

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

***ARS ARTIUM: A CONCEPT IN ART EVALUATION***  
**Alternative Thinking to the Subjective / Objective Dichotomy**

by

**Kathryn Jane Burns**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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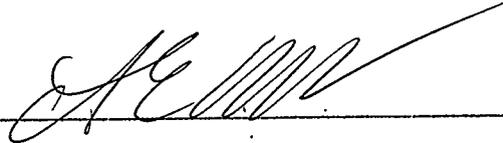
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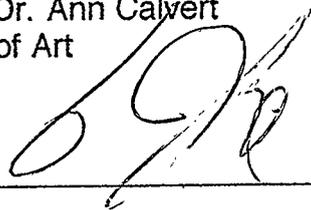


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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, **ARS ARTIUM: A CONCEPT IN ART EVALUATION** Alternative Thinking to the Subjective / Objective Dichotomy submitted by Kathryn Jane Burns in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Supervisor, Dr. Ann Calvert  
Department of Art



Dr. David Jardine  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction



Professor Carol MacDonnell  
Department of Art

August 5, 1993

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## Abstract

Examining the subjective/objective dichotomy in relation to art evaluation, I devised a new label, *ars artium* (borrowed from Latin), to describe an alternative to the limitations implied by the aforementioned dichotomous terms, thereby encompassing more appropriately the ways of knowing of people involved in evaluation and assessment of art. Through qualitative research methods of participant observation, interviews and discussion within specific case study situations at post-secondary levels, I sought to triangulate my data in a search for what it means to evaluate art. In conjunction with those methods I examined the writings of some theorists about aspects of hermeneutics, aesthetics and the subjective/objective dichotomy. I found that indeed the evaluation of art is not simply a subjective response or an objective process, **but** is a way of knowing based on experience with art and with the evaluation of art, a transforming acquisition of knowledge through experience, and an ability to express one's judgment through language. I conclude by recommending that art students be directly involved in evaluation practices throughout their art training, and also conclude that life experience, ethnic heritage, individual capabilities and the changing appearance of contemporary art all affect our capacity to appreciate, understand and evaluate art.

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I am grateful for the support and help of many people in the development of this thesis.

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**PART ONE - STRUCTURE**

## **Chapter 1** **Introductory Concerns**

### Prologue

*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*

The above statement is a common expression attributed to the observation of nature, human beings and often the products of human creative endeavour -- art. The statement seems simple enough, yet the underlying idea is prone to debate within discussion of issues such as universals, truth and subjective/objective views.

As an art student the subjective/objective issue was a relevant one to me. The mid-term and end-term posting of grades always provided opportunity for statements such as "but it's so subjective." It was a statement one could use to console oneself when comparing grades with classmates. My personal experience in this realm is not an isolated case. During the first class of a graduate seminar course on evaluation methods in art, one of the professors relayed an incident that occurred with a student in a 300 level studio course. The student had produced a well done project and the professor granted her a mark of "A". This same student confronted him on his grading -- not because she disputed that she had earned an "A" on the project, but because she believed that two other students had been wrongfully awarded a grade of "A", when she believed that her work was superior to theirs. Rather than discuss the issue with the professor and try to come to some kind of mutual understanding, the student dropped the course because she did not feel that she could deal with the professor's grading policies.

In addition to classroom incidents, it is not unusual while in a gallery to overhear comments from viewers such as "I don't know if it's any good or not, but I know what I like"; or "why is that here -- my three year old could do better than that"; or "they [the gallery] might like it, but I think it's crap".

Comments such as these from students and from the public indicate a strong belief in the idea that art appreciation is a purely subjective response. By contrast, and paradoxically, educational institutions, due to pressures from parents, administrators and students are constantly trying to bestow a sense of rigour upon pursuits in the arts by seeking objective means for analysis and evaluation. These two apparently opposing approaches to art evaluation have been the source of much debate and conflict.

### Introduction

The incidents and concerns previously mentioned acted as the impetus for my current research. My research focuses on evaluation in art, particularly the subjective/objective dichotomy of aesthetic response and its impact on art making and art teaching. Evaluation within the fine arts has always been one of the most difficult tasks of the art educator. The need to balance the subjective aesthetic response with the objective evaluation of technique poses problems within an educational system requiring structured, definable criteria with which to account to students, parents and administrators. My study will help clarify the on-going debate between the subjective/objective dichotomy as it pertains to the evaluation of art. As sources for my research I seek to bridge theoretical writings of philosophers concerned with subjectivity and aesthetics with the current practices of two Alberta university sculpture instructors. In order to gather data, I was involved as a participant observer in a third-year sculpture

class at the University of Calgary. I video taped class critiques and one-on-one student/professor critical discussions which I subsequently reviewed and interpreted. As a participant I experienced, first-hand, criticisms from the professor of my own work. I also interviewed the professor and three students as a means of getting direct comments relating to evaluation practices in this class -- the professor to learn of his intentions and ideas; the students to learn of their understanding of his intentions and criticisms. I also discussed criticism and evaluation with a sculpture professor from the University of Alberta as a means of gaining a somewhat broader perspective on different attitudes towards evaluation.

The main question I am seeking to answer within my research is: in hermeneutic<sup>1</sup> terms, "What does it mean to evaluate art?" More specifically, the question is "How does the subjective/objective dichotomy and alternatives to that dichotomy such as connoisseurship or *Bildung*<sup>2</sup> function in art evaluation as manifest in the practices of sculpture professors? Implicit in this question is the notion that the subjective and the objective are the primary manifestations of evaluative judgment (each of which is usually represented in such a way that implies the superiority of one over the other). I am suggesting alternatives. In addition to the two mentioned in the question, I have devised a label, borrowed from Latin, to describe my notion of an alternative: *ars artium*. *Ars artium* literally translated means "the art of arts" and, in brief, I have chosen it to encompass a meaning of accumulated wisdom/knowledge based on experience with art (the study of and/or practice of). More detailed explanations

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1. Although *hermeneutic* will be defined in greater depth later in the chapter and throughout the entire body of the thesis, it is sufficient to say at this time that, in simplest terms, hermeneutics refers to inquiry based on interpretation and meaning of a particular phenomenon.

2. *Bildung* is a German word which does not have a direct translation in English but it relates to formation, cultivation and erudition. A fuller explanation of the term can be found in Chapter 2.

are found within the following sections.

Before going on, however, I wish to lay the parameters and limitations of this particular study. I believe the information I am unfolding will be relevant to teachers' approaches to evaluation even though the intention of my research is not to devise some sort of practical evaluation plan for classroom art teachers. Although this study pertains primarily to the evaluation of studio art (processes and products) as currently practised at a post-secondary level, it is not meant to determine appropriate weighting of studio, aesthetics, history and criticism within an art curriculum at any level; in fact, I am more inclined towards a concept of integration of those components as opposed to viewing them as separate isolated segments of an art curriculum.

In the context of this study I will address only those aspects of aesthetic theories that pertain to my examination of the the subjective/objective dichotomy and evaluation processes. I do not make pretence of profound understanding of any single philosopher (it is not unusual for a researcher to spend a large portion of his/her life on the study of one philosopher's writings and I am am not able to match that kind of in-depth knowledge within my initial studies of philosophers whose writings are relevant to my research). Much of the information I incorporate in my study comes from secondary sources as summaries or compilations of different philosopher's writings.

I am considering the relationship of teaching art and making art but I am not setting out to make a case for artists as teachers; I am presenting the beliefs of educators and theorists about the effect of first-hand practical experience in relation to teaching the skills or concepts of that experience. I wish to acknowledge the vastness and diversity of the area of contemporary art and state that within this study I try to touch on, in a broad sense, the differing

concerns of contemporary artists as they might be perceived in an evaluation context although I cannot begin to examine all the implications for evaluation of assorted contemporary art forms. I try to acknowledge the effect of cultural context (both of the artist and the critic) on the evaluation of art in places within my discussion where it is relevant, even though I am not able to examine it at this time to the extent it perhaps warrants in view of the overall problem of the subjective/objective dichotomy.

### Terminology

Although the second chapter will go into further explanation of certain terms, it is necessary to define briefly a few key terms prior to proceeding. My use of the word *subjective* refers to an immediate, non-intellectual, personally-based response to a work of art. Although "subjective" often carries with it negative connotations, I do not wish to imply those here; a personally-based point of view is not negative, it is simply *personal*. *Objective*, on the other hand, refers to a personally removed, criteria-based, empirically provable point of view (i.e. that table is red). The term *knowledge*, also subject to much debate within philosophical writing, I use to refer to something constructed by an individual as a result of training, reading or experience; something ingested which the individual is capable of drawing upon in relevant and/or related circumstances.

The term *ars artium* has in the past been used to connote a hierarchy (J. Hume, personal communication, Nov. 13, 1992) as in the epitome of the arts or the highest of the arts. I wish to deny that connotation in my use of the phrase. Rather, I have coined the phrase to mean the art or the skill of understanding art: the art of *knowing* the arts. Understanding art requires a reasoning (the

type of reasoning employed by a connoisseur) in order to be fully formed and articulated. For pedagogic purposes, the ability to articulate one's judgment is a necessity. Therefore, when I refer to a person having a capacity for *ars artium*, I mean that that person has an experience of art and through that has acquired a wisdom and a way of knowing that facilitates and enables that person to judge art and articulate that judgment. The acquisition of wisdom, of *ars artium*, is an ongoing process of change and accumulation, it is not a finite state that one achieves. My use of the word *traditional* refers to art forms which exist in a fairly standard format of a two-dimensional object hanging on a wall (usually framed); or a free-standing or plinth-based three-dimensional object; in both cases, normally representing either something identifiable, or a non-objective (unidentifiable) abstract art work based on formal concerns.

My use of the terms *evaluation* and *assessment* do not refer to the allocation of grades: any time I wish to make reference to the allocation of grades I will say so specifically. I will use *evaluation* and *assessment* interchangeably (although I know many authors distinguish between the two) to refer to passing judgment through the use of constructive criticism (whether outwardly spoken or not) on a work of art or a student's performance. This opens the use of the terms to the type of judgment used by both teachers and critics -- I believe that the evaluative actions performed by art teachers and art critics have some similarities although their judgments do reach a different audience, they do have somewhat different functions, and the teachers have the additional task of assigning grades to accompany their judgments. Consider the following quote from Eisner (1976):

What the critic strives for is to articulate or render those ineffable qualities constituting art in a language that makes them vivid. But this gives rise to something of a paradox. How is that what is ineffable can be articulated? How do words express what words

can never express? The task of the critic is to adumbrate, suggest, imply, connote, render, rather than attempt to translate. In this task, metaphor and analogy, suggestion and implication are major tools. The language of criticism, indeed its success as criticism, is measured by the brightness of its illumination. The task of the critic is to help us see. (p.141)

If one were to reread the previous quote inserting the word "teacher" everywhere that Eisner has said "critic," the significance of the statement would remain intact. Arguably, it represents many desirable qualities of an art teacher. In relation to the cross-over of roles of teacher and critic, Feldman (1981) states that: "Art instructors need to function as critics *during* the process of [art] execution as well as at its conclusion." (p. 460). This describes one of the different functions of an art teacher's form of criticism from that of a critic -- a critic would seldom observe the artist's work in process and would reserve criticism for the product.

I have already made reference to the the term *formal* (as pertaining to visible form); my use of it refers to the elements of an art work which are observable and definable such as the compositional arrangement, the colour relationships, the scale relationships; and although less easily definable, but still *formal* to a certain degree, are the qualities of harmony and unity<sup>3</sup>. The *formal* components of an art work are also those which are usually considered to be the most conducive to *objective* analysis and evaluation processes. *Aesthetics* is a term referring to the philosophy of art and appreciation of art, most commonly associated with the pursuit of beauty or Truth within an art form. *Appreciation* is not necessarily synonymous with liking something although it may be an additional factor; appreciation pertains more to an awareness and

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<sup>3</sup> I use the terms harmony and unity to refer to qualities of totality within an art work, where all the parts function coherently and integrally within the whole; this does not, however, mean that dissonance and chaos cannot be a part of a unified whole.

understanding of the experience in question (Eisner, 1976, p.140). Neither beauty nor Truth are easily definable terms which is partially why there is so much philosophical debate within aesthetic theory. I do not, within my thesis, deal much with those terms though I will elaborate on them in relation to specific people's points of view where necessary.

### History of the Subjective/Objective Dichotomy

The dichotomous relationship of subject and object made its first appearance in the fifth century B.C. According to Barone (1993), the Greek philosopher Parmenides "fathered" the dyad (p. 26). However, we are aware of it in a comparatively more contemporary context and view its arrival with any degree of impact in conjunction with the period of enlightenment along with Descartes and Newton and the Scientific Revolution.

The medieval outlook changed radically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The notion of an organic, living, and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era. This development was brought about by revolutionary changes in physics and astronomy, culminating in the achievements of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. The science of the seventeenth century was based on a new method of inquiry, advocated forcefully by Francis Bacon, which involved the mathematical description of nature and the analytic method of reasoning conceived by the genius of Descartes. Acknowledging the crucial role of science in bringing about these far-reaching changes, historians have called the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Age of Scientific Revolution. (Capra, 1982, p. 54)

Descartes' philosophies played a vital role in the separation of subject and object. The idea of the separation of mind and body is reflected in his well-known statement "I think, therefore I am." His analytic method of overcoming doubt consists of:

...breaking up thoughts and problems into pieces and in arranging these in their logical order. This analytic method of reasoning is probably Descartes' greatest contribution to science....

On the other hand, overemphasis on the Cartesian method has led to the fragmentation that is characteristic of both our general thinking and our academic disciplines, and to the widespread attitude of reductionism in science -- the belief that all aspects of complex phenomena can be understood by reducing them to their constituent parts. (Capra, 1982, p.59)

Descartes sought to isolate his thought from all that was around it: that which could be known by deductive analysis, which results in the subject (I and what I can know in my mind); and the object (that which exists external to my thought -- matter). Charles Taylor (1991) referred to Descartes' notion of the self as the "individualism of disengaged rationality" (p.25). Victor Heyfron (1983) summarizes Descartes' influence in this way:

The characterization of mind as an exclusively internal phenomena, a complex labyrinth inside the brain, is particularly damaging to our understanding of artistic experience. We inherit this notion from the dualism which has dominated Western thinking since Descartes. All we can know according to this theory are ideas in our minds, and these ideas are only indirectly related to the outside world. The view has resulted in a number of fundamental dichotomies. The logical separation of subject and object, fact and value, body and mind, and man and world. An assumption underpinning this view is that we are conscious not of things external to ourselves, but rather only of the impressions that objects literally cause in our heads. Feelings have a more inferior status in this scheme of things than physical objects. Art objects are rendered innocuous. (p. 47)

The influence of dualist thinking and by extension *objective* art making, is partially evident in aspects of the work of the artists of the Renaissance period. Many chose to follow the models of classicism as ideal forms of beauty and followed mathematical formulas such as the "golden mean,"<sup>4</sup> and Vitruvius' mathematical theory of human proportion as portrayed in Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. Mathematics was central to the creation of art. Da Vinci stated "Let no man who is no mathematician read the elements of my work"

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4. Golden mean refers to a mathematical formula of proportion known since Euclid (third century B.C.) which is believed to have its own aesthetic virtue containing some "hidden harmonic proportion in tune with the universe" (Murray, 1976, p. 193).

(MacDonald, 1970, p. 44).

In general, prior to the period of Descartes and his contemporaries, medieval artists could perhaps be more appropriately referred to as artisans. Each artisan would have a particular craft skill which he/she would perform toward the creation of the whole product, such as the role of the stone mason or glazier/glass painter in the production of a cathedral. Consequently, art and architectural works of the medieval period are rarely attributed to a particular author. It is only after the onset of the Renaissance that the sense of creative ownership began to take on such a significant role. This parallels Capra's description of the general philosophy of the medieval period.

Before 1500 the dominant world view in Europe, as well as in most other civilizations, was organic. People lived in small, cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships, characterized by the interdependence of spiritual and material phenomena and the subordination of individual needs to those of the community. ( p.53)

The changing world view from Medieval to Renaissance is further emphasized in the concept of artist training. As MacDonald (1970) states, the "concept of art education as distinct from craft training was realized in Italy in the 16th century due to the recognition of art as a product of the intellect rather than the skillful hand..." (p.17).

The classical models also provided the criteria for artistic pursuits into the 19th century within the art academies of the time. There was a strong tendency to training academic modelling and rendering of the human form as well as design schools which encouraged the practical pursuits of industrial drawing as preparation for trade and manufacturing skills (MacDonald, 1970). Monroe Beardsley, in the twentieth century, developed principles relating to classical canons of beauty which could deductively be applied to the evaluation of art in

regard to *unity, complexity* and *intensity* (Dickie, 1977. p. 142). Classical canons or principles were what the academies sought to impose as rules for students to follow in their art-making processes. The results of formula art, however, were sometimes less than great; lifeless, uninspired art was often the product of this process (P. Hide, personal communication, Oct.12, 1992). The twentieth century held a diverse array of approaches to art making, many inspired in reaction to the strict formulas of academic ideals. The development of abstraction, commencing with the work of Cezanne, through Picasso, to the complete absence of representation initiated in the work of Kandinsky followed by artists such as Mondrian, and then the abstract expressionist movement which, paradoxically, developed into another context for implementing formalist ideals and principles within the work of the Modernists. According to Peter Hide (personal communication, Oct. 12, 1992), however, Modernist art places more emphasis on truth than on beauty. I interpret this as meaning truth to form and truth to medium as opposed to the beauty one might achieve via a representation of nature already attributed with characteristics of beauty (such as the human form). Even more recently, within the pursuits of certain contemporary artists, a shift further away from academic and formalist ideals is underway.

Suzi Gablik (1991) sees this move as reflective of the larger, (world view) paradigm shift currently underway. She states: "...what we are beginning to experience, at the leading edges of our culture, is the dismantling of Cartesianism -- the paradigm of the bipolar subject and object" (p. 164). This translates into art forms that are addressing issues by means beyond our current definition of aesthetics in relation to an object. Gablik speaks of a "new paradigm based on the notion of *participation*" (p.27) which carries with it

holistic social and ecological implications. She states:

If modern aesthetics was inherently isolationist, aimed at disengagement and purity, my sense is that what we will be seeing over the next few decades is art that is essentially social and purposeful, art that rejects the myths of neutrality and autonomy. The sub-text of social responsibility is missing in our aesthetic models, and the challenge to the future will be to transcend the disconnectedness and separation of the aesthetic from the social that existed with modernism...(pp. 4-5)

Questions arise from this theory regarding what kind of art will result from this shift and what kind of resistance and hostility we will encounter along the path of change. In Chapter 7, the issue of our view and assessment of contemporary art will arise again.

### Methodological Basis

A full explanation of the methodology incorporated for this study will follow in Chapter 3. At this point, however, I wish to describe the underlying concepts behind my methodological choices. Let me begin by reiterating the cyclical process which I have just described in the previous section. The medieval period consisted of an organic, community oriented world view. The Renaissance period through to 20th century activities reflected Cartesian, individualist ideals. As we approach the 21st century, there is a reactionary element occurring as evidenced in a renewed emphasis on social and ecological goals and responsibilities in the ensuing paradigm shift (the paradigm shift is discussed in the work of Capra, 1982; Rogers, 1988; Gablik, 1991) which brings the world view back to something more akin to that of medieval time than that of the Renaissance -- incorporating aspects of medieval life that reflect larger, community or social considerations and goals as well as ecological concerns rather than the autonomous, individualistic focus

associated with the Renaissance and the ideas of Descartes. Cyclical processes are repeatedly evident in qualitative inquiry. Naturalistic evaluation “enables investigators to study situations or programs where variables are ambiguous, conditions are in a flux, and changes can be responded to or incorporated as they occur” (Mallins Rubin, 1982, p.61). Robert Stake (1976) uses a twelve point clock image to describe “Prominent Events in Responsive Evaluation” (p.122). The clock-like format suggests a circular pattern to the implementation of those events. Stake states that “the evaluator would pick and choose what to observe, what to record, what to feed back....For clarification and extension, he would ask for additional opportunities to observe...” (p. 123).

The cyclical process is an important aspect of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic inquiry is defined as: “the science of interpretation, or of finding the meaning of an author’s words and phrases, and explaining it to others” (Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Second Edition, 1977). That definition is perhaps a bit sterile. For this paper, hermeneutics can be more broadly defined as the exploration and interpretation of a text (a text could be a written, spoken or visual work or an experience) incorporating a cyclical process of excursion and return; of understanding part/whole relationships. A *reading* of the *text* sparks the journey, as the exploratory journey proceeds questions and insights arise which in turn create the need for a return to the text for reexamination whereby new questions and insights will arise. New insights become new parts in a transforming whole; the cyclical process renews and repeats itself. “Hermeneutic phenomenology” as described by Max Van Manen (1990) is:

a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an *interpretive* (Hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as

uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) "facts" of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the "facts" of lived experience need to be captured in language (in human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process.

(Van Manen, 1990, pp. 180-181)

The hermeneutist Hans Georg Gadamer (1960/1989), in *Truth and Method*, makes reference to Heidegger's description of the hermeneutic circle:

In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing, and we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.

(Heidegger in Gadamer, p.266)

Essentially, we must continually return to the *text* (keep our eyes to the transforming whole) to maintain our bearings in our quest for knowledge. The text itself provides us with the source material from which to construct knowledge. The continual excursion/return process assures a thorough examination of the *text*. With each subsequent excursion and return, the shape of the *text* changes which in turn transforms the body of knowledge built up around it. The knowledge which one constructs through hermeneutic inquiry is not a static product but a plastic, fluid and flexible acquisition of wisdom.

For purposes of clarity and ease of articulation of concepts, I wish to bring to focus an idea presented by Smith (1991). In discussing the history of hermeneutic thought, Smith articulates three themes which remain consistently present in hermeneutic inquiry since the time of Freidrich Schleiermacher of the nineteenth century (p. 189). These three themes are: the pivotal role of language in human understanding; the inherent creativity of interpretation; and,

the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation.

These three themes provide a structure to my thesis and are encountered frequently within the ideas presented in my thesis. As a structural component, I have borrowed the three themes to represent the three Parts of my thesis. Chapters 1 through 3 form Part One. The information contained in Part One consist of foundation and underlying structure for the presentation of my ideas -- introductory concerns such as historical context, explanation of terms used and methodology; which parallel the structure of language as a means of communication -- as in the pivotal role of language in human understanding (i.e. the necessary role of structure as grounding for the clear presentation of ideas to assure understanding). Part Two consists of Chapters 4 through 6, which deal with my data and my interpretation of the data, thus corresponding to the hermeneutic theme "the inherent creativity of interpretation." Part Three, Chapter 7, is the summary chapter and seeks to assemble conceptually all the parts into a whole; to synthesize the information provided in the first six chapters into a comprehensive summary while giving consideration to the implications for contemporary art making and art teaching, for student individuality and life experience, all as parts of the cyclical process -- all as aspects of a transforming whole. Thus Part Three parallels the third theme of hermeneutic inquiry "the interplay of part and whole in the interpretation processes."

Hermeneutics is not a "method" for my research, but rather a screen or lens through which I view the data obtained by qualitative research methods. I am constructing knowledge and pursuing answers to my questions through hermeneutic eyes -- with what I perceive to be a hermeneutic vision. That metaphor, however, is incomplete. It is not simply a screen or lens belonging to me, but hermeneutics is an integral part of the topic itself. There exists a linked

parallel between human understanding (hermeneutics) and aesthetic appreciation with all of their accumulated problems such as the subjective/objective dichotomy. Hermeneutics is already in the topic itself, and the topic is already in hermeneutics. And it is for **that** reason that hermeneutics cannot be a method. My emphasis is on the interpretation of data rather than the telling of "facts." Hermeneutic "vision" allows me to explore links between things normally considered separate and distinct. While exploring written and spoken language and actions of observed subjects, I seek a pathway to the discovery of meaning and understanding.

Most of my understanding of hermeneutics comes from secondary sources, although I do reflect on some direct excerpts from Gadamer. I have developed an understanding of hermeneutics based on those sources and my interpretation of them. Hermeneutics as a concept, as a mode of interpretive understanding, and as a term to be defined, becomes more clearly articulated throughout the entire body of this thesis. My understanding of hermeneutics as a cyclical process, as a reflection of part/whole relationships which in turn relates to my evaluation concept of *ars artium*, can only be fully articulated through elaboration with examples and the ideas of others as an ongoing development.

For my study, I believe the ideas of hermeneutic inquiry have a great deal of relevance. In parallel to hermeneutic cyclical processes and part/whole relationships is the pedagogic process of student/teacher interaction; my reference to this process pertains not only to the student responding to the specific task initiated by the teacher, but also to the teacher responding to the specific needs of students in a back-and-forth, to-and-fro nature; not in a direct cyclical repetition but a process by which one response stimulates another

which stimulates another, etc. in a process of mutual dialogue resulting in the ongoing transformation of teacher and student.

As a further example of this cyclical, transformative process, consider the paradigm shift that appears to be happening (according to Capra, Rogers, and Gablik). The shift is not simply a function of history repeating itself in order to relive certain medieval goals, but the process is a response to the direction which the Cartesian-based paradigm has led us. With each excursion, we must return to revisit and reevaluate so that we can embark on further subsequent excursions -- a process not unlike the writing of a thesis. An experience initiates interest (the "struck" phenomenon); the research commences; it sparks direction; further research results in greater insight; an outline for procedure is devised; with each elaboration of outline elements, the research material must be revisited, renewed and transformed to account for subsequently arising issues. Ultimately the thesis product -- a written document -- is finalized, but the insights and sparks from the initial research can be ongoing for a life-time as the excursion/return process and part/whole relationship continues a never-ending cycle.

The fact that the cycle does not end, but is simply renewed, parallels the notion of passing judgment on art. A judgment is never truly final, aspects of the work can always be reexamined, and indeed art works often spark interest on many levels with many interpretations starting right from the most objective, descriptive elements to the interpretations of meaning and value. Herein lies also, the transformative aspect. As new art forms develop, so too do views on art history -- art historical works take on their form not only in relation to what has gone before them and in conjunction with them but also in relation to what is currently occurring. Consequently, the judgment of art reflects the

transformative nature of art history. The very fact that critics and historians can spend much time and focus on single art works attests to the multiple possibilities for examining art.

Hermeneutics, pedagogy, the paradigm shift, thesis writing, and art evaluation all consist of cyclical, excursion/return processes. That commonality forms the basis of a compatible union and a coherent thread in my pursuit of this thesis topic.

## **Chapter 2** **Review of Related Ideas**

### Subjectivity and Objectivity: Alive And Well or Dead And Fading?

As an assignment for a graduate level seminar for studio art, we were required to write briefly about our idea of the function of art. It was a question that I could have answered in many different ways but I chose to respond by posing a concern with the question of *value*. By value I do not mean monetary value (although eventually that does come into play), but the value which we as creators and we as viewers or critics place on a given *object* - what is *good*, what is *bad*, and who deems it as such? Without a desire to have a critical/aesthetic value bestowed upon a work of art, I believe that many (not all) current artists would find little purpose in the creation of art objects (unlike the primarily religious purposes of art making of the middle ages). There seems to be an underlying need for artists to produce something deemed *good*, something of value; perhaps viewed as such only by a select few, but nonetheless, it continues to be a driving force in the creation of (and by extension, the function of) art. The "why" of this condition, I believe, has to do with an awareness of our mortality and our desire to leave an imprint of our presence in the ongoing development of history.

Reflecting on this response to the question of function, I realize how deeply it is embedded in the Cartesian concept of separation of subject and object: creator as subject, viewer as subject and the art work as an isolated object with attributes of an autonomous commodity item. The creator subject maintains an isolated authorship and ownership of the work in terms of public recognition thereby striving to carve a niche for his/her name in the history of art.

As members of twentieth century Western society we have a difficult time *separating* our thought constructs from the Cartesian influences in our lives. The adherence to such concepts is portrayed in the proliferate writings available on the debate between subjective and objective.

One of the things that became increasingly clear as I proceeded with my thesis research is that there is a definite conflict evident within the attitudes demonstrated toward the subjective and the objective as influences in evaluative processes in art and in educational research. Philosophers and theorists seem to lean heavily in support of one side or another. The following quote epitomizes the existing conflict:

My central concern can be stated simply: if artistic judgments cannot be rationally, objectively justified there can be no place for the arts in education....

The confusions and self-contradictions are relatively easy to recognize, but only if one can escape from the mistily rose-coloured spectacles of subjectivism, and consider the central questions for the arts in a fresh, objective light. (Best, 1992)

Best appears to condemn harshly subjectivity in search of objectivity. Writers who acknowledge the subjective element in their work do so almost apologetically. For example, Peshkin speaks of "virtuous" and "unvirtuous" subjectivity (1985) and also talks of "tamed subjectivity" (1988) as a means of recognizing and acknowledging its influence in his research. Zerull (1990) believes that "Subjectivity has traditionally been avoided in evaluation because it assumed that it introduces outside influences that compromise the validity and reliability of the evaluation" (p. 20). Roman and Apple (1990) state:

There are certain concepts that seem so simple at first glance that one is often surprised by the complexity lurking beneath their surfaces. "Subjectivity" is such a concept. It is often used to signify a form of pollution in social and scientific inquiry. To be "subjective" is to be "biased," allowing one's values to enter into and prejudice the outcome of one's research. (p. 38)

The black and white, subordinate/superior relationship of the subjective and the objective demonstrated by the words of the aforementioned writers seems narrow and devoid of real understanding of the influences at play in the examination of ideas and objects. As an art educator, I have come to the conclusion that perhaps fuelling the fire between the subjective and the objective is not the way to resolve evaluation issues in the arts, nor will it endear us to school administrators, students or the public. Rather, we need to look at another mode for understanding and dealing with these issues.

Best, Peshkin, Zerull, Roman and Apple, for instance, all seem to be at the mercy of limited vocabulary to explain the nature of artistic judgment and research influences. Perhaps, as Barone (1993) suggests, we need to lay these dichotomous terms to rest and devise new ones without negative or positive connotations. Barone claims:

The death of the notion that objective truth is attainable in projects of social inquiry has been generally recognized and widely accepted by scholars who spend their time thinking about such matters.... I want to advance the notion that following the failure of the objectivists to maintain the viability of their epistemology, the concept of subjectivity has been likewise drained of its usefulness and therefore no longer *has* any meaning. Subjectivity, I feel obliged to report is also dead. (p. 25)

In an attempt to deal with the limitations and connotations of the terms subjective and objective, Barone wants to "suggest terms within a new vocabulary that might better serve the purposes formerly served by the old dyad" (p. 26). He recommends "that as educational inquirers we no longer talk about research texts as being objective or subjective but about texts that are more or less useful or, in varying degrees and ways, persuasive" (p. 26).

Heshusius (1992) addresses the question "What concept transcends the contradiction [of subjectivity and objectivity] if both terms of the contradiction are

true?" (p. 1). She questions separating that which we can know subjectively and that which we can know objectively and goes on to say "should I reach out to what I want to know *with* all of me, because if I really want to know the other, I can't do anything else? Is the act of knowing an act of wholeness?" (p. 6). She later refers to "a knowing that is concerned with both the totality of that which one wants to come to understand, and with the 'participation of the total person'" (p. 9). Heshusius also states "The belief that we can and must restrain and manage subjectivity seems to me another misguided attempt at healing that split while in fact maintaining it" (p. 17) and coins the term "participatory knowing" as an alternative to our existing understanding of the dyad. However, she says that defining the new term poses problems. She states:

I believe the difference between subjective knowing and participatory knowing to be so consequential that we keep escaping into the objectivity/subjectivity debate. For once knowing is experienced as participatory, it requires one's full, somatic, and immediate presence in the realization that what seems to exist "out there" is only a reflection of the extent to which we are able (or not able) to merge, in other words, it is a reflection of ourselves. (p. 26)

Rogers (1988) speaks of a move "from the objective to the perspectival" (p. 4). In the perspectival view "one's experience, values, and expectations impact on the conceptualization of reality" (p. 4).

Here then, are three new terms as presented by Barone, Heshusius and Rogers that offer alternatives to the confines implicit in the dichotomous terms subjective and objective. At this point, I feel it is important to acknowledge that the authors I have been citing thus far in this chapter are speaking of the subjective and objective dichotomy in relation to different concerns. Best (1992) and Zerull (1990) for example, are referring to the dichotomous terms in relation to art evaluation. Barone (1993) and, Roman and Apple (1990), on the other

hand, are speaking of the dyad in relation to educational research. Although the context of these authors' concerns may vary, I believe the dilemma presented by the use of these terms is the same regardless of the context of discussion. Whether the concern is research or evaluation (and in a sense, research is also evaluation in that it requires judgment), the confines and boundaries implicit within the subjective/objective dichotomy are narrow and limiting to a full comprehension of the elements of the researcher/evaluator that are a necessary part of his/her chosen task.

The term which I am proposing for art evaluation is not one that offers a grey area between the black and white, nor a compromise between the subjective and the objective, but one which suggests an alternative. This alternative contains the elements which I encompassed under the label of *ars artium* (as presented in Chapter 1) and includes aspects of what we previously understood as both subjectivity and objectivity but it does not place those aspects in a situation of conflict or hierarchy. It is important to mention here that the evaluative component of *ars artium* does not relate so much to the "possession" of expert knowledge, but to a way of knowing based on diverse experience. *Ars artium* is not something one owns or possesses achieved by jumping through designated hoops, but something that becomes an integral part of the person, a window through which one is permitted to view art more fully. Like hermeneutics, it allows for openness and transformation based on the experience of constructing knowledge. To clarify the elements which are involved in *ars artium*, I will continue to elaborate on the ideas of others.

### Social Context for Judgment and Knowing

First, I present a look at individualism, subjectivism and universalism as

concepts for understanding in relation to our cultural milieu. Subjectivism as defined by Peshkin (1985) is a "view that attaches supreme importance to the subjective elements in experience" (p. 279) which he views differently from subjectivity. Subjectivity, on the other hand, he claims is "functional and the results it produces are rational" (Peshkin, 1985, p. 280). Universalism refers to a state of being universal, universal meaning something which extends to or comprehends the whole number...pertaining to or pervading all or to the whole; all-reaching (Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Second Edition).

Charles Taylor (1991) discusses the individualistic contemporary culture in which we live. He speaks of it in its ideal as the *culture of authenticity* and in its extreme, deviant forms as the *culture of narcissism* incorporating such things as the postmodern idea of nihilistic deconstruction. The contemporary version of individualism in relation to the *culture of authenticity* is based on two factors: 1) social - the recognition and acceptance of the equality of difference; and, 2) the understanding that our personal, intimate relationships with others affect the forming of our self-identity. According to Taylor the *culture of authenticity* is frequently misinterpreted and results in the "slide to subjectivism" when fulfillment of the self leads to "social atomism" (p.58). This essentially leads to a breakdown of *community* or of the social aspect of authenticity. The notion that social relationships influence who we are already moves us in a step away from the pure subjective beings we are often thought to be.

Barone (1993) also deals with the significance of social contexts. He suggests that the terms subjectivity and objectivity could be considered "nuisances" in that "they attempt to take to the field in an already abandoned language game. The phenomena they purport to describe have already been satisfactorily redescribed" (p. 30). Barone offers for consideration what he

refers to as Dewey's Darwinian view of adapting to one's environment which incorporates "dynamic transactions" (p. 30) between the subjective and the objective (meaning that wo/man nor beast do not view themselves as separate from the environment in which they live, but as an integrated part of it with transaction/interaction occurring between the being and nature, rather than a subject/object relationship). Barone also mentions the work of George Herbert Mead and states that "the genesis of self occurs...within a social setting" (p. 31) attesting to the influences of cultural context. Barone goes on to mention Gadamer's claim that interpreting a text is not an "arbitrary exercise of purely independent will," (p. 31) but a result of the tradition and culture we inherit.

Such notions of the influence of cultural context also appear in the work of Hamblen (1984) and Eisner (1991). Hamblen (1984) discusses the influences of "culturally non-innate factors" (p.22) at work in the process of acquisition of visual language and artistic expression. Eisner (1991) claims that "some knowledge is not universal but personal due to experience and context of acquiring knowledge but that does not make it subjective" (p. 44).

Ideas such as those just presented can lead to treading dangerously around the much debated area of universals in artistic response -- that everyone responds the same way to a certain visual stimulus. While different theorists and philosophers would support or refute the idea of universals in differing ways (and I am not in a position to examine those possibilities within the scope of this paper), I wish to state my support for both a universal aspect and a culturally contextual aspect in art. My understanding of a universal in art does not take the point of view that we should **all** respond to art in exactly the same way, nor that there is such a thing as a set of defined principles or canons that describe what might constitute a universally acceptable work of art. Rather,

I view the universal aspect of art as a cross-cultural, all-encompassing desire and need to produce art and/or encounter aesthetic experiences. Hamblen (1981) proposes that "artistic expression serves the universal need to give form to affective aspects of life which evade discursive modes of communication" (p. 2). Although I believe that we should not be **obliged** to respond to a work of art all in the same way, the history of art has demonstrated that it is possible for many people to respond similarly to a work of art, to view the same work of art as successful or *beautiful*; therefore the historical implication does lend some support to the notion of a role for universalism in the creation and appreciation of art.

My support for a cross-cultural component of universalism in art is derived from Hamblen's (1984) work regarding developmental theory which states that the stages of development in children's art remains consistent across cultures, indicating some uniform visual symbolic language that extends across language and culture barriers. Hamblen's notions of universalism in art are acceptable to my understanding and acceptance of the term; and those aspects in conjunction with the "culturally non-innate factors" of which she speaks are of equal significance in the making and judging of art although presumably not so clearly defined and readily distinguishable. As such, I see these ideas extending to my definition of *ars artium*, that aspects of ourselves such as innate and culturally non-innate factors form parts in a transforming acquisition of art knowledge.

#### Kant and "Common Sense"

Kant's (1790/1964) notion of "common sense" (in a transcendental, empirical sense -- consensus) and Gadamer's (1960/1989) notion of *Bildung*

(in a human, experiential sense -- perspectival) represent both a universal and a contextual condition (albeit in differing ways) present in the judging of art.

Kant's (1790/1964) *Critique of Judgment* is considered to be a ground-breaking work in its attempt to provide a philosophical basis to the idea of aesthetics:

He made explicit and precise what had been implicit or partially glimpsed in the writings of his predecessors. Up to this time in the history of Western thought works of art and natural beauty had always been appraised for the pleasure they gave, for their moral influence or their educative or ameliorative effects, for their practical utility of one sort or another or intellectually because they embodied certain approved principles or conformed to certain rules. By rejecting all these grounds of judgment and showing that aesthetic judgments are differently based and form a class of their own Kant was breaking new ground and laid the basis for aesthetics as a distinct branch of philosophy. (Osborne, 1968, p. 115)

Kant's *Critique* discusses many different aspects about judging art; he makes distinctions between judgments of *taste* and judgments of *beauty*, he distinguishes between *pleasant*, *beautiful* and *good*, and indeed the work becomes almost a treatise on semantics. The type of universalism implied within Kant's work requires a separation of object and viewer, thereby creating a judgment based on the object in and of itself devoid of the contextual aspects of the viewer. Only then is the judgment of beauty universal, according to Kant. Kant (1790/1964) states that one who "judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things....does not count on the agreement of others with this judgment of satisfaction,... but *demands* it of them" (p. 287). He further states that "the judgment of taste carries with it an *aesthetic quantity* of universality, i.e. of validity for everyone" (p. 290). This indicates a recognition that a statement such as "it is beautiful" is an attribute of the object, whereas the statement "I like it" is a response of the

subject. By stating that something is beautiful, as an attribute of the object, the speaker thereby *demand*s a similar expression of its beauty by all who apprehend it unless that speaker prefaces the statement with "I think". While such a concept confirms the Cartesian view of object/subject separation it is also a concept that demonstrates the commonality in Kant's notion of "common sense". With regard to "universal assent" Kant states:

whether the ought, i.e. the objective necessity of the confluence of the feeling of any one man with that of every other, only signifies the possibility of arriving at this accord, and the judgment of taste only affords an example of the application of this principle... we have now only to resolve the faculty of taste into its elements in order to unite them at last in the idea of a common sense. (p. 304)

There are a couple of paradoxes found within Kant's theory. Kant speaks of a "common sense", a consensus of "beauty," so I might assume such an idea is a denial of contextual aspect to judgment. However, if I continue to make assumptions, and consider the period in which he wrote when travel and multi-national relations were not what we know today, I perceive that he is actually speaking of a context-bound universal or common sense. The judgments of beauty of which he speaks extend to the limitations of the culture in which he lived, that of eighteenth century Europe (Prussia/Germany); in fact Edwards (1967) even states within the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that Kant was not a traveller himself and the knowledge he received of other places was through news from friends (p. 305). Therefore, as readers and interpreters of his writing, we must acknowledge the historical and geographical context of his work. In addition to that, we must also be aware of potential differences of meaning of the words used by Kant. When I asked Ray Arnatt in our interview about a statement of Kant's, he expressed concern with the meaning of terms; for example, what does Kant mean by "judging" -- it is a term which could relate to

evaluating or interpreting. The commonness of Kant's "common sense" may not be so thoroughly common today as Kant suggests.

In addition to the first paradox, while Kant so strongly advocates the universal/common aspects of judgment and the "*aesthetic quantity of universality*" he also claims that "there can be no rules to which anyone is to be forced to recognize anything as beautiful" (p. 290). Kant describes beauty as a "purposiveness without purpose" (p. 299) and it is this idea that is extended in his statement: "the purposiveness in the product of beautiful art, although it is designed, must not seem to be designed" and "the product ...shows no trace of the rule having been before the eyes of the artist and having fettered his mental powers" (p. 314). Such ideas as these have found their way into the beliefs of contemporary advocates of formalism. Kant's ideas have been described as "a theory of aesthetic response, interpretation, and judgment that serves as the cornerstone of modern aesthetic theory and formalism" (Hamblen, 1989, p.11). The separation of object and artist, the adherence to pure form as the subject matter of art objects, and the notion of art for art's sake are all elements of contemporary modernist artists' approach to art making (my use of the term *modernist* refers to the twentieth century art movement that embodies Kantian formalist ideals evident in the work of the some of the minimalists, the constructivists, the abstract expressionists and International Style architecture, etc.). The paradox exists because in spite of claims for "no rules" there are unarticulated rules which form the basis of modernism -- rules pertaining to a limited view of what qualifies as "art" -- such as the notion that "art" is not about ideas (social or political) but about form, form that adheres to principles of design and composition. I make that statement as a result of my post-secondary art training where I was influenced by people who advocated as paramount the

role of form in art and played down the significance of social or political ideas as content. According to Dickie (1971), Kant “asserts that it is the recognition of the *form* of purpose, not recognition of the purpose itself, which evokes the beauty experience” (p. 29). I do not wish to pass “judgment” on this attitude towards art but simply to make known the limitations of this approach as practised by the proponents of it. The knowledge and awareness of these “principles” form a part of my intended meaning of *ars artium*, but do not represent the complete picture of it. Formal principles are one aspect of art which historically and currently compose a part of many approaches to art making. Some artists limit their approach to remain within the confines of formalism, others incorporate aspects of formalism to the creation of art which speaks about ideas external to itself while still maintaining a sense of coherent design or unity. In relation to *ars artium*, it is the capacity to recognize aspects of form as one part in a whole; the evaluation of art involves consideration of formal components as well as content (idea) in an interpretation of an artwork.

#### Gadamer and *Bildung* : Law and Play

Gadamer (1960/1989) addresses the ‘no rules’ idiosyncrasy of aesthetic judgment through the use of analogy. The absence of rules as described by Gadamer differs from the ideas of Kant. Gadamer’s parallels of art and law, and art and play demonstrate resistance to imposed rules which are tied up within his concept of *Bildung*. Essentially, *Bildung* is a state of being of the person making an aesthetic judgment; a person is immersed in *Bildung*, it is not a possession. *Bildung* is a word that defies a direct translation and definition but it relates to the cultivation of good taste. It may be somewhat intuitive but can be advanced and developed through learning. It relates to “tact,” and it is a human

quality that prepares a "sensitivity and receptiveness to otherness" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 77). It allows for an openness to new things based on experience and knowledge. Like Kant, Gadamer views the appreciation of beauty not as a purely private response but as a publicly acceptable judgment which relates to common sense, and reflects one's capacity for *Bildung*. *Bildung* is a concept that is further developed through Gadamer's idea of a parallel between law and aesthetics - the verdict of good taste.

One must have taste - one cannot learn through demonstration, nor can one replace it by mere imitation. Nevertheless, taste is not a mere private quality, for it always endeavours to be good taste. The decisiveness of the judgment of taste includes its claim to validity. Good taste is always sure of its judgment.... Taste is therefore something like a sense.... It is a remarkable thing that we are especially sensitive to the negative in the decisions taste renders. The corresponding positive is not properly speaking what is tasteful, but what does not offend taste.... Taste is defined precisely by the fact that it is offended by what is tasteless. (pp. 34-35)

The relationship to law is reflected in the changeable nature of taste in a social and historical context.

Aesthetic response, like law, is continually subject to change as time passes, circumstances change, and as new needs and understanding of a given situation arise. There are no criteria on which to determine how to change the law but the change occurs as a result of the individual case. There are no rules stating how to make rules, simply a need for a sensible response to a given situation. "So too is aesthetic taste a sensible judgment which possesses a decisive sureness even though it employs no general rules" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p.77).

Taste and judgment are a response not just to the individual object but also in relation to the implied whole. For example, our understanding of

Cubism and our judgment of it as an innovative, progressive art movement exceeds a limited view of one particular art work in order to understand it in the context of what preceded it and what followed it. Even when looking at a single cubist object, we cannot isolate it from its context when making a judgment, although each individual object will have a different fit within that context. Each cubist object is viewed on its own merits within the context of the larger whole.

In law, each case tried before judge and jury is viewed as an individual case, yet the judge and jury cannot lose sight of the larger whole (historical precedence and society) in the process. The judge must consider existing laws in relation to the individual case. The individual case in turn supplements and transforms the existing laws. Each case, like each artwork, must be tried individually, yet in the context of a larger whole, which in its aftermath causes a change in the existing 'law':

laws never seem to apply exactly and unequivocally to the individual case; and if life does not prove for that reason to be one long series of exceptions, that is because the code is constantly supplemented and developed by being applied to concrete cases. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p.77)

Precedent setting cases, like new movements in art, gain their recognition and ground-breaking status through the "fecundity of the individual case" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p.38).

Both law and art consist of certain established criteria and rules but are not governed by them entirely. Each case and each work of art is tried individually and viewed beyond the confines of the rules. One cannot hold up a check list or example against the given case or work of art and seek to match them point for point. The rules do not measure the case but supplement and redefine it; in turn the rules are then supplemented and redefined.

Weinsheimer's (1985) statement, "The function of taste: to judge by unformulated and unformulable rules" (p. 78) sums up the paradox: we judge by rules, but the rules do not really exist. It is the cyclical process of breaking rules in order to make rules enacted by judge and jury that requires *Bildung*, and it is this cyclical nature that relates to hermeneutic thinking. Like *Bildung*, *ars artium* also encompasses the power of understanding that allows for transformation of ideas in the context of a whole; change as a result of individual aspects while keeping in sight the transforming whole.

The ephemeral essence of rules that exist yet do not exist is also evident in Gadamer's idea of structure and his notion of "play." In his discussion of play, Gadamer is referring not to the making of art but to the aesthetic experience. The analogy of art experience with a game is such that the viewer is a participant who is immersed in the playing to the extent that all else becomes lost...the participant is absorbed and possessed by the playing. "Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play" (Gadamer, 1960/1989 p. 92). Rules of play are incorporated differently each time the game<sup>1</sup> is played and with the addition or omission of players. The rules are confronted when involving an uninitiated player or when there is a breakdown in the game, otherwise the rules are unspoken when the game is played by experienced players and are altered to suit the playing of each game. The implicit or explicit presence of rules is what provides play with structure. The rules are present and incorporated as needed in relation to each game -- rules are changed and altered in the excursion/return process of play. As a parallel in an art context, I offer for consideration the development of Cubism; cubist tendencies appeared in art prior to the Cubist movement as evident in the work of Cezanne. Later,

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<sup>1</sup>. By game I refer to a form of spontaneous child's play, not organised games such as *Monopoly* for instance.

once it was brought forward in the Cubist movement, the deviations from rules contributed to the changing character of art. Duchamp's "ready-mades"<sup>2</sup> are another example, they are viewed as art because of the context in which they are placed. They created controversy because they broke the existing rules of art by making an extreme comment on the current state of art. As a result, they created new rules for art. Deviations from the rules contribute to the changing character of the the game and, by extension, of art; culminating in what Gadamer refers to as the "transformation of structure."

There is a paradox evident in this process. The individual (i.e., Picasso as a Cubist artist) could not allow his art to just consist of structure and to conform to the acceptable rules of art; and the existing structure did not allow for the individual unless he broke the existing rules. It is the paradox that leads to the transformation of structure -- it is the deviations that redefine and reform structure.

Playing does not seek resolution and conclusion but is constantly renewed and altered through repetition -- like viewing art, each time a work is viewed, the viewer does not draw any kind of final conclusions but is immersed in and affected by the presence of the work of art itself. Like the to-and-fro movement of play, turn-taking, and excursion and return, art is not tied to any definitive goals or rules but is renewed through repeat viewing.

Here again we see the cyclical motion inherent in hermeneutic thought and discover harmonious integration of paradoxical ideas. The ideas embodied by *Bildung* as expressed by Gadamer are also notions which I wish to include within my meaning of *ars artium*. Like *Bildung*, it is developed though

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2. "ready-mades" - readily available found objects -- Duchamp's first "ready-made" was a bottle rack followed by a urinal (Murray, 1976, p. 138).

experience, and it has the capacity to transform and to be transformed within various contexts.

Any one judging art within his/her capacity for *ars artium* is doing so within a context; it is not the context of the art work's creator (although that might come into it) but it is the context of the judge's knowledge constructed from experience of art -- encompassing knowledge of history, of principles, of other art forms and of cultural influences, none of which, however, can be defined or listed as sequential component rules for passing judgment on art.

### Eisner and Connoisseurship

Within his work, Eisner (1977) acknowledges the connection between evaluation and research. He states: "Those familiar with the evolution of the evaluation field already know that it has been significantly influenced by the assumptions and procedures employed in doing educational research" (p. 633). Eisner goes on to say that educational research "took as its model the natural sciences" (p. 633). Rather than accept that educational research should follow scientific procedures, however, Eisner instead proposes another option for pursuing research in education. He uses the term "connoisseurship" which he claims is not based on a "scientific paradigm" but an "artistic one." In order to clarify his meaning of connoisseurship, Eisner employs the following analogy:

The wine connoisseur has through long and careful attention to wine developed a gustatory palate that enables him to discern its most subtle qualities. When he drinks wine it is done with an intention to discern, and with a set of techniques that he employs to examine the range of qualities within the wine upon which he will make his judgments.... In addition, he brings to bear upon his present experience a gustatory memory of other wines tasted. These other wines held in the memory, form the backdrop for his present experience with a particular vintage. It is his refined palate, his knowledge of what to look for, his backlog of previous experience

with wines other than those he is presently drinking that differentiate his level of discernment from that of an ordinary drinker of wine. His conclusions about the quality of wines are judgments, not mere preferences. (p. 634)

Eisner extends the analogy to the connoisseurship of art:

When it comes to the fine arts, even more is required for connoisseurship to be exercised. Works of art have a history, develop in a social context, and frequently possess a profundity in conception and execution that surpasses wine...(p. 634).

Eisner elaborates on the attributes of art connoisseurs claiming that they must be able to recognise how particular works of art "depart from conventional modes;" a recognition which depends on art historical context and the intentions underlying the work in question. To appreciate art requires

not only attention to the work's formal qualities, but also an understanding of the ideas that gave rise to the work in the first place. This in turn requires some understanding of the socio-cultural context in which... artists worked, the sources from which they drew, and the influence their work had upon the work of others. (p. 634)

Some of the concepts enmeshed in my description of *ars artium* are derived from Eisner's concept of connoisseurship. Like Eisner's description of wine connoisseurship, I view things such as the ability to discern subtle qualities and the incorporation of present experience with past experience which lead to the capability of passing judgment, also as aspects of *ars artium*; which in turn is also augmented by Eisner's description of art connoisseurship. The person imbued with *ars artium*, like the art connoisseur, can also recognize the social and historical context of art and understand such contextual conditions as influences on other works of art.

Eisner goes on to discuss the relationship of criticism to connoisseurship. He claims that "criticism is the art of disclosure" (p. 635) meaning that the critic

“aims at providing in linguistic terms what it is that he or she has encountered so that others not possessing his [sic] level of connoisseurship can also enter the work.... the function of criticism is educational” (p. 635). There are two concerns that I wish to address in regard to this statement. First, I wish to acknowledge and agree with the significance of linguistic representation as a vital component of the teacher immersed in *ars artium*. In order to involve students in the act of evaluation or criticism, the teacher must be able to model and describe that activity. The modelling takes the form of setting example, the description takes the form of linguistic dialogue. Second, I wish to address the implied elitism that accompanies the term connoisseurship. Eisner, himself, addresses this issue in an end-note to his article stating:

The term connoisseurship has some unfortunate connotations that I would like to dispel within the context of the work proposed. One such connotation is that of an effete, elite consumer or snob; something belonging to the upper classes. Connoisseurship, as I use the term, relates to any form of expertise in any area of human endeavour.  
(p. 646)

Likewise, I would like to deny an elitist connotation in my use of the term *ars artium*. I do not believe that the capacity or capability for a particular skill or area of expertise makes one an elitist. The notion of elitism is formed through the attitude of an individual, not as a foregone, component part of their knowledge. Otherwise, any person with a particular skill could be accused of the same thing. We do not consider the farmer to be an elitist because he/she has the knowledge required to grow crops compatible with one another and with soil conditions. The farmer shares that knowledge with family and friends so that the same skills and expertise can be passed on to other generations so that all may reap the benefits of the resulting crop. In a parallel way, it is a task of the art community to keep art alive by passing on the appreciation of art

through experience of art -- implicit in that heritage is the concept that art is something to be valued, not necessarily as a commodity but as a representation of our culture. We, as art educators, as artists or as critics need to preserve the conditions which keep art alive and those conditions involve teaching others to appreciate and value art.

In summary, within this chapter I have looked at various interpretations of the terms subjective and objective and I have reviewed parts of the works of Kant, Gadamer and Eisner in an attempt to clarify the term *ars artium*. *Ars artium*, I view as being neither subjective nor objective but something supplementary to our current understanding of the dyad. Kant's work provides some explanation for the formal aspects I see involved in *ars artium*, Gadamer's work provides analogies which function to help understand the hermeneutic components of *ars artium*, and Eisner describes some of the aspects of "expertise" that make up connoisseurship, which by extension I have incorporated into my presentation of the term *ars artium*. I follow this now with a description of the methods I used to help bring me to a greater understanding of how *ars artium* is incorporated by professors who teach and pass judgment on art in post-secondary studio environments.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

#### Qualitative Inquiry

Gadamer (1977, 1979, 1985) has suggested that it is not possible, in genuine inquiry, to establish correct method for inquiry independently of what it is one is inquiring into. This is because what is being investigated itself holds part of the answer concerning *how* it should be investigated. (Smith, 1991, p. 198)

As stated in chapter 1, the hermeneutic question for my study is "what does it mean to evaluate art?" It is a hermeneutic question because the answer it seeks is one of meaning, one derived from interpretation of lived-experience and not one that consists of quantity and statistical significance. In order to discover what it **means** to evaluate art, I sought information from people who are directly involved in such an activity -- those in the position of giving evaluation and those in the position of receiving evaluation.

It would be possible to devise a quantitative study of art evaluation based perhaps on giving a survey questionnaire to a large number of randomly selected art professors and students. Such a method might indicate certain criteria for evaluation, or a priority scale of what elements of an art work are necessary for a good grade, or what percentage of students get A's, B's etc. But such a study would not provide sufficient information about what it **means** to evaluate art or how life experience influences one's capacity to evaluate art. In order to discover and interpret meaning from the actions and words of those involved in evaluation, a qualitative study, and for my purposes, hermeneutic inquiry, was required. As stated earlier, hermeneutics does not refer to a method of research, but a perspective for interpreting data. Weinsheimer (1985) addresses scientific methodology. He claims that:

the methods of a particular science cannot be criticized without undermining its objectivity. A science is its method. What makes it science, in Gadamer's view, is that it cannot reflect on its own method without ceasing to be science -- and becoming hermeneutics. This delimits all natural sciences to the field of their objectification, defines them as against hermeneutics, and demonstrates that hermeneutics is more basic than any particular science and indeed than natural science in general. Wherever we attempt to examine the ground we are standing on, there we are engaged in hermeneutical reflection -- not natural science. (p. 32)

I was involved in several qualitative methods for obtaining data. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I met with University of Alberta sculpture professor, Peter Hide, to discuss his perspective on the evaluation of art. I was involved as a participant observer in Professor Ray Arnatt's Art 485 sculpture class at the University of Calgary. I interviewed Ray as well as three of his students from the class to obtain information about his ideas on the evaluation of art. I played a dual role, both as a first-hand participant involved in critical interaction, and as a researcher; the interviews with Ray and his students allowed me to obtain direct verbal comments regarding evaluation and criticism. Information regarding my subjects will be expanded at the end of this chapter. First, my methods of research are elaborated.

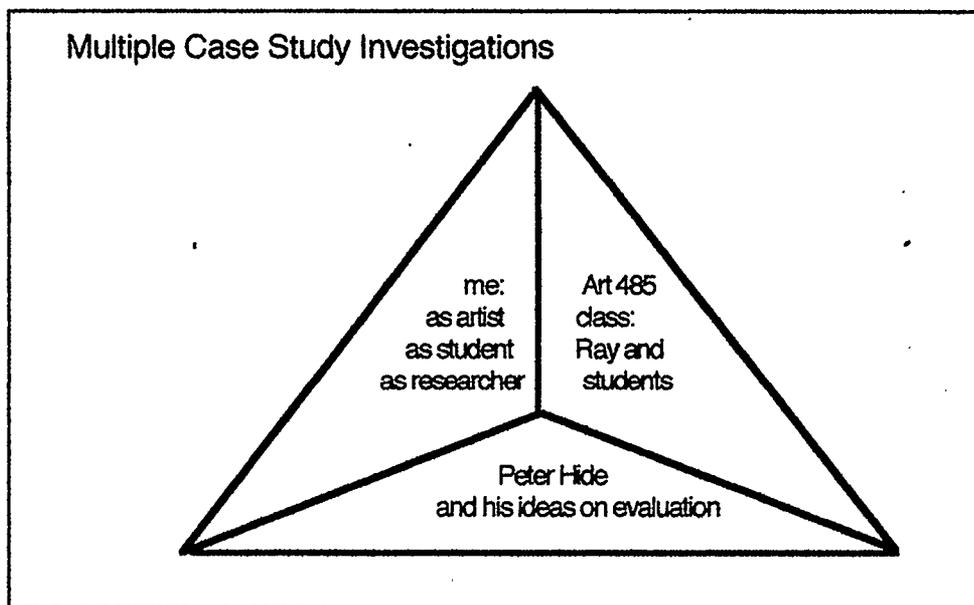
### Triangulation

I have drawn on ideas from Sevigny (1978), who, in an attempt "to move toward a holistic understanding of studio classroom events" (p. 1) developed what he referred to as triangulated inquiry. Triangulation can be simply defined as multiple perspectives on a single phenomenon. To obtain triangulated data, Sevigny suggests incorporating such things as "multiple case study investigations, multiple strategies for data collection, multiple strategies for data

processing, and multiple strategies for data analysis" (p.7). Providing multiple data and perspectives adds an aspect of *validity* to the study that may be absent if only one approach were used. Stake (1988) states:

One of the primary ways of increasing validity is by triangulation. The idea comes from sociology (and further back, from navigation at sea). The technique is one of trying to arrive at the same meaning by at least three independent approaches. (p. 263)

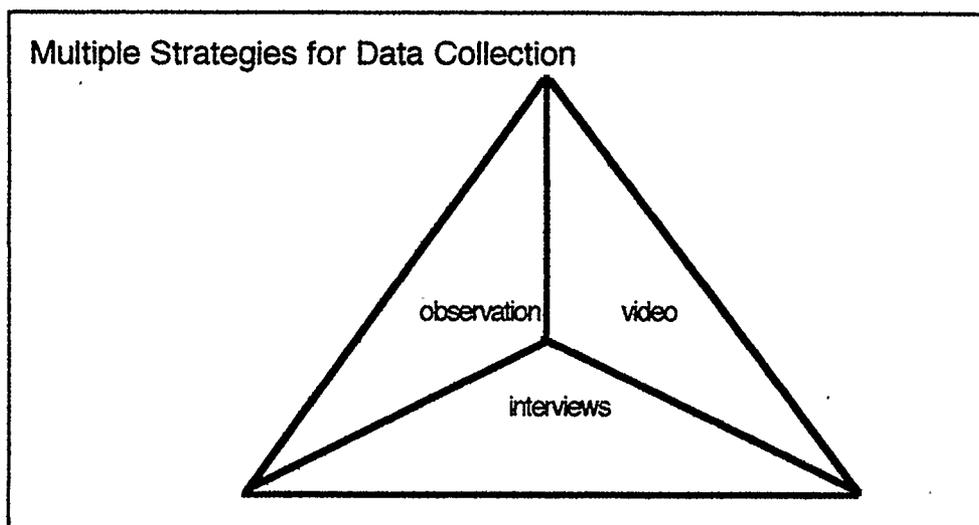
Within my study, I have attempted to employ similar multiple strategies. My case study investigations involve information from the Art 485 class, from Peter, and from me, all contributing different perspectives on the single phenomenon of what it means to evaluate art.



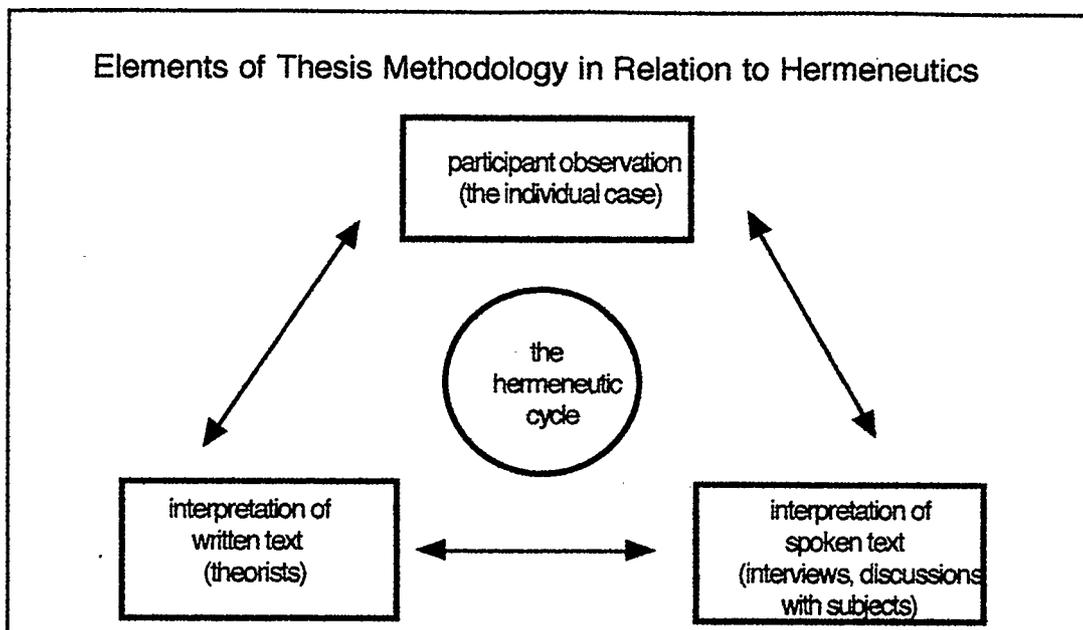
I include myself as a case study because my ideas as an artist, as a student, and as a researcher all contribute to the content of the data as well as the interpretation of the data.

My strategies for data collection included observations, interviews and video taping. During my time as a participant observer in the class, I made

notes of what I observed around me regarding ongoing events and the interaction between the students and the professor. I had periods of time when I was not actively participating as a sculpture student, but instead functioned more in my role as a researcher and roamed around the studio video taping the students working, the one-on-one professor/student discussions, and the class critiques. In this way I was able to retain material to reflect on over and over again and extend my capacity for memory and my need for elaborate note taking which in turn allowed me the time to participate more fully as a student. For my interviews with Ray and the students and my discussion with Peter, I donned my "researcher" hat, even though as a researcher I still maintained my perspective as a student and an artist.



The hermeneutic "vision" spoken of earlier, plays its most significant role in the interpretation of data. The strategies for investigating and collecting data are part of the cyclical process of hermeneutic interpretation. My observations derived from the case study of the Art 485 class, for example, influenced my interpretation of the subjects' spoken words, which affected my focus and



interpretation of the written text of theorists. There is a back-and-forth play between these aspects of my research that forces them into a relationship of parts in a whole rather than as separate, isolated entities. As stated by Smith (1991) it is the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation that “later became articulated as the ‘hermeneutic circle’ at work in all human understanding” (p. 190).

#### Description of Methods

More precisely, all the processes previously mentioned are related to ethnography as descriptive, qualitative research methods of studying social phenomena. Ethnography developed from the work of anthropologists (Jacob, 1987) as a means of describing and analysing a culture or community. Ethnographers employ a variety of methods for seeking their data. The “bounded system” (Stake, 1988) of the specific culture or community being examined can be referred to as the case study. Participant observation and

informal interviewing are methods used by ethnographers to examine the culture in question. The participant observation allows for immersion into the culture and interviews allow for "verbatim statements from the natives in order to get their views of their world" (Jacob, 1987, p. 14). Jacob goes on to say that "ethnographers are expected to record observations in as detailed and concrete a manner as possible, trying to keep inferences to a low level" (p.15).

Herein lies the main departure point of ethnography from the hermeneutic perspective of my study. Smith (1991) discusses the "inherent creativity" of hermeneutics and states:

Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting it. This distinguishes the hermeneutic effort from, say ethnography... wherein the task is to try to give an account of people's thoughts and actions strictly from their own point of view. (p. 201)

Smith goes on to say:

Hermeneutically we understand how impossible such a task is, given that I always interpret others from within the frame of our common language and experience so that whatever I say about you is also a saying about myself. (p. 201)

Hermeneutics acknowledges the significance and presence of the researcher in inquiry. Whereas the ethnographers seek to describe the scene and the behaviours and words of the subjects, hermeneutists seek to interpret that same data through their own perspective as well in order "to make proposals about the world we share with the aim of deepening our collective understanding of it" (Smith, 1991, p. 201).

Case Study:

The "case studies" or "bounded systems" I used as sources for data consisted of the Art 485 course as a *culture* being studied, as well as the

perspective of Peter Hide as a case study, and my own experiences as a case study. Stake (1988) defines a case study as something which:

focuses on a bounded system, whether a single actor, a single classroom, a single institution, or a single enterprise -- usually under natural conditions so as to understand it in its own habitat. (p. 256)

Stake also states that the

principal difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the case, not the whole population of cases.... the search is for an understanding of the particular case, in its idiosyncrasy, in its complexity. ( p. 256)

Such purposes for research lead to questions regarding generalizability -- a goal of significant importance within the world of quantitative research. For example, how can information from one case, or even two or three cases, provide information generalizeable beyond those cases? Quite simply, it cannot, certainly not in the same sense that statistical data can be generalized.

However,

Even statistically significant findings from studies with huge, randomly selected samples cannot be applied directly to particular individuals in particular situations; skilled clinicians will always be required to determine whether a research generalization applies to a particular individual, whether the generalization needs to be adjusted to accommodate individual idiosyncrasy, or whether it needs to be abandoned entirely with certain individuals in certain situations. (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 181)

Case study research has different goals and different strengths from other forms of research. Case studies do not need to refer to the "whole story," but they do "deal with the unity of the case, the unity of the experience, in ways other research methods do not" (Stake, 1988, p. 258).

First of all, there is a broad agreement that generalizability in the sense of producing laws that apply universally is not a useful standard or goal for qualitative research. (Schofield, 1990, p.208)

Schofield's statement reflects similar ideas to those of Gadamer (1960/1989) as expressed earlier in Chapter 2. Gadamer speaks of the individual case with regards to taste and aesthetics, law and morality. He states:

At issue is always something more than the correct application of general principles. Our knowledge of law and morality too is always supplemented by the individual case.... Like law, morality is constantly developed through the fecundity of the individual case. (p. 38).

In parallel to Gadamer's ideas of the individual case supplementing knowledge of law and morality, so too can case studies supplement existing information about specific areas of research or supplement additional case studies to offer a degree of "generalizability" about one situation in relation to another. As stated by Spradley (1980), "generalities are best communicated through particulars" (p. 168). While a case study does not **specifically** describe anything other than itself, there can be present about it, a fullness, a fecundity, that speaks beyond itself so as to broaden understanding about other cases. In order to give substance to subsequent cases, the first case must be articulated and understood after which an interconnectedness to other cases can be found and then supplemented by knowledge of the first. As such, I expect to find from my studies of the cases previously mentioned, broader implications for other art teaching and art evaluation situations.

#### Participant Observation:

As a further justification of the the validity of the methods of inquiry I have employed for this study, I again cite the words of Sevigny (1978) regarding participant observation:

In this way, the researcher acquires some sense of the subjective side of the events which he could less readily infer if he observed without taking part. Having become a part of the phenomena, the

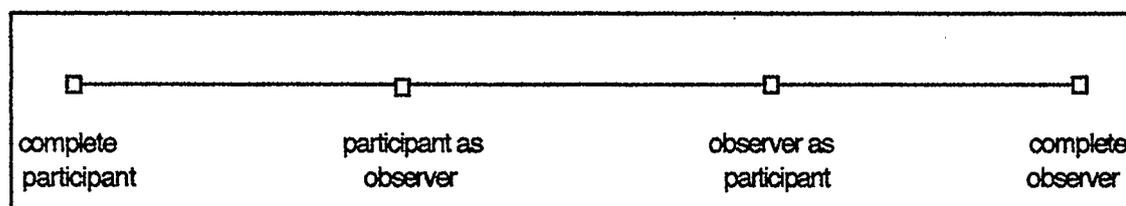
researcher has attained personal knowledge and the question of validity is not tested against the corpus of scientific knowledge but against the everyday experience of a community of people. (p. 4)

Babchuk (1962) claims that a participant observer "gathers data as an ongoing member of a group" (p. 225). This is true to my experience. I did become involved as a member of the group, attending each class session, performing in the same role as the students. During my introductory chat with the class to inform them of my role and presence, I stated that I was not looking for anything specific. Indeed, I did not know myself what I was seeking. I made a conscious effort not to have any preconceived expectations enter into my observations. Even though I knew that I was looking at what goes into the evaluation process and I did have some expectations that what I would find would not necessarily comply with the boundaries of the subjective/objective dichotomy, I did not know exactly what I would find. I did not have a hypothesis: I did not predict an outcome. I consciously sought to allow myself to be open to all possibilities. I was afraid that if I permitted preconceptions to enter in, I might overlook some equally significant data because it was not what I set out to find. My role as a participant observer allowed me the most freedom in this respect, in comparison to the interviews, for example. As a participant, I could not in any way dictate what was said in the class or what would be the course of events. I simply let it happen around me. I participated as the other students, in addition, I video taped relevant in-class events throughout the term.

The video camera was a presence that concerned me. I did not want it to affect the events and behaviour of the class. Within the first class meeting when I introduced my project and explained my involvement in the class, the students seemed receptive to my presence and did not voice any concerns about the video camera. Ray did ask the students to come forward at any time if they felt

the video camera was in any way affecting their learning or art making or if they believed it would affect his ability to grade fairly. Initially, I think the video camera was a bit imposing and disconcerting but as I continued to bring it to almost every class, and as I became a student participant like them, I think they soon became accustomed to the presence of the camera. I sensed a definite loosening up of students in terms of the video taping as the classes progressed. Occasionally, the students would come along and "ham it up" a bit in front of the camera or ask about about the results of the taping. My presence as a student was also more understood; my work, like everyone else's, was a subject of class critiques and I often entered into discussions with different students about the problems and difficulties we were encountering along the way.

As a means of explaining the role of participant observer, Gold (1957) offers a description of the varying capacities in which one can perform as a participant and observer. Gold's delineations have been cited and described in the works of others as well such as Babchuk (1962) and Sevigny (1978). For ease of explanation, I believe Gold's roles can be viewed on a continuum.



The role that I undertook was that of "participant as observer". I will describe that in more detail later, but first, the others.

The "complete participant" is involved to the extent that his/her true identity as a researcher is not known to the "natives." It is the role that demands the greatest amount of pretence. "Observer as participant" refers to a role which involves more formal observation that usually consists of one visit interviews

with subjects. Gold (1957) cautions that these brief encounters can lead to mistaken perceptions. The "complete observer" tries to observe unbeknownst to the subjects; he/she is detached and separate from the ongoing events and circumstances affecting the subjects.

Within the role of "participant as observer," the subjects are aware of the role and relationship of the researcher to the field situation. It allows the observer to develop a relationship with the subjects over time and Gold (1957) admits that the "participant as observer" is apt to spend more time and energy participating than observing. This was true in my circumstance. I often found myself so immersed in what I was doing that I had to resurface and remind myself of the primary purpose of my presence there and try to continually keep my eyes and ears open for potential data to capture on video. In trying my hardest not to let preconceived notions or expectations creep in, on occasion I would momentarily lose sight of my purpose. Sometimes I would suddenly start from my sculpture-making in response to a discussion across the room. I would drop what I was doing, grab the video camera and focus in on the student/professor interaction that was taking place.

Gold (1957) cautions that the relationships developed during the role of "participant as observer" can lead to friendships but some distance must be maintained -- the field worker can often become more of a colleague than a researcher/observer (p.221). While my role as observer did not lead to friendships outside of class, I felt that I had earned the students' trust. Throughout the term the students and I would readily discuss the sculptures on which we were working and the problems we encountered; we would make jokes and laugh, and generally I felt that I had been accepted as a participant in the class.

Babchuk (1962) presents some other considerations to the role of participant as observer such as task requirements. Like all the other students, I completed all the assignments in the course (although I did not receive a grade). Babchuk (1962) goes on to mention concerns of status. On one occasion when Ray had to leave the class early, he announced that he would leave me in charge. When jokingly asked by a student "how come she gets to be in charge?", Ray's reply was "she's the grad student." My "special treatment" in this case then, had more to do with my advanced student status generally, than with my role as observer or researcher. On the whole, I believe I fit in at the same level as the other students. My limited experience with figurative sculpture meant I was approaching the projects in this course from a similar starting point as the students. As such, I believe the students were more able to view me as a fellow classmate than if the work I had produced had been "head and shoulders" above the rest.

Essentially, participant observation functions as a way of discovering information that cannot be found via other methods. In drawing inferences from this method, we are seeking to prove neither truth nor falsehood, but considering likelihood within other contexts (Becker, 1958, p. 656).

#### The Interviews:

Interviews are considered an important component of ethnography (Jacob, 1987) and of participant observation (Babchuk, 1962). As explained earlier, I was involved in interviewing Ray and three of the Art 485 students, Marie, Andrew and Ken. As well, I engaged in discussion with Peter Hide of the University of Alberta. Peter chose not to have our dialogue taped, so we simply sat at his studio in an old warehouse in downtown Edmonton and discussed his

work as a sculptor, his work as an instructor and his feelings on making and evaluating art. I made notes during our talk, after which I wrote up a narrative based on our talk and sent it to him to be sure that I had recorded what he said correctly. He returned the narrative with some additional comments and ideas. My references to his ideas within this thesis reflect this discussion process (unless stated otherwise). In terms of understanding Peter's words, I have the advantage of having done my undergraduate Fine Arts degree under his tutelage and was a full participant in his classes for three years. Although I was not formally observing at that time, I can now reflect on my experience as one of his students to augment my understanding and interpretation of his words.

My interviews with Ray and the three students took place about two thirds of the way through the course. The decision to conduct the interviews at this time reflects the ideas of Babchuk (1962) that one is likely to get honest answers to interview questions after having a period of time to build up a rapport and trust with informants, as well as the fact that the informant is aware that his/her words are subject to scrutiny based on his/her observed actions. This form of *validity* is not available in the questionnaire survey form of research (p. 228).

Within my role as interviewer I was able to make a more directed attempt at seeking specific information. I prepared ten interview questions for the student interviewees and eighteen questions for Ray. The student interviews took approximately forty-five minutes and the interview with Ray took about an hour and a half. I was not controlled by my prepared questions. Rather, I used them more as a guide-line or reference for re-focusing the discussion. Much of the discussion resulting from the answer of one question would lead to other questions that were not on the prepared list. I was not bound by my page of

preconceived questions but used them simply as an aid to assure momentum in the conversation.

Much of the information gleaned from the interviews is dealt with in Part Two. However, I wish to discuss one question here in this section because it reflects my choice of information collection methods and supports its validity. I asked Ray and all three of the students if they felt that my presence with the video camera had affected the proceedings of the class. The students stated that there may have been a little concern or discomfort at the beginning but after a while they were used to me and the camera and so it did not interfere much at all. Ray stated something similar. He claimed that it really had little bearing on what was going on because I would rarely start taping until something was already underway, therefore there was not the opportunity to put something on especially for the camera. My concerns regarding the presence of the camera were essentially alleviated based on the comments and actions of the people involved.

### The Subjects and the Course

In addition to the concerns of interference by the video camera's presence, I had to deal with its presence on an ethical level. Ray and the models and the students were asked to sign consent forms allowing me to observe and video tape the events of the class. The video tapes were primarily for my own research and reflection, but after the completion of the course I edited a fifteen minute film documenting some of the interview with Ray, interspersed with visual content from the class activities. All the people involved were requested to sign another form allowing release of the video for conference or classroom purposes. The video filming and editing process not

only enhanced and supplemented my data collection but also was an enlightening technical process for me. I was pleased with the support of the Art 485 students and models, as well as Ray, in allowing me that opportunity.

As mentioned previously, Peter Hide, sculptor and instructor of sculpture at the University of Alberta, chose to participate in an informal way without being audio- or video-recorded. As his former student of three years I was able to expand my interpretation of our discussion with my recollections of his role as an instructor. Although my views of Peter as an instructor do not represent the views of all his students, I found him to be a professor who demanded hard work and dedication. He clearly articulated the stylistic limitations afforded to his students, and he maintained a certain distance from his students (though more than willing to socialize with them outside of class) through an authoritative and disciplined climate.

Ray Arnatt, instructor of the observed sculpture class, maintained a serious attitude towards his students' performance though he was not devoid of humour in his presentation. Although I would not describe him as a demanding professor (I believe he expects the students to place demands on themselves), he does tend to come across in a "no nonsense" kind of way -- he earns respect (of his knowledge and position) while demonstrating gentle humanity. Although he does not mince words in his criticisms (his comments are direct and to the point), he is not harsh or demeaning.

By chance, the three students interviewed (selected for the interviews because they volunteered to participate) involved quite a cross section of interests and attitudes. Marie, the student described by Ray as having "the most intuitive talent", was a drama major and enjoyed participating in the art classes for the tactile sensations they could add to her acting vocabulary through a

greater awareness of our tactile selves. The two other students, both art majors, one in photography and one in printmaking, consistently produced what could be described as the most primitive or naive work in the course. They had to struggle consistently against that barrier in their attempts at modelling the figure. Both Andrew and Ken showed a commitment to art through their actions and words, but saw their lives as art students somewhat differently from each other as will become apparent in Part Two.

Art 485, *Three Dimensional Study from the Human Figure*, is described in the University of Calgary 1992 - 1993 Calendar as: "An introduction to and development of three dimensional study skills in which the student works directly from the human figure using clay and plaster." I chose this course as the subject of my participant observation for three reasons:

1. I expected the professor would be receptive to my presence in the class -- and indeed he was -- he was interested in the basic concept behind my research and intrigued by the fact that my research could be conducted in the classroom/studio setting.
2. I have little experience within my own art background in the practice of figure sculpture so I thought that I would be less likely to impose preconceived expectations onto the processes involved, and I could also participate more fully as a learner in this course.
3. It is a fairly well accepted concept among people involved in the art programs at either the University of Calgary or at the University of Alberta that the former is more conceptually based and the latter is more formally based. By that I mean that the U of C artists (generally) make art about ideas and U of A artists (generally) make art about form. While the distinctions between the philosophies of the two institutions are not that clearly delineated, the comments

from Peter and my understanding of his role as an instructor often support the general distinction. Part of the reason for being involved as a participant-as-observer in Ray's class is that the figurative content of the course kept it more in line with art that is based on form. Keeping the two subjects of my research as close as possible makes comparison and analysis easier.

The prerequisite for Art 485 is the introductory visual fundamentals course. No other sculpture or figure drawing course is required in order to be admitted to the class although all of the twelve students involved had done some figure drawing and two or three students had done some sculpture from the figure. For most students though, figure sculpture in clay was a new experience. Only two students enrolled in the class were sculpture majors, all other students had majors in other areas. Students ranged in age from about 20 to about 50 years old, so it was a diverse group in terms of life experience and arts interests.

The studio where the course took place contained remnants of student work from previous years. The make-shift wall (which functioned as a way of affording some privacy for working from the model) was covered with photocopies of pictures of sculptures by the masters. Everything in the room was covered with a layer of dust from dried clay and plaster. The abandoned remains of rusted old armatures were stacked precariously on shelves and in the corner of the room like unusual archeological relics. The armatures were there for our use, so that we might rejuvenate them with the life-force of our clay manipulations. On that note, I now move to discussion of the class and to the actions and words of the subjects involved.

**PART TWO - INTERPRETATION**

## Introduction to Part Two

### The Hermeneutic Fit:

Once again, as mentioned in the first chapter, hermeneutics can be described as having three main themes:

- 1) the inherent creativity of interpretation
- 2) the pivotal role of language in human understanding; and
- 3) the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation. (Smith, 1991, p.190)

I have chosen those three themes to organize the three structural Parts of this thesis and now as a microcosm of that overall thesis structure, I have organized Part Two (as a part within the whole) to also consist of three parts corresponding to the three hermeneutic themes. The three chapters that make up this part of the thesis revolve around the observations of the sculpture class, the interviews and discussions, and my interpretation of the subjects'/informants' words and actions. I have not sought to articulate a distinction (because I do not believe it is possible) between my views as an artist, or as a student, or as a researcher but have brought all those aspects or perspectives into my interpretations.

In relation to the hermeneutic themes, the chapters correspond to the themes as follows:

Chapter 4 - *the creativity of interpretation* reflects the choices made by the student artists and artist/instructors regarding the emphases stressed within their art making and/or art evaluating processes. The maker/judge is involved through the *creative interpretation* of his/her own life experiences and interpretation of other art forms as manifested in his/her own creative actions.

Chapter 4 deals with concerns about the grading of art works, both as a teacher and as a student. It deals with emphases regarding the process and the product of art making, and it looks at suggestions for alternative modes of evaluation. In addition, it reflects the creativity inherent in my interpretation of the data obtained.

Chapter 5: *the pivotal role of language in human understanding* reflects the interpretations of language as a descriptive tool in the evaluation and explanation of art, how the instructor communicates to students; and also goes on to look further at the subjective and objective dichotomy and our understanding of the meanings of those words.

Chapter 6: *the interplay of part and whole*, (although very difficult to keep separate because that interplay occurs throughout the whole thesis), consists of the part/whole relationship affecting unity and totality in a work of art; and the part/whole relationship of our humanness and art; and the part/whole relationship of these things to hermeneutics.

In an attempt to **live** the part/whole emphasis in hermeneutic interpretation, I have sought to integrate the concepts of the hermeneutic themes with the interpretation of my observations within the next three chapters. I choose not to isolate theoretical concepts but to include them as relevant components along the way. The hermeneutic themes and my findings have become indistinguishable parts in a whole as a process of the writing of this thesis. My purpose is not so much to **tell** about hermeneutics but to **do** it -- to interpret meaning and speak about it.

**Chapter 4**  
***Creativity of Interpretation: In the Processes and Products of  
Art Making and Art Evaluating***

The Projects

The Art 485 course involved the creation of four main projects, some of which resulted in several products. We did a sustained sculpture of a female head, four gestures of full figure female, a sustained male full figure, and several expressive/interpretive studies of a male head. The following is a chronological description of those projects.

**Glynnis:**

For the first session with the model, Glynnis, I chose not to bring the video camera in order to give everyone an opportunity to get underway. In my own studio experiences, I have found that students are most self-conscious of their art making at the beginning of a class. Once work is underway, and they begin to know each other a little better, the students soon overcome their inhibitions. Most of the activities of the first class revolved around re-shaping the armature and building the clay up around it. Most students had achieved a recognizable head form by the end of the class and some students were involved in measuring the model with callipers for comparison against their own work. The primary purpose of this project was to create, in clay, a representation of the model; to portray the model in three dimensions. However, Ray was the first to admit that the features of a model are really so subtle that it is impossible to replicate the human form, therefore it was some sort of equivalency, not duplication, that we were after. The model would rotate every twenty minutes to provide each student with all views. The six class sessions allocated for working on the female head were interspersed with four sessions for the

production of four full figure female gestures. Ray introduced the full figure projects by describing the stance of the human figure. The focus of our attention in these small gesture works was to try to portray the stance of the model correctly and to try to represent accurately the linear relationships of the figure. Such concerns are usually considered to be primarily *objective* because personal interpretation of the figure is not an issue. However, personal interpretation is not something that can ever fully be avoided. By the time we were involved in the third full figure gesture, this pose based on the Degas sculpture *Statuette: Dressed Ballerina*, (the students now seemingly more comfortable with the processes of working in clay, combined with a better understanding of the model), resulted in works that were becoming more accurately proportioned as well as more expressive.

Later in the course we were given the option of taking our work on the female head to an additional stage through a casting process. Mid-way through our work on the male figure, Ray selected Marie's female head sculpture to use as a demonstration sample for plaster casting. Everyone in the class could carry on with the sculpture of male figure, and Ray would call us in to the plaster room at significant times to explain the casting process so that we might do it on our own at a later date. Karen, another student, and I chose to work alongside Ray to make our casts so we could fully understand the processes involved. I confess that on more than one occasion, I secretly wished I had never started the process. I am sure that once someone has made casts several times it becomes quite straight forward, but I found the process frustrating, time-consuming and messy. However, I plodded on, reminding myself how much I was learning from this (one thing I learned, is that the next time I want something cast, I would prefer to hire someone to do it). It was a long process

and I did not complete the work until the following weekend. By the time I was through, whether as a result of carelessness or ineptness, my plaster cast ended up devoid of two ears and half a mouth. Or perhaps it was a result of my heavy-handed, frustrated hammering as I chipped away the plaster mould to reveal the damaged Glynnis beneath. Karen also came on the weekend to complete her cast and she had more success (perhaps she exercised more patience); hers was missing part of an ear, but she managed to repair that at a later date. Meanwhile, a week or two later we saw that Ray's cast of Marie's sculpture had turned out successfully intact, complete with a faked bronze surface which he applied (for which he revealed to us all the secret recipe).

Earl:

Our session for the sustained male full figure sculpture consisted of eight class periods. Earl, the male model, was accustomed to modelling for this project. Indeed, he came equipped with photographs of last years' students' sculptures. My fellow classmates were both intrigued and intimidated by what lay before them in the photographs and the seemingly huge (4') armatures standing in front of them waiting to be embodied with the essence of Earl. The first class was reserved entirely for taking measurements. Undoubtedly, it would have looked extremely bizarre to any unsuspecting on-looker who might have stumbled upon us, to witness ten people milling about a nude man, repeatedly approaching him with various instruments of measurement -- rulers, sticks and callipers. A large number of measurements were dutifully documented on the blackboard beside a drawing of a figure. A student, Charron, asked at one point, that if we were all going to be working from the same measurements, would our sculptures not all be the same? This could not

have been further from the truth. By the end of the project, the only aspect that remained relatively constant between all the sculptures was the height. Everyone's work maintained a height of approximately 46", which translated into two thirds of the height of Earl in the stance selected for this project. All the measurements taken from Earl were translated into the 2/3 scale so that they could be directly applied to the sculptures we were making.

At the start of the next class, Ray demonstrated a way for us to apply the clay to the armature. Because many students are at a loss to know how to begin such a large work, Ray believed by showing us at the outset, several problems might be eliminated. After the demonstration, most people did not hesitate to plunge into their work. By the end of the second class, most students had their armatures completely covered with clay and all had the semblance of a human form. The room began to take on a whole new quality as the presence of twelve "Earls" imposed themselves on the space.

At the start of the third class, several people who had incorrectly covered the wet clay on their sculptures, had to remove a large portion of the clay which had dried out, and begin again. Ray was somewhat disturbed by this carelessness and half-jokingly, half-seriously stated that he would have to start failing people whose sculptures dried out. He thought that it was an awful waste of time and effort if people did not look after their work. It was a scene that did not occur again: everyone carefully dampened and wrapped their sculptures for the remainder of the unit. One of the tidbits of advice offered by Ray during this project was to "model the light"; to watch where and how the light hits the form and try to represent that. It was a helpful bit of information for my work and, I believe, for others as well.

Sonny:

The final project of the term, which was allocated five class periods, was another head with another model. This time an older male, Sonny, became the subject of our sculptures. For this sculpture, Ray wanted us to forget about measuring and accuracy of representation, and to try and find ways to become more expressive in our sculptural interpretation. He encouraged us to make several versions of Sonny, and to experiment with different scales. This project gave many students the opportunity to blossom as it freed them from all restraints. Jodie, a student who demonstrated a bias within the full figure works for working massively, chose to use the opportunity with Sonny to make a head about ten times life size. The clay was built up on the oversized armature by throwing it, and once there was sufficient clay on the armature, Jodie manipulated it and *molded* it with the assistance of a two-by-four. Her hands never directly touched the clay again once the clay was on the armature. Jodie, as well as several other students, used the opportunity to experiment with different methods of working and with different intentions than had been permitted in the previous projects.

#### Preferences in Teaching Methods and Thoughts on Grading

Having explained the content of the course I observed, I can now move on to revealing the conduct of Ray in relation to his interaction with students and his grading methods. Prior to moving into Ray's displayed preferences, however, I offer some thoughts on Peter's actions and words.

The role of university teachers as described by Peter demonstrates his preferred method of teaching which involves something akin to a master/apprentice relationship. As a student of Peter's, I was well aware of the

importance and sanctity of his on-campus studio. During class time, we could interrupt him at any time to request help or ask questions but outside of class time we would usually not disturb him at all, but if necessary, we would wait for a seemingly convenient moment to interrupt him. The physical proximity of Peter's studio is relevant to his beliefs about the relationship between teaching and making art. The first point he made during our discussion meeting was that he advocates teaching by example. Such an idea hearkens back to the master/apprentice relationship employed by artists years ago, where prospective artists sought the opportunity to work in the studios of master artists whom they admired (usually, however, as an assistant to the artist rather than for the creation of their own work). In Peter's classes, students worked on their own art but in the company of the creative processes of Peter's art making. Peter could use his work, problems and/or ideas as sources of project themes or as content for critical interaction.

Such involvement with a professor's work could not take place without the presence of the instructor's studio and certainly not without the ongoing practical research of the professor. The danger of such a working situation, however, is that the professor's work maintains such a strong physical presence in the educational environment that much of the students' work resembles his. In fact, my interaction with people outside of the sculpture department at the University of Alberta as well as with some people within the department, frequently turned to discussion about how much all the work looked the same. The University of Calgary, and Ray's sculpture classes do not employ the same sort of mentor/student structure (as will be discussed in greater detail later). Ray states about his students' work that "I don't want it to be my work by proxy, in other words, with students, I don't want my own reflection in it and I think

that's always a danger with an instructor, that they respond only to things which they have dealt with in their own work." While I do not believe that it is Peter's intention to have students duplicating his work, the very nature of the working environment is structured such that often strong similarities between his work and students' work are noticed. As a student of Peter's, I remember that he always encouraged his students to use material creatively and with originality, but there were limitations and conditions that severely affected how much we could deviate from the type of work in which Peter was involved. Essentially, we were instructed at the outset that we would be working with wood or steel in a constructivist (building or constructing using construction methods such as screws and nails or welding as opposed to carving wood or forging steel) manner and if we would prefer to work in some other way, this was probably not the place for us. Peter describes his method of teaching as a means of providing a "specific" art making experience (personal communication, May 30, 1993). Within that mode of working we received a firm grounding in what Peter refers to as the "grammar" of sculpture and received a strong foundation in visual formal concerns and principles that would be hard to achieve in any other type of learning situation.

Within my experience as a participant in Ray's class and through discussion with him, I learned of the differences in his approach to teaching. The figure class did indeed offer students an understanding of the "grammar" of transforming human form into clay as both an exercise in observation and technical skill. However, Ray stressed different emphases than Peter did as an instructor. During Ray's introduction to the course, he made a special point of emphasising "process" as opposed to "product." Ray stated he was primarily concerned with the efforts and pursuits of the students during the process of

making the sculpture, rather than with what was visible as the final result of that process. In relation to the evaluation procedure, Ray stressed the importance of student participation. Indeed, in a course where a model is required for each session, a class cannot be made up -- if a student misses a day, that day is lost. Also, Ray considered each individual's progress throughout the course. Ray assigned a grade for each project and a grade for participation, all of which were averaged to produce a final grade. Ray stated that he has a good visual memory and is therefore able to recall all the stages of a student's work of art on the road to completion. This claim is evident in Ray's actions because he frequently discussed the stages of a student's work within critiques.

Both Peter and Ray demonstrated differences in the emphases incorporated in their teaching practices. The purpose of my research is not to advocate either the mentorship over the personal search for expression or vice versa, but to point out that although the methods of teaching are different, there is also a similarity in that neither approach could be achieved without the experiential knowledge of the professors involved. As such, the words and practices of both instructors indicate a presence of *ars artium* that through interaction with students and student work demonstrates the inherent creativity incorporated in the interpretative processes of both Peter and Ray.

#### Grades as a Reflection of Student Merit

Within the content of this section, the ideas of the students play a much larger role than they have previously. After all, it is the students who are the most directly affected by the grades issued them, and it is the grades that provide a quantifiable measure to the processes and products of students. It is a curious thing that what the students have to say when confronted face to face

about grades does not necessarily comply with what their actions indicate nor with what Ray had to say about student grades. In this regard, the *creativity of interpretation* is demonstrated as open and frequently different interpretations of similar information -- grades. Here, I acknowledge that these students do not reflect the entire student body nor do Ray's comments about grades reflect all professors' experiences. I believe, however, that there is some significance to the variation in response, between the students' and Ray's actions and comments.

Marie stated in her interview while reflecting on her first studio experience (an introductory drawing course) that "I had this thing in my head that I couldn't draw so I went in there and said that regardless of what mark I get maybe I'll get something out of the class.... I was really impressed with the amount I had learned and I considered that more important than the grade, and I felt the same way about this [Ray's] course." Her comments demonstrate an ideal I am sure most professors would like to think that their students hold. During the sculpture class, however, the event of the posting of mid-term grades told a different story. Marie was first in line, followed by other students milling about the piece of paper hung upon the wall looking for their grades. I continued to work on my sculpture and after a while, one of the other students whom I later interviewed, Ken, asked me if I had checked my grade and was surprised to discover that I would not be receiving a grade. Marie, who was also part of this conversation, said that even if she was auditing a course she would probably want to get a grade.

Another student, Cindy, who during the plaster casting class had later decided to join Karen and me in our messy endeavours, also made a comment showing her views of the significance of grades. As the class time was nearing

an end (and we still were not finished the lengthy casting process) Cindy happened to mention in passing that my decision to have undertaken the making of a cast might help my grade. At which point, I replied "but I'm not getting a grade." Cindy looked at me, surprised, and said "you sure work hard for not getting a mark!" Here it was again, that underlying premise that the work we produce and the effort we put into it, is for a grade, not for our personal satisfaction and achievement.

I thought afterward, that in artistic pursuits, of all places, people should learn to work hard with little return other than self-satisfaction and the appreciation of only a few others. That is what it is like in the real world of the artist (at least it is for most of the artists I know). But, in school, it is hard to avoid the reciprocal relationship of getting a good mark for for hard work. I, too, have a hard time avoiding this expected reciprocity in an educational setting. I somehow see grades as a concrete and direct reflection of my ability and performance bestowed upon me by an (omnipotent/omniscient) other. Grades provide a numerical comparative guideline for one student's performance rated against another's. I know it is embedded in me also, and I did wonder on occasion what grade I would have received if I were being graded in this course. It is unfortunate that so often we look upon the grade as some kind of external reward system rather than determining for ourselves how we have progressed and how we have managed to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. How often do students think of their goal as receiving an "A" as opposed to achieving a certain level of quality within their work? Although, presumably, quality does go along with an "A", to students it seems to be a secondary thought to the grade itself.

Marie's particular case exemplifies a contradiction between actions and

words. However, being witness only to Marie's actions and informal conversation or listening only to her answers to formal questions regarding grades would serve to provide incomplete information about Marie's feelings and response to grades. Indeed, while I am sure that she is pleased with what she learns from a course, it appears that without the grade to validate it, her learning does not hold the same value. Marie somehow feels that her achievements within a course need to be recognized through the receipt of a grade in order to assure herself that her achievements were indeed successful and sanctioned by somebody else. Here, the *creativity of interpretation* is afforded me as I witness and interpret Marie's actions and words spoken in different contexts, and the *creativity of interpretation* is afforded Marie as she allows herself to interpret her learning both as a means of improving her artistic ability and as a means of achieving a grade as a recognizable, concrete illustration of her ability.

When asked about signs that might indicate how he was doing in the class, Andrew stated in his interview that "in terms of marks, actual grades, I guess you don't know...I don't care I don't think as much as other people get upset about marks...I go there every day and try it and talk about it and ...as long as I'm thinking about a problem that I encountered during that class and how to get over that ...that's how I think I'm doing well in that class -- it's holding my interest." Later, Andrew goes on to say that he does believe that students can assure a good grade if they choose to and that comes about as a result of the fact that "I think I will be evaluated on my enthusiasm and my outward energy about the whole program and the interest I show." Indeed, Andrew showed within his actions in class, that he did have enthusiasm for what he was doing. Even though he stated that what we were pursuing in class was not to his

“artistic liking”, he spent a great deal of time speaking to Ray, talking about his intentions and asking questions, listening to suggestions made by Ray and then attempting to follow through. As stated earlier, Andrew had a difficult time getting beyond making fairly raw and primitive objects within this class as if, as stated by Ray, he could not see the model for the clay -- the clay itself became the subject of his modelling rather than the model.

Within the interview, Ken stated the key to getting good grades a little more frankly than Andrew; he said that “for the most part if two personalities click, then you get higher grades and if they don’t, you don’t...and if you spend a lot of time in the classroom and they see you are present and that you’re there, your grades, even if your work isn’t as good, will be higher.” Ken believes the only indicator of how well he is doing in a class has been from the marks he has received and although he was pleased with the mid-term mark he received in Ray’s class he did not feel he deserved it when he compared his work to that of the other students in the class. He also said that the criticism he received from Ray was more meaningful than looking at the grade postings. Ken, like Andrew, continually produced primitive objects while struggling to get beyond a certain perceptual block; by the end of the course Ken confronted his primitive tendencies head on in the sculpture of Sonny by carving directly into the clay rather than continuing his effort and trial with the modelling of clay. His results from this mode of working seemed to afford him some freedom and greater success and certainly a greater understanding of where his strengths and weaknesses resided.

In a sense all three students are *saying* similar things, that the interaction and ideas encountered in the class are more significant than the grades. Marie, one of the most successful students in terms of her art products in this class,

contradicts herself in her actions and informal conversations as to her view of the significance of grades. Andrew and Ken, who were both struggling to get beyond archetypal and primitive results in their work, claim that the grades really did not matter; Ken was pleasantly surprised but felt his high grade was unwarranted and Andrew admitted that he believed it was his enthusiasm and dedication that would help improve his grade in the course. Andrew believed that his attitude had a great deal to do with the marks he received and Ken stated that he did not know what really was required to pass this course. Ken thinks that professors, in general, should lay out more specific criteria to indicate the requirements for the students' projects. Those are the students' perspectives of how grades fit into the structure of their schooling.

Ray views things somewhat differently. First of all, Ray expressed some disgust with the emphasis placed on grades. He stated that the "Canadian educational system...which is grade and reward oriented" strongly influences students so that in a learning situation, what the students want are "clear objectives and view points so they can gauge their success or failure" and he believes that the university should have "very little place for that." Ray believes that more emphasis should be placed on the critique and interaction process which provide input to the students' work, not validation or valuation; but "a lot of students don't like that, they like it cut and dried.... I was amazed when I first came here to be asked by a student, tell me what you want and I'll do it so I can get an 'A'.... I've actually been asked by a student 'I need an A in this class', as if I've got anything to do with whether they get an A or not and they don't have anything to do with it." These comments from Ray demonstrated his sense of despair with the grade-oriented system condoned by educational institutions and its effects on students. From my perspective as a student, I understand the

so-called *need* to get good grades. We do indeed live in a society where grades wield a great deal of weight: our scholarship system is strongly influenced by them, university admission depends upon them often as sole criteria, and as a product of such a system and as a parent I suspect that grades will be the strongest indicator of my children's educational achievements.

### Considering Alternative Evaluation

I am forced to question the emphasis on grades evident in our educational settings and can only conclude that grades are essential to maintaining the hierarchal power structure inherent in the established patriarchal systems of the status quo. In such a system, the teacher/instructor maintains a power position, a power not necessarily of an authoritarian or disciplinary nature, but a power over the students' degree of success or failure. Students, although subject to new trends advocated in curriculum theory<sup>1</sup>, still are not allowed to take much responsibility for the evaluation of their work. If we were to consider the possibilities afforded by altering emphases in our thinking and in turn our educational structure, by incorporating what both Capra (1982) and Rogers (1988)<sup>2</sup> have to say about female ways of knowing and

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1. Much literature has been written regarding newer approaches to education which indicate a move away from a teacher-centred, content focus. These views are related to ideas such as *personal practical knowledge* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988); the concept of connoisseurship presented by Eisner (1977); and phenomenological concepts such as presented by Van Manen (1990). In relation to evaluation considerations, Herman, Aschbacher and Winters (1992) state:

New visions of effective curriculum, instruction and learning demand new attention to systematic assessment. No longer is learning thought to be a one-way transmission from teacher to students with the teacher as lecturer and students as passive receptacles. Rather, meaningful instruction engages students actively in the learning process.(p. 12)

2. Capra (1982) discusses cultural values through the analogy of Yin and Yang (Chinese symbols of balance) as representative of feminine and masculine respectively. The values of modern Western civilization have been unevenly weighted towards the Yang or masculine side; Capra is suggesting incorporating into our current world view feminine attributes including things such as intuition, cooperation and synthesis as a means of re-instigating a balance. Rogers (1988) picks up on the ideas of Capra and predicts the occurrence of a redefinition of human nature which will make paramount the "validity and worth of the values of the female ethos" (p. 1).

understanding, then perhaps our current patriarchal systems could be positively influenced by matriarchal attributes. *Ars artium* as a quality of informed, experienced art instructors could be a quality inherited by students through direct experience and interaction with evaluation of their own performance and products. This bequest would undoubtedly alter the current grading system and would expand the students' understanding of art and evaluation concerns.

In spite of student concerns with grades and the grade-oriented system of our educational institutions, Ray has chosen to downplay the significance of grades as a reflection of the merits of the art object through emphasizing the process rather than the product. When asked about his view of the value of art objects Ray stated "I think I probably value the art objects less than I value the process of making art.... the actual artifacts at the end when one looks at them in an appreciative manner is a quite different thing from the process of making and since I'm involved in making art, that is a much more important factor...in the end." Within Ray's role as an instructor and evaluator of student art, it is the emphasis on process that allows for fairness in grading. With regard to the work of Andrew and Ken for example, Ray describes their resulting work as products which are "naive and primitive," and although there are values in that type of work such as "archetypal values, atavistic notions of going back to image making" that is not the kind of thing that this particular course is leading to. Ray believes that with enough effort, these students should be able to get past this type of 'perceptual block" so in looking at their work he evaluates "their effort as well, and not just the results.... I am not just looking for one factor and evaluating that." Clearly the students have some understanding of the significance of process in Ray's grading procedure. Andrew stated that he believes Ray "looks at the students, not so much what the student produces"; Marie stated "I think I

have been judged fairly, I don't have any complaints with the way I have been marked." Ken's comments described earlier indicate his acceptance, albeit confused understanding, of his good grade in light of his naive art products.

The problem with the strong weight of grades might be partially alleviated by a suggestion made by Peter. Peter suggested that a pass/fail system or a first class/ second class/ fail system might be more appropriate to the evaluating of art than grades which really only have significant bearing in quantifiable subject areas (such as aspects of mathematics). While I am not in a position to recommend changing the the entire structure of our educational system overnight, I think that such concerns within the area of art are real and valid and warrant consideration. The results of placing too much emphasis on grades show up in comments from the interviewed students: Marie stated that even though students have their own way of working "because you are listening to what he [the professor] is saying and trying out the techniques he is suggesting, that helps your grade." Marie's comment completely overlooks the fact that because of the professor's experience and knowledge, his comments and suggestions could ultimately improve the student's knowledge and technique simply as a benefit to the student's artistic experience. Andrew's comments are tempered somewhat with an underlying premise that he is essentially in this learning environment for his own benefit. He states about the class: "although this is an imitational process we're involved in now, and basically doing it for grades or for Ray, I'm always doing it for myself." When asked about who he was making art for, Ken responded by saying, "I would like to say I am doing it for myself, but I don't know if I am." Even though all three students stated within their interviews that the critical and interactive processes were helpful and significant to their art making, without the focus of their work being on their

improvement and learning but on grades or pleasing a professor, I question how significant that learning experience can be. Again, in order to alter such emphases, the student needs greater involvement in the evaluation process, needs to develop his/her own sense of *ars artium* so that the art making and learning experience becomes more personally significant.

As a further consideration of the role of evaluation, Andrew made a suggestion as to how the significance of it could be improved for him. When given the opportunity to comment on what changes he would implement in the evaluation practices at the university, Andrew mentioned his concerns with the art program in general at the University of Calgary. Essentially, Andrew believes that the program and evaluation procedures are too lax. He believes that the best way for a student to evaluate himself is in comparison with the work of others. However, he stated " I don't feel myself being pulled or pressured by other students, because there is such a lackadaisical attitude some of the time." He believes that "evaluation takes care of itself if the students take it seriously, if they debate about it then the evaluation and everything is going to be of higher quality." Andrew felt that a competitive edge and "sense of urgency" was absent in the university environment to which he was exposed. He stated that he thought a tougher environment could be implemented through professors who would be harsher and more intimidating and who would provide a lot of constructive criticism. He stated that the professors should make more effort at weeding out the less serious and less committed students so as to create a more competitive environment for the dedicated ones. Andrew believed that the students were evaluated more in terms of simply doing the work, and that no one "exceptional can be produced in this environment." He stated also that the evaluation "should be just a lot more intense" and that the professors should

"exercise their powers of judgment/evaluation."

Another suggestion for an alternative method of evaluation was that of a jury process -- having several professors collaborate on the grading of a student's work. That suggestion will be elaborated in another context in the next chapter. The consideration of all of the aforementioned suggestions leads directly into the issue of whether Fine Arts should be offered within an academic institution when it cannot be evaluated by the same means as the so-called academic subjects. I cannot fully address this issue within the scope of this thesis although Ray does briefly address the issue within his interview. That too, will be addressed within the next chapter.

**Chapter 5**  
***Pivotal Role of Language in Human Understanding:  
Language as Words/Language as Art***

Introduction

Thirty spokes meet at the hub,  
But the void within them creates the essence of the wheel.  
Clay forms pots,  
But the void within creates the essence of the pot.  
Walls with windows and doors make the house,  
But the void within them creates the essence of the house.  
Fundamentally:  
The material contains utility,  
The immaterial contains essence.  
Lao-tse

Words are the stuff of verbal interaction but it is often the significance of the unspoken or the suggested that forms the essence of meaning. As a researcher, incorporating not just observation of action but the significance of the spoken word in interview and discussion sessions, it has been my task to sift through that documentation and attempt to interpret the meaning -- that which is immaterial -- from my transcripts and notes. Essences are not fixed, finite concepts in hermeneutics. This is where the "fecundity of the individual case" comes into play. The case and the essence of meaning in words are subject to transformative interpretation over time. As such, I acknowledge that my words are subject to interpretation by others just as the words of my subjects were subject to mine. My search for meaning in this study reflects not only the words of the subjects but also the observed actions of the participants involved.

### Teacher as Communicator: Metaphor and Analogy

In my discussion with Peter, he stated he believes that teaching can occur "a thousand different ways." It is a useful skill to be able to evaluate and communicate certain ideas but it is equally beneficial to teach by example and direction. In the actual practice of teaching, Peter believes that because artists are born and not made, it is the role of the teacher to recognize and encourage that capacity in an individual.

Ray views the relationship between making art and teaching art as a compatible one. He believes that "one aspect of art making is to try to project what you think, what you believe, who you are.... Another aspect of that is verbal communication in just projecting through teaching someone or interacting with people in an educational environment...so I don't see them as contradictory, I see them as complementary and I've always been an enthusiastic teacher because I think that is an important aspect of art making for me."

Ray sees art making as a visual metaphor for the human condition, that art making "is the only form that actually carries the full...the complete metaphor of the human condition." Through teaching, where language can be significant to understanding ideas and processes, Ray continually made use of metaphor and analogy as a means of articulating concepts. When asked about it, he said "I think people remember metaphors and analogies...language is basically a metaphor for something we can't grasp and I think the structure of metaphor is just an extension of language."

In practice, Ray's metaphors and analogies were frequently inserted in his verbal interaction with students to augment their visual understanding. As our work progressed with the female head sculptures, Ray made the rounds with the students for private discussions regarding their work and I followed

behind, with the video camera rolling and tried to unobtrusively capture on film the interaction taking place. He commented to Cindy that her work had a harshness and a graphic quality about it, almost as if it was drawn rather than modelled (a comment that could only come from an experience of drawing). While talking to Andrew, Ray stated that his work reflected his preconceived notions about form and clay rather than an actual representation of the model, that he should only make a mark on the clay when he actually sees that form on the model. Ray explained to Andrew that until two things are close enough in similarity (i.e. the model and the sculpture) comparisons cannot be made. He used an analogy stating that one cannot make a reasonable comparison between chalk and cheese; one can, however, make a comparison between cheddar and Cheshire cheese because with them the discussion is about two things with enough similar properties to make a logical comparison.

Ken was also having difficulties getting beyond any kind of primitive or archetypal representation of a head in clay. Ray claimed that Ken's constant problem could be referred to as some sort of "visual dyslexia" (here incorporating language about language concerns, and depending on the knowledge about that more commonly understood phenomenon as a context for comparison), and consoled him with the idea that even the process and experience was beneficial to him. Ken fully agreed and claimed that three-dimensional study of the head and figure would be a definite advantage to drawing and perhaps should be considered as a preliminary study for drawing rather than the more common reverse sequence.

In discussing value (light and dark) in my work, Ray made use of another analogy. He believes that the more refined the object in question, the more defined are the subtle aspects. For example, if a fly lands on a smooth, white

wall it is clearly visible; if, however, the fly lands on a textured, wall-papered wall it is much more difficult to spot. The fly would have to be almost hummingbird size to show up with the same clarity as the fly in the former case. The same situation is reflected in the use of detail on sculpture -- a rough, textured surface requires more exaggerated lines and crevices to create areas of light and dark than does a smooth, uniform surface.

Ray's use of analogy and metaphor did indeed help the understanding of certain concepts in the making of art. Eisner (1977) states:

Metaphor is the recognition of underlying commonality in that what is usually considered discrete and independent. The sudden recognition of such commonalities through the use of metaphor provides a bridge between the critics language and the work and provides the conditions through which insight is generated. (p. 636)

However, we can not always assume that everything that is spoken will be interpreted as it was meant. Confused interpretations surface in the discussion in the next section.

#### Teacher as Communicator: The Language of Criticism/The Language of Art

The description of Art 485 as sculpture 'from the human figure', indicates that it will involve imitational approaches to art making. Attitudes and understanding of imitation vary. Ray described this process not as an attempt at making replicas but as "trying to make equivalent through the material clay." The idea of making a replica is not possible nor reasonable. Ray stated in class that "we're looking at a polychromatic *object* [the model] and we've got monochromatic material [clay]...this is where a verbal analogy would come in well, we are making a metaphor, an equivalent to it, but it is not a representation or a replica of it.... All the things that clay can give you as an equivalent and not

an approximation have to do with intensity and to do with the lights in a person's eyes, to do with immediacy, to do with recognition, not only of the person but of the material." Even in the study situation of working with the model Earl, taking all the measurements and comparing those measurements with the sculptures we were making in the class, as I stated in Chapter 4, the end results were remarkably different. Many of the sculptures managed to capture different *essences* of Earl, but none of them were in any way replicas of him.

We were told by Ray that we were in this class to make equivalents or metaphors for the models from which we worked. The students, however, articulated this pursuit somewhat differently. Marie believed that Ray was looking to see "how accurate the statue is compared to the figure." Andrew stated "I think that it is a direct attempt at imitation, I think that is what Ray seeks, I think that is what we are supposed to do." However, according to what Ray said as stated earlier, as well as the significance inherent in some of Ken's comments, it becomes clear that the goal of realistic representation interpreted by Marie and Andrew was not entirely what Ray was seeking. Ken said that in comparison with everyone else in the class, he was not pleased with his work. Yet, he also stated that he received a mid-term grade that was higher than he expected or felt he deserved. Although Ray did indeed stress the need to try to be sensitive to the proportions within the figure, he did not state that he wanted accurate representations. Rather, he clearly stated many times that he was more interested in the process of working and Ken's grade would seem to verify that. Ken worked at trying to overcome his "visual dyslexia" and although he did not achieve the same visual results as some of his classmates, he did make progress. That progress and effort is paramount in the process aspect of Ray's evaluation considerations -- not merely grading the art object but the student's

effort and improvement, as evidenced in the higher-than-anticipated grade received by Ken.

Such differences in interpretation could lead into debate about the ambiguity of language as a means of expressing ideas. Ambiguity is often viewed as a negative aspect in the practices of a professor. The apparent lack of clarity in language may lead to confused interpretation by students regarding evaluation considerations. However, Ray states: "The idea that ambiguity is something which is necessarily vague is not right -- the real meaning of ambiguity is having two opposing factors which you will have to consider simultaneously."

In addition to the problems associated with ambiguous language, biases are often considered to be a form of subjectivity. Biases (I use the term to refer to innate, unconscious sources of influence), which often lead to accusatory remarks, can possibly be reduced or at least reexamined, by incorporating a jury process of evaluation with several professors involved in assessing a body of student work. In the interview with Ken, when asked what changes he would like to see to the current way students are evaluated he stated "I think there should be more than one person evaluating." Ray also stated that a jury process would work well at the university. He felt that a structure could be worked out where one person would have the responsibility for recording the mark "but to arrive at that mark, there might be several people involved." The students might receive a grade based on several people's points of view and the professors would become involved in an interactive process. Ray believes that the evaluation of art is part of a process of understanding and dialogue, and "one of the great weaknesses of the university is a lack of dialogue in a teaching context between people who teach." The implementation of a jury system of

evaluation would necessitate that type of dialogue taking place. While the professors involved would bring their own set of experiences and ideas, the interaction between them during the process of evaluating would serve to broaden the experiences and artistic concepts unique to each jury participant.

One of the things I discussed with Peter and Ray was how they perceive the role of teacher as critic. They both saw a relationship between those roles but neither of them believed that the teacher actually functions as a critic. The most descriptive distinction that Ray made was that he believes that criticism (as a function of a critic) is not about art but, rather, is about criticism and the language of criticism. The art work itself, while appearing as the content of the criticism, is actually the vehicle through which another form of expression (critical writing) is realized. With regards to the interpretation of art criticism, Ray stated "I think everybody should realize that it's more about the critic than criticism...they use the work of art to make their own work...in the same way that I use material to make art, the material they use is art work." Ray perceives the role of the critic as a mediator between the art world and the public. The critic does not dictate what artists make; essentially, artists must make what they make regardless of what the critics say. Ray does believe that there is a relationship between art making and art criticizing because artists in the act of creating are also criticizing their work as they proceed. In relation to his teaching, Ray claimed he never performs as a critic. He claimed that "I only try and inform the student by talking about factors in their [sic] work from as far as I can, not from my point of view, but from the work's point of view....That's the way I approach interacting with students rather than criticizing them."

In a similar vein, Peter claimed that an instructor of art is someone who is practically related to art -- a maker rather than a judge but who is capable of

communicating verbally. He does believe that the roles of critic, instructor and artist do overlap in that many critics have been or continue to be involved in art making and he cites Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg and Terry Fenton as examples. As an extension to the role critics play, Peter also discussed the role of art theorists. Peter stated that he believes that theoretical aesthetics are not necessary to making art although some artists choose to reach out and learn about different philosophical theories. He claimed that "the visual, tactile world dances to its own tune" and that the theorists follow behind. The artists are the ones who break ground, the theorists can only write about it retrospectively. In relation to what happens in an university art class, Peter stated that he believes class critiques are useful in encouraging verbal articulation but the capacity to articulate is not essential nor necessary for everyone, nor necessary for the making of art. In discussing the dangers of art theory, Peter claimed that an artist cannot necessarily follow an agenda when making art. The capacity for words can sometimes lure artists from sensation. Yet our criticisms are couched in words and verbal articulation. While there is a relation between words and art, Peter believes that artists cannot be dependent on words to have their art work speak -- the visual aspect of the art should speak the loudest and the most clearly, verbal articulation can follow but should not be necessary to the art work.

In support of these ideas of Peter's, I offer for consideration the ideas of Ellen Dissanayake (1988). She claims that literacy has affected the human race and the ability to value and interpret visual works:

Literacy as an accomplishment is commonly considered to be an unquestioned benefit to the individual who acquires it...however, we can look at some of the consequences of this bequest and become aware that learning to read and write is an initiation into a state from which one cannot return, a loss of virgin innocence that cannot be restored. (p.173)

Although Dissanayake concedes that presumably what we have gained does offer an improved existence, it is important for us to consider what has been lost. For example, "literacy allows people to ask themselves (and answer) certain kinds of questions that were not asked (and could not even be thought of) before records were kept" (p. 173) and further to that, literacy leads to categorizing, classification, isolation and hierarchy (such as is evident in written works making use of outlines and topic headings -- that which we are all guilty of if we want to be able to articulate clearly through verbal means). As a result of literacy, Dissanayake claims that "meanings are explicit rather than implicit, uniform and lineal rather than discontinuous and simultaneous, symbolically embodied rather than hermeneutically deciphered" (p. 174). These ideas pose an interesting paradox to those people pursuing hermeneutic interpretation. As stated all along, hermeneutics is about language, indeed about the *pivotal role of language in human understanding*, in fact, hermeneutics originated as a means of interpreting hard to decipher texts.<sup>1</sup> Yet here in the same breath I am quoting Dissanayake's claims that literacy has inhibited our ability to decipher hermeneutically. In an odd way, that which literacy takes away can also be renewed through hermeneutic interpretation of language. Dissanayake claims that for people whose thinking

is largely occupied with instrumental, pragmatic concerns, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate the more embedded, enactive and symbolic type of thinking that is characteristic of nonliterate. Such persons may forget after they leave childhood that there are ways of knowing other than the rational, and that the world can be well and deeply experienced without being dissected and analysed. (p.178)

Such "ways of knowing" is what hermeneutic interpretation attempts to

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1. David Linge (1976) states the following about hermeneutics: "The earliest situations in which principles of interpretation were worked out were encounters with religious texts whose meanings were obscure or whose import was no longer acceptable unless they could be harmonized with the tenets of the faith" (p. xii).

rejuvenate. In fact, "interpretation as it is presented by Gadamer, understands reading as an event that connects the word and the world" (Sheridan, 1993 p. 116). Sheridan also states that :

Literacy is the ability to meet language and interpret it with self understanding, the ability to meet the world in a word and experience the meeting as momentous because we understand how to let language speak to us of the world. But neither is literacy a self-satisfying transaction with the world, an exchange of one possession for another. Rather it is a loss of self to the world in a word, a loss that enriches the reader with a new understanding of the world in words. (p. 107)

Hermeneutic interpretation allows for words to extend beyond "utility" to the immaterial quality contained in "essence." That which we lost by becoming a literate species, enriched us by offering new means of understanding. Further to that, our hermeneutic understanding of the essence of words may be enhanced by an appreciation and understanding of visual form. The habits associated with language of labelling, of structuring, of isolating and compartmentalizing as discussed by Dissanayake (1988) may act to divert the mind. "If nothing is distracting it, the mind finds occupation in its inner life or directly in its surroundings. The immediate world is more likely to be noticed -- colours, smells, sounds, appearances of things, as well as their relationship to each other and to the mental and imaginative life" (p.176). It is the reintegration of things, the understanding and acceptance of the part/whole relationship that allows the paradox of the isolation factors of literacy and verbal language to coexist harmoniously with the integrational aspects of hermeneutic interpretation. We can view visual language and verbal language both as interconnected parts forming our understanding of the whole, of the "world."

As an extension to Peter's thoughts that art is not dependent on words in order to speak, I wish to mention that he also stated that he believes art is not

dependent on the context of the culture in which it was created. Although Peter feels that works of art are indeed apprehended through the medium of one's culture, he believes that they can still be valued without an understanding of, or being a part of, the culture. For example, he stated an exhibit of Indian sculpture can be appreciated primarily as sculpture -- an understanding of the iconography would perhaps add to that appreciation but is not necessary to it. Art is not dependent on the subject matter or the content, but it is related to it. Peter stated that there can be such a thing as overt subject matter and true subject matter -- he used the analogy of two artists painting a picture of the *Madonna and Child*. One artist could be primarily concerned with the Christian significance of the subject and another artist could be using that particular subject simply as a vehicle for an exploration of colour relationships. By the same token, viewing and judging would occur in a similar way, one person would view for the significance of content, another person for the colour relationships, although it is unlikely that these two components would ever be viewed or created entirely in isolation of one another in as extreme a manner as this example would indicate. Such components would more likely function as integral parts of a whole. The concept of integration will appear again in Chapter 6, but for now the topic of extremes brings this discussion to a focus on the dichotomy of the subjective and objective points of view.

#### Further Understanding of the Subjective/Objective Dichotomy

During the interview, Ray openly denounced the idea of separation of objectivity and subjectivity. When asked to respond to the David Best quote (as quoted in Chapter 2 but duplicated here for convenience):

My central concern can be stated simply: if artistic judgments cannot be rationally, objectively justified there can be no place for

the arts in education....

The confusions and self-contradictions are relatively easy to recognize, but only if one can escape from the mistily rose-coloured spectacles of subjectivism, and consider the central questions for the arts in a fresh, objective light. (Best, 1992)

Ray claimed "I think it is one-sided rubbish." Ray continued to say "One of the great dangers of education is that we start putting things into compartments." Ray's response to the Best quote attests to his resistance of the Cartesian paradigm that is still so much a part of Western ideals. Best's statement suggesting that objectivity is something to aspire to and subjectivity is something to avoid, indicated to Ray that Best must also view his entire world in that dichotomized way: "it's like a class war, the rich and the poor and it's also like a wall between male and female -- you'll have to see those things in dichotomized terms to actually start making that sort of statement. I don't believe it, I think its a very dangerous statement. I hope he doesn't teach any of my kids."

Here, I believe it is an appropriate time to reiterate Barone's (1993) idea about subjectivity and objectivity: due to their dependence on one another for existence, the demise of one must result in the demise of both. Barone explains:

Dyads are pairs of words with opposite meanings, each logically dependent upon the other for its existence. I think of these binary opposites as conceptual Siamese twins severely joined at birth, each incapable of living independently of the other. (p. 26)

It follows that either we alter our understanding of these words so that they do not represent two ends of a continuum, or we strike both of them from our language and seek alternative terms to express our ideas. In spite of my support for leaving such words to the memory of an obituary, I am unable to

continue my current task, the writing of this thesis, without using them because of how they are used and understood by others. I now attempt to confront that issue.

With respect to the Art 485 class, Ray stated "I wouldn't want to put the human figure, isolate the human figure from any other art making." The notion of an artist choosing to work in a particular way then has less to do with a conscious decision to work in one mode over another but according to Ray, "What it's to do with is bias and emphasis, its not to do with exclusive separation." Many might ask, however, *What is bias and emphasis if not subjective?* While *bias* and *emphasis* are indeed aspects belonging to the subject, they are not what I consider to be *subjective* elements in that they are not consciously controlled. Subjective, I view as an autonomous, individualistic, preferential point of view; bias I view as an innate tendency towards something, and emphasis is displayed in the manifestation of the bias in physical or verbal terms. In the case of the artist making art or the art instructor evaluating, that bias takes its form through both the innate characteristics of an individual as well as the experiences encountered through one's life which contribute to the innate components of bias. The innate characteristics could take form through either *talent* or through perceptual limitations (i.e. "visual dyslexia"). The experiences could include the influences exerted by significant teachers or by encounters with artists. Biases resulting from such things, can no more be called subjective than the colour of your hair; they result from coincidence or circumstance rather than a consciousness. They result in something "perspectival" or in "participatory knowing." The subjective happens when an individual chooses to isolate and compartmentalize or limit his/her response to art and refuses to acknowledge the connections between things. As such, the

"I" becomes the all-powerful persuader, the response to a work of art is not "it is good" (which could be a comment based on experience or innate bias) but is "I like it" (which does not address any qualities or aspects about the work of art itself). It is the former that reflects the possibility or potential for *ars artium* as an attribute of the person speaking. It is the former that reflects the understanding that there are links between the work of art in question and other art works and the world we live in; the latter comment reflects only a narrow and isolated response.

The student responses to interview questions demonstrate a contradiction in ideas. The students seem to support the idea of clear distinctions between the subjective and the objective. When asked about evaluation in the arts I received comments such as: "the higher you go [academic level] the more subjective it gets because you go into your own style but early on it is a very objective working system" from Marie; "I think a lot of it is subjective, very subjective" from Andrew; and "very subjective, I think if they like it...if two personalities click, then you will get higher grades" from Ken. Marie does not distinguish between bias and subjectivity but seems to have some understanding of a difference between them as indicated by the following comment: "It is impossible not to have a bias in situations like that [studio courses]...even though I don't think they [professors] have necessarily liked some of the things that have been shown to them they can still point out the stronger elements in the art." Likewise Andrew and Ken seem to have an involuntary understanding of the difference between bias and subjectivity. Andrew stated: "I think they have biases and I don't think they are controllable, I don't even think they're conscious;" and in addition to his comments on the subjective aspect of evaluation Ken stated "there's probably certain varying

underlying criteria that is needed that they [professors] look for.”

While it is not my intention to deepen the abyss between things by making our current labels more and more distinct, I believe the articulation and distinction of such labels is important to the interpretation of the ideas presented by the informants. The students I spoke to seem to view things in a dichotomized way. They see bias and subjectivity at one end of the continuum and objectivity on the other. If I am to succeed in the presentation of my notion that these things are not so distinct nor distant, then perhaps, because of the associations we have with these words we must let them rest in peace as Barone (1993) would have us do, and accept new words that allow for fusion rather than polar opposites to be brought to mind. Herein lies the reason for my search and labelling of what I perceive to be an important factor in the evaluation of art, not to fuel the fire between the dichotomy but to bridge the gap via the integral, holistic concepts inherent in *ars artium* and hermeneutics.

As a means of offering greater understanding of how the parts and the whole reflect an integral world view that can be extended to many aspects of our lives, I offer another metaphor (showing again the pivotal role of language in human understanding) provided by Ray during our interview. Ray discussed the university as a macrocosm in which we fit as microcosmic elements: “ I think of a university of being very much like a human, again like the human analogy in which you have to satisfy all the human needs that the human person is made up of and I think this university is set up in that way. So, in other words, you have a Faculty of Religious Studies that tends to address notions of spirituality in a human being. We have physical education and biology, which deal with the science of the body. We have...faculties and departments of psychology, which deal with the human psyche... we have art departments and

music which actually deal with the aesthetics which is important to human people.... I think we have to maintain that range in the university to cover the whole understanding of what it is to be a human being....if you get rid of one it is like chopping off your head.”

As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, this comment reflects Ray's ideas on the role of Fine Arts in the university setting -- it is an integral aspect to the whole; to eliminate it as a vital aspect of our educational offerings denies the significance of it as a necessary part of human completeness. Understanding that part/whole relationship is necessary not only to the justification of Fine Arts in a university, but extends to many areas in our lives. What follows, is a look at the part/whole relationship between humanness and art.

**Chapter 6**  
***Interplay of Part and Whole in the Process of Interpretation:  
Unity as a Quality of Art and of Human and Hermeneutic  
Relationships to Art***

Unity as a Quality of Art

The artist's responsibility is to remodel the language, the artistic propositions of the great artists preceding him under the impetus of his own personal artistic truth. It is the artist's responsibility to sift out what is challenging and important in what is handed down to him and to resolve the tension between his inner artistic impulse and this legacy by producing a new synthesis.

(Peter Hide, 1992)

In my discussion with Peter, the topic of unity was a significant one. Peter essentially views unity as the most important element relating to quality (referring to a degree of "goodness" ) within a work of art. Peter claimed that basically two things go into art making and/or art evaluating. Those two things are sensation and unity. Sensation relates to the emotional and unity to the intellectual. The intellect provides the means for achieving and apprehending unity in art. The resulting art work must be a synthesis of intellect and feeling. These ideas can be compared to the form/content debate mentioned previously: form as intellect; content as feeling. To expand on the notion of bringing together or synthesizing form and content, I offer the words of Palmer (1969). He states that understanding of art "does not come through methodically cutting and dividing it as an object, or through separating form from content" but it comes through openness and an ability to hear "the question put to us by the work" (p. 168). Further to that Palmer goes on to say: "What is central to the aesthetic experience of a work of art is neither content nor form but the thing

meant, totally mediated into image and form, a world with its own dynamics" (p. 170).

Palmer's idea of mediation is one which I equate with unity. Palmer speaks of "total mediation" referring to an interplay of elements within a form which becomes its own world and not simply a copy of anything (p. 160). In sculpture-making unity is achieved via a process of building and removing elements. The process, however, cannot follow in a descriptive, methodical manner if the resulting sculpture is to achieve unity and not jigsaw puzzle disconnectedness. For example, as the six sessions on the project of the head of Glynnis were drawing near to a close, the students in the class were drawing closer and closer around the model so as to pay greater attention to detail and translate it into clay. The degree of detail in the creation of these works should be built up in a uniform, progressive manner. Ray spoke frequently about achieving totality or unity (a sense of unified wholeness, all parts as necessary and integral to the whole) in a work of art. It is a hard concept to comprehend fully and often even more difficult to attain in one's work. Some people seem to achieve unity instinctively, others have to work much harder at it. During the final critique of the sculptured heads the focus of the discussion was unity. Marie's sculpture, Ray claimed, maintained a sense of unity about it throughout the entire building process, a result of what he believed to be natural talent. My sculpture, he claimed, achieved a sense of unity through "knowledge" and a conscious struggle as opposed to intuition. According to Ray, several students' sculptures tended to separate out, to act as if they were constructed of separate elements pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle. This condition, he stated, could be a result of "leapfrogging" or working on one part of the head up to a certain degree of finish and then going on to the next and the next to the point where

the parts begin to appear separate and unrelated if the increments or leaps incorporated are too great. Ray stated that the problem with putting a sculpture together like a jigsaw puzzle is that in the end the viewer sees the “seams rather than the object.”

In our regular one-on-one discussions with Ray about the progress of our sculptures of Earl, the topic of unity was again a significant one. Ray made the analogy of fetal growth as a comparison with the emerging process of modelling sculpture. A fetus does not simply pop out an arm or a leg fully formed with fingernails and hair follicles, rather, everything grows together at a similar rate; likewise sculpture should be built up and grow gradually all over a bit at a time, and as such, it will tend to maintain a sense of totality and unity. A student, Charron, consistently resisted the total, gradual building process and his sculpture of Earl had a very tiny head and was minus arms for a long time. The attempt to attach arms at a later time posed problems for him because they could not be fit into the shoulders without appearing somewhat disproportionate or disjointed. Just prior to the final critique Charron decided to do something about the tiny head. All along Ray had reminded him of the problem of this kind of separated development and discussed with him the size of the head (a small head on a large body tends to make the sculpture look monolithic, like a very tall man). The day of the critique Ray popped out to get himself a cup of tea. When he left the head on Charron’s sculpture was tiny, when he returned with his tea, it was huge. Charron’s monolithic man had rapidly become a dwarf. Ray kidded him about the sudden burst of growth. It is true that Charron’s dilemmas became the brunt of many class jokes. Charron good-naturedly claimed that he always set the example of what not to do in the class.

The heads on the Earl sculptures were an important element in the final

critique discussions. It was the head that most often affected the totality of the piece; it is because the head and face are so much the signature of a person or as Milan Kundera (1992) states in *Immortality*, the "serial number" of a person. The face holds so much information about any individual within all the subtle details of the features that it is difficult, when any attempt is made to render a human form in sculpture, not to overemphasize the facial characteristics. My work suffered from this problem of having the head visually disengaged from the body because it was treated in a more detailed manner than the rest of the figure. In complete opposition to this was the work of Valerie. The face on her sculpture was devoid of any features whatsoever: it was a perfectly smooth surface. Valerie's work, however, managed to attain more sense of unity than mine because her sculpture overall was very smooth with little detail, although not to the same degree as the face. Details in hair, eyes, or lines around the mouth can all accentuate the face to a point that it no longer seems a part of the sculpture. Karen's sculpture at the end of this project was the one that seemed to maintain the most unity. All aspects of the body and head underwent similar treatment and thus resulted in a unified whole.

The final critique of this project again emphasized how differently we all see. Even though we were all working from the same measurements, the sculptures were remarkably different. Jodie made her sculpture quite robust. It was stocky with massive legs and torso. We worked beside one another, and my sculpture had thin arms, legs and torso and yet our sculptures were essentially the same height. Ray pointed out when comparing the two that Jodie's work appeared to be that of a 4'6" man and mine of a 6'4" man (neither of which described Earl's size, I might add). Somehow, even though there were these tremendous discrepancies, the works often maintained a sense of unity

within themselves though they did not always match the scale of the model. Jodie's work was quite well unified; she achieved that by having all the parts within her sculpture, such as the scale and weight of the component parts, relate to each other even though they did not necessarily relate to the model.

Within our sculptures working from the model Sonny, we discovered some techniques which assisted the process of unified development. Many students chose to work the clay through the use of a stick or some other form of repetitious process such as adding like-size bits of clay to describe all the surfaces of the sculpture. We learned from this process that the use of such techniques often result in a unified product. If one is using a single stick to create the sculpture, whether the person is working on an eye, an expanse of cheek, or part of the hair, all aspects of the surface of the form are treated in the same manner. There was a tremendous variety in the sculptures arising from this experimental approach; Sonny materialized in all sizes and configurations, from fairly accurate representations, to Rodinesque or Epsteinian expressive approaches, to primitive modelled and carved forms.

How does the notion of unity translate into education and evaluation considerations? Peter views his role as an evaluator of students and student art in a way that does not address the process of art making as a distinct element from the art product. He claims that the problem with being put in the position of evaluating art in a learning institution is that the *learning* that occurs cannot be measured. While a teacher can evaluate a product created by the student, the learning that has actually taken place by the student cannot be measured and might not even become apparent for many years afterward. In the context of the learning environment in which I was involved as a student of Peter's, I would have to agree with his statement in relation to his practice. I cannot state with

any degree of certainty how much emphasis Peter puts on the process of working. I do not believe it wields the same weight as it does within Ray's evaluation procedures. I know Peter expected commitment, dedication and hard work from his students and perhaps that type of student effort was a foregone conclusion within Peter's expectations (of students). With that criterion out of the way, only the art object was left as the indicator of the student's capabilities. In this way, Peter's actions indicate a more unified marking procedure than Ray's. Peter did not make the distinction between the student's process and the student's art product. Ray very definitely articulated within the classes and within the interview that the art process and the art object were separate concerns for evaluation purposes but I think that in the actual process of allocating a grade to a student's work, Ray did not see them as independent. When evaluating, Ray would go from sculpture to sculpture and write down a grade on his class record. When approaching the works, he looked at the work and reflected upon the student's process in making it. When asked about the mental processes involved in his marking procedure Ray stated (as I mentioned previously), "I've got a good memory" and through that memory he can look at a student's works and recall the stages that the student took to achieve them. Because "everything seems so immediate in those classes" the critical interaction and the marking procedure involves certain skills. Ray claimed "It's a bit like being a boxer, you have to think on your feet and that is largely to do with one's insight and experience." In actuality, I believe that neither Peter nor Ray are looking at the student work in isolation from the student who created it, the two things are integral and inseparable.

### Unity as a Quality of Human Relationships and Art

We seem to as human beings to want to make a statement about a sense of our own identities as being human, and that's I think really what gives the importance to art making, why it is really important as a human activity and why no matter what age we seem to be in and what biases are held in a particular age, art will always be made because we need to make it. It is not a frill on the edge, it is a biological necessity.

(Ray Arnatt, 1992)

Ray's notion that our art-making behaviour stems from something biological is not an entirely unusual thought. Dissanayake (1988) claims within her work, *What Is Art For?* (which looks at the role of art in primitive tribes and other cultures), that art is a "bio-behavioural" act, that the act of making art is an act of "making special" and a behaviour essential to our survival as a human species. She states:

there remains something to be said about the relationship of art (understood as a general human endowment or propensity) and life (understood biologically). Since all human societies, past and present, so far as we know, make art and respond to art, it must contribute something essential to human life. (p. x)

Making connections between human qualities, art making and art observation are unavoidable. Even in the most fundamental sense, as Ray stated "if you make a very minimal piece, which is just 6' high or 5'10" or something which is human height, there is an automatic connection to the human figure." The biases that we have are a human quality. Ray mentioned in his interview that *endemic biases*, such as a bias towards emaciated figures or archetypal objects, apparent in the work of various students are simply aspects of our humanness and the uniqueness of our vision. Awareness of our biases, however, is essential to our development as artists. Ray stated "I think it's

important to point out those biases when you recognize them so they are not just innate things that the students do by accident as it were, but they know it through insight, and therefore can actually do something about it.... Most people, once they recognize it, feel a bit more comfortable and say that's where my bias lies, and I'm going to sort of make it richer."

Ray stated that our attempt to model the human form, although considered passé in many contemporary art schools, functions to affirm our humanness and therefore is essential to our art making. He claims that it is not by accident that entire periods of art (such as the Renaissance, which was also the period of Humanism) focused on the human form as content for representative art. Making connections between what is human, what is innate in ourselves and in our art making is an important element in our artistic growth and transformation.

The human form is full of so many subtle relationships and parts, even when we were measuring the model, it was difficult to translate into a replication of the model. Ray claimed that the attempt at making representational art is primarily memory work - the information that "you can carry in your memory you can carry to your work." Ray discussed the measuring processes with Marie. She was diligently measuring the model with callipers and a ruler to make comparisons with the sculpture. Ray claimed that the measuring is helpful, but she was measuring something that is essentially unmeasurable. The creation process of art making cannot depend simply on a procedure following an objective (that of measurement) process. There is something within the capabilities, uniqueness and perspective of the artist that must bring to life some aspect of the model in order to give life to a non-objectifiable object. Ray told us that in our infancy as sculptors it is very difficult to achieve a sense of unity

intuitively or to have everything fall into place as we expect it should. Any sense of the so-called creative genius that artists long to acquire, tends to happen for only fleeting moments (at most) at this early stage of artistic development.

Achieving unity in the creation of a piece of sculpture is a result of a number of things working in synchronization, such as good hand-eye coordination, good observation skills, experience with human nature and perhaps some innate talent. In addition to that, Ray stated that unity “extends much, expands much further than the art world...it’s just a microcosm of something much larger.” Ray went on to “expand to a universal theory” that he holds “that everything is connected, that nothing can be separated, and the only separation that we have is based on the mechanics of our interaction with the universe, so at that level the dichotomies don’t exist.” While there are the people who continue to place their understanding of the world in isolated compartments there are other people who “sort of slip and slide, and don’t need to come up with definitive answers but only ask more important questions and that seems to me to be much more fulfilling as a human being.”

Ray’s “universal theory” of interconnectedness contributed to the development of my understanding of *subject* and *object*. During the introduction to the class, with regard to our working relationship with the models, Ray claimed that the model is not an object to be mastered, but is a *subject* affecting the art just as the artist is a *subject*. In relation to this comment, I see the *subject* as a combination of three participants -- the model, the creator and the viewer; all imposing something of themselves upon the resulting art *object*. When I first undertook the topic of subjectivity and objectivity in art, I had certain preconceptions of what that entailed (as described in Chapter 1). Ray’s discussion of subject and object began to

provide me with some alternative perspectives, within an art making realm, on the subjective/objective dichotomy.

The role of creator as *subject* took on a significant meaning that became apparent during our first critique, which occurred early in our work on the head of Glynnis. At the end of the second class period for this project, we all placed our sculptures (in progress) at one end of the studio with the model in front, and we viewed the works as content for critical discussion. One of the main focuses of the discussion was the *self-portrait syndrome*. It is not uncommon for people when making portraits of someone, to incorporate some of their own features, particularly during early attempts. Such a phenomenon emphasizes how the creator as a *subject* incorporates him/herself within the model as *subject* to the creation of an *object* that is neither the self nor the model but something that contains essences of both.

As an explicit example of this self-portrait phenomenon, Ray pointed out the work of Karen. Karen is Chinese, Glynnis is Caucasian. Karen's sculpture, however, had Oriental characteristics to it. Karen, seemingly somewhat embarrassed by this phenomenon so well epitomized in the work beside her, was also certainly aware of its presence. With concentrated effort, she did manage to move progressively away from the self-portrait aspect in her sculptures by the end of the course.

Ray also pointed out the work of the two oldest students, Jack and Cindy, and described their works in terms of being the farthest along and perhaps depicting the most likeness to the model at this stage of the project. He attributed this to the accumulation of "life experience," not necessarily the most art experience. The *life experience* aspect, I believe, can be compared to the work of Karen, with her ethnic background as *life experience* coming forward,

not just in the self-portrait characteristic of her sculpture, but simply a reflection of the type of art of her heritage which she might be accustomed to seeing.

Life experience as a *subjective* component in art making can be extended to art evaluation. If through life experience an individual becomes more aware and more observant (the ability to observe is paramount in the creation of "representational" art), then that ability would also be present in the evaluation process. Teachers with more life experience have more context on which to base their judgments. If simple life experience can enhance aspects of art making, then directed art observing experience should enhance the foundation for evaluating art, and the actual making of art would presumably enhance it even further. Therefore, the greater the art experience of the educator, the greater is the instructor's ability to evaluate; and by extension, the greater the art experience of the educator, the greater the element of *ars artium*.

The notion that experience and knowledge of a discipline makes up a vital part of a teacher's background is not isolated. For example, in an article discussing the language of mathematics, Jardine (1990) stated:

if we don't know precisely what we mean when we use such language, how is it we can feel confident when we attempt to teach such aspects of mathematics to young children? Implicit here is the equation of the ability to teach something with knowing what it is that you are teaching. (p. 183)

Jardine goes on to say that we must caution against interpreting "knowing what it is that you are teaching" as requiring precise literal definitions. He states that "Although there is indigenous to the discipline of mathematics a form of literalism and exactness of speech...it is not this exactness that makes it possible for one mathematician to understand what another is talking about" (p. 183). Likewise, the language and terminology employed by artists (or people

knowledgeable in art) cannot be clearly and specifically defined. People knowledgeable in art are familiar with the language through experience; people imbued with *ars artium* understand one another. It follows that the specialized capabilities of *ars artium* sensitized people are what contribute to the capacity to teach and evaluate art. This example brings me naturally to the next section.

### Unity and Hermeneutics: Interpreting Language

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Peter's comment referring to the artist's responsibility as one of transforming the historical *language* of art into a new synthesis. Peter's description would lend support to the concept of the hermeneutic circle as a transformative process. The synthesizing of historical concerns with current art making processes indicates an ongoing construction of new forms which continually contribute to the "living" history of art. In this sense, the momentary phenomenon of a specific art movement, or of a specific theory, which, phenomenologically, is arrested in time; is allowed to continue to transform through the fecundity of the hermeneutic cycle. Likewise, a parallel can be drawn with the development of *ars artium*. *Ars artium* is a synthesis of a historical understanding of art juxtaposed with a sensitivity to concerns exemplified in contemporary artistic pursuits. Evaluators of art cannot isolate their understanding of art history from their response to unity in art or from their response to contemporary influences in art in order to make a judgment; although, that is what the advocates of the subjective/objective dichotomy would have us do in order to maintain an objective distance. If it were indeed possible to achieve an objective distance, that objective distance would be different for everyone because everyone brings different experiences to that distancing, therefore the objective distance could no longer be considered objective by the

description relegated to it by the proponents of the dichotomy. In fact, that so-called objective distancing could be nothing else but subjective. The proponents of dichotomized thinking force themselves into a narrow view of all aspects of experience and life. Without considering the larger whole that is formed by (and indeed greater than) the sum of the parts, art could not be evaluated. But it is evaluated, constantly, by the public, by artists, by critics and by instructors. Although advocates of structured critical procedures (such as those proposed by Edmund Feldman<sup>1</sup>) would have us believe that we can separate all the parts of a work of art in order to evaluate it, we can never separate the aspects of ourselves which we bring to that work. In that sense, art evaluation can never be fully objective, nor is it fully subjective. The dichotomy simply does not exist in so clearly delineated a manner. Experienced evaluators bring something different to their task that goes well beyond the limitations of the dichotomy, involving the synthesizing of many parts (historical understanding, observation experience, art making experience etc.) into a transforming whole; transforming because with each passing day our life experience, our art experience, is increased and thereby augments *ars artium* acumen into a new whole which is never a complete whole, but a constantly changing and transforming whole through the extension of new and multiple parts. If this were not true, artists would not change throughout their lives, rather, they would continue to remake the same work of art or the same type of art without ever allowing for new experiences to influence their art making or art

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1. Feldman (1981) describes a critical process involving four stages: description, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment. Description consists of listing the component parts, the analysis is concerned with the formal relationship of the parts, interpretation is the stage relating to determining meaning, and the judgment stage is for determining the value of the work. It is designed as a sequence to be followed in order so that the viewer can focus on the visual facts prior to making inferences about meaning or value. My sense of this approach is that while it might be a reasonable way to introduce criticism to students, essentially it is not possible to view those components in an isolated sequential approach, but rather the experiences associated with each stage actually happen simultaneously, not necessarily in any order, in most art viewing circumstances.

judging. With regard to my own personal experience as an artist I know it is the learning of new ideas that causes me to question my previously held assumptions about art, forcing me to reevaluate my ideas and thereby influence the choices I make in creating art and in evaluating art.

Even though the students I interviewed appeared to view subjective and objective as distinct concepts, they readily saw the merits of a crossover from the content of this sculpture course into the other aspects of their lives. As a result of this sculptural activity with the figure, Marie claimed "I find myself doing a lot better with physical things, I am better at sculpture than drawing, I am better at drama and showing you how I feel ... than writing.... I think acting takes observation, I just observe a lot of things.... I was thinking about the connection between drama and sculpture." Andrew stated "I think it's beneficial for perception, I find myself studying lines, studying faces a lot more, just trying to, not find beauty or anything, just trying to solve how the cheek bones relate to the nose, how the lips are formed... it was just something I'd rarely do before this class, it really gives you an appreciation and it heightens your awareness." Ken's comments included "sculpture has helped me a lot with drawing...I can see the spaces a lot better." In spite of the tendency of the students to maintain a distinction between what is subjective and what is objective, that same tendency for isolation has not permeated all aspects of their involvement with art. They seem to have an unwitting consciousness of hermeneutic, cyclical connections and links between things, and a capacity for making that leap from part to whole when it connects to the actual making of art. But then, in a system that encourages the making of art and makes students responsible for their art making but does not extend that responsibility to evaluation, it becomes clearer why, with evaluative concerns, they experience greater difficulty overcoming the

compartmentalized notion of clear distinctions. Within art making as well as art evaluating, the juxtaposition of concepts and the integration of ideas leads to unity and wholeness.

Our "grade-oriented" educational system, that tends to bequeath the power of evaluation and allocation of grades to the instructors involved, without offering some of that responsibility to students, can tend to limit the capacity of the student to grasp the integrational relationships of part and whole. I wish to disclaim the fact that instructors believe they have that sense of power I describe: they may well not be aware of it or believe it. However, the actions and the words of the students would indicate that they perceive that power structure to exist. Such significant bearing on grades does not demonstrate a sense of unity or wholeness. Rather, it takes one aspect of our educational lives and puts it above all else. (Again I reiterate, even if educators do not perceive grades wielding this much weight, many students obviously do, and it is, after all, their education about which we are concerned.) If we are to find a balance within our educational lives, we need to increase the value placed upon interactive and critical processes. Such value increases can only be achieved if those processes are modelled and encouraged by instructors; students need to play a much larger role in the evaluation of their own work and that of their peers, ultimately striving for an *ars artium* basis of knowledge through direct involvement and participation in evaluation processes. Ideally, the allocation of grades could play a much less significant role. Negating the students' opportunity for active participation in evaluation, in effect maintains a sense of isolation and segregation to art processes, rather than working to unify the knowledge they gain through their total involvement.

This seems the time to address another paradox that has arisen within

the last two sections of this chapter. Previously, I briefly mentioned that specialized capabilities in art improve one's potential for teaching and evaluating. Yet, just now I have indicated the necessity for greater involvement on the part of the students so that they might better be able to perceive the connections between things, thereby developing their own capacity for understanding art, in effect reducing the power of the special capabilities of the artist/teacher involved. At this point the question of specialization needs to be summoned pointedly.

Specialists can be regarded as experts, as people who through experience and training have acquired sufficient skill in an area to be considered as possessing superior knowledge of that area, whom other less knowledgeable people can call upon for help and enlightenment. There has been ongoing debate about the merits of specialists; on the one hand they have the expertise in an area which they offer to students, but on the other hand, specialists have been accused of being narrow with a lack of sufficient general knowledge to see the connections between things, thereby perpetuating the compartmentalized notion of disciplines and concepts.<sup>2</sup> Ray had ideas to offer on the subject of his own specialization as a condition for his teaching. Ray maintained that he does not perceive the notion of specialization as a narrow concept. He stated that he is only a specialist in the thing that he makes -- sculpture. He claimed that he brings to that a broad background and a wide understanding which then contribute to a focus within the sculptural product that he is making. Ray stated that he perceives a generalist to be someone who is

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2. Leslie Thompson (1986), for example, discusses in her article some of the arguments for specialists in society and counters those arguments with ideas refuting them. She states "Specialization makes possible great advances in science and technology, but it also creates a mindset and an accompanying bureaucracy and compartmentalization in many ways detrimental to the human spirit" (p. 3).

linear with their ideas as a cumulative and additive process, whereas his notion of himself as a specialist consists of the ability to bring a wide range of experience into one work of art. Ray said "I know that's a common understanding...the more you specialize the narrower you become, but I don't think in the arts that is true, I think it's the opposite." How does this relate, however, to the art making experience of teachers? Within the university setting, Ray states, that instructors must be active in the role of what they are teaching; "the university is set up to recognize the critical [link]...between individual research of every faculty member and the capacity to be able to deal with the discipline and pass that on to students." Research is not separate from teaching but is a "prerequisite" for one's job at the university. Ray felt the ideal would be that all art teachers right down to kindergarten were required to be actively engaged in research in their discipline but such an ideal is neither occurring nor perhaps realistically possible at this time. Regardless, Ray believes, teachers must be "at least sympathetic to art, have some understanding about its importance and some insight about what the children are doing, otherwise I can't see it being good to have anyone teaching art." Ray's endorsement of art teachers as specialists seems almost a contradiction to his previously mentioned notion that he does not really view himself as a specialist. Here, I believe, it must be remembered that the specialization to which Ray is referring is the actual making of art, but that there is a broad range of experience and knowledge which contributes to the potential to perform that specialized capability, and therefore the practitioner that Ray speaks of is not a specialist beyond that certain capability. Such a capability can only be realized through a expansive range of knowledge external to the so-called specialization.

Within this chapter I have addressed unity as it pertains to art making, human understanding and hermeneutic understanding. All these things are connected parts in a whole, a whole that pertains to an understanding of relationships between people and forms of communication. Essentially, to have arrived at this point in the writing of my thesis, I have seen connections and relationships between things of which I was unaware before. Coming to an understanding of the connections between life and art contributes to our sensitivity when viewing art and evaluating art; art as manifestation of the fusion of ideas between members of the human species and the products we make.

**PART THREE - SYNTHESIS**

## **Chapter 7** **Summary Portrayal**

### Summary and Conclusions

Throughout my participant-as-observer involvement in Ray's class and through my discussion with Peter, in conjunction with my interpretation of different theorists' writings, I have come to the conclusion that what goes into the evaluation of art does not fit neatly into the dichotomous extremes of subjectivity and objectivity. In watching Ray and in speaking to Peter, I perceive that they do not have a list of specific criteria that they seek when evaluating art, nor do they respond simply through personal reaction. Rather, they bring something different to their evaluation. Their responses and evaluation processes as indicated by their words and actions reflect a presence of *ars artium*. Both Peter and Ray have a different sensibility of *ars artium*, but it is none the less present as a result of their experience with art.

I concur with Barone (1993) that the terms subjectivity and objectivity are no longer viable, they no longer represent what it is that needs to be articulated and present in the evaluation of art. Just as Barone offers the term "persuasive" and Heshusius offers the term "participatory knowing" to the vocabulary of those pursuing educational research, I offer the term *ars artium* to encompass the complex character of the skills for evaluating art.

*Ars artium*, I reiterate, is something which is developed through experience over time, a quality in which one is gradually immersed; it is not simply a compromise between subjective and objective responses to art. In addition to my suggestion of the phrase *ars artium* as a replacement for the defunct terms subjective and objective, I also suggest that direct experience

with art evaluation can in turn enhance the development of *ars artium*. I view it as a cyclical, transformative process of acquisition. Through the experience of art (viewing it, or making it, or analysing it, or reading about it etc.) the participant develops a broadened awareness of art, thus developing his/her sense of *ars artium* and capacity for evaluation. By extension, I believe that direct involvement with evaluation of art as an additional experience of art can serve to more rapidly advance the acquisition of *ars artium*. The varying aspects of *ars artium* build upon each other resulting in a more diverse and wide ranging capability for evaluating of art, encompassing such things as creative interpretation and the skill of portraying that interpretation through language -- that is, making significant qualitative judgments and articulating those judgments.

*Ars artium* is not something which one achieves through a systematic process with a finite end; one does not suddenly say "there, that's it, I've arrived at *ars artium* enlightenment." Rather, it is an ongoing process without a definitive product at a specified end. It is continually developed and transformed throughout life. As experience with life and art increases so too does the *ars artium* sensibility. As instructors of art we need to nurture and sustain the growth of *ars artium* in our students -- if it becomes an aspect of learning within students' early years of education, it can reach more fully developed stages earlier in life.

### Seeking the *Ars Artium* Vision: Present Implications

It is impossible to think about teaching without thinking about a relation to the object to be known. It is impossible to think about the object to be known outside of the human relationships that designate it as meaningful in our world. (Grumet, 1990, p. 104)

At this stage of my thesis, I now have to ask the question "What would *ars artium* look like in a classroom situation?" Clearly I am not seeking implementation of the extremes. For example, one end of the dichotomous extremes might appear like this:

*A teacher stands at the front of a clean and orderly studio classroom. The teacher presents the project by handing out a sheet of paper listing the requirements for the assignment -- the painting must use all primary and secondary colours, the painting must incorporate the "golden mean" as its method of balance, it must contain a figure in landscape, it must be painted with a size #3 hogs-hair brush, it must be a finished size of 24" x 30" with a horizontal orientation, and it must be accompanied by a written statement explaining how it fulfils the requirements. At the end of the project, the teacher takes a master check list and reviews each student's work as to how it adheres to the criteria on the list. Those who adhere the most closely get the best marks.*

At the other extreme, the scene might be something like this:

*A teacher shuffles through the clutter in the classroom to reach the front of the class. The teacher announces that the project is to make an art work using any materials, about anything the student wants. The students flounder, clutter the room some more, some work hard and some "goof off." At the end of the project, the teacher gathers the students and art works for a class critique and says "yah, I like this one" or "hey, this one makes me feel depressed" or "this stinks, what kind of garbage is this?" The students receive a grade based on the personal response of the teacher with no explanation or justification for the grade given.*

Neither instance represents the desirable qualities of teaching imbued with *ars artium* (nor *Bildung* nor connoisseurship). Neither example demonstrates the instructor's capability of portraying part/whole relationships and the concept of unity (learning as building blocks not as dissected parts); neither example demonstrates the teacher's capacity for incorporating language in a pivotal way in critical interactive processes; and neither example demonstrates the teacher's creativity inherent in his/her interpretation of the art work in question. The three themes just mentioned have reappeared many times within my thesis as aspects of hermeneutics and as aspects of the *ars artium* sensitized teacher. I continue to revisit each of these themes as they pertain to my concerns and ideas for the implications of art education in relation to my thesis concepts.

#### Hermeneutics and Pedagogy: Present Implications

Prior to moving into detail about art education specifics, I believe it is necessary to discuss the inherent pedagogical character of hermeneutics. By its nature hermeneutics is pedagogical; it is not simply happenstance or a by-product of the fact that this thesis is written within a Faculty of Education.

As mentioned in the first chapter, hermeneutics and the topic of this thesis are inextricably entwined. It becomes increasingly difficult for me to speak of any aspect of my thesis without presenting it in relation to the hermeneutic "vision" spoken of earlier. As in a piece of woven cloth, my thesis topic forms the length of warp tied to the ends of the loom forming the foundation of an idea. That idea is developed and constructed via the back-and-forth action of the shuttle leaving the weft of hermeneutics into the embracing hold of the warp to create the resulting fabric. One without the other results simply in a pile of loose yarn without body or coherence. My thesis

development has evolved in a similar way. I have presented my concerns with the subjective/objective dichotomy, my observations of the subjects involved, and my development and perception of the term *ars artium*, all as intertwined within the fibres of hermeneutics -- my interpretation and understanding of hermeneutics.

I now offer for consideration, the relationship between the young and the old. In a discussion with Education professor David Jardine (personal communication, May 13, 1993), he mentioned a recent conversation with a school principal who indicated the need for "new blood" in the teaching profession. According to Jardine, such beliefs speak of the regenerative aspects of hermeneutics. The teaching profession requires "new blood," it requires the ideas of the young to advance and transform the foundation built by the old. Reflecting similar sentiments, Ray spoke of the advantages of being a teacher of art. Ray claimed that the thrill of being a teacher is not what one gives out to students, but what one gets back. Ray stated that teachers and students learn from each other. Regeneration and transformation of ideas are vital parts of hermeneutics and reflect part/whole relationships between that which is new and that which is old.

By extension, such ideas can be related to the history of art, for instance. Through our dealings with new and contemporary art, we can revisit and reexamine our understanding of the history of art. I believe that our understanding of Van Gogh's art, for example, is different in the 1990's than it was in, say, the 1960's. I believe it is impossible to look at a work of art without bringing our current understandings of art to our knowledge of the historical development of the art work in question. How, for example, can I view Van Gogh's self portraits now, without also bringing to mind Joe Fafard's

polychromatic sculptural interpretation of Van Gogh's portraits? My understanding of Van Gogh is not only developed by what I know about him historically, but is also transformed and further developed by my knowledge of other people's interpretations of his works. As an art instructor teaching about Van Gogh, I would be obliged to offer not only historical data but also interpretive *data* (I acknowledge that historical data is also interpretative, as interpreted by art historians, but I am suggesting offering additional interpretations in relation to other art contexts). As such, I am given the opportunity for creative interpretation. I am offering an understanding of part/whole relationships in the picture I present of Van Gogh and I use both visual and verbal language to elaborate on the specific work of an artist so that that work might in turn be viewed **beyond** the confines of its specifics. In this sense, the *new* is two-fold. The new is the current art work which affects my understanding of the old, and the new is the young learning about ideas of the new and the old so that they might in turn develop their own ideas about the relationships of the new and the old.

The significance of the new and old in hermeneutics is what makes it inherently educational. There is an interdependency formed between the young and the old. The young not only needs the old in order to learn and to survive, but as well the old needs the new in order to carry on the things begun. We choose to offer to the young a sensitivity towards and appreciation of art so that they in turn might transform and develop that knowledge to offer back to the old and to the future new. It is a regenerative aspect that parallels the biological functions of human kind.

Contemporary Art and Evaluation: Future Implications

One of the concerns that I have mentioned throughout my thesis is how the changing view of contemporary art affects our approach to evaluation. This is a subject that could perhaps develop into a thesis of its own but within the limitations of this paper, I wish to simply pose questions and concerns about the newer trends in art making so that they might at least generate pause for consideration to those involved in evaluation processes.

My concern rests mainly in the area of the creative processes and the unusual products involved in contemporary art making. Contemporary art seems to result in more temporal and transient products -- brief moments in a changing time depicting not a complete whole in itself but part of a much larger whole -- the larger whole of a transforming world, with transforming values, experiences, paradigms and emphases. In many ways, it seems as if contemporary art is becoming more and more elusive even though often claims are made for its relevance to our daily lives because it seeks to express social or political concerns. For example, I offer the following description for consideration:

Both sensational and cerebral, Jana Sterbak's work may be considered in the context of recent art that examines the social and cultural conditions of subjectivity, using the human body as sign and symptom of a pervasive malaise. Through groupings that focus on the body, on the bedroom, and on clothing, as metaphors, the exhibition explores the private and social dimensions of the self as they relate to desire and power and questions of freedom and control. (The Nickle Arts Museum, *Jana Sterbak: States of Being* exhibition press release, 1992)

Certainly clothing, the bedroom, the body; and desire, power and freedom all seem like things that are commonplace concerns and relevant to everyone, but it is the metaphor aspect that throws people off. Someone said to me about this

exhibit (I paraphrase), "Why does she have to try to show it through metaphor, why not simply get on a soap box and say what she wants to say verbally or else make it clearly visible in the art?" The uninitiated viewer's context for understanding art simply does not extend (yet) to the implied and metaphorical; if it doesn't have decorative and beautification purposes, why bother? If you want to make a statement, why not voice it? In terms of evaluation, do we turn our focus to assessing the statement as opposed to assessing the visual product as a visual product?

Without the more traditional adherence to the aspects of art we consider *formal*, how do we go about evaluating art works which speak of ideas? Hobbs (1993) summarizes the difficulty well:

...formalism, even in its most sophisticated versions, fails to account for a great deal of recent art. Formalism's pedagogical equivalent, the principles of design, especially, is not only inadequate for explaining happenings, conceptual art, and performance pieces but is relatively ineffective for explaining the monotone compositions of such painters as Newman, Reinhardt, Klein and many of the hard-edge abstractionists. (p. 111)

But can we deny the importance of formal properties and still call the resulting form of expression "art"? Do we require a broadening of the language rather than a limitation of definition -- by definition, are "art" and "happening" (as a form of visual, interactive, kinetic expression) for example, the same things? They seem quite different, so can we extend criteria for one to the other?

Not only do the limitations of formalism make evaluation of contemporary art difficult, but the increasing number of artists choosing to work collaboratively would make the grading of individual students next to impossible. Certainly collaborative works can be open to critical interaction, but how do the instructors in turn allocate a grade to each student based on the resulting art works? Do all

students involved in a given project simply get the same grade and if so, how well would that type of grade allocation actually reflect the capabilities of individual students? Students do have varying capabilities and varying talents. A choice to work collaboratively does not in turn make students all the same. (Such concerns as these may have implications for other group learning situations as well).

Questions such as those I pose begin to scrape the surface of the long list of considerations for the place of *ars artium* within the needs of current art instructors. Sensitivity to part/whole relationships, openness to the new, and the relevance of language in human understanding, are all aspects of *ars artium* that find applicability in studio classroom practices. Based on my observations of Ray, I would say that he demonstrates such practices. I recall his interaction with Andrew and Ken, for example, as he worked to try and encourage them to see beyond their perceptual limitations and to use their biases to their advantage (such as Ray's suggestion to Ken to carve instead of model in order to directly confront his primitive art-making tendencies). Even though the content of the particular course I observed involved the more traditional concepts of figurative sculpture, Ray's behaviour indicated aspects of *ars artium* that would be transferable to other studio situations. He clearly understands the significance of part/whole relationships within process and product, he focused much of his interactive discussion on unity in art reflecting part/whole concerns. He remained consistently open to the students' individuality, particularly during the projects of Sonny when he encouraged students to work into their biases to make them "richer" rather than dictating specific self-motivated directions. And, he made vivid and vital use of language through analogy and careful verbalisation to articulate art making concepts and

to foster student comprehension. His analogies of “chalk and cheese,” for example, or the fly on the wall comparison for describing textural detail, explained artistic concepts much more clearly than simply the use of jargon or art terminology. Such forms of behaviour as I witnessed in Ray’s actions and words demonstrated a sense of *ars artium* that would easily extend to studio pursuits of a less structured nature such as contemporary performance or installation art.

### The Role of Genius: Future Implications

Some of the concerns just mentioned have to do with allowing for the individuality of students in a collaborative context. This consideration can be further elaborated by considering the role of “genius” in an educational context. How do we deal with its presence and allow for the varying capabilities of students? I wish to acknowledge that although the term “genius” may be an outmoded expression that is rarely used outside of the I.Q. context in current times, I believe considering its meaning and its implications to art and art education are relevant concerns. First, I consider a description of “genius.”

The real surprises, which set us back on our heels when they occur, will always be the mutants. We have already had a few of these, sweeping across the field of human thought periodically like comets. They have slightly different receptors for the information cascading from other minds, and slightly different machinery for processing it, so that what comes out to rejoin the flow is novel, and filled with new sorts of meaning. Bach was able to do this, and what emerged in the current were primordia in music. In this sense, the Art of Fugue and the St. Matthew Passion were, for the evolving organism of human thought, feathered wings, opposing thumbs, new layers of frontal cortex.

But we may not be so dependent on mutants from here on, or perhaps there are more of them around than we recognize. What we need is more crowding, more unrestrained and obsessive communication, more open channels, even more noise, and a bit more luck. We are simultaneously participants and bystanders, which is a puzzling role to

play. As participants we have no choice in the matter; this is what we do as a species. As bystanders, stand back and give it room is my advice. (Lewis Thomas, 1974, p.146)

The question of genius is a difficult one. On the one hand we are all part of the same human species, and yet there are these “mutants” or anomalies who come along and cause us to question our own fit within a race along side of them. We question whether what we see in them is what we could classify as genius or is it some other factor that has permitted them to develop in the manner we witness. Ray stated in the interview after mentioning the ideas of Thomas that “we don’t have to argue for genius [it’s existence or not], all we have to do is recognize it.” During an in-class discussion about the sculptures portrayed in the xeroxed images on the wall in the sculpture studio, Ray stated that as we look at the works of masters, we are often coming face to face with the product of genius. In past times, genius was more readily allowed to flourish. In contemporary times, Ray believes, the role of the artist in relation to societal expectations has forced artists to focus on self-fulfilment as a reason for the pursuit of art rather than as filling a significant and necessary professional role in society.

In an attempt to achieve an understanding of the place of genius in a contemporary context, many questions come to mind. Are those whom we label genius, simply “mutants,” as Thomas states, and are geniuses increasing in number as a population increases and therefore harder to recognize? In an educational context these are important questions. If genius does exist, are we as instructors indeed able to recognize it and therefore foster its growth? If we do recognize it, by what means can we aid its development? Is genius

synonymous with what educators now term as “giftedness?”<sup>1</sup> Will the “mutants” develop and grow regardless of educational encouragement (as Thomas seems to suggest) and if so how is that relevant in the development of “gifted” education programs? Here again, I believe some of the answers to the above questions lie in the educator’s ability to acknowledge part/whole relationships, to understand the individual and his/her capabilities and to be able to view that individual as a fecund case to hold up next to others in order to recognize both similar and dissimilar attributes in other people as manifested in the creative processes of art making. I think of Ray’s attempts at encouraging students to work toward the enrichment of their biases, such as Jodie’s larger-than-life sculpture of Sonny or Ken’s eventual involvement with carving, that attest to Ray’s sensitivity to their individual strengths (though not necessarily “genius”) and understanding of how those biases might best be addressed. The questions posed pave way for future studies into “giftedness” in art and the development of an awareness of *ars artium* sensitivity in that context.

#### Life Experience and Ethnic Considerations: Future Implications

Gadamer’s (1960/1989) concept of the “fecundity of the individual case” extends beyond my concern with the role of genius. A capacity for recognizing “genius” is only one of many attributes of an *ars artium* sensitized instructor. Reflecting on the extreme examples set out at the beginning of this chapter, I pose the question: if we are looking to avoid either of the extremes in the studio classroom situation, how then does the instructor go about making *ars artium* a visible concept to students? If it is not simply a list of criteria or a personal

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1. I understand the term “gifted” in an educational context, to refer to students who have a natural affinity for a particular subject area (math, art, etc.) who are able to digest, decipher and incorporate their easily acquired knowledge readily within relevant situations.

preference, then what is it and how do we teach it to students? I believe it is a cumulative process in that there is no method which can be applied to the acquisition of *ars artium*, but the instructor brings orientation towards it by displaying it. Similar to Peter Hide's concept of teaching by example, of having the instructor's studio present in the students' studio; so too, do instructors provide example of *ars artium* in their interaction with students. In order for this to benefit the students and not simply exist as a behaviour of the instructor, the instructor needs to pay attention to what students say within critical discussions (i.e. the pivotal role of language in human understanding). Herein lies another place for sensitivity to the individual case and by extension, the relevance of the individual case in relation to other cases. Each student will come to his/her understanding of an art work from a different starting point (bringing in things such as life experience and art experience).

At this point, I refer back to Chapter 6 (pp. 103 -104) and the discussion about the self-portrait syndrome that occurred in the work of some of the students, particularly that of Karen. The fact that Karen's ethnic heritage materialized in her work has all sorts of implications for Canadian teachers dealing with multiple nationalities in relation to the effect of our ethnicity on how we see, and in turn, how that ethnic vision is translated into other areas of learning. If our life-experience so vividly appears in our artistic creations, it must also have all kinds of effects on how we learn language, for example, or for our capacity for mathematical or physical logic. As Canadian teachers, I suggest we move to include this set of ideas into our curriculum. Ethnic students should be understood in the context of their ethnic heritage (this does not mean teachers have to be experts in all cultures, simply open enough to allow for differences and to allow for learning to occur back and forth between student

and teacher). Our task should not be an attempt to mold all students into similar shapes. Again we can cite the example of Karen as significant when considering the fecundity of the individual case. If ethnic heritage materialized in the work of Karen, then we might also want to consider the ways in which it would extend to other ethnic students. Educational researchers pursuing study about the effects of ethnicity on learning may want to consider my findings regarding the physical manifestation of self in the art work of students. Such study could possibly lead to both new research ideas and new insights about the effect of ethnic heritage on the existing curriculum in our Western dominated culture.

#### A Plan of Action -- Alternative Evaluation: Future implications

Pedagogic criticism is meant to advance the artistic and aesthetic maturity of students. It should not so much render judgments upon student work as enable them to make judgments themselves.  
(Feldman, 1981, p. 460)

As a means of extrapolating from some of the findings I have uncovered, I suggest the direct involvement of students in the evaluation process. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I believe direct exposure to evaluation processes will advance the acquisition of *ars artium* sensitivity. As discovered and discussed in Chapter 4 (pp. 73 - 76) and Chapter 6 (pp.107 - 109), students have a difficult time stepping beyond the subjective/objective dichotomy in their understanding of what occurs during evaluation processes. The professors, however, seem to indicate within their behaviour that much more does go into evaluation -- *ars artium*. It is the result of experience with art over a period of time. It is not possible to provide an itemized list of characteristics of the professor imbued with *ars artium*, it is simply the

accumulation of experience with art and the ability to extrapolate from those experiences in order to pass judgment and evaluation on other art. In order to offer the opportunity for art evaluation experiences so that students might increase their sense of *ars artium*, I propose providing them with a chance for evaluating their own work and the work of their peers.

Students can then take responsibility for their own work, and be accountable for the degree of success demonstrated in their work. By developing an understanding of evaluation processes through critical interaction with their own art as well as that of their peers, students learn to articulate more clearly about art, they gain a greater understanding of aesthetic concerns, and they might begin to loosen up their perception of the dichotomous restraints of subjective and objective approaches to art evaluation. Even if students are not involved in evaluating every work they produce, being directly involved part of the time will provide opportunity to learn to appreciate the things that go into art evaluation which extend beyond the confines of the dichotomy when receiving marks from a professor.

The professor maintains a vital role in this process even if he/she is no longer solely responsible for the giving of grades. There exists a perception of authority which accompanies the *ars artium* of the instructor. The professor models *ars artium* through critical interaction and discussion, through openness to new ideas and concepts, through understanding the individuality of students and by offering explanation about the transformative nature of art and art history. I believe professors will have varying degrees and varying attributes of *ars artium*; some will more readily accept new things while others will offer more fluidity in verbal articulation of ideas, for example. In any event, the student who is permitted the opportunity for participating in self evaluation and the

evaluation of peers will have a greater capacity for understanding and appreciating art in encounters outside the classroom environment and will certainly have developed a greater capability for evaluating their own work in progress.

The professor would maintain an interactive role in the practices of student peer jury evaluation thereby eliminating any concern with the "blind leading the blind." Also, many of the students will already be actively demonstrating an increasing capacity for *ars artium* sensibility. The professor might offer help by suggesting things that the jury members should be most cognizant of in their examination of a given project, or may provide examples of previously documented criticisms of similar projects. The professor, ideally, should be actively engaging in discussion throughout the evaluation process as well as the creative process.

Students must be made aware of the time factor involved with this type of learning process. Just as a person cannot learn to play the piano in a short period, neither can one develop *ars artium* quickly. The young budding pianist begins with exercises and simplified versions of musical compositions. As the pianist gains mastery over a period of many years of training he/she learns to play the most difficult compositions of Chopin and Bach as if they were second nature. Likewise, the acquisition of language is a long term process. A child learns his/her first language by living it and experiencing its relevance to his/her everyday life. Initially, the use of language is functional, simple and direct. Later, as one achieves mastery, literary skills such as metaphor and analogy come into play as means for presenting ideas. In parallel, *ars artium* follows similar paths of development. Even though it has no finite or specific end product, by gradual immersion into art evaluation processes, and by constant

exposure to and experience with art, the skills associated with *ars artium* continue to develop. Without that exposure, even though we may be able to provide excellent technical training in studio classrooms, it appears that the capacity for evaluating art is much more slowly developed (considering the narrow perspective of the students I interviewed regarding their understanding of subjectivity and objectivity in art evaluation). I make that statement based on the differences between the attitudes demonstrated by Ray and by his students. Ray readily foregoes the subjective/objective distinction in art evaluation. It is not a distinction that has any relevance in his view of critical interaction. He is concerned with dialogue, with interactive discussions with students about art. Students, on the other hand, are concerned with grades and with their capabilities as depicted in the grade allocated them by a professor. They view that allocation of grades as a direct reflection of objective criteria or subjective personal response. Given the opportunity for more active engagement in evaluation, I believe that students' narrow understanding of what is involved in evaluation would soon be dispelled. Consequently, they would have the opportunity to develop a sense of *ars artium* more quickly than students without such involvement. In simplest terms, *ars artium*, modelled and fostered by professors, can in turn result in more self-sufficient and capable students at earlier stages of their careers.

### Final Words

*Ars artium* as I have developed and presented it offers an alternative to the subjective and objective limitations in explaining the evaluation of art. Ray Arnatt and Peter Hide, as the particular cases I studied, both demonstrate aspects of *ars artium* in their evaluation practices. Peter's strengths in formal

concerns extend to an understanding of unity and part/whole relationships. Rays' interaction with students in the Art 485 class demonstrated his openness to their individuality, his skill at using language to aid student comprehension and his interpretive understanding of unity and part/whole relationships. Certainly in the particular cases cited, I believe *ars artium* was present and I suspect it will continue to be present in their subsequent teaching situations. By extension, I believe aspects of *ars artium*, as an alternative to dichotomous thinking, is present in the evaluation practices of many teachers and professors of art.

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