WRITING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS, RE-CONSTRUCTING SELF: AN ARTS-BASED AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

DISSERTATION

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the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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This dissertation is an arts-based, autoethnographic study, which investigates my adjustment to a foreign culture and social system and my growth in academia, as well as the use of artistic and self-reflexive methods in the research process. The primary personal goal for my research is to understand the changes in my cultural identity and self-perception caused by life-altering cultural changes. By critically re-evaluating my experiences I investigated the methods for studying identity, cultural production and approaches to diversity education. By studying my life on a personal level through photography and creative writing, I apply and propose inquiry methods that can further advance studies of identity construction and educational pedagogy.

The main theoretical interest in this study is the intersection of artistic/creative behavior and systematic qualitative research practices through critical analysis of the involvement of alternative and artistic methods in the process of studying cultural identity. Founded in feminism, critical visual sociology and ethnography, advanced studies of visual methods, knowledge, and culture, as well as contemporary art theory, my study provides a model for using self-reflexive and artistic practices in professional development and diversity education. My research further develops the relatively new methodologies of arts-based inquiry and autoethnography, critical self-reflexive methods, and advances our understanding of the possible roles and uses of visuals in qualitative research. The methods used to study changes in my life situation, ideas, and self-perception, since leaving Finland to attend a doctoral program in Ohio, are photography, participant observation, photo-writing, memory work, photo therapy, critical essay writing, public display and discussion of my photographs and creative texts.

My research findings support a critical pedagogy and curriculum that focuses on learning about cultural phenomena, artists, visual culture producers, objects and artifacts, and an individual’s culturally situated, relational, identities in their varied and complex discourses. The significance of this study is the
exploration of the processes of gaining access to intellectuality and the construction of understanding, only available through the emergence of artistic, self-reflexive, and theoretical thinking with the intention of increasing awareness about visual knowledge that has remained largely uninvestigated.
I needed to pause and listen to the voices and wisdom of women.

Āidilieni, to my mother
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been fortunate to have Dr. Patricia L. Stuhr as my mentor. Her insightful understanding of my educational background and cultural heritage has been a great help and advantage. She has allowed me to wander, to take my time and find my own ways and voices. One day I hope to be as great of a mentor for my students as she has been for me.

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art Education
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My story is about the struggle of learning to speak, my story is about learning to write (in any language), my story is about becoming an adult, my story is about the difficult process of separating my identity from that of my family. It is about struggling to live in two different time zones, with two languages, two or a thousand ways of viewing the world as a place that belongs to “us” —as a political, authored, understood, theorized physical and social experience.
CHAPTER 1

WRITING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS, WRITING THE SELF: Using Artistic Methods in the Investigation of Individual Cultural Identity

My dissertation is an arts-based autoethnographic study which investigates my growth in academia and my adjustment to a foreign culture and social system. By studying my life on a personal level through the artistic research process that involves photographing my life and creative writing, I have gained a deeper, more complex understanding of the changes in my self-perception and social identity caused by the life-altering cultural adaptation process, as well as how the different, interwoven life aspects affect my teaching and academic decision-making. This process has been an active re-creation of self, an attempt to understand these changes in self-perception and to create new representation of self informed by the study. My research focuses on a three-year period starting with my move from Helsinki, Finland, to Columbus, Ohio. Throughout the written artifact, I wish to demonstrate how I came to critically re-evaluate, through local, personal and visual methods of inquiry, the methods we use to study identity and cultural production, as well as how we approach diversity education.

I believe that people create an understanding of who they are through reflecting on the stories they tell and the images and other documents created about their lives. I believe that all the research we do, and all the academic texts we publish, also change our understanding of who we are (Richardson, 1997). Conducting research is an active form of self-(re)creation, thus I find it important to seek methods of research that best express the researcher’s intentions and epistemological understanding. For that reason I begin this study by telling my personal story.
I grew up in an artistically oriented family and I received my previous degrees at the University of Art and Design Helsinki in Finland, which strongly emphasizes the development of students’ individual artistic identities. While artists are trained to be deeply involved in the process of inquiry emotionally and through bodily experiences, scholarly and scientific modes of cultural and social research often separate the body, senses and emotions from the process of inquiry and devalue forms of knowledge construction other than logic (Pink, 2001). In my dissertation I have attempted to approach the process intuitively, respecting and listening to all aspects of myself.

My main theoretical interest is the intersection of artistic/creative behavior and systematic qualitative research practices. Through my study, I provide a rich description and critical analysis of the involvement of alternative and artistic methods in the process of studying identity construction. While many art educators have shifted their curriculum towards teaching about life in its multiplicity through the critical study of art and visual culture and several scholars have shown innovative interest in studying humanity through art and creative behavior, I believe that we need to continue critically re-evaluating the methods we use to study art, visual cognition, and identity construction. I am looking for an alternative approach; my research further develops the relatively new methodologies of arts-based inquiry and autoethnography by providing an example of how identity can be critically studied in the context of an increasingly diverse society through local, personal and artistic experiences and critical self-reflective methods.

In my dissertation work I have positioned myself through different components of my identity “in relation to the great traditions, be these epistemic structures, the signification of specific location and its national/cultural identification or gendered narratives and histories” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 123) that have formed my self-perception. My life and story began reshaping as I relocated to a new social and cultural context at The Ohio State University. I found this change liberating as the new environment allowed partial re-creation of identity and helped me to question the individual I had assumed I was. My study focuses on the first three years of my life in Columbus, Ohio. However, I soon found myself delving into layers of family history to understand how it was that, even before I was born, events took place that influenced who I assumed I was. Although I had found this change in living conditions and cultural environment helpful in
questioning my socially learned and adopted identity, I found myself “sliding” back to my old behavioral patterns and daily routines. These conditions needed to be investigated when I was re-writing my identity. In this process I needed to apply different theoretical and conceptual frameworks to approach the concept of identity construction. While my writing relates to many contemporary social and cultural phenomena, I am mainly writing myself into the map or genre of writing and representation. According to Carol B. Stack (1993) in her article “Writing Ethnography: Feminist Critical Practice,” “the goal is to explore and experiment – to learn and write as much about our understanding of how we locate our voice[s] in our writing as possible” (p. 81).

Photography and Visual Inquiry

In my investigation of my fragmented sense of “self” my camera has been my faithful guide dog and ally. This process would have been impossible without this mechanical apparatus. For a visual story to be born requires a special moment and privacy. I react to my own visuality through the camera while photographing and while looking at the proof sheets; these images trouble me, please me, and touch my emotions and feelings. The photographs that I choose to further work with are the ones that seem willing to have a conversation with me, or the ones that require immediate attention. Through my camera I see the world differently; it limits, crops, selects and guides seeing.

If we could learn new ways of using our cameras we could start by telling our own stories in different ways. Initially we could use the camera for a dialogue with ourselves, as in photo therapy, to de-censorize ourselves, or as a type of visual diary-writing. Once we feel it is safe to proceed we can share our ‘new’ stories with allies, and we can begin to re-imag(in)e who we are, both visually and verbally. If we were encouraged to do this as children, who knows what we might begin to make of the world by the time we became adults? (Spence, 1988, p. 214).

My aim in this study is to further develop the relatively new methodologies of arts-based research and autoethnography and advance our understanding of the possible roles and uses of visuals in qualitative research. I have investigated the meanings of visual images for research, both independently and in conjunction with texts. I believe it is possible to transmit information through art that would be impossible to verbalize and arrange according to verbal cognitive patterns. I believe that images and visual understandings themselves are knowledge that does not need to be translated into any other form of knowledge, thus I have examined images as data, as sources of information for investigation; as a medium
for analysis for the researcher; and as an alternative form of representation in qualitative inquiry. While my approach to studying identity construction is visually informed and oriented, as well as characteristically autobiographical, the guiding principles and some of the methods I have modified for my study could be further altered for other artistic mediums/self-reflexive methods.

Writing, Texts, and Visuals

Although my abilities to communicate in English and to use theoretical texts to support my narrative have improved since I began using English in everyday communication three and a half years ago, I hope that a sometimes naive tone and a partially limited vocabulary available to “newcomers” in this social context are still present in my text. While my work is more evidently informed by multiple social and cultural positions, it is also sensitive to multilingualism (Ong, 1995). The Finnish language, for example, does not recognize gender positions of objects and subjects, but the subject’s gender is understood from the context. While this does not mean that the Finnish language is not gendered, it is easier to create (an illusion of) a gender-neutral text when distinctions between “he” and “she” do not need to be made. Also words are often lengthy due to the frequent use of compound words. This encourages the creation of new words and allows for the alteration of the tone of the text through slight variations of word form.

The founding idea of my study is to learn more about the process of identity construction. One naturally desires positionality and the sense of security provided by a feeling of belonging within the intricate structures of everyday life as well as within the academy. One of the ways belonging could be understood is “the ability to live out complex and reflexive identities which acknowledge language, knowledge, gender and race as modes of self-positioning” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 13). We read texts and visuals from our contemporary perspectives, bringing personal desires and needs into reading (Kuhn, 1995). Through this ‘reading’, and the interpretation of the information, Irit Rogoff (2000) suggests that we “fragment, appropriate, rewrite and utterly transform those texts” while these visuals and texts simultaneously change and mold our understanding of culture and our place within it; visuals and texts “constitute us rather than being subjected to historical readings by us” (p. 9). According to Rogoff by constantly asking oneself the question ‘Where do I belong?’ and pursuing the articulation of this question in relationship to one’s life brings awareness to the process of self-positioning, in-flux identity and the
complex process of writing one’s self into culture. For the past three and a half years my studies have focused around the questions, “Who am I?” and “How is my culturally informed identity and self-perception constructed?” Although Laurel Richardson focuses on text, I believe that the concept “writing; a method of inquiry” (2000a) can be extended to visuals and artistic visual production. I have used the artistic medium of photography, the medium I know the best and am most comfortable with to study changes in my life situation, ideals, and self-perception. Most of my ideas are born while photographing, and I can best analyze and understand my behavior when writing in a fictional or poetic form in relationship to my photographs. Only lately have I found writing to be an important expression for self-reflexivity and therapy through the theoretical writing of this artifact. I now write to verbalize my conceptual understanding; I write to further the complexity of embodied and tacit knowledge represented in my photographs. For me, combining and intertwining visuals and writing has “created new ways of writing and reading” (Richardson, 2000b, p. 154). It has changed me, the ways I understand knowledge, the ways I read and write/create visuals and text. I hope that the intensive process of self-reflexive study is apparent through this body of work and the installations of my work, and I further hope that models for using self-reflexive and artistic practices in professional development and diversity education can be found through reading this written-visual artifact.

**The Structure and Three Main Themes / Aspects of Identity**

My study is constructed of different forms of textual and visual representations. I have allowed myself to imagine. The only thread that I have followed throughout the process has been the desire to enrich my understanding of self as it has been altered through drastic changes while living in a new cultural environment. Different forms of narration have been present the whole time. As the use of English as my main language of communication in private and educational settings was new to me, I started to photograph my own life and write short accounts based on my feelings recalled from the photographs I created. I found an escape from the rules of appropriate academic English and its grammar in the language and format of these stories (further discussed in Chapter 3). Between writing and photography, photographing has been the more consistent activity, while I have found calmness and understanding in these emotional stories. I
could have re-written them from the perspective that time provides, but I have chosen to remain faithful to their original forms in mood and wording. These initial stories are included in this body of work while I have also provided lengthy descriptions of several analytical processes (Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

Arts-based educational research and autoethnography both have goals similar to those of art: they aim to touch the reader/viewer, evoke emotions, and provide alternative perspectives in viewing life (i.e. Barone & Eisner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). They both use artistic methods of writing and expressing oneself. This style of writing is most commonly associated with fiction. My study is based on visual images, creative writing, and visual and textual narratives. Arts-based educational research and autoethnography do not have a set of methods or a fixed philosophical/theoretical framework that can characterize these types of study. My study modifies methods from multiple academic disciplines, as well as from art, art criticism, autobiographical writing, and oral and written storytelling traditions. The research process is as much about the emergence of methods and theory as it is my story of immigration and assimilation (or refusal to assimilate?).

My work is theoretically influenced by critical visual sociology (Chaplin, 1994); critical visual ethnography (Pink, 2001); embedded in critical ethnography (i.e. Clifford, 1996) that recognizes the partial nature of all ethnographic knowledge; cultural studies (e.g. Hall, 1997); and interdisciplinary visual culture studies (Mirzoeff, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) and studies of visual methodologies (Rose, 2001) that have greatly advanced the social, cultural, and political nature of visual knowledge. I have studied visual and textual autobiographies and memoirs as well as theories of autobiographical writing, knowledge construction and individual artists’ works. I have also been involved in studying contemporary art theory, and the study of artists’ work (especially that of women photographers) whose work is engaged in studying cultural, gendered and situated identity and who have written about their own work. Like other scholars studying the construction of visual knowledge, I argue that the study of art and art theory helps to critically re-evaluate the academic methods of studying identity. I am also, and especially, influenced by feminist works that through questioning the established practices “produce different structures of intelligibility that, in turn, produce different epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 2).
Chapters 2 and 3 form a theoretical framework for understanding the alternative approaches of arts-based research and autoethnography, and the ways I have used photography and different modes of writing in the research process. Chapter 4 then focuses on the gendered identity as it is formed in close relationship to one’s family, yet in the complex discourses of culture and society. Writing Chapter 5 would have not been possible without the in-depth study of the themes discussed in the preceding four chapters that created a framework and basis for discussing my understanding of critical visual- and arts-informed pedagogy. In turn, writing Chapter 5 informed my evolving theoretical thinking, as I returned to critically re-evaluate the theories and concepts discussed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. All these chapters are written in layers, not in the linear order presented here. This format reflects my belief that research, pedagogy, and private life cannot be separated, but inform one another and intertwine.

The form of my dissertation does not follow the dominant and most commonly accepted structure set for academic dissertation research. This structural pattern, I believe, would have worked against my study and what I have learned from it. My dissertation is constructed using varied styles of writing, and combinations of visuals and texts. The different sections might appear to lack coherence; however, every part is constructed in a way that I believe best supports my intentions, and taken together form a whole. I intertwine my photographs with different types of texts forming visual and textual sequences according to the theme. My dissertation is built around three aspects of identity: cultural, gendered, and academic.

The starting point for the critical study of cultural identity was my move to a new country. The first months of my life in this country, culture and educational system, with new professional roles, changed the way I viewed myself; and the following three years made me question all the aspects of life and knowledge I had previously accepted as the basis of my existence. While I knew that hundreds of other graduate students, and also immigrants who have come to foreign countries for reasons other than education, have gone through this life-altering adaptation process in their private and professional lives, I felt that I had jumped into this experience unprepared to face the profound effects this experience would have on my self-perception. I could not pass up the opportunity to research something so important to my emotional and intellectual development.
During the first year in Ohio I was a stranger, an alien, and I experienced the privileges and
downfalls of being incognito. The beauty of strangeness lies in the freedom for self-creation, but fears are
easily fed by insecurity and a need to become part of the new society and to feel accepted. Quoting Howard
argues that a stranger faces difficulty and struggle in a new cultural and living situation because s/he is still
living in part in the old and what was before. My personal stories intertwined with the theoretical texts are
often filled with sadness, grief, and struggle. I have searched for acceptance, but I have refused to let the
past go completely. The richness of this multicultural experience is that I have lived multiple lives,
personalities, and roles at once that may never merge. Yet, multiplicity naturally causes a loss of a united
sense of self. The first main “theme” section of the dissertation, the construction of cultural identity,
focuses on questioning the learned and adapted cultural identity while building a critical and self-reflexive
understanding of the concepts of travel, location-dislocation, belonging and un-belonging, home,
nationality, otherness and strangeness (Chapter 3).

The second “theme” section is built around the critical study of self as it is constructed in
relationship to one’s past and personal relationships in varied and complex cultural and social discourses
(Chapter 4). I understand self and identity through relationality: that is the understanding of self as
constructed in relation to one’s surroundings and especially in relationships with other people. Several
educators and scholars, especially feminist scholars, (e.g. Eakin, 1999; Witherell & Noddings (Eds.) 1991;
Belenky & al., 1986) have written about relationality in the process of identity formation and learning to
understand one’s self. It has often been claimed that, women especially form their identities in relationship
to the significant people in their lives. I understand identity as in-flux, complex, multiple, relational (Eakin,
1999), communal and simultaneously performed in many stages (Smith, 1998). I believe in the power of
narration and storytelling in shaping one’s identity and expanding one’s views about “otherness.” It
becomes possible to understand relationality between a person, his/her surroundings, and others through
shared stories and life experiences; we “naturally” relate to the story of the narrator, and read our own
stories through complex parallel readings of the other. Furthermore, this relational reflexive behavior opens
the doors to acceptance, since it is through these personal narratives that we best relate to another person’s
experience and come to question pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes. Thus, personal narrative has to be one of the most influential ways of teaching for educators whose goals are deepening understanding of otherness and more democratic and equal societies (Chapter 3, 4 & 5).

The fifth chapter draws from the previous two main themes through connections found between one’s personal life and one’s role as an educator and researcher. It performs educational and cultural criticism through a combination of theoretical and autobiographical essay writing (Hesford, 1999). While some narratives relating to my past educational experiences have been included, the focus of this chapter was to arrive at my pedagogical and professional/theoretical positionality. Since my aim as an art educator is to teach diverse and multiple perspectives in viewing life through the arts, critical analysis of visual artifacts, and visual production/communication, I investigated how my personal cultural and gendered identities continuously shape my educational philosophy. Through this research process I have gained an appreciation for my students’ stories and come to understand how to help students to investigate their global, national, local and personal cultural identities. Wendy Hesford (1999) calls attention to the participatory role educators play “in the construction of ‘other’” (p. xxx). To gain deeper understanding of my participation in constructing and supporting stereotypical “otherness” and ability to promote democracy in my academic practices, I have questioned myself: “What narratives of identity and difference shape [my] authority, and how can [I] use the authority conferred to [me] to challenge and expose [mine and my students’] narratives?” (Hesford, 1999, p. xxx).

**Words for the Road**

Throughout the process of writing my dissertation, I have felt alone. I have feared bringing the private into public and I have often been afraid that I would not be able to pull this all theoretically together. What has kept me going is my desire to challenge the representational forms that discriminate against visual and silent knowledge, the denial of the personal, and the fact that my academic advisor never asked me to drop the topic. I wish to invite my potential readers into my story which, as unlikely as it may occasionally sound, is about the beauty and excitement of life and fascination with human thought. I also hope to invite my readers to participate in my journey through the lost sense of self, the fruitfulness of experiencing temporary fragmentation of identity, and my growth in questioning the narratives I learned to
live by. It may sound “cheesy” and romanticized to talk about the importance of individual thought and identity construction as a means of providing answers to the intercultural, interethnic, and interpersonal communication difficulties with which we seem to be increasingly struggling. Yet, I believe it is more important now than ever to re-evaluate the methods we use and theories we follow in studying personal and cultural identity. Through my research I wish to call attention to the sociocultural borders we build and live by and within, and to the moments of contradiction at the borders and their eventual or possible rupture.

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide a terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular and communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2).

I suggest that similar processes of visual and self-reflective inquiry can be adapted to the study of self and other in diversity education at different levels. The process requires willingness to expose one’s self to public scrutiny, which at times hurts. Although I write about myself and the text discusses themes specific to my life, I believe that we can find temporary self-determination through relating to other’s personal narratives. As an educator, I believe that there is a continuous need to re-evaluate methods used in multicultural and diversity education. My critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1994; Hesford, 1999; Dunlop, 1999) is based on an indepth study and understanding of individual learners’ as well as cultural producers’ contextual lives and narratives. Acknowledging the achievements of diversity education thus far, I claim that we need to reconsider the categories that some multicultural and ethnic philosophies of education assume and instead focus on interpersonal communication and critical reflection on a very basic individual level. I am not suggesting that we should abandon categories, but that we need to see beyond gender, ethnic, cultural, sexual, geopolitical, and social classifications, and focus on the complexity of identity construction. We have to be willing to listen, hear and share, take the time and commit to developing further understandings of “otherness,” that which is strange to us, and recognize the “stranger” (Shabatay, 1991) within ourselves that makes interpersonal communication complicated. Pausing and recognizing the uniqueness, strangeness, and sameness of each learner, we can create new grounds for acceptance.

This process has been driven by my need to understand the connections between theories, practice, and private life. My undergraduate and masters education was artistically pronounced and the educational
training emphasized more of the feeling (gut) that a certain educational practice was right, rather than explaining and investigating the theories behind these practices. Through my doctoral education, I have searched for answers and explanations on how to better understand humanity, how to learn and teach increased understanding and critical acceptance of diversity, and how to connect the private self with the theories practiced. I believe this to be possible through self-reflexive practices and a constant search and re-formation of methodologies and research practices that best suit personal and professional intentions.

I believe that it is necessary for art educators to become increasingly involved in research on visual knowledge construction and the various alternative ways visuals can function in research as data, a form of critical knowledge, and text (Pink, 2001).

I have observed fields as varied as anthropology, ethnography, literary studies, art criticism and media studies become increasingly involved in advancing research in visual-based knowledge construction. Researchers from various disciplines have started to acknowledge the demand for people who have the ability and training to both understand the social aspects involved in visual production and consumption, and the practical, ideological and theoretical skills necessary for understanding the processes of image and artifact production. I foresee a greater potential for art educators to participate in this wider discussion about visuality and offer their practical and theoretical knowledge about learning through the visual, bodily, and emotional. My study offers an example of how different theories of thought and representation – such as photography, art criticism, visual culture studies, feminism and ethnography – can be innovatively used to enrich knowledge of visual and human behavior.
Memory

Memories are treasured, cherished and loved. Memories bond families. Memories are thought to be nice and positive, but they also cause shame and sadness.

I didn’t use to know how to construct memories. I didn’t seem to remember what was found valuable; instead I remembered what was thought to be odd or irrelevant. I thought I had no memory or my memory was off the track.

I so often felt insane and loss of control when trying to remember how a certain event proceeded linearly. I felt loss of reality after going through an event multiple times, each time, viewing it differently and pronouncing different aspects of a memory. I read it in layers – eventually confusing facts to dreams and wishes. My regrets and needs changed the story in my favor, or made it even worse in case I needed to punish myself for misbehavior.
It took me twenty-some years to question shared memories instead of my thinking. I had to find a different way of representing my past reality.

Images storage memories in a very different manner than verbal memory constructs. No matter what we are told, there is no right or wrong in images. They are the containers of my memories, my needs and dreams. I use them for whatever I need them for. They are my servants and my lords in giving me help and guidance in remembering.

⇐ Photograph 2
CHAPTER 2

COMING TO METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the general ideological framework of my dissertation. I describe my research as arts-based autoethnography and, although I sincerely believe it is, both of these methodological approaches are so varied and undefined that other readings/interpretations of my research process might also be possible. I believe I could have given my research a different title and called my methodology something else – like fictional narrative – which would have caused different readings of my story. I have created visual and textual narratives through which I hope my readers/viewers will be able to relate to my story. I do not expect anyone to adopt my position – I do not even believe this is conceivable. But I do expect it to be possible to read one’s own personal stories in parallel with mine, in relationship to the representations of my multiple subject positionings and the complex identity that I have attempted to depict through this body of work. In this chapter, however, the narrative writings, images, and theoretical texts do not yet meet. Instead this chapter introduces theories and approaches to scholarly inquiry that make this kind of artistic and self-reflexive work possible. Similarly to an artist, I have innovatively searched for creative solutions to emerging problems and engaged in the research process emotionally and through bodily experiences. Later in this document I describe my “constant search” and process of questioning learned ideology and practices as my pedagogy. This approach to knowledge exemplifies my attitude towards research as well.
Upon my arrival to the United States, my understanding of women’s roles in society, both in
general and especially in educational leadership roles, differed greatly from what I was about to experience
in a North American state university setting. I grew up thinking (under a false perception?) that women
were equal to men, strong, and independent. This is also how I perceived myself. By contrast, women in
contemporary America, especially scholars, were openly fighting to be heard in academia, which I had
thought was the rhetoric of the seventies. At first I was disturbed by the constant reference to feminism
during my first academic courses at The Ohio State University, and it was not until I learned about the
significant contributions of feminist scholars, queer theory, and critical race theory in the history of the
United States that I became fascinated by feminist theory. I had come to assume my role as a woman in a
culturally specific way that did not apply in my new domestic and occupational environment. Thus, gender
roles and identity came to play a significant role in my research.

The feminist, cultural, and social issues in my photographs and inquiry are intertwined with a
postmodernist approach to thinking about art, in which the process of thinking and constructing a piece
matters more than the final product. The pieces are interpreted within personal, historical, social, and
cultural contexts (e.g. Hamblen, 1995; Linn, 1996). The process of analysis in my study focuses on
different textual and visual analytical approaches applied from autobiographical literature, Laurel
Richardson’s texts (1997; 2000a; 2000b), art criticism, and visual culture studies. These practices are then
further modified to fit my specific analytical intentions. I do not seek to create an objective analysis or find
a true, shared meaning in my images or writing. What matters is the interpretative process driven by my
artistic behavior, thinking and practice.

The importance of the postmodern ideological era is its theoretical focus on questioning the meta-
narratives we have learned to follow without question. Postmodernist and deconstructive thought invite the
researcher, as well as the reader, to approach all information from their own lived experiences that are
recognized as located in the space “in-between,” in the “interstitial space” of cultures and communities, or
in the “third space” between or beyond the “borders” of culture and interpersonal communication (Bhabha,
1994, pp. 2-5). Postmodern ideology is not only about building communication bridges among
communities, ethnicities and nations, but about questioning and studying the culturally, politically, and
ideologically charged terms and metaphors such as border, bridge, travel, nation, identity, individual, knowledge, text, and time. Postmodern thought is about problematizing all thought and knowledge that is no longer questioned but is taken as static truth. It is about establishing multiple ways of knowing the complex in-flux realities that are constructed through interpretations and representations.


My research is based on the following concepts:

1. Critical self-understanding and acceptance can be learned through the reading of others’ personal narratives, thus personal narratives (not limited to textual and oral narratives) create new perspectives in understanding diversity education and interpersonal communication.

2. Valuable information about educational and cultural phenomena will be missed if identity is not understood as complex, relational, and in-flux; furthermore, the composing and reading of texts and visuals is an activity that requires multiple subject positionings and listening to the body, spirit, and emotions of the researcher (and reader).

3. Visuals and artistic behaviors contain, fabricate, formulate, and carry information and knowledge that can greatly enrich our understanding of meaning construction.

4. The format and ideology of the study needs to reflect the researcher’s intentions and attempt to continuously question the methods used, epistemology, and discourse analyzed in relationship to a researcher’s personal identity.

I believe that the representational format I have chosen for my study best reflects my understanding of knowledge, research, and myself. In this chapter I discuss my understanding of photographic documentation, visual culture in relationship to my study, and locate myself in the field of photography and visual representation. As mentioned before, this text also leads a reader to the “grand” methodologies of arts-based research and autoethnography that informed and shaped my research throughout the study, whereas different approaches are applied in each of the following ‘theme’ chapters (Chapter 3, 4 & 5). Although I believe it to be natural and sometimes necessary to build walls around our practices and theories
to validate our work, it is only through breaking these artificial boundaries that we can move on to find
new concepts and questions (Neilsen, 2002). This is the goal I have set for myself as a researcher, and I
hope this attitude is reflected in this written/textual artifact.
Pool

Swim, swim, swim and float.
Water gives you comfort.
Soft, calm, slow and easy,
Surrounded by older people.

Photograph 3
The twentieth century is usually studied in terms of linguistics and text, and the beginning of the twenty-first century is said to be heading toward pictorial and visual cultural representation. If so, the challenge for art education is: Are we capable of reading, communicating, teaching, and learning issues that matter in today’s society through images and artifacts? Modernism draws attention to images and artifacts themselves, independent of their context. Postmodernism seemingly breaks down the barriers between image, artifacts, and text, image, artifact, and their wider contexts, and the multiple readings of images and artifacts. J.W.T Mitchell’s (1986) comment on how “everything – nature, politics, sex, other people – comes to us as an image” (p. 30) describes well the flow of visuals, either physical or evoked by descriptive text, that we encounter daily. The wider use of images in everyday communication is evident, but the challenge that remains is to acknowledge images and artifacts as a channel for education, research, and information. I believe that the possibility of multiple ways of knowing and communicating needs to be further investigated.

It appears to me that the knowledge constructed through images and artifacts, or text, is understood to be separate and different. “Word and image are like two hunters ‘pursuing its quarry by two paths’” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 70, quoting Foucault, 1982) writes J.W.T Mitchell. Barthes (1981; 1985) has similar statements on how the “information is thus supported by two different structures” (p. 4) and how these structures complement each other but still provide different kinds of information. My understanding differs, since I believe that our knowledge cannot be strictly divided into the two ways of creating reality, each of which can then be further analyzed. I believe visual knowledge that cannot be expressed in the form of words and cannot be brought into linguistic-based thinking exists, but at the same time I find it impossible to completely separate these two ways of learning and understanding. Although this practice can be subconscious, we use words in our thinking when we react to and interpret visuals. On the other hand, language relies strongly upon metaphors and evoked visuals.
Documentary Photography: Representation or (Re)creation of Reality?

I use the terms document, documenting, documentary photography, reality and representation of reality constantly in my text. These terms are all to be understood from the postmodernist perspective and in complex cultural and historical contexts. I use Sturken and Cartwright’s (2001) definition for representation: “Representation refers to the use of language and images to create meaning about the world around us” (p. 12). I hope that the following conversation will explain the use of those terms.

Artists and other producers of visual culture create the images we believe, or question, representing the reality (or fantastic reality) of the events depicted. It was Italo Calvino’s (1974) book Invisible Cities that guided me to question reality and its construction through text and mental imagery. In Calvino’s novel, a fictional person creates stories about magnificent places and adventures, creating for the listener a kind of reality the listener wants to believe and live in. The novel questions reality and existing social structures without forcing the reader toward a specific direction or conclusion. It is multi-layered (oppositional to linear order) in its storytelling, and the tales rely strongly on visuals evoked by descriptive text. Here I see a connection to documentary photography, arts-based research, alternative forms of narrative research, and my work. People in general have learned to question documentary photographs, and it is known that the images are often created under political influences using technical manipulation to describe events or objects in their social context. However, our instinct still is to accept what we see as reality. Arts-based research and autoethnography are based on the artistic methods of representing partial, contextual and multi-layered reality in political and social contexts of representation. Similar to photographs, arts-based research creates ‘visual’ worlds evoking empathy and offers alternative ways of seeing reality and viewing one’s life.

To form a context and framework for my thinking, I used Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s (1991) text “Who’s Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography” to raise issues about documentary photography in its historical, social, and semiotic context; W.J.T. Mitchell’s (1986) article “What is an image?”, which discusses the relationship between image and text; and Roland Barthes’ (1981; 1985) books to discuss photographic representation. I have also found several aspects of Allan Sekula’s (1999) photographic work and theoretical writings about family, politics, document, and narrative helpful.
Awareness of the social uses of photography for propaganda to extreme is increasing. Solomon-Godeau (1991) raises the question of reality and mechanical reproduction, but also, similarly to Roland Barthes (1981), she demands the analysis of photographic images within themselves, apart from their context. She states that the success of photography is in its confirmation value. I believe that by “confirmation value” she refers to what she calls “social uses of photography” (p. 171) and the trust we have that photographs can provide evidence of the reality and the course of events. Barthes (1981) goes further, stating that reading a public photograph is always private, relating to the reader’s personal worldview and lived experience. Solomon-Godeau (1991) also postulates that the term “documentary photography,” created during the 1920s, one hundred years after the invention of photography, is more valid historically than ontologically. Documentary photography, as we understand the practice, was established decades earlier and only received this name afterwards. This kind of naming and categorizing is characteristic of Western culture, and ironically the same images that were called documents since the 1920’s are now commonly called art (Solomon-Godeau, 1991). She suggests that in order to understand documentary photography we need three perspectives to approach the phenomenon of photography: (1) a historically situated approach within the framework of its contemporary discourses, practices, and uses; (2) a semiotic approach as a part of larger system of visual communication, as a conduit and agent of ideology; (3) a documentary photographic approach within the discursive spaces of mass media [also galleries and museums] in order to understand the roles, the belief system, the assumptions and attitudes involved (Solomon-Godeau, 1991, p. 170). Although I did not follow these guidelines when analyzing my photographs, elements of this approach can be seen in different parts of my research, as well as in my teaching practices.

Solomon-Godeau (1991) mentions Allan Sekula among others as a new generation of photographers whose attitude toward reality and document is somewhat skeptical and revisionary. Sekula (1999), who is more interested in photography’s modesty as a medium and the radical wisdom that follows from close and sustained attention to reality than its fine arts status states: “This is schematic philosophic argument for photography’s special aptitude for depicting economic life, for what used to be called ‘documentary’, and for an affinity between documentary and democracy” (p. 251). Sekula talks about
subjectivism and the culture of memoir. For Sekula, the essence of documentary is something very “direct, uninflected by obvious esthetic treatment” (p. 240). He defines photography as the mixing of materials, playing with the relation between staging and the everyday event, and understanding that the everyday event already includes elements of fiction or theatre. He sees aspects of performance in photographing everyday life. Sekula is one of my favorite photographers who combines visuals and text, and also writes critically about his work in its political context and objectives. I find his work resourceful and rich. Through the study of his artistic and textual work I gained an interest in the works of artists who write about themselves and their work, as well as works of the female photographers who question gender roles and ideology that supports ethnic differentiation and racial stereotypes (i.e. Carrie Mae Weems; Lorna Simpson; Cindy Sherman; & Wendy Ewald).

Visual Culture Study

Images and objects in popular culture and advertisements are traditionally found to be an effective way of questioning or supporting learned ideologies and belief systems. Since we “naturally” fear the unfamiliar, but are accustomed to reading photographic representations, it is through photographic images that the strange can be made less or more fearful. We view color photographs with mixed emotions, wanting to believe in their instancy, truth-value, and touchability, but we have also learned to question the truthfulness of an image as we have become aware of technical manipulation (i.e. Barthes, 1981; Sekula, 1999). We view and interpret images without concern for or awareness of the analyzing process and without thinking about how this process progresses through the ideologies we have accepted as natural. We have also grown to accept the process of analysis without questions. Only when our automatic reading is interrupted by something unfamiliar or disturbing, and reading the code language of an image does not happen automatically, do we question the intentions of the image producer. The commercial world employs this “new criticism of the viewers;” sarcastic criticism against accepted values is constantly displayed in commercial images. This false feeling of awareness and pretend freedom of thought placed upon the viewer is one of my main educational concerns (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).
Visual culture studies emerge from the different disciplines of sociology, anthropology, geography, film and media studies, cultural studies, and art history. Instead of studying visuality in each discipline separately, there has been a movement toward collaboration among researchers. As Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999) writes: “While the different visual media have usually been studied independently, there is now a need to interpret the postmodern globalization of the visual as everyday life” (p. 3). He continues about the focus of visual culture studies: “Visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology” (p. 3). Visual culture studies focus on the ways we use and understand images in arts, communication, and advertisements. These studies strongly affect how I approach research that involves visuals and how I view my goals and ideals as an educator, forming my critical pedagogy. I teach multiple and diverse perspectives of life through art, through visual communication, and through oral, visual, and textual analysis, relating these to the viewer’s personal perspectives within larger discourses. Therefore, I find it important to teach the critical and analytical reading of visuals. I see this as central to my teaching during a time when our communication happens increasingly through visuals due to the use of vastly developing technology.

(Feminism and) Visual Culture

Feminism brings me to the question how we read and understand the visual world surrounding us, and what politics are embedded in the ways we understand visual information from advertisements to arts, from bodies, spaces, fantasies to the representations of those aforementioned surrounding us. To understand critical studies of visual culture is to understand visuality as more than visual representations. Visuality is about the politics and epistemologies that guide the vision and representation. It is about understanding seeing not merely as a physical activity, but as a socially, historically and aesthetically embedded process of knowledge construction (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). It is about understanding “how we actively interact with images from all arenas to remake the world in the shape of our fantasies and desires and to narrate the stories which we carry within us” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 30). Feminism has brought the emphasis on the personal also to the study of visual culture. It crosses boundaries between cultural studies and sociology by considering both the human behavior and semiological reading of the signs (visuals and text) (Chaplin, 1994; Pink, 2001). Through the representational decisions I have made during my research process I aim to
convey how visuality, tacit knowledge, creativity, and my evolving understanding of epistemology have interactively formed my understanding of experience and identity.

The emergence of visual culture as trans-disciplinary and cross-methodological field of inquiry means nothing less and nothing more than an opportunity to reconsider some of the present culture’s thorniest problems from yet another angle. In its formulation both of the objects of its inquiry and of its methodological processes, it reflects the present moment in the arena of cultural studies in all of its complexities (Rogoff, 2000, p. 30).

Scholars from different disciplines such as Irit Rogoff (visual culture and geography), Elisabeth Chaplin (visual sociology), Sarah Pink (visual ethnography), and Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999; 2000) recognize the possibilities of critically informed visual research in forming new ways of understanding culture and humanity, creating new ways to read, analyze, and communicate knowledge and culture. This requires a departure from empirical and positivist research that aims to objectify knowledge and find universal understanding. It also necessitates the consideration of a visual representation as separate and different from the subject represented, and mindfulness of the multiple and contextually situated readings of its viewers (Chaplin, 1994). This is also the goal for most alternative approaches to qualitative inquiry, including arts-based research and autoethnography. Rishma Dunlop (2001), along with many others invested in narrative and artistic methods of inquiry, writes about the fears of breaking boundaries and the need to protect disciplinary epistemologies by developing categories. She asks, “what would happen if the world were truly to be seen according to multiple and different points of view?” (p. 19, quoting Krieger, 1991). She further challenges scholars on this creative, artistic, intellectual, and intuitive1 path towards “rich forms of knowledge representation with new possibilities for the transformation of our understanding of what constitutes knowledge across disciplines” (pp. 19-20).

Visual culture studies assume active participation in the process of knowledge construction: “in reading or looking we re-write, ‘speak about’ the text…in claiming and retelling the narratives…we alter the very structures by which we organize and inhabit culture” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 32, referring to Trinh T. Min-ha, 1992). Research texts constitute what they used to claim to represent, and simultaneously the text changes the researcher (Richardson, 1997; Clifford, 1986). “We write ourselves as we read,” claims Dunlop (2002, p. 221). This assumption is significant in my study and forms the basis for my research and

1 These are my words of describing her, and many others that I admire, attitude towards research.
pedagogy. I actively re-shape and negate my identity as I “write myself” into cultural and academic rhetoric. All the texts, others’ narratives, social interactions, and visuals that I am exposed to have potential to inform and change my self-narrative. Reading, re-reading and analyzing – making use of visual culture – allow us to constantly re-occupy and situate ourselves within the culture. Critically studying visuals, texts, and research practices changes our perception of our surroundings and ourselves (i.e. Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Eisner & Powell, 2002). Irit Rogoff (2000) lists three components in this reading process: (1) “images that come into being and are claimed by various, and often contested, histories;” (2) “viewing apparatuses that we have at our disposal that are guided by cultural models such as narrative and technology;” (3) “subjectivities of identification or desire or abjection from which we view and by which we inform what we view” (p. 32). It is central to my study that visuals are not read as contributing to the text or as information that needs to be translated to analytical text. The photographs in my inquiry stand independent, representing knowledge that would be impossible to translate to textual form. These visuals do not reflect reality, nor do they reflect the words; they “contribute social argument in their own right” (Chaplin, 1994, p. 3).

I could not have arrived at this epistemological position from a solely theoretical background. My education in studio arts has built a “tacit craft knowledge” (Chaplin, 1994, referring to Ravetz, 1971) and formed a trust in intuitive decision-making that relies on personal aesthetics as well as bodily experience. I aim to follow this intuition as I construct research, form representations, and teach. Throughout my study, I address these issues central in understanding the relationship between practice, ideology, identity and knowledge construction.

Coming to Theory and Methods

This kind of visual and artistic research methodology does not have a set of predetermined methods or a strict theory to support the varied research projects. Its beauty to me is “the effort of arriving at a positionality, rather than the clarity of having a position, that should be focused on” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 3). In this kind of research, methods and methodology emerge through a researcher’s deep involvement in the subject. My dissertation research is a narrative of coming to question one’s subjective identity and the relationship between visual, textual, material, and knowledge construction. It is also a story about the emergence of methods and formation of methodology. I would be lying if I claimed to know what to expect
during the course of research and what the goal of my research was. I had a purpose; I needed to know more about the theoretical intersection of artistic and systematic qualitative research practices, as well as what happens to those who move far from their homes for academic reasons and how this affects one’s self-perception. Yet I did not know what the significance of my study would be for a wider audience. Studying one’s home ‘harbor’ (identity, home) is only meaningful if one does not know what the catch of the day will be and how one’s experiences at the sea have changed the way one views home upon returning. Research, theory, and knowledge as I understand them, is an adventure into one’s intellectual and emotional capability; it is about learning, un-learning and re-learning the possibilities of human thought. This dissertation is my effort to find a language and knowledge that will allow me to position myself in culture (Rogoff, 2000).

Working the Visual - Why Visual?

“The image – or the metaphoric, ‘fictional’ activity of discourse – makes visible ‘an interruption of time by a movement going on the hither side of time, in its interstices’” (Bhabha, 1994, quoting E. Levinas, p. 15). What I have found in my visuals is a complex structure that allows me to return to them repeatedly as to a source that is not limited to a specific location, time or interpretation; they allow me to find something new every time I return to them. This is something that I had not been able to recognize before, or that was not there for me to see because I was not ready for the further readings of the image.

Over the past few years, the pile of contact sheets and negatives has grown and the main method of choosing a certain photograph to be analyzed or displayed has been its ‘willingness to talk’ or its ‘volume’ of asking to be analyzed and written about. While I have found it difficult to find theoretical support for the claim that there is information and knowledge in visuals that cannot be brought to spoken discussion or scrutinized under written analysis, I have most deeply felt that an unstructured and direct awareness of the importance of a specific photograph dominates the research/analysis process. Semiologists argue about the existence of the “punctum,” a concept introduced by Roland Barthes (1981), and some want to deny the possibility of un-coded information that could not be made a subject or the result of a semiological reading of an image. My photographs have been chosen based on their ‘punctuation’ volume.
– the way certain images kept me interested and evoked stories that seemed significant for the process of understanding the ever-changing identity and meaning construction.

At different stages of my study, the relationship between images and texts has varied, as has my relationship to both of these as sources of information and knowledge. However, I try to be as concise and explanatory as possible in explaining this changing affiliation.

It is worth emphasizing that there is no single or ‘correct’ answer to the question, ‘What does this image mean?’ …Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have ‘one, true meaning’, or that meanings won’t change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretative – a debate between, not who is ‘right’ or who is ‘wrong’, but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contested, meanings and interpretations. The best way to ‘settle’ such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example [is there such?] and try to justify one’s ‘reading’ in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing (Hall, 1997, p. 9).

I am grateful to Gillian Rose (2001) for her book *Visual Methodologies*, which forms a profound and well-grounded argument for the importance of recognizing the “critical visual methodology” (p. 3) She explains critical visual methodology as:

an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging (p. 3).

Rose provides an overview of different possible approaches to analyzing visuals: “the good eye” (Rose, p. 33, originally Rogoff’s term, 1998), content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis, two types of discourse analysis, and finally mixing different methods. Psychoanalysis, semiology, modernist aesthetics, and discourse analysis all influence my interpretative practices. I would have, however, found myself forcing an artificial analysis on my images if I had followed any of these paths or even created a mixture of different methods. To some extent, of course, this is what I have done: Yet I have found it important to my study to avoid forcing any specific approach. I have taken great liberties in “surfing” among epistemological theories, art, and art criticism, and I have modified my methods based on analytical autobiographical and narrative writing practices. Starting from the beginning, the photograph I took of my grandmother (Chapter 5) several years ago, I have chosen to follow the contested and fascinating “punctum” that leads me to certain images and the stories they had to tell.
Public showers

How would I know how to behave, how would I know not to take my clothes off? Shower, water meant to clean, how could it clean through my clothes. Hide, be embarrassed, change your clothes, but don’t be naked. Chat –don’t watch; remember to wish “a good day.”

Photograph 4
Self as a Subject of Study

Although context and theme-specific aspects of my identity will be discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will briefly address the complexity of self as a subject of study here. The most personal goal for my research is to understand the changes in my cultural identity and self-perception caused by a life-altering cultural change. I have studied these changes through artistic processes of narrative writing and photographic documentation, manipulation, and production. Even though I do not call my methodology an autobiography, aspects of autobiographical writing and inquiry are present throughout the process, and some texts about autobiographical subject and agent are central to how I understand identity. While autoethnography has strong connections to sociology and ethnography, it can also be claimed as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). To comprehend changes in my cultural identity and self-perception, it is necessary to question who is the self that I am photographing and how does my social and physical environment affect this construction of self / selves.

The idea of self in theorizing autobiographical acts or photographing is complex. It could be stated – and which is probably true at some level of all self-portraits – that the motive of autobiographical writing or photographing is self-determination (Rugg, 1997). The self can also be seen as fragmented, relational and situated (e.g. Smith, 1998; Eakin, 1999), therefore it becomes important to study identity and its representation linked to the specific, yet often undefined historical, cultural, and social contexts. Some theoreticians have adapted a dualistic view of understanding self and are thus torn between the culturally traditional, modern belief in individualistic, authorial, self-expressive self; and the postmodern situated and multiple existence of identity. Linda Haverty Rugg (1997) describes the double consciousness that guides some autobiographers as “the awareness of the autobiographical self as decentered, multiple, fragmented, and divided against itself in the act of observing and being; and the simultaneous insistence on the presence of an integrated, authorial self located in a body, a place, and a time” (p. 2). Somewhat differently Sidonie Smith (1998) argues, drawing on Judith Butler’s work on performativity, against the existence of “I before
the text” and states “there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating” (p. 108). This “autobiographical subject,” according to Smith (1998), is “amnesiac, incoherent, heterogeneous, interactive” (p. 110).

Central to my analysis is the ideological understanding of self in relation to other people and one’s living environment in an autobiographical act of writing or visualizing one’s life. To understand the notion of a relational self (e.g. Dunlop, 1999; Eakin, 1999), identity has to be seen as a subject positioning. These positions are plural and the categories for the subject are defined through differences (otherness) and similarities. “Because of this constant placement and displacement of ‘who’ we are, we can think of identities as multiple and as ‘contextual, contested, and contingent’ ” (Smith and Watson, 2002, p. 33, quoting Scott, 1993). Like experience, identities are constructed in different discourses through language, visual and linguistic. Using the texts by Stuart Hall and M. M. Bakhtin, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2002) argue that identity is always an incomplete process constituted within representation and through the discourses surrounding a person; one will come to understand what identities they are expected to adopt and who one is in relation to those identities (Smith and Watson, 2002).

Autobiography, the life story of the author’s self, supports the Western desire to believe in individual self-creation (Smith, 1998) because “in autobiography, the object and subject of the text are the same” (Rugg, 1997, p. 2). If I state that I am artistically producing my life story, does my physical self who is absent in the photographs contradict this autobiographical project? There are buildings, landscapes, spaces, objects and undefined groups of people present in my color photographs. I am rarely visible and, even then, it is only a body part, my reflection in a mirror, or my shadow that can be seen. I only once pose directly for the camera. I am in this photograph with the dog I found, Shirley, which I could not keep. It is the first time I had ever owned a dog, and I needed to document this bond between her and myself. Other than this occasion, I have turned the lens toward everything surrounding me. Through writing and visualizing my world, I aim to understand myself in relation to other people as well as in the social context of this interaction. I see myself performing an ethnographer’s role in dealing with these different stages of my life. I approach my subjects as a photographer, but the lens of my camera is colored by the social theories and research philosophies I have adapted (Hirsch, 1999; Rugg, 1997). In a way, I recreate myself
through these photographs and my motivation derives from the need to express my temporary in-flux interiority (Smith, 1998). I create physical bodies; photographic surfaces that allow me to break thoughts into parts and analyze them separately.

I have previously discussed the complex and culturally learned relationship between photography and the concept of reality. I will, however, return to the topic for a moment to discuss photographs in my projects and the presentation of myself. The power of photography in depicting reality, that what was or “that-has-been” (Barthes, 1981, p. 77), can be proved real; this is evident in photography’s direct relationship to technology and the function of light. Barthes (1981) argues:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceeded radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed (pp. 80-81).

My relationship to photographic representation is complex. I understand that a certain level of reality will be read in my images and stories as both autobiographical writing and a photographic document. This assumes that at least some aspects of what is portrayed are truthful to reality and do in fact physically exist. I play liberally with this assumption. I want to invite my readers to believe in my honest intentions of representing my experiences as I experienced them, yet I claim that there is no reality to be perceived and interpreted. It is finally the decision each reader/viewer has to make in reference to the material available for interpretation.

**Arts-based (Educational) Research**

Science is one lens; creative arts another. We see more deeply using two lenses. I want to look through both lenses, to see a ‘social science art form’” (Richardson, 2000a, p. 937).

As I discussed in the introduction, constructing my research according to empirical research methods was not an option. My understanding of knowledge is so strongly built around a constant and individual search for meaning that accepting research methodologies, as they existed and were available to me, seemed like cutting wings from my intellectual thought. I found it necessary to search for theoretical support and
legitimation for integrating all the ways I felt I am aware of my surroundings: bodily, visually, tacitly, emotionally and relationally, into my research “that was becoming at once visual, visceral, and verbal” (Clark/Keefe, 2002, p. 6).

In this section I will define my current understanding of arts-based (educational) inquiry. Through my research on this topic I came across multiple uses of, and definitions for, the term “arts-based.” Also, in this section I locate myself among the research I believe qualifies as arts-based. My dissertation is an arts-based study investigating the changes in identity and understanding of self when living through a life-altering change. It is also an investigation of self-creation, as I feel my research actively reshapes me as I proceed. Qualitative research is said to be in a crisis of representation, and issues of power have been raised. Representation is closely connected to postmodernism and is used to “depict, portray, or describe social phenomena” in all social science (Schwandt, 1997, p. 138). I am interested in issues of inherent power structures of the author/subject/participant/observer/researcher and the possibilities of the researcher in using visual/textual representations. I hope to create links between arts-based research and autoethnography / narrative research. I also hope to discuss what arts-based research and autoethnography entail and the issues of representation, authority, voice, agency, and researcher’s identity construction. As an educator and a scholar, I find it important to do research and educate people about the reading of signs in the visible world – these are the evidence for, and active constructions of one’s culture. Education in developing critical, visual sensitivity is necessary for this reading. The language in images is multi-layered and socially constructed, which supports both a feminist and a postmodernist approach to qualitative inquiry and creates prospects for alternative approaches such as arts-based and autoethnographic inquiry. According to my understanding through image-textual combination it is possible to represent the research process in a form that is not limited in time and space and expresses personal narratives as well as cultural stories (i.e. Hodder, 2000; Harper, 2000). By combining sequences of photographs, creative writing, and theoretical text in my dissertation project, I can in the best possible way represent and reflect this process of coming to know. The effects and influence of this process in reshaping my self-perception and identity are discussed throughout the text. Later, in the Chapter 5, I reflect on how artistic and narrative research have informed my pedagogy.
The criticism against ‘traditional’ forms of textual representation is that they reinforce power structures and cannot appropriate the complex voices and identities of participants (Denzin, 1997). Cognition and representation are known to be inextricably linked, and different forms of representation can change one’s understanding of the phenomena. In a search for proper forms of representation, arts-based research has been recognized for its “ability to create a virtual reality; the existence of ambiguity; the use of expressive, contextualized and vernacular language; the promotion of empathy; the personal signature of the writer, and the presence of aesthetic form” (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999, p. 3, referring to Barone & Eisner, 1997). During the last two decades in the area of education, researchers have begun to look for more artistic approaches to inquiry (Barone and Eisner, 1997). Arts-based educational research means that an approach to investigation is based on the arts and uses artistic expressions in both investigation and in reporting the results. A study can be defined as arts-based by the “presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing” (Barone and Eisner, 1997, p.73). Even though these aesthetic elements are present at some level in all educational inquiry, only when they are pronounced can the research be defined as arts-based (Barone & Eisner, 1997). According to my understanding, for the research to be arts-based, the chosen art has to be an integral and informative part of the process, producing knowledge otherwise inaccessible. Like an artist who seeks to analyze and construct knowledge, the arts-based inquirer searches for partial truth or a ‘new,’ deconstructed and then re-constructed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Diamond and Mullen, 1999). Through the unconscious that becomes accessible through therapy, artistic practices, aesthetic experience and arts-based autoethnography, Patrick Slattery (2001) believes it is possible to uncover meaningful data and deconstruct the disciplinary gaze that strongly influences all aspects of identity. According to Slattery “the goal is to free the self from the petrified connections forced on to the self by a repressing society or normative methodologies” (p. 377). Although I support heightened sensitivity toward all aspects of one’s self, I wish to stay away from the intensive psychoanalysis or Jungian therapy referred to by Slattery.

I have stayed with the story and images in a way that is different, in a way that has moved me to a different level of understanding (Ball, 2002, p. 18).

I am (researching) the process of my own doing (de Cosson, 2002, p. 5).
Quantitative and qualitative approaches to research require a very different understanding of truth and reality about the methods to be used to achieve valuable knowledge of human behavior and experience. Quantitative research arises from the positivist paradigm and could be considered a more scientific research method, since it seeks the “right answers” and measurable results. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, concentrate on interpreting the multiple understandings of truth and reality. The purpose of an arts-based approach in qualitative research and its artistic representation is not to offer an easily readable packet to an academic audience, but to reach a wider audience and invite a reader/viewer/spectator on an interactive journey towards an unknown and undefined ending (Barone and Eisner, 1997; Butler-Kisber, 2002; Diamond and Mullen, 1999).

Arts-based research is qualitative research often investigating educational and culturally-situated practices. It is not limited to investigating certain phenomena or using specific methodologies. The approach, defined as being more artistic than scientific in character, is shaped by the inquirer’s worldview; the study ‘naturally’ gets its form from the researcher engaging the specific art practice and understanding that to approach, analyze, and represent the results of the study in a relevant artistic format best support her/his intentions (Barone and Eisner, 1997). While most published research in both arts-based and autoethnographic research still focuses on using literary forms such as poetry and narrative, some examples of the use of others mediums exists, such as quilt-making, collage, installations, photography, and paintings (i.e. Ball, 2002; Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999; Keys, 2003; Springgay, 2002; Willis, 2002).

Arts-based research, as well as autoethnography and narrative research, has brought together (art) educators and qualitative researchers in experimenting with alternative representational methods. While multiple publications are dedicated to the alternative approaches in conducting qualitative research, the criticism against alternative representational forms has also been raised and the opinions about a researcher’s artistic abilities required in order to produce meaningful representations vary greatly. In this chapter I discuss the kinds of criteria suggested for autoethnography, narrative research and arts-based research. I also discuss my role as an artist, educator and researcher.
Characteristics and Types of Arts-based Research

In the article “Arts-Based Educational Research,” Barone and Eisner (1997) cite seven design elements typical for art-based research. Their categories are drawn from literacy forms of art, which according to them and based on my study, is still the dominant method employed by artistic researchers. These stylistic features are (1) the creation of virtual reality, (2) the presence of ambiguity, (3) the use of expressive language, (4) the use of contextualized and vernacular language, (5) the promotion of empathy, (6) personal signature of the researcher / writer, (7) and the presence of aesthetic form (pp.73-78). The way arts are used, however, and the use of the arts as a tool for learning differs significantly in different arts-based studies. What qualifies a research project as arts-based, according to my understanding, is the level of intellectuality and complexity with which the role of artistic behavior is discussed. I categorize the existing body of arts-based research (or what has been called arts-based research) into two different general types: (1) use of arts as an integral part of research process and (2) research in which a form of art is used as a tool to enhance learning and therapy. In the first approach, the arts-based approach to research and the arts-based representation of inquiry are emphasized. The arts are understood as integral in the process of investigation and, as mentioned before, the knowledge achieved could not have been gained without the involvement of the artistic practices. The other approach to arts-based educational practices is more or less the involvement of artistic techniques and equipment as a basis for teaching and learning about other matters. The term arts-based has also been used to signify arts-based educational and academic programs. The following section intends to provide an idea of the possibilities through some example studies.

Art as an Integral Part of Inquiry

The goal of this kind of arts-based study is to challenge the values, meanings and ideologies that we take for granted and no longer question as being one of many belief system (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Dunlop, 1999; 2001; 2002; Neilsen, 2002; Slattery, 2001). Arts-based researchers write from a narrative perspective, acknowledging and questioning the subjectivity of the “I.” The goal is similar to arts: to release imagination, involve the reader in investigation and challenge the current understanding of cultural and educational practices and learning (Diamond and Mullen, 1999). In his study of the use of arts for a personal release from marginalization and experiences of victimization, Patrick Diamond states that the
The purpose of writing from a self-narrative perspective is to create or reform ourselves and our voices and practices as professional educators (Diamond, 1998). Further, in these kinds of texts, in which the goals are educational, “the value of learning through the arts” is “demonstrated at the personal, interpersonal and social levels” (Mullen, 1999, p. 143). Helen K. Ball (2002) writes:

To be committed to the development of different ways of knowing through the development of different methodologies, and on alternative writing strategies, will necessitate the development of different research/scholarly practices. The notion of the rugged individualist researcher will need to make space for the researcher who pursues connectedness, creative sorts of knowing….I am suggesting making space for different kinds of knowing and for different methodologies for knowing will mean reexamining how we teach and practice research….We need to begin to move beyond what we know. This is facilitated by challenging how we know and how we represent what we know (p. 24).

One of the earlier examples of an arts-based study is the Davis and Butler-Kisber’s (1999) investigation of the art form of collage as a contextualizing strategy for data and as an alternative representation form in qualitative research. Their article is based on Davis’s case study done for a qualitative research class about how artists make their creative decisions. The purpose of Butler-Kisber’s article is to demonstrate how Davis used her own collage work as an analytic memo. Davis states that the purpose of her continuous collage making during the study was to “reflect, clarify, and contextualize a variety of the issues that [Davis] pondered as the analysis progressed” (Davis and Butler-Kisber, 1999, p. 7). Davis and Butler-Kisber’s aim was to show how the “collage process helps to suspend linear thinking and allows elusive qualities of feelings and experiences emerge and be addressed tangibly” (p.18). What draws me to this study are the multiple possibilities for art in its structure and the complex roles of the people (participants?) involved. Butler-Kisber is a university educator and a mentor with an interest for alternative research methods, mainly representational. Davis is a student, an educator, and an artist who studies artists. What the authors failed to do is to see the produced collages as texts rather than just material produced for further analysis or a tool to aid in the analyzing process. Many arts-based research processes are like collages, since the researcher has to draw from various sources to ground the study and create a theoretical framework. Similar to Davis and Butler-Kisber, Stephanie Springgay (2001) describes artistic inquiry in her Master of Arts Thesis project “The body Knowing; A Visual Art Installation as educational Research”:
Art is a way of inquiring and researching. Art as research is a bodied expression, a mode of communication that resonates with all four senses….Conversely it is the juxtaposition of my artist's self that finds new spaces, new structures and brings forth questions that might otherwise have been ignored (pp. 11-12).

**Autoethnography**

“Writing [is] a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (Richardson, 2000a, p. 923).

When we view writing as a *method*, however, we experience ‘language-in-use,’ how we ‘word the world’ into existence (Richardson referring to Rose, 1992) and we ‘reword’ the world (Richardson, 2000a, p. 923).

I am well aware that multiple variations and definitions for autoethnography exist. My understanding and use of the term is built on the book *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* edited by Deborah E. Reed-Danahay (1997) and the edited and authored publications by Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (i.e. Ellis & Bochner, 1996; 2000; Bochner & Ellis 2002). Autoethnography is often considered a part of multiple alternative forms of qualitative research. I wish to clarify this term with a definition borrowed from Arthur Bochner (2000). Bochner describes alternative ethnography as “an alteration or transformation [rather] than an alternative – a change in form as well as in purpose” rather than an “option or substitute” (p. 267) as ‘alternative’ would suggest. Thus alternative and traditional forms of qualitative research cannot be separated, instead they are developed in an interaction with one another as well as within larger ideological, political, and historical discourses.

Reed-Danahay (1997) defines autoethnography “as a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography” (Reed-Danahay, p. 9). According to Reed-Danahay, interest in personal narrative, life-history, and autobiography, especially among anthropologists, is characteristic of the postmodern and postcolonial period in which we are currently living. I have found that scholars from other disciplines, as well, have gained an increasing interest in the inclusion and questioning of self in the scholarly work within the past twenty years. Good examples of this can be found in aforementioned texts and books edited by Bochner and Ellis. Within their chapter “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject” in the “Handbook” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), Bochner shares his narrative of coming to question empirical research and gaining
an interest in self-reflexive methods of writing. As Reed-Danahay (1997) has further argued, this trend is theoretically and historically informed by and linked to disciplines coming to problematize “conception of both the self and the society in the late twentieth century” (p. 2). Reed-Danahay (1997) states that the newly informed autoethnography synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto) autoethnography can be signaled by ‘autoethnography.’ ....When the dual nature of the meaning of autoethnography is apprehended, it is a useful term with which to question the binary conventions of a self/society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective. The postmodern/ postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement, and of shifting axes of power (p.2).

Autoethnography is about writing one’s self into culture, but it is also about writing about one’s personal experience in relationship to larger issues in society. These personal narratives are written as critical reflections; using one’s vulnerability, personal feelings, and emotions as a form of information as well as concrete details and vivid descriptions of life and cultural phenomenon to examine and portray “feelings,” “motives,” and “contradictions [a researcher] experience[s]” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738). Bochner and Ellis (1996) describe “new ethnographies” as “narrative strategies “ that “transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think” (p. 18). Lesa Lockford (2002) describes this emotionality and sensitivity in alternative ethnographic texts as “stories that move [her] to stillness…call[ing] [her] to take pause, to reflect, to feel” (p. 76). This I believe is the power and significance of personal narratives in scholarship; it touches, it sometimes hurts, it has a potential to help to heal and recover while being informational about cultural phenomena. Not all alternative scholarly writing, however, is good. I will later address the discussion about possible criteria for academic writing that engages self-reflexivity and artistic or narrative modes of expression.

Sense of Self – Subjectivity and Ethics

Autoethnographical and scholarly narrative writing is “self-consciously aware of itself as artifice” (Gergen & Gergen, 2002, p. 17). These texts are not coherent, but intentionally abandon coherence.
Representation is understood as a relational act, as are knowledge and identity construction. The intention is to make the reader feel, live through, and emotionally participate in the narrative. Every reader is understood as reading the story of the other in relationship to his or her own life story, finding temporary self-determination through the other’s story (Gergen & Gergen, 2002). This attitude could be exemplified by the quote: “I am politely curious about you, but I am really reading this to learn about my self, the situation I am currently living, and those I will later be living through.” Gergen and Gergen argue for the “relationship as the necessary prior to individual being” and view relationships “as the fundamental matrix from which human being are born” (p. 27). My understanding of relational selfhood is further discussed in Chapter 4.

The self in postmodern autobiographical and autoethnographical writing is assumed to be complex, subjected to constant changes, and situated. Through self-reflexive writing pieces of the fragmented self can be examined within a scholarly framework. These forms may provide temporary determination as they aim to perform sensitivity to all aspects of one’s self. According to Laurel Richardson “ethnographic life is not separable from the self” (2000c, p. 253). As we write we construct ourselves, and at the same time the way we understand ourselves inform what we write, feel, interpret, and how we construct meaning (Richardson, 1997; 2000c).

What is the Story, am I the Story? Interpretation of a Story versus ‘isness’ of a Story

I have created various interpretative stories about some of my photographs, and I have sometimes created several alterations of the initial stories. I discuss different writing activities and “writing as a method of inquiry” (Richardson 1997; 2000a) that helped me to reinvestigate one of my stories in Chapter 3, whereas Chapter 4 is constructed around re-readings and re-evaluations of a few key photographs in the process of investigating gender identity in the framework of family lore. Through writing these very personal narratives and re-shaping them for the others to read, I have come to recognize the ‘trap’ of starting to live by the created story, becoming the story I tell. According to Douglas Flemons (Flemons & Green, 2002) what happens is

when you write a story about yourself, you accept an assumption about yourself that then determines in part how you understand yourself, and if you publish this account, then you are defining yourself not only personally but also professionally (p. 90).
It is impossible to control the meanings the potential readings give to the story once it has been published. Stories and narratives can be endlessly altered if critically examined and read. Does the story then have an “isness” (Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 92) or is even the core and essence of the story only momentary? Is my personal identity temporarily in the story, words, and images that create? If this would be the case, are these personal narratives “an outing process – that [I] out [my]self intentionally or unintentionally” (Green in Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 93)? I like the idea of temporary self-determination and I want to believe in self-outing through writing as an inquiry process (Richardson, 1997; 2000a). The thought of the possibility to re-write my life-narrative through re-writing the story that “no longer serves [me] well” (Kiesinger, 2002, p. 95) feels comforting. This creating and re-creating “a place that I can live in” (Ellis in Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 93) is what makes narrative scholarly work therapeutic, and that makes reading therapeutic to its readers if enough space is left for the readers’ interpretations.

**Should Research be Therapeutic? Is the Therapeutic Significant?**

From the researcher’s perspective the desired goal for self-reflexive research is to “open…up to greater understanding or a multitude of understandings” (Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 116) and through this perform a form of self-therapy; gain “insights about themselves”, and possibly “work through…problems” (p. 116). Writing my story has been therapeutic at times; similar to puzzle work, it is about forming an understanding through the fabrication of images from the existing pieces of the identity puzzle, and the silent pieces that remain missing, unvisualized (Kiesinger, 2002). I have questioned family narratives, read and studied obituaries collected by elderly women in the family, tried to listen to the very quiet voices that tell the side-story of the official tale, attempted to see beyond the initial anger and find the suppressed pride. I have paid attention to the behavioral patterns and individual roles in the complex web of interactions, fears, and silenced desires. I needed distance from my family to write my story and I found courage and language through the real and imaginary distance between present and past. Eventually I learned to love and anticipate how every experience re-shapes and tunes my life-story. Have I then become more aware of the stories I live by, of the new agencies and authorships that I have accepted? Do I have the ability to evaluate the skills, awareness, and mental resources that I have available? Would I know when I
had gone too far, when my story is too personal and raw to be told, and when it does not enrich anybody else’s life but mine? (Partly modified from Kiesinger, 2002, p. 109) I hope that the rest of this chapter adds clarity to the criteria I have set for my research and to the questions I have asked of myself throughout the process.

Personally I feel that if an alternative text simply touches, moves, hurts or entertains the reader without providing sufficient framework for reading, guidance, or possible further reflections, the representation has not achieved its goals. I believe it to be the profound responsibility of all scholarly work to make connections to other readings and help the reader move on after finishing the text. It is also necessary to discuss the theoretical purposes and possible audiences these narratives are written for. I occasionally find myself irritated by some alternative scholarly texts. Some of these texts are beautifully written and touch the reader. Indeed they make me cry and cause my heart to feel empathy for the victim of the story; however, if sufficient framework is not provided through the representation, I am left feeling betrayed and troubled. Several sections in Bochner and Ellis’s (2002) co-edited book *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics* discusses the relationship between therapy and narrative ethnography. If we assume relational reading, as I have argued before following the path of others, failure to bring a reader back to an emotionally safe place from the journey to the researcher’s personal life-story, is as irresponsible act as it would be for the therapist to leave the patient dwelling in the deep layers of trauma until the next session. Powerful endings should not be used to increase the aesthetic quality of the narrative and compromises should not be made in returning the reader to a safer place.

Although arriving at new questions and concepts through relational reading is the goal of most alternative qualitative research, the reader has to be able to assume a return from the emotional trip to the self of the other. As Ellis (Bochner & Ellis, 1996) states: “our main purpose isn’t to make readers suffer but to help them learn how to converse with and use these stories” (p. 25). This could be seen similar to what Carolyn Ellis described as “pushing the end of her story” (Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 121), openly discussing why certain decisions were made. This is how Christina Gonzáles (Flemons & Green, 2002) separates “writing an autoethnography” from “just telling a life story” (p. 121). The goal for the researcher is “to write yourself into a space you can live in, and the space we live in has other people in it, other people reacting to
us” (Bochner in Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 168). The text should be assumed to have relevance beyond the researcher’s self, thus performing a testimony instead of (self-) confession (Lockford in Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 169). In my opinion the therapeutic value of bringing these stories to the public and receiving feedback from others, does not justify the publication; instead significance to other people must be assured.

Significance

Partly continuing what was discussed before, I would like to state that the significance of alternative approaches to qualitative research is its creative use of means that in the best possible ways convey meaning and helps enrich other’s lives as well as that of the researcher. These narratives are existential, reflecting a desire to grasp or seize the possibilities of meaning, which is what gives life its imaginative and poetic qualities. The call of narrative is the inspiration to find language that is adequate to the obscurity and darkness of experience. We narrate to make sense of experience over the course of time (Bochner, 2000, p. 270).

I believe that “questions about how to speak about, for, and with others need to be continually examined…what I am affects what I observe, what I write, and how others will react to what I say” (Bass Jenks, 2002, p. 184). Did the story I wrote liberate me? (Flemons & Green, 2002). My story has therapeutic and healing value for myself and hopefully for others as well. During the process a shift has happened, from finding alternative representations for my changing identity and immigration narrative, to re-creating myself and forming new, altered representations of my tale accordingly. I have transformed from passive representer and observer of my life to an active creator, thus claiming power. This I see as the main significance of self-reflexive inquiry through which understanding of self is altered to a constant painful process of scrutiny and change with the promise of new critical and more complex understandings of self in relation to varied discourses. I found tools, questions, and methods to problematize what I have learned to accept just moments ago. This I hope will keep informing my pedagogy and research.

Validating Alternative, Artistic and Self-reflexive Methods of Inquiry - Creating Criteria

Qualitative research has gained attention and increasing acceptance during the last two decades, which has once again changed the issues in academic conversation. Qualitative research has been critiqued for its lack of validity and generalizability; on the other hand postmodern researchers have brought into attention the multiple realities of experience, and feminist research, the voices needed to be heard as well as
the ethics of investigating human subjects in general. These advantages have helped to convince the academic society about the need to study a particular phenomenon in depth and in context (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). At the moment the conversation has turned inward amongst qualitative researchers, and while issues such as analysis and representation are continuously discussed, the debate is focused around issues of epistemology. I realize that attempts to create specific definitions and criteria for the kind of work I am committed to would again eventually lead to exclusion and suppression of innovation and imagination. In the next section, however, I wish to provide an overview of the criteria and characteristics created by several respected scholars about alternative autoethnography that have helped me to evaluate my process and motives along the research process.

Very simply stated, alternative and artistic approaches to research aim to evoke feelings and thinking through relational reading. These texts desire to “do meaningful, significant, and valuable work” that “seek[s] to nurture the imagination” (Bochner, 2000, p. 268) and to pull the reader / viewer into a world that is recognizable enough to be credible, but ambiguous enough to allow new insights and meanings to emerge. Through accessible language, and a product that promotes empathy and vicarious participation, the potential for positive change in education becomes possible (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 231).

Laurel Richardson (2000c) argues for the necessity and benefits for evaluating these texts through scientific and literary (arts) reading. According to her “ethnography is always situated in human activity” thus bound to “human perceptions and feelings” (p. 254). Whilst ethnography is constructed “through research practices (p. 254), these practices can be personalized from “science,…literature, creative arts, introspection, and memory work” (p. 254). Her personal criteria, although always under critical inspection, are divided in to five aspects: “substantive contribution”, “aesthetic merit”, “reflexivity”, “impact”, and embodied expression or communal sense of reality (p. 254). I find Arthur Bochner’s (2000) list about the things that make him feel and understand the narrative a good addition to Richardson’s. Bochner looks for “abundant, concrete detail” and “emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty” (p. 270). He is drawn to nonlinear, “structurally complex narratives” while in quest of “two selves” (p. 270), a transformation story of how the narrator changed in the process (I find this somewhat contradictory). Bochner also expects high ethical self-consciousness from the writer whose story preferably moves his “heart and belly as well as [his] head” (p. 271). Carolyn Ellis (2000) enlightens this evocative reading process describing it as “the two
sides of my brain be[ing] engaged simultaneously or for the text to forth one side and then the other, back and forth, until thinking and feeling emerge” (p. 273). Norman K. Denzin’s (2000) criteria remind us what ought to be the goal of critical qualitative inquiry: the betterment of other’s and, in Denzin’s case, working towards a more democratic and racially equal society. He asks for constant re-evaluation of all claims of ethics, truth, knowledge, and the practices that relate these to research conducted. While critical ethnographic texts perform a cultural criticism, not being just descriptive but producing new understandings, representations, and reality, they are sites of resistance and “places where meaning, politics, and identities are negotiated. They transform and challenge all forms of cultural representations” (Denzin, 2000, p. 259).

My approach to research is radical but well validated. My devotion and deep engagement in the research process makes me confident and has build a trust in achieving knowledge that will enrich the lives of others’ as well. I have been alerted of the risks of getting involved with something so alternative. Eventually, my only goal is to find intellectual happiness and satisfaction, and to grow as an educator. This, I believe I can best achieve by remaining true to my intuition. I could have made choices that would have made my inquiry easier to accept for those who are not willing or ready to cross set boundaries, but to stay true to myself I did not. I have been criticized for not studying real subjects. This comment obviously assumes that I am not a subject, which makes me assume that in this person’s eyes I had not assimilated. I have also been told that if I were to study real subjects (in the case of autobiography, would this be famous people?) and to use real methods instead of taking these words from those books, I could learn something (valuable?). On the other hand, some people have been amazed how much they learned about themselves and about identity construction by just listening to my story. For some, my stories have provided comfort, for others new ways to understand humanity and difference. If my presentations or installations have touched half of the spectators, I have reached my goal. If I have not been able to make someone think about these issues relating to identity construction, strangeness, and assimilation, I hope this person will, if choosing to proceed, at least enjoy the lengthy theoretical and pedagogical overviews included in the following chapters.

The in-depth, context-specific work that this portrays allows others to take away from the particular (Donmoyer, 1990) what resonates (Conle, 1996) with their experiences and use
these understandings to enhance educational practices in other settings (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 230).

There has been a relative amount of conversation about validating the artistic work produced by arts-based and autoethnographical writers and producers. I do not wish to justify or defend my artistic practices and my role as a mixed-creature; an artist and researcher, will be covered later in this chapter. I believe that I have done my work, if the judging criterion is, “the author’s motivation for writing or creating any artistic expression” (Butterwick, 2002, p. 244). Although some people seem to think that sitting at home and writing ‘funny’ stories about yourself is an easy and fun task, deep involvement in the investigation of self is occasionally devastating and always mentally and intellectually challenging. It requires courage, devotion, motivation, and trust that telling the personal narrative will have a positive influence on others.

Validity in social science is “one of the criteria that traditionally serve as a benchmark for inquiry. Validity is an epistemic criterion: To say that the findings of social scientific investigations are (or must be) valid is to argue that the findings are in fact (or must be) true and certain” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 168). Truth here needs to be understood in postpositivist reference in its multiple meanings and understandings. There are different ways of defining the criterion of validity. One of them is presented in Patti Lather’s article “Validity as an Incitement to Discourse: Qualitative Research and Crisis of Legitimation” (1997). Lather describes validity as always partial, situated and contextual, and talks about blurred genres, multiple perspectives, reflexivity, and narratives. Lather lists a set of qualitative research practices as criteria to achieve validity, credibility and trustworthiness: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation of sources, methods and investigators; negative case analysis; referential adequacy; member checks; thick description; audit trial; and reflexive journal (modified from pp. 12-13). Finally, it is the reader of the study who defines the validity of the study through the degree it is “transferable to their own context of interest” (Lather, 1997, p.11).

The pressing issue of validity is even more complicated when talking about images and research based on visuals, because not all of the qualitative methods of validating research practice are suitable for inquiry based on images. If the visual imagery cannot be transferred to communication through language, are the validating practices of qualitative research suitable for inquiry based on visuals or art? I have tried to learn from all the scholars discussed above, and I have seriously considered the criteria presented here.
Again, I have discussed the effects the research process has had on how I perceive epistemology, education, and research, and I will continuously return to these topics throughout this study. Eventually, it is the potential readers’ and viewers’ reactions that will determine the validity of my work.

**Current Personal Standing. Why Visual Narrative Inquiry? What am I?**

I am fascinated by arts-based inquiry and autoethnography because they allow me to justify and connect the involvement of the person that I am and the theories I focus on through practices that makes the research “fun” and challenging. It makes me forget that boundaries between work and pleasure exist. It gives me opportunities to be involved emotionally, sensitively, and bodily; revealing and celebrating the inevitably personal nature of intellectual inquiry instead of hiding and suppressing it. What I can express through words is only part of what I know. My visuality is as intellectual and deep as my verbal thoughts.

I do not know what to call myself. Would I be an artist with theoretical and educational interests, a researcher breaking the boundaries between these roles, a scholar of all before mentioned, or a teacher with too many conflicting ambitions, making it impossible for me to stay in a classrooms. As I realize that I can simultaneously be all of these, I am none of these alone. For a short moment I was fascinated by the term “scholartist” (Neilsen, p. 212) until I was alarmed by the elitist sound of the word and the modernist connotations it carried. The definition does not fit me. To arrive at titles and terms to name myself I tried to use metaphors, only to find out that the very bodily symbolic language I give for my identity is mainly borrowed from nature and the everyday: “my hair, the color of hay; my legs and thighs sturdy as a working horse, my mind, the steam rising from a slowly boiling soup” and I realize that any title that is too graceful, would not fit the way I conceptualize myself. As a writer and thinker, I am a sturdy pony on a break from the farm work, or the pony who never had to participate in the farm work. As an artist, I am a dreamer lying on my back on a half cloudy day, as a scholar I am in the woods not always knowing where I am at, but knowing where I should go. As a teacher, I never seem to be able to conceptualize the physical space of the classroom though knowing the **physicality of gaze and emotion.** The interdisciplinary phenomenon that Dunlop calls (2002) “a proliferation of narrative experimentation in research across disciplines” (p. 215) has made it possible for me to surf “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1 & 17), “in the interstices” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 15, originally Roland Barthes’ term) of different roles simultaneously occupying them all.
I not only feel like an outsider in the mainstream group of researchers, but an outsider in my own ‘camp,’ qualitative and educational researchers (Erickson, 1992). As a researcher performing arts-based research, I currently define myself as a “bricoleur,” borrowing from all different paradigms. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe bricoleur as a person who is “adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection…reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism) that can be brought to any particular problem” (p. 2). I ground my approach to the phenomena under investigation in the hermeneutic learning process without the aim of gaining ‘deeper’ understanding in the spiral-shaped motion or process, but a postmodern multi-layered understanding of reality and findings.

**Language and Education**

The articles on arts-based and autoethnographic research have helped me to understand why my heart’s burning desire is to prove that artistic and visual inquiry in education is valuable, especially for art educators. While postmodernist scholarship has educated us about the “multitude of approaches to knowing and telling [that] exist side by side” and we acknowledge that language and representations “produces meaning, creates social reality” (Richardson, 2000a, p. 928) we are still in the process of proving that visuals and visuality qualifies as knowledge, equal to logic and linguistic representation. Robin Usher and David Scott (1996) have raised the question of educators’ lack of interest in understanding and questioning the research process and its effects upon our understanding. Even though there is an increasing interest towards critically studying educational research processes, I believe that we need to further analyze visual and tacit intellectuality. This is significant because “the credibility of educational practice depends on knowledge of people and their relationships as these are expressed by educational researchers” (Usher & Scott, 1996, p. 176). I find it important that educators from different disciplines use their special skills to prove that the skills they teach to others are valuable when constructing ‘higher’ educational knowledge through research. Art is said to be an important and unique medium to gain knowledge and understanding of the world otherwise impossible. If this is true, as a field, we need to re-evaluate our research practices and epistemology; the roles of art in the research process, visuals as knowledge, and further investigate the
potential of art as a form of representation. In terms of the ethics and politics in qualitative research the question of epistemology needs to be further investigated, this leading to re-evaluating validity and representation.

The current understanding is that we create understanding and think through language, and the limitations of our understandings are the limitations of the language of communication. Some terms are not transferable from language to language. Students and scholars of bilingual education deal with the differences between languages daily. Naming something with one language may seem impossible with another. The classic example of Eskimos having 40 definitions for snow when English language simply defines all different snow types as the same, makes me question an English speaker’s ability to see and separate different snow types. I also wonder whether a person could be trained to understand the differences, or would this understanding only arise from circumstantial needs. There is no doubt that those snow types did not exist in, for example, America, but the need to differentiate them from another may not be significant. The other issue that arise are whether it is necessarily for learning to name the types of snow or could the learning happen through some other way of communicating the matter, like the use of images. The variations of snow are a very simplistic example of the communication problems we are facing, but there are also more complicated issues (Barone and Eisner, 1997; Diamond and Mullen, 1998). Once again, I believe that there is knowledge that cannot be expressed in a written format. I also believe that the everlasting value of arts as a unique way of communication holds its meaning because of its ability to communicate understanding that would be otherwise too complicated. In my opinion, advancing these special features of the arts should be a pressing issue in researching arts education and finding solutions in teaching and critically understanding diversity beyond learned classifications, respecting the complexity of one’s culturally constructed identity (Bhabha, 1994; Dunlop; 1999).

Because individuals are subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, their subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, rigid (Richardson, 2000a, p. 929).

Methods

Finding and modifying methods for my research forms the heart of my epistemological narrative and is tightly linked to the more personal narrative told and evolving simultaneously. Whilst lengthy and
contextual descriptions of each method will be discussed in the narrative and theoretical context in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will provide a brief summary of them here to guide reading and to help in anticipating that which is forthcoming.

PHOTOGRAPHING AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: These methods are based on critical visual ethnography and visual anthropology but also intuition, bodily -, tacit -, and craftsmanship-knowledge, as well as feelings and emotions.

“PHOTO-WRITING” (my own term): with my photographs in front of me I write informal, self-reflective narratives, I meditate with chosen photographs. This is a secondary creative process and an important stage between the initial visual process and the subsequent critical essay writing.

MEMORY WORK (Kuhn, 1995): A systematic study of memory in the political and social context through public and private visual documents: a critical analysis and recollection of past events and memories, also silenced and untold, in the contemporary context. Performing memory work involves three stages: (1) awakening of the questioning of life and world around a person (critical consciousness); (2) finding a voice for the questioning followed by (3) endless learning and understanding when this critical consciousness has been awakened (Annette Kuhn, 1995, 3 stages modified from pp. 102-103). Memory work as a method emerged as I was reading and writing stories relating to the photograph of my grandmother (Chapter 4) and has since helped me to theorize and contextualize my personal narratives.

PHOTO THERAPY: Instead of studying existing documents alternative representations of self are created to critically analyze one’s socially and culturally constructed identity (Jo Spence, 1988, 1995, Spence and Solomon, 1995). Through photographing my surroundings, family, and the people I socialize with, I have created an alternative “family album,” and alternative representations of myself that. This method that combines visual and verbal narratives provides me with an opportunity to actively re-create multiple representations of myself as I wish to be “seen.” Although I am mostly physically absent from my images; all my images discuss and re-negotiate my identity in relationship to the topic currently under investigation.

The process of “discovering” these above mentioned two image-based methods prepared me for re-writing and re-conceptualizing all sections of my study.

CRITICAL ESSAY WRITING as a method intertwines visuals, creative and theoretical / academic essay writing. Through critical essay writing I analyze my visuality and photo-writing in the light of relevant theories and in the disciplinary context. This method is influenced by autoethnography, narrative research, arts-based research, and especially Laurel Richardson’s approach to “writing as a method of inquiry” (1997; 2000a; 2000b).

PUBLIC DISPLAY AND DISCUSSION OF MY PHOTOGRAPHS AND CREATIVE TEXTS: Through presentations and exhibits, I have offered myself and my texts and images to public exposure and discussion. While I have sometimes been terrified about the feedback and about being judged based on the criteria and expectations of quality set for professional artists, I have been excited to add another level to the interpretation of the images. I have received feedback from people that would not have seen my images without them being displayed on a public space. To my pleasant surprise, the feedback I have received has been less judgmental and more focused around sharing personal
narratives. One of the main goal I have set for my projects has been to provide spectators with a way of relating to another person’s narrative and in that find temporary self-determination. While many of these people would never read my dissertation text, I have been able to give something back to the community through my talks and exhibits, returning my experience in this community for others to investigate.
“What the fuck am I doing here?” I thought.

It’s about pure anger, depressed anger that slices me inside making it hard to breathe. It’s about drowning in the emotional chaos, it’s about depressive attempts to belong and understand. “Depths of despair” my friend would comment every now and then, joking.

I was abandoned, I had abandoned.

I remember: I came here this morning to breathe. Walls in my tiny room started to approach me. They reach me with their whispers. I needed to leave, to go out, belong to a group, to a circle of friends for a short while at least.

— But they were fighting. They were going through relationship issues and I was angry and alone.

It’s about ambitions. The hardest moment in my life I can recall: I realized I was ambitious. I had left my family to become a professional. What Finland had to offer me, I didn’t find enough. I left my family, I left everyone I loved. And I lied to them: “Four short months and I’ll be back again, and then a long summer together.” Summer is never very long there. “Who knows maybe I can do some of my work here.” I lied to myself.
CHAPTER 3

RE-CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL IDENTITY

As mentioned in the introduction, my dissertation is divided into three major themes or aspects of identity: cultural, gendered, and academic. In this chapter, the discussion focuses on learning to question one’s nationally and culturally constructed identities. My main methodological interest is the intersection of artistic and systematic qualitative research practices; I hope to lead my potential readers to the reasons for choosing alternative research methods through my emotionally charged photographs and stories relating to my first year in Ohio. These reflect how I experienced lack of power, inability to communicate in English and fears relating to survival in this new cultural situation. In this chapter, I also discuss the profound influence of Laurel Richardson’s texts and teachings upon the ways I understand epistemology, the practices of writing, and analysis of texts and visuals.

Particularly within this chapter, I wish to provide a glimpse into the everyday struggles and emotional chaos of an educated immigrant in a Midwestern academic setting. This chapter is built upon visuals and short stories that I feel most sincerely, sensitively, and complexly demonstrate how I came to ask questions about identity and belonging; how these creative practices formed methods; how I connected them to the theories I was reading at the time; and how the methodology of my study began to emerge. Through my research, I promote an alternative approach to researching cultural identity: doing so through personal experiences using investigation through creative behavior and visuality. This section, the first ‘thematic’ chapter, forms the basis on which my gender identity and scholarly identity chapters are built.

The structure of this chapter varies from the other two following ‘theme’ chapters. At the beginning of my research, I did not know what kind of research project would emerge from my intuitive and creative investigation. I started photographing my life and writing short stories based on the
photographs, but the theory has been read into my behavior and practices afterwards. In this kind of research process, methods and theory are formed and emerge through practice and deep engagement with the research topic. Although not coherent, and in fact more fragmented than the other sections, this chapter forms a narrative about finding methods and theory in everyday life, and coming to question cultural and social structures through very personal experiences and involvement. What I aimed to construct was an allegorical and layered text that continually turns inward, travels and forms connections between different layers, stages, and through the process, interprets itself (Clifford, 1986).

Although I suggest that I will lead a reader through the first year and a half of my life in Columbus, Ohio, it is important to remember that I do not find linearity or coherence in storytelling crucial to what I aim to do here. Even if my story appears to follow a timeline, the ideas never came to me in the order suggested here. In the photographing and photo-writing project, visual and creative development of the process has followed its own path (which forms the storyline of my narrative), while the theorizing of this process has been complex, multilayered and independent of the restrictions of time. Even though I have the physical ‘evidences’ of photographs and short stories that I have written, and I know how I came to connect theories and methods to certain images, it is impossible to determine the moments in the process these connections were made. This, I believe, is due to the nature of visual and bodily knowledge, the awareness and understanding of something that has not ‘reached’ the level of linguistic self-expression or logic. I am not just reading theoretical knowledge into existing visuals (although this also happens) as could be argued, but claiming that some of the epistemological understandings that I discuss in the following chapters existed much earlier than the moments I came to write about them.

**Luggage – a Suitcase Personality (personal background)**

I came to Ohio to pursue my Ph.D. degree. I started teaching at the university three weeks after my arrival (in a language not my own), I took a full load of academic courses, and tried to establish a social and cultural network. When I felt that reflecting on my ideas and experiences in conversations with my family members via the phone or e-mail was not enough and that my new life situation was overwhelming and too complicated to conceptualize, I started photographing my life. Once I had the contact sheets of my photographs I started writing self-reflexive stories based on the imagery.
I came here, to the United States, with nothing but two suitcases and a gut feeling of what I thought was right and wrong in educational philosophy and pedagogy. I knew vaguely what my epistemology was, though nothing I learned seemed to support my understanding of knowledge-construction, except when something ‘alternative’ was studied during the last weeks of a course. I was thrown in the middle of teaching an academic course on Ethnic Arts in America and I had to learn – quickly – how to always remain half a step ahead of my students. It is not that I intended to achieve a level of knowledge that would make me superior to my students, but that I could be knowledgeable enough to prevent some of the dilemmas my students might be facing. I learned first hand what “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1995), communal learning, and learning in collaboration meant as we as a class exchanged knowledge that was needed to enrich our understandings about otherness. I learned about the renegotiation of power through everyday situations in the classroom as I was relatively young, female, and practiced a different pedagogical model – a model that was not always recognized or valued as an educational practice capable of producing knowledge by my students. I shared my experiences in the classroom and my students told stories and wrote about their views of American culture and about what was often viewed as the rest of the world. This often led them to investigate and write about otherness in themselves as they investigated their personal cultural heritage and interviewed their relatives about preserved or slowly dying traditions specific to their family.

I came here with nothing but the two suitcases I was allowed to bring through customs and everything I thought I would need to start my new life – clothing for four seasons, educational equipment and material, personal memorabilia, “stuff” – had to be in those cases. Even though my suitcases functioned as the containers of my belongings they soon gained a double meaning; lacking a better term I started calling the phenomenon I was living a “suitcase personality.” Besides feeling as though I had freed myself of the past and who I had been before by leaving all my belongings behind, this also caused confusion. The fragmentation of identity that I experienced, “the loss, or better the absence, of navigational principles by which such questions [such as: Who am I, where do I belong to and how do I begin to understand this new context] were determined” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 3). Losing the sense of belonging I was lead to question how “political realities, epistemic structures and signifying systems” (p. 15) naturalize and
guide (through language and visuals) identity construction. Arriving at these questions in relationship to the visuals and stories I was producing, however, came sometime later. The visuals and self-reflexive texts located on their own pages in this chapter were my initial reactions to what was happening to me. They were originally written for me and only later became part of the research process.

Irit Rogoff (2000) investigates the concepts of luggage and suitcase in her book *Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture*. According to her “the suitcase has become the signifier of mobility, displacement, duality and the overwrought emotional climates in which these circulate” (p. 36). Where the modernist notions of luggage often signifies the “utopian beginnings” relating to immigration to the ‘new world’ and “doomed journeys of annihilation” promoting binary thinking of nationalities and borders (p. 43), she questions these significations (referring to luggage as a semiotic sign) and wishes to discuss the concept of luggage in a broader sense of signification in the contemporary context. Rogoff distinguishes luggage as a multiple marker: of memory, nostalgia and access to other histories. Equally it is read as the tool of ideological construction either of utopian new beginnings or of tragic doomed endings. Finally it is understood to be the signification of the permanently circulatory, infiltrating and co-inhabited nature of both contemporary cultural and economic organization (p. 37).

Referring to Bhabha (1994) and R.M. George in *Traveling Light: Of Immigration, Invisible Suitcases and Gunny Sacks* (1992), Rogoff further suggests that since identity can be read in relation to cultural and national immigration narratives that largely use the symbol of luggage and suitcase, they critically re-write the concept of nation by crossing the borders and by leaving and entering.

**Belong or Not to Belong – the Concepts of Home, Travel and Displacement**

Before I moved to the United States, I was warned by older Finnish people about homelessness and loss of national identity that would follow my partial adaptation to “American,” midwestern culture, its social life, and its political environment. Indeed there was truth in those warnings since I recognize how I have been “Americanized.” The change is small, but every time I visit home I feel a new sense of evoked criticism. I believe that criticism naturally emerges when one travels and gains a different perspective on what had not previously been questioned.
The first year of my life in Columbus I felt as though I were traveling; I was on an adventure to
the academically and socially unknown, and I found myself often simultaneously annoyed and fascinated
by the ‘exotic’ and strange that I experienced. Ever since, I have felt that I am always traveling, floating
“in-between” (Bhabha, 1994), yet incapable of arriving and settling down. I have longed for the exotic
travel related to tourism and felt that to physically travel in-between the two countries I now associate
myself with is less significant than between the two lives, social and mental, that I simultaneously occupy.
Although Finland will always be my home, I also have a home in Ohio. And whereas Finland has become
partially strange and limiting to me, I do not ever want to, or cannot, feel completely at ease in America
either. Through my personal experience I came to discover the complexity of the concepts “home and
away, placement and displacement, dwelling and travel, location and dislocation” (Kaplan, 1996, p. 1).
Travel, as a modernist concept, refers to capitalist leisure, commercial and academic\(^2\) travel, whereas
displacement is often understood as a modernist, engendered phenomenon of mass migration (Kaplan,
1996). Postmodernism, then, complicates these terms by “suggest[ing] their links as well as their
disjunctures, their possibilities of historicized emergence as metaphors in critical practice” (p. 3). This, and
my own experiences, brings me to the “active category of ‘unbelonging’…as a critical refusal of the terms
[marginality, opposition and a mode of ‘dropping out’]…and of the implications of those terms” (Rogoff,
2000, p. 5). My life situation made me recognize the complexity of belonging/not-belonging and
dislocation, my attempts to narrate my new life situation made me question coherent and “straightforward
relations between subjects, places and identities” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 6), and the difficulties I had with
naming my own subjectivity and positionality further directed me to question different epistemologies.
What I have attempted to argue is that all different layers/aspects of my life worked in complex interaction
towards problematizing identity and the process of knowledge construction. My physical relocation has
both helped and forced me to experience moments of mental, theoretical and idealistic travel that could be
described as

the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of
difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For
there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an

\(^2\) Academic travel is my addition to Caren Kaplan’s list.
exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delà – here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

I wish to recognize that while the fragmentation of identity caused by a life-altering change in my life slowly and gradually guided me towards questioning all aspects of identity, I immediately reacted to this fragmentation and un-belonging by starting to perform visual inventories of my belongings using photography. These material inventories of my living environment, domestic spaces and other places I found comfortable or troubling, rather soon came to carry deep symbolic meanings, although they first reflected my desire to find comfort and create visual evidence of the (false?) permanence of my situation. My photographic documents replaced the lack of permanency in my living situations; through photographing my life, I created a visual memory line.

Reflexive Visual Inquiry: Working the Texts and Visual

To ground my research methodology I have searched for support from various epistemological approaches such as visual anthropology, visual sociology and visual ethnography that discuss the analytical readings of visual information. My dissertation focuses largely on discussing the emergence of method, the relationship between methods applied, and theory. While this discussion is imperative to understanding any research process (Pink, 2001), it is especially crucial for understanding new methodological approaches. Although some of the terminology that I use such as ‘narrative,’ ‘subject positioning,’ ‘reading,’ and ‘document’ are widely used in methodology books like Emmison and Smith’s (2000), I wish not to be associated with the ways visual inquiry is understood as a process working toward producing empirical, scientific, and realist knowledge, and in which visual information is understood as a raw data and a form of representation with no special nature of knowledge of its own (i.e. Collier & Collier, 1967/1986; Prosser, 1996). Emmison and Smith (2000), authors of the recent book Researching the Visual state: “…our reservations about an image-based visual social science rest on the view that photographs have been misunderstood as constituting forms of data in their own right when in fact they should be considered in the first instance as means of preserving, storing, or representing information” [Italics mine] (p. 2). The authors aim to provide grounds for “theoretically informed and empirically productive” (p. 2) visual research in social science, however, their ‘toolkit’ described on pages 66-69, for example, lacks theoretical grounding.
Also the four categories named as existing approaches to the “use of visual materials:” ethnographic documentation, semiology, visualization in scientific research and communication, and video document of social interaction (pp. 19-20), and the fact that they claim their agenda is to enlarge the study of visuals and visuality to consider objects, places, and social interaction leaves me wondering if the authors spent any time reading the recent publications about the studies in visual culture that cross the boundaries between cultural studies and sociology.

There are as many authors conducting visual research in different fields as there are understandings of visual knowledge and the role of visuals and visuality in the research process. I have been drawn to methods such as ‘visual inventory’ described by Collier and Collier (1967/1986, (their term “cultural inventory”), pp. 45-63), and the myth/legacy of photographs as representations of reality still strongly influences contemporary understandings and readings of photographic images but my theoretical understanding of the roles of visuals in knowledge construction and in research can only be linked to the recent, critical approaches to visual inquiry such as these demonstrated by Sarah Pink (2001), Irit Rogoff (2000), and Gillian Rose (2001). I have also been impressed by Elisabeth Chaplin’s book *Sociology and Visual Representation* published as early as in 1994. Her writing is influenced by post-positivism, feminism, and her criticism suggests the consideration of visuals as sociological knowledge and text. While some visual anthropologists have suggested similar approaches, she has not yet found much support in the field of sociology (Pink, 2001). In the following section I will discuss how I came to identify my research as a reflexive approach to inquiry.

I do not believe that systematic photographic practices in ethnographic research or social studies can produce objective documents. Instead I consider visual knowledge to be a rich counter-partner for subjective observations, analysis, and writing; all of these components working to fabricate knowledge that is not truthful to reality, but to the researcher’s current understandings of their personal, social, and theoretical contexts. I believe this to be what Clifford (1986) calls an “ethnographic fiction…determined in at least six ways”: contextually; rhetorically; institutionally; generically; politically; and historically (p. 6).
His approach is based on the belief that ethnography will always construct partial and incomplete knowledge and representations of reality. Rather than being a method of data collection it is a system of knowledge construction based on researcher’s experiences (Pink, 2001).

The reason I find it important to discuss, at least briefly, some ethnographic texts is that at the beginning of my research process I identified strongly with ethnographic fieldwork practices. Further, I believe that ethnographic field methods have been influential in developing many of the educational research practices and are used as observational tools by artists and photographers. Finally, as the documentary value of photographs has been increasingly debated due to the vast improvements of technology, ethnographic practices, as well as cultural studies and semiology, have been critically discussed by feminists, post-colonial theorists and through critical race theory.

In the next “gendered identity” chapter I turn ‘inwards’ to find links between my visual practices, analysis and my personal past in relationship to my living context. During the first year of my study that I discuss in this chapter, however, I intend to move between myself as an analytical observer and as an emotional and physical subject. In my research, self-reflexive approaches obviously emerge. I do not find it necessary to create distinctions between my personal life and professional practices, and I have not made ‘ethnographic images’ a separate category from those of therapeutic and personal study. It is clear that I would find division between “personal experience and ethnographic experience, autobiography and anthropology…and fieldwork and everyday life” (Pink, 2001, p. 19) artificial. Nonetheless my motive for producing images during this period was mostly ethnographically and anthropologically oriented, assuming of course that something as personal and self-focused as my project can still be considered (auto)ethnographic. I wish to remark that researchers conducting autoethnography do not necessarily come from an anthropological background, but from various disciplines and often are only connected by their interest in the subjectivity of the researcher in the various cultural, social and academic discourses of research and life.

The reflexive approach to inquiry requires the researcher to recognize aspects of one’s own identity (gender, politics, age, religion, sexuality, ethnicity), the different political, social, cultural, physical, and geographical components that form the context of one’s theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, and
to critically study the effect of the aforementioned on data collection, methods, analysis, as well as the subjective nature of the viewing experience (Pink, 2001). All the above-named conditions make it clear that the analysis and representation will never be complete, and will never achieve full conclusion, but will remain open for reinterpretations. Thus they can only be read as “ethnographic fiction” (Clifford, 1986).

While I have experimented with textual and visual representations throughout my dissertation, I am aware that the reading of the individual sections, and even the project as whole, will carry various connotations from textual and visual genres.

George E. Marcus (1986) identifies two categories for experimental modes for writing modern ethnography in his essay “Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World.” The first type Marcus defines focuses on the “explanation of momentous historic events” (p. 189). In contrast, in the second type of modern ethnographical writing, the author’s focus is on the representation of ethnographic research. It is characteristic for texts of the latter type to be open-ended, fragmented, dialogic in the context of fieldwork, and to apply multiple voices and modes of writing into the text. The authors of these modernist rhetorical essays are not concerned about researcher’s objectivity; instead subjectivity is openly discussed. Also, the quality and complexity of the subject’s experience matters more than holistic experience of the particular culture; the culture is represented through the individual, the local and the particular even though the intent of the researcher may be to address issues that are more ‘universal.’

Instead of calling this chapter of my dissertation an ethnographic essay, I would rather call it an autoethnographic merging of cultural phenomena and my private life. My main focus is on the intensity of an experience, its representation and theorization, not in describing events and activities from my private life in the order they happened, although they would fittingly spice up the theoretical conversation and discussion of my subjectivity. My project has required me to reject the concept of distant outside observer and the academically defined methods suitable for and distinctive of traditional ethnography. My narrative is open-ended in every part; it explains the phenomena discussed only partially, leaving the visual and textual narrative open for further perceptions and interpretations, mine and my potential reader’s.
Rather similar to the description about arts-based research provided by Barone and Eisner (1997), Marcus claims that the evocative and local, however not strictly tied to the physically local context, “fragmentation, rough edges, and the self-conscious aim of achieving an effect that disturbs the reader” (p. 191) are characteristic of ethnographic essays. Edginess and fragmentation are distinctive to my story. My intention is not to disturb the reader, however, but to tease and attract the reader into engaging in my story and through this create a counter story about him/herself. Similar to an ethnographic essay, I aim to evoke the strange experience and provide a reader with an opportunity to live through the strange and the unknown, my story of assimilation. My research, however, discusses cultural phenomena through the personal story, which is the focus of narration. The narrative rhetorical text of an ethnographic essay allows different perspectives and modes of writing to coexist; the author’s style may vary and his/her subjectivity is openly discussed in relation to the difficulties faced while in the field. Thus, according to Marcus, an ethnographic essay is suitable “to a time such as the present, when paradigms are in disarray, problems intractable, and phenomena only partly understood” (p. 191). I aim to present a cultural story, which is also a very personal story. Throughout the text I have attempted to adapt different perspectives using my photographs and various methods of writing. It is always me talking, however, influenced by the theoretical academic framework, writing mainly for the academic audience and for their (and my) benefit in helping me and them to question the culture in which they are members.

The discussion provided by Deborah P. Britzman (2000) about educational poststructuralist ethnography has been of great help in positioning my research in relationship to ethnographic traditions. Instead of providing a representation of reality, according to Britzman, “ethnography constructs the very materiality it attempts to represent” (p. 28). Ethnography is a set of social and textualized identities, a “set of practices and a set of discourses,” (p. 28) and due to its partial nature (Clifford, 1986) what is absent is interpreted against the present (Britzman, 2000). Poststructuralism questions three aspects of ethnographic authority: “the authority of empiricism, the authority of language, and the authority of reading and understanding” (p. 28). Britzman describes subjects, participants, the author and readers, as “textualized identities…[whose] voices create a cacophony and dialogic display of contradictory desires, fears, and literary tropes that, if carefully ‘read,’ suggests just how slippery speaking, writing, reading, and describing
subjectivity really are” (p. 28). The profound questions she asks are the construction of “modes of intelligibility that constitute the subjects” (p. 36) in the discourses of study, how the subjects arrive at representations and subject positioning, as well as how the researcher represents the participants’ voices, agencies, authorities, and her/his own in the various discourses of constructing and reading the text.

Re-negotiating National Identity

To talk about cultural identity in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to understand it in a framework of feminism, deconstructivism, post-colonialist politics, multiculturalism, and postmodernism. All these affect the understanding of fragmentation and multiplicity of one’s ethnic and cultural identity.

Globalization, a term used by Frederic Jameson (cited in de Souza, 2001) refers to the new international structure of capitalism, the impact of new communication technologies and the migration and movements of ethnic populations. These factors not only make national identity problematic, but they make it impossible to think of ethnic identity in terms of simple location. Globalization also refers to the changing relationship between ‘global’ and ‘local’ scale in culture (de Souza, 2001, p. 94).

Globalization has often been seen as a potential threat to what has been perceived as national culture. Despite the concerns expressed by individuals, some arts -, educational -, and human rights organizations about promoting the exclusive and homogenous national identity it appears to me that a notion of shared and unifying national culture and national identity still exists in the two countries I have lived in, Finland and the United States. Although a commonly shared notion of what is profoundly and essentially American or what it means to be Finnish supposedly continues to live on, I would argue that this is based on stereotyping and learned concepts of self in relationship to national identity (Alasuutari, 2000). The potential to understand one’s identity as plural and multiple has made it more complicated to understand and define an ethnic identity, which in the case of Finland closely relates to the notion of national identity. We often “naturally” feel a need to celebrate one’s uniqueness and individualism, however, restricted within an assumed group and among certain classifications of identity. It is characteristic in the current postmodern political environment to encourage a celebration of one’s uniquely built personal ethnic identity within the limitation of nationality. Governments, state institutions, and cultural institutions that
emphasize nations or locations uniqueness have separated ethnicity from “others” and through public funding and by providing publicity for certain projects encourage this corruption of understanding (Alasuutari, 2000, Mirzoeff, 2000; Dunlop, 1999).

What then does the concept of national identity mean? As I think about Finnishness, I think about saunas, outdoors, pure nature, high level of public education, hockey and other winter sports. These are things we, the Finns, are assumingly proud of, something we can associate ourselves with, something that makes us unique compared to our surrounding neighbors. Despite the achievements of the young nation (independent since 1917), its high level of education, and some international recognition of its ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture, the stereotype of Finnish culture as being underdeveloped and loutish still persists as the legacy from the nationalist period when the Swedish speaking Fennomans, the cultural elite, saw Finnish culture as valuable, yet in a need of a sophisticated touch, editing, and internationality. The influence of this time period and the ways Finnish culture and language were founded among the civilized nations still fuels our desire to gain acceptance and recognition among the European nations/states. We fear appearing too ‘Eastern’ and wish to strengthen connections to middle Europe and be seen as equal to Sweden (Alasuutari, 2000).

State substitutions for the arts and culture are often justified for the following reasons: building a cultural legacy for future generations; preparing the nation for future challenges; civilizing the nation with ‘high’ culture that patrons could not afford to support and would not otherwise be exposed to (this assumes that some citizens are in need of being civilized); strengthening the nation’s capability to compete against the other nations in other areas than culture; and building a reputation of a distinct culture globally. It is characteristic to the European cultural rhetoric to tightly link country to a homogenous nation and its culture (as a nation’s way of life) and art (Alasuutari, 2000). While the immigration rate is in many European countries negative, the situation is changing and the numbers of immigrants escalating rapidly. Is it then questionable to promote a hegemonic nation when the face of the country is changing rapidly towards a multiethnic and multicultural nation?

Increasingly, ‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities. The most significant effect of this process is not the proliferation of ‘alternative histories of the excluded’ producing, as some would have it, a pluralist anarchy (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 5-6).
While I find Bahbha’s words easy to relate to the contemporary situation in the U.S., I find this problematic when reflecting on my thoughts about Finland. It makes me think about popular culture, youth culture and city life in the capital area. I find the street life in Helsinki has changed every time I visit home: young teenagers dress up like Black American rappers, the influence of different cultures in music and television is evident, and the visual interior and menu of the bars and restaurants are spiced up with the ‘exotic.’ I would argue, however, that the influence of the exotic and foreign trends are more easily accepted and some aspects of American consumer culture admired, whereas the political and cultural life is more disdainful of the ‘foreign’ growing from inside and becoming part of the domestic.

I find the following quote from Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) touched with hope: “It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (p. 2). While I hope that the Finnish society will learn to listen to the growing otherness within its own infrastructures instead of oppressing these new and strange voices, I also believe that the numbers of these minority groups have to still grow for them to be truly heard.

How are subjects formed ‘in-between’, or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

The questions Bhabha asks are profound in discussing national identity, diversity education and the formation of cultural identity. As educators and scholars we are well aware “that the experiences of racism and discrimination [have] a clear effect on the psychological well-being of the immigrants” and that such encounters cause anxiety, stress, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Vesala, 2002, p. 214). I am drawn to speculate that promoting a complex but unified nation and culture may have some positive effects in that it helps to build the nations self-esteem and supports global competitiveness. On the other hand this exclusive focus on unity does not allow equal and democratic opportunities for all. Later, in Chapter 5, I will discuss the advantages and problems posed by some
approaches to multicultural and multiethnic education, and discuss an alternative that avoids pre-determined classifications and aims to focus on individuals in a complex and multi-layered net of social structures.

**Feminism, Domesticity, and National Identity**

Using Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) text and the feminist analysis of domesticity, I aim to prove that there are links between the questioning of national identity as homogenous, and one’s private, domestic life. While it is in the space of culturally conflictual situations and the emergence of minority and women’s narratives that the need to re-negotiate the larger, cultural narratives becomes evident, it is also in those moments that the “borders between home and world become confused” (p. 9).

The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes the boundary; a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres (p. 9).

Feminist scholars in particular have brought attention to the richness of culturally embedded codes and power relations that can be studied through the domestic. The roles of different ethnicities, gender, age, and sexuality in the community are all negotiated daily in the hidden, yet rich and complex interactions of domesticity. While turning the private into public in the form of fiction or biography is not new, it is characteristic to the postmodern era to read culture through the domestic.

…it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence…there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Everyday aspects of life, through emotions and lived experiences, most strongly affect and shape my thinking. Hence I find a connection to feminist perspectives in research and art through the appreciation of personal and individual experience. The main subjects in my photographs are objects and spaces at home, and people with whom I interact. According to my analysis, this may reflect the need to build a home as a safe place and a net of relationships as a support system, substituting for immediate family and friends back in Helsinki. These aspects of life, decorating, keeping-up home and social networking, are traditionally connected to femininity and the assigned roles to women in Western social systems. Pauline
de Souza (2001, citing Claire Doherty, 1998) refers to home as a stereotypical creation of fiction and lived reality and Lucy Lippard (1977) writes about the ways women artists have worked with household items to “raise questions about domesticity as a social subjectivity, and an identity comprising a complex articulation of pleasure, desire, fear, and pain” (de Souza, 2001, p. 92). I find the argument about the commonality of “scripto-visual” and “figurative” art among feminist artists intriguing, but troublesome (Chaplin, 1994, p. 10). This argument, however, follows a certain logic of relying on the combination of visuals and text or the obvious problematizing of gender through visual representation enforced by the importance of the message conveyed.

My study is rooted in postmodernism, critical theory, cultural studies, visual culture studies, critical visual sociology, critical visual ethnography and postcolonialist concepts of understanding location and identity. All the above-mentioned critically study location, situatedness, and construction of knowledge. Against my expectations prior to studying with Laurel Richardson and Patti Lather, I am strongly invested in feminist epistemology. What I find especially heartening about feminist studies is the courage to bring the private and the physicality of the body into the theoretical discussion. Naturally not all feminist theory agrees on the involvement of body but recognizing the alternative ways of knowledge construction, the physicality of the experience and knowledge construction attracts me in feminist scholarship.

Gender is a field of structured and structuring difference, where the times of extreme location, of the intimately personal and individualized body, vibrate in the same field with global high tension of emissions. 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…. Feminism loves another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering and the partly understood. Feminism is about sciences of the multiple subjects with (at least) double vision. Feminism is about critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space. Translation is always interpretative, critical and partial….So location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality or to borrow from Althusser, feminist objectivity resists ‘simplification in the last instance’. That is because feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning. There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions….We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledge makes possible. (Haraway, 1991, pp. 195-196).
Feminism has brought to light the significance of studying the rich multiplicity of the private. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) calls this hidden and silenced the “unhomely” and, referring to Freud and Hannah Arendt, defines “unhomely” as the very private that ‘shouldn’t’ have been brought before the public eye. According to Bhabha, feminism has been the driving force in re-negotiating the distinctions between private and public in calling attention to what can be learned about the public through the very personal.

It was eventually my understanding of the relationship between identity and community that strongly linked me to feminism. I understand identity as in-flux, complex, multiple, relational (Eakin, 1999), communal and simultaneously performed on many stages (Smith, 1998). Through my creative practices I aim to form an “active perceptual system, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life” (Haraway, 1991, p. 190). Bhabha’s (1994) analysis of Toni Morrison’s “Beloved” beautifully depicts ‘feminine’ communal identity: “The women speak in tongues, from a space ‘in-between each other’ which is a communal space. They explore an ‘interpersonal’ reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses – aesthetically distanced, held back, and yet historically framed” (p. 17). Bahbha’s second important analysis states that these novels, as is typical of many artists and theorists today, move beyond what is now and within the limits of one’s self to something that is not necessarily of greater understanding, but that touches the future and moves from present to “post” in the borderlines of present (p. 18). It is important to note that I do not intend to argue that understanding women’s identities as communal and formed in-between, as well as within one’s self, means that all women are the same or even similar. While occupying a gendered identity a woman as a “subject occupies different subject positions at different moments [and simultaneously], and she cannot be determined by any single determined apparatus” (Ong, 1995, p. 351). Further, the anxiety between these different subject positions continuously “destabilize any hegemonic position”(Ong, 1995, p. 352). I wish to explain that even though I talk about women and communal identity, I do not, by any means, intend to argue that women form a worldwide community, or that all women are somewhat similar. Gender identity is always only part of one’s identity fabricated from many different and simultaneous identities or fragments of identity. However, I wish to communicate here the significance of some feminist scholars’, writers’, and artists’ work (i.e. in Behar & Gordon, 1995; bell hooks’ multiple books, Carrie Mae Weems’ art work) that
investigate the complexity of identity construction and that have crossed the set boundaries between the self and the other. Lila Abu-Lughod (1995) states: “By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide” (p. 347). Similarly Rishma Dunlop (1999) suggests in her article “Beyond Dualism: Toward a Dialogic Negotiation of Difference” that by allowing the space in the educational curriculum, critical reading of personal narratives, and interpersonal dialogue for the search of identity that is formed in a “third space” (p. 57) we can learn to recognize and understand the “other within” one’s self (p. 59).

Referring to Goethe, Bhabha (1994) suggests that a nation’s cultural life is unconsciously lived without questioning the national culture. If we can come to recognize the relationship between domestic and public and the relationality of identity construction, we may be able to arrive at new questions and educational models for teaching critical awareness and acceptance towards “strangeness” and “other.” Finally, we can arrive at the questions of exclusive/inclusive nations, and the (un)necessity to cherish and protect distinct nationality. My suggestions for a critical pedagogy that promotes relational readings of narratives of all kinds is further discussed in chapter 5.

Location, Subjectivity, Visuality, and Social Space

Much of the theorization of space and place problematizes the space as a physically existing reality similarly observable to all. Through my practice I find deep connections to the ideological and physical places that symbolize home. These connections inform my theoretical thinking and guide my research. My special attachment to the physical and imagined qualities of home, shaped by past memories and future expectations, influence my relationships to that which I considered new and strange. Home has an identity of its own and I find temporary subjectivities in relationship to it. I believe that my theoretical work in relationship to the homeland and the concept of home makes it possible to question how the specificity of these places in relationship to culture and the domestic has shaped my behavior, theoretical thinking, and understanding of space and myself (St. Pierre, 2000). In Chapter 4, I explore the complicated and intermingled structure between my relationships to Finnish nature, Finnishness, and my immediate family. I have found myself writing my physicality as well as my experiences, emotions, wishes and
dreams into my text. “We write – think and feel – (with) our entire bodies rather than only (with) our minds or hearts” (p. 258) Trinh T. Minh-ha (1999) writes and continues: “…thought is as much a product of the eye, the finger, or the foot as it is of the brain” (p. 261). My experience – narrative – has been fragmented throughout the process and I have constructed my story from these pieces and their complex temporary unities. In what follows I discuss the links among visuality, subjectivity, embodiment, and location.

I understand visuality and visual culture as active and in-flux concepts that include art, but which are not limited to forms of visual representations; rather they are a means through which identities are both produced and represented. Visual culture circulates “visibilities (and poli[ces] invisibilities), stereotypes, power relations, the ability to know and to verify” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 20). Through the combination of my photographs and texts I position my identity within the location, thus creating visual representations of my subject positionings. While my identity is “constantly in the process of being formed” (p. 20) I study this through visuals and texts, and again, try to make this process accessible to others through visual and textual representations. I see myself as acting a form of personal geography, a body of situated knowledge through which I actively unname, rename and revise “power structures in terms of the relations between” these places and myself (Rogoff, 2000, p. 21). Social spaces are produced through psychic subjectivities, social positions and relations, and through studying this we can learn about the location (or nation) formed by individuals (Rogoff, 2000). Feminist and post-colonial theories insist on multi-subjective, multi-positioning, multi-inhabitation of the space, which is in conflict with the homogenous idea of a nation state (Rogoff, 2000). Visual culture, supporting endless recycling and re-reading of the images may be of aid when intending to write the various bodies, physical and knowledge, into being within the existing framework of cultural signification.

Gender, Identity, and the Absence of the Body

For the past three years, I have photographed my life for the purpose of investigating changes in my cultural identity and self-perception. Most of the photographs are about domestic and private spaces, objects, details, and people I socialize with. My body, or physicality has been almost totally absent from
these photographs. I have found spaces and objects surrounding me informative for investigating the construction of the self, and I feel that critical analysis of these photographs has deepened my understanding of the complexity of identity construction, my current living environment, and culture.

Ultimately it is about working against associating an individual with a certain culturally-embedded perception of one’s body. One reason my body is absent is to avoid the culturally-embedded pre-determined readings of the female body. I needed for this project a freedom from the limits of my physicality. I discuss gender, cultural identity, and the limitations and subjectivity of experience, and I abandoned the image of my physical body to be the person I wrote about. Through making others trace signs of my physicality and “true” existence within the features of others in the photographs, I wanted to leave space for imagining the writer me as something other instead of immediately settling on the real physical me ‘evidenced’ in the photographs. According to Roland Barthes (1981) a person, a moment, dies at some level when the photograph is taken. The person, or the scene, becomes evidenced in the ‘document,’ and we limit our interpretations to what we think we see in the image. I needed some distance from my physicality to create space for the relational reading in my narrative. Too many troublesome theoretical texts about the power of gaze and spectatorship, looking and being looked at, made me hesitant to submit my body to public scrutiny. I was not afraid of being looked at, but this was not the representational form that interested me. I felt that this would require an entirely separate body of visual research. I studied works by female artists such as Cindy Sherman, Carrie Mae Weems, and Lorna Simpson and realized that my way of addressing the “aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (Butler, 1999, p. 418) was to focus my gaze on my environment and others. Although my bodily appearance and past strongly affect and influence my experiences, my study is about me seeing, visualizing and interpreting. I have claimed power and control of the spectatorship by not being seen. My project is about me gazing and about introducing my sometimes intuitive, sometimes calculated vision for others to analyze. I have chosen to make the focus the most private and intimate spaces of my life, the spectrum of feelings and emotions, and the relationships within my family without giving myself a physical shape.
I do not believe that part of a person dies at the moment the photograph is taken - this would make it ethically questionable to alter others’ bodies for photographing. I have felt, however, that I can leave more space for the imagination when my face and physical body are not plastered on every other page of this text. We are all fixated on the “evidence value” of a photograph. Two years into the process of investigating cultural identity and self-perception through my photographs and creative writing, I read Barthes’ (1981) words in *Camera Lucida*: “if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing!” I then realized that I am not only investigating the changes in my cultural identity; I am re-creating myself in a way that I never have, and in which I could never exist in the real world. While photographing, I have subconsciously removed my own body, the physical part of my selfhood inseparable from my identity, from the photographic documentations of my life. I have investigated my living spaces, created masses of material for analytical practices familiar to me from visual anthropology, and photographed others, but the physical me is excluded from these photographic documentations. The photographs could not have given me the body I want to be seen in. I do not refer to my feminine body, as it is, with dissatisfaction, but I had a feeling that I could not embody my complex and changing identity in the representations of my physical form.

I discussed Roland Barthes’ concept “punctum” in the previous chapter, and eventually the reason for my body not being present in the photographs is due to the absence of the punctum in the photographs where evidence of my physicality can be traced. I have not hated the negatives in which I am reflected in the mirror or photographed by someone else but I have not found them interesting or stimulating either. “Images are the sites of identity-constitution” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 149), and I believe that through the presentational forms that I have chosen I can best study the construction and constant re-negotiation of my identity. Rogoff continues:

Unacknowledged and unspoken ideological contradictions have always informed the ways in which cultures set up and represent femininity as a meeting point between rational and irrational discourses. Perhaps if I could gain insight into how the culture of belonging shaped the represented identities of women within it, I might also gain some perception of its own internal contradictions (p. 150).

My photographs and texts are how I wish to be represented.
Without talk of identity (and hence also boundaries), I do not see that there can be a basis for responsibility of action, including political action. ... Not all talk of identity involves thinking of the self as unitary or contained; nor need boundaries be conceived in ways that make the identity closed, autonomous or impermeable. We need to think individuality differently, allowing the potentiality for otherness to exist within it, as well as alongside it (Battersby, 1999, p. 355).

I argued earlier that the concept of nation state is problematic and its institutional and cultural maintenance need to be critically discussed (Alasuutari, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2000). Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000) argues that interpretation is the prevalent threat for modernist nation state. While diasporic, hybrid, plural, multiple, influx identities constructed in-between and in the interstices of culture are widely discussed today (i.e. Bhabha, 1994; Mirzoeff, 2000) I believe it is relevant to return to Stuart Hall’s (2000) definition of diasporic identity, which “lives through, not despite difference: by hybridity…which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 31). Lately I have been fascinated by the concept of strangeness within us, not just alongside (Battersby, 1999). A stranger is a newcomer to the community, somebody who lives on the edge, in-between, in the interstices (Bhabha, 1994). She has lost her identity and sense of belonging and needs to be heard and understood (Shabatay, 1991). For her to be heard requires “enter[ing] into dialogical relationship with her. Real dialogue allows for the uniqueness of the other to be brought for” (Shabatay, 1991, p. 136). Finding a language for this dialogue requires us not to enter the dialogue, that is what we are already familiar with, however it requires questioning the dominant rhetoric within which she is heard.

I have found my rhetoric in the presentational format of this dissertation. I have written my story into being through domestic ethnography that “play[s] at the boundaries of inside and outside” (Renov, 1999, p. 141). According to Michael Renov (1999) “domestic ethnography’s potential [is] to mine cultural memory with a level of intensity unavailable to outsiders” (p. 149). The process “functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial other” (p. 141), but it has been written as a narrative about the cultural framework within which I think and function. I question my subjectivity, identity, authority and intelligibility during the process, never separating these from the discourse. I have broken boundaries between the other and myself through our
mingled stories inseparable by blood, past, memories and experiences. In the last section of this chapter I discuss writing as a method in relationship to academic essay writing and my visuality, as well as providing an example of the interpretation process.

**Writing as a Method of Inquiry (Laurel Richardson’s influence)**

One naturally desires positionality and sense of security provided by belonging within the intricate structures of everyday life as well as within the academy. One of the ways belonging could be understood is “the ability to live out complex and reflective identities which acknowledge language, knowledge, gender and race as modes of self-positioning” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 14). We read texts and visuals from our contemporary perspectives, bringing personal desires and needs into this reading (Kuhn, 1995). Through this ‘reading’, the interpretation of the information, we “fragment, appropriate, rewrite and utterly transform those texts” while these visuals and texts simultaneously change and mold our understanding of culture; visuals and texts “constitute us rather than being subjected to historical readings by us” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 9). Irit Rogoff continues that constantly asking oneself the question ‘Where do I belong?’ and pursuing the articulation of this question in relationship to one’s life, brings awareness to the process of self-positioning, in-flux identity, and the complex projects of writing one’s self into culture. She calls attention to the naturalization process of self-positioning through language in the “political realities, epistemic structures and signifying systems” (p. 15). A similar argument by Bhabha (1994) referring to Goethe suggests that we live culture, especially national identities and realities, unconsciously without often enough awakening to question the ways reality has been pre-lived, pre-constructed for us.

Rogoff (2000) claims that taking critical positions of belonging and not-belonging “is the very condition of critical theoretical activity” (p. 18). Learning to listen to, respect and trust one’s own critical voice, body, emotions, and intuitions is the most wonderful lesson I have learned from Laurel Richardson’s (1997; 2000a; 2000b) texts and teaching. She believes that

writing is a both theoretical and practical process through which we can

(a) reveal epistemological assumptions,
(b) discover grounds for questioning received scripts and hegemonic ideals – both those within the academy and those incorporated within ourselves,
(c) find ways to change those scripts,
(d) connect to others and form community, and
Although Richardson focuses on written text, I believe that her ideas can be extended to visuals and artistic visual production. During the class Laurel Richardson taught about analyzing qualitative data, I began analyzing my photo-texts through various writing exercises in which different analytical tools and approaches are adopted to deconstruct the text/visual and deepen/diversify one’s understanding of this text/visual. Her class changed my understanding of both data analysis and writing. Going back to my research diary notes (one of her assignments for the class) from that time period, I find myself amazed by the radical change that occurred during this relatively short period of time. The Window story included in this chapter and follow up alterations of it, Pool, Showers, and Learning to Read among many others were written during that ten-week period. I am not sure if I can conceptualize what happened, why and how her teaching had such an impact on me, but I know that when I left her course I had stopped apologizing for who I was and the ways in which I think, behave, and write. The atmosphere she created supported testing one’s limits and modes of expression. Richardson’s course was built on discussions about texts, participation in small writing groups, individually designed analyzing practices, and journaling that combines “observation notes,” “methodological notes,” “theoretical notes,” and “personal notes” (Richardson, 2000a, p 941). Entering the class I wrote: “I cannot afford to be imperfect,” “I fear writing”, and “I hate rules and regulations.” I also expressed my insecurity caused by “word-blindness”, dyslexia in the family and concerns about my ability to communicate in English. I wish to demonstrate the drastic change in my attitude through the following diary entries (April, 2001). Although I continued discussing some insecurities relating to writing, I claimed, “writing my ‘poems’, my short entrances [I have also called them emotional outbursts], have made me believe in myself. I am finally able to express something meaningful without being conscious of language barriers.” I also described myself as a lazy writer except when writing ‘discoveries’. I analyze this writing activity as something that allows me access to another level of understanding in some other system of intellectuality. I continued explaining that pausing to listen to myself, to write these discoveries makes it possible to analyze my intellectuality and shape it into words. The last note from that spring reads: “I fear for the times I ‘go into my self’ and start writing and working the images. The intensity of those periods is scary and exhausting” and “challenging my thinking gives me
ultimate happiness” (May 5th, 2001). Weighing the heavy pile of diary notes from her class in my hand, I realize how dramatic the change really was. Considering that only a few months earlier I was not sure if I would ever survive in this new environment, now I recognize that I “graduated” her class feeling good about myself and my writing.
Window

Everything appears blurred and unidentified. White light from outside separates outside from the inside space. If I would develop the image darker I could make the view behind the window visible, but I do not wish to see what is outside. I remember the view from my window and nothing out there is meaningful. What matters is how I felt in this room and how the small space of this room shaped my life.

I cannot see the screen behind the window, but I remember how it made the room dark and created a feeling of prison. Although the screen was there to keep insects outside during the summer months, it created a hardly visible barrier between the outside and me. I could not open the window. A little separate part of the larger window, framed by the same metal as the rest of the framing, could be pushed aside, so that the fresh air could stream in. I used to love the feeling of fresh air and sometimes I would go to my knees just to get the fresh air blow to my face.
My life was blurred at the time. I controlled my little space, but the rest of the time I lived on the mercy of others. My social relationships were formed by strange rules and weird manners and my possible success in academia seemed to lie in the hands of others. I had no family to go to, no one to turn to when I needed an opinion of someone who knows me better than I do. I was building new and I lived two different lives simultaneously. The only way I could connect these two worlds was to document my life and send reports to those involved. I was and I still am creating and reshaping my self-identity more consciously than ever before. This room was my home base and my hideaway, but it was also my prison and a reminder of isolation.

I cherished my first plant as I cherished everything else that belonged to me. I did not mind clothes on the floor or food items on the shelves because it was all mine. Even the light in the room was only mine.

⇐ Photograph 6
Photograph 7
Photography, revealing the family’s unconscious optics, provides a medium for the exchange of the family’s fantasies, and for the intersection of its looks, for the ambivalent processes of loss and mourning that structure family life. As such, it can offer both parent and child ways to acknowledge, to themselves and each other, some of their respective wishes, fears, and anxieties, even as it attempts to contain them within its frames (Hirsch, 1997, p.177).

This chapter discusses the second main theme of my research: gendered identity. My narrative-driven and theoretically influenced text will lead the reader through the process of learning to question cultural and social constructs of gendered identity through the analysis of women’s roles in my family. In the process of confronting my learned and adopted role as a woman and through the study of visual-textual memoirs, I have discovered different modes of visual inquiry that I have then modified and named as methods suitable for my artistic and autoethnographic inquiry. This chapter links together the two other main themes in my research, the studies of cultural and scholarly identity.

I was resistant to bringing an autobiographical critique to my study. For the first two years of my research I thought I could simply focus my research around the changes in my cultural identity caused by my move from Helsinki to Columbus, Ohio, without having to touch the happy and romanticized, yet murky and uncomfortable, stories of my personal past. In the process I realized that it was necessary to investigate how my past affects my research, pedagogy, and everyday life; it became impossible to deny the deep influence past experiences and memories had on my perception and understanding of my new life situation and myself. This chapter forms “the heart” of my research. Like any other chapter that I have
written, I did not know what to expect as I began investigating this specific theme, aspect of identity or epistemology. Similar to the previous chapter the personal stories were first written for purposes other than research. A change, however, happened in the process of forming these texts based on personal experiences as the personal and creative writing and the more academic and theoretical writing started to merge. I later adopted this practice when forming all the chapters in this body of work.

This chapter is divided into three (I seem to be a great fan of number three) stages of the process that form a (time-bound) linear narrative:

1. Generational legacy (Mummu, Grandma text)
2. Relational reading of textual and visual autobiographies and memoirs (Relational selfhood)
3. Temporary self-determination through the emergence of critical voice and theoretical contextualization (Mother text)

In the first section or stage, the grandma story, I conduct a “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995) in three stages. I (a.) read stories into a photograph I took of my grandmother several years ago with the intention of later (b.) interpreting those stories and (c.) analyzing the “story of the story” (Eakin, 1999, p. 59), the story of writing about the generations of women in the family. This interpretation process has helped to understand other aspects of my study and my motives in conducting them. I came to understand that my physical move from Helsinki to Columbus made me re-define myself in relation to my new environment and question everything I had been before. In the second section I studied the textual and visual autobiographies of authors and artists from various cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. I found validation and inspiration for the autobiographical section of my dissertation research through this practice. Critically reading and theorizing others’ narratives helped me to conceptualize my project both within and outside academic discourse. As I found inspiration and motivation through the study of these stories and I gained trust that my personal story would in the same way validate its existence, by deeply touching the reader and by providing a tool for self-determination for the readers. Through writing the third and last section of this chapter, I found temporary self-determination and a temporary harbor on my journey of travel between Finnishness and strangeness. In this final section, the study of gendered and cultural identity merge in the self-reflexive visual and textual analysis of a key photograph taken of my mother.
While writing this chapter, I was continuously confronted by the ethical dilemma of writing about self in relationship to one’s family. Critically re-evaluating one’s identity within the pre-set limits of family lore, myths, silenced narratives, and accepted modes of narration is not an easy task. Ruth Behar (1995) asks the very sensitive question of “What do you do when your parents are ‘the other’?” (p. 67). I have focused on the legacy of the different generations of women in the family, but I have also found myself re-writing the story of my family (Byng-Hall, 1990).

**Mummu (grandma)**

A family album holds a profusion – a confusion – of pleasures and pains, as pictures old and new offer themselves up with deceptive innocence. Family collections are never just memories. Their disconnected points offer glimpses of many possible pasts, and yet, in our longing for narratives, for a way of telling the past that will make sense in the present we know, we strive to organize these traces, to fill in the gaps. Each viewer makes their own tracks through the album. Each new generation brings new perspectives, new understandings and new forgettings (Holland, 1991, p. 1)

The struggle is now, the past is made in the present. Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them – how we use them – is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, our selves – now. There can be no last word about my photograph, about any photograph (Kuhn, 1995, p. 16).

**Initial Reading**  (February, 2002)

This photograph I took of my grandmother has influenced my writing, or more precisely, my mother’s and sister’s reactions to this image. In the photograph, I have portrayed my mother’s mother wearing a nightgown against a flower-patterned background. On my request she covered her face with a dark wooden mask she holds in her right hand. My mother and sister find the image disturbing, dark and uncomfortable. As I write my dissertation, the women in my family are going through an empowering period in the family history. We seek academic success, achieve our goals, leave our home country, divorce to leave abusive marriages, find new independence and social power, and discover new happiness and pride in who we are. The photograph of my grandmother speaks of the underlying power structures between different generations in my family. It inspires me to write with and for family members adjusting to new and constantly changing life situations.
This is an educational/educator’s story; it is about finding a voice, defining an identity. Although I was hesitant about including the autobiographical aspect of my story to my dissertation, I also knew that I had to do it; I had to write about the hidden and silenced stories of my past and discuss the previously unspeakable to gain my full potential as a scholar and an educator. To trust and respect myself as an educator practicing critical pedagogy, I had to confront the very personal biases shaping my identity and professional practice. As I have written in the previous chapter, I arrived in this country with two suitcases filled with what I needed to start my new life. This photograph of my grandmother was among the items packed tightly in my two bags. It hangs on the wall next to my workstation among photographs of other family members, an ET movie sticker, and a reproduction of a thinking Buddha. I find myself gazing at it every now and then, searching for support and understanding.

Personal Past and Background

Although the focus of my dissertation is the first three years of my life in Columbus, Ohio, I find it important to start from the past and analyze my self-perception in the context of my own family. My research is in part based on the photographic documentation of my life. I come from a visual world: I was raised in an artistically talented family and received my master’s degree at an art-focused university. In my family ideas are shared through images and conversation evoked by images rather than through text or conceptual analysis about the visuals. Text inspires conversation and visual art, and serves its purpose as an intellectual stimulus. Only lately have I found writing to be an important expression for self-reflexivity and therapy. I now write to find my conceptual understanding; I write to analyze my visuality. As children in my family, we were not expected to be good writers or talented in academic subject matters. We participated in sports and performed in the visual arts. Almost everyone in my mother’s family is gifted in the visual arts. Although it was unacceptable to dream about life as an independent artist, the arts were the only channel through which we were expected to find our talent and occupations. We grew to appreciate the arts, but without a clear understanding of how to combine the arts with everyday practice and a future occupation, as well as how to use our artistic talents to perform better in life.
My grandfather was not particularly interested in raising his children. He created the guidelines, but all the everyday matters of child raising were left for my grandmother to manage. Although this gendered division of labor may have been common and typical for the time period, artistic talent created more inequality between them than gender. My grandfather wanted to focus on his main interest in life, art, and his daily work as a classroom teacher for disabled children already took some of this valuable time from his paintings and drawings. The greatest misfortune in his life was, and will always be, that he never had a chance to work as a fulltime artist, to explore his artistic talent with fulltime devotion; financially, the family had to be the priority. This has created a dark shadow around our creative talent and none of us within the next two generations seemed able to solve this dilemma. My grandfather’s tragedy, combined with my grandmother’s Laestadian religious heritage, which I will discuss below, causing her low self-esteem, have been the two dominant dilemmas from the past for me to overcome in order to find my place in academia and in the art world. I have had to understand that despite my grandfather’s misfortune in the past, I am entitled to pursue my own career and that I do not have to carry over into yet another generation low self-esteem. By leaving home I ended the tradition of the oldest daughter staying close to her parents and sacrificing personal goals for the family and marriage. I am the first oldest daughter in four generations who will not be given the final acceptance among the women in the family through founding my own family. I have gained acceptance among the women in the family, at least my mother’s, by strongly following my own goals.

In the image in front of me, I see my maternal grandmother posing against a patterned fabric, which I recognize as my grandparents’ old comforter. Sometimes, on weekends, we – my siblings and I – were allowed to stay overnight at my grandparents’ house. When I was small, or if I was the only grandchild staying there for the night, I was permitted to sleep next to my grandmother. I find the strongest connection to my maternal grandparents through these memories of spending nights with them. Later, when my grandmother taught me how to maintain a household, we established a new, different kind of connection.
One late afternoon, while asking questions about my grandparents’ afterlife beliefs, I was introduced to a collection of mourning poetry, commonly published in obituaries. My grandmother’s religious spinster aunt started this collection. It was continued by my great-grandmother, who added her carefully chosen selections; the rest are my grandmother’s favorites. I treasure this collection because through it I am able to better understand how the women in my family have viewed their lives. While my grandmother’s and her mother’s “favorite” obituary poems reflect deep relationship with and trust in God, mine emphasize individual spirituality. Most of these poems draw metaphors from nature, and most discuss destiny in one form or another. By making me the new guardian of this collection, my grandmother expressed her trust in me as the next guardian of the family lore.

Mistrust of the Children’s Achievements

Some of my maternal ancestors have followed Laestadian religious ideals. This extremely conservative religious lifestyle affects not only one’s worship, but also the way people see themselves. I find a connection between my grandmother’s religious beliefs and the lack of praise and admiration we received as children, and why, being “naturally lazy,” I became ambitious, but an underachiever. As a child, I was characterized as strong-willed, goal-oriented and a leader, but also the child who dominated her younger siblings, causing alterations in their characters. A friend once told me that she has never met a person so desperately in need of acceptance and approval from her mother as I. Although we were the greatest pride and joy in my mother’s life, she found it difficult to express this pride. It has taken generations to truly enjoy the “earthly glory,” the everyday or non-religious achievements, or more precisely, to find words to express this joy without shame related to the pleasure. My mother never achieved the recognition she deserved with her accomplishments and we children were not to be praised either. A person has to try hard and try his/her best, but never to be better than others. High school diplomas, confirmations, graduate degrees, we (the children in the family) were given the party, but also reminded of our downfalls. Whatever goal we reached, there was always something that could be pointed out to lessen our achievement. It may have been a graduation dress, hairstyle, or just general behavior, but there was always something we did wrong. In the middle of my graduation party on receiving a Master’s degree I was told by my grandfather to go back to college and become a teacher, which is a lower degree
than the degree I had already earned. When I proudly announced my acceptance to a Ph.D. program in America, I was quickly advised to start taking English classes so that my assumed poor English would not fail me. If immediate failure was not found in my behavior, then there was always the American educational system that could be criticized for its bad quality, evident because they would let me teach in a state university. This cruel and constant criticism did not rise from malicious wishes and intentions, but from an honest disbelief that I could actually succeed.

Re-negotiating Our Relationship and Becoming an Active Participant in Creating Family History

Even if I had thought, at the moment of building the stage for shooting this series of photographs, that the only reason for choosing this fabric as the backdrop was to add movement and liveliness to the image, the connection to my childhood memories is so strong that, at an unconscious level, I must have found it meaningful. The soundly colored, plant motif fabric adds historical depth to this image by evoking childhood memories. When looking at the image, I tend to relate it more to my childhood and current life than to the year 1996 when the photograph was taken. Still, if I would name a moment in our interaction that changed my relationship to my grandparents, this session would be just that. Since they have not been photographed often, especially together, I believe that, through creating these images, I took partial control over the memories they would leave behind. My family’s past and my grandparents’ personal histories

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became personally significant to me. Instead of listening to these tales as past family life and re-telling these stories myself, these narratives seemed to influence the formation of myself. I had become an active participant in creating a familial past and stories. I just recently realized that all my projects since this photography session in 1996 have involved my grandparents somehow: I interviewed them about experiences of loss and mourning for my senior project, I used their afterlife and graveyard-related stories for my master’s thesis project, and now I am returning to them and our relationship for my dissertation work. I have grown to understand the generational legacy of family lore.

This photograph was originally taken for a project dealing with gender roles, power and class. Back then, none of these issues were really clear to me. I have only recently started to verbalize my visual work; verbalizing was not a highly valued skill at the Finnish art university and most of the professors were mainly interested in the technical aspects of our work. Trained to think and analyze according to modernist ideals, the professors thought the work should speak for itself. My project, however, is influenced by the contemporary inter-disciplinary visual and textual memoirs and “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995) that often intertwine personal and theoretical aspects of researching memory, autobiographical writing, and identity (i.e. Hirsch, 1997; Rugg, 1997). For this project I borrowed a cape from a TV station’s wardrobe and, fascinated by it, I decided to ask people I knew to wear it. I gave them directions and guidelines, but my models mainly chose the poses and created characters for themselves. My grandfather wearing the royal blue cape is absent from this photograph. He also held a mask in his hand, but did not cover his face. I directed them to either cover, partially cover, or not to cover their faces. Even if not aware of it, I obviously played with gender roles and power structures in the family. Influences of several photographers, such as Sally Mann, Walker Evans, and several Finnish photographers can be seen in my themes, attitude, and composition. My grandfather is the artistic maestro in the family, while my grandmother’s role is to perform daily, necessary routines. My grandfather wears the cape, where my grandmother’s conservative nightgown covers her body with a tight bow around her neck.

Later, I photographed my grandmother alone, sitting on a chair. When posing alone, contrary to my assumptions, my grandmother did not appear uncomfortable. Although she is an experienced model for human figures in my grandfather’s drawings and paintings, she has never expressed a desire to pose for a
pen or camera. Quite the opposite, she has *played along or acted?* the mentality of ‘I am not worthy of your time or film’. I recall her usual reluctance to appear in the photographs. She claimed to be old and ugly and asked the person capturing a family event not to waste the film, but to save it for capturing the children who were still beautiful. Her behavior makes her negative self-esteem evident, yet I recognize a change: she sees her grandchildren as beautiful, whereas she was told as a child that she was hopelessly ugly and only God would know what could happen to her.

In analyzing the image of my grandmother today, I discover myself still bothered by its striking power to evoke discomfort. This photograph needs further reading and I need to read it. Her gaze, the maternal omnipotent gaze (Hirsch, 1997) that has so strongly controlled my mother’s life still continues to influence me. Although the gaze my grandmother gives me is friendly and nurturing, it also measures and judges me. The wooden mask’s easy and relaxed glance fools me into looking on the side, giving my grandmother a perfect chance to evaluate my current being, without my being aware of this. I still do not know why I brought the Sri Lankan masks into these photographs, but by offering my subjects the masks, I gave them a chance to either totally or partially cover their faces, and thus appear unrecognizable, or to voluntarily reveal their personalities. Even if not aware of my intentions at the moment of photographing, I was re-negotiating the power structures in the family by giving my subjects partial control over their portraits.

The next section is my fictional letter to my grandmother. I never intended to show it to her *she can’t read English.* It is my way of confronting her; confronting this image about the difficult relationships between mothers and daughters in the family. At the moment of writing this letter, I had begun reading autobiographies that focus on relationships between family members. Carolyn Kay Steedman’s (1987) *Landscape for a Good Woman,* Annette Kuhn’s (1995) *Family Secrets,* and bell hooks’ (1998) article “Writing Autobiography” had especially influenced me, and my intention for writing this letter was to find a voice to state accusations and silenced desires.
Letter to mummu (grandma)

I see you hiding behind the mask. I cannot see your eyes, our eyes don’t meet, but I can feel your gaze. Your increasingly religious attitudes have added judgment to the looks you give me. I wonder whether you are correcting yourself, or me, before the eyes of your God?

Your mother grandma Signe, or grandma Riksu, as she was also called after the city she lived in starts the lineage in my mind. I do not know when, where or who started the custom, but instead of using my grandparents’ first names, we used to separate one grandparent from another by adding the city they lived in front of grandma or grandpa. Is this a Finnish custom? Then it is you, my grandmother, followed by my mother Paula, your daughter, and finally it comes down to me.

Your mother was a character in all meanings of the term. She was determined and persistent so am I, and so is my mother; but also a caretaker so are you, so is your daughter and so am I. These characteristics were built in our identity during early childhood. The identity she built according to expectations set for her as the oldest daughter in the family you are your mother’s only daughter, my mother is your oldest and I am her oldest daughter; the daughter to be trained as a maid. She was never to put herself before the needs of others, but be strong and self-sacrificing. It took you almost seventy years to find a voice for yourself and to ask for attention, didn’t it? Your mother’s consistency and need to control the course of events stretched the common understanding of appropriateness as she even planned her own funeral and burial; as if she could, by doing this, plan her afterlife. Your mother did not give you much space to develop your own personality, did she? I remember her caring in a practical manner, but not emotionally. Did she cherish and admire you? Did she physically or emotionally express love? According to my mother, your daughter, she aimed to treat her grandchildren with all the luxurious dainties she had missed. Did she bring you these sugar treats as well? What was she like as a mother? Would she ever overcome the trauma of war and express the love and attention you lacked as a war child sent alone to Sweden?

You have always been modest. You have put yourself down. We were all artists, except you and some others married into the family. Especially when compared to your husband, you have been the maid. All your children were talented in the arts and you saw this talent in your grandchildren. How did this make you feel? Were you left out or were you actually happy without the tormented gift most of us shared. We never heard stories from the hospital you worked at. Did nothing worth telling ever happen there or did you just not want to share these stories? I remember you baking, cooking, cleaning the house with me, teaching me the necessary skills of good housekeeping, taking us on little trips. You were the first person to give me what I wanted and I felt important, as you trusted me to make good practical decisions in purchasing clothes for school or special events. The way you taught me how to wipe, mop, wax and polish until things shine and appear spotless has given me delight and made me proud.

I hope you know how much you have influenced my life. I wish I had told you how strongly your household ideals shaped how I view and observe other people’s houses, and through this their personalities. The way you taught me how to wipe, mop, wax and polish until things shine and appear spotless has given me delight and made me proud.

I need to think about my mother as your daughter, as I need to think about myself as my parents’ child. My mother’s love towards us children has always been tender and devoted. We grew up knowing that we were always the priority in our mother’s life, but my mother was raised without appraisal, acceptance, closeness, and emotional caring. She grew up observing the praise of her
younger siblings’ special characteristics, herself under a strict control. *You even read her letters, didn’t you?* This led to her loss of identity during puberty and made her feel unworthy. You failed to tell her that she was talented in many ways. She was, like all of you, surprised when she succeeded in school, but as she reached adolescence, she became an underachiever and so did I.

I have always played team sports, but never been a star. I have never been able to see myself in a role of a winner, the leader of the team, but I have been addicted to the feeling of belonging to a team. Through teams I have experienced both functional and dysfunctional families. I knew how to play games to win and belong to a group of the best, but I was never the absolute best and neither I, nor the others, considered me exceptionally smart. I knew I could do some artistic work, but I didn’t think I could write; produce ideas on paper worth reading. My mother was shocked the first time she heard her name among the academic achievers; so was I.

In this project, I tried to approach the photograph from the four different perspectives Annette Kuhn names in *Family Secrets* (1995) for doing memory work: (1) following by the initial description, an adoption of the position of the subject; (2) consideration of the photograph’s original context; (3) discussion about the intended context and the ideological, aesthetic and technical framework; (4) its anticipated audience and reception (p. 7). The one she mentions first, adopting the position of the subject, caused me fear. Taking my grandmother’s perspective concerned me as I felt I was confronting her somehow by doing this. I knew I would break through the public face of the family, reveal unspoken aspects of our family life, become a betrayer, as I did not want to ‘play along’ with the unspoken rules (hooks, 1998; Kuhn, 1995). None of the texts I read, dealing with the ethical issues related to writing one’s family narrative, helped me to justify my project, to ease the discomfort. As I struggled with writing an analysis of this photograph, I read bell hooks’ (1998) article “Writing Autobiography,” hoping to find guidance. Even though hooks describes the writing experience as freeing, she considers the possibility her struggle is caused by her resistance to let the past go, to completely heal from the past events.

The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It was the longing for release that compelled the writing but concurrently it was the joy of reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual part of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present (p. 431).

While I have recently found creative writing therapeutic and reassuring, this project is not yet liberating but needs further analysis. Jo Spence in *Putting Myself in the Picture* (1986) creates alternative ways of viewing herself by re-creating identity in visual representations. She uses these “different ways of ‘seeing’
myself” to re-read herself in the photographs (p. 93). The photographs are either staged by Spence or photographs others have taken of Jo Spence (and her family members) earlier. She organizes these photographs in new combinations, and further analyzes them in combination with critical writing. I needed to read this photograph of my grandmother to learn to better understand myself. Gillis (1996) mentioned how it is typical in current society to find meaning through the past, rather than in relation to a person’s living environment. Although the main indicator for my dissertation is the fragmentation of identity (Smith, 1998) caused by a life-altering cultural change, I had to first locate myself in my lineage of generations of women to understand myself the way I am today, as I distanced myself from my family when I re-created myself in this American culture and society. Writing my story will change me, and it already has. I will never again be the same person I was when I started.

Second Reading  (several weeks later, spring 2002)

Although we take stories of childhood and family literally, I think our recourse to this past is a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present (Kuhn, 1995, p. 1).

I have been able to take distance from this image and its analysis and suddenly the process seems clearer to me: From this image, I search to explain my current feelings toward my family. I confront the image to find reasons to the feelings I have toward my family.

Photography, revealing the family’s unconscious optics, provides a medium for the exchange of the family’s fantasies, and for the intersection of its looks, for the ambivalent processes of loss and mourning that structure family life. As such, it can offer both parent and child ways to acknowledge, to themselves and each other some of their respective wishes, fears, and anxieties, even as it attempts to contain them within its frames (Hirsch, 1997, p. 177).

Differently from Annette Kuhn’s (1995) story in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* I have always, even though I am thirsty to hear the tales, questioned family stories. Family stories evoked by memories or photographs made me feel that I belong to a continuously changing group of people. They made me search for similarities in appearances, but they also made me question each person's roles within these stories. My grandmother, for example, always told me that as a child, I was constantly mean to my sister and blamed me for the possible traumas my behavior may have caused her. Although I used to find it fascinating to think that people can be described by few characteristics that give them their special role in
the family, I wanted to question these given and practiced roles, especially since I did not want to carry mine. Paul John Eakin (1999) argues that an individual’s interactive relations to other people (especially family) and living environment are the key components to understanding an individual. I did not want to carry the role created for me within the family structure, instead I wanted to “shoot back” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 282, notes, nr. 6), to become a subject who, with words and by re-reading these images, changes the familial system that has formed her as an object and who takes over the power of shaping her identity. I break, fragment, rupture and contest the family lore and through this practice cause personal, and hopefully collective, change in attitudes and behavior. I find myself “resisting the image”; my acts of “reading, re-reading, and misreading thus become forms of active intervention” (p. 215) and every reading births a new me. By contesting the image, I contest the “familial gaze” (p. 193) that has shaped the ways I view myself.

I divide my “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995) of this photograph into three different stages: reading stories into the photograph of my grandmother, interpreting those stories, and analyzing "the story of the story" (Eakin, 1999, p. 59). The first two happened in part simultaneously. As I analyzed the past, I approached it from both a scholarly and a personal perspective. I wanted to protect my family’s past by explaining people's behavior with social issues, but I also attacked these past relations, seeking confrontation – even if only in my imagination. As Kuhn (1995) writes, memory work happens both in the past and in the present. The work is "never ending, not revealing the ultimate truth, but greater knowledge" and "new understanding of both past and present" (p. 8). I have come to a different conclusion with this image. This may not be my last interpretation of the image, but it helps me to understand my current projects and motives in conducting them. I have come to understand that my physical move from Helsinki to Columbus made me re-define myself in relation to my new environment and question everything I had been before. Sidonie Smith (1998) writes in her essay "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance": “The very sense of self as identity derives paradoxically from the loss to consciousness of fragments of experiential history” (p.108). I lost who I had been before, but the loss of the "learned" helped me to start interpreting these fragments. Even though the process of reconstructing my identity most evidently parallels the physical move, the "awakening of questioning life and world around" me had happened earlier. The radical changes in my life pushed me to find "a voice for this questioning" (Kuhn,
1995, pp. 102-103). I find aspects of feminist resistance in my behavior; I am searching for language and knowledge that will help me to question the limitation of fully developing and exploring female identity. I am searching for language and space within academic limitations that would allow me to tell an immigration, a woman’s and an educator’s stories about “the complicated and painful process of identity” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 215).

I would like to argue against my previous comment about the process not yet becoming liberating. In response to wondering why I so often unconsciously blame my family for abandoning me (even though it was I who moved), my friend said after reading my personal stories that at some level my family had already left me (stories included and the topic discussed in Chapter 3). She analyzed my move, the distance I wanted to take, as a reaction to what had happened earlier. I believe that I moved because I did not like what I saw for my future in Finland. I knew that if I had stayed, I would not have the tools to break my role in the family and become what I wanted to be. I needed more space to become adult, partially free from the learned behavior models inherited as a generational legacy, re-negotiated but still reenacted within my immediate family. During my first months in Columbus I was incognito, free to re-create myself and shape this new person's future. It was a scary and incredibly freeing experience, but soon I started shifting back to my previous model of acting. Still, it has never been the same. As Kuhn (1995) says of her personal experience: "there is no end to critical consciousness, to the hunger to learn and understand" once this critical consciousness has been awakened (p. 103).

The process has become therapeutic. The photograph of my grandmother will still talk to me from the wall, but I have broken my grandmother's gaze by analyzing the reasons my mother and sister might find this image disturbing. I believe that for them it represents the repression we feel as women in my family. It also talks about the limits our close and caring family has built to separate each family member's individuality from others by categorizing us all according to simplistic stereotypes. Each one of us plays a role in the family drama and the roles are hardly ever modified.

The process has also become therapeutic because I have realized that by making my stories public through my narrative, I finish my mother's work of investigating family structures. As Sheila Ortiz Taylor describes her role in the verbal and visual autobiography Imaginary Parents constructed by Sheila and
Sandra Ortiz Taylor (1996), my mother has performed the role of a detective. She has returned to the “scene of the crime, [to] search for weapons, motives, [and] opportunities” (Ortiz Taylor, 1996, foreword, p. xiii) and I have followed her. This my mother has done by studying the family dynamics and early childhood education. In a continuous “court” of raising her children, my mother has doubled her role as a lawyer, a metaphor also used by Sheila Ortiz Taylor (1996), fighting to win a case against the traditions she grew up with by changing the ways her children view the family and the world around them. I cannot name my own role yet, but I know that I am building an altar, or an ofrenda, the Spanish word Ortiz Taylors used for their version of an altar. Their text, an ofrenda is “an offering, tribute, and memorial to the family’s history” (Adams, 2000, p. 62). Mine, by contrast is an offering to the family in showing them how I have changed through questioning the family tale. If reading my story in relation to their own lives, they can find ways to change their lives to better serve them as well.

Third Reading (some days later)

Now that I look at my grandmother’s photograph again, a few questions arise: Why the burgundy color and why is this photograph of my maternal grandmother hanging in a golden frame in my workspace? My paternal grandparents died last year. A photograph of my father’s father is framed and located next to a portrait of my brother and his children. This seems logical since my brother (and my father) carries my grandfather’s middle name, as does my brother’s son. A clock my maternal grandfather painted and decorated for me stands next to these photo frames, as does a painting my nephew gave me. A small, freestanding Chinese calendar, presenting fancy sports cars, crowns this very manly corner, making it my unconscious and humorous altar of masculine family memories. It is less humorous, however, to realize that even though I have located myself among these otherwise manly memorabilia, I am represented through a painting my grandfather made that depicts a blonde, seemingly Scandinavian, young woman (girl) whose features only remotely mimic mine.

My father’s mother is missing in the room. At first glance I thought that she is the only one not displayed, but now that I return to my maternal grandmother’s portrait, I realize that elements of my paternal grandmother are there. When she died, I could not fly to her funeral. Mourning was difficult apart from my family and in separation from the cultural mourning traditions. I bought a plant that reminded me
of her to help me mourn. The only item I wanted from the house after her death was a glass ball that had a photograph of my paternal great-grandmother mounted in it. My grandmother’s death caused arguments in the family. I still do not know who has the object I desired, but the color of the glass ball is very similar to the overall color of the photograph I took of my maternal grandmother. In a way they are both present in this photograph. I feel that I knew my paternal grandmother very little, but I was always told that I inherited dimensions of my personality from her.

A very similar photographing session, to the one I conducted with my maternal grandparents in 1996 occurred when I was about ten. All of us children were photographed individually and together in my grandfather’s studio in their basement. The location is almost identical and the structure of my setting imitates the one that appeared over ten years earlier. All four of us (my three siblings and me) look uncomfortable and only my brother has been able to squeeze out a natural-looking smile. Not realizing the similarities between these two sessions I rebuilt the set, only to photograph my grandparents instead of us grandchildren. Marianne Hirsch (1997) writes how Eugene Meatyard’s mask photographs “document the limitations of the family photography, that which it cannot record or tell” (p. 100). I read the same intentions to the photograph I took of grandmother; I re-lived and re-constructed what had happened a decade ago and aimed to show what was previously left out. Our family has never displayed “official” portraits around the house, including wedding photographs—especially my mother has always ridiculed that kind of photographs. Instead these posed photographs were taken as a raw material for the portraits my grandfather would paint of each one of us. These paintings would then be displayed in the family’s domestic spaces. The photographs were not taken for the children, but for the families. While it was my mother who dressed us in similar clothes she had sewn for these occasions, it was for the other members of our extended family that we were really dressed up. We were posed according to adult views on how children should be posed, not for ourselves. This may also explain why none of us particularly likes the portrait made of him or her.

The inability to relate to one’s portrait is first caused by the adult setting and the photograph, often taken by my mother, and then my grandfather’s artistic view and analysis of each one of our personalities. By photographing my grandparents, I subject them to the same kind of posing we had to do as children, but
I also include them in this session from which they were previously excluded. In her analysis of Meatyard’s mask series, Marianne Hirsch suggests that “when we are photographed in the context of the conventions of family-snapshot photography, Meatyard’s pictures suggest, we wear masks, fabricate ourselves according to certain expectations and are fabricated by them” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 98). The group photographs taken of us as children and the memories based on these images taught us to believe in our personalities as we learned them. We learned to believe in the myths of the special characteristics of each one of our personalities. By photographing my grandmother, I gave her permission to pose freely at least partially from the myths she had grown to believe in. Through the analysis of her photograph, I aim to break the blocks and boundaries that others and I have built for my personal growth and development. Still, I must admit, I am not able to answer Eugene Meatyard’s question: “Am I looking at the mask or am I the mask being looked at?” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 99).

**Relational Reading of Autobiographies and Memoirs**

The following section of the chapter is an examination of autoethnographic memoirs that combine writing and photography, and a study of how both the memoirs themselves and critical scholarship theorize the focus, terms, and limits of “relational” representation. In this section I discuss different autobiographical novels and essay collections written in Western cultures. All these narratives combine text and visual materials, mainly photography. I use Paul John Eakin’s (1999) essay “Relational Selves, Relational Lives: Autobiography and the Myth of Autonomy,” as a critical tool in my analysis. I will both examine and support Eakin’s terms “relational lives” and “relational selves,” using theoretical texts by Annette Kuhn, Joan Scott, Sidonie Smith, Smith and Julia Watson, and Susan Stanford Friedman. Central to my analysis is the understanding of self as an ideological construct in relation to other people and one’s living environment in these autobiographies. I focus my attention on two things: the role of the author and the understanding of identity in these written and photographed narratives; and the self in relationship to family, society, and the multiple existing, adapted, actively used and/or relational selves. Also, my interest lies in analyzing the interaction and different roles of visual and verbal texts in these narratives.

Through the study of others’ autobiographical texts, I found validation for my own research project. By being deeply moved and partially changed by these texts, I gained faith in the power to cause
change through relating to someone else’s personal story. These texts provided me multiple chances for self-determination and, through the story of the other, guided me to further question my identity as a woman and the complex ways in which identity is constructed in a larger social and cultural framework.

Relational Selves, Relational Autobiographies

Paul John Eakin’s (1999) main argument in his essay “Relational Selves, Relational Lives” is that “all identity is relational” (p. 43). The relationality of all identities, then, leads to theorizing all autobiographies as relational. This essay is significant for understanding and questioning identity because it draws its ideas from the two counter-readings of autobiographies, individualized male author and the relational female, whose identity is constructed in an interaction with others, and combines these two models for reading all life narratives as relational. Eakin claims that all identity is plural and should be understood in relation to an other or others, and that all autobiographies, not just women’s, should be read in relationship to significant “otherness.” His argument has been a somewhat difficult for scholars other than feminists to accept. Learning to understand one’s self is a culturally formed and informed process (i.e. Eakin, 1999; Friedman, 1988; Smith, 1995).

Georges Gusdorf’s theoretical essays about autobiography and selfhood have often been, according to Susan Stanford Friedman (1988), brought to focus when discussing and theorizing self. Gusdorf states that in the post-Renaissance Western civilized societies, “conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life” (p. 72) is seen as a requirement for autobiographical narration; without this historical process of individuality, autobiography would not exist. Several feminist theorists during the last three decades have criticized this Gusdorffian model of understanding selfhood as individualistic. These feminists’ work has led to several alternative models for studying the formation of women’s identity and expression of self as they apply to women’s autobiographical writing. The criticism for the idea of an individualistic male self and its heroic and linear autobiographical narration has given rise to understanding female identity as collective, relational, non-linear, discontinuous and non-teleological in some theories of women’s autobiography. Susan Stanford Friedman’s (1988) main argument in her article “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice” is formed against Georges Gusdorf’s well-known definition of an autobiographical act of writing. Gusdorf states that autobiography would not exist in a culture in
which people live collectively with each other and form identities only in relationship to one another, rather than as isolated beings or in opposition to other community members. Susan Stanford Friedman’s essay opposes this Gusdorfian model. For Friedman (1988) “women’s autobiography comes alive as a literary tradition of self-creation when we approach its text from psycho-political perspective based in the lives of women” (p. 79). According to Friedman, the collective consciousness of self, the significance of “interpersonal relationships and community in women’s self-definition” (p. 79), and the mother/daughter relationship in women’s autobiography are the key elements in researching how women have established themselves in their autobiographical texts. This is because, according to Friedman (1988), women do not form their identities as separate and isolated from others, but in a relationship to a maternal other, to a shared sense of womanhood, and the identity of woman formed in communal relationships.

Eakin has recognized the significant work of feminist critics and states that:

The critique of the Gusdorf’s model of selfhood and the positing of a female alternative paved the way for the serious and sustained study of women’s autobiography – the single most important achievement of autobiography studies in the last decade. (p.48)

However, Eakin criticizes the polarization of two separate genders, male and female, that has occurred as a result of defining women’s experience of selfhood differently from the male model. But Eakin fails to recognize the similarities found in the texts of different marginalized groups, including women and other minorities in Western societies. This recognition, I believe, is significant, as it would shift the perspective from a binary description of psychological and cultural development of identity between men and women to one that discusses the issues of power and oppression in modern Western societies. Chapter 3 of this dissertation focuses on the issues of cultural identity formed “in-between” and in the “interstices” of culture (Bhabha, 1994). This understanding of identity construction assumes a relational reading of national, communal, and personal narrative. Nevertheless, Eakin’s groundbreaking request to reconsider and understand the masculine identity – and all identities – as relational validates the use of the categories of the different relational models he has defined for the relational autobiographical narration; the social environment and the key other individual (p. 68). He asks us to “recognize and research both the autonomous [Gusdorfian model] and the relational dimensions [relational identity in feminist theories] of men’s and women’s lives without placing them in opposition” (p. 52).
Eakin uses relationality “to describe the story of a relational model of identity, developed collaboratively with others, often family members” (p. 57). Even though the focus of life stories Eakin uses is not on an individual life, he challenges previous readings of these texts based on the argument that all human life is fundamentally relational. To clarify relationality in narrative texts, Eakin uses Carolyn Kay Steedman’s book *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (1986) as an example. According to Eakin “Landscape for a Good Woman” is neither autobiographical nor biographical, but combines both of these genres and thus can be read as relational autobiography. Steedman’s mother’s personality, and her desires and relationship to her daughters have profoundly affected the formation of Steedman’s personality. In fact the process of writing her mother’s narrative made Steedman question her own individuality in her relationship to her mother. Instead of viewing herself as a person born of her mother, she saw herself as an episode in her mother’s life “brought into being for particular purposes” (Freedman, 1986, p. 122). According to Eakin’s relational reading of both of their stories, Steedman was not born as an individual but to be part of and continue her mother’s tale; even before she was born her life-narrative was influenced by the legacy of her mother’s life. Thus her life cannot be separated from her mother’s but must be read in relation to it.

**Three Components of a Relational Narrative**

Three important aspects or components of a narrative form a relational autobiography: (1) the autobiographical aspect, the narrative of the author; (2) the biographical story of the “other”; and (3) the story of the story. It is often difficult to separate these aspects of the narrative from one another. Sometimes a biography is told from a third-person perspective, and other times from the first as if, at least partially, narrated by the subject of the biography. A good example of this would be Art Spiegelman’s (1986 & 1991) *Maus*. Art Spiegelman, the son of Vladek, tells all three stories: Vladek’s survival story from Auschwitz, the biography, from his own (the son’s) perspective; Art’s autobiographical story as it follows; the story of the story, the development of Art’s and Vladek’s relationship. Yet the narrative perspective constantly shifts, appearing as though Vladek himself would have told his story as autobiography.
The story of the story is fundamental in understanding Eakin’s concept of relationality. It constructs the written narrative; it is about the birth of the story and about the complicated relationship between the narrator and the “other.” Through the story of the story we come to understand how and under what circumstances the narrative is composed. According to Eakin, this story of the story tells “us something fundamental about the relational structure of the autobiographer’s identity” (p. 60). It reveals the complex nature of constant self-reflective practices between self and the other. The story of the story is often similar to ethnographers’ “personal” accounts about the process of their research; about the difficulties experienced while on the location of the study, or about the relationships these ethnographers established with their subjects of study. However, in relational autobiographies, the story of the story is foundational to the narrative told, giving the story its structure (Eakin, 1999). In relational autobiographies the story of self is as important as the story of the other. This dynamic relationship is reflected in the story of the story, which is the narration of developing the co-operation, performances and relationship between the self-reflective narrator and the “other.” This relationship and the creation of the “other’s” story provide the narrator “a measure of self-determination” (p. 61) and a possibility of re-reading the constructed self. The self narrates the story of the other, thus creating this other as an inseparable co-subject of the narrative. Again, Spiegelman’s *Maus* provides a good example of the struggles one may experience. His complicated relationship with his father often leads to interruptions in communication. Even though it first appears that the main story is Vladek’s, Eakin (1999), among some others, has argued that the *Maus* is ultimately also about Art and thus autobiographical. I would argue that the relationship between Art and Vladek, the story of the story, forms the basis for both of these co-existing personal narratives that would not exist without this complex father-son relationship.

Since the relationship to this significant other recorded by the narrator is the key to understanding the narrating self, it is in this story of the other and the story of the story that self-determination can be found. This is because, in reflection to this “other” and in the relationship between the two, identity becomes re-evaluated and re-constructed. Again, I see this as similar to Bhabha’s (1994) analysis of *Beloved* and the ‘feminine’ communal identity formed in the “in-between” space (p. 17, discussed in Chapter 3). The possibility of self-determination through telling the other’s story leads Eakin to John
Shotter’s theoretical work and the birth and construction of the “I.” Shotter, among many others, questions individuality as a closed system. Different from Foucault and Althusser’s abstract models of social interaction among institutions, the individual and the state, Shotter argues, “one ontologically learns how to be this or that kind of a person” (Shotter, p. 138) “in conversation with others” (Eakin, p. 63). According to Shotter, social reality has already been created for us and we understand ourselves as individuals as a response to the social accountability. Eakin refers to Ian Burkitt’s understanding of the dialogic nature of the formation of identity. According to Burkitt’s analysis, personality is “not a product of social discourse, but is a self-created aspect of concrete social dialogue” (Eakin, 1999, p. 65, using Ian Burkitt, 1991, *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*). He names language, family, and cultural storytelling tradition/practices as important components in forming one’s identity. Against social constructivist models about the social institutions’ influence on the formation of identity espoused by Foucault and Derrida, Burkitt sees humans as “embodied social beings” (Eakin, 1999, p. 64) and the understanding of the self and the world as “grounded in the experience of the body” (p. 64).

Eakin also argues that the “very act of writing a life story promotes a sense of self-determination not only in autobiographers but also in their readers” (p. 61). This, I believe, means that self-determination can be found countless times in the life narratives we read, rather than only when we perform them. I use family photographs, photographs I have taken to document my life, and my texts as tools for self-determination. These documents make possible constant self-reflexive study of the constructed self. The relational other in my texts and images varies, however, as I always analyze myself in relation to some “other,” such as my new living environment or personal past in relationship to generations of women in the family. Further, I hope to provide others a possibility to find temporary self-determination through the relational reading of my narrative.

Identity formation, as theorized by social constructivists like Shotter, is a process of created social accountability. To agree with Shotter, it is necessary also to agree on the plural subjectivity of a self and to see the self as dynamic and always changing (Eakin, 1999, p. 98). It is significant to address and discuss certain aspects of subjectivity and the performative nature of an autobiographical subject that make possible the process of reading autobiographies as relational. In her article “Performativity,
Autobiographical Practice, Resistance” Sidonie Smith (1998) discusses self as a performative subject. According to Smith there is no individual, single self or coherent selfhood; rather, selfhood is temporarily found through performative acts of the narration of self. Different stages of performance are multiple, causing the self to be always fragmentary and making coherence impossible. Through autobiographical acts, a moment of coherence and authority to narrate one’s life is temporarily found; these “moments signal the making and unmaking of identities” (p. 114).

The Relational Others in Eakin’s Relational Autobiography

Eakin names the family as the most significant environment in an individual’s formation of personhood. Families serve as the community’s most important agent for the transmission of its cultural values (p. 85). Families are important in both of the main categories Eakin names for reading relational autobiographies; (1) the social environment, and (2) the key other individual (p. 68). By the entire social environment, Eakin means a particular kind of family or a community and its social institutions. When an environment functions as the significant other in the formation of self, the importance of family and the physical and cultural community is not excluded, but the key in understanding the narrator’s personhood is embedded in his/her relationship to the environment. On the other hand, when the self’s story is viewed through its relation to a key other person, issues raised by the environment such as gender, ethnicity, language, class, and learned ideals of the community are inevitably important. The key person’s story can be written as an autobiographical account or as a biography. This key person is often a family member, such as a parent. In these relational autobiographies the parent or sibling can be either absent or present; the interest may be in the family narrative, in its secrets, history, relationships, power relations, social class or perhaps a special trauma like sickness or survival that defines this special relationship.

3 Personally, I would consider a person’s physical or mental illness as a separate category since I would not describe these stories as relational to either the key other or environment. In this case, although a significant relationship to another person may exist, the personal illness is more dominant in the reconstruction process of the author’s identity. To me these are narrated most strongly through social and mental conditions.

**Memory**

We need to be able to return to past events to write an autobiographical narrative. The past can never be recalled as it was experienced at that time; rather the reinterpretation is inevitable because remembering is an ever-changing process tied closely to and interpreted from our current lives and perspectives. Different incitements, both public and private, are used to evoke remembering, and the memory itself is tied into our historical and cultural (political) context, to our life situations, and to the materialization of our memories. Annette Kuhn’s (1995) book *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* offers an interesting example on how the reformation of a personal past is constructed through private and public references.

Kuhn begins the book by describing the relationship of the past and the present and the role of remembering in understanding the present. The prime objective of her book is the disentanglement of “the connections between memory, its traces, and the stories we tell about the [our] past” (p. 3). According to Kuhn, experiences can never be relived as they happened to us in the past (p. 4). Instead, the value of remembering can be found in the present: “Although we take stories of childhood and family literally, I think our recourse to this past is a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present” (p. 1). I have used this method to access the stories that have continued to affect, although suppressed and silenced, my decision making and relationships to other people. Kuhn continues: “Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of ourselves. To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account—whether forgotten or repressed—as by what is actually told” (p. 2). With this argument Kuhn draws the politics of remembering into discussion. Remembering is always contextual, supported or suppressed by public institutions and the family. As an aid to recalling memories, Kuhn introduces a systematic model she calls memory work. She uses private and public images as her
starting point, but the public and private, the personal and collective, always intervene on different levels.

To read an image one needs to be aware of the political agendas involved, the demographics of the society, and the politics of photography.

Kuhn’s memory work “is a method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories…memory work can create new understanding of both past and present” (p. 8). “Memory work presents new possibilities for enriching our understanding not only of how films work as texts, but also of how we use films and other images and representations to make ourselves, how we construct our own histories through memory, even how we position ourselves within wider, more public, histories” (p. 39).

Performing memory work involves three stages: awakening the questioning of life and world around a person (critical consciousness); finding a voice for the questioning; and endless learning and understanding when this critical consciousness has been awakened (pp. 102-103). Since memory for Kuhn is fragmentary and non-linear, reading and interpreting past experiences takes place “for, as much as in, the present” (p. 108). This allows changes in perspective and endless re-reading of past fragmentary experiences. Kuhn calls this memory work never-ending, not in that it reveals the ultimate truth, but that it leads to greater knowledge (pp. 5 & 108).

Experience

Experience is often understood as belonging to the individual. Joan W. Scott (1992) calls for the re-evaluation of this idea of individuality in her essay “Experience” and states that the assumed individuality of experience is the cause of our failure to recognize that meaningful experiences are social productions. According to Scott, subjectivity is constructed through the process of experience. Interpreting Scott’s argument, Smith and Watson state that “experience, then, is the very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject, owning certain identities in the social realm, identities constituted through material, cultural, economic, and interpsychic relations” (p. 25). It is this constituted subject adopting provisional identities that experiences, not the individual. Experience, for which one must claim authority, needs to be understood here as discursive, embedded in cultural knowledge and in language. It is also, like memory, a result of interpretative behavior.
Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced (Scott, 1992, p. 27).

**Identity**

To understand the notion of a relational self, identity has to be seen as subject positioning. These subjects are plural and the categories for the subjects defined through differences (otherness) and similarities. “Because of this constant placement and displacement of “who” we are, we can think of identities as multiple and as “contextual, contested, and contingent” (Smith & Watson, 2002, quoting Scott, 1993). Like experience, identities are constructed in different discourses through language. Language, in my opinion, should here be understood as not limited to logical and linguistic thinking. Using texts by Stuart Hall and M. M. Bakhtin, the authors argue that the identity is an always-incomplete process constituted within representation (Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, 1994) and through the discourses surrounding a person, one will come to understand which identities they are expected to adopt and who one is in relation to those identities (Smith & Watson, 2002).

**Embodiment**

Embodiment should be understood in the same theoretical framework as the three previous components. One may easily disregard the importance of the body in the process of self-identification and analysis of a person’s past, yet the “body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied” Smith & Watson, 2002, p. 37). “The ability to recover memories, in fact, depends upon the material body” and its functions because “there must be a body that perceives and internalizes the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world” (Smith & Watson, 2002, p. 37).

**Agency**

People tell stories about their lives in their political and cultural living environment. Their stories are situated in a historical time, discussed through available cultural scripts and language, performed through multiple and staged identities, experienced in and through their bodies. To be able to tell these stories, the narrator has to claim an agency, or a right for authorship, which requires that a temporary self-determination be experienced. To discuss how people gain agency in their narratives and perform multiple
adopted identities that use cultural scripts, Smith and Watson outline several different theories of agency. The critical framework for agency is complex, and in their text discussed through “ideologies; transverse tactics and modes of disuse; the flexible network language; the navigation of imagined communities; performativity; psychic disidentification; the games of culture” (p. 45). Discussing agency is probably best done through empowering narratives that change the power structures in the context of the narrative. The best example of this would be post-colonial narratives. For these narratives to be born, a language of representation has to be found first. This quite often has to be done by partially adapting the language of the dominating culture. Even though this may seem like a compromise with the dominant culture and its representational models (thus continuing the oppression), it also leads us to a unique and interesting genre that both performs and criticizes autobiography in the same text (Smith & Watson, pp. 42-45).

**Relational Reading of Memoirs**

In the following section of this chapter I discuss several different kinds of life narratives through relational reading. Interestingly, I chose mostly women’s works, many of which are from minority ethnic groups. I cannot say if women from minority groups simply write more interesting autobiographies, if they write in a way that appeals to me, or if their common struggle to be heard and to find a personal voice to tell their stories is something I can easily relate to. It may be because of my own project of investigating generations of women in my family that I was drawn to women’s autobiographical narratives.

First I will turn to Leslie Marmon Silko’s (1981) *Storyteller*, which may be the most controversial of the texts included here in that the author herself has never agreed on this relational interpretation. Part of me feels that I am violating her stories by even trying to analyze them from an outsider’s perspective, yet the narratives in Silko’s book appealed to me so strongly that I wanted to include them. The narrative is constructed of 26 photographs and 67 written pieces in the form of poems, short stories or prose. The text varies in representation appearing sometimes freely constructed, and sometimes formally formatted in two columns. Although these stories seem autobiographical, it is unclear whose narratives they really are. This, I believe, is the essence of Silko’s narration. The ownership boundaries of a personal experience lose their significance as she tells the story of her own, of her family’s and of all Laguna and Native American people. This is a relational account of the Laguna history; the author of the text is Silko, but the traditional
narrative informs and constructs her understanding of peoplehood and self. In the narrative, she exists within the Laguna culture and through its traditions, not as an individual apart from her environment. My intention is not to claim that Silko does not have a normal sense of selfhood as she crosses time periods and adapts multiple personalities in her narration, but that the form of selfhood tied to individuality is not significant in the Laguna culture, or at least to Silko. Her focus is on keeping the oral storytelling tradition and the Laguna worldview alive in her text. Her relationship to the Laguna culture is what has most significantly shaped her personality. At the first glance, *Storyteller* did not evoke my visual interest, however this book drew me into its storytelling power, which then directed my attention to minor, unusual visual details, like the form of the book or the brownish-red color of the cover. It is a mysterious and fascinating book, even though some of the wisdom in the traditional Laguna Pueblo’s, Native American narratives, interpreted and translated by Silko, will never be fully available to my understanding.

Art Spiegelman’s (1981 & 1991) *Maus* and Sheila and Sandra Ortiz Taylor’s (1996) *Imaginary Parents* are the most visual of my chosen autobiographies. In both of these, the narrator’s personal stories are written in relation to their parents. Sandra and Sheila Ortiz Taylor composed their autobiography *Imaginary Parents* in collaboration. Sheila wrote most of the text and Sandra created the images, although their roles were flexible. Sheila writes in the foreword: “much of my writing was inspired by our conversations and mutual re-collection as we cooked together or dreamed our way through boxes of family photographs” (Foreword, p. xiv). Sandra’s main methods of storytelling are the colorful box-like installations she creates. She combines text, found objects and visuals in these three dimensional, small size installations through which she tells her narrative. The outside and the inner space of her pieces create an interesting interactive relationship. Sandra describes them “as books; that is, the outside is the cover that sets the mood for the interior action” (p. xvi). She has also written the Art Notes as her forewords to the book and the text in the List of Illustrations. In these texts, Sandra both explains these pieces and returns to moments in the past as she remembers them.

Their identities and those of their family members are questioned in their narrative, and the self is multiple and in flux, serving different purposes. Whereas Sandra’s work starts from re-collecting memories and forming narratives from found objects, Sheila portrays herself through multiple roles. First she
describes the book as made of bones and sees herself as the Bone Woman, La Huesera, who crouches “over the bones of the dead coyote” (p. xiii). On the other hand, she is the rebel coyote itself who crosses the boundaries, “the ambitious zones of time, gender, and race” (p. xiv). She identifies herself as a lawyer, like her father, investigating and collecting evidence, as well as patient, experienced, and systematical diver who is “committed in finding the drowned ones as if they were her own parents” (p. xiv). I believe that Sheila’s description of these adopted identifications suggests that her identity is not tied to a time period, but that she analyses her current personality simultaneously in the past and in the present. They have both adopted a childhood perspective for their storytelling. This is a story about their childhood, analyzing the adults they have become. Their relationality to their parents’ lived lives and personalities is clear. Sandra states her motives in creating these pieces in the “Art Notes:”

My motivation partially comes from a need to try to understand my parents and our lives together and how that past continues to influence the present tense of both my sister and myself.

Similarly, Sheila explains:

Our common vision of our parents as handsome, intriguing, perhaps unknowable people whose love affair with each other and with the strange southern California culture of the war years shaped them and us in ways we wanted to explore, critique, and celebrate with each other and with you (p. xiv).

These quotes are significant in understanding this memoir. The sisters affirm the relationality of their lives and state their motives. Yet the story, especially Sheila’s, does not suggest or offer closure, but remains open for further interpretations by themselves and by the reader. She is the Bone Woman organizing and arranging the bones of the coyotes, her parents and their extended family, and she is also a coyote herself, re-evaluating gender, ethnicity, nationality sexuality and identity roles. Their parents were the makers of their own lives. They came from poor families, but somehow managed to live the “American Dream” in Hollywood. Sandra sees the connection to their own lives and to their artworks in this reinvention: “It was as if they invented themselves. It is no wonder that we are participants in their myth. Through our art forms, we are now their shadow masters” (p. xv). This is similar to Steedman’s proposal that children are always chapters in their parents’ lives. I believe that the Ortiz Taylors recognize this, not only as their
parents’ fundamental influence in the formation of their own identities, but also as they honor their parents’ personalities in the narrative they tell. They are the shadow masters, not the reinventors of their parents’ lives.

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus I* (1986) and *Maus II* (1991) largely involve Art’s complicated relationship with his father, Vladek Spiegelman. It is useful to compare *Maus* to the *Duke of Deception* by Geoffrey Wolff (1979) because both are written about father-son relationships. In the *Duke of Deception*, reality is questioned through Wolff’s father’s perception and through the culturally built norms that he has torn down as he frequently re-constructed his identity to meet each life situation. In Wolff’s book, identity is an ideal open for endless negotiation between an individual and his/her counter-partners. In Spiegelman’s story, reality is constructed in the relationship between the father and the son, and later in writing this story. In Spiegelman’s narration of his father’s survival story, reality is negotiated in the father-son relationship, since truthful documents or parallel narratives do not exist. In order to form his family’s story and the story of his own life, Art is dependent on his father’s storytelling. I agree with Eakin that this narrative needs to be read in three layers: as Vladek’s biography, as Art’s autobiography and as the story of the story – the story of Vladek and Art’s relationship.

**Jo Spence – Multiple Relationalities and Photo Therapy**

Relationality in Jo Spence’s autobiographical book *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (1988) is truly intriguing. There is always the significant other that Spence uses as a surface of criticism and platform for reconstructing her selfhood. However, my interpretation is that this “other” changes over time and there is ultimately only one significant otherness that follows her throughout her life: the photographs she produces individually and in collaboration with others. Spence’s earlier work focuses on negotiating her relationship to her nuclear childhood family, especially to her mother. As political awareness grows, she focuses on her identity on a larger scale of politics, womanhood, and class. Even though the book has been arranged chronologically, different aspects of her life have been discussed in separate chapters. The political, the autobiographical, and the personal intertwine throughout the narrative. Spence herself refers to photography as the most significant other
several times in her writing. Later, as illness dominates her life during her period of hospitalization she writes:

I began to try to represent to myself what was happening to me by using my camera. But how to represent myself to myself, through my own visual point of view, and how to find out what I needed to articulate it and make sure I got it – ultimately wanting to make this visible to others? How to deal with my feelings about myself and give them visual form? (p. 155)

Through the analysis of her own visual work Spence becomes aware of the gaps in family albums and oral narratives about the physical and mental histories of her relatives. She realizes how the visual representations of the family’s story have been very shallow, focusing on staged documentation of happy events. Spence constantly finds herself questioning all the aspects of her life through the visually constructed representations of herself. This shallowness of visual representations about the family is equally important to Annette Kuhn (1995) in *Family Secrets*, and both of these authors point to the gaps in representation, the hidden aspect of life not evident through the official and public narrations of the family.

Photo therapy, as it was created and formed by Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, supports my argument that photographic images are the main relational other in Spence’s life and text. To Spence, photo therapy is a way of healing through the production and analytical reading of photographs about one’s adopted selfhood. The main focal point of Spence’s therapeutic work with Rosy Martin was to heal from a “mind/body split” (p. 156) Spence describes her sessions with Rosy Martin:

It had become clear that in documenting my physical progress, I had entirely left aside my powerlessness as a patient, my relationship to doctors and nurses, my infantilization whilst being managed and ‘processed’ within state institution, and my memories of my parents. Later the work moved towards body image, emotional eating and the way parental control worked through diet and feeding patterns. This led to a visual exploration of the mother and daughter relationship, as a result of which my mother ceased to be the monolith of my imagination and began to exist on many different visual planes, each linked to my memories of her at different periods in her life. The ability to have a dialogue with my imaginary mother (now dead) encouraged me to ‘parent’ myself better. (p. 156)

Her relationship to her working class mother is similar to the relationships between Annette Kuhn (1995) and her mother, as well as Carolyn Key Steedman’s (1987) to her mother. These daughter-mother relationships are all formed around a framework of the mother’s lost dreams and their womanhood that never came fully to bloom.
Spence uses photographs and different types of text in a dynamic relationship. The main text, photographs and collages, and the illustrative texts are three independent components that form the actual narrative. The text that follows the illustrations does not run parallel to the main body of text. The illustrative text questions the information in the images, and vice versa. Even though Spence’s narrative is mostly very serious, I would claim that she plays interestingly with the textual and visual components of the narrative. She never really explains the way the narrative is composed.

Spence sees amateur photography as the promise for more democratic representations. In the last pages of the book, she summarizes her changed relationship to photography:

Photography can only attempt certain things compared with other media, but its radicality lies in the fact that we can produce, process and circulate snapshots by ourselves, for ourselves and amongst ourselves. If we could learn new ways of using our cameras we could start by telling our own stories in different ways. Initially we could use the camera for a dialogue with ourselves, as in photo therapy, to de-censorize ourselves, or as a type of visual diary-writing. Once we feel it is safe to proceed we can share our ‘new’ stories with allies, and we can begin to re-imag(in)e who we are, both visually and verbally. If we were encouraged to do this as children, who knows what we might begin to make of the world by the time we became adults? One thing is certain: the meager and partial view of social and psychic life presently on offer through image making and photography would quickly become clearer. (p. 214)

Through her special relationship to photographic representation, Spence comes to understand how similar practices could be adapted to other people’s lives, and how the advances in technology make this tool of self-investigation readily and increasingly available to everyone. The question that remains is the possible effects on one’s personality, were such a tool as photography easily available from childhood. Spence finishes her narrative by stating that what she finds most valuable is educating others on how to use photography in their lives.

Relationality is not Eakin’s original term; he has adapted the idea from previous feminist studies. The significance of Eakin’s article is that he enlarges the understanding of relationality to all autobiography, not just women’s. However, he is not the only person making this argument. This phenomenon is not unique to literary studies of autobiography either. I find connections to relationality from Michael Renov’s (1999) essay “Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the “Other” Self.”

Examples of the photo therapy workshops she and Joan Solomon have organized can be found in What Can a Woman Do with a Camera: Photography for Women (1995).
Discussing domestic ethnography in film studies (see Chapter 3), he focuses on the complexity of and boundaries between the self and the other, subjectivity and objectivity, and the representation of the domestic world in film. Renov sees domestic ethnography as a supplement to autobiography because it “functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial other” (p. 140). He further claims that there is a “peculiar sort of reciprocity (which might equally be termed self-interest) built into the construction of Other subjectivities in this paraethnographic mode” (p. 142).

I find Eakin’s somewhat static groups, the tendency to group autobiographical texts in a certain category, sometimes problematic. In my personal project the significant other shifts constantly, even though my narrative is obviously written in close relationship to and reflection on my childhood family. Visual representations of my life (and eventually the methods of my study) function as the faithful partner on my journey. As with Jo Spence, my understanding of and need to reflect myself in relationship to the larger context of society changes. It is my writing and visuality that travel along like a navigator reading the map as we drive.

**Writing with Photographs as a Method of Finding Temporary Closures**

In this section my analytical practice turns toward meditation of the meaning of the visual. While the first section of this chapter (Grandma story) is build around coming to question culturally formed gender roles through analysis of a photograph of a family member, and the previous section presented a visual-textual theoretical analysis of others’ memoirs, this last section was written aware of the theory, yet focusing on the personal. This was an important point in the research process where the boundaries between too personal narratives and analysis for research purposes were negotiated. It forms a temporary conclusion to the Grandma story and mentally pulled all the strings together for me to continue the research process, to write the last “theme” chapter about personal understanding of a critical pedagogy. The text deals with a sense of self and professional/researcher identity. It is built around a process of self-awakening as I realized I had lost an understanding of who I was. It is about slowly putting these pieces back together, finding the inner strength and understanding to continue.
Photograph 9 ⇒
Äiti  
(Mother)

Äiti kannattaa kiveä, pitää kädessään, punnitsee katsoo ja miettii jälkiä, pyörittää ja kääntelee.

*Mother holding a stone, holding the stone in her hand, weighing it looking at it, wondering about the marks on its surface turning it around.*

Minä tahtoisin olla noin pieni, olla kivi jota äiti ihmettelee. Äiti kantaisi minut mökkiin, jättäisi rapulle koristukseni.

*I would like to be so small, be the stone my mother holds. She would carry me back to the cabin, leave me outside to decorate the stairway.*

Myöhemmin pintaani ehkä maalattaisiin leppäkerrettuja tai vaan värejä. Minä olisin siellä kestäisin vaikka maalini menettäisiin.

*They would later paint ladybugs on my surface, or maybe just colors. I would stay out there and take the rain, even if I would lose my colors.*

Olisin oven vieressä valmiina jos ovipainoa tarvittaisiin, olisin auringossa lämmennyt jos pintaani koskettaisiin.

*I would be there, ready by the door if something heavy were to be needed to hold the door open, if someone were to touch me they would feel my surface warmed by the sun*

Minä tahtoisin olla tuo kivi mutta olen kasvanut äitiini mittaiseksi. Jos olisin täällä joku, olisin karihka, äitiäni kookkaampi.

*I long to be that stone but I have grown equal to my mother If I were something around here, I would be A driftwood bigger in size than my mother*

Minä kävelen äidin rinnalla. Katson kameran takaa kun äiti hyppelee kiveltä kiveltä ja juttelee, ihmettelee kiviä.

*I walk next to my mother Gazing through my camera how my mother jumps from rock to rock, chatting, talking, wondering, amazed by everything.*

⇐ Photograph 9
I am facing a difficult task. I have chosen to write about my mother, to evaluate and discuss the first relationship a newborn baby ever creates. As with many of the important issues we encounter in our lives, I did not come across this topic by accident, nor was I surprised when I found myself constantly thinking about it. I have moved toward it gradually, almost systematically, as though knowing on some subconscious level that talking about my mother would eventually become inevitable. Still my hesitation was great; I was not anxious to discuss the strongest, yet most fragile and sensitive, relationship of my life in the very first publication of my academic career. This not only makes me, but also my mother and my immediate family, subjects of public scrutiny. However, I find this photographic “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995) or “photo therapy” (Jo Spence, 1988) important in the process of investigating the formation and changes of my cultural and gendered identity as well as my adaptation to a previously unknown cultural environment. This, I believe, justifies the perhaps unwanted publicity.

Talking about my mother is not easy. Instead, I might rather talk about the use of language, the longing I feel for my native culture and its nature, perhaps even the anger I have felt towards my father. My mother has been a pillar of support throughout my life, and in some sense the center of the development of my personal identity. It is now time for me to separate my identity from hers. I realize that “my own psychic integration depends upon the recognition of all the aspects of this, my primary relationship” (Martin, 1991, p. 213).

I did not come to this photograph of my “Mother Holding a Stone” knowing what I was about to deal with, and I would not have been ready to tackle this delicate topic without circling around it for the past several months. I began by studying the gender roles in my family within the past four generations and focused my text on my grandmother. As I write, my mother is in the same room with me. I find my motivation and purpose from my academic study, but I also wish to honor my mother’s work of investigating and analyzing the embedded roles of women in my family. Through her childhood memories and relationships within her family, she has studied the learned and adapted roles of women with the intention of ending the poor self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness that have plagued women in the family for generations. I see women in my family as the guardians and librarians of the family lore (Martin, 1991; Spence, 1991). We also try to function as the therapists in the family by spending endless hours in
psychoanalytic discussions about partners’ and sisters’ behavior (which few men would ever do) with the desired outcome of healthier relationships between couples and among family members. Sharing my personal life as a daughter, sister, woman, and, as expected, a future mother, I wish to discuss the political, cultural, social, ethnic, and gendered identity that I have adapted and learned to know as myself. I also believe that these kinds of personal accounts of women can increase the understanding of the roles of women we teach to future generations through the memories we build in our family albums and narrations – or through the silences we maintain in our stories. I approach my mother through a photograph I took of her a year and a half ago (text written in fall, 2002). I realize that this approach allows me the possibility of stepping back to discuss the photographic elements in case the surface of the relationship becomes too irritated and sensitive from my needy and demanding touch.

I wrote this story during the Summer Workshop (it was actually called “Summer School”), an intensive five-day seminar dealing with Evocative Writing in Jyväskylä, Finland. It is the first poetic, format-free self-expression in Finnish that I have written in reaction to my own photographs since I moved to Columbus, Ohio. It is characteristic that this short story was an immediate follow-up to an aggressive and angry story about my father and a failed attempt to talk about my relationship to Finnish landscape and nature. The reason I return to it now is twofold. The critique I received during the Summer Workshop would not leave me and caused me to question my identity in relationship to that of my family on a deeper level than before. Secondly, the silence that fell in the room after I shared my writing made me understand (believe) that I had gone too far; my text was too raw, unfinished and personal to touch other people. I also realized that I needed to protect myself and gain a deeper understanding of the issues I was dealing with in my writing. What follows is my re-reading of the photograph and the ‘poem’ I wrote last summer.

I look at my mother gently holding the stone, smiling, looking happy, and recall the day this photograph was taken. I remember us sharing stories and catching up with what had happened since I was last home. It was an important day of bonding for both us, I believe. My mother and I share the same interests and we are in many ways very similar. We are both art educators, we find beauty in our surroundings, we like working with people, especially with children, and we are observers and seekers. We want to change what we find to be wrong and have a positive influence on people. Our relationships to
other people are often therapeutic in that we share an endless interest in other people’s lives and dilemmas and enjoy listening to them – a friend once called my behavior ‘borderline nosiness’. Or do we? Should I rather argue that this behavior is a role learned as an eldest daughter in the family? As daughters we have learned to be responsible, to compromise, to care for others more than for ourselves, and to re-evaluate our plans when someone else needs our attention. We have learned to sacrifice and to find pleasure in these sacrifices made for other people – or have we really? Although I have always been strong-willed, I have made a choice that is extreme even by my standards – moving to another continent to fulfill my personal dreams and to find freedom to form my own identity. To me, my mother has always been a mother and only lately has she started to fight for her own space, which she can only find if she stops living her children’s lives for them. She has never been a person without the role of a caretaker, and for a long time I thought I wanted the same; to find a husband and to have children at a young age. I built my identity upon my family’s and ended up in romantic relationships in which I was the caretaker of the other person.

As I am writing this story, my dissertation, I find myself re-writing my own narrative. This was not originally my intention. For a year or so, I innocently assumed that it would be possible to write an artistic narrative about the changes in my cultural identity without discussing the past. I thought I could write an ethnographic and social study focusing on the last three years of my life without ‘touching’ or questioning my identity as it had been built and formed since I was born. Through my photographs and writing, I investigate the changes in my self-perception and cultural identity, but I am also driven to find out who I was before this process started. I realized that I could not gain my full potential as a scholar and an educator without investigating how my personal past still influenced all my decisions.

During the six months, especially after my last trip to Finland, I have felt a loss of control, naturally causing panic. I have found it difficult not to question every action, feeling, and emotion I have experienced. My life became a mess of interactions, all potential subjects for analysis and investigation. There was no life outside my dissertation: I had become the data, analyzing tool, analyzer, and the ethical judge of my investigation, and this judge had grown merciless. Nothing was outside speculation until I lost the subject. I did not know who I was anymore, and the topic had grown bigger than my life. I wrote in my research diary on April 21st, 2002, before the Summer Workshop in Jyväskylä:
My story is about the struggle of learning to speak, my story is about learning to write (in any language), my story is about becoming an adult, my story is about the difficult process of separating my identity from that of my family’s. It is about struggling to live in two different time zones, with two languages, two or a thousand ways of viewing the world as a place that belongs to ‘us’ – as a political, authored, understood, theorized physical and social experience.

I could not feel anymore without analyzing the emotion immediately, trying to find a cause for this consciousness at that specific time, a childhood experience-cause relationship and most important of all – a theoretical question this feeling would relate to. Writing became an enormous struggle and I could not stop reading. I had become very clumsy, because I could barely walk without trying to sense and focus on every motion and every thought that crossed my mind. There were no irrational thoughts or crazy fantasies anymore, but everything had to be taken seriously and analyzed. Although I had become aware of myself in a different way than ever before, I simultaneously experienced a fragmentation of identity that scared me more than the loss of cultural identity discussed before. Needless to say, I was tired and ready to quit.

I now find myself adapting to another difficult role as I re-write my family’s narrative. This process is troublesome and complicated. All the events and power relations from my family’s past that had been hidden or repressed are slowly rising to the surface in my conscious thinking. In photographing my family I create for myself a new family album built according to a new set of rules and narratives that I am willing to attach to these images. While I am photographing, I feel as though I have only partial control and understanding of what will be captured on the film. This may, as Annette Kuhn (1995) argues, be partly because photographs are not evidence from the past, but are instead material for interpretation. Insightfully, John Byng-Hall (1987) describes re-writing the family myth or legend as follows:

…I was resisting change in the story. It was as if what I had been told as a child was such a powerful truth that the implications of changing it would be profound: I would have to change my image of myself and my family (in Raphael & Thompson, 1987, p. 217).

The first time I wrote about the photograph of my mother, I wanted to write about my relationship to Finland and its environment, not about my mother. Perhaps I should have had a photograph of my reflection on a large stone next to the photograph about my mother so the connection would have been clearer. While writing, my desire to find words to describe my longing for home was so great that in my ‘poem’, my mother came to represent my home country and the stone she was holding symbolized me. On
a conscious level I thought about my mother as my home and me as the stone, but on a subconscious level I was talking about our relationship as persons. Still, today this photograph is not only about my mother, it is about my relationship to my native country and culture. I have grown more critical of Finnish society and its politics. There has not, however, been a day when thinking about home and all the people I have left behind has not brought tears to my eyes. Things have changed and I have changed. Even though my identity is still strongly Finnish, I have become Americanized and my relationship to Finland now includes romantic nostalgia for a place that only exists in my heart. The following is my humble attempt to write about the feelings I have when experiencing deep connections to places I feel I belong to:

I am on the island. My legs long and slim against the granite stone marked by the moving ice, thousands of years ago. Warm sun behind my back filling what’s behind with yellow light. I smell and hear the sea and I feel playful, but grounded. Even though my feet couldn’t grow roots, even though the surface is too hard to spear, I feel rooted, grounded in stone, sea and its history. I can afford playfulness apart from where I now live, returned to where I used to belong. I have missed these sounds and smells, and I have longed for this connection.

Rarely do I find it though. I find it with my mother, I feel it with my sisters, but everything else has already changed and become something other than what it was when I left.

My thoughts are heavy, but uplifted with safety. If something were to happen, this sea would rescue me, these people would swim after me, this island would not forget. I would become another mark on the stone, marked against the moving ice next winter. I would rest in the colorful leaves molding against these rocks. I would become a small bit of autumn that the sea wind would carry and I could drink the juice of these tiny flowers if I ever felt thirst.

If something were to happen to me, I would stay here in this place, in its self-sufficient bio-cycle. And I would not be carrying this all in my heavy suitcase. I would not carry it in my nose, ears, eyes, on my skin and body. I would not pack the molding leaves in my bags, but I could give my eyes a rest. I would leave the memories alone instead of trying to capture on the film what is impossible to be captured. If something were to happen, I would stay. But nothing happens; nothing makes me stay.

The diary note about my relationship to my mother was written immediately after the thought occurred, and reading this reminds me of the romantic tone that evidently colored my thinking that day. I had arrived in Finland just some days before writing this. The only remark on the diary entries is about the tone of my texts, which often starts positive and dreamy but gradually becomes more negative towards the end. I cannot separate these texts from one another, thus I found it at first difficult to accept what my mother’s
photograph was trying to teach me on a personal level. I had decided earlier that during my visit to Finland I would pay attention to my changing feelings about “Finnishness,” thus reading both my diary notes from the visit and the “photo-writings”, as described in the next paragraph, was influenced by this idea.

When I write about the photographs, I sit in front of one of them and “let the text come out.” I feel as if I do not have full control over the lines that are formed word by word. I sometimes stop to taste the words or repeat what I have just written, but mostly the writing “leaks out” as a stream or a happy spring, only afterwards making me ponder my own thoughts on the sheets in front of me. It may take months, even a year, to accept and analyze these combinations of words, short stories or poems, as I call them. It often feels as if the visual had the text embedded to be deciphered within it and I only had to be ready to let it out and face in text what I already had visually understood earlier.

When I talk about this somewhat odd process of text "flooding" the paper before my eyes, I believe that I am describing visual knowledge gaining a verbal representation. Something that I have already understood in a visual form reaches a different "level" of understanding when it reaches paper. These words and sentences often surprise me. I might find them troublesome. On other occasions, I find the content pleasing. It is often knowledge or information that I have been seeking, but that I have not been able to express with words. This method of recalling past events and analyzing them, I believe, could be called memory work. My use of this term is closer to Annette Kuhn's (1995) description of memory work than Jenny Onyx and Jennie Small's (2001), for example. While looking at these photographs, I return to past memories and experiences. While I may be able to recall the exact moment a certain photograph was taken, layers of past events and intertwined memories form a non-linear web of awareness from which I pull the words to form a story. What happened today and what I knew an hour ago becomes inseparable from what I was thinking when photographing or during the months that the photograph was still a negative. I talk about my personal experiences, and while writing I seek nothing common or shared. I try to listen to the feelings and emotions that the photograph evokes in me and to stay as honest to the recalled feelings and thoughts as possible. While writing these stories I lose the fear of using a strange language in my writing and I write free from the rules of the language and academic requirements.
While taking the photograph of my mother and writing about it, I felt warmth and affection. I wrote about this affection towards my country and my mother. However, there is another layer in this image; the lack of touch and ability to express affection that is characteristic in my family. A friend once pointed out while observing this image that I seemed to desire to be that stone and I appeared to be in need of the admiration the stone was receiving. I have had difficulty expressing affection and fondness both physically and with words. I do not have that language installed in my system and only the contact with people from different cultures and strange families has made me realize that there may be a child inside me wanting to learn that language, desperate to be touched and accepted. Breaking my personal, physical space with hugs and touches has confused me, as I have been afraid that my stiffness during those short physical encounters could have been read as a sign of dislike. I am not quick and smooth enough to share compliments and receiving them bothers me. According to Finnish customs, it is not appropriate to compliment another person if you are not sure that the person is worthy of your compliment. Even then, paying a compliment is not easy, since the possibility of embarrassing the other person may be more bothersome than the compliment seems worth. While living in Columbus I have learned to appreciate compliments, even if they are half-truths, and to share them. Yet I have to be aware of not adopting this manner in the interaction with my Finnish friends, as there too much admiration and compliments are easily interpreted as dishonesty.

The criticism I received from other people has made me defend my intentions while writing about this photograph. Through the process of writing about this image, however, I came to understand that even if I try to limit the possible connotations that the image may carry, my photographs speak to other people in ways that I cannot fully control. On a personal level, the topic did not come to a conclusion by discussing this with my mother, but I found it therapeutic to be able to express in words something that I had secretly longed for. I wonder how long it would have taken for me to understand that I felt socially incapable to fully and freely express affection if the topic had not found a form in this photograph. By bringing painful and personal feelings to analytical discussion (even if this was subconscious) I learned about cultural behavior. Then again, discussing my behavior as culturally learned helped me to accept its very personal nature.
It has again been several weeks since the last time I read this text or looked at my mother in the photograph (Fall, 2002). I am now willing to accept that I came to this image wanting to talk about my mother, but I also wrote about that very specific moment it captures with the desire to give a form to an experience of deep connection to my surroundings. I hope it is there, because those are the moments for which I long when I dream about home. In these very defined, passionate, and intense moments I find my Finnish identity. These experiences of strong and direct connectedness to the Finnish nature are more effective in defining my Finnishness than what I am able to experience with other Finnish people apart from the environment. This may all be romance caused by alienation. My perception of Finnish nature may be learned from the art of the Nationalist period, and the essence of the Finnish identity may be spiced with
the romantic and heroic stories from the *Kalevala*, our national epic, but in this complicated and integrated relationship I find my specific cultural identity and site-specific existence (Hannula, 1998; Pulkkinen, 1998).

As I write about my family and the photographs I have created for the purpose of rebuilding my family album according to my newly accepted terms and conditions, I realize that nothing I write, nor the subjects I write about, are truly only mine, and none of these writings or creative practices happens outside the framework of shared events, public and political. I am always writing in relation to the key “other” that shifts depending on my theoretical and personal needs and interests. I cannot operate outside the ‘accepted aesthetics’, outside the cultural and political framework of my studies and education. However, it is in this necessary connection, “the junction between personal memory and social memory, between public myth and personal unconscious” (Holland, 1991, pp. 13-14) that the value of making the personal public can be found. While I cannot offer final interpretations or truths about either my public or my private narrative, I have shared the first steps I took towards critical consciousness through my interpretation of these key images. Homi Bhabha notes: “Interpretation is the first condition of empowerment” (quoted in Holland, 1991, p.14). Through my story I wish to inspire other people to have the courage to dive in to the scary, sometimes painful and complex, but yet rewarding journey of learning about one’s self.
Three horses and a donkey

I have three siblings, two sisters and a brother. We all learned woodwork in the fifth grade and we all built wooden miniature horses.

Except mine isn’t a horse; it is a donkey. The teacher I had for six years was a very religious woman, and being the student I was, my true passion was to please her. So I built Jesus a donkey, to ensure that both the teacher and Jesus would be pleased with me.

Ten years later at a class reunion, this same teacher, the teacher who awarded me yearly for my academic excellence, whom I admired, and who made me want to become a teacher, didn’t remember me. In fact, I was the only student she couldn’t recall.

Photograph 11 ⇒
“Why did this happen?” I ask myself. Why can’t she remember me? How could she forget the girl who ran faster than the boys, scored better on tests, was overly social, overly loud, who sang, played sports, knitted and sewed clothes, and was always involved in everything?

“You’ve changed,” she said, looking at my face in an old class photo. Still, she couldn’t remember me.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCHING ACADEMIC IDENTITY: BEING A SCHOLAR, BEING AN ARTIST

This chapter discusses my identity as a teacher and scholar, the theoretical framework for studying this academic identity, and the methods I use in this particular section of my research. I perform and practice (cultural) educational criticism through a combination of theoretical and autobiographical essay writings (Hesford, 1999). I have included the educational narratives in this chapter that I feel best explain how I have used these narratives in the writing process, and how similar processes of forming personal visual/verbal narratives could be used for educational purposes. The investigation of my academic identity forms one of the three main themes of my study; the other two discussed in the previous chapters are: the re-negotiation of cultural identity and its study through ethnographic self-reflexive approach, and my gendered autobiographical identity. Aspects of personal identity and autobiography are integrally woven into all these themes; however, in this particular chapter, the discussion about identity differs as well as the use of autobiographical writing in relationship to my photographic work.

While my research methodology is arts-based autoethnography throughout the text, the body of literature used to study the particular approach to my identity construction varies in each section, and is thus discussed separately in relationship to the specific theme. Discussing the development of my professional and academic identity as the last one of the three major themes in my research felt natural, since understanding and learning about this side of my identity has taken the most time. Although I must admit that more time was spent in studying the other two aspects of my identity, I finished writing this chapter first and thus, this text in turn influenced the constructing of the two previous chapters. It requires maturity and self-confidence to scrutinize one’s teaching and research philosophy and to avoid artificiality
and learned patterns in discussing one’s educational role. My hope is that the following discussion, especially the inclusion of personal narratives and self-reflexive artistic methods, contributes to the understanding of the educator’s role in our rapidly evolving field.

Through my text, I encourage others to openly discuss their growth in academia and their personal responses to changes in their disciplines. I have read challenging and insightful articles suggesting theoretical changes to the curriculum (i.e. Freedman & Stuhr, in press; Desai, 2003; 1999; Davenport, 2000), yet I believe that changing pedagogy requires more information about the personal involvement of the educators practicing this disciplinary reform.

While writing the proposal for my dissertation project, I knew I would be required to prove its relevance to the field of art education and relate my project to teaching and teacher preparation. In part I was forced to do so; I had argued that researching my cultural identity and self-perception would make me aware of my thinking in a more holistic way and would improve my abilities to teach and research. I have only recently (within the last year) learned how significant the role of my teacher identity is in the process of adapting to the multilayered Midwestern culture and social life. Through learning about myself as a teacher and scholar, I have gained an increasing acceptance of the more private aspects of myself. On the other hand, learning to understand my private self has made me more aware and open-minded as a teacher. Andra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2000) state that “knowing ourselves as persons is very much part of knowing ourselves as professionals” (p. 15). I believe that through investigating the connections between my personal and professional lives, I have found a life-long interest in professional development. In this chapter, I will first discuss related terminology, theory, literature, and pedagogies. Then, I will examine the methods I used and how my personal background and history has affected my teaching concepts. Finally, I will demonstrate how the research process and the related literature formed and changed my understanding of the philosophy of teaching and of knowledge construction.
Related Terminology, Theory and Literature

Culture

Paradoxically, even though I teach cultural pluralism and explore different definitions of culture with my students each academic quarter, I find it difficult to define the term culture. “Culture” is an abstract term, similar to “art,” and as we have become influenced by postmodernist ideas, visual culture studies, feminism, multiculturalism and interculturalism, we have consciously tried to dispel the use of binary terms such as high art/low art, good art/bad art, moral/immoral, and real/made up. This new openness makes defining culture even more difficult because no specific set of ideas and activities that constitute culture can be delineated, nor is there a group of artifacts that might be described as products of culture. The best and simplest definition I have encountered can be found in the article “Multicultural Art and Visual Cultural Education in a Changing World” by Christine Ballengee-Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001). According to the authors, culture is what we do and what we value (p. 7). Culture is in-flux, multilayered, alive, simultaneous and based on creative thinking; a constant search for meaning and a negotiation of ethical behavior. Culture is very personal, because it is embodied within individuals; indeed, belonging to a culture/cultures is based on individual’s life and participation in the community. Age, gender, sexuality, social and economic class, exceptionality, geographic location, religion, political status and ideas, language, ethnicity, and racial identity all form one’s personal cultural identity (modified from Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2000; and Freedman & Stuhr, in press). Personal cultural identity creates guidelines and boundaries for how we view the world around us and how we understand “otherness.” Like culture, identity is in-flux, changing and plural, and an artistic and cultural expression is thus only a temporary expression of one’s understanding of a culture (Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995). Since understanding of one’s own culture is limited, a person from outside a culture can hope to understand even less. I believe cultures and multiculturalism can be learned through “investigating and critiquing our understanding(s) of our national culture(s) [. This] may help us and our students to identify and recognize our ethnocentric perspectives at the national, regional, state, and local levels” (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 8). Since my aim as an art educator is to teach diverse and multiple perspectives in viewing life through the arts, critical analysis of objects and artifacts, and visual communication, I have investigated
how my personal, national, and global cultural identities continuously shapes my educational philosophy. Through this research process I have hoped to gain an appreciation for my students’ stories and understand how to help students to investigate their global, national, local and personal cultural identities.

To explain my use of several sociopolitical and cultural terms, I will begin by explaining and analyzing some aspects of my cultural background. I grew up in the capital area of Finland, Helsinki. I did not know many children from diverse cultures, and the few who looked different were born to women who fell in love with Southern European men during their annual vacations to Southern European beaches of which Scandinavians are very fond. These children were admired for their “exotic” looks. Although Finnish society is strongly bi-lingual (Finnish and Swedish), the minority Swedish speaking families (six per cent of the population) are concentrated in certain areas and towns (Koivukangas, 2003). My family traveled throughout Europe and strongly encouraged learning about different cultures and “alternative” ways of living. The only black people I ever saw were musicians or basketball players from America, whom we idolized, and ironically called “jenkki” (Yankee). Since diversity was hard to come by, differences were invented about the abilities of neighboring nations’ men to compete in a variety of contests. Stereotypical jokes were commonly told about Finnish, Russian, Swedish and Norwegian men who always either lost or won these imaginary competitions. These men were never individuals, but stereotyped presentations of what was considered characteristic of each nation.

The racial political environment was pretty quiet for decades until the first refugees arrived from Ethiopia. The borders of Finland have been tightly guarded since the World Wars, and the first large group that the Finnish government welcomed were the dark-skinned Muslim Somalis from Africa. Even though Finnish people tend to be hospitable towards newcomers, the significant differences in cultural heritage did cause some problems, as might be expected.

Like all Finnish people today, I am forced to re-evaluate my attitudes as the population becomes more diverse and the cultural life in the Helsinki area changes rapidly. The culture in which I was raised has changed noticeably, and adjustment to the new is sometimes difficult. I have noticed strange feelings of

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5 I am not educated about the numbers of refugees Finland accepted each year, but based on my experience the ‘Somalis’ were the first large group since the Vietnamese a few decades earlier.
anger and fear when I visit home. On late night walks I see teenage groups and ‘foreign’ gangs on the streets; the chaos of emotions this vision evokes is confusing. These feelings are caused by uncertainty, insecurity, and the fear of losing what is precious and familiar. We Finnish have traditionally not been racist and as a nation have been proud of the neutrality of our foreign politics. However, we have lived in isolation between culturally and ethnically more diverse Sweden and Russia. Now, as the population of non-citizen residents in Finland with high concentration around the Helsinki area has increased from 13,000 to 140,000 since the 1980s, we are forced to re-evaluate our understanding of nationhood (Koivukangas, 2003). Fortunately we have been privileged to follow the Swedish government in dealing positively with the unpredictable effects of a diverse population. However, the number of asylum seekers is still significantly lower than in our neighboring Scandinavian countries, the process longer, and the rejection numbers higher. At the same time reportedly 300,000 first generation Finns lived abroad in 2001 (Koivukangas, 2003).

I have now taught an Ethnic Arts class at The Ohio State University for three years, and with my students, I have learned about the diversity in North America and in the Midwest region. In communicating with my students, I am forced to face my inevitably biased ways of viewing the world and question my personal as well as educational ideas.

Identity

In order to discuss the terms “cross-cultural,” “multiculturalism,” “gender,” and “visual culture,” and suggest improvements to the art education curriculum, it is crucial to first discuss identity. Identity determines how we understand reality, culture and theory. Then again, our cultural, political and theoretical frameworks strongly influence our self-perception. The political and cultural influence of multiculturalism, interculturalism, feminism, and postmodernism in arts, theory and education could be argued to have caused a fragmentation of identity: We understand ourselves as plural and identity as dynamic and always changing. Identity appears somewhat schizophrenic when I consider all the aspects that form the temporary

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6 These numbers may not seem large at first, but since the capital in the Helsinki area is little over one million and 5.2 in the whole country, the numbers gain more significance.
self I am. I have analyzed relational performative selfhood through various autobiographical texts in Chapter 4. It is my current understanding that the continuous process of forming a selfhood needs to be understood through the relational (i.e. Eakin, 1999) and performative (Smith, 1998). By relational I mean that identity is built in relation to the cultural, political and historical framework of one’s life, in which families (or alternatives to the bourgeois family) provide the most influential institution by which traditions and ideas are continued. I believe that a person finds agency in relationship to others and his/her environment. I do not believe in an individualistic, autonomous soul that travels or could be separated from the body, but rather one that embodies the temporary agency of a self that is repeatedly and actively gained in an interaction with one’s immediate, physical, social, and imagined environment.

Not many texts by art educators specifically deal with the construction of individual identity. Identity, however, is commonly discussed in relationship to gender, ethnicity, multicultural education and visual culture. According to Freedman and Stuhr (in press) “addressing aspects of one’s personal cultural identity has become a critical issue in general and in art education” (p. 6). I believe this to be true, although there are still art educators who teach artistic techniques, skills, and aesthetics without a desire to study how the arts and visual culture affect a child’s personality development. The basis for socially constructive multicultural education, with the goals of equality and a more democratic society, is the understanding of how age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, context, language, ethnicity and politics affect the formation of a person’s identities (Hesford, 1999; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001).

Wendy Hesford (1999) writes about the politics of academic identity as they relate to autobiography, and how this must be seen within the contemporary political and cultural framework. Hesford’s text calls attention to the participatory role of the educators “in the construction of ‘other’” (p. xxx). To gain deeper understanding of their participation in constructing and supporting stereotypical “otherness” in their academic practices she, similarly to many art educators, advises all educators “to be accountable for the narratives of gender, race, and class that they [the educators] inhabit” (p. xxx). Healthy and productive communication and interaction, despite these differences, can be achieved with this knowledge. Quoting Peter McLaren (Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture: Oppositional Politics in a Postmodern Era, 1995), Hesford argues that educators “need to be able to read critically the narratives that
are already reading us” (p. xxx, author’s emphasis). Interested in McLaren’s assertions, my research is to study, “What narratives of identity and difference shape [my] authority, and how can [I] use the authority conferred to [me] to challenge and expose these [mine and my students] narratives?” (p. xxx).
Learning to read

“You learned to read when I was supposed to.” My brother starts telling the story I hate to hear. “I was going to school and doing all these reading exercises – and then all the sudden you started to read on your own. And it was my turn to learn.”

I hear my brother’s voice tightening up as he returns to this memory, equally painful for both of us. He is threatened and bitter by this memory, I am embarrassed and apologetic.

I don’t remember it all that well…I mean, how I learned to read, but I learned before I went to school. My brother is a year and half older than me. My mother didn’t hurry me to learn and I didn’t learn it at school. I learned to read at my friend Katja’s house, whose parents were doctors, and thought it was important that their children know how to read when they were 3 or 4. I would have rather done something fun, played outside but I was a very social child and fond of her. So I stayed inside for the daily-required hours and stared at Donald Duck comic books. Eventually I figured out the connection between words and images—or maybe my friend taught me. I don’t really remember because I didn’t care. As far as I was concerned, I could have faked the whole thing. My family only found out when my brother started practicing at home and I wanted to be part of the activities.

I still feel bad for my brother – and also for myself. From a very early age I adopted and accepted the role of a child who always manages, survives, and does not need much support. I was strong and demanding, and the expectations others and I set for me were high. It is not that I was ever smarter than my brother or sisters and for this reason performed better at school, it was my role and it still is.

When I entered the first grade our teacher promised us a small book of psalms and the New Testament as a reward for learning to read. I, like the other kids, didn’t care about the book. I wanted the prize and attention. I faced a minor challenge because this book didn’t contain any visuals like the books we read at home. I hardly ever opened the book, except when I was required to, but I still have it somewhere. Afterwards this book’s religious content made me wonder about my teacher’s motives. I find it awkward that Lutheran religion was presented this way, and the promise of Jesus was made a reward for those who achieve desired educational goals.

I can still name the children who were the last of the boys and girls to learn, to receive the word. Even though we were just children and we adored our teacher, I feel partially guilty for those who were last.
Gender in My Research and in Art Education

Some feminist theoreticians (i.e. Bhabha, 1994; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy & Belenky, 1996) have argued that certain ways of knowing, viewing reality, and forming an understanding of truth and one's surroundings are particular to women. It is not clear whether this is true for solely sociological reasons or for both social and physiological reasons. Despite this uncertainty, these differences between men and women are apparent, as are gender differences in children's learning processes. Some art educators have investigated this matter by studying the reasons behind boys' and girls’ topic choices when creating artistic work, as well as gender differences in the pace and order in which girls and boys learn. Donna M. Tuman (2000) gives an informative overview of research on these matters in her article, “Defining Differences: A Historical Overview of Research Regarding the Differences Between the Drawings of Boys and Girls.”

Even though I have gained an increasing interest in the topic of gender-specific knowledge and learning, when I address gender issues in my writing I most often intend to discuss and question culturally formed gender roles. To discuss women’s roles in today’s Western society I feel it necessary to talk about feminism and feminist research in art education. Like multicultural art education, feminist art education in the United States has its roots in the civil rights movement and in feminist activism during the 1960s and 70s. The basis for both feminist education and multicultural education is that “certain groups continue to be overlooked and misunderstood [through stereotyping] to their detriment, and that we benefit by studying and understanding the diversity of ‘non-mainstream’ cultural experiences from within their cultural context” (Wyrick, 2000, p. 57). The term “feminism” itself is complicated and thus, feminist research in art education is hard to define. A common theme among feminist researchers, however, is investigating the influence of gender on personal, professional and political aspects of women’s lives (Irwin, Mastri & Robertson, 2000).

According to Patti Lather (1991) “to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry” (p. 71). Even though the focus on women’s issues is a hallmark of most feminist research in art education, feminist inquiry often tends to improve social conditions for more
than just women. The results are rarely seen to affect only women, but ideally challenge more general thinking of society on a larger scale (i.e. Speirs, 2000). Lather (1991) also sees “gender as a basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives” (p. 71). She continues, “feminism argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege” (p. 71). I agree with Patti Lather, but I would like to add that a person’s identity in all its aspects seems to shape their consciousness in addition to others’ perception of the individual.

There is a connection to feminist collaborative action research in Irwin, Mastri and Robertson’s (2000) description of their collaborative feminist research group. Referring to Susan Noffke (1997) and Kenneth Zeichner (1993) they cite personal (strongly emphasized), professional and political aspects of their lives as the three dimensions of their inquiries, and they call attention to understanding, interpreting, challenging and taking action upon these areas through investigating the context of the occurrence and exploring issues of power and control in these interactions. The more focused my dissertation work has become, the more interest I have gained in culturally formed gender roles. While Irwin et al. (2000) began with an interest in gaining awareness of gender issues, I was interested in learning who I had become, how changes in my living environment had affected my self-perception, and how has this research and adaptation process changed me.

I became immediately aware of the differences between being a woman in Finland and in midwestern American culture when I moved to Columbus, Ohio. I felt as if I had been sexually harassed or otherwise deeply insulted when men in Ohio openly called me “sweetheart” and “darling” in public or otherwise commented on my looks. I felt that I had been patronized against my will. Both the public interactions between men and women and the behavior in intimate relationships differ from the culture in which I was raised. All this has helped me to question gender roles in both contexts; the gender roles that dominate my life here in my new environment and in the family and culture of my upbringing. Instead of reacting negatively to perceived “offensive” communication, I now find these occasions of negative attention beneficial for analyzing local culture and changes in my own behavior and attitudes. I have gained an interest in issues of power, control and domination, which I study through the work of women artists,
especially women photographers (i.e. Cindy Sherman, in Krauss, 1993; Carrie Mae Weems, 1998; Lorna Simpson, 2002, 1997; & Wendy Ewald, 2000; 1992) and autobiographers (i.e. Sheila & Sandra Ortiz Taylor, 1996; Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, 1995; Norma Elia Cantú, 1999; and Leslie Marmon Silko, 1981), and through my own work as a teacher, researcher and artist. Similar to Irwin, Mastri & Robinson (2000) I needed to “reassess [my] own behaviors or beliefs in a manner that motivates [me] into political, professional and personal action” (Irwin et al., p. 45). I have come to realize that it is impossible to analyze changes in my cultural identity unless I investigate the gender roles learned in my previous living context of Finnish culture and especially in the context of my own family (Chapters 3 and 4). It is a privilege to be able to pause and investigate my thinking and actions.

Prior to studying my personal, gendered identity, I thought I was teaching ethnicity and found gender issues forced, artificial and secondary in the syllabus compared with studying ethnic minorities. Now, however, I find diversity education impossible to separate from issues of gender. I find it important to promote increasing awareness and continuous discussion among teachers, researchers and students in (art) education toward investigating learned gender roles in our behavior and our pre-conceptions and stereotypes related to sexuality. Mary Wyrick (2000) writes about the application of feminist ideas to multicultural art education. She provides examples from feminist studies and analyses of how individual artists’ works have helped art educators to broaden their views. The most significant applications of feminism in art education are the recognition of a person’s simultaneous and multiple, cultural identities and the term “border cultures” (Wyrick, 2000, p. 58, originally the term was introduced to art education by Elizabeth Garber 1992). Wyrick describes a “border cultural” artwork as a piece in which plural cultural identities co-exist. Art educators like Elizabeth Garber (1995) and Mary Wyrick (2000) study and teach culture through individual women’s narratives and art with a focus on investigating power and politics embedded in these works.

Feminist art education is an action-oriented alternative approach to teaching social issues through and within art (Speirs, 2000). Through investigating social issues and gender roles with students, the goal of the teacher is to help the pupils question their beliefs and learned concepts (especially male and patriarchal biases). According to more general feminist ideas that reinforce the questioning of all power
relations, including those of the researcher’s and participants’, it is typical among feminist educators to call for a re-negotiation of power relations in the classroom with their students. The idea is to learn together instead of through traditional methods, including lecturing and testing (Speirs, 2000; Finnegan, 2000).

Irwin & al. (2000) discuss embodied knowing, studying “a knowing body” (p. 48) referring to feelings, actions and interaction in daily life. The changes I study are physically evident and become embodied in my photographs and poems, as well as expressed through feelings, emotions and behaviors⁷. The most significant results, I believe, are embodied in my teaching practices and ability to listen and relate to my students’ stories.

Although it is yet to be seen if my dissertation research will have social implications, I have gained a “deeper” understanding of myself as a consumer, educator, and researcher of culture. As a teacher I find it my responsibility to study these issues, because this is what I expect my students to do. I try to create an atmosphere that encourages individual thinking and the search for knowledge with an interaction with others. I intend to help my students become aware of the politics and rhetoric in the ways women, ethnic minorities, and other disenfranchised groups are presented in textual and visual language. My intention and goal in teaching is to help students become aware of the power of language in learning, how we often take it for granted, and how it shapes our thinking. I want them to develop a more critical stance of how language is a representation of a perspective or set of beliefs and to try to understand what those beliefs are in relation to their own lives (Finnegan, 2000, p. 101).

Cross-cultural Art Education

Even though I sometimes use the term “cross-cultural,” I am often troubled by it. The term seems to suggest that specific cultures can be defined and separated from one another. According to cross-cultural ideas, borders of these different cultures can be crossed through certain educational or cultural activities, and people involved can participate in activities crossing these cultural boundaries. This suggests that cultures can be compared by finding differences and similarities between cultures and among members of a specific culture. A cross-cultural approach to cultural phenomena conveys ideas of binary thinking more

⁷ By “physically evident,” I do not intend to state that there is visible evidence in my photographs readable to all viewers, but that in my research process these are the most significant forms in which the changes in my identity and attitudes take physical form, making it possible for me to investigate and analyze them.
strongly than approaches that aim to promote pluralism and multiculturalism. The term also suggests
cultural authenticity and agency over cultural practices. I find this contrary to what I have learned from
multiculturalism and visual culture studies. Stuhr, Krug & Scott (1995) write about partiality of cultural
understanding and the impossibility of gaining a full and complete understanding of a culture, thus
rendering specific definitions of a culture partial and artificial.

I consider Graeme Chalmers’ (1999) essay “Why Focus on the Common Ground” a cross-cultural
instead of multicultural approach to art education. Chalmers argues for education that seeks to find
commonalities between cultures, instead of emphasizing cultural differences and uniqueness. He states “…I
believe that we should seek to maintain diversity and individuality while enabling and focusing upon
shared views and vocabularies. To live together successfully we must accept alternative communities while
searching for a dynamic core of common concepts and views” (Chalmers, 1999, p. 16). Chalmers believes
that it is easier to find extraordinariness in every culture instead of cherishing what is shared. I support
notions of finding a connection instead of solely pointing out the differences, and I believe it is important to
celebrate individual discourses of difference and uniqueness. I find Chalmers’ approach dangerous in that
finding universalities (intercultural connections and similarities) can direct us back to promoting Western
aesthetics and ideals of beauty. Since I believe it is extremely difficult to understand culture in its
complexity, ambiguity, and multiplicity at a deep enough level to understand the purposes / functions /
mythologies / spirituality of the artifacts and arts produced in the community, this approach would easily
lead us back to modernist aesthetics and ideals by evaluating and searching for commonalities.

Another important issue raised in Graeme Chambers’ article is the understanding that the younger
generations’ view of diverse cultures is more global than that of today’s teachers. This indeed seems to be
ture since I believe that even my generation, born in the 70s, differs from my parents’ generation in that
many of my friends have lived abroad and participated in extended study programs in different countries.
We are more confident in using different languages and we have adopted a global communication mode8.

8 Even though I argue that my generation is more ‘global’ than the previous generation, I would like to state
that as I have taught in a Mid-Western American State University the past few years I have learned that
there are great differences in understanding ‘global.’ Whereas Scandinavian young people speak different
languages fluently this does not seem to be the case with my students at The Ohio State University. Instead
This again makes me wonder why “art curriculum built around the bedrock of aesthetic inquiry” (Stout, 1999) should be endorsed; aesthetics inevitably would require acceptance and use of modernist views to some extent.

**Curriculum Change for the 21st Century?**

While the art education discipline is concerned with proving its importance in the general educational curriculum, individual art educators and researchers are left without clear guidelines and a definite vocabulary for addressing the rapidly changing educational demands. Melanie Davenport’s (2000) article “Culture and Education: Polishing Lenses” helps to clarify the terminology concerning educational reform as it relates to cultural and multicultural teaching. Davenport defines international-comparative, global, multicultural, and community-based approaches and provides examples of each. I found especially important the manner in which she clarifies the confusion between global and multicultural educational approaches.

Multicultural education deals with knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to live in a pluralistic society, whereas global education includes that and also the concept of a global village with limited recourses and increasing interdependence…Where multicultural education attempts to address issues of diversity and the causes of inequality within a particular society, global education goes beyond that to consider all of the forces that shape culture and contribute to cultural differences across humankind. Hence, multicultural education may contribute to global education as one topic among many (p. 365).

At the end of her article Davenport suggests a comparative-international and anthropology-informed alternative; a combination of global, multicultural, and community-based approaches called “intercultural.” She calls attention to understanding culture as being in-flux and socially constructed, and refers to Elsie Rockwell’s (1999) text stating that interculturality “treats each student’s own culture as one of many worthy of study, while specifically addressing the intersections between cultures” (p. 371). Admittedly, I find the term “interculturalism” attractive, and I would like to see increasing numbers of publications on

my students in my “Ethnic Arts” class have grown to be more accepting towards different ethnicities in their culture and social environment. According to my observation there has been an enormous growth of actors and characters from various ethnic backgrounds on TV sit-coms the past two years. This I believe encourages awareness among young adults. On the other hand I have not noticed any increasing curiosity towards finding information about different cultures from the Internet.
this matter. However, Davenport fails to fulfill her own criteria as she proceeds to use this term in a confused and undefined manner. She mentions European and Latin American countries and their use of the term interculturalism as equivalent to the term multiculturalism in the U.S. with an additional emphasis on intercultural communication caused by “the proximity of national and linguistic borders” (p. 372).

Davenport further promotes cultural and ethnic stereotypes by stating that the emphasis on communicating between cultural groups is essential due to the geographic borders and language differences. The tradition for the emphasis on the individual as a learner within the communal, social, and intercultural context has been deeply embedded in education, at least in Finland and Sweden, for some time; and it would be a mistake to reason with this emphasis on geographic and linguistic boundaries. For the past decade Finnish art educators, for example, have been interested in intertextuality, multimedia, Internet, gender, and personalized knowledges (Lindström, 1998).

In the next section, I discuss multicultural art education, visual culture education and problem-posing education, as I believe these approaches have great potential in reconstructing the art education curriculum. These approaches have also profoundly informed my teaching and educational research philosophy.

Multiculturalism and Multicultural Art Education

As I have studied articles on the potential directions art education curriculum could adopt, I have been surprised by the scarcity of in-depth discussion about the implications these theories could have in practice and on pedagogy. Sometimes the theories used seemed even contradictory to the educational goals these educators suggested for broader use. June King McFee (1999) and Enid Zimmerman (1999) highlight the need for stronger theoretical knowledge and the lack of sufficient research in their articles in the Journal of Multicultural and Cross-cultural Research in Art Education. Sleeter and Grant’s (1988) book, which defines five possible methods for teaching multiculturalism, appears to be the most commonly used guideline for art educators in defining their own multicultural curriculum and practices. When trying to identify multiculturalism, I find the following authors especially interesting. Rachel Mason (1999) points out the importance of “the politics of difference and rediscovery of local identities, histories, and traditions at a time of increasing globalization in contemporary fine art” (p. 58). She suggests a focus on
“deconstructing Western art history and unlearning racist myths” (p. 59, italics used by the author). Even though she criticizes American multicultural educators, she agrees with contemporary American multicultural publications about the importance of community-based and community-involved curriculum. Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr’s (2001) description of multicultural art and visual culture education, closely matches my own views. Their goal is to teach life and human experiences through art and visual culture. Teaching is seen as an interdisciplinary practice with the goal of improved “democratic power relations” and increasing “equity in opportunities for all students” (p. 9). Their ideas encourage learning about the people who create art and visual culture in their sociocultural context, and supporting student and community-based learning. The authors call attention to teachers’ cultural identities and biases, and promote learning about sociocultural group values and practices as they affect aesthetic production.

Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, informed by critical theory, strongly encourage the “focus on the dynamic complexity of factors that affect all human interactions: physical and mental ability, class, gender, age, politics, religion, geography, and ethnicity/race” (p. 10). Dipti Desai’s (2003) compelling argument about the urgency of adding sexual difference as one of the main components in studying identity and subjectivity supports reconstructivist multicultural art education, yet criticizes the fixed ideas of culture and “heterosexual imaginary” (p. 148) that institutionalized multiculturalism promotes.

Formalized multiculturalism and feminist studies both have their roots in the Civil Rights Movement in the late 50s to early 60s, and while “the trope of making the invisible visible (that is, the experiences, writing, and art of marginalized groups), for instance, was common in early Women’s Studies pedagogy” (Hesford, 1999, p. 27) drawing attention to issues of cultural diversity through art and visual culture continues to inform multiculturalism. While postmodern theories and multiculturalism have dominated discussions about the suggested educational reform, multicultural education has been heavily criticized for its unintended promotion of cultural and ethnic stereotypes. What Dipti Desai (2003) calls “mainstream” (p. 148) multicultural pedagogical discourses does create, according to Hesford, “curricular add-ons, revisions that do not fundamentally alter the superstructures of the academy or the ways that texts get read or how certain voices get integrated into the curriculum and become institutionalized” (Hesford, 1999, p. 27). This may be one of the more important criticisms of multicultural art education and a reason
for some art educators to search for alternatives, or to return to teaching aesthetics from a modernist perspective. Unintentionally, and due to the international-comparative approach still in use mixed with multiculturalism, stereotypes are promoted through “theme-weeks” and over-generalizations. According to Wendy Hesford “the pedagogical challenge in increasingly multicultural classrooms is to avoid replicating these binaries [colonizer-colonized, male-female, majority-minority, white/Western-other], to expose how they work, and to discourage situating the “cultural other” as a spectacle of a dominating, voyeuristic gaze” (p. 28). Quoting Andrew Lakritz she further states that, “to find a productive way to address otherness in critical analysis, it must be first by a self-reflexive glance at the very optical machine that gives access to the other in the first place, that actually constructs the other as other” (Hesford, p. 28). Students are traditionally seen as passive receivers of knowledge. My understanding is that to achieve a level of critical self-reflection and to engage in a continuous self-reflective activity, students must become active participants in the learning process, in which the educator functions as an indicator and director. As Hesford proposes: “Our efforts toward curricular transformation are more worthwhile if we also focus on the discourses of our students, who have been virtually absent from most institutional conversations designed to support multiculturalism” (p. 57).

**Problem-posing Education and Critical Pedagogy**

Henry Giroux defines pedagogy as “the production of and complex relationships among knowledge, texts, desire, and identity; it signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities” (Giroux, 1994, p. 29). Problem-posing education is a Freirean model focusing on the development of individual’s critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Critical consciousness involves: drawing connections between knowledge and power; becoming both self-reflective and socially reflective; developing analytic habits of thinking, reading, and writing that foregrounds the historical nature and context of knowledge and that challenge myths and values learned in mass culture; and taking part in and initiating social change. Problem-posing approaches to education are often described as participatory, dialogic, democratic, multicultural, situated, and activist (Hesford, 1999, p. 30 referring to Ira Shor, 1993, pp.32-35).

I follow Wendy Hesford’s (1999) lead to Freire and later to Giroux’s critical interpretations about the Freirean model. She states that Giroux and other critical educators have suggested reading this Freirean
model as post-colonial; Hesford, however, is skeptical towards labeling the Freirean model as such due to the political dilemmas surrounding this term. Instead, Hesford wishes to emphasize educators’ responsibility to investigate the effects on their own social, cultural, and academic status to their teaching. Related to this idea, their traditional status as the bearers of knowledge and power must be examined. Hesford supports critical pedagogy that promotes education towards social change through solidarity, instead of empathy. She does not intend to undervalue the problems related to oppression and “the importance of empathy but to point out the contradictory nature of agency and the difference between co-suffering and acts of solidarity in order to mobilize these contradictions and differences toward liberating ends” (1999, p. 34). It is indeed still typical to position white culture at the center and call it dominant (as if that would justify the biased reading) or European, as my students often mistakenly call what they perceive as dominant American culture. Multiculturalism and critical pedagogy call for identification through the shared and the personal, and it is important that educators recognize both their own biases in this relational activity as well as the multiple readings that their students impose (Hesford, 1999). This pedagogy emphasizes the contextual understanding of both the writing and reading practices of autobiographical acts; the relationality and plurality of identity; the deconstruction that is needed to break the self and other binaries; and the in-depth self-investigation of the constructed identity that is necessary in order to achieve the ability to question the relationship between self and the other. According to Giroux, the role of an educator is to “influence how knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular social relations. It [Critical pedagogy] draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning” (Giroux, 1994, p. 30).

Rishma Dunlop (1999) explains her critical intercultural pedagogy through ideological “third space” (originally Bhabha’s term, 1994) between cultures and binary identifications that makes possible more complex identity structures instead of being one or another, split in-between two binary identifications, or adopting a hyphenated cultural identity. Dunlop states: “I seek approaches to diversity that point to connections across differences – of race, of gender, and of disciplinary of study” (p. 58). Dunlop (1999) further argues that the educators’ role is to “unfix mindsets” and “unmap polarized notions of geography” (p. 58). This could be done using narratives, critical analysis, and investigations of literature;
the subject positionings, polyphony of voices, gaps, and silences. I would like to add to this list my personal emphasis as mainly a visual arts educator, the multiple possibilities that visual communication, art, objects and artifact offer, and the consideration of the “other kind of language”, inaccessible to verbal communication that I claim visuals also communicate through. This I find somewhat similar to Dunlop’s description of how meanings of others and selves are created “deep below the surface of language” (p. 59).

I have been especially impressed with Rishma Dunlop’s (1999) contributions to the discussion about diversity education, learning through narrations of self, and the discussion she includes about the stranger or other with and within, and I will return to discuss the ideas she proposes in the concluding Chapter 6.

Visual Culture in Art Education

“To look is to actively make meaning of the world” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 10). This quote, I believe, best explains visual culture. To study visual culture assumes that looking is not just a mechanical activity, but an active engagement in a meaning-making process that is socially, culturally, and personally contextualized. It is, however, important to understand that the study of visual culture does not take place separately from “writing, speech, language, or others modes of representation” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 5).

The current strong emphasis on visual culture and communication could be argued to be a natural cause of postmodernist theories. However, there are counter-arguments that claim the current interest in visual aspects of our culture is caused by our modernist ways of viewing and understanding the arts and visuality (Duncum, 2001). In order to define the term ‘visual culture’ and discuss its potential uses for art educators, Paul Duncum examines the two separate words. Duncum believes that although these visual artifacts appear to other sensory modes, in addition to carrying information and coding that is other than visual, “the term visual suggests that we are concerned with substantially visual artifacts” (p. 106). The term culture, he suggests, speaks about an interest larger than the physical artifact:

an interest in the social conditions in which the artifacts have their being, including their production, distribution, and use. Images are viewed in their contextual richness, as part of an ongoing social discourse that involves their influence in social life (pp. 106-107).

The shift to studying and teaching visual culture is significant for the field. Visual culture as an approach to art education is far more inclusive than the terms by which art has been traditionally understood. Based on
recent publications about visual culture, Malcolm Barnard (2001) suggests two categories for understanding the term; the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ sense of visual culture. The strong sense “stresses the cultural side of the phrase. It refers to the values and identities that are constructed in and communicated by visual culture” (p. 1). It is then an exchange of meanings through visual communication, as well as understanding self through socially and culturally constructed images (Cartwright & Sturken, 2001). The weak sense then “stresses the visual side of the phrase. It refers partly to the to the enormous variety of the visible two- and three-dimensional things that human beings produce and consume as part of their cultural and social lives” (p. 2). Adopting a visual culture approach to art requires that the “piece should speak for itself” attitude must be abandoned, because learning to read, interpret, and understand visuals in their social and cultural context is the essence of visual culture. The old masterpieces and artistic geniuses of the history of Western art will be included in the curriculum, but their status and justification as symbols of the high achievements of intelligence of Western (and world) culture will be questioned. Paul Duncum’s main argument is that a shift in art education from studying an institutionalized art world to studying visual culture is happening, and this change is inevitable and necessary. This argument suggests fine arts’ loss of its central role in art education. Although the fine arts are still included in the curriculum, the emphasis is in learning about visuals and visual communication in cultural and sociological contexts, taking into account all the senses and their effect on interpreting visuals. Art educators have already provided interesting examples of the new non-hierarchical connections that can be made between what was previously thought of as high-culture and popular/ low-culture (i.e. Freedman, 2000). This approach to changing curriculum and teaching practices from within, using pieces with which the teachers are familiar, as well as teaching them along with new forms of visual imagery, may be the easiest approach. However, it does not really change the old ways and does fully emphasize the importance of learning to read visual communication as a socially and culturally charged product embedded in existing power structures and struggles. Instead, Duncum suggests a curriculum that applies a set of provocative questions to discuss these matters (pp. 108-109).
Kerry Freedman and Patricia L. Stuhr’s (in press, 2003) publication “Curriculum Change for the 21st Century: Visual culture in art Education” intends to create a theoretical foundation for visual culture in art education, and by doing this lay a basis for the curriculum theory. The need for re-visioning art education philosophy becomes evident through their statement for the goals for art education: “If the intention of education is to prepare students for personal fulfillment and to constructively contribute to society, then art education must deal with newly emerging issues, problems, and possibilities that go beyond the constraints of learning offered by a discipline-based curriculum and standardized forms of assessment” (p. 4). The authors’ arguments are based on the changes in social and cultural environment, the increasing use of visual communication, the effect of technological advances in the ways we view culture and cultural identity, and the fluid and border-crossing movement among visual media. This forces us to re-evaluate how we understand, interpret and categorize visuals and interpersonal communication. “Visual culture is the totality of human-designed images and artifacts that shape our existence” (Freedman & Stuhr, 2003, p. 5) and when viewing experiences are discussed in relationship to visual culture, active and holistic terminology is used, such as involvement, engagement, and totality of the experience.

My understanding of visual culture is embedded in critical theory, cultural studies, semiotics, feminist visual culture theory, postmodernism, and critical race theory. I see visual culture as a logical development of the postmodern era supporting awareness of our surroundings and promoting local-global knowledge formation. Visual culture empowers the viewer in that it is the viewer who produces knowledge in relationship to his/her context and the piece. The emphasis is on the process of knowledge construction and learning, instead of “quantity and quality” of the knowledge internalized.

I strongly support the ideas of visual culture studies in both my teaching and research. I believe that visual information exists that cannot be transformed to textual or verbal forms of communication or representation. As we begin to recognize this in our teaching of visual culture, I argue that closer attention needs to be paid and more research conducted in how to use this information in art education research applying methods from for example arts, psychology, social studies and cultural studies.
Self-reflexive Methods in Investigating Academic Identity

Personal History: Artistic and Educational Background and its Affects on Teaching Ideas

Understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and a concomitant condition to the understanding of others. The process of education is not situated – and cannot be understood – in the observer, but in we who undergo it. (Pinar, 1981, p. 186).

In their book *Researching Teaching: Exploring Teacher Development through Reflexive Inquiry* Andra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2000) advise educators to return to their personal histories and significant stories from the past to form a better understanding of the teaching ideals held. I have returned to my personal and educational history through photographing objects from the past and by returning to the educational stories that have followed me for years. I believe it is important to return to those cherished, yet sometimes hurtful learning stories in order to understand the motives behind my personal teaching philosophy. Borrowing again from Wendy Hesford (1999), I believe there is “a great need for studies of the pedagogy and culture of the academy that are situational – located specifically and elaborated contextually. There is also a great need for a sustained analysis of the political stakes of invoking the autobiographical in academic sites and the contradictory effects of such acts” (p. xxii). While I discuss and analyze my photographs I try to maintain awareness of the larger sociopolitical environment that has affected my educational experiences. While it is through the most personal emotions related to these narratives that I gain an understanding of the importance of these private poetic and photographic self-expressions, and about the situations that enforce these stories. I attempt to study these “autobiographical acts as social signifying practices shaped by and enacted within particular institutional contexts and their histories” (p. xxiii). Also, I hope that through the approach I have embraced, I will help to “reframe and renew contemporary discussions about the academy as a site of struggle, collaboration, and transformation” (p. xxiii). In the context of discussing the influence of personal history in pedagogical practices, Maxine Greene (1978) has stated:

Each of us achieved contact with the world from a particular vantage point, in terms of particular autobiography. All of this underlies our present perspective and affects the way we look at things and talk about things and structure our realities (p. 2)
The past three years, the time period I have been a Ph.D. student and lived in Columbus, Ohio, have been the most influential time period in my life. It has been an exhilarating experience, sometimes even a struggle learning to teach at the college level, creating a scholarly identity, learning to write and speak fluent academic English, and living by the rules of the surrounding culture. I have taken all my student feedback most personally, without understanding why this is happening. Teaching, in my opinion, is not just a job; it is an occupation that requires a level of intimacy and self-exposure, which at times may cause difficulty in holding onto the boundaries between private and public aspects of self.

I have been haunted by the question of “What is it that I am really teaching?” since my first practical experience in the field while still an undergraduate in Finland. The educational system at the University of Arts and Design Helsinki supported the development of students’ artistic and individual identities well and provided a wide range of opportunities to explore one’s artistic potential across the visual arts genre. However, the educational system did not emphasize the understanding of the underlying theories that formed the methods, beliefs, and practices that were followed in art education. While it became possible to convey artistically pronounced Master’s thesis and Doctoral dissertation projects in 1992, sufficient theoretical and methodological guidelines had not yet been developed, meaning that each researcher had to define one’s own methodological framework without significant support from the faculty. While this invoked a creative and innovative attitude towards research, I longed for guidance. Thus I came to The Ohio State University to learn about theory, to find out who I was as an educator, and to determine in what direction I would go as a researcher and a scholar.

I intend to teach diverse perspectives of life through visual art and through visual culture, and I wish to convey to my students my deep interest in the diversity of human life. While I welcome the changes in my cultural identity that the exposure to my new living environment naturally causes, the newly adapted plurality causes inner conflict because of the gradual loss of my old ‘purely’ Finnish identity. I have learned to pronounce words with an Ohio accent and I have lost most of my old accent that was the result of an education influenced mainly by British English, English friends, and an exchange program in
Ireland. My “visible” ethnic identity is slowly vanishing and I fear the loss of the exotic, and the status of “otherness,” resulting in melting into the vagueness of the majority (Hesford, 1999). Recognizing this, I believe, is important in that it clearly affects my teaching and research.

As stated several times before, I believe that through art and visual culture it is possible to transmit information that would be impossible to verbalize and arrange according to the verbal thinking pattern. My teaching, research and attitude toward knowledge honor this unique quality. Teaching, in my opinion, cannot be separated from one’s understanding of knowledge construction and thus from one’s involvement in research. My research and teaching philosophies are deeply embedded in the way I understand the function of art in our lives. Art, teaching, and research are inseparable parts that can only fulfill potential when working together. I am not an artist, even though I am “visually talented,” but I am not strictly a scholar either. My life is in between and involves crossing borders of these fields that have often so oddly been separated from one another (see the discussion about professional roles in Chapter 2). As a researcher I am always present in the texts and studies I produce (Richardson, 1997). These and all the other narrations I create and repeat, or silence, form who I am today and who I will become (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). It is also through my teaching and relationship to my students that I express myself as though I were telling a story.

Art functions on a very personal level, directly influencing its spectator emotionally, intellectually, and physically. I teach multiple and diverse perspectives of life through art and visual communication, therefore I find it important to teach critical and analytical reading of visuals, and the potential combinations of visual and written expression. I wish to teach all my students, art majors as well as students from other disciplines, how to incorporate critical discussion and analysis, and possibly into the study of their own work and the visual culture surrounding them.

Moving to America changed my life on many levels. Most profoundly, perhaps, it changed my relationship to writing and language. I have grown to question the metaphors and culturally embedded codes language carries. I have been an ESL (English as a Second Language) student myself, and taught an ethnic arts course, which fulfills three university General Education Requirements (GEC). Teaching humanities, social diversity, and second level writing, to students who, in most cases, do not have a
background or educational training in art has been a great challenge for the past three years. To maintain a balanced and interesting class for art majors, as well as for students from other disciplines, requires sensitivity and trust between students and their instructor. I used to fear writing, especially with a language that was not my own. Writing my poems and my short stories, made me believe in myself. Through the stories I write about my life I am able to express something meaningful without being conscious of language barriers (last section “Window story” in Chapter 3). My personal goal for the course is to help students reach a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own cultural heritage, which hopefully leads to increasing openness towards “otherness,” world views and cultural traditions that were previously foreign to the student. Through my own experience and through teaching this course, I have learned that students write better and are more actively engaged in the conversation about art and social/ethnic matters if they are able to find an immediate connection to their own lived experiences. I find it important to communicate with each student individually, so that I am aware if a student cannot relate to the topic of discussion. Without this connection these learning experiences of “otherness” remain superficial.

**Memory Work**

I have discussed the term and method “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995) in greater detail in Chapter 4, however, I will briefly examine how it relates to the educational and autobiographical aspect of my research process. Returning to past events, to me, is a “heuristic” (Hesford, 1999, p. 4) experience, a search, rather than an attempt to find and document factors. My attempts to return to the past using “memory work” as my method is “a cultural materialist approach that investigates how one attempts to position one’s self, or is positioned, among competing discourses and that relocates autobiography in the rhetorical and historical moments of its production and reception” (Hesford, p. 4). The past can never be recalled as it was experienced at that time; rather the reinterpretation is inevitable. Remembering is an ever-changing process tied closely to and interpreted from our current lives and perspectives. While past experiences can never be relived as they happened to us in the past, the value of remembering can be found in the present (Kuhn, 1995). I use different incitements, both public and private, to evoke remembering, and my memories themselves are tied into our historical and cultural (political) context, to my life situations and to the
materialization of the memories. The education-related stories I write based on my photographs are influenced by student evaluations, conversations with students and colleagues, private memories related to school, university, and educational experiences outside formal educational settings.

The prime objective of the method “memory work” that Annette Kuhn (1995) proposes is the disentanglement of “the connections between memory, its traces, and the stories we tell about the past” (p. 3). Recalling past events and re-living one’s own story is “a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present” (p. 1). The stories I have included in this chapter are stories I have found difficult to accept and understand. Kuhn (1995) continues that one’s life stories are not limited to personal past, but are about shared-past and telling is thus “a key moment in the making of ourselves” (p. 2). To win my insecurities as an educator and a scholar, and to gain my full potential as young college teacher, I forced myself to face the suppressed and silenced memories that had haunted me for years. Remembering is always political; it is contextual, supported or suppressed by public institutions and the family. To read an image one needs to be aware of the political agendas involved, the demographic of the society and the politics of photography. My photographs are often both taken, and analyzed for the research and educational purposes, which occurs within the framework of postmodernist ideals of art; greater than ever personal involvement in the fast developing technology; rapidly changing ontological understanding; and increasing international political tension.

As an aid to recalling memories, Kuhn (1995) has introduced this systematic model she calls memory work. She uses private and public images as her starting point, but the public and private and the personal and collective always intervene on different levels. Kuhn’s memory work, which is a “method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories” (p. 8) supports the intentions of many current scholars world-wide who by publishing their life-stories as members of the academia, wish to contribute and call attention to the subjectivity of knowledge and the holistic experience of conducting research and teaching (i.e. Haavio-Mannila & al. 1995; Eskola, & Peltonen, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 1996; 2002). While my goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the multilayered and intertwined infrastructures that shape
my thinking as a scholar, I realize that “Autobiographical acts...do not reflect unmediated subjectivities; rather they are acts of self-representation that are ideologically encoded with historical memories and principles of identity and truth” (Hesford, 1999, p. xxiii).

Narrative

The sounds of storytelling are everywhere today. Narratives of many kinds are being opened and explored. Journal keeping goes on apace on all levels of learning; people write autobiographies, shape family histories, become authors of their own lives (Maxine Greene, in Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. ix).

Aligning myself with many current autoethnographers (e.g. Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Richardson, 1997) and researchers investigating and using narrative as a method of inquiry (in Witherell & Noddings, 1991), it is my firm belief that all forms of narrations about life create an understanding of who we are in relationship to society, culture, and others. I believe that we create an understanding of who we are by means of the stories we tell and through the images and other documents about our lives we create (Richardson, 1997; 2000). The way we understand ourselves is deeply embedded in our cultural and social environment and interaction with other people. Yet, it is through the most personal feelings, emotions, and experiences that we understand and view the world around us. Visual and written stories, myths, personal narratives, and autobiographical accounts all give a voice to silenced aspects of ourselves. They speak the most private languages and bring about parts of our personalities that could not have been expressed otherwise. Referring to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) I believe it to be the inner voice or the voice of reason that speaks in these accounts. The past ten years have celebrated individual stories and narrations about one’s personal story in relationship to their occupations (i.e. Stout, 2001; Fitzner & Rugh, 1998; Bochner & Ellis, 2002). My aim is to help my students form a deeper understanding of who they are and what affects the ways they view the surrounding world. Art and visual culture provide unique tools to learn about self and to engage one’s self in the larger conversation about society and culture. It is my goal that my students both learn to understand themselves in relationship to their environment, as well as understand their role as active architects of their culture using art works, cultural productions, and critical and analytical discussions and texts.
Narrative Knowing

“Decisions as to which stories will be told and which suppressed not only give definition to a life but serve as a form of power for the writer. The teacher, like the writer knows of this power through the oral and written texts of classroom life…” (Witherell, & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). While forming, re-creating, and analyzing one’s personal educational narratives is a process of re-negotiating one’s private and public self, the process is also closely related to situating one’s self and one’s research in an academic genealogy (Shuman, Amy, personal communication, 2003). Our academic work must be seen as relational, not only as situated in the field or paradigm. As researchers we are adopted sons and daughters of our mentors and through our academic narratives we are “rooted in an earlier consciousness of relation to another who listens and responds appropriately, the narrative closure affectively and cognitively gratifies expectations created in and through its form” (Helle, 1991, p. 57). An ethnographic perspective understands narration as “a cultural symbolization that contributes to the continuity and shaping of the life of a community” (Grumet, 1991, p. 68). All educational narratives might be seen this way, as they contribute to the knowledge-community of the academic field. Referring to Sartre (1966), Grumet states that “settling into our stories is bad faith…it is capitulating, forgetting that there is always a face beneath the mask. The politics of narrative is not, then, merely a social struggle but an ontological one as well. We are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience” (p. 69). I find relevant Freedman and Stuhr’s (2003) article, in which they state that “truth” and understanding reality is no longer about epistemology, but rather about our ontological understanding about reality and subjectivity. This is relevant in investigating and understanding the truth-value and relevance of educational narratives. While I believe that through sharing personal narratives we have an access to the essence of human experiences, it is indeed necessary to recognize that telling one’s story causes separation and distancing from the subject of the story, that “telling diminishes the teller, and that we who invite teachers to tell us their stories develop an ethic for that work” (Grumet, 1991, p. 70). Becoming involved in autobiographical narratives, we accept the fact that teachers and researchers become actors in their own stories, thus their
personalities are inevitably altered and impacted by those stories. This is one of the aspects of my study that I have battled with, because I have found it difficult to resist the temporary conclusions achieved through these individual, but inter-related stories and visuals.

The academic world today is willing again to recognize the power of a good story and the use of metaphors in education, and the “predominantly logico-scientific mode of knowing” (Witherell, & Noddings, p. 3) is losing its position as the only mode of constructing knowledge and gaining understanding about the human mind and experiences. Researchers who involve personal knowledge in educational research, according to Madeleine Grumet (1991), convey research that “honor[s] the spontaneity, complexity, and ambiguity of human experience” (p. 67). Narrative not only describes a sequence of events, but it moves in non-linear fashion engaging its teller as well as the one who listens, or who will hear the story in the future. Educational narratives are written with specific audiences in mind, (Witherell & Noddings, 1991) and while reading an autobiographical narrative, “the reader is a subject-in-process, holding the meaning of prior events in abeyance, deferring them in anticipation of later events” (Helle, 1991, p. 57). This is not to argue that only the narratives written for educational purposes should be recognized as educationally significant. Even though we begin to tell stories as soon as we have means to express ourselves, it is often hard to recognize the relevance of narration for academic purposes. It is an intuitive reaction to believe in a well-written or told story. We relate to the storyteller or the hero, and the “I” of the listener relates to the “I” of the story. Stories provoke our interest, help us to relate to others’ stories, and allow us to experience things otherwise impossible. Visual stories, as well as written one’s make us feel and experience. Although this is traditionally deemed important in researching human experience, it is difficult for those in academia to recognize that these stories “matter,” construct knowledge, or even that they are rarely based on empirical research. And in a sense they do; a good story lives, even when details and facts are forgotten in the process. Good stories are based on their generalizability in ways that teach us matters that are essential in understanding humanity. Emotions and reason meet in the stories, cultural practices, art and inter-human communication.
Feminist Reading of Educational Narratives

Feminine behavior has its roots in Western thought; it is still often thought to be the women whose identities are relationally constructed, whose behavior is the emotional, and thoughts are ‘irrational’. Yet, men are increasingly involved in research practices that integrate emotional and personal (autobiography and autoethnography). Narrative and story, whether based on images or written, involves a dialogue – a dialogue between one’s self as a writer and as a reader; the one that the writer was in the past and the self they are today and tomorrow; a dialogue between self and other. Forming a narrative and telling it requires one to be simultaneously its subject and the active teller that is subjective in its relationship to the narrated self. “Narrative processes form a connected medium for knowing – an embodiment of an intimate relation between knower and the known” (Helle, 1991, p. 50). Inner- and inter-personal dialogue reinforces negotiation of meaning, which leads to contradicting stories. I believe that it is through this contradiction found within one’s own identity that one can come to understand ‘otherness’ in a meaningful and constructive way. If one does not come to find contradicting ideas through the process of learning about self, the understanding of other as equal and equally unique remains forced and artificial. This process of finding discontinuity and fragmentation in one’s understanding of self can be experienced as frightening and uncomfortable. Experiencing selfhood through plurality can be felt to be as loss of control and unity. What has been learned to be understood as “I” is unpredictably questioned from within. The awakening of a critical consciousness has to come from one’s self because “the stories we tell to others may be finally less dangerous than the ones that we tell to ourselves” (Grumet, 1991, p. 70). Anita Plath Helle (1991) states that people are often driven to find alternatives from which to question their dominant identity. On the other hand, a sense of selfhood can also be found through the questioning of socially constructed or forced identity. This is evident in many women’s and minorities’ liberation, migration, and self-investigation testimonies and stories (e.g. Steedman, 1998; Spence & Solomon, 1998, Kuhn, 1995; Hirch, 1997).

While studying my own culturally constructed identity, I was often frightened about the loss of control that was caused by the multiple dimensions of myself of which I became aware. As I have written in the previous chapters, the fear of losing control made me focus and analyze my thinking and emotions to
the extend that I no longer had energy to control my increasing physical clumsiness. Through an intensive
period of “photo therapy” (Spence, 1986; 1995) and “memory work” (Kuhn, 1995, Hesford, 1999) I was
able to accept some of the new aspects of my identity that I had previously suppressed and intentionally
hidden from conscious analysis. I create visual and written narrations about my life that help me organize
my thoughts and form a more complex understanding of my surroundings. Teaching for me is “both a
personal and public activity” (Witherell & Nodding, 1991, p. 9). It calls for intuitive and tacit knowledge as
well as for analytical thinking based on reason and logic. I believe that it is only possible to analyze one’s
teaching behavior and construction of knowledge by allowing also the subconscious, silenced and creative
behavior to direct one’s inquiry.

Anita Plath Helle (1991) cites transformation and connection as themes of study in women’s
autobiographies and feminist philosophy. I have followed these themes without recognizing them as tools
that I have used them to analyze my identity as academic teacher and researcher. I have previously
associated transformation and connection stories with cultural and diasporic stories, and only lately have
found the transformation and connection within one’s self in relationship to the surroundings. The term
“relationality” has again helped me to fight against the deeply embedded belief in the Western
individuality. Helle’s (1991) approach is embedded in feminist theory: “Narrative ways of knowing
function collectively to affirm the values of multiplicity and connection, desirable alternatives in a feminist
climate threatened by division and fragmentation” (p. 49). Narrative as an educational tool “models the
process of recognizing the other” (Helle, 1991, p. 52). In the narrative the other does not just exist with me
in the space we share, but is within me (Helle, 1991). Even though the stories that we tell about our lives
change us and force us to distance ourselves from what we have learned to recognize as our personal
identities, it is this moment of alienation “that initiates a process of meditation rather than an end in itself”
(Grumet, 1991, referring to Hegel, p. 70).

Typical of feminist pedagogy is a multiplicity of perspectives and connectedness. “Where
narrative’s power of specifying combines with theory’s power of generalizing, ever more inclusive and
multiplistic standpoints for knowing become possible” (Helle, 1991, p. 63).
Language & Photo-writing

The relationship between language and visuality were discussed in detail earlier. Thus I will only briefly discuss these practices here as I feel the creation process, as well as their reading, differs from the visual responses to other aspects of my life. I “meditate” around my photographs for several months before I am ready to write. For a story to be born requires a special moment and privacy. I react to my own visuality through the camera while photographing and while looking at the proof sheets; these images often please me aesthetically and touch my emotions and feelings. The photographs that I choose to further work with are the ones that seem to be willing to have a conversation with me, or the ones that require immediate attention.) Working with the images that relate to my educational background need a long period to develop. Whereas I usually react to a vision that then alerts other senses, with educational imagery I am often not even attracted to the vision itself, but to the story I want to tell. Places, like the classroom in which I used to both take classes and teach, intrigue my thinking, and the visual is built based on this spatial story, instead of visually evoked attraction. One of the reasons “working” these educational stories and images requires a longer period of time to develop is the “heightened responsibility toward self and others” (Helle, p. 64) caused the public nature of these narratives and the relationship to their institutional context.

Narrative as an Educational Tool for Teaching Interculturalism and Diversity: The Stranger’s Story

Learning through personal, visual, written or oral narrations is a powerful tool for learning about otherness. It has been through my short stories, e-mail correspondence, the stories I tell my family when I call home, through my photographs, and finally through composing this text that I have become aware of the difficulties I have experienced while trying to adapt to my new life situation. While my intention has not been to underline differences, it has often been that the most sensitive areas of everyday interaction and the unspeakable differences that appear as themes in the photographs and stories. This again leads me to the philosophical understanding of self as related to others and its context (Eakin, 1999; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). “The community that allows for diversity is, as we have seen, a strong vital organization. Perhaps it is the stranger who teaches us how to teach strangers. The ability to appreciate otherness in individuals and communities is a way of redeeming the stranger and of redeeming the world” (Witherell &
Noddings, 1991, quoting Shabatay, p. 81). I hope that by making my story public, I can teach myself and others something valuable about the experience of being a stranger and a newcomer.

Whatever the situation, the stranger is the one who lives on the edge between her unique world and the world of others that she has just entered. The stranger by her presence asks something of us: she asks that her heritage or her condition be respected. This requires that those with whom she comes in contact enter into a dialogical relationship with her. Real dialogue allows for the uniqueness of the other to be brought forth. Such openness to differences is an essential component of caring relationships like that of teacher and student or counselor and client (Shabatay, 1991, p. 136)

**Practice: Continuous Search as a Teaching Philosophy**

The teacher of visual arts, diversity, multiculturalism, interculturalism...and will there be a democratic future?

I look at the photograph and I read the story about the three horses and a donkey over and over again. I had known that this story had to be told, and I had planned this photograph for a year. I usually work with a theme in mind, but eventually it is the photograph in front of me that informs the story and guides my thinking. This is one of the few stories that were formed in my head after the visual idea, yet without having the concrete photograph in front of me.

I truly loved this teacher and I was shocked and bitter when she did not remember me. I believe that this story directly connects to my past disability to distance other, more private aspects of my identity from my role as a teacher, and why I had difficulty accepting negative student criticism. This happened to the extend that I would ignore all the positive feedback if I received any less constructive criticism. Feedback, such as: “I think Anniina is a good teacher, because she is seemingly devoted to her students’ learning” would not matter to me if one of my students wrote, “you suck, this class sucks.” Because I could never bring myself to compare hand-writings between class assignments and student evaluations, I could not be certain who wrote the negative comments and thus I became insecure about the class as a whole and tried to avoid contact with my old students if I was not absolutely sure they had liked me and my teaching style. Going back to my own experiences as a student helped me to understand that I had difficulty separating my performance as a teacher from the rest of my life. Subconsciously, my success in the classroom began to correlate to my ability to survive and become a full member of my new social context. I was constantly insecure about my abilities as a writer and my communication skills in English, thus I
started compromising with my students in ways I was not willing to compromise. I would be lenient with deadlines and allow myself to be sucked into their failure stories, which always ended with me taking blame for the lack of their success.

My experience with the teacher of the story was holistic. She was my classroom teacher for six years and she taught almost all the courses. I saw her daily for years and she became the model of a teacher to me. She was also the sole holder of the power (educational and religious) in the classroom; the only one that you had to please and the one whose acceptance you had to gain to be somebody in the class. My academic and overall life experience in Columbus, Ohio, has been a holistic experience as well. I have often felt that the system I have built around me, my life here, is built of interdependent fragile match or stick structures. If a part of this structure fails, I have quickly repaired it before the rest of the structure collapses. While I recognize that this is true to all life situations, I have learned not to glue those pieces together anymore, but to let individual structures collapse every now and then and find enjoyment in the reconstruction processes as well as new possibilities for revisioning. I am still sensitive to student feedback, as every teacher should be, but I now understand that they are not all my elementary school teachers and my success in this “system” does not depend on individual students’ likes or dislikes.

In the text that follows, I aim to both study my own educational principles through the act of writing and to state my teaching philosophy for others to see.

Visual culture studies focus on the ways we use and understand images in arts, communication, and advertisements. Such studies empower the spectator in a viewing situation, giving him or her freedom of interpretation and making this interpretation process personal. These studies strongly affect how I approach research that involves visuals and how I view my goals and ideas as an educator. My understanding is that the everyday aspects of life, through emotions and lived experiences, most strongly affect and form our thinking. Hence, I find a connection to feminist perspectives on research and art through the appreciation of personal and individual experience. Feminist ideas mingle with the postmodernist approach in thinking about art, in which the process matters more than the final product, and pieces are interpreted in a personal, historical, social, and cultural context. Postmodernism empowers the viewer, giving individuals room for intellectual thoughts and self-reflection.
As a believer in issue-oriented education I teach social justice, equality, and diversity (social, gender, sexual, and age) through arts and aesthetics. I aim to provide students with tools to critically discuss and analyze art and visual information that surrounds them in their everyday lives. I wish to increase their appreciation towards the rich cultural criticism and discussion about the society in which artists are often involved. I also believe it is important for art majors to critically discuss and write about their own work. It is rare, unfortunately, to read texts written by the artists themselves and I hope to see my students increasingly involved in public discussion about their own work and the art of others. I view every learning situation in and outside of the classroom as integrally connected to ways of learning about self, life, and knowledge formation. I learn alongside and in close relationship to my students, and my role as a teacher is to be an involved member and a co-constructor of knowledge. I see myself as a director of an independent movie in which plenty of space is given for student improvisation.

Continuous critical discussion is the core of my teaching theory. I seldom lecture and I believe it important for the learning process that each student decides his/her own learning pace and level of involvement. We learn in collaboration; I invite guest speakers, we go on field trips, prepare presentations, watch educational videos and movies, listen to music, and even share meals. My syllabus and in-class activities are built to support the students’ individual research, collaboration with one another, and intellectual/critical thinking. My teaching philosophy is intended to prepare students for investigation and critical discussion about social and cultural issues, as well as to build trust in their own ability to make ethical judgments necessary to participate in a democratic society. Many of my students feel uncomfortable with writing, and some are not capable of composing academic text at a college level. My job, then, has been to engage these students in the topics of their interest and help them to express themselves through the combination of writing and visuals. Many of my students have found pleasure and pride in writing about their own family traditions, while overcoming the difficulties they experience with English grammar and lack of experience with academic writing.

My dissertation provides an example of how issues of globalization, diversity, and interculturalism can be learned through the exploration of local and personal experiences, and I suggest that similar artistic learning processes adapted to art education would help students in exploring and forming their cultural and
contextual identities. I wish to develop and teach courses that allow students to set their own goals for learning within the framework of the studied topic. I believe that self-reflexive visual and/or written journaling advances this process of identifying students’ individual needs. I would like to adapt the concept of visual journaling and reflection through studio work to art education at all levels. It would benefit student teachers to have a studio course that relates to their practical training, in which ideas and dilemmas evoked by their work at schools could be processed through their own creative work. Artistic inquiry organizes one’s thinking and promotes and supports the growth of cultural identity. Through my work with children I have found it most valuable for the learning process to focus on themes of children’s current interests. Visually studying these topics helps them to identify feelings, emotions, and ideas, as well as organizes, connects, and advocates intellectual thoughts about the world around them. Most important of all, visual language is critical in child development. Recognizing this promotes equality in learning in that it supports different ways of learning and communicating.
Teacher

Teaching and being a student in this room differs in two ways: the way I use the space, and the way I meet another person.

When you are a student you are not supposed to intensively look in the eyes of your peers and professor.

Instead, you gaze at something in the great distance, stare at your notes, draw or write, check something from the text.

Only momentarily would you dare to look at someone intensively to let them know – or the others – that you are paying attention and that you care, disagree or agree.

Yet, you have the option of staying anonymous.

Teaching then…

You sit there, you stand, move around, keep the class alive.
Sensing, hearing, tasting, feeling, being on alert.
Look your students straight in the eyes, letting them know that you want them to learn with you.

You don’t agree or disagree, you don’t prove or ignore, you always start from where your students left you last time you met them.

You have to meet them in the space between you and them, because if you don’t, if you don’t leave your own body, there is no learning, only memorizing.

You have to reveal yourself to your students, because if you don’t, they don’t believe you.

If I want to teach, for me, for the teacher, the option of staying anonymous doesn’t exist.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND IDEAS FOR CONTINUATION

Why do I still travel? What narratives do I live by and within?

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing the place for the first time (Richardson, 1997, p. 6)

I have built my dissertation upon sequences of texts and visuals that I believe best suit my research purposes and that appear welcoming, hopefully even seductive, to the reader. The power of artistic representations is that it “can occur on multiple levels, engaging multiple senses, producing a more visceral impact than does textual prose and hence eliciting greater intellectual/emotional response” (Kondo, 1995, p. 62). Italo Calvino’s (1974) *Invisible Cities* once took me on a tour such as that described by Laurel Richardson above; it inspired me to re-vision the world differently, to respond on multiple levels with unspeakable emotions and thoughts. The book took me on a trip to the complexities of life and human thought from which I have still not returned. I have not yet finished the book as I have declined to return to estimate how the place and self that I once left behind have changed. Instead I have finished and started new projects that will allow me to keep searching and immigrating. I am still traveling because this process of investigating culturally constructed reality and visuality is not yet over and it may never be. Like a nomadic ethnographer, I have traveled “without departure or arrival” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 265, quoting Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

The Power of Visual-Verbal Narrative

Writing narrative in a constantly changing relationship to my images has become a powerful tool for self-examination for me. The process has changed my relationship to writing. Whereas I used to fear
writing, through this process I have learned to write in ways that help me to find relief from stress, analyze loss, mourning, and ultimate happiness, find connections between nightmares and theoretical dilemmas, approach and conceptualize my artistic behavior, and investigate different aspects of my thinking. It has taught me many lessons about myself.

Many arguments have been formed to validate the use of narrative in educational, social, and cultural research. “Reality is subjective and is known only as it is experienced by individuals. By focusing on how ethnographic knowledge about how individuals experience reality is produced, through the intersubjectivity between researchers and their research contexts, we may arrive at a closer understanding of the worlds that other people live in” (Pink, 2001, p. 20). Understanding experiences, culture, and reality is always partial and interpreted through different aspects and environments of our identity construction (Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995). Through self-reflexive visual and verbal narratives a critical understanding of the negotiated reality between the researcher and his/her environment (described reality) may be achieved.

One of the most exciting trends in the contemporary art scene is the use of (digital) photography and (digital) video to study human experience and identity from “odd,” previously unseen perspectives. It is a fresh turn partly inspired by the availability and affordability of high-quality digital equipment that allows reproductions to be produced with “snapshots” skills. Whereas playing with two slide projectors was still a cool and fresh idea ten, fifteen years ago, artists now manipulate “documentary” material fluently. Slow motion and the inclusion of still images, for example, have been taken to a completely different level, and the inclusion of “stills” in otherwise “running” material does not bother us because we are accustomed to it. Michael Renov (1999) writes about the potential of domestic ethnography to capture the culturally significant that which most often goes unseen and hidden behind the ethics of privacy. What is significant is “domestic ethnography’s potential to mine cultural memory with a level of intensity unavailable to outsiders” (p. 149). It discusses themes relevant to the study of identity roles as well as the personal study of family, relevant only to those involved. “Afforded a depth of access to its subjects, domestic ethnography discloses secrets, performs masquerades of identity, and, temporarily at least, rearranges family hierarchies” (p. 149). Domestic ethnography, along with interactive home pages, and numerous published autobiographies and memoirs, for example, have led us to the spaces and dimensions of domestic
experience previously inaccessible. Very similar to domestic ethnography, Jo Spence and Joan Solomon’s (1995) photo therapy workshops educated participants about the use of photographic representation to gain an insight to the narratives, agencies, and authorities the participants lived by and within. Creating alternative representations makes new understandings available, and new authorities claimable. Visual stories about domestic life, such as the ones Renov (1999) calls domestic ethnography, teach us about the strangeness, “otherness,” and commonalities of human experience. They are larger than life, while still being less than a life (Richardson, 1997).

We naturally relate to the “I” of the narrator and reflect our life stories in relation to the “I” of the teller. If we educators are invested in creating alternative stories that inform our pedagogy and help our students shape alternative narratives for themselves, we may be able to stimulate a change towards a more democratic society. Others have investigated possibilities for varied and alternative methods of studying identity. What I suggest is a new angle for studying identity construction and experiences through using visual knowledge, memory, personal past, and for investigating diversity through connections found between private and public spheres. Whether my research will have wider social implications remains to be seen. I have, however, gained a “deeper,” more complex understanding of myself as a consumer, researcher, and educator of culture. The methods I propose can be modified to fit all educational levels from professional development to early childhood education. I have worked with social workers, continuing education students, school children, kindergarten children, and retirees in Finland, and traditional and continuing education programs in the U.S. Through my practices I have seen a positive change in my students engaged through activities which critically question visual cultural representations and artifacts, and their discursive representations. I witnessed changing attitudes in my students towards otherness and increased critical acceptance of differences. Also I noticed improvements in their attitudes concerning self-respect and their willingness to participate in culturally critical conversations.

**Audience and Accessibility**

“Consequently and rightfully, everyone can claim to own the representation, because everyone can be affected by it and authorized to respond” (Kondo, 1995, p. 62). I have chosen (was it ever an option?) to fabricate a representation from textual, verbal and visual fragments, individual narratives, and tales

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forgotten or never finished. I trust this representational format’s ability and power to seduce readers and spectators into my story. I invite readers/viewers to include their personal emotions and experiences in the reading process. I want others to travel with me, to migrate, to lose their sense of self, and again slowly put those pieces back together.

Can everyone claim the representation, though? Is it possible for everyone to respond and relate? Probably not. I cannot apply so much understanding and subject positioning that my story would appeal to everyone. Actually, if I believed that visual and textual representations are equally accessible and readily available for all spectators, my job as an art educator would be done. It is naïve to claim that all viewers can equally own and access artistic representations. This is where I see my role as an educator of critical visual awareness beginning: to equip my students with tools for critical analysis on their path towards understanding how visual and textual narratives are reading us while we in turn read and produce them (Hesford, 1999). We analyze and understand within limits of learned self-perception and we behave accordingly. My work is about coming to question who I have learned to be, finding a voice and language to further explore questions arising, and about forming and shaping representations that may help others to further explore their situated identities. Finally, my work further explores arts-based research and autoethnography. It sets an example of yet another possible methodology for educators and researchers, who share my interest in inquiring into the complex connections between one’s personal life, artistic persona, and critical pedagogy.

For Professional Development

The most evident results of my study are embodied in my changed teaching practices and ability to listen and relate to my students’ stories. I have grown to critically investigate my pedagogy and philosophy through self-reflexive artistic methods, and through searching and finding connections between my personal life story and the public tale I live by and within. My claim, that continuous and critical self-reflexive practices in relationship to professional practice, is the ground for critical pedagogy was well worded by Welty (1956): “It is by knowing where you stand that you are able to judge where you are” (Welty, quoted in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 260) once you arrive at this positionality “perhaps, think of where you might rather be” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 260). While I have found temporary situatedness for my in-flux
identity in my visuals and texts, I hope others find temporary positionality through their relationship to my text. Constructing this body of work has helped me to acknowledge the reasons behind my educational decisions. Gianna DiRezze (2000) argues that self-reflexive studies that are sensitive to all aspects of individual experience help teachers make conscious and intelligent choices. I agree with her. While it is a privilege to be able to pause and reflect on one’s thoughts and actions, I believe that critically studying the connections between one’s personal and professional life will help teachers and researchers become increasingly aware of the power structures, institutional rhetoric, and political agendas that inform our pedagogical decision-making. I provide an example of the use of visual and verbal practices as a method of coming to engage with unspoken narratives embedded in tacit, visual, and embodied knowledge that directed my emotional, social, and professional lives. I have found a temporary “home within myself” (DiRezze, 2000, p. 273, quoting Jersild, 1955). I can walk into the classroom knowing that there are always hidden agendas embedded in every syllabus, even when written by myself, yet knowing that I have done the best I can to explore the narratives that silently, but firmly, direct my pedagogy.

My Claim for Further Developing These Research Methodologies

New and exciting autoethnographic, arts-based, and artistic inquiries are currently being conducted in many places. Much is happening in the arts-based educational genre, and scholars committed to narrative and autobiographical inquiries can be found all over the United States, Canada, Scandinavia. My home country, Finland, has started a whole new genre (or should I say genres) of artistic research (Kiljune & Hannula, 2002; Kaila, 2002; Saarnivaara & Sava, 1998). However, all these approaches and practices need to be continuously critiqued and re-evaluated. The Department of Art Education in the University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland, has faced many problematic situations when trying to create evaluation criteria for artistic-scientific master’s thesis and doctoral dissertations. Universities in the U.S. and Canada have had to fight battles to gain acceptance for this alternatively conducted work. I greatly admire the intuitive direction the Academy of Fine Arts in Finland has taken by not focusing on justifying their artistic research based on the standards of the larger scientific community, instead creating in-depth knowledge for the arts community about the emergence of artistic and cognitive knowledge-construction.
My theoretical interests are these: I wish to call attention to the merging and intertwining of the different ways knowledge is constructed through and within everyday experiences and practices. We often separate visual and verbal knowledge and communication, while most of the time we are simultaneously engaged in multiple ways of actively and critically observing our surroundings and constructing new understandings. I am fortunate to have been “trained” in the visual arts, and I recognize that creating representations and producing visual artifacts may not be similarly available to everyone. What I find most significant in my work is not the production of alternative representations that helped me question my autobiography, although this has been personally and professionally beneficial, but the process of gaining access to intellectuality and new understandings only available (for me personally) through the emergence of artistic, self-reflexive, and theoretical thinking. Somewhat similar to visual domestic ethnography or innovative art projects, which study human personas and experience, these research processes have the potential to question pre-set categories and boundaries of identity by providing access to layers of human experience that are rarely accessible through modes of knowledge. My researcher, educational, artistic, and private identities and roles come together through my research; the projects crosses pre-set boundaries for research practices by using private life as a source of knowledge, by claiming to know artistically, and by situating the theory into the midst of all this. We recognize the power of narrative, and we are aware that much remains uninvestigated about visual knowledge. I wonder how the face of the academy would change if we would give more recognition to intuition, visual knowledge, silent knowledge and such in creating research.

I have also been fortunate to be able to take the time and freedom needed to come to terms with my artistic practices while I was learning to write research and read theory. These projects naturally merged through everyday experiences. I needed to be active in sports in order to be able to sleep after I read, thought intensively about what I had read or “got emotional” just as I needed to photograph to give visual shape to the emotional chaos inside me, to analyze social interactions, to analyze and ground theory. I also needed the theory, the visual and verbal narratives, and the everyday experiences to survive and perform successfully as an educator of culture. It is a dialectical process in which different parts feed one another yet cannot be separated.
While the theoretical “training” and mentorship system in the U.S. is far more advanced and organized than in Finland, groundbreaking, exiting, and innovative work is being produced in Finnish universities where the students and their mentors are not so bound by academic restrictions and legacies. My work tries to balance these two systems; artistic behavior is the core of my intellectual thinking, for which I wish never to apologize, and all my theoretical thinking arises from everyday bodily and emotional experiences. This intellectuality, however, needs theoretical support and epistemological understandings to find its voice and authority.

**Diversity education: How to teach about the stranger with and within? Suggestions for educational practices and for future research**

I search for “discourses that cut across gender and ethnicity” (Dunlop, 1999, p. 59), discourses that are not limited to binary assumption of being one or another. Our efforts in “training” critical visual thinkers are only worthwhile if we focus on the students’ complex identities and discourses that have been previously suppressed in the institutional curricula. I support and propose a pedagogy and curriculum that focus on learning about cultural phenomena, artists, visual culture producers, objects and artifacts, and students’ culturally situated identity construction in their varied and complex discourses. These investigations may lead to specific, richly detailed, multiple, and locally situated understandings, observations, and sharp criticism. To the best of my knowledge, I teach critical tools for investigating biases, perspectives, and narratives that inform individual readings of varied representations created about one’s own and others’ experiences. I see myself as a director of an independent movie in which plenty of space is given to student/actor improvisations, and in which the actors and audiences equally teach the director. I practice critical (Giroux, 1994; Hesford, 1999; Dunlop, 1999), and engaged pedagogy (Finnegan, 2000; Speirs, 2000, hooks, 1994; 1995) informed by personal life-stories.

I believe that through relating to others’ personal narratives (visual-verbal) a new understanding of the other, previously perceived through stereotypical positioning, biases, and personal expectations can be negotiated as we are forced or seduced to adopt the narrator’s subject positioning(s). Dunlop (1999) calls this a process of “self-othering,” “a dialogic process of recognizing the other in self and the self from the position of the other as the prerequisite to developing a transformed relation to difference” (p. 61).
Learning to recognize the “other” within myself forms the basis for my critical pedagogy and research (Dunlop, 1999, using Kristeva, 1980 & 1991). Similar to my earlier investigation between public and private domains, Dunlop (1999) questions these boundaries and calls attention to multiple subjectivities and cultural complexity. Through my artistic work, I have come to question my autobiography as I have questioned how I perceive my occupational role in relation to institutional, social, and cultural myths, expectations, and contexts (Britzman, 1991). “Although we may begin with language, it is deep below the surface of language that we create new meanings for ourselves and with others” (Dunlop, 1999, p. 59). Through experiencing the fragmentation of cultural identity, I found it impossible to re-locate myself within set and assumed categories of identity, thus my personal experiences led me to search for an alternative voice, language, and subject positioning that would allow me to again write myself into culture.

As I questioned the roles of an educator, scholar, and visual culture producer, I became aware of the institutional, academic, and cultural rhetoric that “silently” and “sneakily” spoke from in-between spaces in the language that I was learning (Dunlop, 1999; Hesford, 1999).

It becomes possible to respect and honor the diversity of voices in the “classroom” as we become aware of the narratives and life-stories that we as educators and students necessarily live by and within. To build a trusting and comfortable relationship between educators and students that honors dialogue, polyphony of voices and multiple, complex subject positionings, we need to aim to critically study all of these. To build trust and new understandings, we cannot rely on students alone to provide information about their cultural background. This practice contains a risk of regressing students back to narrow and uncomplicated categories of ethnicity, class, gender or any others if they are forced to perform as informants and spokespersons for that certain group (Dunlop, 1999). As Stuhr et al. (1995) pointed out, and Dunlop also emphasizes, is that all of our knowledge is inherently partial. Students in the midwestern university often come to the classroom assuming that the ethnic- and minority-related issues do not relate to their lives because of their “all-American,” “non-ethnic” background and heritage. While culture is perceived as the symbolic festivities and rituals that unite a community, these students often perceive
themselves as lacking culture. Students identifying their heritage as Polish, Native-American, German, and middle-class white American present even more of a challenge to the educator than the specified “minority” identities in the classroom.

My pedagogy and curricular activities attempt to investigate unique, complex, and culturally discursive identity, no matter what subject matter is studied. These are not matters, however, that can be solved simply by providing practical advice since all educational settings are different and every student group unique. Thus, I would like to see an increased interest in sharing experiences about one’s attempt to address changing social, ideological, and theoretical demands in one’s pedagogical practices. Again, I believe that, through sharing personal learning and “battle” narratives, we could learn about the reality of learning situations. I acknowledge the sensitive nature of these issues; by sharing one’s struggles in understanding difference through personal self-reflexive narratives, one may feel professionally threatened.

Since I seem to have little shame in sharing my struggles with educational issues and credibility, I have started a collaborative project with another educator, a study that focuses on the struggles encountered by two white female educators while they are trying to teach about diversity and “otherness.” We had both found a deep connection to Carrie Mae Weems’ work, and felt that this “personal” relationship with her work may help us to approach the difficulties we faced when teaching issues strange to us, such as African American female experience in the contemporary U.S. Understanding self in relation to one’s complex cultural and institutional discourses and further studying the artist’s (Carrie Mae Weems’) verbal-visual narratives, interviews, and the theoretical texts written about her work we felt that issues such as gaze, spectatorship, other, outside-inside, gender, ethnicity, and partially adapting the perspective of the other became available to us in a different way than we had ever experienced before. We use this knowledge as the core of critically questioning the narratives that inform our teaching, our students’ identity construction and their analysis of visuals and artifacts, thus enabling them to become active participants in constructing more socially sensitive and just culture and representations.

Another personal research project currently in process is studying the change in my students’ critical and self-reflective texts in relationship to the various stages in my “assimilation” process to American culture and my growth as an educator. I have been fortunate to teach an academic course that
focuses on the development of identity and critical understanding of diversity through arts and visual
culture in contemporary United States. Now that I have finished writing this body of work, I will return to
the papers on critical visual culture, influenced by folklore studies and ethnic arts written by my students
during the past years to find out if I can further develop my understanding of the connections between my
personal growth as an educator and how I was able to direct my students. I hope to see an increased number
of artistic and autobiographical studies that problematize new theories and pedagogical practices in the near
future.
REFERENCES


