making holes
making sounds
knitting silent words
changing one thing
to make another
different selves*

re-making myself

examining myself

do I need a machine to do that?

- RW Are you going back through the male gaze to re-look at yourself? Is that the way you see yourself through the veiled image?
- C *Yes, that would be right. Yes, the machine was part of it, but I didn't understand at the time. But previously, I wrote that the experience of putting the veil over the hand was like a ritual. Am I distorting that ritual by putting it over the male machine?*
- RW Yes, perhaps you are able now to make this connection. It would seem that at the time you were just following your impulse to do something to express how you were feeling. And because you had already said (in an earlier conversation) that you felt invisible in terms of your being female, at this point in your life you were-examining who you were.

Over the past twelve months our letters to each other have filled with details about the rhythms and the rituals of our daily lives. It was here that the real talk began. We write of pain, of sadness, of frustration as well as the pleasure of our lives. We talk about ageing. The difficulties of finding employment for women over the age of fifty. Establishing new relationships. We share thoughts on the books we are reading, and we discuss the dilemma of care for our ageing parents. With her words she has supported and comforted me through a family trauma. A long relationship is ending. She provides inspiration. And through the exchanges of poetised texts we have come to a different place of understanding. In peeling away the many layers to reveal our unconscious desires and attitudes we have affirmed, invented and discovered new ways of breaking our silence. Through re-shaping words, together we have created a space for critical reflection on the story lines that have defined our existence, on the ways in which we have understood ourselves as women, and in doing so, we have altered our awareness and shifted discursive positions.

In her latest letter Caroline writes of her sense of relief. Her creative energy is returning. On one of her trips back to the city I give her old copies of art and craft journals:

The craft magazines have been a source of assurance that I'm on the right track with my first textile piece being made for an exhibition. In fact, I am feeling very happy with it – a feeling that had deserted me for so long – nice to have it back!

You'll not be surprised to know it's concerned with language. A long, long tongue pierced with several hundred spirals, that will mount itself into scrolls accentuating the points. It has a feeling of tongue and teeth combined – angry implications, and yet, is has a seductive play of light and shadow; an interplay of soft (cream, thick virgin woolen blanket stuff) and hard (rolled, glued cotton strips-painted spirals) repellent and fascinating. Well I hope that's how it will be received. In truth – a tongue crucified and silenced – bearing mute witness and accusation.

I still have to write the theory and finish the making of even MORE spirals (an interesting thing just happened – I made a typing error and wrote spit) i.e. to do with the mouth and anger - I believe writing really brings out the unexpected and coincidental nature of inner thoughts (22 June 1998).

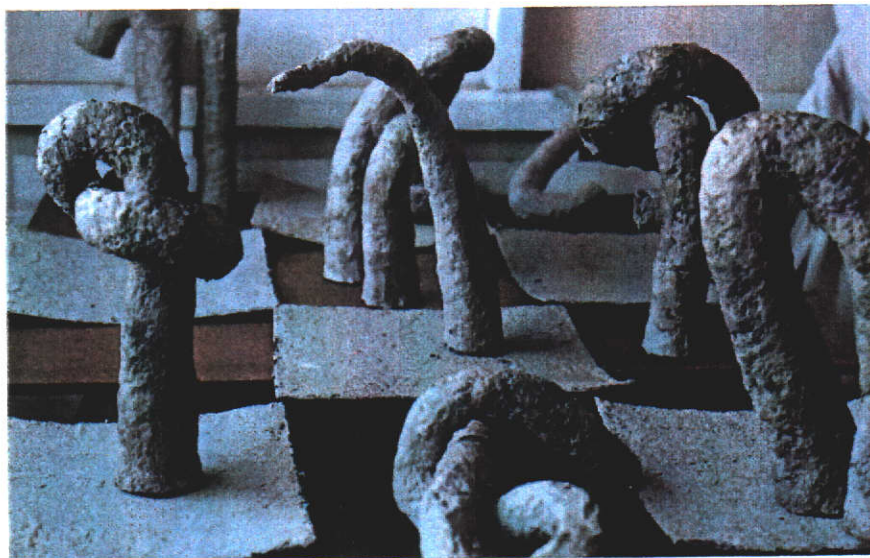


Fig. C6

POSTSCRIPT

July, 1998.

I write to Caroline and tell her I have been invited to submit a chapter for the book on 'Heartfelt Inquiry'. I want to use her story. I send her a copy of the words I have constructed and ask for permission to use her photographs.

Letter August, 1998.

It's stunning and body tingling!! There has been much within the words that I read; and we have been part of those. How time and work has evolved allows me to say that the disclosures which were once intimidating have moved into a position of feelings of pride for women. Where once there was aloneness there is now a feeling of community.

With the acceptance of permission to reproduce my photographs should the work be published I only have small pinpricks of fright about being identified from them. Just a few academics and art students have seen the tongue drawing and body bowls. There still remains for me a tense alertness about family's inquisitiveness and my personal privacy, but it's very unlikely that any of my close family would ever read such publishing of inspiration and beauty. (And sadly, nor would they gain richness from such)

So the answer is Yes to permission (Have a sigh of contentment)

I will read it again and again – an embodiment of lived and shared experience, and if you permit, when it is published there are some female friends I'd like to invite to read it also.

MARIE'S STORY

To seek to discover-rediscover a possible imaginary for women through the movement of two lips re-touching ... does not mean a regressive recourse to anatomy or to a concept of 'nature', nor a recall to genital order – women have more than one pair of two lips! Rather it means to open up the autological and tautological circle of systems of representation and their discourse that women may speak (of) their sex [parler leur sexe].
(Irigaray 1985, in Whitford, 1991, p.173)

It is late summer. Hot and dry, with that peculiar summer haze that hangs, shimmering, like a visible wave of energy over the landscape, where objects seem to be both still and moving at the same time. I am driving from the flat plains of the suburbs of Perth to the bush in the foothills. I am driving to visit to Marie. I used to live in this area when I was a practicing potter. A lifetime ago now, or so it seems. Returning to this landscape, washed in shades of smokey green and blues from the trees and the rich terracotta reds, oranges and browns of the gravelly soil, I sense waves of nostalgia surging through my body for the sounds and smells and freedom of the bush.

For the rhythms of nature. For a life that once gave me so much pleasure. It fed my spirit, my soul. I open the car door and I'm immediately met with the heady fragrance of eucalypt trees. And silence. Except for the sounds of crickets, tick, ticking loudly, in the background. My body connects with this environment and I feel myself sink into my centre.

Marie greets me at the door and invites me into her kitchen. We had never met before. As we walk down stairs, past rooms and through passages, I can't help noticing they are covered in paintings, large, extravagant, vibrant, richly textured images. They are mostly oil paintings. It is the house of an artist with its light filled wide-open spaces. It is also filled with isolated handcrafted objects. Each one carefully chosen and placed so as to give space, form and meaning to the mysterious quality of light filtering through the windows. I can feel the energy in this house quietly humming.

At the back of every word we write is no word. Only because no word exists is there space enough to write some word. So when we write about our feelings and perceptions we touch the place where there are no feelings, no perceptions, there is no you, no person doing any writing. In other words you disappear, you become one with your words, not separate, and when you put your pen down, the you who was writing is gone.
(Goldberg, 1990, p.40)

Marie had begun menopause naturally at the age of forty-nine. Six months prior to our first meeting she had had a hysterectomy and an oophorectomy. She explains that she had developed fibroids which had grown quickly.

I didn't really have difficult problems prior to the hysterectomy. I'm not conscious of any noticeable changes in my life. In fact, I just loved the experience of having a hot flush. I thought it was absolutely fantastic because it was quick and my whole skin surface was wet. But, it was just that these fibroids had grown quickly. It was a preventative measure. I had started hormone replacement therapy before the hysterectomy and I believe they contributed to the serious growth of the fibroid. I had started HRT to prevent the hot flushes at work. I was having twelve or more a day.

Six months after that, I checked with the gynaecologist. The fibroid had grown. He wasn't admitting that it was related to the HRT, but he gave me an ultimatum that perhaps for my health it would be best to have it removed. I deliberated about that because I felt if I had just the fibroid removed the uterus would stay and the ovaries would stay. He explained that there could be problems and the fibroid could re-grow and I didn't want that to be an ever-present problem. It was an awful decision. I really deliberated about it for months. Because there was no obvious disease, apart from the fibroid which is a tumour in the muscle and not necessarily damaging to my health. But I was frightened that I might be the one in 10,000 that did experience cell change and I didn't want that. I hadn't experienced any of the excessive bleeding or real fatigue that I know a lot of women have with fibroids, so I felt a bit fraudulent in going ahead and having the operation. I felt that I was cheating myself by having it . . . you know . . . by having.

I am kneeling on the ground adjusting the microphone in front of Marie while she is telling me this story. I am not concentrating, and then I hear her voice falter. Now I lift my head and look at her. I check her face. She is weeping. Silently. I sit back in the chair. Uncertain. Was my question of 'so taking away your womb made you feel a sense of loss?' intrusive? Have I caused these tears? No. These were tears of release. And then something unexpected hits me, a wave of grief surges through my own body. I

remember my own hysterectomy in my mid 30s, and the tears. So I just sit there drinking my coffee, lost for a moment in my own thoughts. Then, I ask 'can you tell me how you feel?'

I just couldn't do it right. I could have lived with it you see. I should have challenged them, but I suppose because my ovaries were not producing the oestrogen the uterus is rather useless without the combination of what the ovaries do. Besides the ovaries had atrophied. I wish I had seen my uterus. I wanted to keep it, but I didn't ask the question. I was silly. Why didn't I?

'Why,' I ask, 'did you want to keep your uterus?'

In a muffled voice she says

Because it was mine.

I nod my head, listening to her tears with my eyes. Remembering that I also had wished that I could have brought my womb home. In a jar. Like children do, when they have their appendix removed.

We do not know why we cry, how much we cry. Tears are not in a direct relation with the apparent cause, etc. Who cries, Who do I cry over? Who makes me cry? How does it cry, orgasm, overflow, how does it indicate a sexed source? What is the relation between these fluids and death? What is the relation to sexual difference which is a partially cultural difference? The Romans had lacrimatories. There is also a culture of the tear.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.43)

Marie begins to sketch in the outline of her tears.

I wasn't able to share this with my mother. She died not long before this happened. I just feel so sad at the moment. My father died some time ago. I feel like an adult orphan. All the unconditional love has gone out of my life. The man in my life, my partner, the love he has for me has lots of conditions attached to it. What I had from my father had none of that. And the same with my mother. All the unconditional love has gone out of my life. I wrote to my sister when she was travelling overseas and I told her in great detail what was happening in my life – the sadness, the loss. I didn't hear from her. When she came home, she said 'all you ever wrote to me about was your old menopause.' So I never wrote to her again. I would have loved it if one of my sisters

had written to me about their menopause. I like to be told about those sorts of things, and how people feel and what they think. It helps you understand your own body. There are so many questions we have about our own bodies. When other women tell you of their experiences they are trusting you with something.

I do have a friend though, whom I can share my thoughts about menopause with. I have known him since my youth. He hears my story. He is just a good friend, but there are friends of mine and my family who don't understand this type of relationship. Not that the doing, the being with him was anything more than just talking to the person, or wanting to spend some time with them. It is fascinating that there is such a restricted sense of what friendship should be, and what relationships should be, and what monogamy is, and what fidelity is. I started thinking about why am I everyone's comfort angel. My comfort was being able to have the ability to visit someone because it was fun on a day off work. This comfort angel thing I see as a role women fall into all the time. All the time.

I haven't spoken with many women about menopause. I have only talked about it with a couple of woman at work. The subject has come up occasionally. There would be a little bit of discussion about it but nobody sits down and relates the complex journey that they have had. Because, it all links in with families and friends and whatever else. I have friends whom I have contact with who haven't been there yet. And another friend who I think has, but she is soldiering on without any sort of assistance. She is involved in renovating a wonderful old house. She doesn't need to talk with anybody. She is simply getting on with living this other life. She has found it. She has made the change. She is LIVING through her new life. I haven't done that. Besides, nobody gives a damn about what a fifty-year old woman thinks do they?

Marie looks at me with raised eyebrows. I think about this for a moment. 'Women are making changes, I answer, 'women are being heard. But yes, I would have to agree with you that the opinions of the average middle-aged women are rarely sought after.' Marie nods her head in agreement, blows her nose and begins to speak again.

In my younger days an emotional display like this wasn't a regular occurrence. In my nursing training you were not allowed to become emotionally involved with the things that were happening around you, or to have emotions. You were told that it would affect the way you worked. We were a whole bundle of young women with masses of emotions with no outlet for them. I have probably continued on like that – feeling the loss of emotion – in the rest of my life.

Losing your womb and your ovaries affected you quite profoundly, in what ways have they influenced your notions of being female, being a women? How did they connect to your understanding of your embodied self?

I had accepted the fact that the ovaries were not producing any oestrogen and therefore with the combination of their function and the uterus's function I was no longer able to nurture a child. I had been looking at that and accepting it since I had decided not to have any more children. We couldn't afford to, or didn't want to struggle to provide the sort of life we wanted. I had known that, but I was surprised at my reactions because when I was thirty I would have thought that looking at myself now, how ridiculous you are. This is not you. But it is the emotional me that has actually been learning to come out over the last few years that I have suppressed for all of my life. I suppose that acknowledging that loss is allowing me to express emotion that I have never expressed before about myself. I suppose I should look at it as a fortunate thing. It has been the impetus for me to look at and accept the things about myself that I have found valuable.

I was a much stronger woman as a young mother. I felt strong in that I was capable in the way I thought about things and how I was bringing my children up. It was absolute. No one was going to change what I did. I was much stronger then, and I think it was because my children were in fact my creative tools. They were what I was working with. They were my creation and their selves were an every day image to relate to, and I could sense how strong and well they were growing. So that was constantly feeding me. My nurturing of them was really nurturing me, and then that stopped and you back out because the kids are living in another space, another world.

M The egg image in those was also related to a sense of landscape and destruction. Although when I probably think about it now..... I wasn't thinking about my own eggs then. But the focus on the egg could have been the fact that I was coming up to being menopausal and that was imminent. But the purpose of the egg was really about the fragility of the earth and the fact that the egg is a symbol of fertility. There is this beautiful glow coming from this. That is an optimistic aspect. This here shows a pathway. I didn't properly understand any of that. I probably still don't.

I think it is about a journey, isn't it?

RW You were painting these egg images believing that they were about the fragility of the environment?

M Yes, but they were really about me.

RW How long after you had done these were you able to look at them and say, ' Hmm I think they are about me losing my eggs ?'

M I don't know.

This one here has the rocks in it. It's about the egg thing too. I've used this shell. It has had its own life growing in it and now when we get to see it, its life has gone. It still has its usefulness but it doesn't have its own life any more.

RW It feels like a very female form.

(Interview 23.7.1996)

So some huge thing out of your life has been chopped away which was a self-monitoring, self-assessment process all the way. If you look intelligently at the way you are bringing your kids up, then that is what you are doing. So that is where my lack of nurturing comes from. I am nurture-less. I know why I painted that bloody great big shell (Fig. M1). It is all about me being an adult orphan and my children are no longer feeding me the information that supports my being okay. I shouldn't be blubbing about all of these things, but the fact is, it's been a very cathartic sort of thing.

Marie fetches a box of tissues. More tears are shed. We talk for another hour and then we walk upstairs to her studio space. The first images she shows me are of broken eggs. (Figs. M2a-2b). She tells me that when she first drew these she explained them to others as being about her connection to the environment.

When I first drew these shells I wasn't aware that my ovaries had atrophied. I hadn't properly realised it. Although I said to others they were about the environment, they were really about my realising my ageing, and they're about me losing the function of my eggs. I am not aware of my subconscious when I paint. I am just there doing it. It is only later when you have time to reflect on the image that you realise that there is another reading.



Fig. M1

'Comfort Angel II'

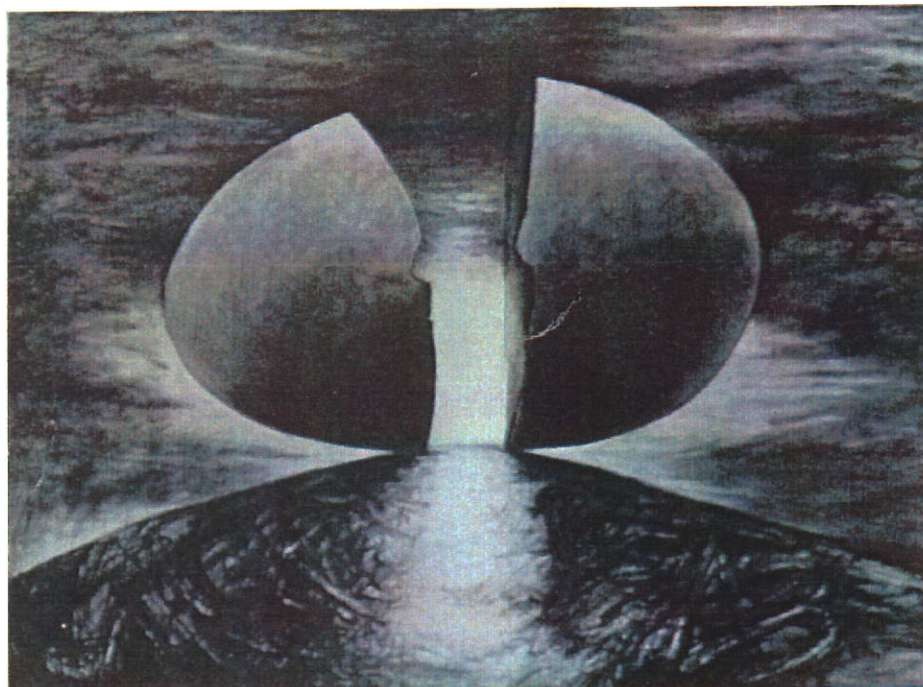


Fig. M2a

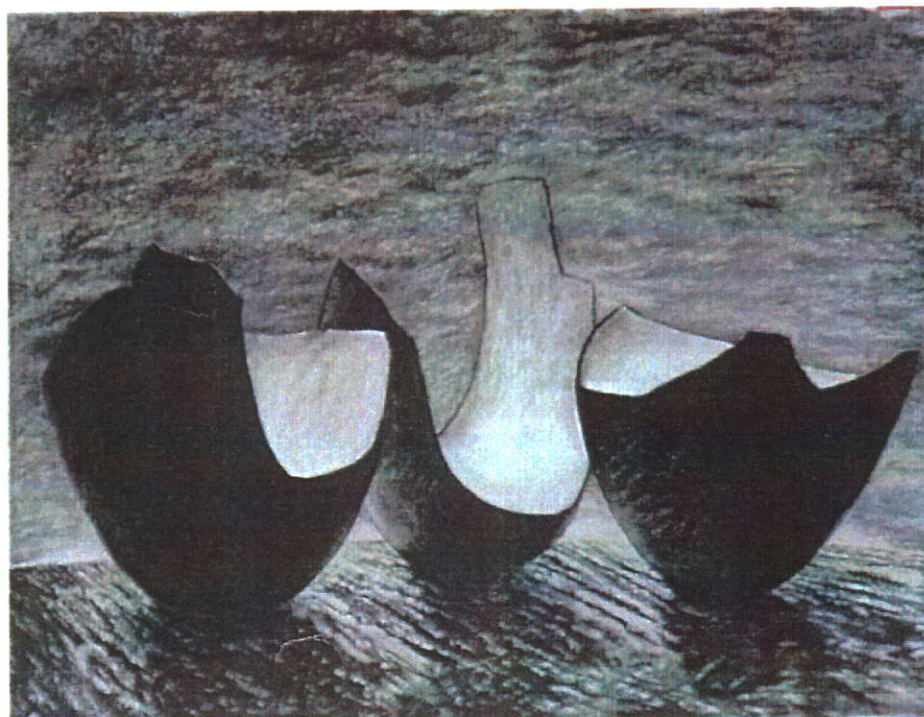


Fig. M2b

A large canvas standing on the floor suddenly arrests my attention (Fig. M3). It is as tall as myself and about 5 feet wide. I am drawn towards it. I am facing the mouth of an enormous cowry shell surrounded by rock-like forms.



Fig. M3

'Tell me about this painting,' I say. She moves to her desk, picks up a shell that fits into the palm of her hand and says 'Oh, it is just a shell I found on the beach.' Really? Should I say to her that I feel that it looks like an enormous pair of lips? Labia? A great set of lips available to be slipped into? They are lips that conceal a mysterious dark

space. A space, like some lost world that I want to step into. But I feel I don't know Marie well enough yet to say these words, so I photograph the work, and then it is time to leave. That night I have a dream. It is about entering the lips.

I awaken suddenly, and find myself lying on the belly of a very large dark skinned woman. She looks Polynesian, and is of indeterminate age. Neither young nor old. I sense she comes from a time many, many hundreds of years ago. My head rests

What the dream shows us in its theatre is the translation, in the open, of what we cannot see, of what is not visible but can be sensed in reality ...and this teaches me many things I did not know about my own secrets. As if my soul were painted on my face.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.28)

between enormous, warm breasts. Gentle hands press my body onto hers. Her skin, soft and velvety, fuses with mine. I melt into flesh. I am drawn down the valleys and clefts of her body, through her lips, into the dark recesses of her womb. It is an amazing feeling being in this dark and unfamiliar place. My eyes adjust to the darkness. The space about me fills with a soft incandescent glow, as though lit by hundreds of tiny candles. It is not so much a womb space that I find

myself in, but rather a huge cavern with rippling, shimmering walls. A stream of water dancing with golden lights runs through the middle. I am lying on a slightly curved surface, firm but yielding to my weight. I gaze about me in wonder. Still, open, listening. Alone. I sense other bodies.

Women's bodies. Incomplete shapes and indistinct outlines weave like gossamer wings in and out of the darkness. I can hear soft whispering passing over and around me like a gentle breeze. Every now and then I hear music. The sort that reverberates through the body when people chant in harmony. It reminds me of the Tibetan chimes my yoga teacher rings at the end of a meditation. I

I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.
(Foucault, 1984b, in Probyn, 1993, p.111)

am not afraid. I am deliciously mellow. As though I have just come back into my body after a deep and relaxing massage. The space around and above me expands. I look upwards. Surprised, I see the night sky. It is the moon which is casting a strange glow over me. My body and all my senses are fully alive, listening,

feeling, touching, tasting. Waiting. I place my hand between my legs, then back to my lips. I feel and taste my own desire. I continue to lie in this fleshy space. It is time to leave. I search for a way out, but find that the only way to exit the cave-like womb is to roll into the deeply flowing stream of golden light and surrender to the rhythm and pull of the water.

I think about the dream in a sort of pensive reflection. I wonder at the symbolic significance of it. At what it might mean at an unconscious level. And then I forget about it, until I ring Marie to make an appointment for my next visit. I ask the usual question about how did she feel when reading the transcript, about speaking so honestly about the many areas of her life that were connected to her experience of menopause. I ask her does she want me to change some of the text because what she has revealed to me about desire, about relationships, could be disturbing to others.

Marie answers:

No, it is defeating to do that, isn't it? However ridiculous it looks. However silly my comments might look, or however cringing I might feel about having said that, I did say them. They came from me. It was what I expressed and at the moment I didn't censure myself, so why should we do it in the transcript? Telling you my story dissipates the pain and the discomfort of the experience. After sharing the story, after expressing the intensity of the emotion, it can't shock you in the same way anymore.

If I use the story of the comfort angel, are you going to wish I hadn't?

Oh no, I think it is pivotal. The fellow that I was visiting was sensitive to my husband's concerns. It was better if I didn't see him, he said. My reaction was 'but what about me, who is going to comfort me?' So there I was again, isolated, and I had to consider everybody else's feelings, but I wanted to say 'what about me!' I don't want that to be changed. It is important. It is pivotal for the rest of the journey I am on. I think that it was at that point of realisation that I changed my sense of how I could and would respond to things. It was a very strong emotional experience to actually observe and understand it immediately. I really want to do a body of work about that, but I haven't

isolated the images yet. Hmmm communication would be an interesting way to go.

Something in the way she says these words triggers the memory of the dream. I tell it to her. It opens a space for more talk. We talk about her most recent work. She begins to fill in the sketch of her menopausal landscape with colour and texture. She cuts across the hills with their shadows of uncertainty and doubt, and she shades the map with deeper blues and greens where she walks through the valley and the forests to stand exposed upon the ridges. She tells me she has a sense of being on the edge of an abyss. Menopause is like a little death, she says. She is fragile and vulnerable. She says she is coming to terms with her fears of ageing. She questions the need, the imperative to document her life. She says I have always had that feeling that I am on the edge of something.

I often feel that I am an observer, but that might just be because I am not working in a job that I really love, and then when I do make paintings they are not connecting to anybody else, they are just mine. I suppose it is a sense of isolation, rather than being on the edge. I don't feel that I am going to fall and crumble. I am not at a point of dysfunction, but I certainly . . . but I don't really feel totally connected with anything.

... I spoke of the difficulty of speaking, of an image being stranded out on a limb with nowhere to go and nothing below, as the spectre of emotionality haunted and taunted me. Both the feeling of speaking into a void – that no one can hear you – and the feeling that what one is saying is merely emotional drivel – that you are saying nothing (new) – are obvious impediments to speaking as a woman.

(Probyn, 1993, p.106)

I ask her if she now has a sense of being an individual, separate from the family.

All through my marriage I have tried to be an individual. I have fought to do things I have wanted to do. I have always wanted to express that. But I think I probably want it to be more than what it actually is, and I am not seeing the more.

What is the more?

Not seeing the more? It is being mediocre.

What does that mean?

Being able to say and express the reactions I have. Feeling comfortable enough to react the way I react with whatever knowledge I have. Yeah, just being able to paint when I need to and to be able to express what it is that I think.

Do you think that has been denied to you in the past?

I think one of the things a mother feels is this huge sense of loss when these children are no longer there from that mothering. Your individuality, identity needs to be quite strong or else you are totally lost.

It is another six months before I see Marie. In between visits, several phone calls are made which I record. On this occasion I have gone to talk specifically about her artwork. I ask her how she is.

Well at least I am not crying anymore, but I am feeling stodgy, lacking in vitality. I am coasting. Seriously coasting, at the moment. In a way I am hiding, I suppose.

RW I am gaining the sense that as a result of experiencing menopause you are making adjustments and redefining your identity without having the security of unconditional love. In a way you are reestablishing a 'new' sense of Marie. new = markedly different from what was before, recently made or brought into being, unfamiliar, recent unknown.

M Yes, it feels like that.

RW Your expression 'adjusting to life as an adult orphan' is a powerful one. It conjures up words such as being adrift, dislocated, deprived, loneliness, being alone.

M Yes.

RW You married when you were relatively young. Went directly from your mother's home to a marriage, then immediately to having children. Your children have severed their bonds with you, as have your parents. Now as you enter your 50s you are finding that you have to experience your Self and discover who you are without the support of traditional structures and story lines.

In a way you are reinventing yourself as you question past attitudes, ways of living and beliefs.

M Do other women in your study find the answers? Do they find solutions to their questions and make dramatic changes that are a solution for them? How have the other participants made changes?

(Interview 23.7.1996)

Before we move upstairs to the studio, we sit for a few moments with the last transcript making small changes and alterations. I don't just transcribe the tapes. I add comments to the questions we have been exploring. Sometimes I include quotes from books that I am reading. Sometimes I read poetry. And sometimes I mention what the other participants have said. Today I read from Jean Shinoda Bolen's (1994), *Crossing to Avalon*.

During mid-life the desire to be real to ourselves which comes from our soul contributes to the crises we unconsciously create when we do not consciously acknowledge that we do not feel vital or authentic ... we may lose what we once assumed was a permanent occupation or relationship, and with this also the familiar shelter of our usual place in the world, and found ourselves 'in the forest.' The forest, the labyrinth, the otherworld, the underworld, the sea, and the depths of the sea are all poetic and symbolic descriptions of the how we perceive the unconscious as a real. It is where we go when we are lost and it is where we need to go in order to find ourselves ... here is it possible to find what we have been cut off from, to 're-member' a once vital aspect of ourselves (p.148-149).

'Do you feel real?' I ask.

Often not. I don't know what it means, but I feel it must be something more than what I am feeling.

Perhaps we have been so conditioned to feeling real through someone else, through the other, that when we feel it through our sense of ourselves it is so unfamiliar that we don't recognise what being real is. It is a story line we have yet to feel comfortable with.

Well, it is very isolating. It is an isolated feeling and I suppose that takes time to get used to.

We move to the studio. Marie has placed all the relevant images around the walls for me to photograph. We stand in front of a large egg shape suspended in dark blue watery space (**Fig. M4**). There is no movement. It appears caught by seaweed-like strands or threads which appear to be connecting to something beyond or outside the frame. The egg has a sense of being held captive in the earthly watery depths of the underworld.



Fig. M4

Tell me about this piece.

Well, it is a very fragmented single image. It also seems like it is on a journey. I have been doing a lot of work on these internal spaces. Fractured space. The egg thing and then the water. There is still separation between these things.

Marie moves the large blue single shell image into the light (**Fig. M1**).

The big single shell image came after the rocks and the shell image. I painted it at the beginning of last year [1996] and nobody liked it. The single image in isolation was just how I felt/feel. The shell, which is on the same canvas as the round rocks - the round rocks symbolising my eggs - the shell, symbolising my body being separated is obviously about menopause, but it could also be about isolation as well, and separateness. It is definitely about separation. You know, body and something. I don't know. But I think they are pretty easy single images to interpret.

I offer my thoughts, and suggest that the blue watery depths might symbolically be a return to the unconscious. That water symbolises the feminine, the universal womb; that it is symbolic of birth, of infusing new life. I tell Marie that to be immersed in the water signifies a return to a primordial state of purity. It represents not only death to an old life and a rebirth into the new, but also the ‘immersion of the soul into a manifest world’ (Cooper, 1995, p.188). Water, I continue, denotes the cosmos, and deep waters such as you have painted are said to enclose a sacred place and are closely connected with the Great Mother.

Mmm. Yes, it was probably was that sort of internalising. The wet look could be about that wet look of internal space. And there is also a passage in that big blue shell where there is no back to it. You go through the red lip type entry and then you just have the blue watery space behind. There is no back in the shell. It has a sense of transparency, but also a sense of not existing. It is as though it is a shadow image rather than a solid form because you see through it. You have got the wet watery space, or sky space through the other side of the shell. That was intentional. It could be read as a passageway. It could be symbolically representing that transitory passage phase, journey phase.

It looks like a very fragile shell.

Yes. I don't know what it means though, except that it is about me, and what I feel inside my body.

And then, Marie points to a large canvas resting on her easel (**Fig. M5**). It is a work in progress. ‘The shell shapes are changing,’ I say, ‘the shapes on the left of this painting actually look like veiled women.’



Fig. M5

These ones look rich and luscious. Are they about having sex.

Yes, they are a bit suggestive, a bit cheeky. It is also about that sixty-nine position. That shell is entering into that one. I am playing with that idea. It is slightly amusing, but a bit vulgar at the same time. There is a part of me that says well 'get stuck into it' and it represents the potential of myself to be filled.

I have a sense that these shapes on the left are moving towards these fornicating shells.

They are.

Yes I took them from the shell, but yes, it is about shrouding. It is about not exposing. Yes. They are a little bit like teepees, little triangular houses.

Are you painting yourself again?

Oh yes, absolutely.

The shells on the right are quite different from your earlier shell shapes, which were more about an invitation and about being heard. Those shells seem to be about genitalia and ears (Figs. M6-7).

They are seriously fucking shells?

RW I wonder what sexuality means for you.

M *Oh, it is a combination of things. I have certainly been focussed on or found focus in my uhmm ... my genital self has been of great interest to the man in my life. It is a vessel for his comfort and that used to annoy me intensely. I find it almost objectionable that there is a focus there on what might be able to be stimulated as a feeling without ever being touched softly anywhere else. My sexuality is an area where my partner thinks my comfort should be.*

(Interview 25.2.1997)

Marie laughs. 'Yes, they are making each other very moist.'

Why do you think you are continually drawing and expressing your genital area and that sense of fullness of the labia?

I am a bit embarrassed about it all actually. But my labia are going to disappear and change; the tissues will dry out. Painting the fullness is about the moistness and excited state of desire.



Fig. M6

'Last'

Are you re-living those sensations before you feel they are going to disappear?

Well, I am making a bloody big painting about it. So it is there. It is mine. My labia. It won't change much in the next decade, but with my cholesterol problem I might have a shorter time span ahead of me. I think I might be just painting about my needs.

I make no comment. I busy myself taking photographs, but I find myself wondering if I might have misread what the shells are actually trying to say. In talking about sex, my focus has only been on genital sex. Perhaps this is not what she is trying to portray at all. I can see that I need to shift my thinking beyond my existing limited attitudes towards sexuality. I recall an earlier conversation when I asked Marie what her thoughts were on spirituality. She had replied 'I have a very strong feeling about the earth. I get great delight in looking at trees. I need to see them. I need to see the earth. The universe challenges my imagination to the end.' I begin to ponder on whether Marie might also be expressing in her paintings a desire to experience more intimately the Eros in her everyday life; for those sensual, palpable, erotic feelings that come when we are more connected to the natural world. On one level, she is painting about her sense of deprivation and loss of desire for the physical sexual act, but on another level perhaps she is also searching for sensual experiences beyond the boundaries that she learned as a child and young woman. Is she, through the realm of unifying waters, and the shell - a symbol of the universal matrix - trying to return to the juiciness of her body? A juiciness that has always been there, will always be there. Is it a search for a dimension of herself from which she feels she has become separated?

... water for women poets becomes a key image in the representation of erotic gratification, evoking both bodily and emotional intimacies and standing for the dissolving of boundaries not only between self and lover but between lovers and nature. (Ostriker, 1986, p.110)

We then talk some more about the person she has had a long friendship with. 'All through your story,' I say, 'you have mentioned this person and it would seem that you connect at a level that is very satisfying to you. This is not to say that your permanent partner is also not special. However, part of the problem in society today is that we have been so conditioned to only having one type of relationship that it is frowned upon to go

out there and find these other nurturing relationships that we then have to justify that to our partners. It would seem that women spend most of their lives being and doing for others, and it doesn't matter who that other is. We have been socialised to nurture, to be empathetic. We find that we are so busy dancing for the other that often there is precious little time to choreograph the dance towards the Self.

Yes. I agree. The conversations we have with people are on different levels. Occasionally we find someone we enjoy having a conversation with. Whatever might come from the union, we want it to continue. It's seductive. It's like a fix. They mirror us in a way other people never can. They become part of your story and your experiences become a part of their story. Together you create another story.



Fig. M7 *'Comfort Angel I'*

Pointing to her hip, she says:

He sort of slots in here. In some way it is the male part of myself. But I lament the fact that I have to see myself in relationship to a man. Is it because they give us pleasure? Is that why? Is that the only reason? I certainly like talking to blokes. Is it because we want to find the male side of what we are?

I think about her questions for a moment. They are good ones. 'Well,' I reply, with some hesitation, 'it could be that, but I don't think so. I think our society has been led to believe in a story line that a male/female relationship is the only one to have. To define

the male as the other half of a relationship needs further exploration. We have learned to think within these oppositional structures. We have forgotten how to experience the full range of our being.' As we are talking I am remembering the words of Ruth El Saffar (1994) in *Rapture Engaged: The Suppression of the Feminine in Western Culture*.

True union arises not in merger, but only out of a state that acknowledges a prior condition of separation. The wholeness that most relationships seek fails to manifest because of the absence of a true feminine *other*. The idea that men and women in patriarchal culture represent separate entities is a fiction built on the belief that dualism has in fact escaped the monism underlying it. Dualistic thinking, and the 'masculine' and 'feminine' that arise from it, represents a flight from the unconscious and the mother that only appears to achieve a difference and separation. The woman who functions in culture is inevitably one separated from the mother, and therefore split off from her source of power. What power she does acquire comes from her role as relational to a man, on whom she depends for her names, her success, her money her well being (p.39).

I speak briefly and simply to Marie about how El Saffar is working with Irigaray's notion of re-connection with the mother. Who in turn is working with Freudian and Lacanian theories. I am careful not to sound as though I am a 'know it all' theorist. I don't want our conversation to become distancing and abstract, but I have to explain who Irigaray is, and how I believe some of her theories connect with her story. Marie knows about Freud, but not Lacan. Although the women in my study are well educated, the majority are not conversant with psychoanalytic concepts of the pre-oedipal phase of a child's development. Theories that claim both boys and girls enter culture rejecting the mother, which then in turn, impact on the ways a mother is coerced into her position by patriarchy.

I explain also that Irigaray privileges touch – the original sense. Touch, that begins from our primordial origins, our mothers and their wombs, and that touch becomes a vital source of knowledge. And I speak of how this sense of touch is integral to developing

close relationships, and that it does not demand a splitting from our selves, our femininity. I tell her of Irigaray's belief that we need to find ways of re-connecting with our maternal genealogy. With the mother. And then I tell her some theorists maintain that intimate friendships with either sex can occupy the space for the best maternal re-development (Code, 1991).

Time has moved on. We have one last painting to discuss and photograph. Once again Marie moves the large canvas into the light. It is a stunning image. 'Tell me the story behind this painting' (Fig. M8).

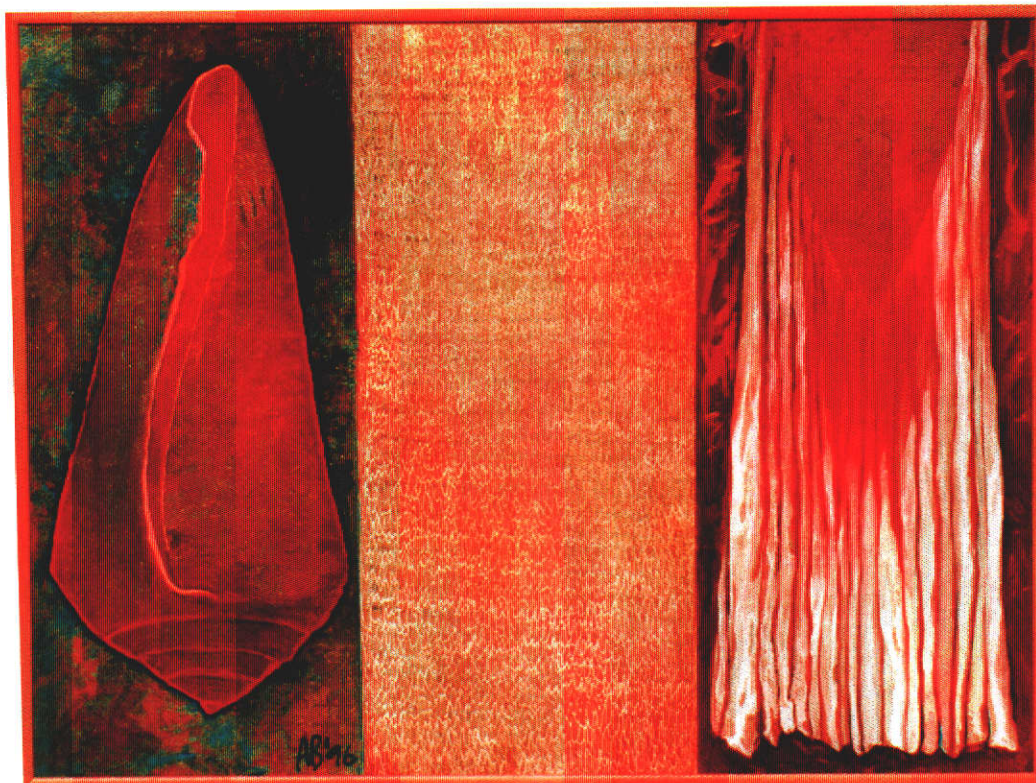


Fig. M8

'Last Flow'

The centre panel was inspired by the Mundaring Weir overflowing.³⁴ I called this painting Last Flow. It is really about the cessation of menstruation and the end of the

³⁴ In 1996 Mundaring Weir overflowed for the first time in 26 years. The city of Perth relies on the catchment of water from this dam for its daily water supplies. The weir overflowing was once a common sight, but drought in recent years has seen our water supply diminish to disastrous levels. When the dam

show. It is about the whole thing. In a way it is a ritual piece. And this end panel. I have no idea where that came from. I don't know what it is. Whether it is supposed to be a women's frock. Originally, I wanted it to be like giving you partly a sense of something that has been cut into the earth. But, somehow that doesn't quite work because I have cut it off at the bottom. I really don't know what it is, and I don't have words to describe it. The V part of it had to stay because that is the female symbol, and I don't know if this folded cloth thing is referring to women's clothing or not, but I did it. I wanted it to be about something draped so there would be a sense of concealing.

I knew it was potent because my partner said 'Oh I don't like what you have titled it,' which was about last blood. I don't know why he didn't like it. I didn't ask him. He won't often explain something like that.

This middle panel is trying to capture a sense of that continuous line of flow. The water was like this wonderful lace that was just captivating. If you actually take the time to look at the layering in there you can see there are lots of different layers of paint, and there is a sense of almost seeing the canvas in places. I did it quickly.

I think this painting is about the loss of my bleeding but I don't really know. I think it is.... .[laughter]. The weir prompted it. Looking at the water, I thought this hasn't over-flowed for over twenty years. So I thought to myself, I would like to make a painting about that, and of course I knew I didn't want to paint a concrete wall. I knew I wanted to paint about this sensation of flowing, and then being barren or dry. It was totally the opposite of what I was doing, and then in the painting of this image there was something else happening. But you will just have to find the right words for it.

It is a very poetic piece. The middle panel looks like strange writing. It is writing from your body. It gives me a sense of tears, falling in large continuous loops and scrolls, which then form waves of desire. The panel on the right looks like a sacrificial alter cloth. I read the folds of the cloth as folds of the self having a dialogue with each other.

overflowed it created enormous interest and thousands of people made the journey, as though on a pilgrimage, to watch the water cascading over the spillway.

It is a conversation between our multiple selves articulating both the epistemological and the ontological aspects of our being. In part, it is a conversation with your Self to that part of your feminine self that has been lost. I have a sense that although the cloth looks symbolically sacrificial, it also looks as though it has been violated in some way.

Yes, I think you are right. It does have that sense of sacrifice, of the religious about it.

Then, I tell Marie that only this week I have been reading Elspeth Probyn's (1993) *Sexing the Self* and her exploration of Foucault's use of the metaphor of the pleat or 'le pli'. I tell her that Foucault maintained that as humans we have only four pleats. They are used as modes of articulating 'the outside' and 'the inside'. For Foucault, the pleat is the metaphor for the 'operation of the art of living (subjectification)'.³⁵ In contrast to Foucault, Probyn quotes Michaux's lovely idea that

A child is born with twenty-two pleats (plis). It is a question then of unpleating them. Life is then complete. In this form the person dies. There are no more pleats to undo. It is rare that one dies without having a few more pleats to undo. But it has happened (p.129).

I suggest to Marie that not only is this painting a process of ritual, it could also be a process of technologising the self. In using the pleat as a form of self-representation, the image might similarly be depicting Foucault's ideas about conceptualising ways in which the body meets with lines of resistance. I add Probyn's thoughts, that we need to stretch our sense of self, not broken, not into a point of madness, but folded, so as to include the inside and the outside, so that overwhelming internal pain does not render our existence null and void.

The act of 'pleating' or 'folding' ('la pliure') is thus the doubling-up, the refolding, the bending-onto-itself of the line of the outside in order to constitute the inside/outside – the modes of the self.
(Probyn, 1993, p.129)

Oh, I like that idea.

³⁵ This quote comes from Deleuze's reading of Foucault (Deleuze 1990, p.151, in Probyn, 1993, p.128). In this particular conversation I chose not to introduce Deleuze and his ideas on Foucault's use of the metaphor *le pli*.

The next day I transcribe our last conversation. I listen with my body to Marie's additional words about sexuality. This time I have a sense she is alluding to a sexuality which is linked to both conversation and touch. The sexuality Marie is referring to is about timelessness, attentive listening, entering (invited), synthesis/offering and of communion. I ring her and tell her of my thoughts.

Yes, I think that is probably a better way of putting it. The shells were finding ease together. Nothing was forced. I certainly think intimacy is a big issue.

Over the next few weeks, from her fifty pages of transcript, I fashion the following poems. I struggle with words in order to give a poetic story to her life. When they were ready I ask if she will come to my house so I can read them to her. I am feeling very unsure about my immediate and direct embodied response to her experience. I am nervous. Had I used her words as a filter to understand my own reality? Was her experience separate from mine? Were they in fact one? I recall Drusilla Modjeska's (1990) words in *Poppy* when outlining the process of the narrating voice.

Is the drama of Poppy's life to be found in the way she told it? Or the way I tell it? Who speaks in whose name? Dimly I begin to understand why my struggle with her is also a struggle with myself, and my own attempt to speak (p.94).

GETTING USED TO BEING REAL³⁶

What is identity?

I am a wife

mother

nurse

painter

woman

I am a carer

I am constantly creating myself

in the last few years

explosions of emotions

suppressed for all my life

have broken open the boundaries

*It is the emotional me that is actually learning
to come out*

tears stream down my face

I wallow in my sadness

I did not do the crying

for things that happened in my early years

I trained as a nurse

*I was taught to leave your emotions behind
you were told it would affect the way you worked*

*I left my emotions in a shoebox in my room
but*

**losing my womb has been a trigger
cracking open the lid of the box**

now there are tears

for forty five years

this type of behaviour never happened before

I feel those soft bits of me

sometimes I let them come surging up

I would like to be soft and giving

but then again

I think no

I must stop being so self indulgent

I must stop

³⁶ The text in bold is my imagined response. The other words were spoken by Marie in various conversations.

BIG BLUE SHELL

disconnected woman
adult orphan
floating in the big blue shell
vulnerable fragile

on a journey

through wet watery depths of internal space
warm and moist
spiraling down
to the primal edge
the place of my origin

separating

severed from the harsh world of reality
the map of this world is felt from within
making sense of body
reading with invisible antennae as though blind

retreating

brooding
hiding
clinging to what is familiar
searching
for easy physical contact
comfort
nurture
nourishment

body speaking
lips open
no sounds

isolated

waiting
longing for touch
the shell has always needed lots of touching
always
it just needs to be touched
softly

.....*nobody liked the big blue shell*

VESSEL FOR HIS COMFORT

Look at the canvas

Look at the paint

Look at me

I am an invitation

The moist ripe flesh of my labia will soon disappear and change

The tissues will dry out

In time they will cease to embrace

the mystery of my inner mouth

lying softy between my legs

No longer do these lips witness my seasonal drips

my leaks

my gushing blood coursing between the furrows

Time is so short

I have not yet had my fill

We were always ending and beginning

this rhythmical body and I

I liked that feeling of dull pelvic ache

Seeing my body appearing on my underwear

It told me I was alive

We will never again dance between babies

between fucking between friends

I see in my body the vault of my vagina

and sense the space that was my uterus

Its life has ceased

I am taking leaping bounds towards the grave

My lips quiver as they search in vain

for my old familiar smells

I am empty now

my eggs long gone

but

my body and I

we still desire

Slip now into this space of longing

let me feel once more my body expand

fill with the rush of lust

You drowning
me touching you
reaching out
and then after
finding ease together
ah.....
now I remember
men don't want to linger
and the old familiar line
'Men will say that they love you to get sex
and women will give sex to be told they are loved'
takes me by the throat
and chokes the dying remnants of desire

Is this how life ends

Bleeding memories into folds of the Self?

Did I tell you I stroked a dog the other day?
It was lovely having something warm and soft to touch
He just kept on letting me do it
He loved it
and so did I
I suppose that is why I became a nurse
You are given permission to touch

THE COMFORT ANGEL

**We were friends
not lovers
Meeting for good talk
and rich connection
Nothing was forced
An occasional laugh
It fed me
*but this was not allowed***

*You have no right to do that
You are married
You have to consider other peoples' feelings*

*But what about me?
Why can't I be with someone whose company I enjoy?*

*Who is prepared to nurture my comfort?
Who is looking after mine?
Why can't I stamp my feet in a tantrum and cry*

WHY?

WHO IS GOING TO COMFORT ME?

*I am everybody's comfort angel
Why should I change my behaviour to suit somebody else's sense of comfort?
Why should I?*

**And so
I paint intimacy into my life
It is self-indulgent
but why shouldn't it be
The canvas is like skin
I can touch and caress
Giving nurture to the shimmering layers of unspoken despair
And in these dislocated sentences
I lose my body
and create the unthinkable thoughts that are me**

I also write in order to go further, further than what I say, and this is not impossible. I can go further than myself because there is further-than-myself in myself – as there is in all beings. This further-than-myself can only be a mixture of others and myself. Traces of others, the voices of my others – but who? We are full of voices, like all islands.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.43)

As I am reading the poems, I glance every now and again at Marie. She is listening intently. She has tears in her eyes. When I finish reading we sit in silence. Me, anxiously waiting for approval. She remembering. ‘Yes’, she says, with a smile, ‘you have captured my experience exactly how it is.’

I sit there in my computer chair and give a deep sigh, and then I remember that I have left two lines out.

‘Oh,’ I say, ‘I have forgotten something, a line, but I guess it doesn’t matter now.’

Which line was that?

We will never again dance between babies, between fucking, between friends.

You CAN'T leave that out. The dance, with the rhythm, with the flow of my life, was the most important part.

FANNY'S STORY

Fanny has lived for the past four years on a tropical island off the coast of Australia. Like Lileth, the interaction between Fanny and myself has been primarily conducted by letters and by audiocassettes recorded on the island. An island, which she describes as *the womb of the universe, a watery cradle, gentle, soft and moist*. Our first 'live' conversation took place in Perth, some months after our initial contact when she was visiting her family. She came to my studio.

The art community in Perth is relatively small. Although as artists we may not know each other personally, our work is familiar because of our links through various networks and organizations. I knew Fanny as a student when we entered art school back in the late 80s as mature age students. During art school our paths occasionally crossed. We met during lectures on art theory. Sometimes we would have coffee afterwards. Our age set us apart from the younger students. We enjoyed each other's company. After graduating we both went our own separate ways. I hadn't seen her for six years. Consequently I was delighted when she responded to my letter of invitation through the Craftwest register.³⁷ In her reply she wrote:

I began to experience the physical changes of menopause when I was forty-five and still menstruating, although the bleeds were becoming irregular. This was four years ago. Since then changes within my psyche and my inner world of emotions, intuition, and creativity have led me to question the following areas in my life. I've thought about my understanding of sexuality and femininity and what it really means to me. I am also examining my identity, and notions of spirituality, but I guess the most significant area of change are my thoughts about ageing, because what I feel and what I see don't match up when I look in the mirror. It is the most visible change. Mirror, mirror on the wall etc. I like my grey hair and sagging breasts and fat stomach, is what I tell myself. I guess I don't like it, but I don't know why, unless it has something to do with the way the media presents images of women at mid-life. The media basically ignores

³⁷ The Craftwest Register is a list of financial members affiliated with the CRAFTWEST Centre for Contemporary Craft.

women, or makes fun of them. I am aware of my mortality and how short our time is here on this earth and how we fill, stuff our lives full of busyness and avoid living! How we are egocentric. How we compete with one another. How we accumulate possessions compulsively, and then we die (April, 1995).

In my first letter to Fanny I asked 'what is it like to realise that menopause is now a part of your life?' She recorded her answers sitting in her small studio over looking the still, clear turquoise blue waters of the lagoon surrounding her home. Long white waves were crashing onto the outer coral reef. The almost incessant roaring sound made transcribing the tape a nightmare. It had to be done by hand. I had to listen to it over and over again. It took hours, days, before I could fill in all the missing words. Occasionally there would be a quiet space as the waters calmed and her words flowed effortlessly. Her voice sounded different. Not as strong as I remembered it. In fact, it was full of emotion as she began to speak.

Okay, here we go. This is the 15th April, 1996.³⁸

Well, I kind of felt

that up until I was making this tape

I was handling it okay.

I am really excited about my new body

from having lost weight and working out.

I'm really happy with my artwork at the moment.

But, when I started making this tape, I had great difficulty

in getting through it

without crying.

This is my third attempt.

At playing it back I am surprised

(shocked even)

at how fragile

and small I sound.

³⁸ The poetised text has been created from spoken words.

*Since I started speaking to you,
my lower back has become incredibly sore.
So there is unexpressed emotion in there
in relation to all of this.
I find that it is really strange that it's coming out now.
I haven't had a period for four months.
I never really gave it much thought until now.
I have realised how comforting
and how reassuring it is
to have a monthly cycle.
It is comforting to know
that one-day I will feel really shitty,
and then
the next day not too bad.
Then I bleed and the moods go away.
There is this predictable cycle in a woman's life.
It just goes round, and round,
month after month.
It is reassuring.
When it doesn't happen,
all the emotions, and all the feelings
that I hold inside my body leading up to a period
happen out of sync.,
and then I don't get a period.
Things happen out of order.
Then I wait.
Then one day I feel 'Oh, I am going to get my period',
and I don't.
It's really unsettling,
disconcerting.
I just don't know where I am.
I am up and down all the time.*

*Mostly though,
I am really happy.
Light.
Full of energy.
Sometimes I get very introspective
and morose about things.*

*So, in a sense
I don't know.*

*Maybe
women go through a grieving process
for the loss of that kind of fertility,
and with that youth,
and what all that means.*

*I never really considered myself unclean
or dirty or messy.*

It was just one of those things.

Getting my period.

*I quite liked that dragging heavy kind of feeling
when I had a good old bleed.*

It was like a cleansing.

I miss it.

*I would have liked
to discuss some of these things
with my doctor.*

But I didn't get the chance.

When I saw him last,

I was still bleeding,

although my periods were irregular.

I had gone for a complete overhaul.

*He took some blood.
I went back for a second visit.
The results had come through.
I was interested in what he was saying about menopause.
I was trying to remember all the stuff I had read.
I was trying to sound knowledgeable.
Then, he sort of said,
'Well you are definitely menopausal.'
It was like something clicked,
a clunk, a smack between the eyes.
It felt I had moved another rung up the ladder.
It was comfortable in one way.
But I was unsure
about where it was leading.
There was no question about it any more.
I was menopausal.
I felt a bit weird about that.*

*Then in the next breath
he was prescribing HRT,
and I didn't really know what to ask him.
It threw me into a fluster.
I had lots of questions I wanted to ask.
But, I just sat back.
I didn't say anything.
I was thinking to myself
'I will wait till I get back home
before I decide whether I am going to take this.
I won't discuss it with him now.'
I wasn't convinced it was really going to be right for me.*

I always feel pressed for time

*when I go to the doctors.
 They don't talk about personal issues,
 feelings or fears.
 I feel disempowered.
 They don't allow enough time in their schedule
 for anything but superficial dialogue
 and time to write a script.
 I started the HRT when I got home.
 I had PMT from hell for two weeks.
 I faxed the doctor
 I didn't hear from him for ten days.
 In the end I had to phone him.
 After that
 I put the medication in the fridge outside
 and forgot about it.

 I coped without all that drama.*

There was silence for awhile, and all I could hear was the crashing and roaring as the waves pounded the reef. And then she said,

I did a drawing recently; it has a heart that is separate from the heart. Part of the outside of it has been cut away so that you can see the inside of the heart body (Fig. F1). I painted it with shellac, and graphite, and glue, and stuff. So, it's sort of got a texture to it. There is a pink artery, and a grey artery coming out of it. They are clamped off with clothes pegs, and then there is another heart sitting on my right shoulder connected to my ears and my eyes with a stitched wound on it that is kind of healing. There is a sort of idea of connecting heart and mind together, and living that, and being true to myself, more so than I have ever done. Sometimes the rest of the family don't cope with that very well.

There is another little thing here that I will read out of my journal about children leaving home. I have also done some drawing about this.



Fig. F1 *'Woman with heart spaces'*

Fanny paused momentarily, and then said. 'Now I will read you a poem I wrote in my journal.'

*The Turning Point
I am a circus performer
I am on a tightrope called motherhood
Stretched between the tower platform of guilt
and the tower platform of my independence
Balancing in the centre facing neither tower
but straight ahead at menopause
and the dynamics of a 26 year old relationship.
I am tired and still up there*

*This space in my heart
 where the mothering and the children existed
 aches
 What happens now?
 Where is the crone with wisdom to guide me?
 Where is the fucking manual?*

*I have memories
 guilt and little icons of light
 to place in the temple
 gems that glow brighter than my eyes can stand.
 No physical passion,
 no art making
 can substitute what has been there
 and is now moving on,
 away, and out
 Not now, not yet
 Let go with caution
 in case one of us is injured by this
 Let it go,
 take it slowly build strength and wisdom gradually
 become friends, partners
 Deep, good, knowing friends
 A friendship built on intimate knowing
 of being inside another's body,
 That other,
 having a child growing in her womb,
 based on that body, skin, knowledge*

There was a noisy silence again, and then Fanny said, 'my husband read this, he cried but said nothing.'

Several months after the first series of letters and tapes were exchanged Fanny visited Perth. She came to my studio and brought with her a folio of work and her journals. I had seen photographs of the work before, but seeing the images in 'the flesh' evoked a powerful connection to her life. Was she a mirror for mine? Fanny lies the drawings out on the floor. I squat down and point to the image of the woman whose heart has moved out of the body.

Tell me some more about this painting? Is this the one you did after the girls left and where you are saying you have had enough of being a mother, enough of being a wife, enough of giving?

Yeah all of that. It's about the feeling of, 'I've had enough. I can't do anymore.' In some ways I felt disembodied. I had lost my focus. I had lost the sense of who I was both physically and psychically. I found some beautiful stones on the beach one day and I felt compelled to pick them up. Then I drew them. I discovered that in looking through some of the symbol books I have, the Romans used them to mark a happy event. So I drew them in. I put them here to symbolise the girls being already separate from me and moving away – the little white stones. The exposed ribcage is where I have had enough and I can't do anymore. No mothering, no giving, no compromising. The claws are the two daughters and a husband. The claws signify sort of being fleshed off. Or something. The heart on my right shoulder is bruised but stitched, and is now healing. So it is sort of pink. One artery is connected to my ear and one to my eye with the idea that I am getting in touch with myself again. Integrating the head and the heart. Having them act as one, because often I feel quite separate from parts of myself.

We sit in comfortable silence and look at this image each lost in our own thoughts. I am drawn to the face. To the eye looking out beyond the gaze of the viewer. It is an eye that says 'you don't know me', 'I don't know myself', 'who am I?' 'what is my truth?' I have seen those eyes before. I hear Fanny's voice saying:

Since I have been on this island I have met women who, although they are all younger than I am, are an inspiration. They are helping me find out about myself given that I have had twenty odd years of motherhood. I should probably add that there are males in my life who are helping as well. Young ones in particular. There are not many wise males out there, but there are a few who are wise beyond their years. They seem to know how to cope with where I am at, at the moment - going through this thing called menopause, and trying to find my identity.

I nod my head. 'Yes, I think there are a lot of sensitive men who are not caught up in all this male patriarchal stuff. We tend to unfairly lump them all together because it is convenient. In exploring your identity with these new friends of yours, how has that made you feel in terms of your sense of sexuality? Has that altered as a consequence of your relationships? Are you aware, or do you feel your sexuality in a way that perhaps you didn't before?'

Yes, the sunny and warm environment up here is conducive to outdoor activities. Going through menopause has changed my relationship with my body. It might sound ridiculous but I actually feel my body as a sexual being. I feel like I have got a fair amount of sex appeal and because I have reached the age I have, I can do a lot of things that younger women can't do. I don't feel like I have to compete. I can just be flirty or sexy if I want to, but I also have the benefit of forty-eight years of living. I am a bit wiser in some ways than a lot of the younger ones up here. It is nice to have that sort of freedom. To be who you are as a sexual being without having too many constraints put upon you. I had a fairly strict religious upbringing. It was pretty difficult, narrow and repressive. I've never really rejoiced in the fact that I was born a girl instead of a boy. I now feel that my body is mine, and that I own it.

Women ... demand a society in which there is no longer any necessity for sexuality to be repressed. Surely they argue, sexuality constrains some force that disrupts prevailing conditions, exploitation and oppression – why otherwise should sexuality be a 'forbidden joy', a 'prohibited pleasure'? This seems, they claim, to be the only explanation for the need for any 'one' to see sexuality twisted and trammled, diminished and perverted.
(Haug, 1987, p.186)

Do you think this pleasure that you are embracing and enjoying in your body is perhaps as a consequence of the your sense of alienation due to the way our generation was brought up? Bodies were rarely talked about.

Yeah, when I got married I was pretty naive, and there was that kind of initial youthful infatuation. When you get married it is forever, and I had no idea what forever was. I have never been very good at thinking of the future. I have always been a kind of immediate person. I have never had a very realistic view of the future, and I guess I have just followed along behind my husband, in terms of career, and oh, I did a bit of

questioning when the kids were born, and were little, and after I had read a bit of feminist literature. But I stopped reading it because it was unsettling me... [Laughter]. I kept thinking if I keep reading this it is going to end in something hard and difficult, so I just avoided it, and now its like I mean one of the things that people have said to me before is 'what stops you from doing what you really want to do?' and I don't know if I was looking for something to hide behind or not, or that I was mainly basically a coward, but it frightens me. It is the money. I don't know what I would do if I decided to move out of the relationship, or how I would survive. It is not that the relationship is dreadful. There is no abuse at all, and it is not like I don't want to be there any more. It is just that I want something else. A bit more.

It is hard to give up that identity. It is a void, you know. Like going out, being a mother and being needed. It is a scary thing. And, at the same time trying to break out of that wife thing. The expectation. In one sense, it is something you are forced to let go of because your kids move away and you can't really hold on to them, and at the same time, you want to move away as well from that 'other'. You know, the husband that says 'Oh good, now that the kids have left home I can have you all to myself.' Older women aren't valued. Particularly once we get into our late 50s and early 60s, it becomes even more of a no-woman's land. It would be really nice to think that our daughters won't have to have menopause be so disturbing. We can pave the way for them. They will have got stuff they can hang on to, or lean on, that will validate whatever they are going through.

'Yes, what you have said is similar to what many women have expressed. They feel the same sense of having compromised their identity, and in doing so they feel at times that they have lived an unfulfilled life. Or they feel frustrated when they have to acknowledge their un-met expectations. It is difficult for women who don't have a good reliable income from a job to become more independent, but many do. Like Catherine Baker (1996), in *Ringling in the Change*, I say, pointing to her book lying on my desk, 'they find a way.'

*Yes I know. But, one big hurdle for me is to actually admit that. It is fairly difficult to hear yourself actually saying words like that, and when other people can see it in me much more clearly than I can by asking direct questions, it is really confronting. I think 'Well, I can't go and get a unit with a nice little studio out the back.' So I'll ask decide what it is that I want, and ask for that within the situation that I am in, and push the boundaries out, but I don't know if that is just another compromise. I haven't decided whether I need to leave, or need to stay. I am still trying to define what it is that I need in a more lucid way, other than 'I need some space.'*³⁹

Well, I respond, perhaps you just have to move ahead one step at a time. Take it slowly until you feel more comfortable with this new you. When you begin to feel better about yourself and more free, then maybe it won't matter where you are. It might just be part of this whole process you are going through, and it wouldn't matter who you were with, you still might be feeling unsettled.

Yes, you're right. It is that kind of completeness within yourself where you don't need others to need you or love you.

Silence again. I sit on the floor with my hands hugging my knees to my chest. It is a slow process to this feeling of containment I am thinking, for myself, as well as Fanny. Her voice arouses me from my reflections.

I have just had a thought. When you have children you know that there is a future that is fairly predictable and now it is unpredictable. You don't know where the road is going. Sometimes I think life is like a merry-go-round, and if you could get off and figure out one bit, then jump back on, and then jump off and figure out the next bit, and then get

³⁹ Letter from Fanny 19 October 1998.

I am reading through my story. There seems to be a discordant dichotomy in my story (life) which has to do with being a mother and being an individual. There is no way on this earth that I would swap the rich experience of being a mother were I to have my time over again. My girls have initiated many deep insights into my self/life and continue to be great teachers. And yet, as you say many women express a sense of having compromised their identity and in doing so have lived an unfulfilled life during their motherhood years. My experience as a mother was fulfilled; leaving other parts of me suppressed until now. I felt unbalanced as a result. I wonder if it is at all possible for women to experience motherhood and individuality simultaneously, or whether we are destined to experience one after the other, in linear fashion. What would need to change in society for the former to happen? For men and women.

back on a different horse, or something, it would be easier. But you can't do that, and I think that is one of the things that is really challenging about being human. You have to deal with it as it comes. You can't carry on two or three lives simultaneously, or have lots of different choices, or possibilities. You know, you have got one life. Since I have been going through menopause I am trying to be more awake, more aware. It is important to be like that, so that if opportunities come along, or there is some kind of little crack in the brickwork that looks like it could be an opportunity, not for escaping, but for whatever it is that comes next, you can take that rather than being asleep when it happens.

'Yes,' I say, 'it's being able to recognise the breaks, the openings. That is where we will see the possibilities for change, for other formulations of who we think we are. Can you communicate to your partner about what you are experiencing at the moment?'

I try to. I find it laborious though, trying to. He says he understands, but I don't get that he does, or he is busy, and there is not the time. There is quite a lot that goes on unsaid. Sometimes we will get together on the weekend and we will talk about things. But I find that often when I do talk to him about it, he lifts it up to kind of male level. Logical kind of practical, physical level, and he finds it difficult to understand what I am getting at, at a deeper level. Sometimes he feels threatened and very insecure. He is not quite sure what is happening.

Okay, I think that is enough for now. Let's have a cup of tea and I'll show you around the garden.

We take our tea into the late afternoon. There are deep shadows being cast in the garden. It is springtime. We walk up the mossy limestone steps, treading carefully over the purple flowered campanula bursting exuberantly out of the crevices between the stones, through the sea-green coloured catenary archway draped in soft pink rugosa roses to the water fountain. I made the water fountain. It was my final piece of work in my lifetime as a potter. We sit on the limestone wall and inhale the fragrance of the daffodils nestling at our feet. The soil is dark and damp and rich. Between the lavender

and the roses a sea of anemones and ranunculus proudly display their early summer faces. Behind us nasturtiums escape the confines of the garden and pour themselves over the fence.

I have created this landscape as a tribute to Monet. I have put my heart and soul into it for the last five years. It is a living impressionist painting. I feel intimately connected to the landscape. It flows through me, I feel 'it', energy, moving in waves through my body and back to the earth again. I had been to Monet's garden in France some years previously and fell in love with the textures, shapes and movement that formed part of his canvas. I too wanted to paint my garden in living colour the way Monet had done. We drink our tea and talk of the books we have been reading recently, and are not surprised to find our tastes are the same. Jean

As she gave an account of a love affair that was offered to her as an answer, questions rose from it and transformed it, so that it became a departure point for other stories, counter-stories. Maybe the critics are right after all, and the act of telling can evoke confession in a woman; but where they, the critics mean to imply that all she does is kneel in the dark and confess her sins, a list of failings she already knows, what she does in writing, in telling, is to search, sifting through the many versions and possibilities to find the shape and truth of her life, the story she doesn't yet know, the image and narrative she struggles to bring, like her self, into being.

(Modjeska, 1995, p.32)

Shinoda Bolen's (1994) *Crossing to Avalon*, Drusilla Modjeska's (1990; 1995) *Poppy* and *The Orchard*, Kate Llewellyn's (1987) *The Waterlily*, May Sarton's (1994) *Journal of a Solitude* and Stephanie Dowrick's (Dowrick, 1997a; 1997b) *Forgiveness and Other*

What [women] do need is to stand centred about their own axis, an axis which passes microcosmically from their feet to the top of their head, macrocosmically from the centre of the earth to the centre of the sky. This axis is present in the iconographic traces left by traditions in which women are visible. It is on this axis that women find the condition of their territory, of the autonomy of their body and their flesh, and the possibility of an expanding jouissance.

(Irigaray, 1989, in Whitford, 1991, p.164)

Acts of Love and *Tasting Salt*. She tells me I should read James Hillman's (1996) *The Soul's Code* and Carolyn Myss's (1996) *Anatomy of the Spirit*. I later purchase these books and then share them with some of the other women in the study. We discuss the power of women's writing to inspire us to act on our dreams. And we talk of how their individual styles of weaving stories within stories about lives of women at different ages have raised important questions for us about the relationship between writing and experience, about art, and why and how we make it. We explore Drusilla Modjeska's (1995) question 'is there a line

between fiction and history, memory and imagination, literature and interpretation, stories and life?' What does she actually mean? Do we always set up binary oppositions? 'Is that what life is,' I say to Fanny, 'a stretching back and forth between these polarities of being? Or do you think it is possible as Modjeska suggests that there could be 'a sort of porousness between one thing and another?' (p.290).

And then we talk about our mothers. Like Modjeska's Poppy, we have spent the better part of our lives trying to re-articulate and reclaim the mother-daughter relationship. In speaking of our silenced mothers, it opens another space. We discuss our need for separation, while at the same time a desire for union, a desire for a return to the bonding of the pre-oedipal stage. We talk of the need to name our own mother's experience so that we (mother/daughter) can both have a history, a herstory; a connection to a maternal genealogy. How can we connect and intertwine the threads of our own mothers' lives with those of our own?

Fanny has brought her journal with her into the garden. 'Read me some of your writing,' I say, 'tell me something about your island, the vast wet womb, that you described as the catalyst, the medium in which you are being carried towards the something you can't define.'

Yesterday

*Huge turquoise seas thundering onto the reef.
 High tides fingering between coral rock
 and lifting all the sand away.
 The beach is baring its bones today
 stripped and laid open
 by forces generated in eternity.
 Ironing piles high on the floor.
 Dust thickens and cobwebs appear.
 Ice thickens in freezers.
 Forgotten bits of food
 sit at the back of the fridge moulding.*

*Yesterday's washing
 stuck flat in the bowl
 waiting to be hung
 and I struggle
 to keep my bones
 from being laid bare.
 My being
 from splitting open*

*What is this enormous urge,
 drive, need to create,
 draw, paint, write, live,
 that is gathering momentum within me.
 Just that? Or is it something ancient
 coming towards me at the speed of light?
 I need to stand in a place where time stands still,
 face the moon,
 body to the wind.*

*I anticipate.
 Waiting.
 Longing.
 Will it be granted me?*

Fanny lifts her head. She sighs. There are tears in her eyes. They are in mine as well.



Fig. F2 *'Woman dissolving'*

She hands me a photograph. It is an image of two shadows in the wind (**Fig. F2**). 'It's for you to keep,' she says, 'I have fallen in love with the wind. You can't draw the wind. It is invisible, but you can see the effects of it. The shadow and the wind are like being and not being. Sometimes when I am walking in the wind I get a feeling that comes close to dissolving.... or, something. Can I read you another piece? It is about desire, but I am not sure what for.'

*On my bike I ride with the wind
 looking at a sky so high
 pure and clear
 filled with bright white clouds,
 sharply defined against blue
 so pure and infinite.
 I see nine frigate birds soaring above me
 heading north on the wind.
 I see them with my heart
 I feel them through misting eyes.*

*Why is it
 that my truth
 causes suffering in others?
 In me?*

*As I think that,
 the birds falter in turbulent air.
 My heart races,
 breath pulled in sharply,
 They flap and skew in the air
 before regaining effortless flight
 on wings outstretched,
 strong and steady.*

But woman has sex organs just about everywhere. She experiences pleasure almost everywhere. Even without speaking of the hysterization of her entire body, one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined – in an imaginary centred a bit too much on one and the same.
 (Irigaray, 1985, p 28)

*I think that when you speak the truth it comes out of what fits right within you. It is generated not as an external thing, but its is something that is living in you, that you then project out externally, rather than being an empty vessel and thinking 'who am I? What is my truth?'
 Interview 7.9.1996*

I listen to these words of longing. I feel them fall like an invisible cloak over my own desiring body. My thoughts are momentarily diverted by remembering the writing of poet and scholar John O'Donohue (1998), as he traces the cycles of life and nature.

The mystery never leaves you alone. Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world waits. A world lives within you. No-one else can bring you news of this inner world. Through our voices, we bring out sound from the mountain beneath the soul. These sounds are words (p.13).

I bring my body back to the present moment. 'Is this what menopause feels like for you?'

Yeah. Although it is mixed up with everything else that is happening in my life at the moment

Has this experience of menopause felt like a labyrinth, a maze, to the centre and then to the outer?

I don't feel like I had a sense of being out before I went in. I left home and virtually met my husband straight away. Then we had the kids. I never lived on my own or supported myself for any length of time. It is not like I am on a straight road and I know where I am going. But yeah, it has been in inquiry inwards I guess, and having to face . . . I mean once you start asking inwardly probing questions, you then start to think about how do the answers that I get from the inside relate to how I am on the outside. I think I am still finding the outside. Yeah, who am I going to be? What sort of being am I? Can I read just a little more?

I nod my head.

*The wind stopped yesterday
an absence –
melancholy stillness
descended from the heavens
like a thick, choking veil.
Air thick with an absence so tangible
as to be hard to move through.
A veil that dulls the senses,
disorients direction and disturbs the heart.*

*A giant pause
between
breathing in
and breathing out.*

*A time for thinking, stillness and tears.
For gathering strength.*

*Tears from the sky
 falling straight down,
 directly, from above:
 driving down into the soil
 hard, steady rain.
 A soul cries,
 the earth rains.
 Body and earth express as one.
 Orange light washes in
 from the rising sun,
 warming the grey rain,
 touching my heart with warmth –
 and reality breaks into my consciousness.
 No space or time
 for grieving in waking time.*

Another day happens.

‘Why are you crying?’ I ask. ‘What moves you?’

It is like electricity. I can feel the presence of it for quite awhile, and then it goes. I don't know what 'it' is though. And I don't know what colour 'it' is. It's a kind of purple colour, an ache, you know, a longing or something. And that is why I can't describe the longing it is exciting and scary, all at the same time.

‘Let's go back inside,’ I say, ‘and you can show me some more drawings.’

I drew the shell first.

Then the fish.

It was such a beautiful fish.

A glorious thing.

I was thinking about it in the open sea.

It was just a drawing exercise.

Shells look beautiful on the inside

and beautiful on the outside.

They live in deep water,

and no one knows much about them.

*They have chambers for sinking
 and rising in the ocean.*

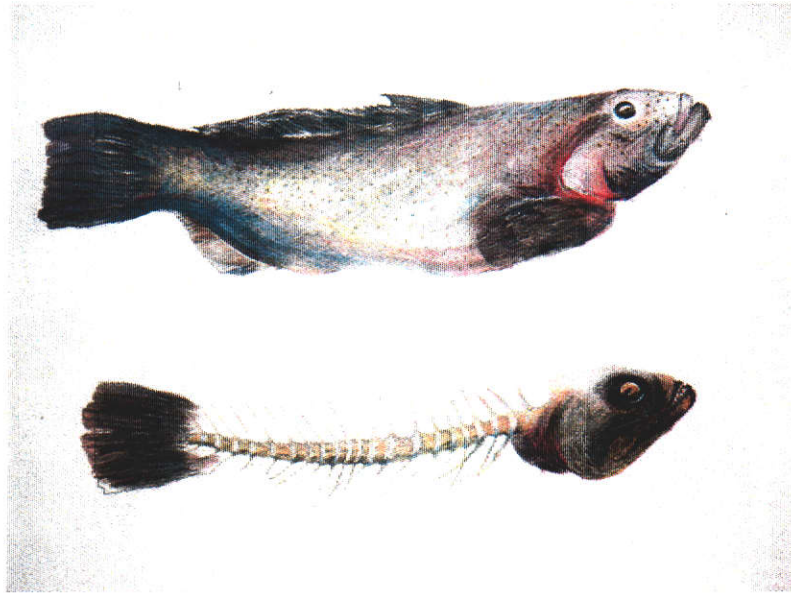


Fig. F4

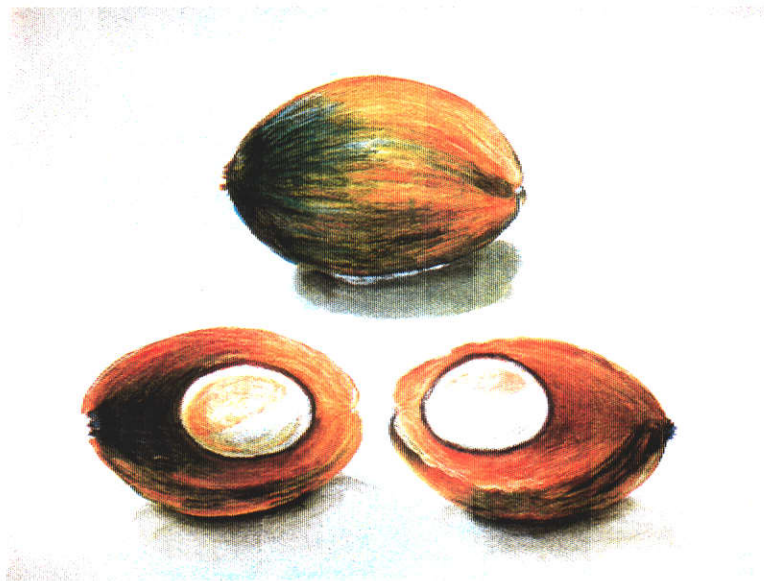
'Fish'

Fig F5

'Coconuts'

*The coconut
is a pretty boring object really.
But, I like its fullness and form.
When they are green
they are just solid masses of substance.*

*They look like they have a great capacity
 and they have.
 They are the seeds
 of coconut palms.
 They contain milk and white flesh.
 When the wind lashes the palms
 they bend and sway as palms do in their being.
 They dance, accept.
 The wind pushes them towards their limits,
 and still they bend.*

Like great mothers do.

In exploring the drawing of the shell and the notion of 'being laid bare' with Fanny, I was reminded of Bachelard's (1969) explorations into various kinds of space. In writing of spaces of immensity and intimacy that attract and concentrate the poetic imagination, he said:

... an empty shell, like an empty nest, invites day-dreams of refuge ... the inhabitant of a shell can amaze us ... A creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell,' is preparing a 'way out.' This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being. The most dynamic escapes take place in cases of repressed being, and not in the flabby laziness of the lazy creature whose only desire is to go and be lazy elsewhere (p.107-111).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In a letter from Fanny, 19 October 1998, she wrote:

After reading Bachelard's quote I was reminded of the many times that I have watched hermit crabs exchanging shells. They gather in huddles on the sand around a large empty shell. There are all shapes and sizes, they jostle around for ages, and then the biggest will quickly scramble into the empty shell, the next biggest into the newly vacated shell and so on. Temporal explosions of being. Before they encounter change they figure out what's next and know for certain that the next shell will fit. I can relate to that, and can feel the urgency to make a quick transition (like the hermit crabs do) lest I be exposed to danger too long in my vulnerable state.

We talk some more. I show her the images I have been collecting from the other women. We talk of their experiences. We weave their ideas and thoughts in and out of our own. I take photographs, and then Fanny leaves. The next time I see her it is late summer time. I have moved house. I have experienced another disruption to my life. Loss and dislocation. I have left my beautiful garden and moved to a cottage at the beach to finish the writing of this dissertation. My landscape has changed. I swim twice a day, and walk on the beach at sunset, aware of the fluid and constantly shifting nature of tides, sand and water. I notice the movement of marine life and how the sea exposes the underlying foundations of our earthly landscape. Yesterday, I watched the pattern of two waves repeatedly rolling in towards each other from different directions. Their white foamed lips meeting, merging, swirling and then rushing up over the sand creating a circle. Separate. Like a giant white lace doyley. A friend has lent me Margaret Somerville's (1995) *The Body/Landscape Journals: A Politics and Practice of Space*. I walk in the cooling sand at dusk feeling its silken caress between my toes, and I wonder at the significance at being here in this fluid feminine space of the sea as I begin to write the stories of the women in this study. I read that for Irigaray the sea represents the space of the semiotic, of a female life force:

The marine element is both the amniotic fluid, the deepest marine element ... is also, it seems to me, something that represents female *jouissance* quite well, including in a movement of the sea, of going and returning, of continuous flux which seems to me to be quite close to my *jouissance* as a woman (Somerville, 1995, quoting Irigaray in Grosz, 1989, p.168).

And, like Somerville I wonder if I can write of female *jouissance* in the rhythm of the waves? 'Is there a way of writing the body/landscape that goes beyond the dualisms inherent in our language?' (p.131). Can I find a way to write beyond the law of the father, the language of the symbolic?

Fanny and I sit outside in the late afternoon sun under the shade of an ancient Cape Lilac tree. Its branches stretch like a giant umbrella from one side of the garden to the other. It is hot and humid. The smell of the sea hangs heavily in the air. I pour a glass

RW The words that come to mind for me when I reflect on your stories of menopause are connection, and being laid bare. Menopause caused you to confront issues about yourself and forced you in a way to expose yourself. ... Perhaps for the first time you are speaking your truth, and in that, you are finding your voice. I have this sense also that you are without a map, and more importantly you are prepared to travel without one. You are trusting that the universe will provide for you.

F Yeah. It is pretty scary but yeah, that is how I feel.
Interview 20.1.97

of wine, turn the tape recorder on and ask Fanny to describe how she felt after reading the transcript of our last conversation.

One of the things I really enjoyed was the layering of your creativity to what I had done.

I did this work from some kind of feeling in here [pointing to her heart] that I didn't really understand, but I had to do it. Then to have you look at it and bring to it your creativity, and do it in the way that you did was really

I really enjoyed that. It seemed to make . . . I don't know.

It was like singing or something like that. It was lovely. I

read it over and over, and then I gave it to my mother to read. I enjoyed the experience of my imagination and your imagination blending together to create something that was a part of you and a part of me, but also something else as well. I liked reading your thoughts about my experience.

Then I open her file which is filled almost to overflowing with letters, transcripts and images. I turn to the page where there is a photograph of a cross embedded in her pelvic area (**Fig. F6**). We talk about the comment made by Joseph Campbell (1991), author of *Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God*, who said that many ancient myths contain sword motifs. The one who delivered the blow, he said, can only heal the wound. In symbolic form, it is only when the lance touches the wound again that it can be healed.

'Tell me the story about this image again,' I say. Fanny sits silently for a moment and leans forward.

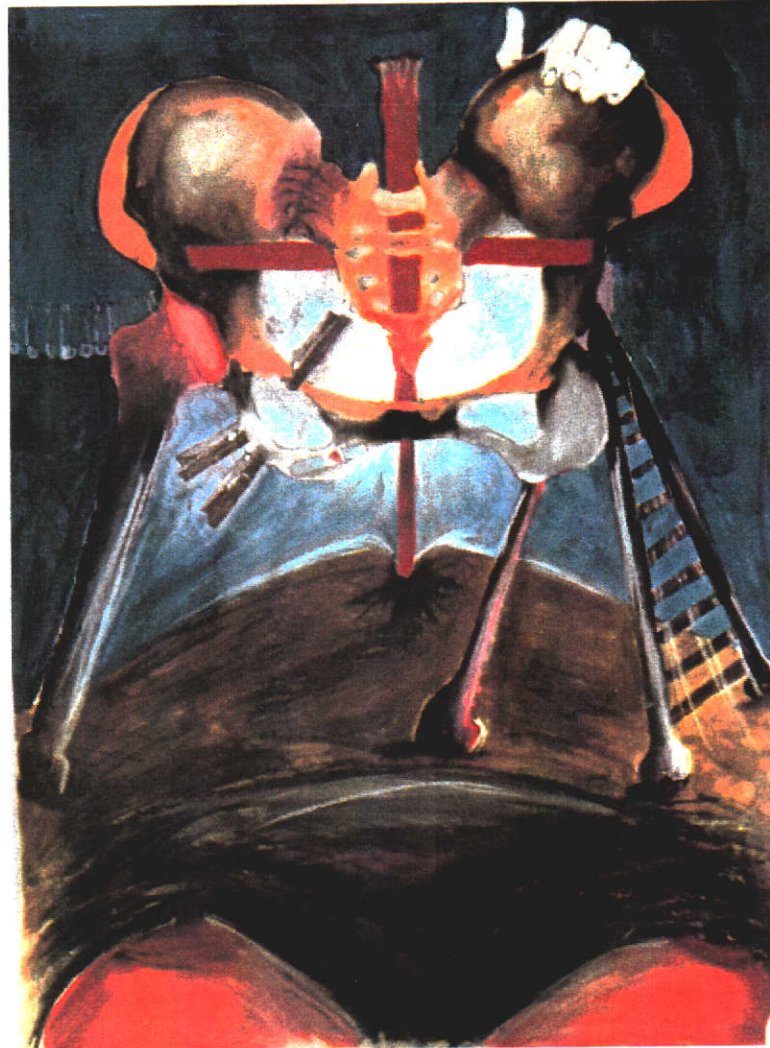


Fig. F6 'Woman with cross'

I feel really angry sometimes at the restrictions that were put on me sexually - my sexuality - by my dad, by religion, and by all those kinds of connotations. The anger stems from my indignation and a sense of loss for the child who struggled with her dilemma for so long.

Maybe this sword has touched me again since I have been on this island with the opportunities that have been presented to me.

When I was young I was really repressed because I didn't have a lot of sexual experience before I got married. I have had opportunities recently, and I have felt that those 'things' are put in front of me so that I can complete a part of myself that has been incomplete for a long time. On one level I can deal with that because it is something I have to go through. It is something I have to complete on a spiritual level, and I can totally disregard the moral stuff about it.

But there is *wounding* ...the wound is a strange thing: either I die or a kind of work takes place, mysterious, that will reassemble the edges of the wound. A marvellous thing also: that will nonetheless leave a trace, even if it hurts us. It is here that I sense things taking place. The wound is also an alteration... I like the scar, the story.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.16)

Does it represent desire?

You asked the question - Does it represent desire? I thought the drawing was about damage when I did it - that was what was present for me then. On reflection, I think there is now a desire there, which exists on two levels, one at the physical level and the other, at a spiritual level although maybe it all originates at a spiritual level anyway. I think there are things we are called to complete about ourselves at a spiritual level, which don't always concur with cultural givens.

Letter from Fanny - November 1998

No, not this drawing, I was trying to do this as landscape. It is more about the damaged part of me and the sense of restriction I felt. The band-aids and the pegs are the metaphors for the injury, for the ache.

Was that the ache for the loss of your sexual self?

Yep. Yeah . . . and this ladder, it was like a little escape thing - a way out of the dilemma. The other things [the hand and rod] kind of propped me up. This piercing bit is kind of like the navel . . . my

sexuality was being brought into question, or into view. Years and years of repression were being opened up.

Are you laying open your internal space to see what damage has been done?

Yeah. It was drawn after things were kind of blown apart.

Let's explore what the word sexuality means. How do you define your sexuality?

It is this feeling of disconnection from my sense of being alive which I believe has its beginnings in the attitudes passed on to me by my parents, that has shaped my sexual identity for the past fifty years. My sense of myself as a sexual being was confused and dislocated then, by, on the one hand the strong and pleasurable feelings I had as I developed through adolescence and began to experience myself as a girl/woman, and on the other, both the very strong and overwhelming religious messages which my parents – Dad and his mother in particular conveyed to me, and the strong desire I had as a child to be accepted and loved by my parents. It was a huge dilemma for me – was what I felt in my body OK? because it certainly felt good, or were the external messages the ones to follow for approval and survival even if they felt hollow? As a child I guess it was important to sacrifice self for others and their approval. I was never given permission – not even a skerrick that I recall – to enjoy or develop a sense of my sexuality, never mind enjoy sex. Sex was something hidden, embarrassing, evil, powerful, very tempting and against God who saw everything and was judgmental. And enjoying oneself for the sheer hell of it was an act of selfishness.

As a young woman I was told things about me (my body) by men who found me attractive which I found either frightening, threatening or somehow out there, beyond me. It was them saying things about me, which, in my reality had nothing to do with me at all. I either detached or fell into allowing those comments to define who I was. He said it, but he's not really talking about me: he said it therefore I am. The most powerful comments always came from males. I didn't even know how, or that I could choose what, where when and how in relation to my body never occurred to me then. My sexuality was external and controlled by others. I gave away my power – unconsciously. The notion that no one 'owned' my body, that it was/is mine and that it is perfectly natural and even wholesome to enjoy and take pleasure from it, by myself and with others, was something that came to me only recently and with any real conviction. Is still coming to me.

And as for sex, it was never for me separate from sin and badness. Sex was something to be covert, secretive, deceptive and defiant about if it was to happen at all! I also remember self control being a BIG deal – not too much pleasure, not too much fun, not too much laughter – or else!. And definitely no alcohol. And no sex. Until after marriage, then all the previous conditioning is supposed to magically fall away, allowing room for the ‘happily ever after until death us do part’ life to begin.

My head is nodding again as Fanny shares these thoughts with me. My own childhood and teenage years flash through my body-mind and I think, ‘it could have been me telling the story.’

And then she leans forward and turns the page over to the next image.⁴¹

This one, she says, is about getting free, about stretching up (Fig. F7).

‘Then why are you holding the pelvic bones down?’ I say. She laughs and then falls silent again.

I think it is about holding my instinctual nature back. Sometimes I get nervous and frightened about what I might do if I just sort of go for it. I understand sex and sexuality differently now. I experience it differently and enjoy being alive in it.

⁴¹ Another possible reading of this work could be linked psychoanalytically to Irigaray’s comments on the symbolic of intra-uterine life.

The unavoidable wound is the cutting of the umbilical cord. When his father or his mother threatens Oedipus with a knife or with scissors, he or she forgets that the cord has already been cut, and that it is enough to take note of that fact.

The problem is that, by denying the mother her generative power and by wanting to be the sole creator, the Father, according to our culture, superimposed upon the archaic world of the flesh a universe a language [langue] and symbols which cannot take root in it except as in the form of that which makes a hole in the bellies of women and in the site of their identity. In many patriarchal traditions, a stake is therefore driven into to the earth to delineate the sacred space. It defines a place for male gatherings founded upon sacrifice. (Irigaray, 1991, pp. 40-41)



Fig. F7 *'Woman stretching'*

'Look,' I say, 'the bones are inflamed. It is like your support structure is still feeling damaged, or is in pain, or feeling wounded.'

Yes, If I become the person that I think I need to be, then I am the only one who is going to approve. I don't think I will get much approval from anybody if I go ahead with my desires.

Does that worry you?

In a way it does, because I like to be approved of, but I also kind of know that this is the way it has to be. I just have to be focussed and centred so that the disapproval doesn't make me topple over.

Why did you draw yourself down in the water?

But I haven't, I have drawn myself standing on the shoreline.

'Oh!' I react with surprise. 'I read it differently.'

Oh I see!

Fanny now looks at the drawing through my eyes. 'Hmmm. Yeah. Seen like that, I have reached the surface, but there is something big here,' she says, pointing to the hands. 'They are holding me down. God I am so skinny. I wanted to make my feet seem like they were grounded. I wanted them to look as though they were stuck to the earth.'

You look a bit desperate actually.

Yeah, well I have been.

And then she laughed. It was not so much a laugh, as a sort of inward sighing.

I probably still am. God. Oh yeah. I am desperate but I don't know what for. When I look at my work over the past seven years since I left university, especially since I have been documenting my life, there isn't a wall or a surface that isn't covered in something. I look at it all and think, what is this kind of need that is inside of me that is trying to find a voice and an answer to what I am seeking. It is getting more urgent that I make and do the stuff. I wonder where it is taking me, and then I wonder, does it really matter? Hanging out here in the unknown is scary, but exciting also.

*You know I feel like I am only just beginning to speak on my own behalf. Now, when I am asked something, or I have to do something, I stop and think 'what is it that I really want? Is it because I think I should, or because it is part of my old conditioning?' It is like getting in behind all of that other stuff, holding the feeling and saying 'Well, I can say NO.'*⁴²



Fig. F8

'Woman exposed'

⁴² Fanny painted **Fig. F8** soon after returning to the island. In describing this work, she said it represented her sense of exposure and vulnerability in creating a new identity for herself.

RECOGNITION ⁴³

Memories
 Just a mother
 or a wife
 Nothing else
 Belonging to others
 Thinking only of others
 Cogito ergo sum: I think therefore I am
 Mother
 Wife
 Therefore I give
 Serve, console, nurture, support,
 beyond tiredness
 beyond capacity

Motherhood was
 baggy clothes
 floppy, shapeless, drab,
 hiding my feminine self within

Typical girl product of the 50s
 Who was I as woman?

No answer

Sexuality?
 self raising flour
 vegemite sandwiches
 pea and ham soup
 a vacuum cleaner
 a Hills Hoist, ⁴⁴
 a good husband
 a barbeque out the back
 happiness

fidelity
 But whose, and to what?

⁴³ Poem created from Fanny's letter, 19 October 1998.

⁴⁴ A Hills Hoist is a metal rotary outdoor clothesline. It was introduced into Australian culture in the 50s. It became a status symbol for the housewife.

LUCE'S STORY

How to begin? Where to start? 'Begin at the beginning and don't stop until you get to the end.' That's all very well Mr. Carroll. I don't know about the beginning – when was it anyway? Was my beginning my birth, or was it when my mother and father merged nine months earlier. Maybe it goes back even further; perhaps I need to know more about my grandparents and their grandparents. And what if I find I've been here before in another life and another time. I can only surmise what went on before I was propelled out of my mother's womb at nine-thirty on a wet and windy Saturday morning on the sixteenth of March 1935 in Brighton. Sussex. U.K. (latitude 50 degrees 50 minutes North. Longitude 0 degrees 10 minutes West). Which means that my Sun is in Pisces with Gemini rising.

As to the end – there is no end. That is why I have to get as much as I can down on paper, look at photos, talk to friends and relatives, read books, surf the internet of life and seek out as much information as I can absorb. Forever searching.

How is it, now, I still like rock 'n roll, A.C./D.C. and Dire Straits as well as Chopin and Mozart? Trousers not dresses. Eat fish rather than meat. Prefer cats to horses. Choose to be on, in or near water, instead of hot, dry, dusty earth.

A compulsion for collecting. Shells, bones, bits and pieces. Art. Stuff. Just what made me the person I am today?

Luce 1997

I have known Luce for a long time. Maybe twenty years. We belong to the same network of art organisations. In recent years however, because of my changing interests I had lost contact with her. We had not been close friends, just good acquaintances who enjoyed good talk together when the opportunity arose. Luce, her pseudonym chosen by myself after my readings of Irigaray, elected to come to my studio so that I could record our conversations. I make coffee. She has honey in hers - I still can not get used to that strange combination of flavours. We walk out through the garden to the studio. The first hour is taken up with catching up on who was doing what in the art world. Gossip. And about all of the 'things' that she and I had been doing in our lives in the intervening years.

I turn the tape recorder on and ask 'Can you think back to a recent event or activity or specific bodily event or experience in relation to the process of menopause that stands out vividly in your mind? Focus on this memory and describe how your body felt. See if you can describe from your inner landscape, sensations, moods, feelings and emotions. Take me back to a specific instance so that I too can see it clearly with my own body.'

I can't remember things exactly. Sometimes the actual cessation of bleeding seems such a long time ago. I have trouble trying to work out how long it took and when did menopause really start. There were so many other things going on in my life at the time. My menopause was caught up in all of them. But the process did take several years, and even now some years later, now that I am at that stage that is medically described as post menopause, sometimes I feel that I move back into that feeling body state that was there during those years. To some of the confusion and questioning. I do remember though, feeling that once I got through the hot flushes, once I stopped passing blood, I WOULD BE FREE.⁴⁵

It felt like a weight off my mind. In fact, although I had lots of other things worrying me I felt very happy. I certainly didn't feel distressed that I was no longer able to have babies because I didn't want to have any more anyway. I just felt that that side of my life was past and that was it. It was sort of like the teenage years. You go through all

⁴⁵ I have used upper case to signify that these words were said slowly and with great emphasis.

this sort of stuff and then you get to this time, AND KNOWING, AND SOMEHOW KNOWING, SOMEHOW, THAT I WAS GOING TO BECOME ME. I didn't have to worry about anything else. It was just like a release really and I think also the hot flush type things that exorcising it. So that is my basic feeling most of the time.

There was relief that this part of me was going and I wouldn't have to put up with the pain and the cost of buying tampons and all those sort of little things. I found myself thinking 'well okay, I may be going through a bit of shit at the moment, but I know it is going to be fine at the end however long it takes, it's going to be fine.'

I can't remember going through too many hot flushes. I was having a period for three days instead of five, and then diminishing each time, and then missing. I think that when I first started to miss a period I tore down to the doctor and said, 'I know I am not pregnant, I haven't been sleeping with my husband or anyone else. Is there something wrong with me?' And then him saying, 'well it is probably the change.' I was quite surprised that I was going through it. I still felt young. I can't remember how old I was.

But it was a bad time for me. I felt I couldn't cope. As well as the biological processes, other stuff was going on. We had a death in the family. My partner and I were experiencing difficulties. My kids were teenagers and getting into adventures that caused me distress. I wanted to be in control. I felt that I had lost it. Whatever 'it' was. I have been in control of my body right the way through my life. You know, you would have a monthly period and that happened regularly. I think I felt that this was something outside of me. You know, you get your period, then you get pregnant and then you don't. You think I'm supposed to be having a period and yet I am not. You can't quite get it all straight, and so you do feel out of control, and everything feels out of control. Your whole body feels out of control. With the heat and the fire it felt a bit like the devil. It felt as if a thing, whatever 'it' was, could over-power me. I tried to go with the flow . . . it is difficult. I can't really explain that. You have the feeling that this thing is going to take over from you and there is nothing you can do about it to stop it. Then it all comes back again. The memory. Then you are breast-feeding, and it's sort of . . . that is life. But when you start to think 'well my periods have now stopped, so what I eat

becomes me. I choose what I want to eat.' I have no other thing saying 'today you have to do this'. That's the memory I have. You're out of control. I couldn't really talk to anybody because I felt ashamed. I felt guilty. Not just about menopause but about failing as a mother and feeling that it was my fault that my relationship with my husband was breaking down.

And then I went to the doctor. He put me on Serapax. I dutifully took it until something else happened. I can't remember what. One day I woke up. And I don't know whether it is in this period of confusion or not, but I thought, I am not doing this any more. I think I went to the doctor and he said 'we will take you off these pills and we will give you this.' It was like cold turkey. That was it. I was in a terrible state because he took me straight off the pills and just said, 'that's it'. I was a gibbering mess.

I hear her story, appalled at the doctor's treatment of her experience. But during my years as a counsellor at the Women's Hospital, it is a story I have heard before. 'Yes,' I say, 'there are many factors occurring within our lives that influence the ways in which we deal with menopause. I think it depends on what is happening in your body both emotionally and psychically as to how well women deal with these external problems.⁴⁶ These are the issues that are not generally discussed in medical magazines and journals. I am interested in exploring how memories of your body and your external landscapes precipitated changes to your consciousness, and how you then negotiated your newly awakened self-awareness. I want to explore your embodied and imaginative sense of them and how they made you feel in being present to the experience of menopause.'

Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomena than mere rejoinders in a dialogue laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance.
(Bahktin, 1984, p. 40)

Well, there was something that happened at about that time that sort of changed my life. It was towards the end of menopause. It might have even been just after.

And then, Luce tells me a story about attending a textile workshop with a visiting German artist. The fabric used for self-

⁴⁶ I use the term psyche in relation to the soul.

expression was silk. Her eyes light up as she becomes fully engaged with the memory of this event. She leans forward in the chair. I observe her closely. Her mind and body are travelling back into time past, shifting in and out of the shadows as her memories bring forth vivid images causing colour to pour over an imaginary page. It was not the words, or the rhythms of the sentences, which captivated me, but the manner in which this text in movement was singing true. At the expression behind the words. At the ways in which she was re-storying her memories afresh. A good story involves not only words. By facial gestures, the use of her hands and the intake of her breath, she was evoking strong non-verbal messages about herself that her earlier conversation had not produced. In the process of Luce unraveling these threads of her history, I am aware once again of Le Guin's (1989) mother tongue; a language 'often on the verge of silence and often on the verge of song'(p.150). Luce's words being produced in this interplay of her body/mind reverberate through my own body. I listen entranced, asking the odd occasional question. This is no linear story. It is a messy text. One that circles around and around, in and out, backwards and forwards as she struggles to put names to things she has never named before. There is much laughter and long pauses and gaps where the sounds of her thoughts almost become tangible. Her story doesn't have an end, just a great exhalation of breath. A noisy silence. I am left suspended, caught in the echo of her inner landscape and transported to some place in my own. Here was a linguistic and imagistic epiphany. Here was the self in evolution (Figs. L1-5).

There is a set of experiences which the self frequently has and which it itself feels to be of decisive significance for itself – its moments of self-encounter, the sudden lucidity of self-awakening. Such experiences are of several kinds, and may happen at various times in the life of the self, but that whereby the self is itself and alone is manifested in each, and each type may therefore be experienced for what it reveals of self.
(Zaner, 1970 p.173)

Luce has brought a video of the textile workshop with her. We take it inside the house and turn the television on. Sitting side by side we watch the images as they flicker across the screens of our minds and of our imaginations. At times the colours of the silk

almost bleed from the screen they are so intense. The sounds on the video are muted. Echoing in the background landscape I hear the German woman announce that the workshop is a ritual performance and that for her, the major elements incorporate poems, maps, dreams and people. The silence in the space of watching grows. And then I hear someone say ‘the silk needs to be cared for with love.’ More muted sounds. Silence. Words are seductive. We strain to hear them. Their absence draws us further into the text. I am struck by the sound of the wind tossing voices aside as it ripped and tore at the streamers of silk in its various outdoor locations. In another echo from this fast moving landscape there was the primordial sound of the rhythmical beating of a drum.



Fig. L1

I turn to Luce. ‘This workshop changed your life, was this the point at which you began to separate from your family, find your own identity?’



Fig. L2

Yes, there were two things that happened. I felt guilty because for once I was doing something for myself. I was taking this day out and trying to cope with it in some way. I would come home tired at the end of the day and find that no one had bothered to prepare anything for dinner. No one thought about what we were going to eat, or who was going to eat it. No one asked me 'what do you want?' I was left with this sense of giving, giving, giving. I have kept diaries from that time. I would leave them open and

The codes of femininity imply suppression of desires in favour of others, particularly the family. (Robinson, 1995, p.140)

in huge capital letters in ink I would scrawl across the page WE HAVE RUN OUT OF MILK - IF YOU WANT CHICKEN GET IT OUT OF THE FRIDGE. They just shrugged their shoulders and ignored my outbursts. And I just ignored them. It was a letting go from it all. Just realising I don't need any more of that. Even though I was still feeling quite inadequate I was able to say to myself 'I don't care what you do.'



Fig. L3

This was your first act of resistance because you didn't feel seen or heard? Your first move towards developing your own sense of agency, of making choices and then acting upon them?

Yeah, and the other act of claiming of myself, of my existence, was when the workshop organised to go to a large warehouse to lay out the silk and the German woman wasn't there. No one turned up. I had driven miles to get there. I picked up a piece of chalk and in giant letters I wrote my name across the floor, and then a message to let her know I was pissed off. When I came

back a few days later I found others had done the same. I thought 'that was a good idea.' I wouldn't have done that the week before. I would have just thought 'oh dear, she is not here, oh, never mind I will go home again.'

So there was this different world going on at home, and I am at the workshop struggling to understand what it was all about. I didn't feel part of it, but I was also strangely enjoying it. Each day was a different feeling. Of blossoming. One day we were all traipsing over sand dunes. I have white silk draped all over me. I am trudging away with my back bent, and I'm thinking 'I don't want to really be here, what am I doing here?' and feeling, big and ungainly. I thought that I looked liked the great white whale.

Then I fell over while running on the beach and the German woman said that I meant to do that because I wanted to draw attention to myself. And I am thinking, 'fucking woman', she really makes me so cross. Yet there were parts of the workshop that I knew were doing me so much good. It was quite amazing. I mean, to see what we were actually doing. It was so different from anything else I had ever done. And, it was that FREEDOM that I had been longing for.

This was such a powerful experience for you. You tapped into your essence, your soul, do you think you could write it out as a poem?

I have never done that before.

Well, there is always a first time for everything. Look what happened at the workshop. Write it from your body. Let the words write you.

A week later in the mail came Luce's first piece of writing.

Voice-cry. Agony the spoken 'word' exploded, blown to bits by suffering and anger, demolishing discourse: this is how she has always been heard before, ever since the time when masculine society began to push her offstage, expelling her, plundering her. ... If woman has always functioned 'within' man's discourse ... now is the time for her to displace this 'within,' explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her woman's mouth, bite its tongue with her woman's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this 'within' where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Clement 1986, pp. 94-95)

LOOKING BACK TO THE CHANGE

*Silk workshop with visiting German textile artist.
 Phone call from organiser of workshop.
 She thinks I could get something out of it.
 (Or is she just drumming up numbers?)
 cost is \$120
 can I afford it?
 It will get me out of the house for a bit.
 Yes, I will give it a go.*

*Day 1. Strange woman (her or me?)
 She wanted silence
 But we weren't able to understand what else she wanted.
 Photos of past workshops pinned up.
 SHE felt hurt
 We did not understand*

SILENCE

*how to know what she wanted
 why 'what SHE wanted'
 Tomorrow she says 've vill all vear white.'*

*Day 2. Acting out a role? Dressing up as brides?
 The silk is torn.
 Why do I feel this is important
 I've torn fabric up before
 In fact I always do
 but don't make a performance out of it.
 The silk seems to be screaming.
 I feel self-conscious
 Most of the younger ones are playing
 I feel too much in awe of this lady
 Don't really like her
 What is it all about?*

*Kings Park next,
 we have to bring something to tie the silk onto.
 Call into Good Samaritans
 choose an old umbrella.
 They can't understand at home what I am doing.
 Do I know?
 Usual thing I've paid for something and will see it through.
 This is supposed to be enjoyable
 but I have to push myself to go.*

*Kings Park - feet marching up and down the lookout.
 My umbrella thing looks a bit silly
 I get to play the 'little drummer girl'.
 Little? Girl?
 More like the great white whale!!!
 Tie the silk into a large piece
 made it balloon in the wind.
 Not too much silence!
 Enjoyed the visual.*

*Dyeing day: Mt. Lawley Campus.
 Not what I (or others) expected.
 She couldn't care less about the dye being permanent.
 Oh well, go with the flow!!
 Most of us have dye on our hands and clothes
 Tomorrow she says 'vare yellow
 we are going to do some dyeing on the beach.'
 May be I will die on the beach
 I don't have anything yellow
 I feel tired, weary, fed up, cold,
 Don't want to go.*

*Go all loaded up with stuff
 Silk
 pots and pans bottles baskets poles and
 the German woman
 playing the drum.
 Well I suppose it is hers to play with (or was it?)
 Don't know what to do again
 I follow what she does
 Let them all get on with it
 feel clumsy ... fall over not much energy look and listen.
 Sun going down bring out the red silk
 Colour brings energy back.
 Fabulous
 run in and out
 of this vibrant movement*

AMAZING

*Boulder Rock. Take the yellow silk up to a huge rock formation.
 I am feeling very sorry for this material.
 Virgin one day,
 then on another
 gets dragged around on sand, water and rocks.
 Weather cold and windy
 but fine.*

Tying the silk at Fanny Samson's Warehouse
Knots, knots and more knots
what kind of knot?
Overhand, reef,
or just any old knot?
Finding knots that were still there
from some other city - person
Undo them? Leave them? Incorporate them?
Just have to make sure my knots are the most beautiful knots!!
The meditation of making knots!!
The backache of making knots.
Tying and untying

The test really comes tomorrow on the beach at Cottesloe.

The Wild Woman from Germany is feeling good!!
The strength of the wind is strong
the strength of the silk is stronger
Are we as strong as the silk?
Am I as strong as the silk?
I have not been raped.

Point Walter. A softer day. I take my camera watch it unfold.

Day of Rainbow
Will the silk and I survive
the harsh environment of a quarry?
Check knots
Cradle it carefully in our arms
there are rough rocks
puddles, wind,
why worry now
after what we've been through
have I become the silk?
maybe

A voice cries out 'OK LET GO'
Can I let go?
It feels like a bird struggling to be free.
I loosen the hold

it soars into the air
the wind blows quite gently

F R E E

it dances with delight

a sigh,

the wonder of it.

*Looking from all angles,
arm in arm with this strange person
I didn't know a few weeks ago
(Her or me?)
Can I soar like the silk?*

*Interesting to note
The silk is still restrained
by a very substantial rope across the top*

I eventually break free

My Self

It takes time.

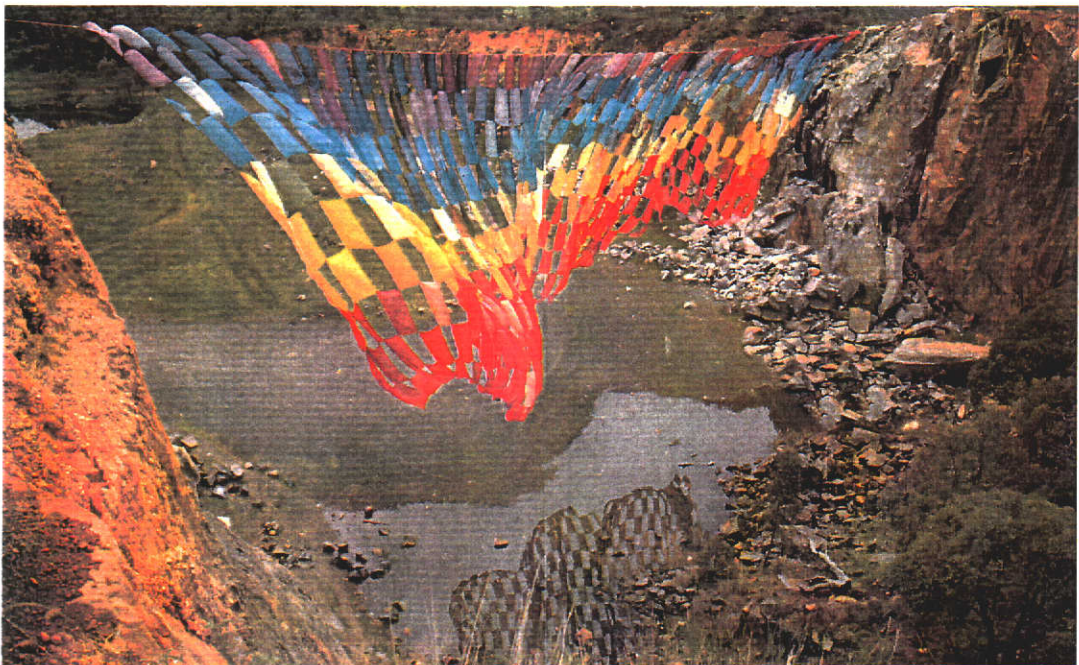


Fig. L4

I call Luce and suggest we meet again. There is more I want to ask her. Her poetic story was filled with rich images I wanted to explore further. Did she want to do that?

Yes, and I have some photographs I can show you as well.

‘The silk is a lovely metaphor for you,’ I say. ‘For me, it feels as though it represents aspects of the feminine.’

... the metaphor with which one thinks of one’s self has much to do with the way one constructs both one’s life and one’s art.
(Byatt 1987, in Bronfen 1996, p.43)

Luce nods her head in affirmation.



Fig. L5

We watch the video again. The participants in the workshop begin by wrapping and draping each other in metres of white silk. It is done in silence. Their actions signify comfort, protection, preciousness, immersion and enveloping love. I become more and more absorbed in the wrapping process. Would men like to be draped and wrapped like this I am wondering? I find word associations coming to mind. They evoke sensations of luxuriousness, nurture, playfulness, loose, free, regal, covering and revealing. And bodies.

Women's bodies. They speak of other worlds and languages, and journeys on other continents. Mysterious journeys to places and lands unknown. This is essentially a female activity. It stirs ancient memories. Images of middle-eastern landscapes and bodies dance across the screen of my imaginary mind. Maybe I have partaken in this tradition of ritualistic garment dressing in another lifetime.

The photographs are spread out in front of us. I turn to Luce and ask 'have you taken part in a ritual before? What did it feel like?'

It didn't feel real. At the beginning I was questioning so much about my life and my sense of who I was. I mean, was the process a part of me? I was connecting to the spiritual side of it, and yet there was the pain of my life as well. It was all tied up together. Tied up in day. As I gained more body awareness, became more fluid, the ritual turned into a dance. It turned into an expression with no words. It was quite a traumatic time.

We talk about the day of washing and the dyeing of the silk, and what that might have been signifying to her unconscious. I read to Luce from Clarissa Pinkola Este's (1992) *Women Who Run With Wolves*.

Not so long ago, women were deeply involved in the rhythms of life and death. They inhaled the pungent odor of iron from the fresh blood of childbirth. They washed the cooling bodies of the dead as well. The psyches of modern women, especially those from industrial and technological cultures, are often deprived of these close-up and hands-on blessed and basic experiences. But there is a way ... to take care of the psychic house of the wild feminine... To wash something is a timeless purification ritual. It means not only to purify ... it means to make taut again that which has become slackened from the wearing. In archetypal symbolism, clothing represents *persona*. *Persona* is a kind of camouflage which lets others know only what we wish them to know about us, and nothing more (p.95).

I remember my mother would do all the washing by hand, and I would do the ironing. Throughout her life she washed sheets by hand even when she was in her seventies, and she was horrified that I used a washing machine. Somehow I feel that ritual of washing in that way has been taken away from us. I mean, we would love someone to do this washing for us, but there is that ritual or whatever this hands onthis rubbing and feeling, then hanging this wonderful clean stuff out to dry. We miss all that. Now we have a machine that does it all for us. It gives us time to do other things, but I still think there is something there that is not happening in our lives that was there in our mothers.

*Every morning
I shower,
I wash my underpants.
I wash and scrub
Wring them out.
Then hang them in the shower to dry.
I never did that
when I was married,
or bringing up a family.
All my underpants
just went in with everyone else 's.
Now that I am not doing a big wash
there is that ritual that I need to do.
Even in the shower
I do things to align my chakras (yin/yang)
And then, last thing at night
lighting my oil lamp,
putting my oil on my body,
then blowing the lamp out.
Letting the fragrance waft on.
Then doing my Reiki
before I drift off to sleep.
The Reiki
is a way of nurturing myself.*

Do you feel you suffered from a lack of nurturing?

Yes, Yeah and I still do. Things still hurt. My father was not around much when I was very young. I sort of get the feeling that my mother loved me but didn't really nurture me. I was an only child. When you think back and look at other families, most single children have usually got more nurturing or more spoiling. I just don't think I went

through that. Maybe I did at the beginning. At the very beginning, but after that I have no memory of being held or touched lovingly.

Let's go back to your memory of the workshop. Tell me what else you remember about that day. At what point, did you feel you entered the dance?

Red is the colour of sacrifice, of rage, of murder, of being killed. Yet red is also the color of vibrant life, dynamic emotion, arousal, eros and desire. It is a color that is considered strong medicine for psychic malaise, a color which arouses appetite. There is throughout the world a figure known as the red mother. (Estes, 1992, p.162)

*It was down at the beach.
I am a water person.
It's where I belong.
The German woman brings out the red silk.
I had no part in the dyeing of this.
She unrolls it.
An explosive energy surges through my body.
It blows my mind*

*The colour red is very powerful.
It is full of passion.
Then we hang it in the wind.
It sings and screams
The wind was strong that day.
I cross over,
backwards and forwards,
between the silk and me.
The silk is precious.*

This lovely flowing silk.

You and the silk were becoming one?

Yes, but I have used the word rape. I have not been raped, but I just felt so . . . yeah . . . with this material . . . that I was going through, had been through a similar process. In the beginning the silk was pure and white. It hadn't had very much done to it. It hadn't been torn or knotted. As the days passed this virgin piece of silk was virtually raped. It was put through an awful lot. The dyeing, and the things that were tearing at it. The wind was making it both sing and scream. I guess that is what I imagine rape is like.

I don't think it is a sexual rape you are talking about, but rather you are using rape as metaphor for the sense of outrage, abuse, violation, despoilment of your sense of who

you are. Of being constrained and compressed into a body with no acceptable means of expression. Of your sense of powerlessness; of being a woman.

Tell me again about tying the knots. It is such a lovely image. I can see you sitting on the oiled jarrah floor of the old white-washed limestone-walled warehouse in the port of Fremantle. I can smell that warm, soft fragrance of lanolin that accompanies stored wool bales. The smell of old dust tickles my nose. It hangs suspended in flowing shafts of pale blue and golden light streaming through the windows. The ceilings soar to the heavens where they are intersected with massive hand-hewn wooden beams. Oiled jarrah. The tang of sea air from the harbour permeates the space, and into the skin of each body. I can see the women sitting on the floor, each one in their own world. Heads bowed as their hands and bodies painstakingly work over the knotted silken landscape.

I pause for a moment, caught up in the images I am creating in my mind. Then I recall the earlier work of Caroline and comments by A.S. Byatt (1987) about knots.

Lately and I think this is a cultural observation – I've replaced the post-romantic metaphor with one of a knot. I see individuals now as knots, in say the piece of lace that one of Vermeer's lacemakers is making. Things go through us – the genetic code, the history of the nation, the language or languages we speak ... the constraints that are put upon us, the people who are around us. And if we are an individual, it's because these threads are knotted together in this particular time and in this particular place, and they hold. I also have no metaphysical sense of the self, and I see this knot as vulnerable: you could cut one or two threads of it ... or you can, of course, get an unwieldy knot where somebody has had so much put in that the knot becomes a large and curious and ugly object. We are connected, and we also are connection which is a separate and unreported object.

(Byatt, 1987, in Bronfen, 1996, p.42)

I continue with my thoughts. I imagine the women are concentrating. Are some of them thinking of other women in other times? Past, present, future. In this fluid, timeless

space Luce undoes her thoughts. She unpicks the knotted self, and in the process of untying, begins to subconsciously create new beginnings. I can imagine that new patterns of thought are taking shape. I can hear the silence and the odd occasional whisper as they pass instructions backwards and forwards. Luce's voice cuts into my day dreaming.

You began to think about the people who had handled the silk before you. I just wanted to make the most beautiful knot.

Knots: tension, frustration, no escape, bind, tether, entanglement, marking points, strength. Knots can also be the instruments of the enchantress, magician or witch, in which case the tying of knots is the power and weaving of spells. Loosening knots is freedom; salvation, the solving of problems. (Cooper, 1995, p. 92)

In this process you were both deconstructing and re-constructing yourself?

Looking back now, I can see that I was.

Paint me some more images about the last day. Is that the first time in your life that you have experienced a sense of transcendence, of the sublime?

Luce's eyes light up again. She becomes animated. Body in motion.

Yes, it was a mind-blowing thing. It was at the point when we finally let go and there was a great exhalation of our breath.

Luce breathes in deeply, and then lets out a deep sigh. Her body is still. She is remembering. She has returned to the quarry.

We were all linked up with sound. But it was silent. Just the wind. And our breath. Then there was a huge Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Once I let the silk go, I felt that it was a similar sort of feeling to having a hot flush. You have gone through all that and now everything will be fine. Without the rope, which was tied to the top of the quarry, the silk would have just floated up into the sky, and we would never had seen it again. It

made me think 'was the rope a lifeline? Was there something in my life that I had to cling on to? What was it?'

Maybe the rope could be a metaphor to connect you to something beyond your knowing. It was a magical experience filled with wonder and awe. It brought you in touch with an aspect of your spirit that you had not experienced before. Perhaps the rope was saying 'just trust me, it will be alright'

Yeah, that's right.

On the other hand the rope might represent a record of your life.

Yeah, that too.

We meet again some months later. I put my first question to Luce.

Is that the feminine condition, always a lifeline to other people's lives and therefore split from our own? Who holds the thread for us? Who held it for her? Does this explain the dreams women have: the perfect husband, the perfect lover, priest, guardian, father. Failing that, or perhaps most of all: the perfect mother. (Modjeska, 1990, p.16)

You say you were a bit of a 'loner' and are 'still a bit like that.' Do you feel that you are unlikely to talk to others about issues that arise from some deeper part of yourself?

Yeah, yeah. I find that I am more of a listener than a talker. I think this is the most I have ever talked about myself to anyone. During my schooldays I went to thirteen schools. I never really had a best friend, and then getting married, and then having three kids fairly young and then feeling a bit dissected, fragmented. Talking to you has been difficult. There is a part of me that wants to say more and there is a part of me holding back. I seem to contradict myself all the time. It has helped me to look at myself a bit more. You don't get to talk much about yourself in this way. It is always what are your kids doing? What is your partner doing? Or what you might be cooking? All the other roles we play. There hasn't been very much time or openness about these deeper things that happen in our lives.

Has it troubled you then, to work through this process, to read against the grain of your previous ways of knowing, to look at aspects of yourself that you wouldn't normally do?

No, it has intrigued me because I have thought that perhaps I would really like to write a book. A sort of year book, a journal. I haven't yet but I know I will. I know I will. The trouble is I find people more interesting than me.

'Why don't you write? What is stopping you? Why don't you start tomorrow? I would love to hear about your life. So would other women. You introduced me to Kate Llewellyn (1987; 1994). You are familiar with her style of writing. Just do it. You

We are our own censor, our own correctors our own masters. While the height of writing, the paroxysm is produced when one leaves oneself in freedom: when one does not master oneself. When one has faith in what is not knowable: in the unknown in ourselves that will manifest itself... At times some small thing or a person is all it takes for someone to write or not to write.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 40-41)

have read Drusilla Modjeska's (1990) *Poppy*.

Tease out the story of your life by following the threads of your history and memory. Use your body and your imagination. You told me earlier that your sense of intimacy and connection to yourself came from reading books; women's writing. It nourishes your spirit, you said.' I then tell Luce I have just completed a creative writing course to help in the creation of this thesis. I

suggest to her that she read Natalie Goldberg's (1986) *Writing down the Bones*. I loan her Barbara Turner-Vessalago's (1995) *Freefall Writing Without a Parachute*. Before I give it to her I read words I have underlined:

The naked fear of the blank page, the stone or the canvas seems neither in our stars nor in our sex but in ourselves ... out of the leap into apparently empty space can come something new. Something that can speak to others precisely because it has never been said in quite that way before. It is often something we could never have foreseen and the saying of it can change us forever (p.35-36).

Some months later Luce calls into my studio with a piece of writing from her journal. It was an entry from her birthday, March 16th 1996. She reads parts of it to me.

The big blank over the last three months has been a lack of courage, self worth and other things getting in the way. Ups and downs of emotion ... I forgive all those who have hurt me including and especially myself. I forgive myself and go forward in the exploration of life. So now I will put on socks for my cold feet and open the cupboard and hope the bones of the skeleton falls naturally into an order that I can cope with.

The skeletons in the chamber represent, in the most positive light, the indestructible force of the feminine. Archetypally, bones represent that which can never be destroyed. Stories of bones are essentially something in the psyche that is difficult to destroy. The only thing that we possess that is difficult to destroy is our soul... We must sit at the fire and think about which song we will use to sing over the bones, which creation hymn, which re-creation hymn. And the truths we tell will make the song. ... These are some good questions to ask until one decides on the song... What has happened to my soul-voice? What are the buried bones of my life? In what condition is my relationship to the instinctual self? When was the last time I ran free? How do I make life come alive again? As we pour our yearning and our heartbreaks over the bones of what we used to be when we were young, of what we used to know in centuries past, and over the quickening we sense in the future, we stand on all fours, four-square... You wish psychoanalytic advice? Go gather bones. (Estes, 1992, p.37-58)

I am going to write a book. I am calling it 'Picking over the Bones.' As a child I had a fascination with bones. I hadn't remembered this until I started to think about writing my story. I have always collected bones. I am still collecting bones. It is also about that thing of bringing the skeleton out of the cupboard. There are lots of things that I don't want to tell a whole lot of people, and yet this is a true story, and there are things in there that I have to say. Now, whether or not I write them down and then destroy the chapter or whether I actually face up to everything, I don't know.

What do you think creates the obstacles or prevents women from speaking what we really feel?

In my case, I think it is because I am frightened at being looked down on, or of not being accepted, or being criticised. I feel guilty. It is hearing people say 'how could you do something like that?' Yet looking back, now that I am getting a lot of it down on paper, I realise I am certainly not alone in what has happened to me in my life. There have been

lots of women who have experienced much worse. In the writing of my story, part of me is saying 'I don't care'. People can do what they like with my thoughts or my sayings, but this other part of me is not so sure of revealing everything.

'Just keep on writing,' I say, 'go where the energy is. I look forward to reading it.'

Over the following months Luce would telephone to tell me of her progress. On one occasion she sent me one of the early chapters. Her description of re-embodying her being during her teenage years attracted my attention. It was not dissimilar to my own, or to the many stories I had heard from women of my generation.

Gradually my breasts start to swell. I try to flatten them by wearing a tight vest. No good. They get bigger. I begin to hunch my shoulders, carry books in front of them. They wont stop growing and I think I look hideous... no one is allowed to take any more photos. I hide in corners, up trees, in the bushes. I want to die.

RW How do you think or where do you think you formed notions about femininity and your body?

L I am not sure what femininity actually means. To me femininity when I was growing up was pretty dresses and probably a bit of flirting and things like that. Yeah, and lipstick. I remember my father taking me to this dance and my mother making sure I had lipstick on. I didn't want it because I was a real tomboy. I found myself thinking 'oh this isn't so bad, okay I don't mind once in awhile', and then realising that that was my femininity and that my role in life was probably just to get married and have kids. That was my femininity. Since those years I have read quite a lot about it, but I still don't know what femininity really is.

RW Is it something you would like to grasp more clearly?

L Probably yes, although I think there is such a mixture in all of us.

(Interview 21.4.1997)

Suddenly a new headmistress arrived...tall, thin, dark hair, quite ugly really. She took a liking to me and gently helped me understand what is going on in my body. 'Be proud Luce, hold, your shoulders back and your head high.' I think she must have persuaded mum to get me a bra. Things get a bit better... and then my world comes crashing down. I start to bleed. I'm very angry. I'm not going to put up with it every month, I don't want to grow up. It isn't fair. Then I find out that nearly every other girl my age and younger have already 'started'. My mother is

sympathetic, makes me a cup of tea and we talk a bit. Growing up is not easy. Looks like my tree climbing days are over. My mother says I have to be more ladylike. I promise her I will try.

More weeks passed. Luce and I are having coffee and talk again. 'Can you tell me what is coming up for you out of this experience of writing a book?' I ask.

Well, I am finding that this little child who is me doesn't look very happy in the photographs. She is lonely. As I am going on I'm sort of flipping ahead in time because I can't really remember my late teenage years. I don't know why. I am now questioning the fact that the photos influence what I am writing. Is it that the photos trigger off memories? or is it my own fantasy and I believe it because this photo shows me doing this? I have got to a stage where there are no photos of me.

I am not sure whether it was because of my choice, or because there is either no camera, or no time, or whatever, but I have nothing to hook my memory onto apart from little bits and pieces that I am beginning to remember. Then I find I am jumping ahead to what I might be writing in the early sixties, seventies or eighties, and discovering that there are too many similarities between my mother and my self. Just the coincidences and little bits. So many different threads to try and braid together. It is weird.

Is it our task to interrogate these memories until they give over their power and no longer empty themselves into the present? Or should we bow to them respectfully, acknowledging them as part of ourselves, and tread gently around them? (Modjeska, 1990, p 51)

Who we are, our subjectivity, is spoken into existence in every utterance, not just in the sense that others speak us into existence and impose unwanted structures on us, as much as early feminist writing presumed, but in each moment of speaking and being, we each reinvent ourselves inside the male/female dualism, social psychically, and physically.
(Davies, 1992, p. 74)

Sometimes it feels like I am writing about someone else. It's bringing up a lot of memories that I didn't know I had. It is probably revealing a bit of the inner workings of myself. It still feels superficial somehow. When I started to write my mind was back in those early days of childhood. I found that my writing style was fairly childlike. Now it is different. Perhaps it is because I haven't written before and I am just writing as I would

think. Or maybe I have become more experienced and I find myself editing the work as I go, or it might be that the expression of the six year old child and how she thinks and speaks and writes is coming out of me without me controlling it. Now, as I come to being a teenager so many things are happening, and the writing is coming out as the teenager rather than the mature woman I am.

What I am hearing you say is that by going back over the history of your life you are reconstructing your identity. You are questioning 'who am I?' before you assumed the many roles and masks that you have learned to wear, before you became a good girl and a good wife?

Yes. Yeah, it is interesting.

More months went by, and then one day Luce rang and said.

When I spoke to you last I couldn't remember parts of my later teenage years. These images of my self were blank. They were opaque. I could not read them. Now I have recovered some memories. I would like to come and share them with you.

Luce arrives with chapter six of *Picking over the Bones* under her arm. We sit comfortably, and then Luce leans her head to one side and begins to read. I am not recording this conversation. I watch her face. She is frowning slightly, almost pensively, as she retreats into her history, pulling memory and imagination into language. I am about to hear a historical telling that until recently has been in the past but now with the retrieval of her memory lies just around the corner, in the future, waiting for her to discover.

What do I remember of this chapter in my life? I went out with quite a few of the 'lads'. Wanting to make friends with someone I could love and who would love me back. I missed a period. Then another. Knowing all along I was pregnant with R.D's child. I wanted someone to love and thought this was it. Going to the doctors, frightened I would be seen. Test is positive.

Must have told a couple of married guys I knew, because they arranged for me to go to London for an abortion. Go to this dark, dismal, damp and probably very dirty, cabbage-smelling place where a woman examined me and asked how far I was gone. Three months is too late, she said. She won't do anything. I am numb but pleased. Could I have gone through with an abortion? I don't think so.

Nearly forty years later, my mind will not help me find out where or exactly when ... How long was I there? [the home for unmarried mothers] What did we do all day? How many to a room? What did we eat? None of it is coming back to me. Mum used to visit every now and then. Sometimes she took me out to tea. Oh how I wish it would all come back to me. Why can't I remember where I was, the name of the place? Not even the year. When the time came to go to the hospital was I driven there by car or ambulance? The pain is bad. Just before dawn I am placed in the delivery room, other mothers are going through the same thing as me but they are married and receive a lot more attention. The pain is so bad – God's punishment? 'Oh mum please help me.' Screaming. 'Mum.' Didn't think God would help, but screaming out his name as well. At last the pain makes me push this little being out into the world. The head nurse is pleased and says a few kind words, 'Good girl - you have a son, do you want to see him?' I lift my head and look at him through my tears. They take him away to give him a wash. Did I have stitches? How long did I lay there? His face is in my memory. Nothing else.

All the women in the long hospital ward were called Mrs. At visiting times 'us girls' did not have male visitors ... so we would escape to the toilet and read a magazine or have a bath or go outside. I would walk down the room holding my empty womb and wonder what was going to happen. I think we were given tablets to dry up our milk, as we were not allowed to nurse our babies.

My baby – Rory Alexander – my baby that I was going to give to a married couple who could not have a child of their own. 'it is best for the baby.' You will be able to have more when you get married. How would I be able

to take care of him? These were the things people were saying and I believed them. I had to let go – forget. The pain becomes a numbness that I learn to cope with.

I would like to try and find him and ask him to try and understand why I did what I did. Tell him that although I have forgotten most of the facts I have not forgotten him.

I did get married and I had three wonderful children, but the pain, shame, guilt and secret never left me. Mum and Dad never mentioned it again. At both their deaths I said how sorry I was to have hurt them. I hope they forgave me as I have forgiven them. It became almost as if it never happened. BUT IT DID. And the most difficult thing now is to tell my three legitimate children the truth. Why has it taken so long?

(1997)

Luce pauses, it is a long time before she raises her head and looks over to me. I am sitting in the chair across from her, hunched over, chin held in my hands. A large crack in my carefully contained reality has opened and I slip through it into the past. Unbidden, waves of emotions are flooding through my body. The pause button, holding in the shame and guilt, has been released and I am also back to the decade of the 60s; to my own teenage pregnancy. I remember the censure, the lies, the concealing, and the loneliness. I remember the shame and the terrible sense of guilt. I can see my mother

The fabrication of difference is manifest in those practices where what a person “really” thinks and feels becomes a matter that counsellors and friends help them to “discover”. Such attitudes and processes are fundamental to the construction of gendered unitary, noncontradictory humanist persons who constitute themselves as having a real, discoverable essence in clear distinction to the social and discursive forces that surround and produce them.
(Davies, 1992, p.68)

fainting when I told her of my predicament. I can hear my father’s silence. I was a daughter of the clergy. I had failed him. I remember the hot baths, the Ford pills and the bottles of gin in my attempts to abort my son. It didn’t work. I remember wearing tight corsets, step-ins we called them – up to my breasts, to work, so that no one would know I was pregnant, and as a result, the subsequent illness from toxemia. I remember being pressured to give up my baby for adoption. Unlike Luce, I got to keep my baby. I chose to get married.

There is a long silence, and then we begin to speak about this time in our lives. We ponder on the knowledge that a great deal of our experience lies submerged within our bodies. The surface of our lives does not reveal to others the facts. We hear each other's stories and flesh them out with more memories. Through our talk we are able to see more clearly how the constraints of old discourses, old story lines positioned us within silence, and how we colluded with these same silences from pain, grief, betrayal and disbelief. We discuss how the romantic narrative constructed by culture drew us in before we understood how notions of identity, desire, sexuality and femininity organised our thinking.

'Had you really blocked all memory of this baby out, until now?' I ask, 'surely there must have been days when something would remind you?'

No, I had felt such a sense of shame. I just didn't have the memory. I had blocked it out completely.

What happened next?

I told my adult children. There was no censure or judgment or criticism from them. Just tears and hugs. My daughter said 'we'll find him, I know we will.' And we did, through Jigsaw.⁴⁷

I rejoice with Luce over this news. 'Have the feelings of guilt and shame gone?'

Yes, through the telling, through the receiving of my story, and because there were no accusations, there has been a real healing. In the opening of this space, ointment has metaphorically been rubbed into the scab of my wounds.

'Well,' I say, repeating the words of Barbara Turner-Vesselago (1995).

Growth comes in quantum leaps, usually by way of a series of writings that grope blindly toward an energy – following a pattern not discernible at the time, but one which in retrospect looks absolutely necessary (p.40).

I send Luce her story, her new narrative to read. We make corrections. Is she happy with the quotes I have chosen to weave theory and story together? Did she understand them? Yes. And then she offers a quote of her own choosing, and one of Adrienne Rich's (1980) to complete this part of her story.

It's a pleasure to share one's memories. Everything remembered is dear, endearing, touching, precious. At least the past is safe – though we didn't know it at the time. We know it now. Because it is in the past; because we have survived.

Susan Sontag, 1975, Etcetera.⁴⁸

and

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult to come by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language this will become not only unspoken but unspeakable.

(Rich, 1980, p. 199)

⁴⁷ Jigsaw is an Australian organisation which endeavours to reunite adopted children with their biological parents.

⁴⁸ Luce was unable to provide full referencing for this quote. I have not included Sontag in the list of references.

LILETH'S STORY

*I am not to be pitied
or under-valued
or time dated
my choices
were not
always
mine.*

*Now I am possum-woman,
grey streaked, titties pointing down,
childbearing a possibility of the past,
not old, not grand, not eminent or known
just living my middle years with pride,
not so distant or different from my past
PAUSE, MENOPAUSE, MENOPAST.
(Lileth 1997)*

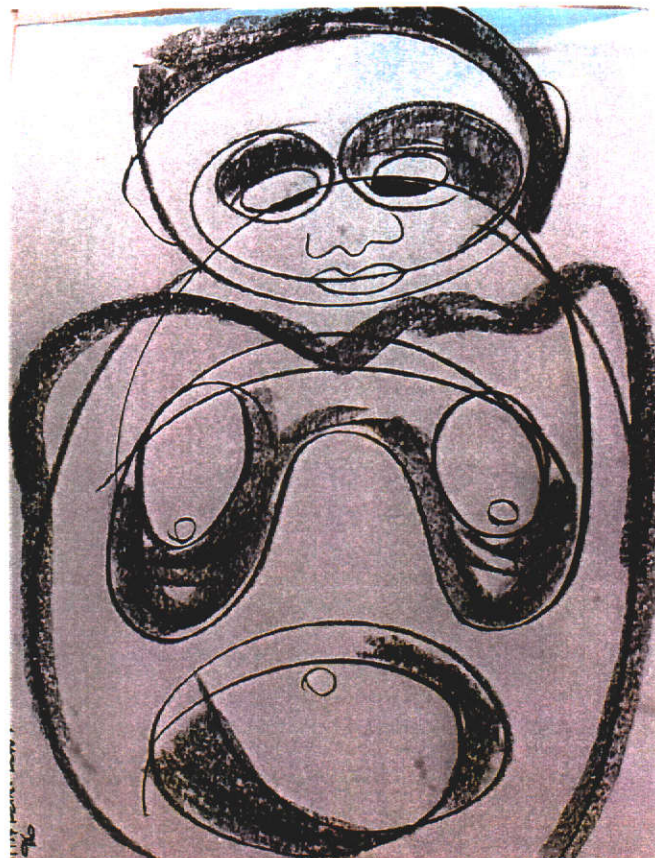


Fig. L1 **'Possum-woman'**

I made contact with Lileth through the Women's Artist Register in Melbourne at the beginning of 1996. She was involved with its organisation. I had requested that the artists' register forward my letter of invitation to its members. Lileth telephoned me to say she was interested in taking part in the research project, but she objected to my use of medical terminology in the letter. She felt my use of words was distancing. She said, that if I could reword it to make it less formal, more approachable to women she would take part. I changed the letter.

Our first meeting was in December 1996. I was on a visit to the eastern states to attend a conference on qualitative research methods at Monash University. My plan was to record an interview, see her artwork and take photographs. It was a timely visit. She was in the midst of setting up an exhibition of her recent work. As luck would have it, these photographs did not turn out. I had a new camera. Somehow I had gotten the settings wrong. It was to be my only experience of failure with the camera, and it had to happen with someone who lived 4,000 miles away.

We had been corresponding for over nine months. My questions and letters to her were typed. On one occasion I rang her and recorded an hour-long interview. Another short phone call followed. Her replies came in the form of beautiful silver embossed cards – her own hand work - and pages of coloured paper covered with strong, powerful, round thick, black handwriting. They were written using a calligraphy pen. With sensitivity and consideration, she had written down the sequence of events that were her experience of menopause. I transcribed the telephone conversation and re-wrote all the written material. I then returned it to her. Although I had never seen Lileth, and had only heard her voice; her handwriting imprinted itself on my body-mind and gave me a strong visual sense of who she was, how she might live her life. Through our exchange of letters and through hearing each other's voice over the telephone, we began to construct knowledge about each other.

In her first letter she wrote:

In the summer of '94 i had a fine focus but dull & constant pain in the region of my left ovary and after a couple of weeks and it didn't go away, i sought

medical attention. (I also had a temporary knot in one of my intestines which caused pain and discomfort but after crisis, resolved itself). It was suggested i go for tests including ones for menopause ie. hormone level. No cyst or other problem was found, but my level was below fertility ie. i was unable to conceive and had reached menopause. This set off my (general) doctor's response of fear of early (not premature) menopause and resultant osteoporosis (bone thinning).

I had had little warning, one period in the New Year and then it stopped. No side effects, hot flushes, discomfort etc except this odd pain (which continued for 9 months).

Because i'd been through extreme grief/distress in this period, where the final break of a committed relationship of four years had happened, it crossed my mind that the pain was biological constriction (psychosomatic) of the ovaries.

I had loved a man and had wanted a child, his child, but he had 2 children from previous relationships, and, in his way, was a committed father and very much - as distances and circumstances permitted - in their lives. Much love was shared between him & his children though understanding was limited, i felt. He had told me that he did not want any more children (partly from lack of choice of either of these two, (partly from knowing the energy, commitment and cost of raising children from his experience under poverty conditions/hard times) and was silencing in his way of preventing me and denying me my wish to talk this through. This ie being my choice of loving him but accepting the decision of having no children (his or anyone's) or leaving the relationship/him and seeking a relationship with a man who might/would want to share a child or share the germination.

I was aware that at this time in my life, 38, that this decision was a crucial one. Because of my life view, that though children were precious, i equally

value quality adult-to-adult loveships (a decision i once had to make in an earlier relationship where a child was not possible) and thus i was very torn as i had both the urge & wish (not conditioned, i believe, my family love children and i had worked years with children and knew them) and i loved and adored this man and believed it was a relationship that would last.

I chose to stay with him. Sadly it didn't last, or more accurately it became obvious to me that too much of me was to be denied, (not only a child), that he couldn't see me fully and had a narrow understanding and limited support of me as an artist and a woman.

And this new crisis, my final decision to break off relations, following a number of emotional betrayals by him, was a real tragedy. I had moved into a new real space of my own (rented), the first for years and had just finished my art course, and was in unfamiliar surroundings, poor (my income was stretched to limits) setting up a new life and trying to find my feet and knowing that i would miss him dearly. It was even more devastating than i expected: i suffered grief including loss, missing him like hell, broken dreams, memories of joys & humiliations and the realisation that i had "gambled/chosen" the man (actual) over the child (opportunity/dream) and i had lost both. My sense of self was severely damaged as a person & very much as a woman, i had chosen "badly", i had lost the chance of having a child.

I knew i wouldn't find someone/or them me, quickly for it isn't my way - knowing this from past experience. I was alone and i would be until i had healed and was ready to risk loving again. Too late for a child of my own. I felt strong about it & i knew it was the right decision of "leaving him" but it hurt.

. . . . I sought medical & natural therapy information about the pain that persisted for 9 months and finally it went away. In that time i learnt about

the hoo-ha about "jollyng"/encouraging women about this time called menopause. I was distressed & i was in pain, and the sadness and loss of possibilities of a child, and the sadness of loss of my period - but i did not regret or have bad feelings about my menopause which i felt and i consider as a natural passage (though i did feel it was brought on early through the culmination of the relationship). It was early but not very as i had got my first period at ten (early), so for 32 two years I had been having "periods". . . I had never hated/scorned or cheapened my periods. I had always valued them, though as a girl, especially, they had caused inconveniences and occasional difficulties. Pains had been alleviated by roller skating, giving me street freedom as well as relief. As a woman i had enjoyed my periods as i was aware of the heightened intuitive and grounded awareness i had on those days. It changed my efficiency in systems terms but it gave special colour, sensation and reality to living. I regretted this loss. The rhythm (ever-changing in my case) of my body was no longer peaking, waxing & waning. A new rhythm would come, and the unknown or "progress" is always a little worrying.

In my contact with medicos, who sometimes did not have the skill to differentiate between my grief & yet my positive basic attitude to menopause, i came to hear some old/hoary "received wisdoms" that were meant well but wide of the mark.

"You don't have to worry about contraception any more". I hadn't worried for years and it was a "worry" that i accepted with accepting my body and ironically was sad now. And the new worry is AIDS, not contraception.

"Hormone treatment would stop me being cranky" . I hadn't been cranky, indeed as my circumstances improved, sad as i was, i was better humoured/natured every day.

"I could/would attract younger men". (Was this a vanity issue? youthfulness?). Why would I want to attract younger men? (stud vanity question?). Chauvinist dinosaurs notwithstanding, young men are not generally beacons of insight, understanding, equality, sensitivity or real knowledge... Maturity has its own values/qualities - whose fantasies were they activating? not mine...

"You won't be less of a woman". I stared, of course i won't, why would i be? It's part of being a woman. Childlessness/unchilded i had also accepted, on a level, as not defining me too. I am a woman, childed or not, fertile or not.

The hormone therapies looked gruesome to me: I remembered "the pill" and the battering of chemicals standardised (refined over the years into micro etc), on the fine tuning of my body. Here was another one.

At the Women's hospital, from a specialist, I was offered a small run (hormonal) to see if it would bring back my periods. (tho' the tests had said i was below fertility). I picked them up, looked at the gross packaging instructions: an abused computer digital artwork of a frenzied cranky woman turned into a calm neat woman (neither i relate to).
- it looked like a new form of Valium - control the woman 90's style... and i went home to think it out... later that night i flushed it down the toilet. Two days later i had a tiny natural period - the last. Was it because i was thinking so much about it?

Research I did

Jean Hailes, Women's Health Services, Naturopaths - general and women specific, gave me info of correlation of osteoporosis with exercise, hormonal treatments, food, health habits, family histories, heart, cancer, midlife crisis etc.

Most of it was of value, but more helpful if less presented as bolstering up women who don't have control of their lives. (self-determination/existentialism/circumstances beyond anyone's control/fate notwithstanding etc). I felt and suffered from, as a result a very clear under-estimation of women and women who seek knowledge. I was saddened and it was already such a sad time for me. I would have liked to have enjoyed it as I enjoyed getting my first period & I had enjoyed meeting my sexuality and its stages of development. And as I had enjoyed my periods, for all the odd pain and social problems this culture adds to it. Or is it meant to be sad - as a step to relinquishing the past to take up a future new direction?

I learnt a lot & came to the conclusion that medical/chemical hormonal "balances" by tablet or implant were too harsh, unpredictable, not safe. Alternative methods - special diet etc, were obviously beneficial but didn't really solve "the problem". Oestrogen has effects on a broad base through the body, not just bones or fertility. So what to do? Finally after much research I, came across a book in the local library that talked of vaginal inserts. - this made sense to me.

- (a) placed at the site of question (or near enough)*
- (b) Could be timed and varied to suit my feelings about how my body was responding. So if i felt it was too strong, i could leave a longer-time gap between.*

Why had the heavy duty guns been offered first?. (Excuse the military metaphor).

So I went to the Family Planning Association and got a script. It was wonderful - simple and had the effect of well-being, balance, gradually took them and lessened them till i felt comfortable, fear of osteoporosis diminished a bit. Of course naturally through sexual intercourse the male hormones that a women gets inadvertently, (is this true do you know?) must

have its effect and celibacy changes this too. (This is a real question that needs to be gone into one day).

After the initial discomfort of pain (9 months) and the odd tiny period it was no major ordeal, it was straight forward. I got no hot flushes etc, except years later, when in an inappropriate situation (bus stop, library queue) i would get a memory of sex with my ex-lover, all the sensual action & pleasure of it, and find myself flushing hot with embarrassment and wondering if:

- a. Something hormonal happened in my body.*
- b. Some sexual trigger had happened near me (image/movement)*
- c. Why/how had i relaxed so these undercurrents had reached to the surface?*
- d. had i or someone nearby unconsciously been attracted/found desirable another/me? Or also had a memory?*

(Letter September 1996)

In accordance with Lileth's request, I tell this story almost in its entirety to highlight the importance of naming our own experiences and then of having someone listen to them. Davies et al., (1997) writing in *Ruptures In the Skin of Silence: A Collective Biography*, speak of the necessity for women to write themselves into the world. They go on to stress the importance of this activity for revealing a history which belongs to women; a history which is connected to women's own bodies, to their lived experience. In portraying their collective account of silence they write:

Much of women's writing about silence is about the ways in which men have silenced them, and their anger (often silent) that is unleashed when they recognise this. In *Listening to Silences* Hedges and Fishkin remind us of Tillie Olsen and Adrienne Rich who wrote of 'the centrality of silence in women's culture specifically the ways in which women's voices have gone unheard. Women's attempts to be heard are 'outbursts' named as 'neurosis.' See *now how upset you have made yourself* and her outbursts are used as weapons

against her by men who remain silent. When her cries ring out, they wound her, and she is reduced to silence (p.66).

In one of our telephone conversation I asked Lileth 'how did you feel while writing your answers to the questions I sent you?

It was a very good experience for me, because what happened, was that I had been very distressed... The doctors could not differentiate between my grief and my positive basic attitude towards menopause. Then, there is always the time factor.

You just don't get enough time to really be heard. {In writing} I had clarified a lot of things in my mind about it, and because it was a couple of years on, I was able to articulate it in a way that would make sense to other people. I was actually frightened at one stage that people would see me as neurotic about it, whereas I don't think there was any evidence at all. But there was so much in a way, there was denial of suffering (health and medical practitioners) because I suppose I made them feel uncomfortable and in writing it up I could see that I wasn't neurotic.

The other thing though, was that it shocked me the first time I saw my words typed up. They looked so bald on the page. It made me wonder, does that mean I am not a good writer? How I shape a word has its own power, and how I lay it on the page has its own power. When it is transferred into print medium a lot of that power is diminished. The human hand-mark has been removed.

In my next letter to Lileth I asked her to elaborate further on how she experienced her body during the different stages of menopause and to reflect further on how the absence of blood to her monthly routine impacted in her life.⁴⁹ She wrote back:

...the real grieving for me about menopause was that I did not have a child, that that chance had gone ...Then there was the sadness of the loss of my period. I was no longer peaking, or waxing or waning.

⁴⁹ In my first draft of Lileth's story this section was presented as poetised text. I was attempting to portray an embodied and direct account of her experiences. It was constructed from recorded conversations and Lileth's correspondence. After reading my description of her experiences Lileth re-wrote her answers with reference to her original notes and clarification.

It was the loss of emotional change that I actually felt in my body.

Having your period, it changes you because you are on a natural physical high ... It is like a natural drug. In a way it is a hit. A psychological hit. When i could, i would gear my days so i had slower more centred days, more natural activities. A grounded awareness. I let time & space for intuitive understanding, and experienced direct living, a richer inner and outer life.

When a woman bleeds, her body is doing something that women's bodies have done for millions of years & it has no memory. This space in my body has no memory of computers, has no memory of modern systems and cities, which I like for a few days each month.

Once i recognised my acceptance of menopause, irregardless of timing & reason, i found it a delightful transition. I tidied up tampons & pads into the bathroom for visiting women. It gave me extra room in drawers. I became aware i would no longer have to soak underpants or worry about swimming or stains on clothes.

I gazed at the moon often, and wondered at its pull, its rhythm of month to month that i no longer have. I sensed the earth and its girdle now mine. My time-line has a longer space now. I remembered the pleasures of my period, the different colours of the blood, depending on the position in the span of days and the heaviness of my belly, and softness, and stiffness of the released blood.

My body's vaginal fluids smelt different but pleasant. I felt its naturalness, that it was meant to be, that it was part of life, now part of my life.

My body had already thickened up with middle age and poverty diet but i was becoming happier daily with bouts of grief that were grief only, not mood swings, that lessened as they healed (Letter September 1996).

On one occasion Lileth sent me a print (Fig. L2). It was a pair of pants with a rose stamped in the crutch. She sent words to describe the image (Fig. L3).



Fig. L2 *'Red Letter Day'*

Now I find my thoughts travel back to my visit to the gallery. It is late in the afternoon and the weather is turning cool. The gallery is located in a renovated Edwardian Fire Station in one of Melbourne's older suburbs. In the same building is a community-based printing workshop. To one side of the gallery in what would have been the fireman's fire truck/carriage space is an area set aside with printing presses and trestle tables. As I enter through the red wooden door my nose is assailed with the redolent smell of printing inks and acids. A sharp industrial odour. And, the soft smell of old dust and rags. Smells. They trigger responses from deep within the body. It is amazing how many memories can flash through your mind in the space of a few seconds.

RED LETTER DAYS

my mother told me of its immanence
as a growth experience to be proud of:
one becomes a woman.

I heard the negativity and experienced
the discomforts, societal and physical,
but i did not internalise these.

I appreciated the chemistry of these days
each month, the anarchic and archaic
living where cognitive terms
were displaced.

Often i shaped my month, my timetable
to live these in softer circumstances,
without denial.

I feared pregnancy at times for poverty
prevented dreams of responsible
motherhood, yet i was saddened
when the choice was gone,
both at the flow of new blood
and at menopause.

My regrets are gone, new fullnesses
fill my life
but I remember RED LETTER DAYS.

Fig. L3

For one brief moment my body-mind returns to the time when I was a student printmaker at art school. What fun that had been. I smile inwardly. I bring my awareness back to the room. It has grand proportions but its age is showing and it feels grubby, and the cement floor is covered in worn paint.

With its soaring wooden ceiling it has a feeling of space. It's a nice room to be in. Lileth has brought a portfolio of work to show me. She is a prolific artist. She shows me an image of herself and her twin sister in her mother's womb. She has called it '*Of Women Borne*'.

'From Adrienne Rich?' I ask.

Yes, she also uses the term. It's not part of a new series, I did it a long time ago.

Next, she produces the image of '*Red Letter Day*'. She places it alongside another image. Like much of her other work it is on embossed silver card. It measures about 30cm by 26 cm. On the left is the same image of the underpants with the rose. On the right is an envelope. Open.

Tell me about the envelope image.⁵⁰

It's a piece, the open envelope, about the intangible/tangible inside, that awaits or has gone. It's also a cultural artifact or social construct if one looks at it through anthropology or sociology. I first used it [the envelope] as opening an "ancient" personal memory and letting little black butterflies escape as regrets. It has come to have other related values, as release, giving up of regrets, recognising and freeing the past, without losing the memory, that the containment that is the open envelope. As a minor point, letters and mail/handwritten communication have always been significant in my living.

⁵⁰ This story I also originally presented as poetised text. I have replaced it with Lileth's written response in answer to my question.

The juxtaposition of the envelope and the underpants is intentional. I felt it was appropriate because the pants were the containment and the blood was from that inner space again. So it is about inner & outer space and the envelope and the underpants both represent enclosure.

A previous piece was called "Red Letter Day" with a blood rose as a stamp on the envelope and a blood rose on the crutch of the pants. The rose comes from the sense of opening out and of releasing. The bud growing to fullness, so the shape of the rose (for me) is also about femininity. It is in part the vulva, but it has a bigger meaning than the vulva. It is also a symbol of the cosmos.

Now at menopause there is no blood so it becomes "White Letter Day", that is no marking for blood/by blood. The open envelope is also the recognition that the regrets have also gone, that I have accepted the 'fait accompli' of time and natural progression.

We work our way through her many pieces of work. Time slips effortlessly by. I shoot off a roll of film and then insert a new roll in preparation for documenting the exhibition.

We walk up a ramp to the gallery space. I wonder if this is the room where perhaps the fire engine once lived. In this space, Lileth is in the process of setting up her work for the exhibition. It is called '*quiet excitement; grammar*'. Some of the exhibits have been hung but most of the work is lying on the floor. Four crisp, newly patched, white washed walls envelope the fragrance of the oiled timber floor. I can still smell it. Sweet and thick. This room also has a high, wooden ceiling. The windows have been closed over. It is a peaceful quiet place, removed from the noise of the traffic outside. We stand in front of a series of eight images constructed from embossed silver cardboard. It is entitled '*Woman Forms*'. She directs my attention to an object depicting a stretching goddess. 'What is the woman stretching for?' I inquire.

. . . . she is stretching out of life energy, reaching, exploring the extremities. The image next to her is a very ancient goddess with a moon in her hand, carved into stone bas-

. . . . she is stretching out of life energy, reaching, exploring the extremities. The image next to her is a very ancient goddess with a moon in her hand, carved into stone bas-relief; and then woman-in-bell, armless and skirted, head high; and the winged-and-hatted goddess – definitely not angel, and then there is the ancient one. This one has crossed arms and no decoration, minimalist lines for nose, breasts, crutch and form. All of them have some information which tells us that women haven't changed in significant physical ways.

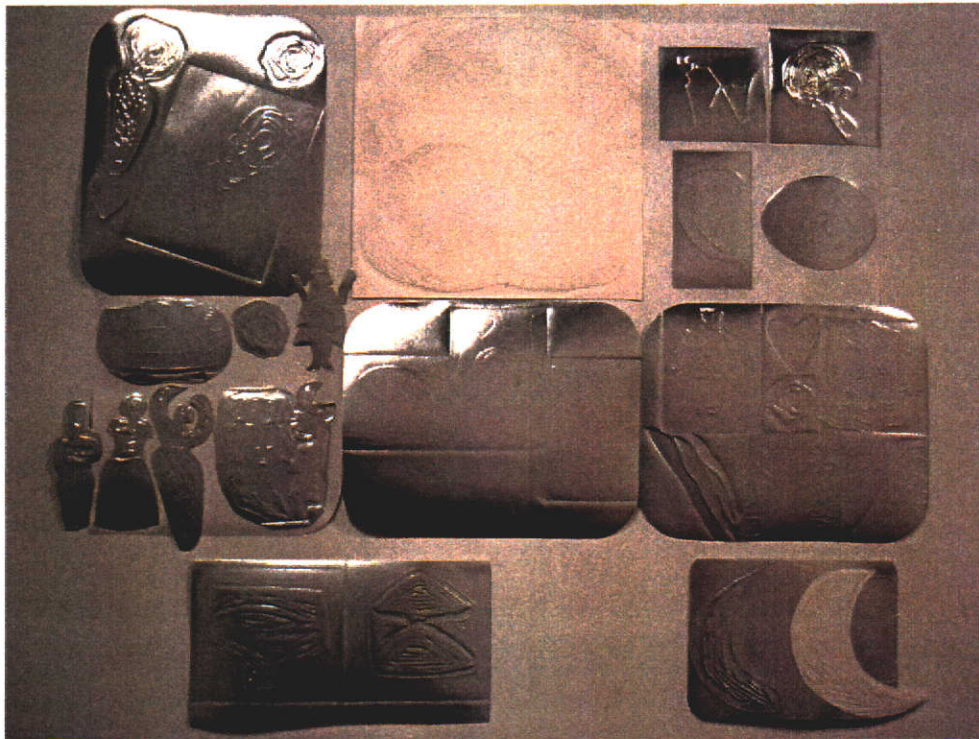


Fig. L4

'Woman Forms'

As my gaze falls on the outstretched arms of the silver form I can hear the voice of Adrienne Rich (1980) in the back of my mind.

How shall we ever make the world intelligent? ... question everything ... remember what it has been forbidden even to mention ... come together telling our stories, to look afresh at, and then to describe for ourselves, the frescoes of the Ice Age, the nudes of 'high art,' the Minoan seals and figurines, the moon landscape embossed with the booted print of a male foot, the microscopic virus, the scarred and tortured body of the planet Earth. To do this kind of work takes a capacity for constant active presence, a naturalists' attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangement, decoding difficult and complex messages left for us by women of the past. It is work, in short, that is opposed by, and stands in opposition to, the entire twentieth-century white male capitalist culture (pp. 13-14).

I pose the question. 'What is the relevance and importance of using the goddess imagery?'

I am aware that the minute one uses an image that comes from a culture that is ancient or one that one has peripheral access to, that one could be playing on connections that are not strongly there. I use Goddess images for several reasons. I became aware that I grew up in a patriarchy and that most of the imagery that I was seeing was male orientated and male-centred imagery. The advantage to me when I suddenly realised that there were images of women whether they were in fertility form or in a more womanly form were highly relevant to me, to my sense of selfhood, of womanhood. Women were not meant to be subordinate, cliched or stereotyped. The fact that I have one, two, three, six goddesses on the one sheet and no two are from the same culture is highly significant to me. To realise it was possible to find such strong and interesting and varied femaleness in many cultures, and I did identify with all of them in many different ways and it deepened and widened my experience of imaging women.

But the stress of leading my life and having this continuity is very important because female imagery of real experience needs to be captured and shown to counterbalance social constructs.

What sort of social constructs?

Menstruation is a word that was 'private' in our society. A word loaded with hygiene and societal taboos. Horror or sad stories of women's pains and discomfort. A girl's unprepared and roughly informed awareness and experience of its initial onset.

I then ask if the experience of menopause has created a space for reflection on past patterns of behaviour and understandings.

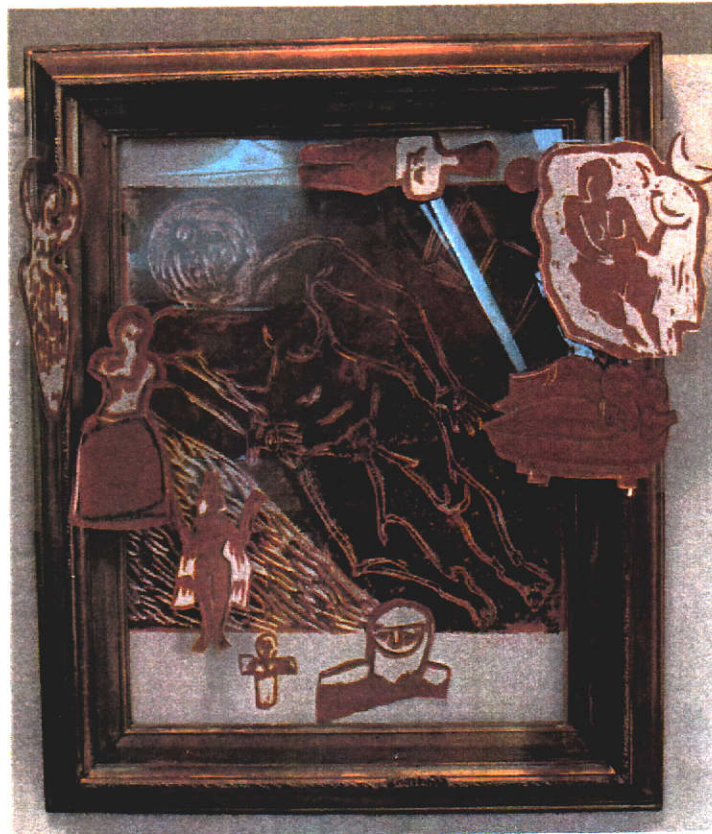


Fig. L5

'Woman'

Yeah, through every transitional passage in my life, however brief I have made time to stop, reflect and feel. This space has been bigger, more expansive. Menopause gave me the chance to dwell more deeply on the myths, the allegories and the narratives that women live by. A thread running through all of my work, is exploring what it is to be a woman. There is a lot of stuff talked about what femininity is and how much of it is constructed. I believe there are some essences that are crucial to pinpointing what womanhood itself is. In this work I am creating a new narrative. It is one that says living in a woman's body is different. There is a sense of being a woman that speaks to me from my body.

Regardless of whether you have had a child or not in your womb, or whether you have breast-fed a baby or not, the body still tells you intuitively and physically certain information. It is not about carrying children, or about fertility, or about cultural feminisation. It is part of that mysterious something that we cannot grasp, or hold, but somehow you just simply know. It is experiential.

In making this work I am both being and doing, aware and experiencing. Intuitive knowing and perceiving. Neither mutually exclusive nor separate. I feel a wholeness. A personal and cultural awareness and its implications.

So I do a lot of work in private to keep other people's voices out of my head, and because I find I have internalised a lot of taboos and I find I can dismantle them at this point so it doesn't interfere with the work, and then a point comes and I have to deal with taboos and expectancies.

I think it is important [reflecting on attitudes] ...I learned at a certain stage as an artist that I had to ignore those taboos ... Many artists don't do certain work because they carry these internal taboos. So I decided that I would do my work then worry about the taboos when I actually put it out in the culture, because that is where the taboos were, whether those taboos were relevant or not. I watched myself with the menstruation work and I didn't have any problems at all in creating the imagery, but when I started thinking about putting it out there and how people would respond to the menstruation

pad, and how many women have not actually seen their period as a positive experience, I was startled.

Because my experience has been relatively positive it would be nice to put it out there to help balance some of the other attitudes and bad experiences.

What sort of taboos are you talking about?

The taboos are about a privacy thing. We live in a fairly antiseptic world, so there is a denial of a lot of visceral and physical experiences about our bodies ... Women are very private about their periods because other people can be abusive in a very subtle way sometimes. It is interesting because [as a society] we haven't talked a lot about menstruation itself but menopause is the final stage of the menstrual experience. So some of the attitudes and theories about menstruation need to be spelt out for other for younger women so that they can understand where menopause fits in.

We move around the gallery. There is a story to every piece of work. I take more photographs. I am worried that the silver paper used in many of her images is creating a reflection when I use the flash. Will they turn out? I wonder. The evening has drawn to a close. It is now dark. Lileth suggests we go to an Italian café and eat. I remember eating Foccacia. It was good. Our conversation was good. We talk about other aspects of our lives, about our histories, our artwork, the work of the Women's Artist Register. Finally we part with a hug. I hoped I would have the opportunity to see her again.

I returned to my hometown. The photos were developed. Disaster. Panic. A flurry of frantic letters about re-photographing the work. Life goes on. In due course more photographs arrived but they were not good reproductions. Months passed. In fact it was well over a year before I saw Lileth again. We continued to write. For Christmas she sent me decorations to hang on my tree. They were small silver images of the stretching goddess and a moon. I had seen these moon shapes at the gallery. Lileth said,

Goddesses . . . speak to me of femaleness. About blood and body fluids effected by the moon. They are about endurance, survival. (Lileth, 1996)

‘they have the same curve as a pad when it has been around a woman’s bottom for awhile because the shape takes the curve of the body.’ I didn’t have a Christmas tree that year, so I hung them in the window where they revolved slowly with the summer breezes. It amused me to watch the goddess and the moon-pad oscillate on their individual threads in some strange sort of spiral dance.

I make travel plans to attend the workshop on Magnetic Island. I realise I can organise my trip to visit with Lileth on the way home. A space has suddenly appeared. A meeting is arranged. She takes a day off work and comes to my room at the hotel. I show her how I have begun to construct her original handwritten story in poetised text. She reads it and then says:

A story that is told is never the same story that is heard. Each teller speaks from a biographical position that is unique, and, in a sense, unshareable. Each hearer of a story hears from a similarly unshareable position. But these two versions of the story merge and run together into a collective, group version of the story that was told. Because there are always stories embedded within stories, including the told story and the heard story, there are only multiple versions of shareable and unshareable personal experience.
(Denzin, 1989, p.72)

*It has a different feeling to what I said to you.
I too am a writer. I feel it is important to put it
down exactly the way I said it to you. I thought
about it carefully before I wrote it all down.
When you edit it, it changes what I am saying .
. . . These are not my words: they are your
words because they are not in the order I
placed them on the page.*

I sit there head nodding trying to think of something to say. Wishing I could conjure Laurel Richardson into the room so that she could explain the notion of poetised texts and about how the story that is told is never the same as the story that is read or heard. I wanted to explain Hillman’s (1990) thoughts on sensing images and how poetry is placed on a page to force the eye ‘to slow itself to the cadence of the images’, but I couldn’t find the words (p.61). In those few moments I could recall Richardson’s (1994) comments about experimental writing:

... experimental writers raise and display postmodernist issues. Chief among these are questions of how the author positions the Self as knower and teller. For the experimental writer, these lead to the intertwined problems of

subjectivity/authority/authorship/reflexivity, on the one hand, and representational form, on the other (p. 520).

*Yes a story told is not the same as a story heard,
but a story written is not the same as a "poetised
editing" by another, it is a false translation. And
a woman's individual voice has its own integrity
and knowledge to be shared as base source.
Trust the reader with the original*

(Letter from Lileth, September 1998)

So, here I was face to face with 'the problem'. 'Okay. Let's compromise. I will edit the words of your handwritten work so that the context isn't changed if you will work through these other texts with me. Put your body back into the writing with me. With your input we can give your words something of the colour and texture that was in the telling of your experience and in my hearing of it.'

For over two hours we worked with the texts. Picking out phrases and highlighting words that would best illustrate her experience. We were shivering. Melbourne in the depths of winter is bitterly cold and there was no heating in the room.

Then I showed Lileth the poem I had written about her image 'Woman' (Fig. L5). It was my interpretation of what I thought she was trying to say in her work. It was my embodied and imaginary sense of the printed image, of entering her body as text. But I wasn't entirely happy with it. I couldn't put into words the connections that I felt at a non-verbal level between feeling the image and my own experiences.

'Woman' 1

The frame
 a symbol of me as woman,
 spectacle of the world.
 Split
 from my existence through the gaze.

 Visible only
 through the stain of my existence.
 Where is the relic
 of my ancient desiring self?
 Where is my image?

I bleed into the frame.
 Early blood of a period
 dull red pink.
 Month after month for thousands of years
 Until submerged
 under layers of your knowledge.

Excavate peel back the sedimented layers
 Dig into
 the non-phallic border space of my existence
 I am a vast
 and unexplored site
 At one with the earth and the moon
 Trace the echo
 and lift me from this distant land.
 Breathe life into the inner landscape

 and restore me to my homeland.

 (RW)

'Woman'

I made this last year for the last exhibition at the Women's Gallery in Melbourne before it closed down. Called 'Woman'. It is a pink and brown colour ... A sort of dull red pink. Like the early blood of a period... It is a three dimensional print/collage using images of Goddesses and fertility imagery from a long time ago with a self-image of myself in my early forties as the major motif. It was to find a common thread in what being woman is. There is a lot of stuff talked about what femininity is and how much of it is constructed. There are levels of construction but there is somewhere I believe on the bottom line some essences that are crucial and pinpointing what womanhood itself is.
 (Interview 6.12.1996)

And so, I asked Lileth if together we could create a poem that reflected something of how both us felt in our response to this image. 'What do you see when you look at the symbols and the colours?'

The frame is about context – art context, social context. It is symbolically painting in blood. It is about reclaiming. It speaks to me of females, bodies, blood. Women know about women. They may not know on a cognitive level, but they do on an intuitive level. For me, this image of woman is an affirmation.

Blood: The life principle; the soul, strength, the rejuvenating force.
(Cooper, 1995, p.22)

As late as the 17th century, menstruating women were still forbidden to enter a church. One of the ideas that underlay the 500 year old witch persecutions in Europe was the idea that postmenopausal women were filled with occult knowledge because they no longer sent forth their wise blood, but retained it in their veins and so became magical persons.
(Walker, 1988, p.301)

Then, she sits with my poem on her knees and with her black calligraphy pen begins to make changes. We work through the words. We say them out loud. We taste them. We argue gently over them. She worries that it *smacks of biology – destiny*. We move words backwards and forwards on the page. Like the colours in a kaleidoscope, trying to get the right pattern and harmony. We try to think of different metaphors for what I am actually trying to say. We talk about the resonance of words and how this resonance can go in four or five different directions at once.

Before our eyes, in our ears, we have discourse in the process of becoming voice, becoming speech: what dominates is the impression of thought in movement. Text in movement.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.41)

Which direction are we trying to portray? Who are these words addressed to?

Patriarchal society, not just men.

We come to the word non-phallic.

Do you mean gynocentric?

No, non-phallic means a space where humans are more than just physical matter. Where gender is not an issue. A space where we no longer feel the discontinuity and fragmentation between the territorial markers of being masculine or feminine. And, it is about the sense of alienation and division from nature that makes us feel strangers in this matrix of physical existence. It is also about wholeness. Unity. We cannot separate ourselves from nature. I am trying to talk about the relationship between matter and consciousness, that consciousness cannot exclude bodily knowledge. Then we discuss the sentence *I am a vast and unexplored site*.

What do you mean? Men have looked. They have explored us. They have colonized us. Women have to reclaim. Men have to be pushed back.

I think about this question. What did I really mean? As Lileth crosses words out, alters the sense of the poem, she worries that she is destroying my creativity. 'Words are precious,' she says, 'these are your words, your thoughts and feelings.' I tell her that I am still learning to write, constructive criticism is useful. Our attention remains focussed on this sentence.

She adds the words, *For you, I am a vast and unexplored site, yet marked with your footprints*. As she does so, she comments, 'they are so proud that they put those bloody footprints on the moon. Let's put that in there.'

I nod my head. I return to my thoughts on exploring border spaces, the spaces that defy the demands of the gaze, of colonization. 'It is a joint thing,' I say. 'We are in this together. Men and women. It is about reclaiming, but it is also about shifting consciousness, not pushing back. It's a re-mapping of shared interior landscapes where the fictional 'Other' and what it signifies is not denigrated. It is about bringing us back into partnership with the universe and with each other. In these tactile border spaces we can reconstruct the map of cultural divisions that have been subtly embedded in our

material bodies. And we can do this by re-connecting to the earth's energy and by reflecting on our bodily senses and the intelligence and deep wisdom it carries. These are the thoughts that I connect to, when I feel your images with my body.'

Then, we look at the sentence *Trace the echo and lift me from this distant land.*

'I am nervous about this sentence,' she says. 'It sounds like you are waiting for a bloke to come and rescue you.' I stop and think for a moment. Am I, at some unconscious archetypal level still attached to romantic story lines? I'm still thinking about that question as I write this story.

Time passes. More words are re-worked until we have a new narrative. I read it through several times. I consider whether its metaphoric images of the pre-symbolic feminine suggest a space of potential for re-figuring a different sense of human subjectivity. And I wonder whether the line *us women know our bodies* poetically signifies not only the space of difference, of diversity, of rupture, but a less rational idea of nature. For now, it is as close as I can get to the unexpressed.

'Woman' 2

The frame

a symbol of me as woman
spectacle of the world.

Split
from my existence through the gaze.

Visible only
through the stain of my existence.

Where is the relic
of my ancient desiring self?
Where is my image?

I bleed into the frame.
Early blood of a period
dull red pink.
Month after month for thousands of years
Until submerged
under layers of your knowledge

Excavate

peel back the sedimented layers
 Dig into
 the non-phallic border space
 of my existence

I and mine
 us women
 know
 our bodies
 our connections,
 some in talk
 some silent
 some yet unsaid
 each generation
 discovers
 old and new mysteries
 of women and womanliness.

Yet for you
 I am still a vast and unexplored site
 marked with your footprints
 at one with the earth and the moon
 Trace the echo
 from this distant land
 breathe life into your inner landscape
 and restore me
 to My Homeland
 (Lileth/RW)

It is time for Lileth to go. Before leaving she hands me new photographs of the work I had unsuccessfully tried to photograph on my earlier visit. Relief. They have turned out. She also gives me two photocopied articles from *The Power of Feminist Art*. The first is an essay by Joanna Freuh (1994), *The Body Through Women's Eyes*. The second, by art critic and professor of women's studies Gloria Feman Orenstein (1994), *Recovering her story: Feminist Artists Reclaim The Great Goddess*. Orenstein outlines the history of the movement to reclaim the Goddess through art and feminist multicultural theory. I glance through it and my eyes fall upon these words:

... the meaning of these early Goddess works by women artists of the 1970s must be read against the Western herstorical background of a powerful tradition of women mystics, heretics, and visionaries, as well as contextualised

within a movement that for the first time directed its energy and power toward self-consciously creating art that would re-imagine what it might have been like to be female, and to experience one's body, mind, spirit, and soul free of all the fetters imposed upon women by Western patriarchal religions.
(Orenstein, 1994, p.176)

I farewell Lileth with another hug. I am sorry to see her leave. I enjoy her company. She challenges my thinking. Now, the afternoon is mine to do what I like with. I decide to go to the National Gallery. They have two special exhibitions running. One is displaying American and Australian landscapes since the 1900s, and the other exhibition is on contemporary religious art. I buy a ticket to view *Beyond Belief – Modern Art and the Religious Imagination*. As I walk into the exhibition space, the first thing I see is a bronze and glass sculpture of a woman squatting, head turned to one side.⁵¹ The form is fixed to a white wall at eye level. It is upside down. Her eyes are turned skywards. They are fixed and staring. Compelling. My body twists and turns so that I can look into her eyes. And then, I see words printed on the wall. I read them. It is a contemporary myth retelling the story of Lileth.

Lileth, the first
woman created equal to Adam
refused to lie under him.
God, said Adam
make me a woman
who will stay.
This woman you have
given me refuses to obey me
she has her own will
she is strong and evil.
God listened to Adam
And then
there was Eve.
Lileth climbed the garden wall
hardly looking back.

Cursed by Adam
 she fell into the night
 whispering and calling
 the Eves across the centuries

YES –
 you are equal – listen
 you are not of Adams rib
 you are

(YOU ARE)

A group of teenage schoolgirls in their navy-blue shapeless uniforms cluster around me. They read the words out loud. They giggle and laugh at Lileth's nakedness. They haven't yet learned to name their own story. At what point in their lives will they come to reflect upon the knowledge that for centuries their female bodies have been the product of the cultural gaze, of the projected image of desire? When will they discover that:

It is in fact her sex that names her, that subjects her to the story lines in which not only is she object but her desire and others' desire for her is organized in terms of that object status. The naming and the story lines, through which that naming is made to make sense, are not an external clothing that can be cast aside but become the very subjectivity through which each woman knows herself.

(Davies, 1992, p.65)

My thoughts return to the woman to whom I gave the pseudonym Lileth before I even met her. To our morning together. To our conversation about the construction of femininity. I can't help but reflect as I gaze into the glass eyes of the sculpture from my own distorted viewing position, is this simply co-incidence, a serendipitous moment – or was it something else that directed me towards this particular exhibition? I wander back out of the gallery deep in thought trying to remember which theorist had said that

⁵¹ The sculpture is by Kiki Smith 1994. I am unsure of the title.

women have not learned to have eyes for themselves; that they have not learned to explore the landscapes of their own bodies.

The 'Dark Continent' is neither dark nor unexplorable: It is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. Because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. We have been frozen in our place by two terrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. It would be enough to make half the world break out laughing if it were not still going on.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Clement, 1986, p.68)

PAULINE'S STORY

*Surfaces of the skin
marked culturally and preceding that
tattoo-like embedding and embedded
building a web of intricate patterns
inscriptions and interruptions
of memory
and desire
wounds
open and close
defining scar tissue
positively*

**Fig. P1**

I am not sure at just what point Pauline entered this study. Like Topsy, she sort of grew into it. Of course, I have a date when she signed the consent form and made it official, but I had been recording her voice for some time before this. One of my other participants was working in a community studio space in close proximity to Pauline. From time to time, while having coffee, we would invite her opinion if we wanted to explore further how women in the late 90s were experiencing menopause. Other women artists also visited this community studio space with its attractive outdoor café, and sometimes there would be several women listening and joining in the conversations. They were interested in this research project, and they all had something to offer. In each telling, in each listening, new stories were produced. It was, in a sense, a collective experience.

From time to time I would invite Pauline take part in the research. 'No,' she said. 'I am not very articulate. I don't feel confident in speaking about myself publicly.' 'But you have had some interesting comments to make about menopause,' I said. In one of our conversations, in answer to my question of 'what do you think the current attitude towards menopause is?' Pauline replied:

Most of the information is very negative. It is mostly not what happens. What you hear is negative. You don't hear the positive aspects of it. It becomes a scary issue. If you mentioned the word menopause to most women, it seems that they have very little knowledge. What knowledge they have is often negative. It is rather scary. It is a scary issue. If something isn't spoken about it enters the arena of 'taboo'.

I responded to this comment by saying I had recently read Betty Friedan's (1994) *The Fountain of Age*, and that she maintained that as long as we cared for our health, remained active and vital and interested in our work and the community, we could give menopause a miss.

I disagree. Women like Betty Friedan are seen as super women. With my generation it was horrific when we began to emulate the role models of women like her. They could juggle careers and families. They said we could have it all. There was no mention of any of the problems that they encountered along the way or what really happened or

how they dealt with it. What was the truth of their lives? We were thinking we were liberated women having a career and raising children, but in most cases all it meant was that we then had twice as much work to do. I liked having the money, but for any one who survives that without having a breakdown physically or mentally deserves a medal. Women such as Betty Friedan were saying 'You are not only equal to a man but twice as good. Go and prove it' and women have been proving it ever since. I don't think we should be told how to have our menopause. Friedan is not a lot different to the theorists I encounter in my art studies. Very few of them talk about the real experiences of their lives either. They are still running along the lines that logic overrides everything else in that binary equation. Subjectivity is still talked about objectively.

Yes, feminism has also created story lines that we got hooked into as well. What are your own feelings about menopause?

I see menopause as a really positive thing. My periods are coming and going at the moment. I haven't had one for awhile. It is liberating. It is the end of child bearing and it is a new phase. I have always looked forward to this stage. Not long ago I awoke in the middle of the night in a sweat. I felt like a heat-seeking missile. I thought 'oh this must be menopause.' I actually got excited. I thought it was wonderful to have arrived at this stage. I love being older. I have always looked forward to my birthdays and enjoyed being older. Menopause will be that next phase where I can see myself as a old happy woman. I think that menopause is releasing me from periods which were so painful and debilitating for so much of my life. It has only been recently that they have not been so bad but in my twenties and thirties I used to have so much pain. I used to have a day off work every month and I would just be writhing in agony for twelve hours. If you went to a doctor, who in those days were mostly male, they always made you feel that there was something wrong in your head. They didn't seem to understand that there was something really wrong with your body. You were either imagining it, or you were a hypochondriac or whatever, and most of my life was spent in pain with my periods. It is going to be a big relief. And to be able to say I am going through menopause is very nice.

Not long after this conversation Pauline telephoned to ask if I would write an article about her work for an arts journal. I agreed to do this, but added, 'why don't you write it yourself? I don't really have time. It will mean interviewing you and writing and rewriting. And then it may not even be accepted by the journal.'

But I am not a communicator in a verbal or written sense. As a young girl growing up in the repressive fifties I learned to speak with an economy of words. My school years were spent in a Catholic boarding school, where, along with a sense of isolation and lack of any real human contact, personal expression was discouraged. My voice was silenced. I wasn't allowed to have an opinion. I got hit, abused, if I spoke out. Writing this article is not something I can do. You are familiar with my work. We have talked about it. You know what it is I am trying to say.

Okay. Let's travel back in time. Can you tell me more about your school days?

We had to conform to a lot of rules. You had to be seen as a young lady. It was very much about appearances. If you went outside, you had to change your shoes, and one of the things we weren't allowed to do was speak. I spent seven years in a boarding school. I worked out that it was only for about three minutes a day that we were allowed to actually speak. We weren't allowed to have newspapers or radios. I think it was worse than a prison. The isolation meant that we had no contact with people outside. Even our letters were censored. I never saw my family - there were ten of us children - except on holidays for seven years. I used to think 'I hope I am adopted, I dam-well don't want to be part of this family.' I suffered terrible feelings of rejection. They never wrote to me. I have come to realise though, that they were only trying to do their best for me in giving me the education that they never had.

I hear this story, and then, with a little gentle persuasion, I suggest to Pauline that she should become a participant in the study. 'If you are prepared to have me write a story' I say, 'that is going to be published in a journal, one that will be read internationally, then speaking out about menopause and its connections to your artwork should not be a problem. It may even transform each other's consciousness. Together we can create a text that will give you a more detailed capacity to share your experiences with others. It will give you a voice. We can turn your oral stories into words on a page. They will be potent. We will give them a life.'

What does it mean to change consciousness? Not just that one changes one's mind about this or that opinion. Rather, when consciousness alters one exists in a different universe, differently charged, colored, felt. And can consciousness be separated from word or image, from the symbol? ... the question of consciousness is not that simple. Among the utterances and pictures of others, one can recognise some images or words from one's own experience, and there are those that one does not recognise ... I have never experienced a state of consciousness within myself that was not shared somewhere by someone. And I am beginning to realise that when I encounter what is strange to me I am merely seeing the evidence for an unknown region of my own soul. (Griffin, 1995, p.195)

To be truthful, a lot of my hesitancy stems from my fear that my voice will be usurped. It is an issue of trust. And I don't believe that the article will give me a voice. I have to do that myself. What it will do is widen people's perception of women's experience.

We arrange to meet for our first official interview. Tell me again what the focus of your artwork is.

It has been about reclaiming my body, my memory, my voice, everything that I thought was mine. Even the work I have been doing during menopause has the same threads running through it. All the pieces are interconnected. I began to do this work while I was doing my honours year. I was doing ceramics for the body stuff and sculpture for the head stuff. I was trying to get logic and emotion balanced. And then language came into it. I had to talk about my work and myself at my review. I arranged my work in a manner that I felt articulated my position.

How did you feel when you were talking about this body/memory work at the review?

I found the whole experience very intimidating. I realise that my project, by being inward looking and having an emphasis on feelings, was in direct contrast to what the lecturers are used to. That is, an exterior, logical, conceptual approach, and therefore they couldn't engage themselves in my work in any meaningful way. I didn't find the experience extended to people outside of the institution. But then with hindsight, I can understand my difficulties with institutions due to my background.

Tell me about the terracotta plates.

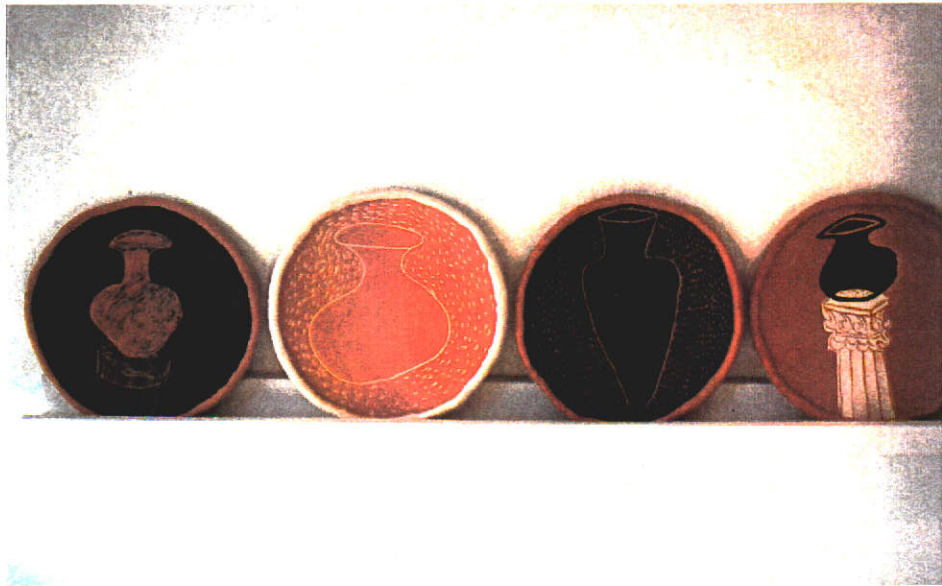


Fig. P2

When I first met with you, I didn't want to talk about the plates. I deliberately avoided analysing them. I knew it was about balancing things – mind-body, masculine-feminine but I avoided a conscious interpretation. That is the point of my work. It is done as a reaction to the emphasis placed on the mind by our social conditioning. What I am trying to do is let the body speak. And before you can do that you have to quieten the mind. Before I start my work I blank out the mind. I go into a sort of meditative state and just let whatever is there come to the surface. I just let it flow through me.

Recently I have started thinking about how my work might be related to menopause, and the fact that my hormone levels are out of balance. My work is all about putting things into balance. I am reclaiming my femininity first, but there is also that unity with my spiritual side. I thought 'I am just going to have to work harder at getting things into balance, that way I will have an easier menopause'. Now I am ready to look at my work a bit closer and see what is really happening. At a conscious level I have been working on balancing out the masculine and feminine aspects of myself, reclaiming my femininity, but perhaps on a deeper subconscious level it connects to my hormones and my biology. Everything in our bodies overlaps. My body doesn't have boundaries. My thoughts are not separate from my body.

I have thought about your earlier comments when you saw the plates at the exhibition. You said that you thought they might be revealing both a birthing of a feminine consciousness, as well as writing from the body in the feminine. Perhaps that is so. But what I see is that I was simply working on different levels. One was that I was attracted to the Greek culture and their forms. The way they depict the vessel. The Greeks were so mathematically correct with their proportions. I see their vessels as being the ideal vessel, and I was just sort of paralleling that with the ideal woman. At the same time that I made the plates I did some sculptures with Venus falling off the pedestal. The plates also depict the vase falling off the pedestal. I am using the vase as a metaphor for the inscriptions on the body, for the self. It is a way of deconstructing the socially prescribed framework of femininity.

As Arthur Miller said about the art forms of Ibsen, Chekhov, and the Greeks:

What was attractive was that they were forms that allowed, or even demanded, that the individual psychology and society move together in a seamless connection, as it is in life, except we're only half aware of it. The water is in the fish and the fish is in the water. There is no separating the two.
(Miller, 1989 in Zohar, 1990, p.168)

I use clay also as a metaphor for my self. I was using the clay body as real body, the human body and the surface of it. Clay responds more sympathetically when it is worked intuitively. A lot of the marks are like tattooing or perforating your skin to get to what is underneath. Pressing, impressing and scratching. Just sort of gouging and getting into the actual body.

STOP
LISTEN! FEEL!

*can you feel those vibrations
pushing up
below the surface
of the skin?
imprisoned
in the membranous catacombs
of the body
those fugitive memories
struggling to be free
probe deeper
pierce the skin
allow a passageway through
scratch the surface

do you bleed memories?*

The clay is both flesh and your inner body?

It was a bit like self-mutilation. A masochistic thing in a strange sort of way. I am not one of those people. If I was going to mutilate myself it would be very neatly done.

*probe deeper,
pierce the skin
mutilate yourself
necessarily
allow the secrets to
emerge
Let them speak
but don't let others hear
they might betray you
wait until it is safe
then you won't care
(Pauline, 1997)*

Perhaps the mutilating of yourself in this way signifies your internal wounding? Wounds signify blood. Our culture can deal with bleeding from external bodily wounds but it has a problem with women's blood and the bleeding of internal wounds. The word 'mutilate' is a sign for amputation of an essential part of the body. It also means to cut to pieces, cripple, damage, adulterate and censor. In using the word mutilate, you are saying a great deal about the way culture positions women's understanding of what it is to be feminine. And if we look at the word 'adulterate', it means to corrupt debase, depreciate, devalue, weaken.⁵² By using marks in this way, perhaps you are creating

⁵² Definitions of the word mutilate and adulterate are from The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1987 p. 16 and p.658.

your own resistance narrative. Perhaps you are generating a new story line in which you are attempting to eliminate the destructive elements that construct women inside the male/female dualism.

Yes, that is right. I feel that my subjectivity is a cultural construction. It's mostly to do with the language with which we need to communicate socially. I feel that the things that are not culturally acceptable become submerged. Things like sexual abuse, and the denial of women's subjectivity. My own lived experience. These are the things I have tried to bring out. Resisted. They are part of the subject that is me, but they reside in the unconscious non-cultural part of the body. That is what I think, anyway. I find it interesting that others have read the plates as slices of the body with the umbilical cord wrapped around the edge you know, like when you do microscopic work.

<p>Self-knowledge requires a semiotic-material technology to link meanings and bodies. (Haraway, 1981, p.585)</p>

So, in making the plates, you have gone into the thing itself, into a bodily knowing which doesn't have a language. Your body has experienced it directly, in contrast to what you had learned to think about it, or before you gave it further consideration or evaluation. You are surrendering to the experience of making and working with this fleshy type of material, and seeing with a different vision what came through your body in relation to working with it. Encoded in these plates is a multiplicity of meanings, each one intertwined and coexisting with the other.

Yes that's right, but by working in this way I am also risking social criticism. You risk being criticised as being non-conceptual when you cannot readily find words to define what you do.

You mean that your work may be criticised as women's art by the critics on the gallery circuit?

Yes, and within the agenda set by the general university curriculum that we were trained in. I am a risk taker. I always have been but I feel like an outsider looking on. I have been thinking about the question of whether work like this is considered as art. Is it

valid as art? That could be a criticism leveled at me on behalf of those judging women's work.

So you feel like you are working in the margins, in the landscape that the theorists call the borderlands?

I feel like I am but I don't know if it is true. People ask me what I do, and I can't say that I am just a painter, or a sculptor or a drawer. I am an artist and I do all sorts of things. If one was to say, 'is this art?' I would have to say this current work is more valid as art. IT IS MY LIFE. My art and my life cannot be separated.

In feminine speech, as in writing, there never stops reverberating something that, having once passed through us, having imperceptibly and deeply touched us, still has the power to affect us - song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive.

The Voice sings from a time before the law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation. The deepest, the oldest, the loveliest Visitation. Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing. (Cixous, in Cixous and Clement, 1986, p.93)

Well, I suppose you could be working right off the page in a space we don't yet fully comprehend. Working in the margins is an expression we have learned to use because that somehow locates our work. Cixous (1986) tells us that a girl's journey is to go beyond the roots of her origins, the native land, and reach out 'farther to the unknown - to invent' (p.93). We are not familiar with the

language of these places. Women have been victims of language, and as a consequence we are unable to render audible with new words all that has been silenced (Conway, 1998; Fisher, 1996; Spender, 1980). Women can only work with existing language and give it new meaning. If women are working in these spaces with new vision and imaginative clarity, it would seem that for many, they have not yet found the words to sing loud enough for all of us to hear. We need to bring the margins to the centre, or at the very least, as Jean Fisher argues, 'we might speak of retracing the borders between the unrepresentable lived body and the fictions within which it is surrounded' (Fisher, in de Zegher 1996, p.30). Perhaps it is then that we will all hear the song.

The next time I see Pauline she is in the process of setting up an exhibition in a city gallery. It is a series of four diaries, autobiographical narratives recorded on a broad

range of materials. The plates, numbering one hundred, form part of the exhibition. They line the walls at a height that projects towards the viewer's body somewhere between the head and the heart. I walk around the gallery taking photographs of the plates.

black, red, and white: represent descent, death and rebirth – the black for dissolving of one's old values, the red for the sacrifice of previously held illusions, and the white as the new light, the new knowing that comes from having experienced the first two. (Estes, 1992, p.102)

Pauline has used three colours, terracotta red, and black and white in her re-evaluation of the idealised female form. I select three plates from the shelf for photographing (**Figs. P3-P5**). The first plate

depicts the white vase form in a black pregnant phallic shape. The second depicts a less defined, vase shape, spilling forth from the black lips of a vase. The marks on the clay make it appear as though it is liquid. The third plate shows a new, white elongated form, fish like in appearance, emerging from the shower of watermarks. 'Were you trying to bring the inside of the body out? Or were you re-birthing an aspect of the self?'

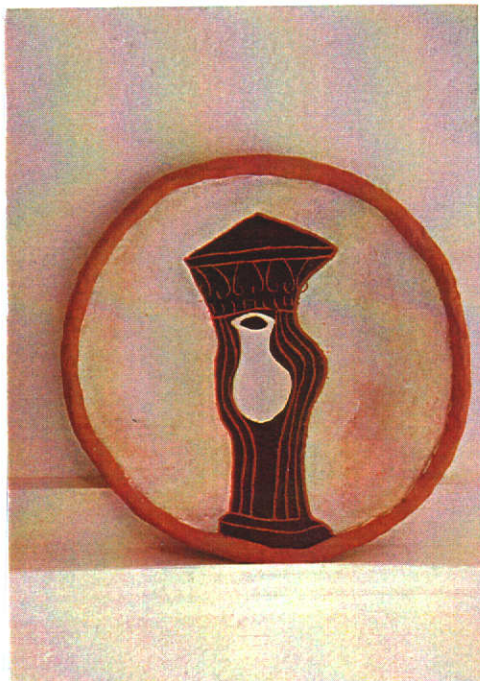


Fig. P3



Fig. P4

Woman is the only vase left in which to pour our identity. (Goethe, in Jardine, 1985, p. 31)

I felt that by the time I got to the last plate, that yes, it was a unity of self, of the bits. Most of my life I have been this fragmented being. Split from my understanding of who I am. There have been little bits flying and flowing all over the place. A lot of my work has been trying to put the bits back together into one. With the last plate it felt that that was what I had done; unified the part of me that was divided.



Fig. P5

I was raised very much as a boy. Only the intellect was acknowledged. It wasn't really good to be feminine because that didn't get you anywhere.

Being feminine wasn't acceptable in my family. My body was ignored and I ignored my body. And then, later on at boarding school, it wasn't good either. All my life I have had to emphasize my brain. I had a good memory in those days. I was top of the class but my brain was all I had. I had no body. I was disembodied. I think once I started

social schizoid
fragmented, floating
decentred
displaced
deranged
a body blown apart
find the pieces
fuck off
i don't have to be
a good girl anymore
(Pauline, 1998)

working with my art work - I wasn't allowed to do art at school because it wasn't considered a suitable career for a young lady - through the process it has enabled me to discover my body. And then to discover my feelings within my body. So yes, it could be the

rebirth of the body as against the rebirth of the mind.

Can we explore this idea of rebirth of the body? Is there a difference between the body and being feminine? Or are they an interconnected thing?

The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. Splitting, not being, is the privileged image for feminist epistemologies of scientific knowledge. 'Splitting' in this context should be about heterogeneous multiplicities that are simultaneously salient and incapable of being squashed into isomorphic slots or cumulative lists. (Haraway, 1981, p.586)

They are interconnected. Initially, because the feelings were so deep down it was a recognition of the feminine body. It was the feminine as I know it be, in opposition to what being masculine means. Being feminine to start with was really hard. It was hard work to say 'yes this is me' and that I have got all these bits of pieces that make up my identity.

What does it mean when you say the word feminine? Does that mean woman, female, or is it your western understanding of feminine?

It is all of those words. It is about reaching out towards difference, but I can't define it, so I use the word feminine. After recognising I was a feminine body I started wearing dresses. I started to begin the process of feeling good about who I was. I had lost my body. I had to accept that I was female and that was part of the package until I became comfortable with it, and sort of doing things that I had spurned when I was growing up. I never did anything that was considered female or wearing anything that was considered feminine. I began to do things that were associated with being a woman that I had refused to do before.

Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. What defines woman as such is what turns men on. Good girls are 'attractive,' bad girls 'provocative.' Gender socialization is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men. It is the process through which women internalize (make their own) a male image of their sexuality as women. It is not just an illusion.
(MacKinnon, in de Lauretis, 1984, p.166)

So what sort of things do you do now, apart from wearing a dress, that you would be able to say was the feminine part of you?

Well it all happened pretty much together. Feelings and emotions. In the process of reacting against the mind - the mind is insatiable it doesn't stop it wants more and more, it just drives you crazy. So when you

can shut it out and let the other side, the feeling side emerge, you feel different. Occasionally I would wear make-up. I now enjoy wearing clothes that feel sensuous next to my skin. I no longer have regular periods but when I do I can now revel in the bloodiness of it all, in the recognition that this only happens to women. I wasn't consciously thinking about the definitions of masculine/feminine or male/female; it was

more the interconnection of mind and body, the head and the heart. It's about something deep within me that I can't define.

What I am hearing you saying, is that for you, feminine is related to those deep emotions and sensory feelings and desire. But I also hear that it is also fluid, ambiguous and complex and that the questions surrounding issues of your femininity have no readily available answers.

Yes.

Okay, how then does that feminine body relate to the sexual body? Or the sexuality of this new body?

Femininity stands for the resistance in the text to existing stories and knowledges, to the negative face of sexual difference in a culture that either presumes to know what woman is (and wants) or utterly denies its relevance or interest. In this sense femininity or "woman" means both something specifically about women – as yet unspecified – and something about the limits of phallogentric culture as a whole that is unable to deal with difference in any form. (Pollock, 1996b, p. 82)

I wasn't actually thinking of my sexual body. I was thinking of it in a more non-gendered way. It isn't about naming, analysing and identifying gender differences. I just wanted back the things that were lost to me because of the society that we lived in. The fact that you are a mind and nothing else. I just wanted my body back, complete with all of its bits. Reclaiming my body back is my act of resistance against existing knowledge and all of those myths that have distorted my understanding.

We are at the threshold where language falters. What is presented is not a nameable thing, but a poetics, in the ancient sense of poiesis: a movement of coming-into-thoughts, of the process of making, of creating. (Fisher, 1996, p.43)

So in making this work, what you got back was a body that is now going to allow you to inscribe your own notions of sexuality, and your own notions of whatever femininity might be, because you have never really known what either of those words actually mean. Without deconstructing your actual lived experience

and the representational codes embedded in your body, these 'inscriptions of the feminine' are your own personal way of re-imagining your world anew, a fresh sense of your own geography of being.⁵³

Yes, that sounds about right. Does it make sense to you?

... bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they are coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated.
(Grosz, 1995, p.35)

I finish photographing the plates and walk to the centre of the gallery. 'Can you tell me about this last piece of work that you did as you stand on the brink of menopause?' I pause for a moment, reflecting on this question. I am intrigued to hear myself use the word brink. I later look it up in the dictionary. Brink⁵⁴ is defined as border, boundary, fringe, margin, lip – the land at the edge of a body of water. As I am reflecting on these words, I am also thinking of the writing of Cixous (1986).

Her rising: is not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft. The vessel. Let her write! And her text knows in seeking itself that it is more than flesh and blood, dough kneading itself, rising, uprising openly with resounding, perfumed ingredients, a turbulent compound of flying colors, leafy spaces, and rivers flowing to the sea we feed .

So! Now she is her sea, he'll say to me (as he holds out to me his basin full of water from the little phallic mother he doesn't succeed in separating himself from). Seas and mothers.

But that's it – our seas are what we make them, fish or not, impenetrable or muddled, red or black, high and rough or flat and smooth, narrow straits or

⁵³ 'A feminist reading for 'inscriptions of the feminine' means listening for the traces of subjectivity formed in the feminine within and in conflict with a phallogocentric system. Beyond that, it implies figuring out what working from that place, however unconsciously, might be *producing* as yet unarticulated, unrepresented, unsignified, unrecognised'. (Pollock, 1996, p.74)

⁵⁴ Brink – The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus 1987, p.121.

shoreless, and we ourselves are sea, sands, corals, seaweeds, beaches, tides, swimmers, children waves . . . seas and mothers (p.88).

Pauline begins to speak.

This piece is an affirmation of my being (Fig. P6). It is called 'Almost like writing'. It was done on a long roll of paper and it is one long continuing spilling out of a kind of language. It is like a spewing out of all this sort of stuff inside of me. I feel more one. More a whole person. It feels like it is a meditation but it has still got the same marks, the same feeling that I am clawing my way through it. It was like I held my tools like a claw as I was drawing.

*Piercing the skin
tattoo like
Probing the cellular dictionary
Are the answers in the surface
or below?
embracing discourses of the past
Which organs hold the key?
Do memories disappear
with layers of skin
layers of meaning
to penetrate to the feelings
festering below?
Almost writing
these marks speak the unspeakable*

*Layers of meaning
layers of skin
many many voices
too many voices
speaking all at once
sucking out the oxygen
from this claustrophobic space
I want to speak
can't breathe
I will faint before I speak*

*give me oxygen
give me space*

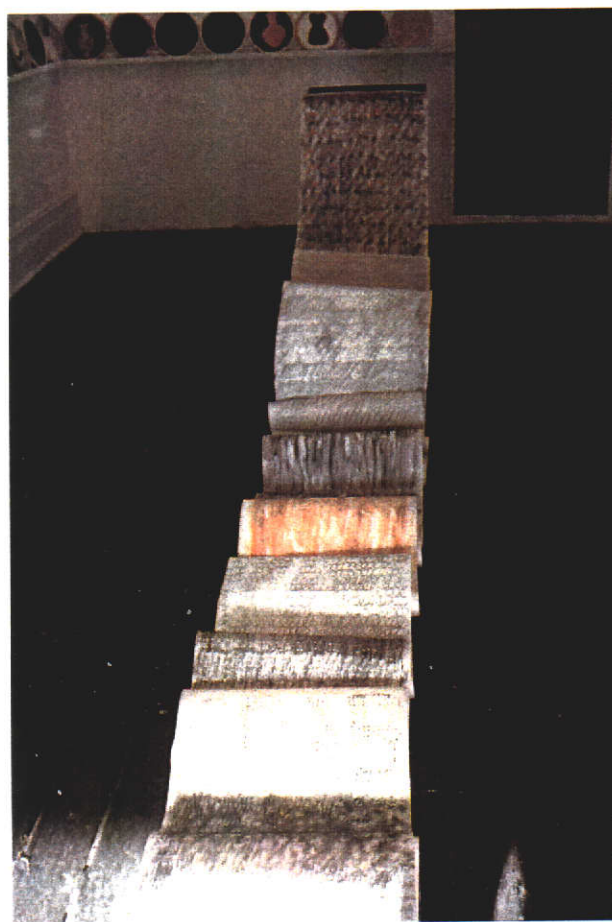


Fig. P6 'Almost like Writing'

The initial intrigue in looking at this work is that it reminds me of a giant tongue spewing forth a type of Braille. On cascading sheets of paper are the traces of indecipherable lines and marks, like heartbeats, pulsing to the rhythm of the body, silently emitting thoughts, secrets, emotions and remembered images. The remnants of forgotten memories that were indelibly etched into every cell of her body, surfacing now, in dreams and unconscious perception.
(Whittaker, 1998, p.32)

With this process I am recreating my identity or bringing out the identity that should have been there before but wasn't. So I am re-making myself, maybe. I can't let myself think too much while I am doing it, because as soon as I start thinking rationally the mind starts criticising. All of the cultural things I have learned bombard me. They hold me back if I allow these thoughts to interfere.

Do viewers of your work understand that you are drawing on the silences between thoughts and images to express your body landscape?

I have been really surprised how women respond to the works on the phone book. They will look at it and say 'I know how you felt that day', or they can pick up on the energy of the marks and feel something of what I was trying to say. They related really well. The guys would say 'oh it looks like wallpaper', which it does a bit. They seemed to resist the deeper meanings. Perhaps this is because many men have not learned to enter their interior spaces.

I squat down on the floor and lift up the different folds of paper and let them fall to the ground again. I run my fingers over the network of traces that constitute Pauline's life and once more I am reminded of the pull between the looping of the epistemological, phenomenological and ontological folds of the self.

The words, sore, scab and scar appear in the undulating folds. A reminder of the healing taking place as the artists reconstructs her identity. The cascading sheets of paper are reminiscent of electronic data gathered from complex scientific technological machines: the equipment of Emergency Care Units that monitor the heartbeat of an individual so as to maintain a connection to the life force and to others.
(Whittaker, 1998, p.32)

I think of Foucault again and how the self is 'always a real activity', a continuous pliable line of analysis where no one aspect of the loop or the pleat can stand for the whole self (Foucault, 1986, p.24). I rub my hand in the watery remnants of substances that feel like body fluids. Blood, vaginal secretions, puss, semen, tears. I press my thumb into the sharp, angry little matchstick type marks flowing across another page. On another, I follow the looping outlines. 'What do these mean?' I ask.

I do a lot of those loopy things. They puzzle me a bit. I have been told by lecturers that these marks are unoriginal. It is sort of obsessive. Very obsessive. It is probably frustration coming through. To me, the figure 8 is the essence of life, a profile of the DNA.

Have you given the tracings different names?

Yes, it starts with this piece 'Fragmentation' then 'Survival' then you have 'Heartbeat'. This one is called 'Across the Grain', and this one 'The Rhythm of Life'. The rhythm of the body flows through most of it like flowing water.

We need to keep moving and to keep speaking our selves in ways that will encourage other movements, that will recreate alternative positions. Brought to a breathless and motionless standstill, we need to remember the 'grain' of the self hear another self. I hear myself, she speaks and in the movement of other images of selves, alternative positions appear as possible. I am drawn to them and re-find them in the motions of selves. As Barthes writes of the 'grain', it is 'the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs'. (Probyn, 1993, p.172)

As I pack my camera into its case, Pauline begins to speak again.

I have just thought of something else that is really important as far as the diaries go. It is the actual recording, the recording of these events and these feelings. Our voices have been cast aside so much in our culture, so the act of recording is extremely important.

Yes you're right. But to speak out in this way however, is no guarantee that you are going to be heard. It is in the receptivity of the viewers to your work that the greatest potential for it to be acted upon lies. It is finding the right audience. They need to be read with a different understanding before they can become sites of meaning. And then I tell her of my recent reading of Griselda Pollock's (1996b) *Inscriptions in the Feminine*.

We need not invent a whole new language to speak the already always known feminine that this culture has repressed like an ice block in its deep freeze. Rather the model of excavation and decipherment offers a way to explode the simultaneous abuse of women's inscriptions in culture as the negative cipher of masculine dominance and the negation of this alterity through cultural inattention to its specificities (p.74).

Some months later I meet again with Pauline. She has photographs of new work to show me. She tells me they are directly related to her menopause experience. Pauline lays the photographs out on the table. 'What were you trying say in this work?' I ask (Fig. P7).



Fig. P7

very much like a bridal dress. It was white and soft. It had the appearance of being like

It came out of a discussion with my doctor. It is a rational mind connection with what menopause does. It is about how plastic affects people. The amount of plastic we ingest with our food and through our environment is affecting the way in which women experience their menopause. The doctor said women are now menopauseing younger and that men were becoming less fertile because of the excess of hormones absorbed by our bodies in our current lifestyle. Because I have worked with plastic in the past I used K-Mart bags to make a large veil. I stapled and knotted them together. It looked

satin or silk. It looked quite beautiful. I made it to look seductive. It did look very seductive – but then, at the exhibition I put this story along-side it about the effects of hormones in our environment.

The next day I type the transcript of our conversation. As Pauline's body steps into the memory of this object I hear the different nuances in her voice. It becomes soft and gentle, shy even, as she says 'It looked quite beautiful.' Again, she says, 'I made it to look very seductive'. From my listening to her description of the work, it was not an objective evaluation of menopause I was hearing, but her body speaking about desire and wounding. And in my imagination I see multiple stories running through this object. I see the veil as signifying ritual, a new beginning, purity, and sensuousness. I feel that it signifies both a rite of passage and concealment. The stapling speaks of trapping, piercing and restraining. The knots, of tension, restriction and bondage. The plastic, suffocation. The veil speaks loudly of survival.

I am aware that in the past Pauline has used plastic to wrap objects in the natural world for protection and nurture, as well as to represent suffocation. The wrapping with plastic was a protest against the idea of a hierarchy that placed the material world above nature. In making the veil, there are elements of her concern for the linear processes of the mind that dominate nature, but I sense also that she is using her feminine bodily specificity to realign aspects of her multiple selves; a strategy for recovering the texture of communication about her self.

Another meeting is arranged. We meet for lunch. Friends of Pauline's arrive unexpectedly. They are mature age students. I keep the tape recorder running. I see it as an opportunity for more collective biography. For stories to generate more stories. The subject matter of Pauline's conversation arouses lively discussion. She has returned to university to undertake her master's degree.

Speaking out with our selves against our selves, catching the movement of being gendered, folding the lines between our selves so as to open up new perspective, inscribing and bending images of our being into positions of becoming, all these are ways for me of extending the 'grain' of the self: the grain of a political project of care and hope.
(Probyn, 1993, p.173)

How do you feel now when your work is being reviewed?

I still feel negated when we have a review of our work. We are not taken seriously. I don't know if it's because we are women, but it is as though all our work is seen as therapy or it's labelled as women's art. When we talk about the feeling body, it is not going into their [the lecturers'] consciousness at all. They do not understand embodiment. And they don't understand that we are also working from a spiritual centre as well. Spirituality is our essence: the unseen part of the body. It is just as important as the visible. It is what connects us to the energies present in the universe. These parts of our selves overlap. They are not separate. It is as though they create a barrier to prevent a sensory invasion of their own bodies. If we talk about bodily sensations they are not heard. They do not understand where we are coming from. They don't seem connected to the real world at all. Our work is labelled egocentric, and yet we are working on something that actually touches every aspect of our lives. We are trying to be artists, mothers, work full-time, study, and at the same time pay a mortgage, as well as being a single parent. Why is it that women can't paint, sculpt and draw about their everyday lives, about the joys and the crises within our families, relationships and bodies without it not being taken seriously?

The others join in the conversation. They speak of artists, both men and women, whose work deals with the everyday and with the body, and yet they are venerated. Their work is not labelled. We talk animatedly of Brett Whitely and his obsession with drugs and women, Picasso and his women, Frida Kahlo and her paintings of her body, and of Mary Kelly, who has documented the body from menstruation through to menopause. And we discuss other highly acclaimed international artists working with the body and their direct lived experience.

What is it that silences you during a review when your work is criticised? What stops you saying to these people 'why can't you accept that my point of view is not an oppositional way of thinking to yours? It is just one way of thinking. My way'.

Every time we are challenged in a review, we are not only dealing with others' intransigence in their attempts to silence us, we are also dealing with what happened in

the past to silence us. There is already an in-built fear. You need people to review your work who are understanding of where you come from and what you are dealing with. Instead of being patronizing they should try and listen to you, help you.

Writing, in a way, is listening to the others' language and reading with the others' eyes. The more ears I am able to hear with, the farther I see the plurality of meaning and the less I lend myself to the illusion of a single message.
(Trinh, 1989, p.30)

Although I realise that my feeling state is my own responsibility, and I am trying to move on from the work I made several years ago, I recently had to display all the diaries, even the early ones. It felt like going over old wounds, picking at the scab. I don't need to do that any more. I have moved on.

I am not coming from the position of being a victim. I just don't need to regurgitate old thoughts and feelings. The making of this work has been a healing, but how can I say that to them. I was hoping that in displaying the work again, new openings, new ideas, new directions might be suggested.

So how can you change the system?

I don't know that we can but I am working towards feeling less intimidated. I feel that I have been pushed so far into a corner that I have been forced to use my voice. I have no choice. I am taking speech lessons. I am learning the art of public speaking. I will not be silenced any longer.

You're taking speech lessons?

Well it is not such a bad idea. It shouldn't matter that you can't express with confidence your thoughts about your work, but it does. It probably is the thing that matters the most, which is an irony really. We are visual artists, not writers or oral storytellers. We can't necessarily always put into words what we are doing. The work should be able to speak for itself. People should take their own reading, use their own imagination. They can only view it through their reality, not mine. Yet it would seem you also have to have a degree in speech making to go with the arts degree. It seems that the students who have done well are the ones that actually speak out. It is often bullshit. And it is the ones that bullshit the most that go the furthest.

I burst out laughing. Well, things don't seem to have changed a great deal since my undergraduate days. We lapse into silence, and then Pauline asks;

Why are we driven to make art? Why do we have to do it? In the past I have neglected my family and myself to follow this compulsion to create.

That's a good question, I'll think about it.

The next time we meet, it is to read through this story together. I think I have found an answer to your question. Let me read you these words:

In Barry Lopez's allegorical fable *Crow and Weasel*, two friends are returning home after a long journey when they meet Badger. They tell her where they have been and what has happened to them. She knows that it is not just the journey but the story that is important and tells them why:

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.

(Bolen, 1994, p.273).

Pauline smiles, nods her head and says, 'yes that it explains it, put it in the story.' She pauses for a moment and then she asks if she can change the pseudonym I have given her to that of another name. I had called her Daisy – after Daisy Bates - in recognition of her pioneering work on the land and amongst aboriginal people.

Am I stuck with this Daisy name? It has been niggling at me for awhile. I would rather use my own name because all through this I have felt like I belonged to a secret society. In using my own name I am claiming for myself what is rightfully mine My-Self.

SOPHIA'S STORY

Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness. Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform, already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translating from the unknown, like a new way of communicating, rather than an already formed language.

(From Marguerite Duras's *Smothered Creativity* in El Saffar, 1994, p.141)



Fig. S1

'Cosmic Doll'

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men – who, for their part, have 'known' for a long time. But *not our body*. Seduced, attracted fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed. Deprived of our movements. Rigid, whereas we are made for endless change. Without leaps or falls, and without repetition.

(Grosz, 1989, p.214)

In the mid-summer of 1997 I attended a week-long summer school at the University of Western Australia. I had enrolled in a creative writing workshop to learn how to write from the 'stuff' of real life and to tell it as compellingly as possible. After one of my readings, where I spoke of my desire to create a short story form that would portray the conversational texture of women's daily lives, Sophia approached me during our coffee break and said, 'I'd like to be in your study, I think I would learn a lot about myself.' She went on to say that she was a professional story teller. In recent years she said, she had found that she was no longer satisfied with the re-telling of traditional mythical tales. New stories, she said, needed to be invented. Although she had had no professional art training she had recently begun to paint as a way of expressing the images that were surfacing into her consciousness. These images prompted her to invent new stories about her life, which she then passed on to her listening audience. Sophia said, 'I stopped wanting to tell stories to children in an educational setting. Instead I began to see story telling as a healing, as a way of describing a life. So I began to develop different ways of working with story.'

We are pleased to discover that we live only a few streets from each other. We arrange to meet in the next month. I send her the questionnaire and consent form. They are returned promptly. I turned to the blank space at the back to see if she had added anything. Sophia wrote:

*One area of concern is probably sociological – how does one keep working in a competitive environment when the body is saying – focus in, pay attention to me – notice this transition – take time to acknowledge dreams lost, and remake new ones – to mend and heal that which needs it, so that this time to come is full and joyous and a promise to younger women?
(January 1997)*

On her first visit I suggest we go back to the beginning of the menopause journey. How did it present to you when you realised that menopause was imminent?

I wasn't conscious of it at first. It was quite an amazing year. My daughter had married, my mother died six months later and then I was on the road travelling visiting story telling festivals. My periods began to fluctuate, and this was unusual for me, as my periods were always regular, but menopause was not on my mind. I was in Canada at the time, living in a room of a woman's house. She had a lot of books and one of them was on women's health. I remember looking at it and seeing that the symptoms for the onset of mature diabetes and menopause were very similar. On one level I wasn't aware that I was thinking I might be menopausal, but I guess on some deeper level I was. I think I didn't want to admit to having menopause. I think I would rather it had been diabetes. I remember thinking that because I was only 51 and that seemed too young.

Did it take awhile for you to accept it?

I think that it is only now, almost in this last stage where you could say I am post menopausal or in that I haven't had a period for a number of years now, although I still get hot flushes and sweats. I think I would say I was still going through menopause and certainly internally I am, but I am much more there, than I was at the beginning. Like, I have made the transition. I have stepped across the bridge but I am still dealing with things. I made a comment on the back of the questionnaire that I am still dealing with stuff that needs to be dealt with before I can move fully into this next period of my life. At first I ignored the fact that I was menopausal. I went off and got HRT from the doctor

because I was having hot flushes every twenty minutes. I work in a very public environment and I couldn't handle it really. I am fairly stoic you see, so I don't pay a lot of attention to my bodily functions.

How did you feel about your body and your menstrual cycle then?

Well, I always had PMT, so the arrival of my period was a relief. It was either a relief because you weren't pregnant, or it was a relief because of that sort of sense of your whole body feeling like a gathering storm. The arrival of the period breaks that. I menstruated very early. I was ten, and there was a lot of shame around that. I was living in close proximity to an Aboriginal community and there was a lot of teasing from the kids about my developing breasts. I found that incredibly painful. For them it would have just been part of their natural process, but for me it was painful to be noticed in this way. I grew up knowing that menstruating had to be hidden. At the time I started bleeding, women were still using rags. Women would not even go into a chemist and ask for pads. There was a lot of public shaming around that whole menstrual process. At school it was only ever spoken of as the curse. Sex wasn't discussed. Not even amongst the girls.

Do you think your attitudes about sexuality and the body are as a result of the schooling you received?

Oh absolutely. The body was such a shameful thing. One of my regrets is that I didn't enter more fully into the Aboriginal culture. But it was like there was a split between us and within myself. There was that whole Virgin, Madonna, whore thing. If you were a good, Catholic girl then you didn't have a body because it was an occasion of sin. So you tried to deny it as much as you possibly could, or at least that is what I did. I had all of these Aboriginal kids confronting me with my body and I didn't know how to deal with it. It was just very shameful. I felt terrible about my breasts. I didn't want to buy a bra and stockings. My God! Funny things like bras and stockings meant you actually had to acknowledge it.

Let's go back to the questionnaire, to the section where I asked about specific changes that might have taken place since menopause. You ticked the little boxes marked sexuality, relationships, ageing and spirituality. Let's talk about sexuality first. How do you picture your sexuality?

Well, I have no sense of myself as a sexual being. I don't know that I ever fully enjoyed that part of myself. I think for a long time I was a good catholic girl trying to be pure and pretending that you didn't have any sexual impulses. I denied everything. But I must have been a sexual being when I was younger because I am only now actually

Knowledge that is denied at the core is often pushed to the periphery. Is it not then predictable that one day the periphery will be observed making an assault on even the most carefully built fortifications?
(Griffin, 1992, p.66)

aware that I am missing it. Talking about sexuality is confusing. I am aware that my sense of sexuality exists on two levels. Once I used to walk into a room and people would notice me. Now I have become invisible, unless I make a lot of effort, and I have found that difficult. I have wanted to scream and rave and pound on the wall and say 'I am still here.' On a deeper level I have always had a yearning for intimacy, for connection to someone. I have had relationships but I didn't feel seen by the other person. I felt very superficially seen, as in lust and desire, and I got very angry about that. Who I am, my full sexual being, was just not allowed to be present, and that is part of my identity. There is a lot of pain for me at the moment around the issue of never being in a relationship that was deeply fulfilling, and it has got nothing to do with orgasm or with penetration. My feelings about sex are overlain with my mother's words 'That's all they are after'. I see sex as a commodity. So that is one part of it. The other part of it is not being able to ask for what you want, in terms of sexual pleasure, or not even knowing what you want, because what I really want is a heart connection with someone. I have been brought up to not have a voice. I didn't know how to express my needs and desires.

It is only recently that I have been able to talk about my sexuality. I would have been very ashamed to talk about it before because I would have been admitting that I wasn't really a woman, and what good would I be to any body. I remember when I had a lot of trouble conceiving my daughter. That whole experience of being infertile was quite

devastating. I remember so vividly, the feeling of 'if you couldn't procreate then what good were you'. Is this making sense? It was devastating. If you couldn't bear a child then you weren't a woman. What were you? I can see now that there is a whole issue of identity tied up with this role of motherhood.

When I speak of the erotic, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

(Audrey Lord, in Northrup, 1995 p.215)

Sophia pauses. We both sit in silence for awhile absorbed in our own thoughts. Sexuality, I am thinking, is an integral part of women's health. It is with us from birth to death and yet the full meaning of 'sexuality' is not clear for many of us. It is perhaps only now, as women reach mid-life and recognise the myth of the idealised female body, that they can begin to re-define sexuality as more than a physical act. Most of the women in this study have spoken about sexuality in ways that implied a much broader concept than genital expression. And, like Sophia, they describe sexuality as a whole-body experience which includes, love, emotion, touch and a deep level of intimate connection in relationships. Although many of them have drawn and painted their sexual energy, they have struggled to find words to describe how their sexual awareness might be in relation to themselves, outside of a male or female relationship; to their creative acts of expression; or to their environment. I think of how music and song and dance, and the sensuous feel of certain fabrics, and the sensation of sunlight and water and earth touching my skin connects me to my own sexuality, to a sense of wholeness and seamless connection with the natural world; a sense of eros, I must add, this awareness has only risen to my consciousness since I began this study. I wonder about a culture that has taught us to denigrate and suppress the erotic. I reflect on an earlier comment by Sophia when I asked her if she ever thought about her womb. 'No,' she said, 'but I have thought about my vagina. Ever since I can remember, I have had an image of my soul. Once when I was at a personal growth workshop we were crawling around naked, and I looked at this woman's vagina and I thought 'that is my soul'. It was mind blowing. It was the exact shape of my soul that I had carried within my memory all those years.'

I am trying to become real. I want to let my hair go grey naturally. I don't want to pretend any more. I want to shed all the roles I have played. But people don't like it much. If I think of my children's response, one was horrified and other one said 'that's fine'. I know other women who have become real, who have gone fully into this stage of their age. I want to do more of that, but the strange thing is, when I look in the mirror two pairs of eyes look with me. I become both the subject and the object. There is a conflict for me. There is a desire to embrace the wisdom of my body and settle into it, but on the other hand I still need to make a living in a very competitive business environment. Whether it is real or imagined, it puts pressure on me. People like young dynamic good-looking women.

I suggest we have coffee. Sophia follows me into the kitchen. I bring the tape recorder. I have learned to keep it on. The best conversations always occur when you least expect them. She begins to tell me a story about a friend taking time off to care and grieve for the death of her mother, and then she tells another story about a funeral she has recently attended, where there was no visible signs of grief.

It triggered something off in me. Since then I have been grieving my life, and it is for all the things that I would do and could be, and that I haven't. My relationships too, and my relationship with my children. I haven't been the sort of woman that I dreamed I would be.

'What sort of woman was that?' I ask, as I press the plunger down on the aromatic, steaming, brown, pungent liquid. Sophia laughs.

Why, perfect of course. And I wanted to make a difference with my life. I feel like I have failed in some respects. Some things are beyond repair and they have to be grieved for and let go. This was for my marriage and the mother that I wanted to be, and the things that I did that were not good for my children, which I did out of my own need and despair. I should have put them first.

'Why did you feel that you had to put them first,' I say, as I pour the coffee.

Because, isn't that what a good woman does? We are very caught up in the story line of being good mothers and wives. I wasn't the good wife that I wanted to be. I didn't know how to be a good wife. I knew about sweeping floors and doing the washing, but I didn't know a lot about the other side of that yeah ... I mean, I am an only child, and I had never seen a woman with a baby until I had a son. Isn't that sad? I did a lot of reading. I was going to do it properly. Motherhood. All the stuff. No dummies. The whole bit. But the good intentions faded by the second and the third baby. Yeah ... full of determination that I was going to do it differently. Yeah ... so in the last little while I have been feeling this sense of failure. Another thing that I am chewing on and struggling with at the moment is seeing my ex-husband and his wife and how it seems to work for them.

Have you talked about these experiences that have come up for you at menopause to other women?

With a few exceptions, most people I have talked to, say in voices filled with impatience 'Oh, what are you on about? Every one goes through this. It is not a big deal'. I notice that if I say I am feeling grief stricken, that I am actually grieving my life, people immediately want to move you through that, which means you don't get heard, which means you don't move through it. This has been happening to me lately. There is no moulding or appreciating the experience.

There seems to be a fear in our society that if an individual stays in an emotional feeling state, you will never come out of it. We are always caught up in moving towards the next moment.

Not just any talk is conversation, not any talk raises consciousness. A subject can be talked to death, a person talked to sleep. Good conversation has an edge; it opens your eyes to something. Quickens your ears. And good conversation reverberates; it keeps on talking in your mind later in the day... That reverberation afterwards is the very raising of consciousness; your mind's been moved ... we need to look at what conversation is. The word means turning around with, going back, like reversing... It is this verso, this exposition of the reverse version, that is, I think, the work of our talk... And to keep turning means that it's no use having fixed definite positions. That stops conversation dead in its tracks. Our aim is not to take a stand on this or that issue but to examine the stands themselves so they can be loosened and we can go on walking back and forth. (Hillman, 1992, p.100)

There is a companionable silence held between us as we sit and drink our coffee. I think about her comments for a moment. 'Yes' I say, 'we have been taught that we always have to be moving on. Always developing. Always improving, and it's a tragedy if you don't.' I tell Sophia I have been reading James Hillman's (1992) *We have had a hundred years of psychotherapy and the world's getting worse*. Hillman suggests that we just sit with our feeling state. We don't need to 'process it' or 'work through it' in lengthy therapy sessions where the goal is to 'fix' our pain, instead, we can re-visit the hurt with a therapist who sees symptoms as the irrepressible imagination breaking through into our consciousness in order to be noticed. We can learn to appreciate our wounds and by using our imagination we can work with them, be in it, in whatever form is necessary. Wounds and scars he says, are the 'stuff of character', the raw material of our souls, the 'marginal informing spirit', and without them powerful art and literature would never have been created (p.154). Artists, Hillman continues, in their own unique way, find modes within their imagination to process the hurt in past memories, events and images. This way the memory walks you, instead of on you, and one day, he says you might find that the grief or the hurt has gone on its way.

We talk some more about Hillman's ideas of inventing a shared language using alternative forms of speech, such as painting, writing, poetry, dance and song, which is suited to the particular life of a person. I read out loud from his book:

... we are not trying to discover and treat a disease, we are trying to invent and speak a language. *That is the treatment, to speak and listen to the life; and the goal isn't that the life heal, or become normal, or even cease its suffering, but that the life become more itself, have more integrity with itself, be more true to its daimon [soul].*

(Ventura, in Hillman, 1992, p. 75)

And then, Sophia tells me she has only begun to write and paint in the last twelve months. 'It is the most amazing freeing thing,' she says. 'When I write I feel that I am

coming from my sense of true self. It is like that with story telling. There is a sense of falling into a total union with the self.'

When you are in a flowing state the sense of 'I' disappears. The sense of 'I'm telling the story' or 'making the art' disappears. It is just the being, telling or creating. It is a wonderful feeling – almost like being inside of yourself. You are both inside and outside at the same time. The small ego centred presence disappears and then it is like the story is telling me. Sometimes I don't know where the story is coming from, there is just a sense of a larger presence, and on good days it just flows through me. I feel bereft when I can't tap into it.

Our conversation circles back again to menopause. I tell her about the other women in the study and some of my own experiences of menopause. Then we discuss Sophia's experiences with HRT and her various encounters with different doctors in her quest to find a solution to her physical symptoms.

I am not comfortable talking about my body. We haven't really learnt a language of self-description that will enable doctors to really hear what is going on with our bodies.

We speak again. This time on the historical silencing of bodies by the medical profession, and then we begin to discuss ageing and the social and economical implication for single women in our culture. The tape recorder turns itself off. We keep on talking. This time about women's relationships to their mothers and grandmothers, and of the difficulties for women in forming an identity that is linked to, but separate from our mothers. I discover that Sophia has studied psychodrama and is aware of psychoanalytic approaches to reclaiming a femininity that is beyond a maternal function equated with reproduction and nurturance. I lend her El Saffar's book and she loans me Irigaray's (1985) *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Our conversation circles back again to talk of mothers and mothering. Sophia tells me that although her mother is dead she 'wears her mantle of fear'. 'Let's save this conversation for next time,' I say, 'I have run out of cassette tapes.' Sophia nods her head and sighs, and then says:

I am thinking, that as I am sitting here, I am feeling full and expanded in myself. Part of that is because you are listening, which comes back to the question you asked earlier about what do other people say when you talk about menopause. The whole thing is about how I am listened to. But that is not all you are doing. By the questions that you are asking you are giving me other frameworks within which to think about my body and myself as a woman. You are actually really listening and responding to me. The telling and the listening are essential to the re-storying of my life. In talking to you, I am hearing things that I didn't know I was thinking, and that is in relationship with you. You have helped make sense of my inchoate thoughts, experiences and feelings. So in a way, your story and the stories of the other women are eliciting another story which even I didn't know I had. Sharing the story of my menopausal experiences with you and hearing these other stories enables me to not feel so alone. It gives me a framework to think about the questions I am wanting to ask about my life.

Yes, this collective exchange between women, of words and images is giving voice to a differently perceived, embodied identity. In the naming of our experiences, we can actively change the circumstances of our lives.

You are right. But it can only be done in a particular type of exchange. In certain situations, I am totally struck dumb. I can't speak. I don't have a story. There are lots of exchanges between women but not all of them engender deep thinking. I come back to that thing, the quality of the listening, and interest. I have a conversation every morning of my life with a woman friend at the beach, but we don't talk about these sorts of things. They are delightful conversations, but they are focussed on social activity, not specifically women's experience. There is no sense of the deeper role of sexual difference or that a woman's experience is something to be articulated. There has to be a quality of seeking to understand the human condition and to name these experiences. And let's face it, if you weren't doing a thesis, would we have developed a relationship and be taking the time to talk in this way?

'That's a good question,' I say. I think about her comments for a moment and acknowledge that until I began this thesis, I didn't have a framework for placing

unspoken ideas and thoughts either. In the repeated hearing of the stories of the women, I have entered their lives and in some strange way their stories have become my own. In the reading and the writing and rewriting of their fragmented lives, certain aspects of my being have not only been revealed to me but have come to exist for the first time. I am reminded in these moments of van Manen's comments on hermeneutic phenomenological writing. Referring to Heidegger (1968), he says, that the act of 'recollecting' through responsive-reflective writing, is a 'gathering of the kinds of understanding that belongs to being' (p.132). 'It works both ways,' I then say, 'your reflections and the conversations of the other women have opened a space within which I can engage my imagination and curiosity in alternative forms of meaning making as well.'

On the next occasion we meet Sophia brings her artwork. We hang it on the walls of my studio. 'Tell me about this piece,' I say, pointing to the strange female shaped form. 'Does it have a name?' (Fig. S2).

No, it doesn't. Isn't that odd. I just call her my soul doll. I created her from a story that began with the words, 'I Am Like'. The first image that came into my mind, was that I am like a rock in the desert, and I immediately thought 'no, no, no, that is not very nice, we'll have something different.' But nothing different came. So I decided to go with it, and the story that emerged was the story of the Sky Mother.

Sky Mother

*I am like a rock in the desert in a red barren landscape.
A goanna rests on me,
soaking up the warmth from the rock
and from the sun above.
A serpent lives beneath me in a hole
inhabited by his ancestors for many centuries.
The hole is full of skeletons and discarded skins.
It is a cool place.*

*Sky Woman was taken from behind
by the blue black man from the mountains
-- this was an unusual coupling,
not joyous and playful
like her other couplings*

*from these couplings came flowers, grasses and fruits.
Sky Woman watched them with great pleasure.*

*But from THIS coupling she bore rocks.
Round, orange-brown rocks,
which she dropped across the desert landscape.
She watched these children for signs of life,
but year and eon after eon
they remained as they were.
Solid in the landscape.
She felt worried and puzzled by this.
And so to protect them as night fell
she would stretch herself in an arc from the sunrise to the sunset,
her long red gold hair touching the horizon.*

*In the mountains the blue black man raged and paced.
The mountains trembled with his frustration –
his need to fertilise these children.
The wind called to Sky Woman,
and the palm tree on top of the mountain moved and spoke
'Move over, move over' - but Sky Woman could not hear.
She had grown deaf over the eons of watching.
And so the tree spoke to the beetle climbing on its bark.
The next night when the sky woman stretched herself
and her hair touched the horizon,
the beetle called,
and numbers of beetles climbed Sky Woman's long red hair,
entered her ears,
and began to clean the wax that was blocking them.
They worked for seven days and seven nights,
and on the seventh night,
when the wind called 'move over, move over'
Sky Woman heard,
and moved over.*

*The blue black man came from the mountains.
He strode to the place and fertilised his children.
In that moment the rock split.
A green stalk pushed urgently skyward.
Great roots dove down, down to the centre of the earth
to the living water that nourishes life.
From the green stalk a bud emerged,
and then burst into flower.
A large red flower, a lotus.
In the centre of which was held a pool of living water.
One after another the rocks split and the desert bloomed.*

*Each day the serpent climbed the stalk and drank the water,
and each day the water was refreshed,
flowing from the well-spring in the centre of the earth.*

*The wise man sat under the palm tree
in the snow on top of the Himalayas
He saw what was happening.
He chuckled, he knew all along that it would be so.*

And that is how the SKY MOTHER came to be.

I sit listening to this story. Entranced. For a few moments, I can smell the desert; feel its brittle heat on my skin, and the tickling dryness in my nostrils as I breathe in and out. I can see the glistening skin of the blue black man sitting under the palm tree, and I can hear the whispered language of the trees and the wind. In Sophia's lyrical storytelling voice, I can hear the sounds of feminine fluidity. They echo and resonate deep within my own body. And, like a child I want to ask 'and then what happened?' But I don't, I step back into my role of researcher and ask 'why is she split in two?'

Perhaps it was because I thought of myself growing up between the sea and the desert. On the other hand there is the good girl versus bad girl, natural woman split. I think I am trying to integrate that.

I walk over to the soul doll, the *Sky Mother*, and run my fingers across her toes. 'She is a bit fish-like,' I say, 'she seems to be neither of the land nor of the sea. She is a strange mixture of both.' Sophia nods her head and says, 'I feel a bit like I am an amphibian. My natural environment feels like it is in the water but I have to come out every now and again and live in the real world.'

Have you told this story? Could you take this story and tell people that you created it halfway through your menopause?

Yes, I could in the right context. I wouldn't feel happy about doing it in public where just anybody could come in. Do you know what I mean? For some people that would be quite revolting and I don't want that response. In our culture, stories about sexuality

are either seen as a joke or they are crude. I want to describe my sexuality somewhere in the middle of those extremes.

I am aware that Sophia, with her storytelling background has a deep interest in archetypal imagery. 'I am intrigued at your use of symbols,' I say, 'are you cognisant of the symbolic significance of the signs you have used?' 'No,' she replied, 'they just appeared in my mind'. 'Would you like to explore what these symbols might mean?' 'Yes.'

I fetch the books on signs and symbols from the bookcase, and for the next hour we are engrossed in exploring the language of colour and the meaning contained within the universal symbols Sophia has used in her artforms. We are intrigued to find that rocks represent an individual's primordial self and that they can be a symbol for a celestial doorway giving access to another realm. (Cooper, 1995) The desert, we find represents the fact that many of us have lived desert lives. Estes (1992) says that 'a woman's psyche may have found its way to the desert out of resonance, or because of past cruelties, or because she was not allowed a larger life above ground. They don't want to be in a psychic desert' (p.37). I read aloud the words of Estes:

[women] so often start out in a desert. We feel disenfranchised, alienated, not connected to even a cactus clump. The ancients call the desert the place of divine revelation. A desert is a place where life is very condensed. The roots of living things hold on that last tear of water and the flower hoards its moisture by only appearing in early morning and late afternoon. Life in the desert is small but brilliant and most of what occurs goes on under ground. This is like the lives of many women (p.37).

Sophia listens, nods her head and gestures to the soul doll on the wall.

I can identify with those words. The doll has knowing eyes. They look into deep spaces. She knows things. She connects me to a much bigger deeper pond. A much bigger river, if you like, that is present in me. And I suspect it is everyone. It surprises me.

Ear: Associated with the spiral, the whorled shell and the sun; this accounts for the otherwise strange notion of birth from the ear, since the shell is a birth symbol connected with the vulva. The ear hears the 'word' of creation and so is associated with the breath of life. (Cooper, 1995, p.58)

And then we look at the meaning of goanna. But as goanna is an Australian word we have to make do with lizard. We read that it is a lunar creature and a symbol of silence. It also represents divine wisdom and good fortune. Beetles, we find, represent the generative power of life. While we continue to look at the interpretations of the ear, the serpent, the flower and the cup and the other symbols Sophia has used in her other art forms, we wonder if archetypal imagery from pre-patriarchal times is buried deep within our bodies. What aspects of our psyche tap into the language of symbols and why? We question whether Sophia is using these symbols as a way of reinterpreting them outside the contexts of patriarchy. Is she reclaiming, as Walker (1988) suggests, symbols of fertility, power and sexuality that were stolen from woman-centred systems? Is her psyche, her soul crying out to connect the fragments of knowledge which have conspired to silence her?

Over the next few months Sophia and I meet regularly. A writing group has formed as a result of the summer school, and every few weeks we gather together to practice our writing skills and read stories and poetry to each other. I get to know her well. I discover that she knows several of the other women in the study and occasionally we meet for coffee. I always take my journal. As I am writing these lines, I glance at a page and see that on one occasion our conversation is centred on the risks of being authentic, in speaking out about what we perceive to be the truth of our lives. Sophia worries that in revealing her female processes in this study, her thoughts will be ridiculed. She asks the question, 'if we expose our female selves to the male world, will we be dismissed as lightweight?' And then they discuss their concern that their daughters are hooking into the same story lines as they did in their younger years.

[Regarding his theory of relativity] These thoughts did not come in any verbal formulation. I very rarely think in words at all. (Einstein, in Wenger, 1996, p.13)

One day on the beach at sunset, while walking with Sophia, I tell her that I feel the creative muse has deserted me. I want to write poetry as a way of re-describing women's experiences, I say, but my

internal critic has returned. It's blocking my flow. 'Have you tried Image Streaming?' she asks, 'it is a method combining Einsteinian and Socratic ways of knowing to describe inner subtle perceptions.'⁵⁵ It gives you access to a person's sub-conscious mind quickly. Through speech and imagination it is a rapid flow of description to a receptive listener or tape recorder, using all five senses in the present tense as a way of finding fresh insights about an object or experience. As well as using one's embodied senses, it incorporates analysis, reflection, and wonder. And, by engaging in uncustomary perceptual ways of seeing, it changes neural patterns, thus generating new mental imagery from the subconscious. It is an activity designed to link left and right brain hemispheres. If you practice Image Streaming it will help you reinterpret inner, subtler perceptions of phenomena.'

I am intrigued and excited by this information. Existential phenomenology has its roots in Socratic thinking. On returning home I immediately connect to the internet. I subscribe to the Image Streaming discussion list. I am excited by the exchange of dialogue that ensues on the relationships between language faculties and the formation of the body-mind, perception, and the side-bands of our sub-conscious minds, and the unconscious. I can see its possibilities for culture change, for people change, and for changes in imagistic healing.⁵⁶ I write to Dr. Win Wenger, the founder of Image Streaming and tell him of my project. He offers advice, suggests books to read and tells me to begin practicing Image Streaming. This I do, with Sophia as my partner. And so, for the past eighteen months we have engaged in this activity as a way of interpreting dreams, re-describing experiences and objects, problem solving, and creating breakthroughs in our personal lives and work practices. Image Streaming techniques began to form an integral part of the writing of these stories and in the creation of the poetry.

In the final stages of re-writing Sophia's transcripts into this present text, she calls by to read what she has said about her life. As she hands me back the typed pages she says:

⁵⁵ Image Streaming Web Sites. www.botree.com/winsights
www.egroups.com/list/imagestream/
www.anakin.com/

⁵⁶ I use the term healing not in a curing sense, but from the perspective of repairing or regenerating health by natural processes and for the restoration of relations and harmony.

I am beginning to settle into my 56 year old skin at last. I am more resigned to it now, but I would like to change the story that I have told myself. I am not sure how to do it. It is damaging. I realise that at the core of myself I believe I am unlovable, and although that feeling is shifting, it is a belief, which has underpinned the whole of my life. It affects my sexuality, my femininity and my ability to speak out.

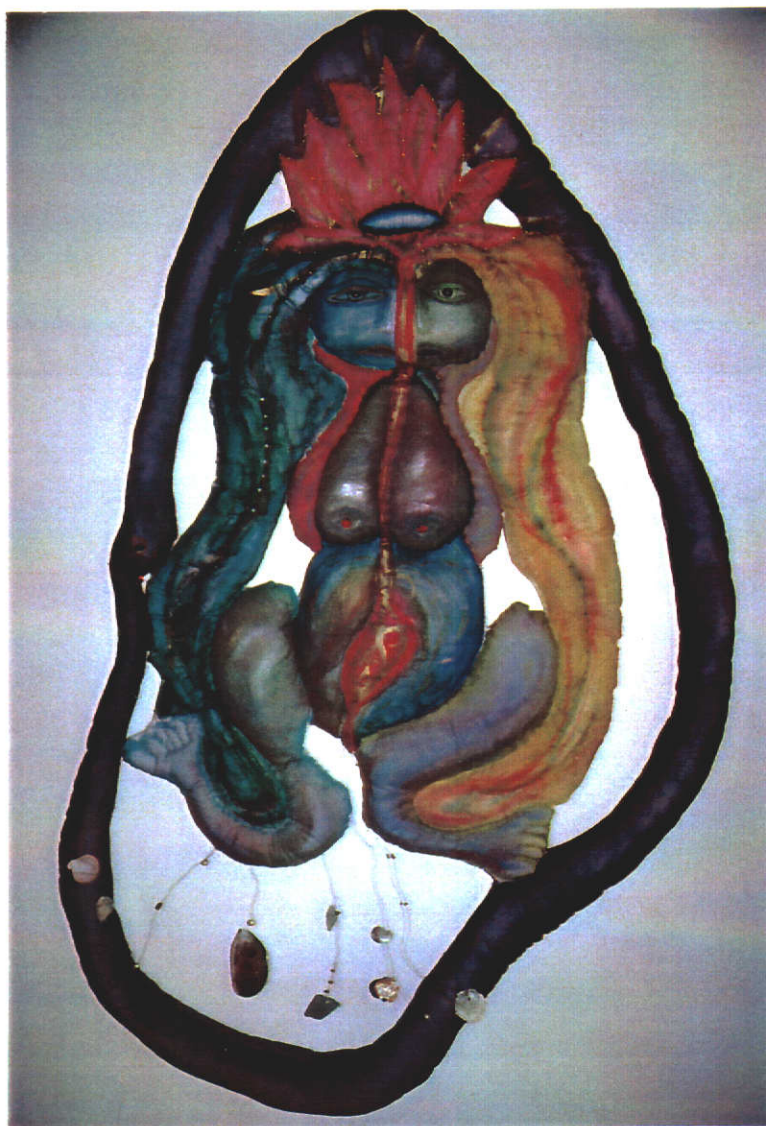


Fig. S2

'Sky Mother'

I hear this desire for change, and I suggest we do an Image Streaming exercise on her soul doll. 'If the soul doll is a representation of yourself, which you say she is, and if she has eyes that look into deep spaces, and that she knows 'things', what story would she tell you about your life that you are unable to access in a conscious state? Perhaps the soul doll can contemplate your life and tell you a story that will begin to soothe your sense of feeling wounded.'

The stories we tell ourselves, particularly the silent or barely audible ones are very powerful. They become invisible enclosures. Rooms with no air. One must open the window to see further the door to possibility.
(Griffin, 1992, p.284)

The next evening Sophia arrives with her doll. It is a hot and steamy, almost a tropical night. There is a cyclone battering the Top End of Australia. Although we live thousands of miles away from the Northern Territory, Perth is feeling the forces of nature. Our normal dry, West Australian summer weather pattern has changed. I am reminded of a holiday I once had in far north Queensland back in the late 80s. There is not a breath of air. It is as hot outside as it is in. We sit in my lounge-room with the French doors wide open. Three female forms. The soul doll is almost life size. She is framed and connected to a serpent. She fills the chair. Her presence fills the room. It is a strange sensation having her watch over us. She does have knowing eyes, I think to myself. I direct my questions to the doll. 'What story would you have us hear?' There is silence as Sophia's thoughts connects to threads of memory. I hear her voice. It comes from a place far away. It is soft and low, almost melodic. At first she begins to shape words from her conscious mind, and then she falls to the submerged levels of consciousness.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This story was created from a dialogue between Sophia and myself. During certain Image Streaming processes a receptive listener prompts and asks questions. This exchange took twenty minutes.

*Moving from one edge of the world to the other
Stretching across time.*

Looking at the spaces between molecules.

Looking at the spaces between stars.

*Spaces -
 full of potential
Spaces -
 full of possibilities
Spaces -
 as yet unformed*

It is dark.

*Silvery molecules gather
 around a wound,
 flesh like.*

It could be

*- a vagina
or a cut, a split; an opening.
Or
it could even be the Christ wound.*

It is red and white.

*It looks like the cut a surgeon makes.
 I want to stroke the inside of the wound.*

*Feeling an urge to stitch it up.
A hand needs to go into the centre
 and bring something out*

It could be a creature, a child.

Or a ball, or an egg.

There is a blockage.

It needs to come out.

Hand reaching in.

It is an egg.

Warm - mottled - round.

I put the egg aside.

The wound has to be attended to.

Hand inside again.

Running fingers across the place where the egg was held.

Instant healing

from the inside out.

Layer upon layer,

right from the core

my finger caresses.

- Stroking.

Tenderly drawing flesh together.

*I make sure the ruptured flesh is healed;
that the wound is closed;*

that all is well.

*I stroke it lovingly
and tell it
ALL IS WELL*

What to do with the egg?

I go and look at it.

I wonder what is in there.

It might be like Pandora's box

I shake the egg.

I can feel and hear

a watery slushy sound.

It feels like a dragon.

Or maybe it's an alligator.

Perhaps it will come out and bite me.

Or it might be soft and curious

I'll get a hammer.

Give it a crack

IT'S A DRAGON!

It's still in its shell

Curled up -

Lying there -

Shell shocked -

It's been there a long time.

It's almost atrophied.

It's been dead too long.

It has missed the moment of birth.

I take it out,

touch it.

I thought I'd be afraid,

but I am not.

I need to be patient.

*I say to the dragon,
'it's a strange world'.*

*I am warming towards it.
Curious also.*

It's a little helpless.

*Gradually it wakes up.
It's looking around.
It's very small.
It doesn't really know what to do.*

*It cannot speak.
Making sounds, like a kitten mewling.*

*I don't know what to feed it.
What do dragons eat?*

*I want to take care of it.
Does a dragon suckle?*

*I want to put this dragon to my breast.
It feels okay, but
his eyes are fixed on me with a knowing look.*

*Maybe the dragon will get fixated on me
because I am the only thing around*

and then, I'll become the mother of a dragon.

NO

It cannot drain my life

I will put some boundaries around it.

*I think I can like this dragon.
I think we can have a mutually satisfying relationship.*

But, I think we will have to negotiate.

Like when it's allowed out and when it isn't.

I type the transcript and arrange with Sophia to read the soul doll's story. She visits the next evening. While I am preparing a salad, she sits at the kitchen table and reads again the reconstruction of our conversations. I hear her sigh. 'Is there a problem?' 'No,' she says, with a long exhalation of breath. 'I would really like my family to read this'. 'Why?' I say. 'I don't think they know who I am', she replies, 'there has never been space in my family for me to express myself in this way. I would love my daughter to read this.'

The wound is a strange thing: either I die, or a kind of work takes place, mysterious, that will reassemble the edges of the wound. A marvelous thing also: that will nonetheless leave a trace, even if it hurts us. It is here that I sense things taking place. The wound is also an alteration. Breaking, for me, remained in the domain of a less fleshy material. I see a stick being broken . . . of course, one can also break one's bones, but then the sticks of the body repair themselves, and there is no scar . . . I like the scar, the story.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 16)

After we have eaten, I read the story. She listens attentively, head to one side, and at the conclusion she bursts into laughter.

Dragon- The dragon, the 'winged serpent', combines the serpent and bird as matter and spirit. Originally it was wholly beneficent as the manifestation of the life-giving waters (the serpent) and the breath of life (the bird) and was identified with the sky gods and the earthly delegates... It can be solar or lunar, male or female, good or evil... The DRAGON and SERPENT are usually interchangeable in symbolism as representing the unmanifest; the undifferentiated; chaos, the latent; untamed nature; also the life giving element of water...It is associated with the sea, the great deeps, also with mountain tops and clouds... Killing the dragon is the conflict between light and darkness, the slaying of the destructive forces of evil, or man overcoming his own dark nature and attaining self-mastery... it represents the divine power of change... the rhythms of Nature, the law of becoming

.....
(Cooper, 1995, p.55)

What a great story. I love it. I am fascinated with image. The story demonstrates that we do have an ability in the right circumstances to image stream from sub conscious levels. We couldn't have written this story unless we had image streamed. When I image stream I touch something so powerful. It feels as though it is the core of who I am. I recognise myself when I am there, but not my external persona. As you read the image of healing the wound, I could still feel the sensation very powerfully within me. I was back inside my body again. I could almost feel a pulsating electrical impulse in my index finger. I remember how I couldn't hurry the healing. I had to go over every tiny bit. It is easy to vision that again, and the dragon. I am amazed at the images. I don't know that I want to be the mother of a dragon. But

maybe I am. What do your books on symbols say about dragons?

As I am walking to the bookcase, I ask Sophia 'What does it feel like to hear that you are capable of your own healing? Does it make a difference?'

Oh yeah. It feels quite soft and beautiful. It feels like ancient wisdom. It feels like old women's stuff. But both old and young at the same time. Do you know what I mean? You realise that within yourself is a different capacity to live. I can take this knowledge and metaphorically put my hand in my body and stitch the wounds together.

Sophia pauses, and then says.

How does memory reside in the cells when the soft tissues of the body replaces itself every few months? Why is it that I still have these wounds and scars after all of these years? What is this body/knowledge I have tapped into?

To transform the patterns of the past you must know what they are made of. Your body appears to be composed of solid matter that can be broken down into molecules and atoms. but quantum physics tells us that every atom is more than 99.9999 percent empty space and the sub atomic particles moving at lightening speed through this space are actually bundles of vibrating energy... they carry information... Chasing the physical structure of the body down to its ultimate source dead-ends as molecules give way to atoms, atoms to subatomic particles, and these particles to ghosts of energy dissolving into an empty void. This void is mysteriously imprinted with information even before any information is expressed. Just as thousands of words exist silently in your memory without being spoken, the quantum field holds the entire universe in unexpressed form.

... The essential stuff of the universe, including your body, is non stuff, but it isn't ordinary non-stuff. It is thinking non-stuff. The void inside every atom is pulsating with unseen intelligence.
(Chopra, 1993, p.14)

I find Cooper's (1995) *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* and search also for Deepak Chopra's (1993) *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, hoping that he will provide an answer to Sophia's questions on cellular memory. I hand her Cooper's book and she turns to the page on dragons and reads in silence. 'It's extraordinary,' she says, 'I have chosen an object that taps into the same archetypal imagery of the underworld and the elements from which the story of the *Sky Mother* was born. There are remarkable similarities.' And then she reads them out aloud to me. It takes some time, for the dragon is a complex and universal symbol with many signifying forms of communication spanning many cultures. We look at other

references and discuss them at length. She tells me that in monotheistic religions the dragon was depicted as evil. 'My dragon,' she says 'is pre-monotheistic, it is not evil. I see the dragon from two perspectives. It is an image that allows the creative life force to flow through me. It is the same life-giving waters that are flowing through the *Sky Mother*, and I see the dragon representing the two sides of myself: the light and dark. This is the paradox I need to work with.'

Yes, it would seem there are times when we need to walk in darkness as well as in the light, and then we need to learn how to negotiate all the shades in between. The more we face our shadows the more we become vitalised.

It is now the morning after this exchange with Sophia. I am in the midst of writing this particular part of the story when the phone rings. It is Sophia.

I have just been to chanting at the Buddhist temple. The monks are here making a mandala for the university's summer school. They had Tibetan rugs for sale, and there right in front of me was a dragon. It was beautiful, and after our conversation last night I just had to buy it. I read the label and it said that the dragon represents the highest spiritual essence. It embodies wisdom, strength and the divine power of transformation.

That's wonderful. I think that perhaps the story of the rug is a fitting way to bring this story of ours to closure. So, what can come out of all of this, the work that we have done together, and the work of the other women? In your professional life you are actively engaged in political reform, you are working to make a difference in people's lives, particularly women's lives, how can we take our inner work out into the community?

Yes, that's the question. I have been thinking about this. Is the inner world a reflection of the external world? Are the inner issues a reflection of the outer issues? Perhaps they are not personal or metaphysical, but rather they are the collective experience, they are part of the wider knowing of the universe. I wonder how much of the world's experience is in me and how much of me is in the collective? If I think that, then if I can resolve the issues of peace within myself, there is a possibility of peace in the world. I don't know what the answer is. Maybe if it is in the collective and you heal yourself you

are healing the collective. That's the possibility we must continue to live in and work with. The task now is to take this desire for healing, this intention into the world, and live it.



Fig. S3 *'The Intuition Doll'*

CHAPTER 4

MENOPAUSE PERSPECTA X 5

In this section I adopt a different narrational approach and voice as I move from the realm of storyteller to that of curator. In my imagination I am now curating the works of five artists to accommodate a shared exhibition space: the pages within this chapter. I am carefully selecting their non-verbal scripts: their art objects, and their writings, in the same manner as if I was curating a real exhibition. From the large body of work produced by these artists, it is indeed a difficult task to select the most appropriate material which will best represent their lived experience of menopause. Drawing on my background as artist and curator, I give thought to the representation of their various artforms. Inherent in the structure of an exhibition is the presence of the maker, the art object and the beholder (de Zegher, 1996). For a curator, it is important that art objects and the accompanying text are displayed in a manner which will open a space for some form of translation and interpretation. This enables the viewer, on seeing the artwork, to begin an internal dialogue between themselves and the fragmentary evocations of the objects. In this exchange, the observer has the opportunity to identify other connections, make comparisons and even contemplate possible contradictions. In a similar way to that of creating the previous stories, where there are different voices speaking at different levels, this collection of plural poetics continues the process of articulating the menopausal body. And like the representations of the women before them, this 'exhibition' foregrounds the physicality of their female bodies. In seeking to render visible their subjective and phenomenological accounts of menopause, their work displays the same tensions, and the same patterns and rhythms, which are inherent in the task of mark making and meaning making when the naming of deep experiences are expressed and changes in behaviour are noted. Although their work is displayed as a group, individually they have explored their different shades of reality, the fictions which surround their lives, and the spaces, in, around and between their organic bodies, their imagination and the natural environment. Their work offers further confirmation that their bodies are continually in the process of asking questions and remaking themselves anew. The artforms presented here offer no fixed statements nor answers, simply different perspectives.



Florence



Eileen



Seymour



Artemesia



Julian

FLORENCE

*... as the Melbourne Cup horse race
rushes to the finishing line,
my uterus is being sliced,
sucked and snipped away from its roots.
Its fifty-year-old bed of bleeding roses.
And I awaken with the doctor
sitting on the bed trying to explain it all.
And Tom - my husband, some where,
as I dream in and out of reality with gentle pain.
Administrating my own pethidine.
Urine leaving through a hole
above my pubic bone,
and a saline drip.*

Sixteen days post-op.

*A blood flow.
Bright, fresh, scary.
Images of trolleys
and a swift return to bright lights,
and sterile air.
I can't, wont do it,
which left me restless and worried.
I tried the golden surrounding light
to curb this unwelcome flow.
One clot, two clots, three,*

and suddenly,

*finish,
and it was back to a pale golden loss.*

I sit thankfully on the warm loo seat

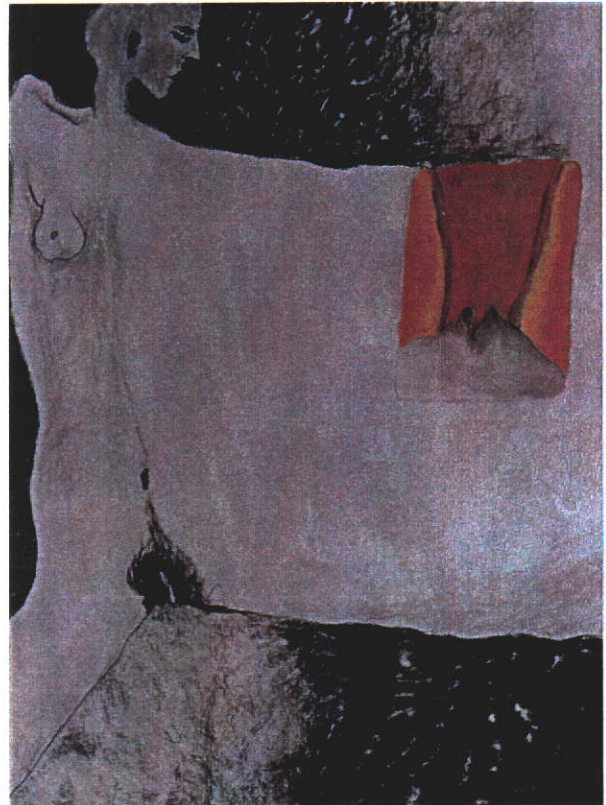


Fig. F1

in the garden morning.
Such dread,
horror and distaste at the idea
of returning to the hospital.
At six o'clock in the evening
preparing to go out,
suddenly a thick fast gush of blood.
This time it feels more serious,
and I am getting miserably panicky.

I ring the gynaecologist.
He says to come to the hospital emergency.
I don't want to,
I don't want to,
I don't want to,
as this heavy, placenta-type clot
slips ungraciously into pads that are unable to cope.
Disgusted and resigned and angry,
to this hospital again,
and to the doctors on duty.
And there in emergency he looks,
and the drip is announced.
This will ground you
Ha, Ha, he says,
and even my veins revolt and go into spasm.

Yoga, relax.
Breathe.

Let this tourniqued, painful arm
stubbornly refusing to become veinful
give up graciously.
At the second attempt it is in.
And the speculum and the pain,
and the privacy opened.
And the drawings fly around in my angry head.

*And then quality time with the doctor
as he slowly gives antibiotics into the drip.
And I tell him of the emotions,
and he tells me of the curse.*

*I tell him I have had a peaceful relationship
with my departed uterus*

..... and the baby.

*I tell him about the baby in the church,
and the drawings.*

*That simple peaceful truthful place
that's often hard to be in.*

*If pressed by this kind of experience,
it's there, to listen, to tune in to.*

*It's the morning time
after a hospital night of dim lights,
and noisy and clumsy walks to the loo.
Antibiotics from a shoe-less nurse.
Light through the blinds,
and the slight edge of drugged sleep
hanging in the antibiotic mouth.*

*Bleeding ceases.
Pads disgust, drugs disgust, hospital routines disgust.
If I want to pee I have to ring the bell.
Urrrgh! I am not sick,
and I don't know how to rest.
Administrations from a nurse that knows better.
You are doing too much.
I am doing what I want.
Is this too much?*

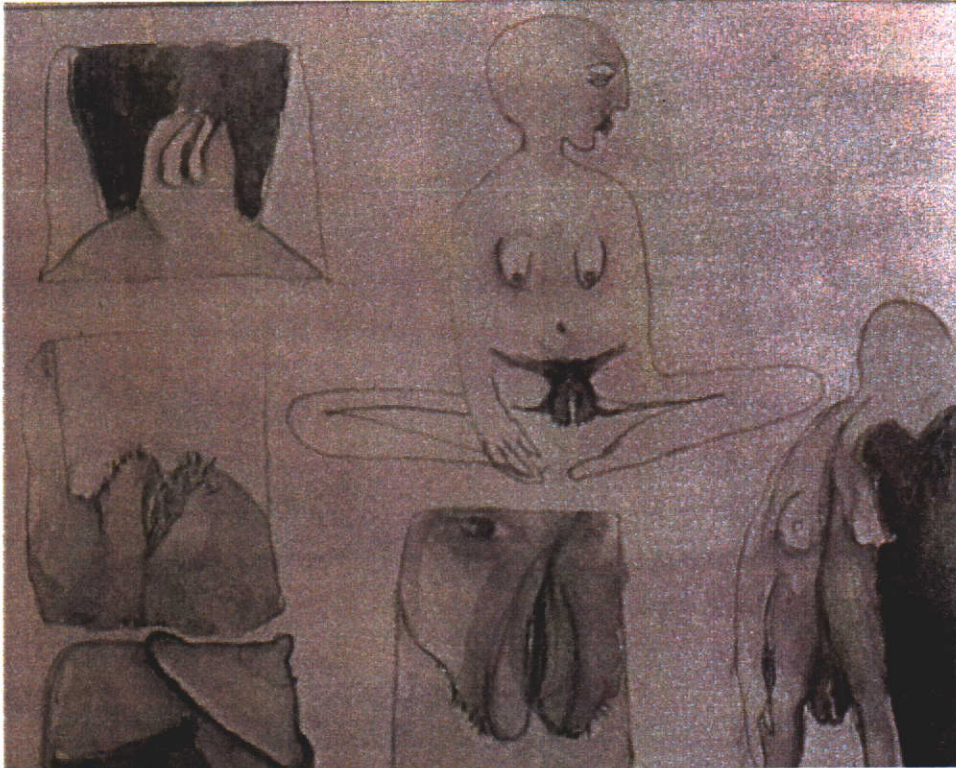


Fig. F2

*What is going to be hard,
 is to search back two weeks
 from the successful post op
 to the removal of plugs, red ribbons, catheters,
 suction tubes, in and out.
 Hot, red, wild pulling at this T/tube
 which brings swearing words from my mouth,
 and spatters the sheet with blood.
 And then the challenge to do so well.
 Then the crying, puking,
 and wild, heavy, mad headaches
 that pulled me right under
 in tears and disbelief,
 as I am knocked out with needles and drugs
 because my stomach objects to all the chemicals.*

*And the hunger.
And it eats itself up with anguish.
I feel really ill.*

*When I am leaving
I have hiccups,
and I am weak and teary.
I go to bed in the garden.
There is a baby in church crying - I live near a church.
I am crying.*

*My need to be a woman and not a patient.
Sexual feelings lying in bed against Tom.
To him, I feel like an untouchable,
a patient.
I am stitched up, unavailable, unattainable.
I need to feel my clitoris
and tease life into these soft tissues of joy
and of super sensations.
And I do.
Then a weekend in Margaret River
where I feel his sexuality dormant.
I awaken it with little cuddles,
and sucks and licks of fingers.
Massaging life.*

*And then,
the curative powers of the lavender fields,
and the hazy warm soft clouds
and bee laden flowers.
It's a perfumed day where paradise clears and heals
and I let the sun touch my shaven lips,
and pierce the soft interior
where the stitches dissolve.
Some painfully.
The need to pee continues.
Night visits,*

*and there is always a little more in reserve.
 I turn off the tap too quickly.
 There is a yellowish discharge.
 Sweet smelling.
 Is this an infection?
 How I want to be okay.*

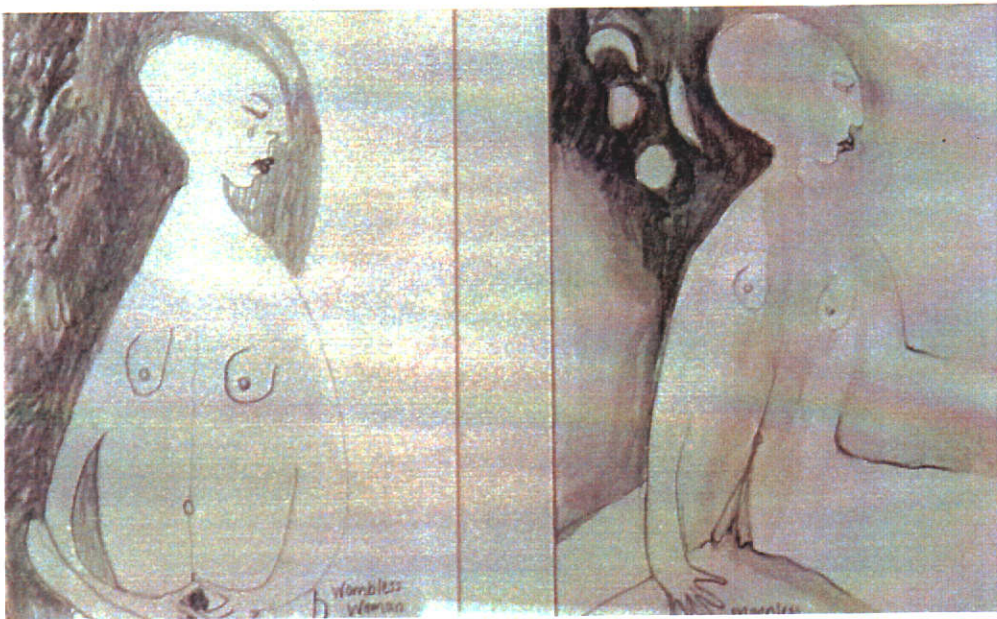


Fig. F3

'Wombless Woman'

*Passing the hospital one day in the car
 I have to turn away.
 I can't take this memory yet.
 These days of sickness from drugs
 and the pain of loss.*

*There is a garden at the hospital,
 and a plaque for all the stillborn babies
 that are lost before twenty-nine weeks.*

*There are roses opening
in the suburban summer.
And cicadas reminding me to awake
and take Australian summer time.*

*And I think,
wouldn't it be lovely,
if there was a garden for the uterus's as well.*

*This is a vital and important
and shocking to myself time.
From where it comes,
from this bald headed loss.
The tear (n), the tear (vb),
the powerlessness of the situation.
Giving over,
giving up my body.
A blazon of red from a halved body.*

Vulval despair.

*One month later
..... slowing down and acceptance.*

Thank heavens I am doing this.

(Interview 22.8.1996)

EILEEN

*During the barren times
 mid-stream, we find our
 life devoid of all
 desire and wonder if
 real love was of
 ourselves, or
 came from others,
 from those we sought to be.
 Our mothers, fathers, daughters, friends.
 Soul mates who understand
 contribute to the knowledge.
 Crises pass and with them
 unconsciously we regain our strength,
 create with passion and
 acknowledge ourselves and
 feel the life force give
 vital spark to all we do to
 authenticate SELF*

*As it was in the beginning.
 Women strong, affirming.
 We look once more to
 touch our souls and the
 hidden aspects within.
 People to people
 we touch and
 know ourselves in others.
 Our life pre-drawn. The palm
 confirms and
 like a map to the inner self
 a journey of a kind,
 the map not overt by nature.
 Sensors are needed to divine.*



Fig. E1 'Transcending'

*No. No more denials,
 No more dreams of the red
 blood of lunar cycles.
 Was it so inconvenient
 that time when I felt its pull?
 All my energy drained to surge in later years.*

*Her dreams surprise her with their
 blood. Blood she no longer
 has with all its connotations.
 Become dry as summer creeks
 but wisdom flows
 not through her creatively
 and she feels no less a woman
 she is merely transformed.
 Will to live and create is stronger,
 give her peace and inner joy.
 It will lift her higher.
 More potent than youth
 and more uplifting.
 More and more and more.*

(13.9.1996)



Fig. E2 *'Going Home'*

*There amongst the tissue layers
is the dead rose
and the fine filigree brooch pinned to
muslin browning with age in the old cabin trunk
And I remember back to
India and my youth.
Tea sampled at plantations
you took us to in the highlands.
Forget the intervening years
to live again in those times and
look once more at the seething mass
into the eyes of your youth
the dark side of me
Eyes that spoke of unknown mysteries
of fire walking and magic,
beasts, mythical beings
and know again the heat of it
Nobody it seems, just my soul
notices the passing of time
that leaves just the bare bones.
Yours white, and bleached
lying where you left me,
turned to the sun and moon
to reflect back at the universe.
Stone still, cold and lifeless.*

(Interview 1.9.1996)

SEYMOUR



Fig. S1

'Bitch Goddess'

*I saw menopause as a metamorphosis,
 a state of change.
 I felt like a witch.
 I felt out of control.
 I felt red and purple and black.
 The feeling of being out of control
 was the major thing
 Suddenly I would have a bleeding –
 then just when the next one would occur, it didn't.
 Then it would occur as a flood.
 I would have to excuse myself... .. go off.
 For someone who felt fairly connected to my body,
 suddenly I didn't know it.
 My body was doing things without telling me.
 Without giving me warning.
 It was like being drawn into a whirlwind.
 I had the ground connection,
 and then, I was just whoosh
 up here somewhere.*



Fig. S2

GIVE ME LIFE

*Yesterday, I began my bed of sticks
 Each one carefully chosen and placed
 Gnarled, angry, piercing
 Odd shapes
 Sizes
 My Mother's bed again
 My shadow lies across it
 I am pierced
 I am hurt
 There is no comfort here
 Each stick's shadow
 Lies across the one before
 Dark in the centre
 Edges you can see through*

*Where am I?
Her child
I lie silently alongside
Grey
I am a hundred seeds
And yet there is no life
The seeds will only burst into life
Through fire
My mother's ashes
Lie grey beside me
I am burnt
At last she reached out
To burn my seed
My soul
And give me life
(September 1995)*

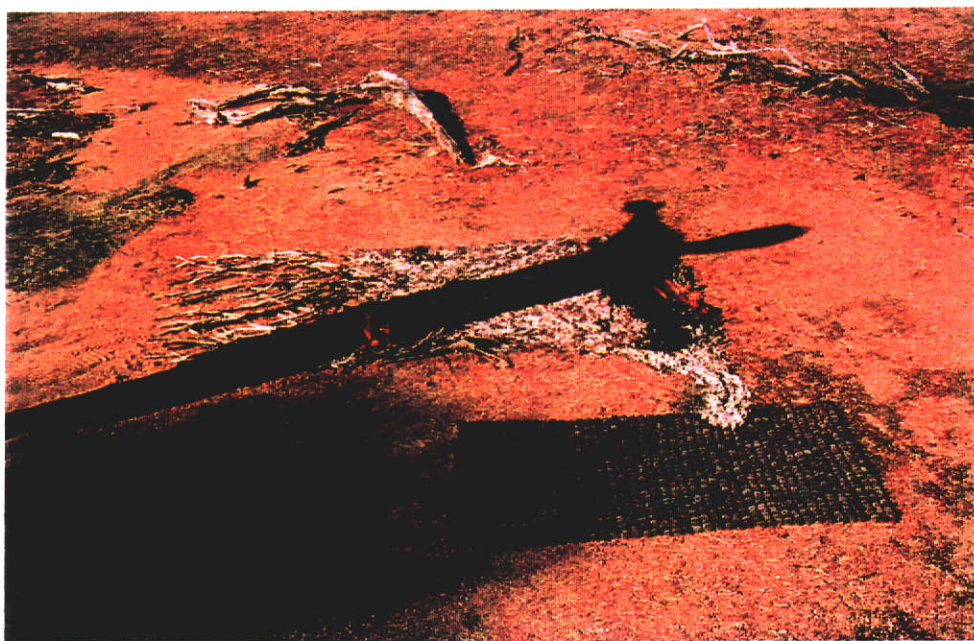


Fig. S3

ARTEMESIA



Fig. A1

I think a lot of women of my generation were brought up to be good girls. Good girls basically kissed enough frogs and married a prince. I married a prince. I love him very much, but oh, the price. I really wonder about the price. There is a part of this person that I am that never happened. It is the price you pay by agreeing at about the age of ten or eleven that because you live in this household, life would be such hell if one didn't conform. My mother was a strong advocate, and followed and swallowed the party line of what was appropriate behaviour for the late 50s and early 60s. She made sure that her daughters followed everyone of the rules. You are so busy following the rules, that you lose the real meaning of it all, I think. So you conformed, and through all the conforming, after awhile you lost your self. It hasn't been really important to find this person, this self, until recently. Now she is out.

A lot of this is now showing up in my writing. The story I am weaving is about myself, and what I would call a better reality. It makes me feel authentic (Interview 18.2.1997).



Fig. A2



Fig. A3

Menopause

*feels like a struggle to change
 a new beginning
 it is a maze
 a beautiful pattern
 not fixed
 nor is it only two-dimensional
 I thought it would be a grey amorphous mass
 of sticky cobwebs – a lost place
 but
 it is quite the contrary
 I fly
 I paint
 open, expressive, intimate, yearning
 I am alive
 I am rebellious
 I feel a need to speak out
 and a need to be silent*

(Interview 11.2.1997)

JULIAN

I was unprepared for the menopause. My mother never talked about it. At those times people never talked about it. I adored my mother, but sexual things were never discussed. My mother never, never discussed the facts of life with us, even things like menstruation was never discussed. I just heard it from the girls at school, and when you hear it you don't believe it. You think 'it is not going to happen to me.' It was the same with menopause. Can you believe? Isn't it stupid? I know my mind knew it, but I sort of ... when I heard other women complaining about this and that. Like, 'I feel so terrible and depressed' I was always so very positive, energetic and healthy, and I thought 'well I am not going to be like that and that's not going to happen to me. When I get it, it won't affect me.' Oh, but did it ever. When I was around 50, I just got so terribly depressed. The depression started when my periods stopped and didn't cease until I started on hormone treatment. It was just absolute complete blackness. I think I could have easily killed myself at the time. I talked with a few women friends about it. Some of them had experienced no effects. They just went through it without any problems. I thought I must be silly if I feel like this. You know . . . they all go through it as if nothing is happening to them. Isn't it strange how it affects different people? I think probably the more sensitive you are the more it affects you, don't you think? It is a difficult time. You are really in the middle of everything. Your own children need you still, and then you have your parents who are also getting older. They need you. So you are really torn. And you think, 'what is left of me, where am I?'

Once I started taking hormone replacement therapy my depressions went. My life started all over again, I got my energy back and that's why I think it is important that women talk about it. I would like other women to be prepared and know what they can expect. Not like me not having any idea of what to expect (Interview 20.3.1996).



Fig. J1

A LOVE STORY

This is the story of a poor Jewish boy and a rich Christian girl who both lived in a little village somewhere in Europe.

Neither knew that the other existed until one day, they were both walking in the little village and passed each other. As they passed, they looked into each other's eyes and there found the most precious thing in the world – they had each found their soulmate. Instantly they fell deeply in love.

The rich Christian girl's parents believed that being rich meant possessing material things, and that wealth could not be found in love. They considered it unthinkable that their daughter should have anything to do with a poor Jewish boy, and the two were

banned from seeing each other, and the girl was locked in her room in the big house in the little village.

The young couple's love however, was so strong that nothing could stand in their way, and they decided to elope.

The girl had a very handsome rooster, a blue hen and a Russian Blue cat as pets, all of whom she loved very much.

The handsome rooster was in love with the pretty blue hen because she was unlike all other hens. When the rooster heard about the young couple's plans to elope, he offered to help them to run away, as he knew that he could run faster than any other animal. The rooster also wanted his pretty blue hen to come because he loved her so much.

The Russian Blue cat also wanted to come because she was devoted to the girl. And so, the whole group of them made plans to elope one night while the village was sleeping.

The poor Jewish boy brought a ladder to carry his beloved out of the window of her bedroom in the big house, and together they jumped on to the rooster's back and held on tight. The rooster ran away as fast as he could and the blue hen and the cat followed.

The mother and the father of the girl found out too late what had happened. They let the dog loose who was green with envy, because he too had wanted to join the group.

However, the lovers, the rooster, the hen and the cat were soon out of sight.

They ran for many more days through dense wood, until they came to a river where a little rowing boat was awaiting them. They all jumped into the boat and rowed away. After many days of rowing they came to a beautiful country called Australia where there was peace, the sky was always blue, and the weather warm. There were palm trees too, and people were very kind, and accepted the young lovers without prejudice.

The young couple were married before God, with the handsome rooster, the pretty blue hen and the Russian Blue cat as their witnesses. For all of them, the village from which they came was a mere memory. They were very, very happy together because they believed that love is the most important thing in Life. They thanked God for their happiness.



Fig. J2

For the rest of the time, they were good and kind and gentle to each other, and to their neighbours. They were blessed with many children, and lived happily ever after with the handsome rooster, his pretty blue hen and the Russian Blue cat who stayed with the couple and had many kittens of all different colours (April 1996).

POSTSCRIPT

We know that the brain takes in experience as word and image, but there is also an uncharted territory in the brain, where experience is stored in a form called, for lack of a better term, the nonverbal or preconceptual... the intersection point between culture and the stored traces of past experiences is *the* most revelatory point of understanding the tension between individual and society. It is the place we have to look to understand the assertion that some human or mentality is “socially” or “culturally” determined.

(Conway, 1998, p.178)

and

If we see our past as a moral and spiritual journey in time, our imagined future will continue that quest. We might not use the imagery of Dame Julian of Norwich, but we'll be in the same existential position as she was – pondering the intersection of our tiny point of human consciousness with the metaphysical pattern she called the mind of God.

(Conway, 1998, p.176)

The end of autumn is in sight. It is unseasonably warm for this time of the year, hot, still, and clear. The blue domed sky arches across the heavens. I want to immerse my body in the ocean. I walk the hundred metres to the beach. It is high tide. I stand at the water's edge. A wave rushes in. A quick intake of breath, as I feel the sudden chill. White foaming water surges around and between my legs. I want to swim, but I am the only person on the beach. I know this stretch of water can be deceptive: undercurrents make swimming dangerous. So I stand there, and let the rhythm of the water, its ebb and flow connect me to my body. My feet sink deeper and deeper into the wet sand. And then, in the silence I hear the soft tinkling song of shells as the water washes over them on its return to the great ocean. The shells roll backwards and forwards, backwards and

forwards. I watch my thoughts. At first they are loose and wandering as I observe the shimmering sunlight on the waves and the swirling shapes in the water, and then I begin to think about the nature of writing, about words, about speech and its paradoxical power to both heal and wound at the same time, how words can soothe and calm, provide strength and connection, as well be interpreted so as to cause misunderstanding and confusion.

The science of the body/mind connection, or psycho-neuro-immunology (PNI), helps explain how the circumstances of our lives can affect our bodies. PNI and related research shows that the subtle electromagnetic fields around and within the body form a crucial line between the cultural wounding, which we think of as 'psychological' and 'emotion', and the gynecological or other problems women have, which we think of as 'physical'. (Northrup, 1995, p. 27)

As my ankles sink even deeper into the grainy sand, I recall conversations on the healing power of words. On different occasions I have shared with Caroline, Fanny and Sophia that I am currently reading Dr. Christiane Northrup's (1995) *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*. Northrup is a holistic physician who blends together conventional medicine, ancient healing traditions, eastern philosophical ideas and quantum theories as a means of teaching women that their bodies are not 'external circumstances that just

happen' (fly leaf). Drawing on the extensive work of medical intuitive Dr. Caroline Myss (1996), Northrup claims that women's reproductive organs have a silent language which speaks of the psychological and emotional wounding that they have experienced as a consequence of unspoken female values. In our bodies, in the data bank of our tissues and cells, we carry our personal history. But, she asserts, it is specifically in the uterus, the ovaries and the vagina that we carry the memories of unhealthy relationships, sadness that cannot be expressed, sexual abuse, psychological rape, shame, fear and abandonment. She says 'our bodies contain information that is beyond our intellectual mind's capacity to understand,' submerged knowledge informs our existing thought patterns and actions (p.38). For women to experience a healthy reproductive body, it is important they learn to listen to the mind of the cells in existing organs. Northrup tells her patients that when they have surgery on their reproductive organs, memories contained within cellular memory may surface into their

If the uterus, the white blood cells and the heart all make the same chemicals as the brain makes when it thinks, *where in the body is the mind?* The answer is, *the mind is located throughout the body ... it exists in every cell of our bodies..* (Northrup, 1995, p. 29)

conscious awareness. Therefore, she continues, it is important for women to feel the emotion connected to the surgical removal of tissue. I tell Caroline, Fanny and Sophia all this.

Northrup goes on to say:

Childhood abuse, incest, loss of a parent and other traumas are not absolutely linked in a cause-and-effect way with subsequent distress in adulthood. The effect of trauma on our physical, mental and emotional bodies is determined largely by *how we interpret the event and give it meaning...* No matter what has happened in her life, a woman has the power to change what that experience means to her and thus change the experience, both emotionally and physically. Therein lies her healing (pp.39 -40).

Healing often occurs through naming how our culture has defined what it means to be a 'good' woman. Once an experience is consciously named, it frees emotional and physical energy which then enables us to move towards alternative ways of knowing our bodies. For some women, these cultural wounds do not heal unless they are witnessed. 'Someone,' says Northrup, 'has to say, 'Yes, this happened to you'' (p.86). But, she adds, what is important is that the woman herself acknowledges her wounds and her need for healing. Once she begins the process of making the invisible visible, she then must investigate how her sense of woundedness has affected her life.

I pause in my reflections and listen again to the sounds of the shells. I can feel them gently touching my flesh. Suddenly my attention is drawn away from my body. I have taken my dog to the beach with me. He has become impatient. His bark tells me to pay attention to him. He wants to run, to play. I turn my back on the turquoise blue sea, throw a weathered, smooth, sun-bleached stick for him to fetch, and begin to walk along the gently sloping clean, white sand. Someone else has been walking on the beach before me. Their footsteps are still visible, and for a time I amuse myself by fitting my feet into their imprints.

I think of the power of words, how they create community, a sense of communion. In my imagination I travel back in time to another place, another location. Towards the conclusion of this study, some of the participants indicated a desire to meet with each other. I understood their need to do this. They are artists and for most of them, they are familiar with exhibiting their work, meeting with fellow exhibitors, and sharing their creative imaginations and differences. I contacted women who lived in the local vicinity and a meeting was organised. While we are sitting having coffee and discussing issues related to menopause, I ask the following questions ‘what is the most important aspect of menopause, and how can it be made more easily understandable? And how can the transitional stages be more easily worked through?’ They think about this for a moment, and then, Sophia says, ‘It is not easy, it is a huge transition. You give up you give up the capacity to procreate, even though you know you don’t want more children. You do move into a richer place, but getting to this place is not all that easy.’ She says, ‘there is little social recognition for the significance of moving from one state of being to another.’ I ask, ‘what was the significance?’ This question prompts a stimulating exchange. The women’s comments focus on the fact that there is little understanding of the multifaceted and complex nature of menopause. Fanny says, ‘We know there is a great deal of literature out there which offers ways of alleviating physical symptoms. We know we can take this pill or that herbal therapy, we can meditate to relieve stress and make appropriate life-style changes, but there is little accessible information on how women really feel. In the books available, the life and soul of women’s experiences is missing. When this study is finished, I am looking forward to seeing the artwork made by the other women.’

As Fanny is speaking, I am reminded of Adrienne Rich’s comments:

... women's art, though created in solitude, wells up out of community ... and, by its very existence it strengthens the network of the community’.

(Rich 1977, in Humm, 1986, p.185)

Sophia says, ‘there is nothing in our culture that prepares us for growing older – for claiming our wisdom.’ Sophia, Pauline, Luce, Caroline and Fanny all agree that the task

of restoring a sense of being a female woman to themselves is of primary importance. It is often a task undertaken alone. Luce says, the female self was the unnamed 'it' that she felt she had lost while going through menopause. Several of the women agree. This was their experience also. The telling of their stories had made 'it', the self, real. Fanny says, 'words like that, fall out of our mouths, yet we don't stop to examine what is behind the word.' Sophia reflects, suggesting if more women shared their experiences with each other, it would strengthen the sense of woman-centered community between us. 'If I tell my story to someone who doesn't hear it,' she says, 'I feel more diminished. I shrink into this small thing and I feel that one day I will just disappear. And I think I did for a lot of years.' Sophia speaks about the difficulties of dealing with hot flashes, mood swings, tiredness and temporary memory loss while competing in a workforce with predominantly younger women. 'You feel you have to hide or minimize these physical signs of menopause. You can't just go and lie down if extreme tiredness overtakes you. And people still make fun of women experiencing hot flashes.'

Luce speaks. Women going through menopause are often dealing with unemployment, the care of ageing parents, their subsequent deaths, and perhaps unresolved family traumas. There are relationship issues and generally teenage children to be cared for. Then there is the additional adjustment when children finally leave home as young adults, or even when they return. Everyone nods.

The conversation takes another turn. This time to address more specifically issues of sexuality. Pauline says, in her recent artwork different forms and shapes are now occurring. They've caused her to reflect on her sexuality. 'Was this normal?' she asks, 'up until now, I have given my sexuality little thought.' 'Yes,' they all say. For the next half an hour this question opens a space for deeper conversation on the ways in which they have come to see themselves as sexual beings. The women share their individual experiences. They talk about the ways in which culture has taught them to see their bodies, and how for some of them, it had made them feel cheated, angry and deprived, not fully understanding what their sexuality actually means. They discuss the processes of the aging body and the ways in which they are adjusting to these changes. They recognise they have become familiar, comfortable even, with their bodies being the

object of the male gaze. Several of the women admit that as younger women, they used their bodies, their good looks, to attract men. Now they are facing a new experience, a sense of becoming invisible. This unfamiliar experience has led to a re-evaluation of themselves as sexual beings. What did it mean to be a sexual woman beyond the years of menopause?

They speak of their erotic responses and desires, which for some women were now less focussed on men. They speak of their growing awareness that sexuality cannot simply be reduced to genital contact, but was in fact a powerful form of energy linked to their creativity and spirituality, and to the environment, as well to their reproductive bodies. They also speak of their flourishing sexuality, of exploring new and different relationships and their delight in discovering the pleasures of orgasm, and of experiencing intimacy for the first time. Fanny says, 'I was never able to express myself when I was young, discovering my sexuality is getting a part of my power back that I've never had before.' A story is then told of finding the courage to enter a sex shop for the first time. There is laughter as other women recall a similar experiences.⁵⁸

But if mothers could be women, there would be a whole mode of relationship of desiring speech between daughter and mother, son and mother, and it would, I think completely rework the language [langue] that is now spoken. (Irigaray, 1991, p.52)

More coffee, more conversation. And then it turns, as women's conversations often do, to the relationships they have with their mothers, and how difficult it has been for most of them to discuss and share personal and intimate details about their bodies. Fanny says, 'The difference between my mother's generation and mine, and that of my daughter's and mine, is that our mothers never talked about it, or if they did, it was briefly glossed over. I don't feel any connection to my mother through menopause, but I hope my daughters feel a deeper sense of connection to me as a consequence of sharing my thoughts and feelings about mine.'

⁵⁸ I am aware that readers may gain the impression that space in the thesis was given only to discussions on heterosexuality. Many earlier recorded conversations did in fact explore the nature of changes around becoming a lesbian or being bisexual. However, because the women had only recently begun to admit their gender preferences, they were concerned about the impact on family members if they were identified by their artwork. Consequently these conversations were deleted.

Fanny's words on mother-daughter relationships bring to awareness an earlier conversation with Seymour. Because of work commitments Seymour was unable to attend this informal gathering. She said, 'It was a transformation for me, but I don't think it is for a lot of people. I think it is cloaked in fear. Fear of change and fear of the unknown and the reluctance to acknowledge all of the positive things that are about menopause. I have gained a self, authenticity, increased creativity and an understanding of the dimensions of spirituality. I think how we feel about menopause is very much related to what our mothers told us about it, and from how other women have handled the change. I think it is probably quite frightening for a lot of people. I have fairly horrific memories from my childhood of what it was like when she was going through menopause. I recall conversations with her as an eighty-year old woman telling me what it was like in her day, and that was pretty frightening. Menopause is a major, major thing in your life. It's not like your 40th birthday, but it is a major change. It is not openly talked about. Women talk about everything you go through when being pregnant, but no one talks about everything you go through in menopause. I found it fairly difficult to open up the subject even with close friends. It seemed as though there was a conspiracy of silence between women. Back in '94 when I began menopause, there was a lack of information around the place. This has changed now that there are commercial gains to be made from menopause.'

At the conclusion of our morning together, the women agree the single most important influence in making the transition of menopause with awareness, was the fact their experiences are listened to, and heard. Fanny says, 'It gives us permission to move on with our lives. Being heard, and listening to others' experiences, gives you validity to what you are doing. Most importantly, it connects you with the female side of the universe.' Pauline then adds, 'My only regret is that we didn't meet in a larger group earlier. Most of you are through menopause now. I am only just beginning. Hearing other people's experiences would be a great help.'⁵⁹

I continue with my walk, wading now, ankle deep through the water. I turn to look out across the body of undulating, glistening waves to Rottnest Island, a long, low-lying

⁵⁹ These conversations were recorded on 22.4.1999.

formation of limestone, sand and coastal vegetation. On a clear day such as this, I can see the outline of the Norfolk Island pines in Thompson's Bay and the lighthouse on Bathurst Point. My thoughts dwell on the power of the word 'hysteria' and its complex encoding of metaphor and imagery. In Western culture, hysteria is a word which conjures up powerful signifiers, all of them negative and destructive to a woman's sense of identity and self. I was to discover that finding the right words to express a theoretical idea containing 'contagious metaphors' is not always easy (Waldby, 1995). I recall the difficulties I've experienced over the course of this study in trying to explain to friends, academic colleagues, students, the participants and even my own family, why I

...feminist readings pursue the ways in which masculine embodied experience is encoded in metaphoric systems, the imaginary, that even the most abstract disciplines rely upon to make themselves intelligible. ... At the same time recourse to metaphor and image in a text has implications for the text's meaning which exceed the intentions or control of the scholar. As Treichler (1988) puts it, metaphors are 'contagious': they form chains of association which link different texts to each other in complex ways. This ensures that any text can be interpreted in ways that may bear no relationship to the conscious intentions of its author. (Waldby, 1995, p.19)

was contextualising, locating part of my study, within the modern discourses of hysteria. Am I adding to the silencing and labelling of women by linking menopausal women once again to the word hysteria?

I would attempt to explain it this way. Theoreticians, writers and artists influenced by psychoanalytic perspectives, are shifting the location and construction of Western culture's understanding of the feminine. They are now calling for a return to the discourses of hysteria as a means of negotiating masculine rationality. Instead of seeing hysteria as a gendered, prejudiced symptom of defective femininity, a specific female disorder, these critics, working with discourse theory

and semiotics, regard hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, a primitive or original language of the body which cannot be verbalized in every day forms of communication. Hysteria, they suggest, is the result of repressed bodily knowing which speaks out against the social construction of sexual roles and identities. Women have found it difficult to find a voice within existing linguistic practices to speak about their own bodily processes, thoughts and feelings. The language women have available is a literary convention of patriarchy. Although my research specifically focussed on women who were articulating their experiences of menopause, and these experiences included stories of emotional bodily processes as well as physical ones, this did not mean they

were exhibiting the behavioural signs attributable to Freud's notion of the hysteric. Indeed, it was the opposite. The women in the study, were significantly contributing to the development of new languages and new story lines which were speaking to, and against, Freud's idea that hysteria was a biological 'woman's disease'. Through the making of art, their poetry and through their journal writing, they were creating new narratives around the metaphors and imagery associated with patriarchal constructions of sexuality and femininity.

However, despite my efforts to demystify and clarify contemporary interpretations of hysteria, I found my comments were sometimes met with resistance and misunderstanding. Not everyone accepts pre-oedipal theories of psychoanalytic discourse, especially feminist ones, and there were occasions when I failed to convince women that their menopausal experiences could be re-framed within the modern discourses of hysteria. It was a concept they were unable to accept. For these women the word hysteria was attached to perceptions containing potent and emotive metaphorical images which did not sit comfortably with their storied sense of self. It activated old memories and wounds from the past. Therefore, it made little sense to reclaim the word hysteria with its culturally determined, negative connotations as a means of theorising art or literary texts.

I keep walking, and now my thoughts dwell upon the power of academic language in relation to women's every day lives. I think about the words I have learned to use when writing academic texts and how they have appeared at times as abstract, objective and distant. My memory recalls a particular occasion where I learned to negotiate language with more consideration, more thought. I learned that if I wrote simply and clearly, my words could inform and validate a woman's experiences.

During the course of this study, I presented a lecture to art students on Kristeva's (1987) thoughts on 'the secret psychotic ground of hysteria' (p.112-113). Prior to this event, I asked Fanny for permission to use her images and a section of her story as a way of illustrating how artists were working against cultural myths of femininity and identity. I

outlined briefly the content of the lecture and forwarded to her a copy of my theoretical notes, as well as a copy of the story. She wrote back.

... I don't really understand what 'love in the feminine', means and I'm not sure what the term, 'specifically feminine protolanguage' means. Proto – first or earliest form of – so I'm wondering if it means the first language as in the patriarchal one being our culture's first language, with the language of the feminine – if one exists – being the second language of our culture. Or is it early history type language? I'm a bit fuzzy about pre-oedipal semiotics as well – does that refer to the child before he/she realizes the unresolved desire for the parent of the opposite sex and the meanings and symbols in relation to that early psychological stage – or does it refer to language in the adult world – or what?! (May 1998) ·

I realise I had forgotten to explain to Fanny in plain language, what words like 'protolanguage', 'semiotics', 'discourse theory', 'female imaginary' and what 'love in the feminine' meant. I had forgotten the words of Rhedding Jones (1997), who reminds researchers to write in plain language. Present your inquiry, she says, 'so that schoolgirls and schoolboys and your mother can understand it' (p.200).

I then write and explain some of the terms I used. I expand and elaborate on the modern discourses of hysteria. I explain their origins, and outline different feminist viewpoints and interpretations. I tell her that protolanguage means, original, preconceptual, or primitive. I explain what semiotics means, and that pre-oedipal refers to the stage in a child's development before they learn to see themselves within the social and symbolic laws of their culture. I tell Fanny that 'love in the feminine' is an expression used by Kristeva (1987) to describe a state of being where we return to long forgotten blissful memory sensations of mother and self; a bodily experience where boundaries between mother and infant dissolve. And that it is here, in the fusion and permutation of one and the other, the mother-child embrace, that mystical experiences occur. Kristeva argues, that self-reflexive narcissism is not simply a motive for attending to the self. It is also a spiritual exercise taking us to the realms of unimaginable spaces where we can make

connections between the relationship of the self to the One, that is God (Robinson, 1995).

In her next letter Fanny wrote:

Thanks for faxing some background information about the discourses of hysteria. I found it interesting reading and very thought provoking. Something to gain strength from. I feel that what I am doing – the art work and the writing – is OK, that it is alright for ME, even if it's not alright in the eyes of society – to be expressing this journey.

I find it reassuring and somehow comforting that writers are suggesting that the 'artistic practices of women require deciphering, like monuments from lost or unfamiliar cultures'. Reassuring for me, because somebody is suggesting that what is happening for menopausal women should be heard and seen, and it is comforting to know that it might have some validity, recognition or acknowledgement; this process called menopause, which is powerful and overwhelming at times.

I found I could identify with what you quoted Kristeva as saying – that self-reflexive narcissism of the hysteric – and this is the bit I identified with – comes from the pain of inner contemplation, day dreaming and even hallucination (not that I've had any of those) as a consequence of sublimating their otherness to masculine rationality. I get a sense of where these images I draw might be coming from, from that quote.

I also thought this bit was pretty amazing – "traumas that have not been adequately dealt with of belated memory traces whose origins are unknown to her. According to Bronfen, the hysteric performs to excess precisely the representations of femininity her culture has ascribed to her". I thought of some of my drawings when I read that – the cross embedded in the pelvis one for instance, and the attitudes I inherited from my parents about religion

and sex(uality). My thoughts also turn towards my mother and those of her generation who, when we need their guidance and wisdom to help us through this, have no memory of their own experiences and therefore nothing to say. In a way this whole silence has been a way of separating women (divide and conquer/control/contain?) from each other and denying all of us the richness of shared experiences and knowledge and meaning and strength and power and communion and communication and connection..... and ah! – everything! If the human subject is formed in language, then it's no wonder the feminine voice on this is not there and that cultural silence remains, and that the masculine voice is the predominant one.

Next day - PS

I'm trying to imagine what my reaction to my discovery of the idea of hysteria would have been had I discovered it before I did all those drawings. In retrospect I believe it would have been like a smack in the face, inhibited me, pulled me up short, caused me to take a step backwards; it would have frightened me. Nonetheless, the feelings I had to generate what I have done so far were so strong and coming from within, that I knew I had to do them, almost as though I had no choice. Well, I didn't really.

I think because I had already listened to the voice within and given it authority, the impact was not a wholly negative one, but a positive one. When I read about it in your text, initially I thought a little – oofh – and then I gained strength from it and it went like this. “Oh, is that what I'm doing, is that what it's called.” I enjoy that interpretation and it is still OK, this is me doing what is right for me, and it feels good to follow my intuition (which I am nurturing back to health after years of neglect). That there might be some cultural niche for it was external validation for me, and we all like a little bit of that from time to time. It also helped me come to terms with the strength and the surprise/shock nature of the images I was producing, and it gave me a starting point from which to gain understanding of why all this

work was pouring out of me. It didn't, and won't change my resolve to plough on with what's there to be expressed. In fact I am more firmly connected to me now, partly because of the dialogue and a new contextual framework to consider and ponder, and mostly, because I still want to make art (18 May 1998).

I pause for a moment in my walking. My thoughts return to the first paragraph of Fanny's letter. She had said, *I feel that what I am doing – the art work and the writing – is OK, that it is alright for ME, even if it's not alright in the eyes of society – to be expressing this journey.* This comment prompts another letter, another question, 'why do you feel it is not alright in the eyes of society to be expressing the journey of menopause?'

Fanny replied:

I show people my work and they just kind of look at me. People have said 'this is dreadful. I don't like it. Why don't you move on to nice, sunny, happy pieces?' My work puzzles them, and I find it is difficult for them to engage with it. I don't have a language to explain it and they don't have the listening for it. They have a listening for youth culture, but not for this type of work (27 May 1998).

I have walked as far as I can along this particular beach. In fact, I have walked too far. Dogs cannot go beyond a certain point. I decide to return home through the sand dunes. As I walk over the slight sandy rise through the spinifex and marron grass, I am immediately struck by the contrast of colours. The vivid blues of the ocean and the stark whiteness of the sun-drenched sand give way to shades of muted grey and green, pig face, salt bush, tea trees, acacias, herbaceous euphorbia, and other hardy ground-hugging plants. My hand reaches out and grasps the tips of young leaves on the tea trees. I crush them between my fingers, inhale the distinctive salty, pungent fragrance, and memories of every childhood holiday spent at the beach come rushing back. I pass the sign that tells me venomous snakes live here. My eyes now focus on the ground. For awhile I am

aware of where I place each footstep. And then my body-mind shifts its focus again. I return to my thoughts on Fanny and the many images she has produced over the past few years. I reflect on her use of landscape, her sense of connection to the earth as womb, the universal womb; and how she has consciously and unconsciously painted her body in association with the natural environment, especially in relation to the sea. Like the continuous fluid movements of the ocean, her work demonstrates a merging of interior and exterior landscapes, of breaking through the illusion of separateness.

As I make my way from the sand dunes, and up the old, wooden steps to the roadway, my thoughts connect Fanny's work to three extraordinary women, all mystics, and all gifted artists, Hildegard of Bingen, Herrad of Landsberg and Meinrad Craighead. Hildegard and Herrad created their poetry, music, writing and art during the twelfth-century (Hildegard of Bingen, 1985; Storey, 1998). Meinrad is a mystic and visionary artist of the twentieth-century (Bancroft, 1989). For many years, I have had an interest in women mystics, both ancient and contemporary, who have combined their spiritual vocations

Memories stir and incubate; they are remembered, reformed and animated into imagery. Whether we are weaving tissue in the womb or imagery in the soul, our work is sexual...

What gestates in this personal underworld waits for passage from one stage of life to another, memories waiting for transformation into imagery. Sometimes I feel like a cauldron of ripening images where memories turn into faces and emerge from my vessel.

(Meinrad Craighead, in Bancroft, 1989, pp.15-23)

with their creative practices to work within and against the misogynist attitudes of ecclesiastical authority. From time to time, Fanny and I have discussed these women's unique theology of the feminine, their artistic capacities, their strength, their courage, the ways in which they worked towards creating egalitarian gender roles, and the leadership qualities they displayed as they sought alternative possibilities for re-visioning a female sacredness. On one occasion, I sent Fanny a copy of Ann Storey's (1998) *Theophany of the feminine*.⁶⁰ This

What we need, we who are sexed according to our genre, is a God to share, a verb to share and become. Defined as the mother-substance, of obscure, even occult, of the verb of men, we need our subject, our noun, our verb, our predicates; our elementary sentence, our base rhythm, our morphological identity, our generic incarnation, our genealogy.
(Irigaray, 1986, p.11)

⁶⁰ Letter from Fanny - April 1998.

I like Herrad because it must have been difficult in those times being who she was. I can identify with that - being who she was in the face of all that religious crap about women. What nonsense to declare women

prompted a stimulating exchange on women, art and traditional concepts of spirituality. We admired the ways Hildegard and Herrad modified existing iconographic sources to incorporate 'active metaphors from the natural world' into their painted illuminations (Storey, 1998, p.17).

Before I began my walk on the beach this morning, I read again Meinrad Craighead's story in Anne Bancroft's (1989) *Weavers of Wisdom: Women Mystics of the Twentieth Century*. I am struck by the similarity of her words, and words spoken and written by Fanny over the past four years. As I dwell on these connections, I find I can also link her story to the stories told by Isabel de la Cruz (El Saffar, 1994), Teresa of Avila (Romano, 1979), Elisabeth of Schonau (Storey, 1998), and Julian of Norwich (El Saffar, 1994; Fox, 1988; Molinari, 1958; Sheldrake & Fox, 1996). Like other female mystics split off from their bodies, Fanny has, through her artforms, engaged in a comparable struggle against the repressive effects of male-defined role behaviours culturally assigned to her. Through her deepening sense of sexuality, a sexuality connected to an all-embracing life-force, her creative forms similarly embrace the earth and its elements in an attempt to retrieve and assimilate her interexistence with body-mind-spirit. I found myself asking the question 'are these the feminine qualities that Luce Irigaray (1986) and Ruth El Saffar (1994) define as necessary for creating a female divinity, in becoming Divine Women?'

These elements, being the site of meditation for the beginning of all philosophies, of any world-creation, have often been misunderstood by our culture, a circle of thought which does not consider its material and economic conditions of existence. Poetry remembers, and so does science, but in a different way (constantly defining new particles of matter which go into our make-up and our environment without us designating or even being aware of them consciously). Our so-called human theories and our most banal discourses are moving away from these things, progressing through and with a language which forgets the matter it designates and through which it speaks.

'physically defective and spiritually and morally weak', when women have given and always will give birth to every human being on the planet! And how powerful is that, giving birth. How pathetic. (I know they got round it by 'inventing' Mary – but please!) If Herrad was subversive then I'm with her.

Their traces or remains are often deposited as enigmas in myths, tales, stories of birth, initiation, love, war, death, or passions still given over to images and gestures innocent of knowledge. Still to be worked out, thought through. Not to be interpreted as 'failure', but rather as a moment in history... It is important that we remember that we have to respect nature in its broad rhythms, cycles, its life and growth. It is important that we recall that that historical event history, cannot and should not cover up the cosmic rhythms and events, in retaining our perspective of becoming more, not less, women. There is no great advantage in resisting the man-woman hierarchy, woman-State, a certain woman-God, or woman-machine only to fall back under the power of nature-woman, animal woman, even matriarchal-women or women women. In respecting the universe as one of our vital and cultural dimensions, as one of the macrocosmic keys of our microcosms, we can become more women, and no longer more and more strangers to ourselves that we were before, even further in exile than we were before.

(Irigaray, 1986, p.3)

I spend the rest of the afternoon reading, first Irigaray's (1986) 'Divine Woman and Ethics and subjectivity: towards the future' in *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), and then El Saffar's *Rapture Engaged*. Both Irigaray and El Saffar are concerned with restoring the lost maternal to its rightful place in culture.⁶¹ They claim that there is no theory as yet expressed that can adequately incorporate a full expression of female autonomy, or one that can lead to an authentic feminine God; a God that for Irigaray and El Saffar is polymorphous. They make it clear that existing theories emanating from Freud's oedipal constructions of femininity, Lacan's 'Law of the father', and Jung's distorted notions of masculine and feminine, provides no space for 'images of the feminine power originating in the masculine godhead or in the archetypal world' (El Saffar, 1994, p.6). These theories fail to acknowledge that women have been acculturated through distorted

⁶¹ El Saffar, in her study of patriarchal theories of the feminine, and of the female mystic Isabel de la Cruz, points out that until the mid-seventeenth century the dominant culture still had an investment in non-dualistic epistemology. In this period of our history 'analogical thinking and a participatory view of relationship to the organic world around us was still possible' (p.2).

definitions of masculine and feminine, and as such, they have no genre or any real home within which to adequately express their images of being both an embodied and speaking female subject. El Saffar and Irigaray argue that neither Freud, Lacan, or Jung fail to take into account the separate and autonomous existence of the feminine other, the lost maternal. As a consequence, the journey from the primordial world of amniotic fluid to female wholeness, to a fully realised female Self, is fraught with struggle. El Saffar writes:

Although I am saying here that masculinity and femininity in the terms expressed by Jung and others are the product of cultural arrangements and not of innate male and female characteristics... it is not necessary for that reason to refuse recognition of embodiment and of our image-making capacities in the shaping of our experience of ourselves in the world. Women live in bodies that connect to the mother and to the earth differently from the way that men do, and those differences need to be honored before women can break out of the entrapment.

(El Saffar, 1994, pp.30-31)

From time to time I pause in my reading. I think about the other women in this study whose imaginative vision has employed organic forms. In various ways they have all gone back to the natural and vibrant energies of their organic bodies and the landscape in which their lives are grounded as a source for re-creating a feminine identity. Are they, like Fanny, also using these maternal referents to retrieve a language from the lost continent of their female subjectivity, their body-landscape relations, in an endeavour to generate a connection to the divine?⁶²

The link uniting or reuniting masculine and feminine must be both horizontal and vertical, terrestrial and celestial. As Heidegger, among others, has written, the link must forge an alliance between the divine and the mortal, in which a sexual encounter would be a celebration, and not a disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship.
(Irigaray, 1991, p.174)

There is nothing to be desired about being the term of the other. This paralyses us in our becoming... Without the possibility, and indeed, the

⁶² Within the scope of this study I am unable to pursue further these ideas.

necessity, of a God incarnated in the feminine, through the mother and daughter and in their relation with one another, no substantial help can be given to a woman. The absence of the divine in her, between them, takes away from her the path towards transmutation, a conversion from her first affects... Only a God in the feminine can look after and hold for us this margin of liberty and power which would allow us to grow more, to affirm ourselves and to come to self-realisation for each of us and in community. Thus is our other still to be realised, our beyond and above of life, power, imagination, creation, our possibility of a present and a future.

Isn't God the name and the place which permits us the appearance of a new epoch of history and which resists this event? Still invisible? To be discovered? To be incarnated? Arch-historical and always future (Irigaray, 1986, pp.11-12).

INTERIM REFLECTIONS ON SPACES FOR CHANGE

So, one must leave oneself go. One must not be afraid because when one sets oneself in writing, or sets oneself to writing, one sets off without brakes, without harness, etc.; this phenomenon which always remains disturbing will be produced; the manifestation of a force expressing itself much more powerfully and more rapidly than ourselves. It is disturbing because it is accompanied by contradictory emotions. Motions of jubilation, because it is like a gift. Disturbing emotions, because we are not the master of this writing which gallops well ahead of us, and we tend to be wary of it... One must be able to let oneself make one's way, not prohibit oneself. One must trust in: that is to say be in a sort of passivity, of faith. And also to let oneself go to exceed oneself. To exceed oneself in all ways.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.39)

When you have your 'aha' experience, you will see something different than I do. There may be an infinite number of things that will trigger the 'aha'. We stop learning when we think that we can read all the meaning in the note. We stop learning when we believe that the beauty of the message is the only message, it is the sweet tasting fruit that wants to lead us to the seed inside ... and inside each seed is more fruit.
(Wenger, 1999, quoting subscriber, E-mail discussion group)

In a traditional, qualitative phenomenological study, it is usual at this juncture to write a detailed summary on the distilled elements from the different participant's experiences and how they then serve to expand our knowledge of the research question. The reduced structural elements are generally arrayed and clustered according to their recurrence and commonality. This is done with the belief that these collective findings portray a more vivid and insightful account of what is immediately experienced. For a number of reasons, I have chosen not to follow this format.

Firstly, although mindful of producing an academic text which will best illustrate, and contribute to, qualitative research methods and methodologies, I want to maintain the freedom to write the female self, beyond limiting boundaries as Cixous (1997) suggests. Secondly, in keeping with van Manen's (1990) comments on inventing a textual approach when organising one's writing 'thematically, analytically, exemplificatively, exegetically, or existentially', I have endeavoured to address phenomenological *réduction* and thematic distillation, albeit at times obliquely, in the unfolding of each individual story (p.173). As van Manen points out, there is no systematic argument or prescribed sequence of propositions that the research needs to follow. Moreover, he further points out that the various approaches are neither exhaustive nor mutually inclusive. Certain meaning, he says, 'is better expressed through *how* one writes than in *what* one writes' (p. 131). He explains it this way:

Research and theorizing that simplifies life, without reminding us of its fundamental ambiguity and mystery, thereby distorts and shallows-out life, failing to reveal its depthful character and contours... reaching for something beyond, restoring a forgotten or broken wholeness by recollecting something lost, past, eroded, and by reconciling it in our experience of the present with a vision of what should be... This kind of text cannot be summarised. To present research by way of reflective text is not to present findings, but to do a reading (as a poet would) of a text that shows what it teaches (p.152-153).

Writing on the limits and power of language, van Manen (1990) says we cannot separate the content of our text from the textual quality or the form of our particular style of writing. Leaving spaces for things unsaid is important. In 'doing' qualitative research we need to consider how the text as a whole aims at a certain effect. van Manen reminds his readers that the 'silence of spaces is as important (speaks as loudly) as the words that we use to speak' (p.113).

van Manen's thoughts on the importance of leaving spaces for things unsaid, is similarly expressed by Barone and Eisner (1997). They suggest that the theme 'is the pervasive

quality in the text' (p.81). It is 'the controlling insight' around which a particular work is developed. The major issues and sub-themes are also woven in and out providing cohesion and unity to the literary piece of writing. Where a theme is related to a work of art or poetic text, it subtly guides the reading. It is never explicit, rather it silently flows under the surface. Barone and Eisner go on to say:

Its format and contents will serve or create a new vision of certain educational phenomena. When readers re-create that vision, they may find that new meanings are constructed, and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated. When that occurs, the purposes of art have been served (p.78).

And for another point of view on the ways new meanings are constructed, James Hillman (1990), suggests that instead of pointing 'at', and pointing 'out', in our linear, literal representations, we need to point 'to', mysterious imaginal spaces. Spaces that connect to the heart and soul, so that the image, or the poetic word, can interpret *us*. In his opinion, the nature of ideas is spherical, connecting us simultaneously to different directions of thought. He says, that by engaging with the process of imagistic resonance - the resounding of an image within the interior cavernous spaces of our body, we can open to hearing those mysterious, unknown, indefinable, intangible components that will make meaning possible. 'Metaphorical insight,' he says, 'emerges through hearing while seeing'. Hillman writes:

We amplify an image by means of myth in order not to find its archetypal meaning but in order to feed it with further images that increase its volume and depth and release its fecundity. Hermeneutic amplifications in search of meaning take us elsewhere, across cultures, looking for resemblances which neglect the specifics of the actual image. Our move, which keeps archetypal significance limited within the actually presented image, also keeps meanings always precisely embodied... Unless we maintain this distinction between inherent significance and interpretive meaning, between insighting an image and hermeneutics, we shall not be able to stay with the image and let it give us what it bears. We shall have the meaning and miss the experience, miss

the uniqueness of what is there by our use of methods for uncovering what is not there. We shall forget that wholeness is not only a construction to be built or a goal to achieve, but, as Gestalt says, a whole is presented in the physiognomy of each event (pp.59-61).

Hillman (1996) also adds that inside each artist, poet and writer is a heart and soul which cannot be wholly defined by theories or paradigms. In reading peoples' lives we need to respect the mystery and magic which sets each individual apart.

The phenomenon of menopause

When working within a hermeneutic framework, it is recognised the texts are multi vocal and are open to many different interpretations – indeed, each one may be valid. However, the meaning of a text and its specific categories emerges in the continuous conversational movement between the interpreters of the text, the researcher and the participant, and their own horizons of meaning. From these generative views, conceptually important perspectives can then be further pursued and discussed. Thus, in employing a descriptive hermeneutical analysis to describe the phenomenon of menopause, I have given an account of the participant's view, as well as relating fresh knowledge from further exploration into the situated context of our lives. These renewed understandings of consciousness form part of the re-visionist storying in the expressive content of this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, Rich (1980), reminds us that 'the awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step and you are in another country... we must continue to question everything so as to understand how we have been led to imagine ourselves' (p.49).

Before I decided on the expressive narrative approach for the study, I involved the women in an activity suggested by Crotty (1996a) in his paper *Doing Phenomenology*. To determine precisely what 'it' the phenomenon is, Crotty offers successive steps as a scaffolding for the researcher to follow. In following these suggested guidelines, Crotty claims it is possible to arrive at a reduced, or crystallised thematic account of the structures of the phenomenon in question. These processes, he says, ground and objectify the structures of specific lived experiences. One of the steps in 'doing

phenomenology' involves a table with incomplete originating sentence stems in repeated but different formulations. The object of the exercise, which is done in an open and receptive stance, is to put aside prevailing assumptions and meanings, focus, and complete each sentence. By involving ourselves in this repetitive activity, Crotty maintains that at least some of these descriptions will evoke the capacity for different dimensions of knowing and seeing to the exclusion of all other understandings.

On a number of occasions, I experimented with this table, offering it to the women to complete at different intervals in the study. I even did it myself. I found that as we moved through the different embodied feeling states of menopause, our descriptions portrayed a body that was constantly in the process of transfiguration and mutation. For instance, a sentence stem that began with **Menopause** feels like , on being completed the first time by Fanny, she said it felt like *shit*, the second time, a year later, she said, it felt like *walking softly, dazzled by the light*.⁶³

In working with this method of phenomenological inquiry, I found that it did indeed provide a space for setting aside intensely subjective observations and discursive reasoning, however, one of the difficulties I encountered in grasping the essence or 'truth' of these formulations, was the growing awareness of our continuously moving sense of self and identity; the fluid, interconnected, indefinite and forever changing nature of our multiple selves. I also found that because we were working with visual images as well as with the spoken word, the women's responses to visual signs, symbols, metonymy and metaphor often indicated contradictory observations of thoughts and feelings. Wherever possible, these observations were explored as a way of locating our subjective positions within the various discourses which have shaped our identity.

So, although this research project has been to ostensibly address the naming of experience in relation to changing states of consciousness around issues of femininity, sexuality and self/identity, and the sub themes generated from these imaginings – sense of bodily disunity, sense of aloneness, laying oneself bare, stealing the language, finding a voice (visual/oral), healing the wounds, claiming the self, maternal connections,

⁶³ See Appendix D for an example of an originating sentence stem table completed by Fanny.

developing agency, and entering the soul, the naming of a particular thought or feeling during the transitional stages of menopause, it would seem, cannot be fixed. It can only be captured in the present moment, frame by frame, like a photographer directing their lens repeatedly on a moving object in an attempt to build a composite whole. I have therefore, woven 'framed' spaces into the text for poetic phenomenological description which I hope will speak as eloquently as a more detailed linguistic explanation.

In breaking with the more rational, academic mode of describing and seeing in human research inquiry, and, as a means of giving sounds to words beyond language, I have chosen to adopt once again, a poetic frame of mind-body to present my hermeneutic analysis. The following poetised revelation encapsulates for me the collective experience of the women in this study. It has been distilled from a series of repeated observations by Sophia. In describing the phenomenon of menopause, she has, as Michael Crotty (1996a) suggests, invented words and bent existing words to 'bear the meanings' embedded within her bodily knowing of this experience (pp.11-12).

Menopause

is like death

and yet

it is also new life

It is cataclysmic

a great event

an opening

It's also a crack, a chasm, a mystery

It's another world

It's understated and underrated

It is blood

It is necessary

It is a doorway

A window

A split woman

A pear

It is a stop,

a breath,

a new moment

It's a moving over

to the richness of a woman's life

NOTES TOWARDS A WORK IN PROGRESS

I think the power of creating new narratives about our lives cannot be underestimated. Re-storying, or re-telling one's own story, or drawing out unspoken stories, expands and creates possibilities. Creating my own visual narratives and stories has allowed me to reframe my own experience ... in a way, everything I know I have learned through stories, and I am really drawn into exploring the deeper waters of women's lives; investigating what is not said, in the silences and the gaps. I want to know about the deep crevasses, the eddies and the whirlpools, the indecision and the uncertainties. That is where we learn. That is what we take nourishment from, but we rarely find it. (Sophia, 1998).

Because it engages a discourse that goes through the belly, through the entrails, through the chest. I do not know where music enters. And it plays its own score on our own body. And we respond with all our body because it is *true* ... To write is to note down the music of the world, the music of the body, the music of time.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.46)

In writing about the menopausal body, image and text, I have tracked a path across and towards, real and imagined landscapes. By unravelling the knotted threads of theory, philosophy and lived experience, I have attempted to create a new thread, braided, which will weave in and out of the margins of our bodies' organic spaces and across the borders of our external and interior landscapes. In making the invisible visible, I have endeavoured to construct, rather than simply represent, alternative spatial practices which will offer multitudinous possibilities for restoring a sense of self and a meaningful relationship with the world.

In helping me bring this study to completion, Susan Griffin's (1992) *A Chorus of Stones* sits on one side of my computer and Margaret Somerville's (1995) *The Body Landscape Journals: A Politics and Practice of Space* sits on the other. I look to see how these authors bring closure to their writing. I am seeking a way to further illuminate the

essence of this bodily process we call menopause. I want to write a few more words on how the naming process, the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community, sets into motion 'the forces that lie dormant in things and beings' (Trinh, 1989, p.147).

I turn to the back of Griffin and Somerville's texts and I am surprised to find they have both presented their final reflections as notes. I am attracted to this idea. Somerville calls her after thoughts *Notes towards a practice of love*. Theoretical texts rarely mention the word love. She is expanding on Probyn's (1993) ideas for creating new positions of enunciation that will rearticulate 'a geography of the possible' (p.172). Probyn calls for a self-reflexivity positioned somewhere between the terrain of the social and the terrain of our experiential being. I too, agree with Probyn that we can acknowledge the primacy of feelings. We can make the space for separate enunciations of our expressive bodies within the epistemological analysis of how experience and knowledge shape the self. Probyn's theory of speaking the self insists on a concept of the self that:

... can be made to move us, to touch us. So the self carries with it a double movement, it expresses 'a matter of "becoming" as well as "being" ... [a self] that can articulate the theoretical necessity of care, of love and of passion (pp. 167-169).

Probyn's ideas on re-thinking what the self might be have accompanied Somerville during her research journey. Similarly, from the hesitating beginnings of this thesis, Probyn also has been with me also.

December '95

*I have been reading Elspeth Probyn's (1993) *Sexing the Self*, and in particular the chapter entitled 'Technologising the self'. Probyn is urging theorists to re-examine comments by French philosopher Michel Foucault on how the gendered self might form a critical position when investigating the events and experiences that have led us to constitute ourselves. She is arguing for a re-think of Foucault's theories which are primarily about domination, power and control. Her concerns are focussed on integrating a woman's experiential knowing self and one's theoretical*

and academic self so that women might enunciate new modalities for change in our current social formation and in our own individual lives. In elaborating on how women might combine the personal and the political as a mode of re-interpreting women's lives, Probyn suggests that women need to think about the self in terms of what it is - a point of articulation - and where it may allow us to go - a way of speaking and communicating a gendered actuality. Her questions explore how women might re-work Foucault's technologies of the self so that we can articulate our work (which, for me incorporates my own aesthetics and sense of erotic existence) into our theories and back into our daily lives.

Somerville says, that while Probyn talks of love and passion, she wants to write about practices of representation which include more of the body. With this intent, she proceeds to distil from each of her chapters, or performances as she calls them, notes towards the writing of a practice of love. They include her thoughts and quotes from various writers, philosophers and theorists.

Griffin, in *Notes towards a sketch for a work in progress*, adopts a different creative stance and weaves together her journal notes with one final story. Griffin wants her work to be read so that it:

... still continues off the page, and is only completed in the imagination ... This last section of the book should be like a sketch for a painting. And not only the journal, but the text too should have, in places, this slightly unfinished quality (pp. 275-276).

In her concluding chapter, Griffin reflects on the need to listen attentively to the stories and testimonies of others, on giving these stories space, so that inner lives can be revealed. She says this exchange between listener and storyteller allows us to conceive of transforming ourselves, to expand our internal world to unfamiliar territories and to new maps inside our body-mind. The act of listening invites hope and action for choice and change, for speaking up and for speaking out. 'Perhaps we are like stones, she says, 'our own history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung' (p.8).

Although Griffin's writing has the appearance of being an unfinished work, an incomplete sketch, I have the sense of being strangely full after reading it. I decide that I will write the coda of this thesis using a blend of Somerville's and Griffin's approaches. I too, have one more story to tell, and like Griffin, it is a story that will include traces of my own process during the research journey. In writing these last pages, my thoughts are to return briefly to the stories, to enter them again, to capture something of the colour and texture of the four interwoven existentials of the lived menopausal body, lived space, lived time, and lived relationships to the other. I want to weave our collective voices together once more so that we can refute the notion of story, of self as a finished product. As Trinh (1989) reminds us:

The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences... The story circulates like a gift; an empty gift which anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess. A gift built of multiplicity. One that stays inexhaustible within its own limits. Its departures and arrivals. Its quietness (p.2).

SPACES FOR CHANGE

Lived Space

On occupying and moving through space with our bodies

March '97

She wanted space in which she might reshape her thoughts and gather together perhaps for the first time the fragments of her being that had slowly been consumed by others. She wanted to stop seeking the answers and live with all of the questions now.

van Manen (1990) suggests that 'lived space is the existential theme that refers us to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home' (p.102).

It is the space grasped through our bodily senses where we can use our imagination to question and piece together knowledges based on the limitations of our everyday lives.

March '97

I write a poem about my mother. It is about love, an emotion that has been difficult for me to express to her. I want to include it in my thesis. Will there be a space? Is it appropriate? The words in the poem prompt me to reflect more deeply on Luce Irigaray (1985; 1991) and her ideas on re-claiming the maternal. She says I cannot have a subjectivity until I find a way to access a female imaginary.

There must be a space for women as women. And in turn for Irigaray, this implies a re-negotiation of the mother-daughter relationship, for until the mother can be seen as a woman, the daughter does not have the basis for a feminine identity.

(Grosz, 1989, p.119)

My father has been a long time dying. He is 96. For ten years, he has lain paralysed and unable to speak in a hospital bed. He has Parkinson's disease. Week after week sitting, opposite each other, my mother and I have been forced into finding some common ground of interest. A space in which we can speak as women; a place that might encourage us to say the unsaid words which in the past have created feelings of betrayal and misunderstanding.

March '97

Because women's definition of maternal is defined by patriarchy, Irigaray says, I cannot know myself within my current understanding of the mother-daughter relation. The self that I know has been shaped within the confines of male sexuality and identity. To know myself as woman, to name myself within existing social structures, I must have my own history, a herstory. A herstory, that until now has been unspoken.

I was the naughty child, the rebellious teenager, the 'bad' wife and mother. She, the loyal wife and 'good' mother. If I close my eyes and drop down into the

memories of my childhood, I can hear Jessie's frustrated voice saying, 'Dear God in heaven where did I get you from? (Later, much later, I was to realise this was a term of endearment) It was like a litany chanted over and over. Where did I come from? Until I was twenty-one, I thought I was adopted, and then when I found out I wasn't, I wished I was. I was angry at being the daughter of a Methodist Minister. I hated the constant reminders of how 'good' girls should behave.

April '97

I look at the skin on the backs of my hands. Forty-nine year old skin. It tells me that while I might still feel youthful inside my physical body, the years are catching up with me. My skin has lost its elasticity and there are now wrinkles and sunspots. On one hand a blue vein meanders. Like a man lost in a desert, uncertain of his destination.

In the gaps between our mundane conversation, a way of filling in time, I begin to tell Jessie stories about the women in my study. It is a gradual process. I begin to share more and more of what I am doing and why. I show her some of the images. What was your menopause like? Her memory stirs. Checking first that my father is asleep and can't hear these personal revelations, in a whispering voice, she pieces together, bit by bit, her recollections. I listen absorbed in her telling. I have always been shy when asking Jessie personal questions. We have never talked as women about the fleshiness of bodies, about blood, about sexuality.

April '97

Menopause – It's shocking. It's anger, It's denial. It's painful. It's confronting. It's loneliness, It's sad. It's emptiness. It's re-connection to the body.

As the weeks go by, I become less shy. Although I feel unable to broach the subject of sexuality I want to know about my history, about the barely audible stories I have told myself over the years. There were gaps in my childhood that I wanted filled in. Spaces where I seemed to have known something but had no

words for. My father was absent for a time during my very early years. Although he is still alive today I grew from a child into adulthood with the feeling that I never really knew him. Apart from his sermons and the wonderful children's stories told from the pulpit on Sundays, he was a man of few words. He had about him the air of a lonely and solitary man. Even Jessie said she never knew him.

April '97

Menopause – it's listening in solitude. It's feeling the silence. It's sensing the moon. It's touching the other.

Jessie telephones to say my conversations with her have triggered a memory. It is of an event that had happened nearly fifty years ago. It is an image she has locked away. Now it has escaped from the invisible spaces within her body. She tells me a story about my father and herself, of his reasons for leaving home. Her honesty surprises me. I listen with tears in my eyes as all the tiny pieces that make up the many veiled memories of my early childhood fall into place. I exist more fully in this moment.

I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing.

(Trinh, 1989, p.22)

It is as though these drawings were cast ahead of an unsuspecting me, from my psyche, and now that these whisperings have taken form, the symbology of them is working its way forward into my consciousness where I can examine them clearly (Fanny, 1998).

I suggest to Jessie that she write her own story. No. Can I interview you like the women in my study? I will create for you your own story. Your own history. Yes? We arrange to meet in the old family home.

Names are hands she lays on space, with a tenderness so intense that at last smiles a face, o, you; and the approach of her lips, and at the vase she drinks smiling.

(Cixous, 1991, p.65).

Lived Body

We have knowledge of our bodies only by living them.

May '97

Menopause – It's seeing the truth. It's knowing the self. It's acceptance. It's love. It's being fully alive.

Jessie sits opposite me at the dining room table. She is eighty four. She wears two hearing aids. She is becoming frail. She has on her best dress. It is blue floral. A turquoise blue, with bursts of pink and lilac petals and tiny acid green leaves. Her greying hair has been set in curlers and there are flowers on the table. On a white crocheted cloth, there is fine china for afternoon tea. I am touched that she senses the significance of this occasion. She has an old notebook in front of her. Its pages are yellow with age. It is filled with the spidery handwriting of my grandmother. I turn the tape recorder on and ask my first question.

There is a specific positive style of feminine body comportment and movement, which is learned as the girl comes to understand she is a girl.

... She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her.

(Young, 1990, p.154)

She leans forward. With hands clasped over her stomach, her solar plexus, she directs her answers into the microphone. She doesn't look at me. It feels very formal. I feel like a stranger. I feel a separation. I tell her this is just a

conversation. Relax. Forget the tape recorder. Just tell me the story about your life and about the women in our family. To take her mind off the need to 'do it right' I reach out and cover the microphone with a serviette.

Denial of the distinctive rhythms established in menstruation, procreation, gestation, lactation, and menopause amounts to yet another expression of the fear of female embodiment that underlies the demonization of Medusa and all women when their connection to sex and death are emphasised.

(El Saffar, 1994, p.31).

*Jessie settles back in her chair and lets her memory and her body do the talking. As she begins to unravel the braided threads of our existence, tracing the individual strands back to the knots that are joined to those of her mother, grandmother and great grandmother, thoughts of Drusilla Modjeska's (1990) *Poppy and Ariadne's ball of twine* float across my imagination. Modjeska writes: 'The first wound comes with the cutting of the umbilical cord. The thread is cut and we are out there alone' (p.3). I wonder if Jessie and I are about to weave afresh these strands of maternal relations so that they might heal the absence of connection and give new life within and between us?*

... the mother must give the daughter more than food to nourish her, she may also give her words with which to speak and hear. The gift of language in place of suffocation and silence imposed by food. This gift of words will always be reciprocated as food can never be: it is 'returned' to the mother 'with interest', in the daughter's new-found ability to speak to, rather than at her mother.

(Grosz, 1989, p.125)

When I set out to make these bowls, I didn't set out to make wombs, I thought I was just learning to make paper mache bowls. Gradually it dawned on me that I was making a cavity, a space that was empty. They are half-rounded little nesting places, and the thread-like language is now running through the empty space from left to right. It is

coiled across the cavity as though I am trying to make something join what is missing. They are the thoughts that are inside of me, which are trying to understand what is missing from my body, and why I am feeling empty and lost (Caroline, 1996).

No man claims to speak from the womb, women do. Their site of fertilization, they often insist, is the womb not the mind. Their inner gestation is in the womb, not in the mind. The mind is therefore no longer opposed to the heart; it is, rather, perceived as part of the womb, being 'englobed' by it.

(Trinh, 1989, p.37)

The story that I like best, the one which resonates within me, is the story Jessie tells about my great grandmother, Emma McLaren. There is vivid imagery in her remembering. I feel a strong and determined energy. It connects me deeply to Emma. And to myself.

A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor – once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction – will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.

(Cixous, 1981, p.75)

Lived Time

On understanding temporality with our bodies

Through quantum memory, the past is alive, open, and in dialogue with the present. As in any true dialogue, this means that not only does the past influence the present but also that the present impinges on the past, giving it new life and new meaning, at times transforming it utterly.

(Zohar, 1990, p.145)

You asked me in your letter how I was going. I feel as though I'm passing through the eye of the needle this year. I have found it almost impossible to do much creative work. I am spending a lot of time thinking and reading. Feeling incredibly sad, and going for very long walks. The kind I never want to return from (Fanny, 1998).

When we set ourselves thinking, time takes shape.

(Cixous, 1991, p.67)

March '97

Time out. I am tired of writing. Today I drew a picture of a pear instead. It is a beautiful pear. I am surprised and delighted at this desire to want to draw and paint again. I read in Poppy that fruit comes 'from the meeting of opposites, male and female'.

(Modjeska, 1990, p.294)

This is a drawing of the breast and the nipples are lower. They are not in the centre of the breast, which is one of the traditional ways of representing women's bodies ...women's breast placement changes. It is part of their passage through time. They need physical recognition through appropriate comfortable clothes and through visual representations with its difference from youthful breasts being seen as lesser value (Lileth, 1996).

Emma was born in 1843. She was one of eleven children. In 1849, when she was six years old, Emma and her family sailed on the Ship Alberta to Port Adelaide in South Australia. When she was twenty-one she married. Over the next twenty two years she produced 11 children. They all survived.

March '97

I am having a love affair with pears. I have spent all day photographing these womb-like shapes on an oval plate. I enjoy their irregular shapes and the soft glow that comes from their fullness. I love the colours: yellow, lime, pink and deep russet red.

When Emma was fifty-two she again travelled across the seas. In 1895 she sailed across the Great Australian Bight to the Port of Fremantle. Five children and her husband accompanied her. They arrived in the middle of a West Australian summer. It was hot and dry. For two weeks the family lived in a tent pitched on the white sandy beach at South Fremantle. The sandflies attacked them mercilessly. Then the family moved to live in the back of a wood-yard in the centre of Fremantle. This time they had two tents. A church now stands on this site.

July '98

I return from Magnetic Island. I begin writing again. I miss the 'island women' and the way we heard each other's stories. I miss the walks in the rain forest, swimming in Nellie Bay, and the dancing and the singing. Away from their support I feel vulnerable and exposed. I paste photographs of them on the side of my computer to remind me to 'bring my body into the text'.

In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us – that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman.
(Cixous, 1981, p.72)

September '98

The stories are now writing themselves, writing me.

On reflecting on our history

We think back through our mothers, if we are women.
(Virginia Woolf, in Ostriker 1986, p.15)

Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited.
(Alice Walker, in Ostriker 1986, p.15)

November '98

Today I am reading about breath in David Suzuki's (1997) *The Sacred Balance*. 'Air,' he says, 'embodies ideas in speech and language, in song and in the sweet airs of music' (p.28). And then in the same book I read a quote by Harlow Shapley.

Our next breaths, yours and mine, will sample the snorts, sighs, bellows, shrieks, cheers and spoken prayers of the prehistoric and the historic past (p.28).

and

Traditionally the breath as understood as the pathway through which the soul entered the body.

(O'Donohue, 1998, p96)

In my yoga class the teacher reminds me to breathe.

I was sitting in the garden in silence. Time seemed to have disappeared. In this quiet space I felt myself settle into my 56 year-old skin. My body moved. My energy shifted. I can't really describe it, but it felt like the skin had been waiting a long time to be settled into (Sophia, 1998).

November '98

In the back of my garden is an ancient mulberry tree. This morning I filled a white pottery bowl with these rich, luscious summer fruit. And now as I write I notice my fingers are stained purple.

Lived human relations

On transforming interpersonal space

As we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend our selves. In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a

sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God.

(van Manen, 1990, p.105)

My great grandfather left to seek his fortune on the gold fields. Emma was alone with five children to care for. She took in ironing to support them. Then all of the children contracted typhoid fever from drinking polluted water from the well in the wood-yard. Their heads were shaved. In those days it was thought that growing hair drained energy from the body.

Rendering language audible

Touch me and let me touch you, for the private is political. Language wavers with desire. It is 'the language of my entrails,' a skin with which I caress and feel the other, a body capable of receiving as well as giving: nurturing and procreating.

(Trinh, 1989, p.37).

And then, Emma herself fell ill. It was thought she was going to die. The eldest daughter, my grandmother took care of her. After her recovery she discarded the ironing. With no training, just her own lived experience, she became a midwife.

On re-visioning the future

...if the story is told differently perhaps another ending can be imagined.

(Griffin, 1992, p.350)

December '98

Deep down inside her she felt the pull of a primordial response, a wild free spirit that could run with the wind, howl at the moon, swim with the dolphins and make love with no inhibitions and great passion.

There is a lot Jessie and I don't know about Emma, but together we have spent hours re-imagining what her world might have been like. We conjecture at her feelings at the harshness of her life. We imagine her thoughts as she listens to the cries of women giving birth. We feel with our own bodies her hands reaching out and touching flesh, bringing new life into existence. We re-vision a new story for Emma, and in the process we create a new story for ourselves.

We are born connected. What layers of your mother's psychic life did you imbibe in the womb, and what memories of hers entered you before you were born?

(Meinrad Craighead, in Bancroft, 1989, p.23)

On writing becoming linguistic flesh

... I will have to speak of the joys of my sex, no, no, not the joys of my mind, virtue or feminine sensitivity, the joys of my woman's belly, my woman's vagina, my woman's breasts, sumptuous joys of which you have no idea at all.

I will have to speak of them since it is only from them that a new, woman speech will be born.

(Annie Leclerc, in Trinh, 1989, p.38)

December '98

I hope the women's stories will give voice to something beyond our current understanding, beyond unspoken words.

On the relations between women

... these connections between women are taken for granted, a backdrop to the real business of life: husbands, children, jobs. It takes only the slightest change of focus to see that these neglected intimacies, independent of more

passionate demands, can offer the terms of which we best learn to be ourselves.

(Modjeska, 1990, p.309)

Jessie tells me she is too old to challenge patriarchal values, to change her ways of thinking. Perhaps it is too late for my mother to dream another dream that might take the place of the law of the father, but her stories have opened a space for me. Through our mutual exchange of words I am beginning to re-imagine a re-defined sense of female eroticism.

December '98

I decide to change my surname. I choose not to revert to my maiden name, instead I will take the name of my great grandmother.

December '98

*Have just finished reading Marge Piercy's (1994) *The Longings of Women*. I smile in acknowledgement as I read her closing sentence. 'At last I am my own woman' (p.537).*

And finally

On speaking from the heart

There is a common speech, there is a common discourse, there is a universe of emotion that is totally interchangeable and that goes through the organ of the heart. The heart, the most mysterious organ there is, indeed because it is the same for the two sexes. As if the heart were the sex common to the two sexes

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997, p.31).

December '98

It is nearly Christmas. I want to buy my mother a present. What should it be? In this space of giving I want to express my love as well as my newly acquired sense of Jessie as woman. I decide to give her words as a gift.

HOSPITAL HOME COMING

*I stand waiting in the hospital foyer
 searching for her familiar face
 A young nurse in white
 leads an old woman down the corridor
 I turn back to the reception desk
 I am impatient
 I am in a hurry
 she said 'Be on time!'
 I am!
 why isn't she?*

*Into the crook of my elbow
 slips a small, cold hand
 I glance down at my arm
 strong, brown and firm
 I notice the gnarled fingers
 and how
 the opaque, crepe-like skin
 across the back of her hand
 covered in sun spots and raised purple veins
 is shockingly different but familiar to mine*

*'Here I am,' she says
 I gaze at the frail stooped body
 in the blue striped dress
 With a shock
 I realise it is my mother*

*I place my hand gently on hers
 She leans on me
 I lead her slowly
 childlike and trusting to the car
 Her throat hurts from the rude invasion
 of the necessary tubes for anesthesia
 So we drive home in silence
 listening to the news on the ABC
 And even if I want to speak I can't
 Rising into my throat and eyes
 I feel an unexplained rush of emotion and love
 I am surprised and embarrassed
 as tears fall out of my eyes
 and run in silent rivulets
 to the sounds of Phillip Adams
 and a repeat of Late Night Live*

Home

*She asks for a cup of tea
 and a plate of bread and butter
 Comfort food*

*My need to rush on home falls away
 I stay preparing her supper on a tray
 I want to do more*

*I turn down her bed for the night
 Folding back the quilt
 I see another glimpse of her life
 Old pink sheets
 worn and thread bare
 I remove her satin nightdress
 sandwiched between the pillows
 and drape it across my body
 sensing the shape of breasts
 my thickening waistline
 through the folds of the fabric*

*I trace my fingers over the rough edges
of a carefully darned patch
and around lace edging
patiently restitched*

*Memories and images
surface on the fast flowing screen
behind my eyes*

*I hear her voice
Her constant refrain
waste not, want not, mend and make do*

*A stab of guilt
in the awareness
of the frugality of her existence
the extravagance of mine*

*I raise the soft garment to my face
Inhale the fragrance that is my mother
and feel again
the unfamiliar groundswell of emotion
expand
across my heart*

*In a place
a space
deep within
I am filled with relief
The dance
back to the mother has begun*

On the 7th April 1999, my father, Sydney, died.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

SCIENCE, MENOPAUSE AND THE BODY

This appendix provides the reader with a brief account of the medical literature that has examined the different ways in which women's reproductive processes are perceived and constructed. In addition, I outline how various scholars, biologists, philosophers, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and nurses have examined the production of knowledge in relation to women's bodies, their health and health care. I conclude the account with my own reflections on current information and resources.

The . . . 'change of life', as it is commonly called, frequently leads to periods of insanity . . . because certain functions then cease, and the constitution is thereby always more or less deranged.

(Morrison, 1848, in Ussher, 1989, p.104)

Terms related to menopause

Menopause, a term which refers to a normal biological event for women, is defined as the cessation of menstruation that occurs naturally when the ovaries no longer produce eggs and hormones. Menopause is the external marker that represents the transition into the non-reproductive stage of a woman's life cycle. Technically 'the menopause' is the last menstrual period, but the effects of the menstrual cycle ending can extend before and after the last bleed. It is known by various names – 'the change' and 'the climacteric', which is derived from the Greek word *klimacter*, meaning 'critical phase'. Today it is more commonly referred to as 'the menopause' (Davis, 1994; Hunter, 1990).

The majority of women experience this normal bodily function around their 50th year. It is an experience that can be understood physiologically because it is under the control and influence of hormones that mediate women's reproductive lives. The biomedical model focuses primarily on women who experience a 'natural' menopause and on the

interaction between the hypothalamic, pituitary and ovarian functions of the body.¹ Many factors can affect ovulation, with a number of women experiencing menopause in their teenage years and early 20s. Some women are genetically predisposed to premature menopause, whilst others experience ovarian failure as a consequence of severe weight loss or gain, stress, or from the effects of chemotherapy for cancer, or from the removal of ovaries as well as from major illness (Cabot, 1991; Davis, 1994, 1997; Eden, 1992; Whitehead & Godfree, 1992; Pahuja, 1994).

The transition into menopause is a process occurring over a period of many years (Suling, Lanuza, Gulanick, Penckofer, & Holm, 1996). Historically, menopause was considered to be only a two-stage process, pre- and post-menopause. In the late 60s, Jazmann and colleagues introduced the concept that menopause was a three-stage process: premenopause, menopause and postmenopause. This notion of menopause consisting of three stages ultimately lead the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1981 to delineate more clearly between the use of the terms, 'menopause', 'climacteric', 'change of life', 'premenopause', 'perimenopause' and 'postmenopause'.

The three stages of menopause defined by WHO are:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Stage 1 | Premenopause: the entire reproductive period prior to menopause |
| Stage 2. | Perimenopause: the period immediately prior to menopause when endocrinological, biological and clinical features approaching menopause commence (<i>menstrual irregularity</i>), continuing for at least the first year after menopause. |
| Stage 3. | The period dating from menopause, although it cannot be determined until after 12 months of spontaneous amenorrhea (Suling et al., 1996, p.294). |

¹ The word 'natural' is used in this context to make the distinction between menopause which has resulted from surgery or disease, and menopause that occurs as part of a woman's normal development.

Suling et al., claim, that while WHO stated accurately the medical definition of perimenopause, confusion still exists amongst researchers, medical practitioners and women over the pre and perimenopausal phase. The normal duration of perimenopause ranges from between 1 to 10 years, which according to Suling et al., is not commonly documented. The median age for perimenopause is about 45 years with an average length of 4 years. Many women do not fit the prescribed biomedical model that states that the experience of menopause evolves sequentially. The word 'menopause' tends to be used as an umbrella term for the whole process and this creates confusion about the physical changes and the subtleties associated with the decline in ovarian function. Suling et al., further claim that because individual women experience wide variations in their oestrone (hormone) levels, the boundaries of a normal menopause become blurred. These authors maintain that it is the stage of perimenopause that creates the most uncertainty.

With a similar view, Jones (1994) states that the commencement and the ending of the menopause process are not clearly understood. As the production of hormones decrease and the cyclical pattern alters, women can move back and forth between the pre and perimenopause and even the postmenopausal stage. Dr. John Eden (1992) makes the same point, suggesting that most women in their early 40s are experiencing symptoms of oestrogen lack without realising the reason. He adds that it is common for women to experience changes to their body in the year or months prior to menopause even though they are still menstruating. Although a woman may be experiencing physical and psychological changes due to ovarian fluctuation, unless she has a blood test to ascertain her menopausal status she is unable to locate herself within the standard three-stage definition of menopause. Moreover, this limbo state can be problematic for women who experience a hysterectomy. Women without wombs, especially if they are uninformed about all the aspects of menopause, may feel a sense of uncertainty as to whether they should seek menopausal information, or even ask questions or seek counselling about their changing bodily status (MacLennan, 1997).

Buck (1991), Davis (1994; 1997), Koster (1991), Jones (1994), MacPherson (1995), and McCain (1990) assert that little attention is paid to the cultural or environmental factors

that influence how a woman experiences menopause, nor do they address the mental, psychological, emotional, and spiritual changes which take place. These authors point out that the biomedical model of menopause is one in which this developmental stage of a woman's life is described as a physiological crisis, and as such, the related symptomatology require diagnosis and treatment. A woman's experience they say, is significantly affected by situational, emotional and cultural influences, menopause is not just a physiological event. They further state, that the biomedical explanatory model implies that menopause is primarily a biological condition. Thus, other bodily changes that can have a marked impact on a women's sense of self, sexual and femininity are negated or regarded as side effects of the physiological and chemical changes taking place in the body.

Coney (1991), Jones (1994), Lewis (1993), McElmurry (1991), MacPherson (1995) and Martin (1987) claim that the predominant medical narrative with its emphasis on menopause as a 'deficiency disease' is biologically reductionist and it contributes to the medicalisation of women's bodies. They are critical of the language that medical texts employ to portray the process of menopause, stating that the repeated use of words such as 'failure', 'decline', 'loss', 'lack', and 'atrophy' continue to re-enforce the negative hierarchical structure of a woman's body breaking down in terms of productivity, rather than on the positive benefits of this important developmental process. MacPherson (1995) suggests, that by focussing on menopause merely as a set of symptoms instead of regarding it as an important developmental phase, we fail to ask 'what positive function can menopause serve?'(p.347).

The biomedical model of menopause

The interpretation of the body in terms of sex hormones contributed to its transformation, ranging from changes in the very words we use to express our bodily experiences to changes in medical practices and power relations.

(Oudshoorn, 1994, p.144)

Throughout the centuries, in almost all societies, biological differences between the sexes have led not only to false beliefs in the innate inferiority of women's bodies, but also to erroneous myths and superstition surrounding the reproductive body. From the time of Aristotle, men's bodies were described as powerful, rational and knowledgeable. Their role was to govern and women's was to procreate. Supported by the medical and biological rationales of the time, women, with their capacity for childbearing were assigned a place in the 'natural' scheme of things. With the womb representing the centre of a woman's being, she 'naturally' represented a more 'primitive,' undifferentiated state', and as such, her social role was limited by her propensity to produce offspring. For centuries this biological argument based on dualistic constructs of mind/body has been used to justify the subjugation of women (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Ussher, 1989). According to Currie & Raoul (1992), Greer, (1992), Ehrenreich (1978), Oudshoorn (1994), Ussher (1989), the assumption that women were associated only with the body, and not with the mind and therefore reason, led to the defamatory belief that women were irrational and potentially subversive. They point out, that not only were women with their limited capacity to reason understood to be inferior to men, their bodily functions were also seen as a 'threat to men's rational pursuit of salvation' and as the 'source of everything that is wrong in the world' (Currie & Raoul, 1992a, p.3). Oudshoorn (1994), and Greer (1992), further point out, that with the matrix of all women's problems seen to be located in the womb, doctors in the second half of the nineteenth century instituted the term 'hysteria' as a means of diagnosing women whose behaviour was seen as inherently unreliable or unfeminine. Women's 'periodic madneses' were ascribed to the cyclic nature of menstruation, and as a result, the term 'hysteria' applied to all the phases of the life cycle from puberty through to menopause. With the medical profession making these unjustified diagnoses, many women were denied a sense of themselves as embodied, feeling, emotional, desiring, sexual beings. In addition, they were denied agency, and were excluded from the life that men pursued and enjoyed (Ussher, 1989).

Academic scholars who have traced historical texts and discursive practices in the study of the female body, provide a fascinating insight into the ways in which women's bodies, specifically their reproductive bodies, were seen as irrelevant in the production

of knowledge (Currie & Raoul, 1992b; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Martin, 1987; Oakley, 1984; O'Brien, 1981; Oudshoorn, 1994; Ussher, 1989; Young, 1990). A common thread running through these deconstructive analyses centres on the dualistic constructs of the mind-body and on the subsequent fragmentation and sense of bodily disunity women experience in their actual lived reality. They point out, that a false understanding of masculine and feminine dualities was created because men claimed the mind as superior, and as the basis for their 'objective' knowledge. In time, these opposing dualities masculine/feminine were further expanded to embrace gender based views of reality: nature or culture, disorder or order, soft or hard, intuition or reason, passivity or activity, to name but a few. Once again, these organizing laws privileged males. There are repercussions from these pairs of oppositions. Individuals have primarily learned to see the world through logocentric theories and ideas, which in turn, have impacted on human consciousness and our capacity to live, and be in this world. According to Cixous (1986), binary systems have created a 'universal battlefield' between men and women (p.64). Furthermore, they have led to cultural stereotypes and to social differences. From this position, women's female bodily existence and women's ways of knowing have not been adequately represented in institutionalised constructions of knowledge (Currie & Raoul, 1992b; Darke, 1996; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Foucault, 1976; Laqueur, 1990; Klein & Dumble, 1994; Martin, 1987; Miles, 1989; Nicolson & Ussher, 1992; Oudshoorn, 1994; Ussher, 1989; Dickson, 1990; Showalter, 1993; MacPherson, 1985). The authors mentioned here, specifically address the ways in which biomedical discourses have appropriated women's bodies into objects of sexuality and reproduction, and how these discourses continue to project into contemporary culture a voice of patriarchal authority, as well as an externalized perspective of women's experiences.

In particular, Oudshoorn's (1994) detailed genealogy of sex hormones clearly indicates that while hormones may benefit 'women's problems' and bring relief to many women, the various roles played by science, medicine, and the state represent a concerted political, economic, and cultural quest in the medicalisation of menopause. Oudshoorn believes the interaction between these three groups is not only responsible for creating changes to medical practice and to power relations, it is also responsible for changes to

the words we use when interpreting and defining specific bodily experiences, and to the concept of the submissive female patient under the control of their pathological bodies. Additional studies of bio-medical discourses, she says, reveal how they have collectively created a sense of bodily fragmentation and bodily disunity. Supporting Oudshoorn's position, sociologist, Susan Bell (1990) expands on the notion of medicalisation and how it operates on the three levels:

On the conceptual level, medicalisation occurs when a medical vocabulary or model is used to define a problem. On the institutional level, medicalisation comes about when professionals legitimate an organisation's work, serving as 'gatekeepers' or 'formal supervisors.' On the level of doctor-patient interaction, medicalisation occurs when individual physicians define or treat patients' complaints as medical problems.

(Bell, 1990, in MacPherson, 1995, p.348)

The transformative power of sex hormones

Gynecologists were particularly attracted to the concept of female sex hormones because it promised a better understanding and therefore greater medical control over the complex disorders in their female patients frequently associated with the ovaries such as disturbances in menstruation and various diseases described as 'nervous' in medical literature. Moreover, by linking female disorders to female sex hormones, 'women's problems' remained inside the domain of the gynecologists.

(Oudshoorn, 1994, p.19)

With medicine and science adopting a naturalistic view of the body, that is, they ascribed femininity to the uterus and thus focussed on the act of procreation, public knowledge about the menopause and associated female phenomena was limited until early in the 20th century (Oudshoorn, 1994). Greer (1992) states that the menopause was not clearly defined until 1899, when an article written by a Dr Clouston appeared in a book entitled

A System of Medicine by Many Writers. Under the heading 'Climacteric Insanity', Dr. Clouston described a set of symptoms associated with menopause and identified the 'critical phase' of a woman's life as a syndrome (p.25). His ideas were subsequently embraced by the medical establishment, who then proceeded to intervene and treat what had previously been a process that had primarily only involved women.

At the turn of the century, with the discovery by two Viennese gynecologists, Emil Knauer and Josef Halban, that ovaries produced chemical secretions, medical attention began to shift from the womb to the ovaries (Oudshoorn, 1994). Not unlike the womb, these 'organs of crisis' were regarded as the receptacles for the 'essence' of femininity and became the object of widespread medical and scientific intervention (p.8). Experimental research then concentrated on these chemical substances contained within the gonads. Subsequently sex endocrinologists claimed that these chemical secretions, which they described as 'male' and 'female' sex hormones, acted as the agents for the messengers of femininity and masculinity. Quoting Lillie, from his article in the first textbook of sex endocrinology, Oudshoorn writes:

As there are two sets of sex characters, so there are two sex hormones, the male hormone controlling the 'dependent' male characters, and the female determining the 'dependent' female characters.

Lillie 1939, in Oudshoorn, 1994, p.17)

With sex hormones seen to be the missing link between the physiological and genetic models of sex determination, the link being the 'essence' that distinguished women apart from men; that made men and women uniquely different, the chemical model of sex and the body became established in the institutional discourses of medical science, gynecological medicine and laboratory science. Thus, by linking the female body to a chemical substance, endocrinologists transformed the basic model for understanding the specific nature of women's sexuality and associated bodily experiences.

Oudshoorn points out, that although the chemical model reduced the differences between the sexes to 'one hydroxyl group', that is, the difference in men and women was relative

to their sex hormones, the assumption was made that female sex hormones had no function in the normal development of male bodies (p.146). Biologists and gynecologists used blood tests to ascertain the nature of hormone regulation in both male and female bodies. According to Oudshoorn, their blood tests demonstrated that hormones were related to the cyclical nature of women's bodies. Moreover, they proposed that these chemical substances were not only associated with reproductive functions, they also argued that the hormones regulated a wider variety of bodily functions. Based on this blood test, gender differences came to be conceptualised in terms of the rhythm of female hormone production. As a consequence of this extension to the chemical model of sex and the body, women were seen to be at the mercy of their genetic limitations and their fluctuating hormones. Thus sex difference became conceptualised in terms of stability versus cyclicity. This association of femininity with menstrual cyclicity reinforced existing notions of the natural female body already circulating in social and medical discourses.

With new diagnostic techniques that could measure hormonal deficiencies from the uterus and the ovaries to the vagina, women's bodies were to be defined by a model of disorders and pathologies. Oudshoorn (1994) goes on to further point out, that although women's bodies and bodily processes were increasingly being controlled, regulated and redefined, knowledge claims about male bodies during this same period was limited. In the 1920s there were no male clinics specialising in the study of the male reproductive system. Although there was a potential audience for the marketing of male sex hormones, there were no existing institutional structures with an already available and established clientele. This difference in marketable audiences was to prove a crucial factor in determining the extent to which knowledge claims were made about women's bodies.

The recognition that female sex hormones may have some therapeutic value in treating 'women's diseases' - traditionally ascribed to dysfunction of the ovaries - triggered further clinical trials. According to Coney (1991), the transformation of sex hormones into specialised drugs began back in the 1920s when Edgar Allen and Edward Doisey isolated and crystallised the urine of pregnant women. They called the crystallised form

of oestrogen 'Theelin', which later became known as oestrone (p.154). Their research showed that the ovaries produced two hormones, oestrogen and progesterone which were integral to reproductive processes. The use of oestrone was restricted and initially it was given only to menopausal women. However it was difficult to obtain sufficient supplies. As a consequence, scientists throughout the world were encouraged to pursue and compete in finding alternative and cheaper sources. The first synthetic form of oestrogen developed was called diethylstilbestrol, more commonly known as DES. Until the early 1970s it was offered to women during pregnancy to alleviate miscarriage and to suppress lactation after childbirth (Bell, 1995). Then, in the late 30s it was offered to women to treat menopausal symptoms.²

Although clinical trials failed to formulate well-defined descriptions of the side effects of hormone preparations, by the late 20s female sex hormone therapy was extended to treat other medical indications. Initially sex hormones were administered to female patients suffering schizophrenia and depression and then their application was further extended to treat diabetes, hemophilia, eye disorders, hair loss, and epilepsy (Oudshoorn, 1994). The more widely known oestrogen product with the brand name 'Premarin' was developed in 1943 from the urine of pregnant mares. In the post war years, technological advances facilitated a drug boom. This resulted in a powerful allegiance between the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry.

According to Coney (1991), by the late 1930s, with the introduction of diagnostic techniques and with access to the recently discovered 'hormone deficiency' drugs, the practice of medicine moved from its unsophisticated 'hands-on' approach to healing, to embrace the power and prestige of science. Thus, the hormone model of disease mediated by laboratory scientists became integrated with the exclusive field of gynecological medicine. Armed with an array of antibiotic products, oral contraceptives, intrauterine devices, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), as well as mind altering drugs and hypnotics produced by the burgeoning and competing

² Bell states that although clinical studies identified DES as the first transplacental carcinogen, in 1995 it was still being marketed in the United States.

pharmaceutical companies, doctors became the experts in managing and treating 'all the problems' of society (p.155).

Oudshoorn (1994) tells us that in 1938, Organon, a leading Dutch pharmaceutical company, chose to promote menopause as one of the major indications for treatment using sex hormone therapy. Their argument for targeting menopausal women was based on economic motives. By treating women employees of menopausal age, productivity would not be lost due to the disorders of menopause. Although later studies were to show that sex hormones had carcinogenic qualities, the debate on the risks associated with this form of therapy had little effect on the promotion and reception of this drug.

Within the limitations of this brief outline of the evolution of menopause and its subsequent treatment, and of the ways in which scientists have actively constructed our reality rather than discovered it, there is not the space to pursue further how the specific 'nature' of hormone drugs and the associated knowledge claims embodied in these discourses are shaped in multiple ways by various institutional networks. For readers interested in this aspect, I refer you to studies by Susan Bell (1995) Gordon (1976), Kreiger and Fee (1994), King, (1989), Klein and Dumble (1994), Kaufert and McKinlay (1987), Coney (1991) and Oakley, (1984; 1993).

Having reviewed the ways in which the concept of sex hormones contributed to the *conceptual* medicalisation of menopause, I conclude this section with the following comments. Prior to the revolutionary changes generated by sex endocrinology, there was little medical attention given to the problems or signs of menopause, being considered by physicians as a normal 'physiological crisis' with little need for intervention. Women who did complain of adverse physical symptoms were either dismissed or ignored. As the field of research into sex hormones expanded, along with the recognition that there was a potential audience in marketing hormones specifically for the reproductive body, medical authorities began to describe menopause as a 'deficiency disease'. By adopting this medical view, doctors could then compare menopause with a range of other illnesses and diseases that similarly could be treated with replacement therapy.

The process of constructing a disease

The social construction of menopause as a disease occurred during the 1930s, but it was not until the 1960s that 'menopause as disease' gained prominence within the discourses of medicine. This was achieved by the seminal work of Dr. Robert A Wilson (1966), a Brooklyn gynaecologist and author of *Feminine Forever*, who took it upon himself to personally convince his colleagues and women that the 'tragedy' of menopause could be avoided. Because Wilson maintained that menopause was not a fate to be endured, and that menopause was a 'mutilation of the whole body', he advocated replacement therapy from 'puberty to the grave' to alleviate this 'emotional and physical decline' (Coney, 1991, p.60). He believed women suffered a deficiency of oestrogen, and as a consequence, the bodily processes of menopause not only destroyed a woman's health, they also had a 'devastating' impact on a woman's sense of self and sexuality. His enthusiastic campaign throughout the United States eventually persuaded medical practitioners, the mass media and women alike that oestrogen could indeed keep a woman 'feminine forever' eliminating the associated physical, sexual and psychological problems attributable to menopause.

Wilson's emotive approach and exaggerated medical model thus re-established the notion of menopause as a physical and emotional disease. The legacy of Wilson's portrayal of menopause as a time of undesirable change is still with us today. Coney (1991), Greer (1991) and MacPherson (1981) claim that Wilson's myth of 'menopause as disease' has been responsible for the continuation of negative views maintained within social and medical discourses. Davis (1994) reminds us, that in our Western culture we have developed a 'tragic caricature' of older women resulting in the creation of negative cultural stereotypes (p.5). According to Davis, we are a society that has learned to be cruelly youth orientated and sexist with very little regard or respect for ageing women. In adopting this stance, Davis adds, that because the end of a woman's reproductive life is associated with asexuality, functionlessness and decline, Australian society generally views 'the menopause' with 'overwhelmingly negative connotations' (p.7).

The middle-aged woman has often been a figure of ridicule and is often ignored completely. Middle-aged women can feel they are invisible as the world around them fails to acknowledge them simply because they are no longer seen as (sexually) attractive. It is no wonder that there is a pervasive fear of ageing amongst women.

(Davis, 1994, p.5)

Supporting this view, Shoebridge (1997), in a review of articles published by the mass media in Australia between 1985 – 1994, found that menopause was ‘overwhelmingly depicted as a time of increasing ill-health’. She goes on to say that this discourse is also reflected in the news media. In a discussion about future directions for the national broadcaster, a newsreader commented ‘For some years now Australia’s favorite maiden Aunt, the ABC, has been suffering a menopausal identity crisis. The hot flushes are not over yet...’

(David Britton, *The West Australian*, 13.7.85, p. 34, in Shoebridge, 1997, p.16)

Another example of negative connotations in the media occurred this year in a television programme on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The event took place in an episode of *Father Ted*, an Irish comedy about the lives of Catholic priests. In this particular episode the priests are entertaining an attractive young male singer. The women in the district hear of his whereabouts and travel across the island to visit him. On opening the front door and seeing a large body of middle-aged women approaching, the young man adopts a look of mock horror and quickly closes the door. When asked by his fellow actors why he didn’t want to go outside and greet them, he replied, ‘I don’t want to catch the menopause!’ This response was greeted with much laughter.

(ABC. Channel 2. March 5, 1999)

Women’s health; menopause and beyond

By the year 2050, with an increased life expectancy of 90 years the ageing of the massive baby-boomer generation will have a huge impact on economic, social and

medical resources (Cabot, 1991).³ Consequently, research, into both conventional and alternative preventative strategies to safeguard women's long term health care has escalated. Scientists and clinicians continue to argue the merits or risks associated with diagnostic treatments and classification of symptoms, while marketing analysts and merchandisers of alternative therapies and products present women with a bewildering array of merchandise to combat a wide variety of possible health problems.⁴ The fact that women now have the potential to live for a third of their lives in the postmenopause stage has contributed significantly to the high profile that the role of hormones has acquired in maintaining a healthy body.⁵ According to projected current statistics, 50% of postmenopausal women will die of diseases related to the heart (Burger, 1996; Pahuja, 1994). The past decade has shown a significant interest by researchers into drugs that will reduce the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. It is estimated that a third of women will experience serious complications from bone fractures (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1994). In addition, one in every two women over 60 will experience urogenital complaints (Organon, 1997).

In reviewing the rapidly changing medical and popular literature regarding the long-term health risks associated with menopause, I found that the presentation of information is changing. Unlike texts published in the early 90s with their emphasis on disease, disorder and deterioration, recent articles and books generally use terminology which avoids overwhelmingly negative descriptions of menopause. Although the terms 'oestrogen lack', 'reduced oestrogen production' and 'oestrogen deficiency' *are* used when discussing health care, I believe that in most cases it is presented not to exploit women's fears of ageing but in a manner so as to increase women's knowledge of their

³ A report on ABC radio 6WF's morning programme 2 March 1998, stated that by the year 2050 life expectancy was likely to be 130 years.

⁴ According to a survey published in *The Lancet* (2 March 1996), Australians spend nearly twice as much on alternative medicines as they do on conventional drugs. The survey found that a large proportion of alternative medicine users were menopausal women.

⁵ Although this study did not specifically address issues relating to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or examine the impact, both positive and negative that these drugs may have had, or are having on the women's lives, readers may be interested in the following information. Of the 12 participants in this study, 9 women commenced HRT. They did this at different stage in the processes of menopause and for a variety of reasons. The main one being hot flushes and mood swings. Eight of the women have since discontinued this therapy, opting instead for alternative health care products.

bodies and to point out the possible risks of long term oestrogen deficiency. At times the word 'deficient' is difficult to avoid using. Most people know that it implies shortage, scarcity or insufficiency, or something that is incomplete. It is a fact that women's ovaries *do* become deficient in hormones and our ovaries *do* atrophy. The word disease is more likely to be used when alerting women to the fact that cardiovascular disease is a significant cause of death in postmenopausal women. A recent check on the Organon web site for *Menopause Care and HRT* showed that the information defining women's bodies included a bracketed word or explanation after the terms 'deficient' and 'atrophy' (Organon, 1998). In this instance the words 'shortage of estrogen' and 'thinning of the surface' were used to simplify these descriptions of the body.

With recent research into phyto-oestrogens – naturally occurring plant substances - indicating possible benefits in alleviating the physical symptoms of menopause, as well as providing protection against selected cancers and reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, medical practitioners writing texts for a lay audience are more actively promoting a fully integrated holistic approach to health care at menopause (Cabot, 1997; Davis, 1997; Lee, 1999; MacLennan, 1997; Northrup, 1998; Stoppard, 1998).

In light of the exploration that has taken place in this study, and from my own experiences working as a volunteer counsellor in the Midlife Support Group attached to our local women's hospital, I believe that the challenge for medical practitioners and health care workers involved in the well being and preventative health of women at menopause, is to initiate measures that will provide educational programs on the different stages of the menopausal processes. For many women, the onset of menopause impacts deeply on their perceptions of sexuality, identity and ageing. They have question and concerns which extend beyond the physical symptoms of menopause. There is a need to provide appropriate support resources for understanding the patterns of physical, psychological and spiritual change during this important stage of their reproductive lives. It is vital that time and space is provided for women to discuss and name the various changes occurring in their bodies. As mentioned in my thesis, a major concern for women as they enter menopause is that of being seen and heard; for their embodied experiences to be taken seriously; to be witnessed. The quality of listening,

and the time given to this activity as women define their own experience, is a significant factor in determining how women positively approach these transformative years.

Recently I met with one of my participants. We had been out of touch for some months as she had been busy moving house. Over coffee, she told me that earlier this year she was hospitalised for a short time due to depression. Her comments about this experience reminded me of an interesting, but disturbing statistic reported at the 1997 Australasian Menopause Society Congress. Delegates were told that one third of Australian women who attend menopause clinics have symptoms of major clinical depression (Bower, 1997). Even more perturbing was the comment by clinical psychologist, Amanda Gordon, who said, 'women may have had depressive illness for years, but chose menopause as a "legitimate" time to seek help' (Bower, 1997). Similarly, Suling et al., (1996) state that the most frequently reported psychosomatic symptom during menopause is depression. However, they point out, studies of midlife women have been unable to find a significant relationship between depression and menopause (p.301). Gordon and Suling et al's., comments invite the question 'why have women remained silent for so long about their feelings of depression, and why aren't preventative measures being put in place to rectify this situation?' According to World Health Organisation experts, depression and other forms of mental illness will be second only to heart disease by 2020 (The West Australian, 1997). In light of these alarming reports, I believe that it is imperative health care professionals encourage and promote the healing power women receive from the creation of their own personal and cultural narratives; narratives reflecting the actual lived experience of a woman's life, which then in turn, can be shared with others.

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Appendix B**PARTICIPATION – RELEASE AGREEMENT**

I agree to participate in a research study of women's experiences of menopause. I understand that artwork, visual diaries, poetry and text will be incorporated into the study. I am aware of the purpose and nature of the study and am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Ph.D. degree including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that my name and other demographic information which might identify me will not be used. I also agree to the researcher conducting a personal and confidential interview with me.

Research Participant _____

Date

Primary Researcher _____

Date

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia.

Appendix C

CROTTY'S SENTENCE STEMS

Describing the phenomenon

Menopause is *flight*
Menopause feels like *shit (sometimes)(physically)*
 What I discover in **menopause** is *strength*
Menopause can be described as *alchemy*.
 I picture **menopause** as *discovery/expansion*
 What comes to light when I focus on **menopause** is *change*
Menopause strikes me as being *a journey*
Menopause presents itself to me *as a challenge*
 I recognise **menopause** as being *transitional*
Menopause sounds to me like *termination*
 What I uncovered when I focus on **menopause** is *me – (the one who was there all the time!)*
 When I gaze at **menopause**, I see *myself being laid bare*
 I depict **menopause** in poetic terms as *water, wind, sky, earth*
 The metaphor(s) that best convey **menopause** is (are)

Wind
The colour blue
Receding tide/advancing tide
(Fanny 1997)

Appendix D

MENOPAUSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Ethics No HR 146/94

Age

Number of children

Level of education

Current Occupation

Current Relationship Status

e.g. Single, Married, De facto, Divorced, Separated, Other

- 1 Which of the following categories do you feel applies to you?
 Premenopausal Perimenopausal Postmenopausal
- 2 At what age did you commence menstruation?
- 3 In general what have been your feelings regarding menstruation?
- 4 Have you ever experienced reproductive surgery? Yes.....No
- 5 If yes, describe nature of operation.
- 6 How have you gained your knowledge of menopause?
- 7 What images come to mind when you hear the word menopause?
- 8 Has your mother shared her menstruation and menopausal experiences with you? Yes..... No
- 9 Do you think there are myths and taboos associated with menopause? Yes..... No
- If your answer if yes can you explain?
-
- 10 Who do you choose to discuss your thoughts and problems about menopause with?

11 Have you experienced any of the following physical/and emotional changes lately?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hot flushes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cessation of periods | <input type="checkbox"/> | Anxiety and/or irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vaginal dryness | <input type="checkbox"/> | Depression/mood changes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reduced sexual desire | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unloved/unwanted feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Increased body hair | <input type="checkbox"/> | Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Excessive sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of self esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fuzzyhead/dizzy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grief/sadness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Poor sleep | <input type="checkbox"/> | Change in body image | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Poor memory/concentration | <input type="checkbox"/> | Weight gain | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Headaches | <input type="checkbox"/> | Relaxed/fulfilled | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dry skin | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other – specify | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12 At what age did these changes begin?

13 Have you experienced hot flushes in public, if so how did you feel?

14 Can you recognise any specific changes with yourself related to midlife?

15 In which of the following has change taken place?

- Sexuality
- Femininity
- Relationships
- Ageing

- Identity
- Health
- Spirituality
- Other – specify

16 Which is the significant area of change

and can you explain why?

.....

17 Have mid-life experiences changed
 your work/artistic practice?

Yes No..... Some change.....

If you have experienced changes
 can you explain the effect of those changes?

.....

18 Have you creatively expressed
 these changes in your thoughts,
 feelings and emotions?

.....

19 Would you allow your work,
 or the product of your creative expression
 to be photographed and documented?

Yes No

20 Would you enjoy the experience of
 creating your own ritual to celebrate
 menopause?

Yes..... No..... Unsure

21 Name the area in your life where you
 feel a loss of self.

.....

22 Name the life situation which causes
 you to feel most powerless.

.....

23 Can you name the area where you feel you
 have increased in sense of self, power or
 knowledge?

.....

24 What are your thoughts about ageing?

.....

25 How do you think the media presents
 images of women at mid-life?

.....

26 Have you taken hormone replacement
 therapy?

Yes No

36 Was there any change to your body as
 a result of HRT? If yes please describe.

.....

37 Have you tried any other health
 remedies/therapies to alleviate 'symptoms'
 of menopause?

Yes..... No

If you answer yes please specify.

38 Do you have any concerns about HRT?

39 Did you have any trouble answering these questions?

If Yes please specify.



Thank you for you time involved in answering these questions.
This rest of this page provides space for comment and constructive criticism. Are there areas you feel I have not addressed?

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Ethics No. HR 146/94