

**Re-Inventing Art Practices:
Indigenous Women Artists Building Community Through Art and Activism in
Rural and Remote Manitoba**

**By
Julie Nagam**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Native Studies

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Abstract:

This thesis documents and explores community-based and socially engaged art by Indigenous women artists. Their artwork is impacting and strengthening communities in Manitoba. The Thesis explores the use of dialogical aesthetics in performance and socially-engaged art by Indigenous women artists in rural and remote areas of Manitoba, and relates these aesthetics to the concept of activism through their art and relationship to their community. The aim of this research and this paper is to document, support and expose the work of a small pocket of Indigenous women artists in Manitoba who are acting as activists or social change agents based on their artwork. I have arrived at this conclusion first by their personal testimonies, second, by their art being socially conscious and lastly, by their art practices entrenched in the framework of dialogical aesthetics, community-based and site-specific ideologies.

Acknowledgements:

I want to take this opportunity to thank Travis, mom, dad, sisters and friends for their support and unconditional love. I also want to thank my advisor and committee members Peter, Cathy, Renate and Roewan for their guidance, support, mentorship and knowledge. A huge thank you goes out to Mentoring Artists for Women's Art for the opportunity and funding to complete the research and report. I want to thank all the women who were part of my research because it is your stories and work that have graced the pages of this thesis and my life.

Dedications

I dedicate my thesis to Travis,
all the working people out there changing the world
and all the future Indigenous women artists.

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The Beginning:

As I sit here and think about how I arrived at this moment of time, I cannot help but think of a recent story that brought me to my proposed doctoral research. It was a cold February morning, minus 43 degrees (my car barely turning over) I am driving through blowing snow across the prairies of Manitoba to participate in an art show at the Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba. That night at the opening there was one individual who was extremely confrontational to the curator, about the content of the show. This man could not understand why the social and political content of the show was Indigenous-based since Indigenous people had all the same opportunities as himself (a Euro-Canadian) and he was tired of this dialogue and visual aesthetics. I waited until the young Métis curator responded and then I could sense her frustration and jumped into the confrontation in order to support the curator of the show. Of course the discussion grew in tone and volume. The curator and myself had the knowledge and tools to articulate our analysis of the artwork, Indigenous people and the social and political issues facing us. After a mind numbing hour and a half the man left learning nothing in the moment. However in my mind I hoped that he would ponder and reflect on what we had told him that night. It is with that hope and optimism in which I would like to continue my studies and work with Indigenous artists to bridge the cultural divide in order to articulate community concerns, address local needs and communicate their knowledge to the wider society.

Through my commitment to social justice as an academic, artist and community member, I have had the privilege to work alongside or participate in many art and community events across Manitoba. I was honored to view an interesting show in Leaf Rapids at the Exhibition Centre; local Indigenous youth were given a camera and were to photograph the way they saw their community. I was able to participate in this dialogue with the young Leaf Rapid artists and

speak to them about the importance of their work. I was invited into the homes of traditional art crafters in Cross Lake, which brought forth a discussion on the current living conditions and barriers that were impacting them and their ability to take care of their families through art production or any other means. I was asked to tour the newly built school in Norway House, to view the elders' courtyard and the breathtaking artwork of a local female Indigenous artist. I have participated in the lives of these artists, thus compelling me to expose and support their art/community work in my master's research.

I am interested in this area of study because art has a role in our global society; in western or colonial countries such as Canada the function of art has been somewhat confined to a gallery space with visual aesthetics being the primary rationale for art production. However, there is a shift in the function of art, thus challenging the way art and artists are viewed in contemporary Canadian society. This shift permits art and artists to rebel against gallery or exclusive art space to site-specific or socially engaged art, which allows people to communicate issues facing them and their communities. For the women artists I have interviewed in Manitoba their art and community work is functioning as a tool to empower themselves and the people in their community. As a scholar and an artist I feel it is vital to document and explore this community-based and socially engaged art since it is impacting and strengthening communities in Manitoba.

My thesis work is an investigation of links by Indigenous women artists in rural and remote areas of Manitoba to activism through their art and relationship to their community. The aim of this research is to document, support, expose and empower the work of a small pocket of Indigenous women artists in Manitoba who are acting as activists or social change agents based on their artwork. Current political performance or gesture discourse theory would position these women as socially and politically engaged. I have arrived at this conclusion first by their

personal testimonies, second, by their art being socially conscious, and lastly, by their art practices entrenched in the framework of dialogical aesthetics, community-based and site-specific ideologies. These concepts will be discussed later in the thesis.

The thesis is rooted in four substantial themes. First, I will continue the critical dialogue dealing with Indigenous women's relation to, comprehension of and relevance for concepts such as feminism, tribalism, and activism. Second, it will reflect on the selected artists' relationships within their communities. This will include a critical analysis of the selected participants' artwork and how it is perpetuating or resisting the dominant western systems of knowledge and cultural production. Third, it will cogitate around concepts such as dialogical aesthetics, performative or gestural art practices and site-specific and socially engaged art. Lastly, it will analyze the manner in which the selected artists are creating socially engaged art, which could be challenging western traditional art aesthetics.

This research grew out of a project commissioned by Mentoring Artists For Women's Art (MAWA). Selected as the principal researcher for the project, I produced and published the report, MAWA's Rural and Remote Assessment: A Developmental Strategy For MAWA on Rural and Remote Women Artists. The objective of this project was to examine, assess and document MAWA's membership opportunities within current organizational strategies and programs involving women visual artists living in rural and remote areas in Manitoba. However, the thesis, it is worth emphasizing, is focused specifically on remote Indigenous women artists, with a broader research agenda.

The first section of the thesis will be grounded in my location, identity, disability, and the conceptual underpinnings of my embodied discourse. This will frame my "situated location" and my motivation in this research, which will provide the opportunity to communicate how my

thoughts and reflections are embedded in current cultural and feminist theory (Mohanty 2002), (Kadi 1996), (Anderson 2000), (hooks 2000), and (Roy 1999). The introduction will thereby provide the reader with an opportunity to understand the basis and foundation of this research project. This insight will frame the epistemologies, methods and methodologies of this research. The foreword will construct the background knowledge and explore its limitations for the thesis, allowing the readers to locate themselves and to understand the contribution to academic scholarship.

The second section will provide a background to the MAWA's Rural and Remote Assessment, which will further ground this research project. It will discuss the methods used in collecting the data. As well, this chapter will provide the demographic locations and information about the rural and remote areas of Manitoba selected for this project.

The third section will reflect on critical dialogue dealing with Indigenous women's relation, comprehension and relevance to concepts such as feminism and activism. The terms activist and feminist appear in current Indigenous/cultural theory (Brant, 1994), (Ouellette 2002), (Anderson 2000), (Deerchild 2003), (Farris-Dufrene 1997) and (Mihsuah 2003). Many of these Aboriginal women theorists are committed to parts of feminist ideology; however, there are complications in their Aboriginal identity. This chapter will also deal with the concept of activist and social change agent. Thus, I am stating that it is useful to continue a dialogue surrounding feminism and identity since in my view activism is linked to these concepts, which are rooted in the struggle to end oppression.

The fourth section will reflect on the selected artists' relationships within their communities. It will include a critical analysis of the selected participants' artwork and how it is perpetuating or resisting the dominant western and capitalist systems of knowledge and cultural

production. The concepts that will be explored are development, capitalism and art production in the non-urban areas of Manitoba. This will frame the research through the interaction of these concepts in the main argument. Our current neo-capitalist society allows success to be measured in monetary terms, which affects artists that choose to or not to participate in the Canadian economy. In particular this affects Indigenous artists because there is a lack of “employment opportunities” in non-urban areas of Manitoba. Thus, western constructions of economic success hinder past and current structures of social organization of Indigenous families. (Kocur & Leung 2005), (Kester 2004), (Nancy 1991), (Suleiman 1998), (Anzaldúa 1990 & 2002), (Khagram et al 2002), (Weiss 2000), (Farris-Dufrene 1997) and (Agamben 1993).

Section five will reflect on the concepts such as dialogical aesthetics, performance or gestured, site-specific and socially engaged art, but will deploy them by, analysing Aboriginal women artists in non-urban areas of Manitoba who are creating socially engaged art. In the process, I will argue that these women are challenging western traditional art aesthetics. I will explore the dialogue that is taking place in localized areas of rural and remote Manitoba, creating new kinds of knowledge and ways of educating people about social issues. I will continue to frame the ideologies of performance, political performance or gesture, socially engaged and site specific art. These concepts will, lead into a conversation about contemporary art and critical theory, which will reflect different situated knowledge and art practices. Therefore a critical analysis of social structure and the concept of community in this present day, will allow for reflection of the consequences of socially engaged art since the community must be involved. (Kester 2004), (Bial 2004), (Jones 2003), (Gagnon 2002), (Kester 1998), (Schechner 2002), (Kocur & Leung 2005)

Section six will wrap up all of the background chapters and the body of the research. This will allow for the limitations and success of the research to be further analyzed and will provide the opportunity to discuss the possibilities that may be built off this project.

My Being:

Images and constructions of home, identity, location, community and family have haunted my thoughts since my childhood. In the back of my mind, I was always wondering where I was from, since everyone was asking. In relation to issues of history and my link to colonialism and 'discovery', I remember my first Native Studies course, the narrative around treaties, fur trade, government legislation, and thinking: where is my family in this? I never had a sense of knowing I was part of this chronicle we call his/herstory. That story was one of the colonizer and the colonized or in Freire's terms the oppressor/oppressed. My family was deeply implicated in the creation of our Canadian nation. My mother's family is French, with Aboriginal heritage on her mother's side, erased from her narrative because she was adopted into a new family. How could I translate this story into my narrative; what meaning does it have? I feel little connection to a culture I have never practiced or even identified with (embedded in colonial practices of assimilation). However, I connect to Indigenous writing, struggles and issues surrounding self-determination and decolonization. The complex struggle to locate myself is further complicated by my father's grandparents, who immigrated into Canada in 1903 from Syria (the next U.S. government target) and on his mother's side Germany. Where do I stand in the mapping of identity and home?

My location complicates my work as an artist, activist and scholar since I constantly have to justify my thoughts and position in the world of academia based on my lived experience. On the one hand, it allows for a richer and more nuanced view in my writing and my art since hegemony or identity totalization is impossible. These issues play a huge part in my abilities as a writer and scholar based on the social and political systems in academia. A large part is learning that my voice is needed, valued and important in current academic discourse. In addition, I have

a learning disability, which makes me work twice as hard to perform the same type or better writing than an average graduate student. However, I find strength and sometimes agency in my current position and build on my ability to write because I want to prove to myself, that I can continue to succeed and grow as an academic writer.

The idea of home or belonging is a binary of love/distrust since I grew up with unconditional love from parents, who were abused by theirs'. My physical home was always a source of embarrassment, marking as it did my economic situation, however at the same time was a security blanket of love and anger. I was unaware-my language, actions and worldview would be markers of my class, not merely my physical home. As I learned to speak the language of the working/poor, I have always understood that I am a worker, not an intellectual (as I struggle to spell the word). I did not have the 'tools' to "deconstruct my own stupidity"¹; I possessed the tools of a carpenter's daughter and the tools for women's work. My destiny was with shovels, saws, wood, brooms, dishcloths and back/foot pain for the rest of my life. There was no retirement fund, no dental plan, no trips, no getaway cabin, thus my only 'free' visits were the doctor's office, which I exercised on a regular basis. I saw the lens he viewed my family with his glasses told a different story than the truth of hard working people without a break. He would have to tell himself something "Stupid. We are too stupid to study, learn, think, analyze, critique. Because working-class people are stupid. So much energy goes into the social lie that poor people are stupid; capitalism needs a basic rationalization to explain why things happen the way they do" (Kadi 40). I never understood when my dad had problems with getting work, compared to his competitors, why people always ripped him off and never paid; I thought it was his fault. I thought he was a bad producer. I thought if he tried harder we would be better

¹ See Joanna Kadi's chapter "Stupidity Deconstructed" in Thinking Class Sketches from a Cultural Worker. Boston: South End Press, 1996.

better off, I believed the social lie of capitalism founded on the backs of poor/working class people like my family.

I am the first person in my entire family to attend university and this is a very difficult position because I have to balance elitist academia with what my family and friends have taught me, the working class values that they have provided me. Before post-colonial reading, I would refer to my identity as hybrid since that was the only word, I felt, that could describe my situation. However, I see it is more complicated since hybridization translates into being a part of white mainstream society or the erasure of any identity rooted in struggles of race. As LaRocque argues “ we may all be ‘post-colonial’ but we are not all placed on the same rung of privileges in the vertical mosaic of Canada” (49). However, my experience has differed from people who cannot and do not want to blend into dominant Canadian society. I have enjoyed privileges rooted in my history being erased by my assimilation into dominant Canadian society at the same time dealing with sexist and racist comments from friends and family because of their own internalized “struggles with self-rejection/acceptance” (LaRocque 45) or perpetuating the dominant racist, sexist and classist/elitist attitudes in Canadian society. People are perpetuating this ideology since I find myself embedded in ‘dialogues’ with misinformed people once I walk out of my front door. I have argued with my own parents, family, friends and random people. Therefore beginning the decolonization process on a practical and everyday level. These ideologies are deeply anchored in our ‘post-colonial’ or neo-colonial capitalist Canadian society, which need to be deconstructed and discussed in every parts of my life. Since, my location is affected and reacts to racism, sexism, classism and colonization. It is important to understand this complex relationship to comprehend the layers of colonization. This thesis is embedded in

decolonization discourse and colonization needs to be discussed in order for me to be able to deal and understand my research's impact on the people and communities involved.

Methods and Methodologies:

When researching there “are multiple ways of both being an insider and an outsider” (Smith 137) and I am placed in different locations allowing for reflectivity in ‘situated knowledges’ as insider (community member, learning disability, woman, mixed heritage) and outsider (researcher, post-secondary education, geographic location, economic situation). I am part of the geographic community of Thompson and the Springfield area however my working situation and education commitment does not allow a place as a committed member of either community, labeling me as an outsider/insider. Being a woman does not allow an immediate insider status because I am married and do not have any children. Many women of my age and situation have a family. I am a student in graduate school, have a dual income from someone who works at INCO (a large mining company). Therefore, I feel the urgency to break down power differences between ‘researched’ and ‘researcher’. Once this process begins, it comes to involve a rejection of western constructions of objectivity by being aware of my location and biases² as the researcher, while at the same time understanding that I will participate in the ‘researched’ peoples’ lives and become embedded in the research.

My parents taught me to fight back and to stand up for myself, not to be embarrassed of my poor/working class background. I am not sure I want to work for systems (university) that oppressed my family and made me feel not worthy as a student with poor/working class background and a learning disability. I would feel stupid and “not good enough” for this university institution, as I didn’t have the language or the supports to succeed. However LaRocque argues that, “we are creating a space and place to be able to enter into the particular

² Further discussed later but this is grounded in Elabor-Idemudia, Patience. “Participatory Research: A Tool in the Production of Knowledge in Development Discourse”. Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism and Representation. London & New York: Zen Books, 2002.

discourse of western thought without having to compromise our personal and cultural selves” (65). This argument gives me hope that I can negotiate my past realities into my present day goals within the academic system, engaging in research “which draws on what may be called ‘embodied discourse’”(LaRocque 69). At the same time I have to “live with the consequences [of my research] on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so [does my] family and communities” (Smith 137). My ‘embodied discourse’ will be further impacted given that I will be aware of my research outcomes on a regular basis since I live in the same community as one of the participants and have friendship and working relationship with the other two. Therefore people in my community will be aware of my work. When I grocery shop or go for a walk I will be reminded of my everyday position, which will force me to be very self-reflective. Thus, self-reflectivity is important as I want my work to be respectful, to “enable people, to heal and to educate” (Smith 128) everyone involved.

There is a call for the voices of Indigenous writers, artists, activist and scholars to be heard, which becomes a counter-narrative that raises “questions about who can/should speak for whom [when people are engaged] with issues of power and the politics of knowledge that [need to be addressed in this] present-day feminist and other postcolonial, contexts”(Code 14-15). I want to move past this counter-narrative and demonstrate that the participants are creating their own narrative outside the dominant Canadian society. Therefore the result is a dialogue with these Indigenous artists and activists that rejects the

universalizing narratives while at the same time taking a firm political stance, affirming real people [Indigenous people] and their needs for social justice while at the same time destabilizing or disrupting categories that are socially constructed. In order to reveal the working of power [and systems in place, creating a space to] make it possible to imagine alternative ways of thinking that will generate less oppressive ways of relations (Ristock and Pennell, 7).

These ways of thinking might also generate less oppressive ways of producing knowledge. As Smith argues “What makes ideas ‘real’ is the system of knowledge, the formations of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located” (48). Therefore the documentation of Indigenous artists and activists have to be validated by understanding how they relate to the existing “development of complex social structures, [and if their way of thinking appears] to be [connected to this idea of the] universal truth and [meet the criteria to be part of western understanding] of civilized society” (48). Indigenous people do not need to reject the universal Western narratives, they need to struggle “to make sense of our [Indigenous] own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world as powerful” (Smith 39) and knowledgeable. One purpose or ethos informing my research is to disrupt the oppressive existing systems and produce new kinds of knowledge. However, this “does not mean... a total rejection of all theory or research or western knowledge. Rather it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and from our own purposes”(Smith 39).

Past work in social justice issues, has enabled me to utilize first hand insights into critical thinking and social justice frameworks, which would include community-based and participatory/empowerment methodology. The three main aspects of participatory research as stated by Elabor-Idemudia are: first, being based in political action and consciousness raising; second, having equal participation and democratic relationships in decision making and learning skills; and third, using the knowledge from participants’ everyday experiences and feelings. She continues to argue that using these core epistemologies “will ensure empowerment for all in the development process as research has the capacity to emancipate participants when certain approaches are taken” (Elabor-Idemudia 233). I would argue that altering the role of the

participants in this manner builds social change. Through this changed role people become active agents in the research process allowing them to have a dialogue about the “access to the production of knowledge and the knowledge derived from a process of engagement” (Elabor-Idemudia 232). As stated by Elabor-Idemudia “I see participatory research as embodying the praxis of critical theory and as crucial in altering the power-knowledge axis” (Elabor-Idemudia 232). By using participatory methodology participants will “make decisions rather than function as passive objects and the people being studied make decisions about the study format and data analysis” (Elabor-Idemudia 232). This methodology is thereby based on the “breakdown of power differences between ‘researched’ and ‘researcher’ and the rejection of traditional interpretations of ‘objectivity’” (Elabor-Idemudia 232), in part through my being aware of my location and biases as the researcher.

In viewing participatory research through a critical lens it is important to note that having ‘equal relations’ is idealist and somewhat impossible; however, I argue that we need to become aware of the power we have as a researcher/academic and to try and achieve ‘egalitarian relations’: “the researcher has to abandon control and adopt an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual discourse and shared risk” (Elabor-Idemudia 233). I think this is and would be difficult. The researcher will have difficulties in abandoning control because it is ‘their career’ and ‘their research’ on the line. Although the repercussions of the researcher could be quite devastating to their career, one has to consider that the participants continue to live and function in their community and the researcher has disrupted their lives for the benefit of themselves and to contribute to the ‘greater body of knowledge’ produced by academia. I think we, as researchers/academics have to move away from this model of thinking and begin to use our talents and abilities as a vehicle for social change, to empower people and communities. Using

power “responsibly as researchers means to strengthen, not diminish, our capacity to affect the world while holding ourselves accountable for our actions”(Ristock and Pennell 10). We as researchers/academics are able to shift and change power relations but we cannot remove them. By dismissing the notion of rejecting or neutralizing power dynamics, therefore we may be better positioned to take accountability for our roles/actions and use that power responsibly.

The concept of empowerment is a highly disputed one based on unclear and misused definitions in areas of development and other discourses. Research as empowerment by the definition given by Ristock and Pennell is, “an approach to research that seeks to effect empowerment in all stages of the research process through critical analysis of power and responsible use of power” (9). This is a working definition but it gives me a framework to work from when framing my research methodologies. To further illustrate empowerment methodology,

research as empowerment fosters consensus among diverse people precisely because it affirms their connections while disrupting their assumptions. To engage in this process, researcher and participants alike need to work actively to create a milieu in which they can attend to each other’s experiences, views, differences, and uncertainties, and at the same time build a sense of mutual trust that will allow them to move forward together (Ristock and Pennell 11).

I am arguing that the concept (as stated here) behind empowerment methodologies are inherent in Indigenous methodologies, therefore demonstrating Smith’s argument of building ‘inclusive’ and ‘self-reflective’ methodologies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.

The third methodology is community-based, as it “is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (Smith 127). This process will be respectful and will “enable people, to heal and to educate” (Smith 128) aiding in Indigenous self-determination. I am making the assumption that

the participants will “know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) any community based projects” (Smith 127). This process will allow the rural and remote women artists to explore their understanding of the discourse of local struggles and examine whether they think there is a link to the process of art making, therefore ultimately deciding if they see themselves as activists and social change agents.

Partners, Projects and Places:

After a breakdown of my original research proposal, I was offered a tremendous opportunity to conduct research for Mentoring Artists For Women's Art (MAWA). MAWA is an artist run non-profit organization based in Winnipeg, Manitoba with over 300 local, national and international members (MAWA). MAWA's mandate is: "Mentoring Artists for Women's Art encourages and supports the intellectual and creative development of women in the visual arts by providing an ongoing forum for education and critical dialogue" (MAWA). The programs that MAWA facilitates are Foundation Mentorship Program, Mentor in Residence, Workshops, Lecture Series, Studio Visits, Community Resource Library, Critical Reading Group and Umbrella Projects.

The project was an attempt to grasp the conditions of rural and remote women artists in Manitoba as suggested in a comprehensive internal assessment of programs and resources carried out by MAWA in 2003. In this research, I made contact with women artists in key areas throughout Manitoba in order to recommend programming initiatives and capabilities. The goal of this venture was to increase participation in MAWA programming by women artists in rural and remote Manitoba. I found and suggested key persons, throughout the province, who I thought would be best to discuss strategies for collaborations and partnerships with MAWA. In the report I documented the needs and responses voiced by practicing women visual artists living in selected rural and remote Manitoban communities. I recommended new programs that are based on current MAWA models of outreach such as mentoring, workshops, visiting artist talks, studio visits and so on. Last but not least the report indicated how these initiatives will benefit women in the visual arts who live in rural and remote communities, and for the communities themselves in terms of MAWA's mandate to encourage and support the intellectual and creative

development of women in the visual arts.

Part of the project requested my time in participating in meetings of MAWA's Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee, which was a great opportunity to network and support Aboriginal programming in Winnipeg. Some of the partners in the project included: Urban Shaman Gallery, Canadian Heritage Culture and Tourism, Manitoba Arts Council and many others.

Project Methods:

The overall method in this project was composed of meetings with artists from communities with established art groups. Since the concept of group was loose, this method was designed in order to support and partner with rural and remote women artists. In my opinion, there needed to be a serious commitment to creative practices, and I thought this would be the case if there were an established art group. Then artists would be really interested in furthering themselves and their community in the area of the arts.

In order to gain a general overview of the situation of rural and remote artists and collectives; I started to research and tap into existing organizations that had contact with these communities. First I met with MAWA staff to discuss and receive contact information of existing rural and remote artists MAWA members. Then I started to contact various arts/cultural organizations such as: Manitoba Arts Network, Manitoba Arts Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Manitoba Arts Council, past rural mentors, Rural board of directors, curators involved in rural and remote shows, art/craft stores, Mothers of Red Nation, North Central Development, Friendship Centres, YWCA of Thompson, Leaf Rapids National Exhibition Centre, Heritage North Museum, Northern Juried art committee, Manitoba Arts and Craft Council, Wah-sa Gallery, Urban Shaman Gallery, Recreation centres, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, and Old Town Gallery. Once these contacts were made, various people from these organizations assisted in leading me to different organizations, art councils and artists.

The communities were selected based on their artists being involved in an art/creative collective, arts council, and museum or art gallery. The communities selected were: Brandon, Virden, Oak Lake, Arrow River, Thompson, Leaf Rapids, Norway House, Cross Lake, The Pas,

Opaskwayik Cree Nation, Flin Flon, Steinbach, Neepawa, Dauphin, Gimli, Boggy Creek, and Russell. This selection was based on the time frame of the project, location, activity, and funding.

Other communities that were selected for mail or email survey were Churchill Arts Council, Holland Tiger Hills Arts Association, Pinawa Eastern Manitoba Concert Association, Teulon Green Acres Art Centre, St. Georges (Manitou) Manitou Rapids Arts Council, Hamiota Midwest Arts Council, Snow Lake Aurora borealis Arts Council, Mc Creary Burrows Trail Arts Council, Carberry Plains Arts Council, Carman Golden Prairie Arts Council, Portage la Prairie's Portage and District Arts Council. Predictably, none of these communities responded to the survey.

The strategic travel plan consisted of: first, contact was made and interest was confirmed the contact person in the community would contact local artists and discuss possible dates and times for meeting with the MAWA consultant; then an official meeting time and place was decided and community members were informed by posters and informal networking such as phone calls or informal meetings and discussions at a local venue. Some communities such as Flin Flon and The Pas councils, took out an ad in the local newspaper; in some communities such as Norway House and Cross Lake, I was interviewed on the local radio stations, to encourage artists to meet with me; in yet other communities I spoke to people at local vendors and asked them if they could give any contacts for artists or cultural producers.

In some communities I was invited to their collective or council meeting and was a guest speaker. I found that this was the most successful situation for gathering information and grasping what they as an art collective were focused on. I would recommend this method because it has the best results. A larger number of people would be present in their meeting

because it affected them or their community, whereas at a meeting with a stranger and an unheard of arts organization, the community member is less likely to see the immediate benefit of meeting with the MAWA consultant. In contrast, you as the consultant are a guest asked to participate in their community and they understand the benefit to having a knowledgeable guest at their meeting. This method was not possible for all the communities derived from the tight time frame of the project and holiday season, which was out of my control but in the month of December and part of January, very few people showed up to the formal meetings, therefore I gathered a list of local artists from various contacts and searched these people out. I visited their work, met with them for coffee and they often invited me into their homes. Although this was very time consuming, it was very rewarding since people let the outsider be a part of their home life and their community.

As the researcher/consultant I was able to communicate with rural and remote artists since I grew up in a rural town with ten houses and presently reside in a remote northern community. Many of these artists expressed concern that they would not have met or granted me the information, if I was an urban or southern-based researcher/consultant. Another important role was to provide an opportunity to give back to the people from whom I was requesting time and information. At each meeting, I answered general questions about their concerns about applying for grants, specific questions about art making practices, my experiences with MAWA, art queries and questions about almost anything you could think of. Of course I could not answer everything but I tried my best to steer the women in the right direction, presenting them with non-profit organizations, arts organizations, artists and other people that might aid them in their questions or could provide insight. This process was greatly

appreciated and extremely needed since rural/remote women artists have a lack of resources or access to people in the area of the arts.

I was invited to an art opening at Old Town Gallery, which was an excellent opportunity to meet with the two artists and people in the community of Oak Lake, including the surrounding communities. I was one of the three hundred guests that attended an opening at Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba with an in house DJ. I was able to see a local show in Neepawa, some unique work there, from wood working, to glasswork, to pottery, to painting and photography. I toured the most interesting show in Leaf Rapids at the Exhibition Centre, where local youth were given a camera and photographed the way they saw their community, discovering some really talented, artistic youth up there. I was able to catch a youth art show in Russell; there was birch barking biting, sculpture, drawing, painting and installations. I was invited to visit an Irish writer who now lives in rural Manitoba at the Thompson Library. I made it in time to see a fiber-based show in The Pas and was able to tour the amazing museum there. As stated earlier, I was invited into the homes of traditional art crafters in Cross Lake. I was asked to tour the newly built school in Norway House, to view the elders court and the breathtaking artwork of local artist Gale Sinclair. I was invited for dinner, lunch and into the hearts, homes and communities of rural and remote women. And for that I am truly grateful.

Places:

Southwest Region: 14 days in 6 main areas

The southwest region is primarily a farming area with livestock and some urban development. The area surrounding Brandon is about 2 to 3 hours southwest of Winnipeg. Brandon is the second largest city in Manitoba and is home to over 35 000³ people. Souris is home to about 2000 people and Virden with over 3000 people. The town of Neepawa is north of Brandon with a population of over 3500. These are thriving, largely non-Aboriginal (with surrounding reserves) communities and all have employment opportunities in health care, education, social services and the service industry. The smaller area of Oak Lake, which is populated by 400 people and Arrow River, would be lucky with my own estimate of 75 people. This area is diverse in people because there is a high Aboriginal population, high immigrant population and past generations of immigrants.

Central West Woodlands Region: 7 days in 5 main areas

The central west woodlands are home to our National Park and some of the most beautiful landscapes Manitoba has to offer. The towns in this region are a 4 to 5 hour drive north/west from Winnipeg. This area is a dense woodland forest with some Natural Resource Industries such as forestry, mining and tourism. In addition there is farming and livestock raising. There are employment opportunities in the service industry, health care, government and education. This area is just as diverse as the rest of Manitoba, in the towns of Boggy Creek and Onanoe there are high populations of Aboriginal people and then in Dauphin and Russell there are large populations of Aboriginal people, with the inclusion of high concentration of immigrant

³ All information on communities has been taken from Censuses 2001 data.

and past immigrant people in all of these places. The population of Russell is over 2000, Onanoe around 500 people and Dauphin with over 9000 people.

Northern Region: 17 days in 8 main areas

The northern region is diverse in landscape as in industry. This area is a 7 to 12 hour drive north from Winnipeg. The major employment areas are Natural Resources such as forestry, mining and tourism. In addition there are many opportunities in social services, education, hydro, construction, healthcare, government and the service area. In these extreme remote areas there are very little opportunities for employment, but much work around traditional, sustainable economy of hunting, trapping and fishing. The communities I visited were of the larger remote areas and were primarily industry towns. Flin Flon, The Pas, Thompson and Leaf Rapids were created by the mining industry. These places have a diverse population of immigrants, past immigrants and high Aboriginal population. The areas of Cross Lake, Norway House and Opaskwayik Cree Nation are all First Nation Reserves where the majority of the people are Aboriginal. The town of Thompson is 15 000 people, Flin Flon with 8000 people, The Pas is over 7000 people, Leaf Rapids is 1500 people in Census data but this was before the closure of the mine and is presently estimated at 350 people, Cranberry Portage is 900 people, Norway House is over 4000 people, Cross Lake is over 2500 people and Opaskwayik Cree Nation is not listed but is generally estimated at 3500 people.

Steinbach and Gimli: 4 days in this area

Steinbach is about 45 minutes east of Winnipeg and is home to over 6000 people rooted in strong Mennonite beliefs. It has a striving economy with livestock, farming, service industry, education, social services and personal businesses. The community is comprised primarily of past and recent immigrants, however there are reserve communities outside of Gimli that impact

each other. Gimli is just over an hour north of Winnipeg home to the New Iceland of past and recent immigrants of Iceland. There are just about 2000 people in the town but are surrounded by many Aboriginal communities. Some of the economy is based in of commercial fishing, farming, livestock, small business and of course tourism.

People:

The women artists selected for this research project were chosen based on meetings and interactions with over a hundred women artists, who varied in ethnic and economic background, in the MAWA project covering most of Manitoba. Once I developed a relationship with many of the artists across the province I chose Colleen Cutschall, Cathy Mattes and Margaret Dumas for my thesis research. I had built a good relationship with April Brass; however, due to a work situation she had moved to British Columbia. I still include an example from her work but I did not conduct a semi-formal interview with her.

Colleen Cutschall is Lakota from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. She is a permanent resident of Canada with American citizenship. Cutschall has lived in Canada for over 25 years and calls southwestern Manitoba her current home. She is a Professor and the Chair of the Visual Arts and Aboriginal Arts Department at Brandon University. Cutschall's educational background includes: a BFA from Barat College, Illinois and a MS. ED from Black Hills State College, South Dakota. Some of her solo exhibitions consist of *Voice in the Blood*, *Sister Wolf in Her Moon*, *House Made of Stars* and *...dies again*.

Cathy Mattes is Métis (Portage Local, Southwestern Region, Manitoba). She is an independent curator and writer currently residing in Southwestern Manitoba. Mattes completed a Bachelor of Arts at University of Winnipeg, Manitoba and a Masters of Arts at Concordia University, Montreal. Mattes is a mother and respected person among her peers and community. She has produced and co-produced many exhibitions: *Robert Houle: Sovereignty over Subjectivity*, *Rielisms*, *Lita Fontaine: Without Reservation*, *blanket[ed]*, *...dies again* and many others

Margaret Dumas is Northern Cree born in South Indian Lake and currently lives in Thompson Manitoba. She completed a Bachelor of Arts with Education Degree. Dumas was one of the hardworking educators who created the first Cree immersion elementary school in Manitoba. She had been an educator for over 25 years and has been practicing art for just as long. She is a mother, grandmother and an elder. She is a writer, poet and a singer. She had performed at various venues across the province and created work for other artists.

Identity, Feminism and Activism:

Defusing the Popular Struggle

Once lost we will never find our way
Shutting down we're devoid of things to say
Prospects are growing worse with every hour
With no voice it seems we've got no power

Overcome by the headlines
We believe what isn't true
You've got no empathy for anyone but you
Our moral contradictions
and subject, hollow tomes
Perpetuate the fear asphyxiating us at home so
Seems like there's no place left to hide
From the cold, amorphous dread
that we all feel inside
Actions might dictate who survives
The hopelessness which punctuates
our empty lives

Could there be something
I need a reason
Could there be anything at all

Systems of technology that keep us informed
Now endeavor to perpetuate the norm
Privatization of concentrated wealth
While millions suffer in dilapidated health so
Who cares to calculate what indigence will cost
How will we replicate urbanity that's lost
The curtain falls on the ultimate disgrace
We hunger for equality
though we never had a taste

The irony will make you laugh
Intervene on our behalf
To undo this mask of false complicity
The despotic, right-winged government
Has manufactured our consent
Can we entrust ourselves
To transform their doctrine to dissent

-Good Riddance

In order to break down barriers for Indigenous women artists, it is important to reflect on the critical dialogue dealing with Indigenous women's relation, comprehension and relevance to concepts such as feminism and activism. The terms activist and feminist appear in current Indigenous/cultural theory and are used by the women who were interviewed for this research. Many of these Indigenous women theorists and artists are committed to parts or not at all to feminist ideology, as a consequence of complications surrounding their Aboriginal 'identity' and

where the feminism movement grew out of. As a result, I am stating that it is useful to continue a dialogue surrounding feminism and identity since in my view activism is linked to these concepts, which are rooted in the struggles to deal with oppression, social justice and women's issues.

The socially constructed terms such as activist and feminist are affecting the discourse in Indigenous struggles linked to decolonization. It is argued by Ouellette that, "the concepts of racism and Eurocentrism have not been adequately addressed by feminist writers analyzing the status of Indigenous women in the global community"(12). Although I would agree with her argument, since past feminist writers did not deal with the concepts of racism and colonization, in the last decade feminist writers and feminist theory have had a whole new generation of writers focused on anti-racist, Indigenous and women of color issues in feminism such as Mohanty, Anzaldua, Maracle, Welsh, Bear. This does not mean that I do not see the issues facing Indigenous people when they commit to feminist politics because there are serious problems when Indigenous women focus on feminist issues and do not focus on Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and self-government. There are repercussions from their community and fellow comrades. As Mihesuah, an American Indigenous scholar argues, not all Indigenous women reject 'white' feminism and "when they [Indigenous] identify themselves as "feminists," they often mean they are "Native Activists," concerned with more than female marginalization. Indeed, they fight for fishing, land, water, and treaty rights and at the same time, they have no desire to be called inferior by anyone because they are women" (162). The concepts behind activism and that term being used as a vehicle to end oppression and create social change is enabling people to bypass all the politics surrounding feminism. This is highly problematic because it proposes that feminists are not activists or Indigenous people who use and identify

with feminism are not really 'feminists' at all; they are Native activists. Are activists and feminists different? If so what are the differences? In my opinion the concept of activist and social change agent (I have developed this term social change agent in order to find a different ideology that is not embedded in social constructions of frontline 'radical' activist) were developed out of my understanding that the role of an activist and social change agent is to transform the dominant racist, sexist and colonial Canadian (or any) society by providing individuals with tools to resist in local struggles. I would argue that feminism is the struggle to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and all oppression as bell hooks defined in *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* almost twenty years ago, when she articulated the view that feminists are fighting against more than 'female marginalization'. If this is the definition of feminism then it allows feminists to be part of the mass movement to eradicate oppression they are activists fighting for social change. This complicates the binary of activist/feminist presented by Mihesuah. Using this binary of activist/feminist bypasses a commitment to advocate for feminist politics. It is a woman of color who argues that women of color from various ethnic backgrounds, including Indigenous women, do not want to make a public commitment to advocate for feminism. They use other terms such as women's issues to bypass the term feminist or feminism (hooks 24). This is precisely what Mihesuah and Ouellette's statements both illustrate "an uncritical acceptance of distorted definitions of feminism rather than a demand for redefinition"(hooks 24). In the case of Mihesuah using the term activist and stating that other women who identify with feminist politics are activists instead of feminists, perpetuate distorted views of feminism and is an injustice to the feminist movement, including the feminist activists who are struggling to end all oppressions and who are decolonizing. Women (such as Ouellette and Mihesuah) will support 'feminist' issues such as the environment, land, childcare, education,

health care and so on, which are listed in both Ouellette and Mihesuah's issues facing Indigenous women. It is important in understanding how there are issues and complications for many women and men who identify themselves as feminist/activist or advocate for feminism.

Deerchild, an Indigenous writer, and Lita Fontaine, an Indigenous artist, deal with feminism under the guise of tribal feminist. As Fontaine defines "tribal first because first and foremost my Aboriginality is important, but feminist because I have adopted some of their ideals. I can relate and understand" (Deerchild 100). This term has been borrowed from Paula Gunn Allen from her book *the Scared Hoop* dealing with feminist ideology with a 'cultural lens'. Deerchild advocates, "Tribal feminism argues that matriarchy gave way to patriarchy within our business, community and governing structures, and women lost their status and their leadership roles"(101). Tribal feminism needs to be critical of itself because its ideology is based on the understanding that most if not all Aboriginal societies were matriarchal, which is a highly contested issue because of the lack of western 'evidence' and Indigenous knowledge to prove this theory. However, even if all Aboriginal societies were matriarchal there could be some criticism that women were "the true leaders of the nation" or "walked in balance"(100-101) with the earth or their communities. This is extremely naïve and unrealistic for any society to have perfect harmony within their communities and outside of them. Although it is courageous that Fontaine and Deerchild are demanding redefinition of past constructions of white feminism and at the same time re-examining Indigenous women's role in their own communities and Canadian society in general. Fontaine argues that it is not only Euro Canadian society that need re-examining she "began to discover that these "isms" also exist in Aboriginal societies and traditions" (Deerchild 100), for example the women's place around the drum. Fontaine further states that she began to "confront what she sees as patriarchy that has stepped into these long-

held beliefs, ceremonies and gender roles” (Deerchild 100). This is a significant shift in thinking for Aboriginal women because there has been denial and it has been and still is a contentious issue since Aboriginal men struggle for a better place in Canadian society similar to women. However there is an imbalance of power within Aboriginal communities for women as a result of colonization. Therefore it is crucial to re-evaluate how and why this imbalance exists. Although the concept of Tribal Feminism is in its infant stage, it however could be a starting point for Aboriginal women. Instead of separating herself from feminism Fontaine is demanding redefinition. If more Indigenous women can find power in what Fontaine is attempting then there can be coalition building, which making it extremely urgent for Fontaine and many other people to find a place within the ‘new’ feminist revolution.

Of the women interviewed Cutschall thought of herself and her work as rooted in feminism, activism and tribalism. Cutschall described her work and her life philosophies built on these theories, which included Indigenous knowledge. As Jackson Rushing states, Cutschall

is a teacher, writer, lecturer, and activist. Furthermore, like so many artists working today - Native or otherwise - her modes of production are flexible and situational: she is a painter whose work expands into performance, sculpture, architecture, and is often highly conscious of, if not driven by, a variety of textual fields, including aesthetics, anthropology, feminism, the natural sciences, and the politics of cultural identity (103).

Cutschall can empathize the myriad of concerns facing Indigenous women who commit themselves to feminist politics however Cutschall’s artwork is based on the above principles and ideologies, which furthers my argument that Indigenous women can subscribe to some type of political movement within feminism and state that they appreciate the complexities in making that decision. Cutschall states, “ feminism has been built into my work pretty much all along...and let me say I don’t know where I wouldn’t be a feminist”(Cutschall Interview). Cutschall is making a strong statement along with other Indigenous artists, writers and activists

(Bear, Brant and Maracle). These women allow for the dialogue within Indigenous circles to take place, which sparks a bush fire in critical thinking around the feminism. Then Indigenous women can continue to ask for re-definition of feminism and maintain recent feminist discourse rooted in Indigenous knowledge and lifestyle. Whether the movement is called tribal feminism or something else, it is up to us.

This is a strong stance for Cutschall considering Dumas and Mattes have been in an internal struggle with the western model of feminism and activism. They both find complications in Indigenous women identifying totally with feminism and activism. As Dumas states, "I have some feminist view points but I am not totally feminist because we [Indigenous people] see the importance of having a balance, each man and woman have a role"(Dumas Interview). Although I value this frame of thought, I still struggle within. Feminism, in my point of view does seek this balance and it is because of the imbalance that feminist thought was created and maintained. If women did at one point walk in balance with men and each party respected and valued each other's role in their society. Could this not be what current feminism is fighting for? In our current Canadian society, women do not have balance with men, in any micro or macro constructed society therefore are women not willing to fight for this change or are they content with what they have? I am not stating that all women are the same, because from personal experience I know they are not what I am saying is that women currently do not walk in balance with men in any area of society and therefore should want to change this. Whether we call it feminism, tribal feminism, anti-racist feminism or social justice, the reality is that there is an imbalance of power. What we have to decide is how we want to shift this power and what does this balance appear to be?

Dumas discusses the loss of the balance and why she can accept some of the views belonging to feminism; so why can't the movement convince her to commit to be involved totally in the feminism discourse? In a moving passage in Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman*, she spins a story of remorse and regret in a speech she addressed to a mass of women, which included Indigenous women. Maracle stated, "that it mattered not that I was a woman" (15). It was after the early eighties that Maracle found strength and power in being a woman and committing to feminism. How did feminism appeal to Maracle and not Dumas or Mattes twenty-five years later? Both Dumas and Mattes have grasped the true concept of colonization and are very aware that there are imbalances in Indigenous circles. Dumas stated that she is frustrated with Indigenous politics being spearheaded by primarily men and noted that it is frowned upon for women to enter the political arena. However, the larger issue at hand is that Indigenous men do not walk in balance with rest of Canadian society and are struggling with and connected with the equivalent concerns as the women. How will Euro-Canadian women who are in relationships with Euro-Canadian men ever understand this predicament for Indigenous women and other women of color? Perhaps only, firstly if we continue to write, speak and act on this issue and secondly if we continue to push this agenda into feminist theory.

Mattes confides in me a story about a strong woman in her family who thought "I never had much need for feminists because I am a strong woman and when it really matters in my family the women make the decisions not the men. Feminists from the outside were to look at my family. They would see the men in control" (Mattes Interview). As Mattes, describes her contradictions with feminism, she does not see feminism using the existing strengths in women, the ability to survive poverty, abuse and racism. It is difficult to suggest that this is not a valid thought however is it a true statement about feminists? Or is it a generalization about feminist

ideals? Is this still the mindset of feminists? Could it be the time frame of the thought and a reflection of past feminist theory? In my generation there has been a lot of dialogue surrounding this kind of a judgment statement and many women in my university classes would not perceive Mattes's situation through the same lens. Nevertheless, there are many people, feminists included, that would look down on a woman who stays home or from the outside looking in sees the man of the house in control. As Bonita Lawrence states in a dialogue with Kim Anderson,

I think the central problem with feminism has been its refusal to see motherhood as empowering. For Native women, motherhood is contributing to the community. Western feminism is so heavily influenced by the notion of the individual rather than the community. The notion of personhood in the West is built on individualism, on the denial of even the existence of community, those enlightenment 'values'. And the western thought has also been built on the subordination of women and on the subordination of non-western peoples, even within Europe. Europe had to colonize itself before it could colonize the rest of the world (Anderson, 275).

Lawrence's statement is a valid point. I agree that certain areas of feminism such as the white middle class type of feminism that has not valued motherhood enough and this could be a contentious issue for Indigenous women because women are the creators of nations and community. Of course I could not speak on behalf of all feminists, although I would state that there has been a swing in this type of attitude in all of the different kinds of feminist movements and theory. This pendulum has swung into writing and reaction to this kind of a stance. It was not long ago that I learned to value my mother's work in the home and her ability to make decisions, and to express that value in a Women Studies class.

It is the values and beliefs of feminism that require a transformation in people's minds. When a woman like Mattes states that "I contribute to feminism. I don't feel a connection and I do not embody myself in feminist theory because of where it comes from. I think it is a lot better than anything else we have, but my work is to challenge it" (Mattes Interview), she is making a

strong argument about her relation inside and outside of feminism. The major issue facing feminism in the 21st century is still based on the foundation of it by western white middle class women, who directly benefited from it. Whereas, the rest of women, whether they were Indigenous, poor, disabled, queer, or women of color, often did not. There has to be a vital shift in this kind of thinking, bearing in mind feminism was a starting point or the beginning of a process to end oppression for all people. If you can visualize feminism in this state, then you can begin your own process of ownership over the movement, whether it is to be critical of it or rejecting it all together. As Beth Brant argues,

And I think it's time we realize that feminism is not just about white women, it is about all of us. Writers like Lee Maracle, Betty Bell, Kate Shanley, argue for feminism that encompasses sovereignty, children, Earth, class, sexuality, and all the varied and exciting aspects that make community possible. We are changing the face of feminism. It is no longer a middle-class, white movement for acknowledgement and better pay – it is about uranium in our drinking water, fetal alcohol syndrome, family violence, a life for the generations to come. We are writing about this in passionate and poetic language (Brant 39).

This is a courageous statement because Brant and the other Indigenous writers are taking ownership over the various aspects of feminism and creating a space that belongs to Indigenous women. Continued learning and contribution of ideas and thoughts from Indigenous women in the feminist movement could result in others joining or envisioning the positive aspects with a critical lens. The state of justice depends on people working together with similar outcomes in mind in order to depress hegemonic and oppressive systems and the colonial machine on people in communities all over the world. The oppressive regimes and politically right-wing thinking elites benefit from our divisions and have been dividing and conquering our Canadian nation since it was “discovered”. When will we rise up and find a common ground to defend and

change value systems that are rooted in sexism, racism, homophobia, elitism and all other repressive ideologies?

Given that countless people are working desperately to create change the concepts of activist and feminist are invading the community and artistic work of the interviewed women along with where they place themselves into or not at all in these categories. However these ideologies should not become 'master narratives' that stop people from creating social change because they are conforming to a particular socially constructed concept. Bannerji argues in the context of these specific concepts that feminists do conform since they identify themselves as "feminists", and are "fractured through experience and locked into identity circles, also they cannot offer a general basis from common action for social change, without sinking into a fear of "essentialism" or "totalization"(84). I fear that activists, feminists, tribalists, traditionalists and so on do sink into essentialism and totalization because they limit people from joining or fully understanding the political movement, since there are negative stereotypes and constructions surrounding these terms. In addition, most groups want to keep you locked into 'identity circles' because there is a misconception that this will further the political agenda however it tends to hinder social change as Bannerji argues. I want to move away from the essentialist attitudes in the concepts behind feminist, activist or tribalist since there are multiple ways of knowing and these categories are somewhat fused and interconnected. There needs to be a bridge to bring these 'groups' of people together once this happens there will be immense power and serious social change. Therefore we must break down these constructed categories and find common links to one another. It is important to understand that it is not an "issue of controlling the stories. It is about holding the stories, keeping them, caring for them, knowing that perspectives must/will shift when locations and experiences are distinct" (Hernandez-Avila 537). There are

multiple ways of knowing and understanding the world and everyone needs to see there is grace in respect and diversity, which disables any form of essentialism and totalization.

As a result, I am advocating for Indigenous women and all people for that matter to have a particular type of commitment to feminism and activism. I do not believe in essentialism or totalization of a group or movement of people. This has been feminism's fatal flaw from its inception; therefore we should learn from its past mistakes. This should allow for a feminist movement that is inclusive, productive and ready to fight for social injustices and end oppression. Feminism should be aware of the imbalance between men and women, Indigenous and people of color whether they are men or women, people with disabilities, queer or situated in any type of oppression. The feminist movement and the people that subscribe to it must always remember which backs it was built on nevertheless it should be forgiven but never forgotten. As activists and feminists we need to be critically thinking and responding to our world around us. We must call into action all the people around us creating or fighting for social change and find multiple entry points into a fuller and more comprehensive language to include a more nuanced way of thinking, learning from embodied knowledge, valuing experience and accepting the complexities and layers in everything. Feminism will never right the wrongs of their past agenda, or change who benefited from it. However, it can change with time and become flexible and fluid with each issue. This can be feminism's greatest success: to embrace the future and be in a constant state of flux allowing people to be critical, reflective and self-aware. There is not one lens to view the world through and feminism has to understand that there are multiple positions. I think it is well on its way to finding that vision.

*The Struggle Continues
Feminism because...*

*war - occupation - racism - imperialism - detention and deportation of
immigrants and refugees - capitalism - genocide - colonization of
indigenous people and lands - sexism - homophobia - transphobia -
control over women's bodies - rape - domestic violence - ableism -
privatization - global inequality - international maquiladora factories
- child labour - sweatshop labour - police brutality - attacks on
sextrade workers - loss of public space - trafficking of women and
children - attacks on unions - lack of livable wages - women's unpaid
labour in the home - poverty - lack of affordable housing - homelessness
- lack of public child care - two tiered health care - barriers to
education - environmental degradation*

*People not profit
Women's struggle united*

- www.newsocialist.org

Community or Commodity:

Psalm for the Elks Lodge Last Call

*Let the waitress put the chairs up, let the glasses she broke form
a picture of our leader with a halo made of smoke. Let the Golden
Oldies station crackle and come through with a final benediction
we'll hum along to, before we say goodnight. Let our talk about the
ballgame and the weather show we care, like a sound we didn't
notice
until it stopped and left us there with the traffic and our
heartbeats
beating in straight time. Let our hatred and affection march in the
same
line, before we say goodnight. Oh, protect our secret handshake.
Once more, with feeling, let the toast to absent members push
through the ceiling, before we say goodnight.*

- the weakerthans

Economic Development and Cultural Production:

Our current neo-capitalist society allows success to be measured in monetary terms, which affects artists that choose to or not to participate in the Canadian economy. In particular this affects Indigenous artists because there is a lack of “employment opportunities” in non-urban or remote areas of Manitoba. Thus, western constructions of economic success hinder past and current structures of social organization of Indigenous families. Therefore an essential break down of selected artists’ relationships with their communities, their artwork, comprehending if it is perpetuating or resisting the dominant western and capitalist systems of knowledge and cultural production. The concepts that will be explored are capitalism, commodity and art production in the northern region of Manitoba.

Trees, rocks and boggy areas blanket Northern Manitoba. It is one of the rare places in the world where northern boreal forest exists. There are very few people and vast areas of land that have never been tracked or have had very little contact with humans. Indigenous people have lived off this land since the retraction of the glaciers or the creation of the reservation system or since their creator put them there, depending on the history you follow. Until the last eighty years nature and humans have lived in harmony, taking what was vital to live and giving back what they could. Friends have taken me out to show me their family trap line, or fishing on a lake that has some kind of personal significance. In meeting with many people they have talked about the land as a living and breathing life force that they know and value. On many of my travels last year and past years, I have seen a serious shift in this life philosophy that has been compounded by enduring the second and third stages of capitalism. As Jameson describes from Mandel's book *Late Capitalism*, there are three movements in capitalism. First, market capitalism that is creating a market where one can buy and sell their labour for its worth based on the present day's market value. Second, is the monopoly and imperialism stage that includes the time period of colonization and the raping of other nations and people. This monopoly stage benefited a small pocket of European mega powers, such as the English, Portuguese, French and Danish elites. Lastly, the final and current stage of capitalism is multinational or The Third Machine Age, where minute factions of individuals or multinational corporations own all the capital and therefore hold all the wealth and power. Northern Manitoba and many of its rural towns are in both the second and third stage of capitalism as a result of economic survival founded on a primary industry such as: farming, paper mill, mining, forestry and hydro development. The corporation that holds the monopoly over people's livelihood and existence holds communities that originate by these primary industries hostage.

The ramifications of the hostage overtaking can be seen in communities that are dying from economic discrepancies or opportunities in Canada's Third Machine Age. Indigenous people who have lived for millions of years on the land cannot live within this machine age or in harmony with Canadian economic system unless they subscribe in its totality. In remote regions the way of life is riddled with conflict. The economic transformation that has taken place in the last fifty years in northern Manitoba mirrors that of a developing nation! Therefore the parallel analysis of developing world is entrenched in the theory of development which can be defined in many different ways: such as economic growth and structural shifts measured in increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), material wealth, or growth in terms of wealth and human well-being which includes not simply income but better health, literacy and the opportunity of choice. Ingrained in the word develop is the implied notion that the undeveloped majority has to catch up to the developed minority world. As Ferguson describes, people on inside and outside view development planning and agencies "as a part of a collective effort to fight poverty, raise standards of living, and promote one or another version of progress" or the stance that nations are building networks and coalitions to create "ideal worlds"(Ferguson 9-10) in a more 'balanced' global society. Our global economy is anchored in the monopoly and imperialism stage and the Third Machine Age of capitalism. These models are based on a competitive archetype of unequal power relations. Development in a capitalist system is not a cure for poverty, as the common public might believe. In the case of remote areas in Manitoba just as in developing nations, the cause of a capitalist-run development project/programs is a fundamentally contradictory endeavor. The World Bank, IMF, large corporations, Western Economic Diversification Fund and CIDA who benefit directly from the second and third stage

of capitalism, promote 'Development', of a particular sort. This type of development cannot at the same time be an instrument for increasing the distribution of wealth and human well-being.

An excellent example of the attempt to increase cultural and artistic development in the north is part of the Western Economic Diversification Fund that finances North Central Development (NCD). NCD mission statement states, "The North Central Community Futures Development Corporation Inc will endeavor to bring together to support, develop, and promote communities, individuals, organizations, business and other appropriate stakeholders within the north central region (of Manitoba) to encourage self reliance and viability of the social and economic quality of life" (www.northcentraldevelopment.ca). The project⁴ in question is a success story in Split Lake, which is a First Nations community. The object of the project was to "encourage cultural economic growth" by providing a small loan to a group of Indigenous women. These women were to create cultural products to sell at the current market value and repay their loan. In the course of the project the loan enabled them to purchase supplies such as hide, beads, fur and sewing instruments. Instead of taking advantage of the natural resources that Indigenous people have accessed for millions of years, they bought supplies from a southern business on advice from their NCD consultant, since NCD had a discounted price at the establishment. Therefore they ignored the organizations or individuals that could have assisted in supplying the women, which would have benefited the region economically and would have created a better awareness of existing community relationships and opportunities. The women created various moccasins, beaded fur mitts, fur hats and other hide beaded accessories to a market in the south and made enough money to pay back the loan and to buy some new supplies for the next session of cultural products. However, they had to sell the products at the market

⁴ Based on informal conversation during MAWA research project with consultant at NCD in December 2004.

value, which did not pay enough for the women to sustain a livable wage or have the products valued at its emotional, cultural and labour worth.

For instance, if a pair of moccasins market value is that of fifty Canadian dollars, the labour entailed is a minimum of five hours, the supplies of beads, hide, fur and sewing pieces are estimated at twenty dollars, then profit from the slippers are thirty dollars at five labour hours: that is less than minimum wage. The six dollars an hour still has to pay for shipping and handling of the good and if placed in a store for consumption, a certain percentage of profit is distributed to the storeowner usually twenty to thirty percent of the total amount sold. Therefore the fifty dollars is further split into forty at twenty percent and the profit is twenty dollars, leaving the creator with four dollars an hour, almost half of minimum wage. The true value of the moccasins is not represented in this analysis since the artist's efforts are not rewarded in our third stage of capitalism. This would also indicate that we are no longer in the first stage of market capitalism, that is creating a market where one can buy and sell their labour for its worth based on the present day's market value because this is not the case for people making moccasins. Indigenous nations did not traditionally participate in cash economies and complications existed for people when a capitalist system was enforced. In the first nation community of Opaskwayaik Cree Nation (OCN), many Indigenous women were beading and making moccasins at their own cost because they were buying their own material and the establishment that was selling them took a large percentage in profit, which left them paying for the production of the slippers. As a result of community or kinship break down, these women were not collectively working or communicating on the price and were competing among each other. Exactly on the premise of capitalism. They could have been collectively working on sabotaging the intervention of cash economies and commercial exploitation. If there are links to kinship or camaraderie among the

artists, then they could create the goods collectively and have more bargaining power with the store and request an increase in payment for themselves if they want to participate in the wage economy. In defence of NCD, they brought the group of women together in Split Lake and had them buy bulk and the loan was shared among all the people in the group, which created a collective and shared profits.

As NCD indicates that their job is 'to encourage self reliance and viability of the social and economic quality of life'. I would also include the second and third stage of capitalism. Which complicates the intention of NCD because the development corporation is in the mindset of doing business in our current system and by western definition and comprehension, development means economic growth, the increase in the Gross Domestic Product, and not necessarily a better standard of living. As Smith argues, "Western philosophies and religions place the individual as the basic building block of society. The transition from feudal to capitalist modes of production simply emphasized the role of the individual. Concepts of social development were seen as the natural progression and replication of human development" (Smith 49). These western ideologies have not benefited Indigenous peoples of the world and an indication of that is when the individual replaces the collective or kinship there is a major breakdown in distribution of wealth and gendered labour in Indigenous nations. As Tooker argues, the pattern of the Iroquois clans and political systems differ in definition of clan because they view all members of a particular clan as descended from a common ancestor and ascribed at birth; members can live in other villages. There were no ceremonies or ownership of properties because land was inherited matrilineally and was not owned in the same understanding of western interpretations. Tooker argues Iroquois women had control in their economy in two areas: women's labour contributed to the major portion of subsistence and owned most property

because they were the main producers of the land. Women did the planting, tending, harvesting, and storing of the crops. The relationship between men and women was not based on political power or economic resources. It was based on how people lived their lives because they had to depend on reciprocal relationships; survival was based on the joint work for subsistence.

This example of Iroquois social organization speaks to the stark differences in western social patterns. However, the Northern Cree classification of social organizing is a highly debated topic among the elders in Northern Manitoba. There has not been sufficient research in this area but earlier research by Flannery, examining these issues with respect to the Eastern Cree in the James Bay (northern Quebec) area compares Eastern Cree women's power with the Iroquois women and, using the example of women's power in distributing the meat and ownership over the animal, suggests their position is comparable to Iroquois women's ownership of the land and that the division of labour between men and women depended on personal ability and common sense rather than entirely on institutionalization of gendered social power. Northern Cree people have linkages to use of the land, gendered division of labour and collective or family kinship grouping. As Smith states, "indigenous peoples offer genuine alternatives to the current dominant form of development. Indigenous peoples have philosophies which connect humans to the environment and to each other and which generate principles for living a life which is sustainable, respectful and possible"(105). All colonized nations have had Eurocentric ideologies forced onto them through education, social structures, governments, resource management, and development. At the same time as "global knowledge" seizes the world, countries are wrestling with colonization and capitalism is sweeping across the nations. Although the decolonizing process is in motion, the misconception of global knowledge and western culture that reaffirms the west as the centre. As the new form of colonization, that is capitalism,

and the west's domination is translated through development projects sponsored by predominately western countries.

Many development programs are justified by contributing to governments or agencies based on false pretences that there will be economic benefits for the people involved and foreign investment and trade for the host country. Capitalism has lead development programming on the path of funding projects that are only economical beneficial to a certain group of elites thus preventing the interests of the affected people's standards of living from being realized or a major concern. These processes that have taken place bare a striking resemblance to the situation in northern Manitoba for the last forty years of government companies and corporations such as Manitoba Hydro, Hudson Bay Mining, Hudson Bay Company and INCO, who have raped the land and mistreated the Indigenous people in the region. Simultaneously the International Monetary Fund (IMF) began what are called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and development agencies such as Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), World Bank, and US Foreign Aid (USAID) supported them. SAPs are "formulated as loan conditions by Northern governments and the International Financial Institutions. SAPs require recipient countries to change their economic policies, generally to encourage greater economic deregulation ("liberalization") of trade, investment, and finances" (www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org). SAPs force countries that are in financial need to decrease the value of their currency, therefore lowering their standard of living but making their market more accessible to countries with money. People living in countries with development projects, experience this exploitation within " neocolonial trading relationships, the domination of foreign multinational businesses, the imposition of structural adjustment programs and the linkages between [that country's] Westernized elites and the ruling class of the industrialized world" (Penna, Campbell

11). The ruling class, made up of small elites, represents neocolonial interests and attitudes. Therefore “to many people “this represents a continuation of imperialism” (Penna, Campbell 12) and Western domination. The costs of the SAP programs are massive and agencies are still in the process of assessing the damage. SAPs put countries in a state of economic crisis. This causes stress and strain on the entire families because many men lose their source of income in times of economic crisis, leading many people to experience a poor quality of life. Women are also negatively affected because “their responsibilities in looking after the family and devising survival strategies increase” (Women Build Africa 185). SAP programs are linked very closely to our Canadian development plan, whether it is called community economic development or just development. Currently, Indigenous men and women are among the most impoverished and at risk in our Canadian nation and their quality of life can be compared to families living in developing nations in Africa and India.

With the opportunity of conducting research for MAWA, all of the women who participated, which includes the Indigenous women, were constantly balancing multiple responsibilities including their family duties, paid labour, art and their volunteer community work. As mothers, employment counsellors, teachers, health care workers, grandmothers and youth workers, they are committed to establishing a strong foundation in their community. Artists are at the fringe of the economic system in large urban centres, which could logically lead us to believe that the economic situation for artists in rural and remote places is in worse condition. All (with the exception of 2 people out of 100) of the women that participated in the MAWA project had employment outside of ‘cultural production’. Only the women who have retired from their past employment could afford to work in full time cultural production. This is a significant issue for many of the women because they would be interested in employment related

to cultural production, but opportunities do not exist in rural and remote regions. In addition to their full or part time employment most of the women had families and were the primary caregiver. A large number of the women reported exhaustion from all of the unpaid and paid labour, which further complicates their relationship to “finding the time” for creating art. According to Census data in 2001, Northern communities had less than 5% of employment in arts, entertainment and recreation. As well, women are already at a disadvantage because as stated in *Women and the Economy*,

The assumptions of traditional economics have had devastating consequences for women. Women’s secondary status within the paid work force had meant that women experience poverty much more frequently than men. It is not only women who are excluded from the economy. People of color, Aboriginal peoples, people living with disabilities, and many others who do not fit the separate and self-interested model of human behaviour described economists are so vulnerable (45).

When these facts are compounded with these women living in non-urban setting, the situation is worse. Where the economy is based on one main or no industry, how do people support themselves? In addition, to comprehend the unique issues facing women artists in non-urban settings, with limited opportunities in the arts and arts education, access to continued professional development and academic dialogue in the arts.

What is the course of action in cases such as the women from Split Lake and Opaskwayaik Cree Nation (OCN)? Is the solution to simply watch Indigenous nations be eaten up by greed, capitalism and competition, as we have seen in urban Canadian centres, or do we revert back to traditional ways of life and living off the land, void of commercial and consumer products? Either concept gives us little room to breathe since Indigenous nations in northern Manitoba are participating in the Third Machine Age of capitalism and are still living in absolute poverty and social breakdown. Yet many people are still living in the footsteps of the

grandfathers and mothers before them. There will be no immediate change in our economic system and they therefore have to find a balance between capitalism and traditional knowledge and living. There should be a fusion of democratic and collective capitalism in traditional Indigenous epistemologies creating a new economic system built on sustainable Indigenous community development and increased social, emotional and mental welfare of human beings. Once people begin to participate fully in a diverse economic system then there can be real change built on everyone's ideas and contributions, instead of on the backs of working/poor people.

Thesis
Re-Inventing Art Practices:

Turtle Island Woman

Gary Snyder
wrote about Turtle Island
won a Pulitzer prize

whiteboy poetry
was all I didn't know much
what to write
for whom for why

he said thanks the one day
I gave him my poetry book
said "read this for a change"

Turtle Island women gave heart
away to his ecological zone
he must give offerings
to a woman spirit
I know I read his poems
listen up for that woman

did he just say gimme to her
the glib coyote testimony way
is a give away

he tells me
white boys
claim to be artists first
like Indian are suppose to be
artists first
to write whiteboy stink
if we are artists first
then we don't need to be Original People
first is a first for first nations
we have to imagine Turtle Island Woman
with her borrowed green heart
not taken as outright steal

he'd refill his pen
greenish ink
pumps from her heart

she didn't sit full lotus
position bedside him
mimicking his wife either

she bitched
I heard it too

- Annharte

Dialogical Aesthetics:

In my analysis of the role of Indigenous women artists in rural and remote areas, a dialogue begins that is rooted in political performance or gesture. The women artists discussed in this paper are part of the 'big picture' of Freire's concept of "untested feasibility", the hope of a possible collective dream of a certain kind of performance entrenched in art practices and aesthetics, not art for art's sake. There is a magnitude of reasons why the concept of "untested feasibility" exists in our implicit and explicit understanding of 'cultural convergence' in the arts. Do we, as people who have experienced some form of oppression and privilege, move past the dialogue of creating space in our dominant Canadian discourse? Our neighbors in Central and South America are not waiting for anyone to create space for them; they are compelling people to join their movements and are re-defining their cultural history⁵. For example, the Landless Rural Worker's movement or Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil, as well as many popular movements in Venezuela, and the National Indigenous Confederation in Ecuador (CONAIE), are all involved in socially engaged art. In localized areas of Manitoba, there are also Indigenous women artists that are moving beyond a counter-discourse, or resistance. They are in the state of "untested feasibility" since they are working towards a dream, or a vision of socially engaged art.

To completely understand dialogical aesthetics one must first begin to understand concepts surrounding the avant-garde discourse. Art should move, disrupt or shift our understanding of the specific concept focused on in a particular piece of work. As Kester states, The key gesture in avant-garde art from this perspective is to oppose forms of thought that are abstract and reductive with experiences that are open-ended and complex. Thus avant-garde art,

⁵ See Landless Rural Worker's movement in Brazil MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) and other popular movements in Venezuela, National Indigenous Confederation in Ecuador (CONAIE).

while not didactic in the conventional sense, clearly seeks to educate and sensitize the viewer in a very specific way (Kester 20). Abstract, oppositional and reductive is the framework that we as scholars and society members use to understand an area of avant-garde art. I am arguing there is a “new” way⁶ to view art based on the work by Kester in dialogical aesthetics and interactive community art and activism. Therefore, I am grounding my argument in linkages to Indigenous women (who participated in my research) that are acting as activists or social change agents⁷, as their work is socially engaged in current political performance and dialogical discourse. I have arrived at this conclusion first by their personal testimonies; second, by their art being socially conscious; and lastly by their art practices being entrenched in the framework of dialogical aesthetics and performance. This area of the thesis will focus on the artwork and conversations with four rural and remote Indigenous women artists, Margaret Dumas, Cathy Mattes, April Brass and Colleen Cutschall.

The first concept I want to touch on is dialogical aesthetics, which is informed primarily by the work of Grant Kester, who has drawn on the work or research of scholars such as Hans Herbert Kogler, Jurgen Habermas, and Roger Fry. Dialogical aesthetics⁸ is a method to interpret and understand the work of art through conversations and dialogue-based aspects instead of focusing solely on an object created by the artist. In order to set the framework for dialogical aesthetics, the reader must envision an art form locked into a collaborative process that is socially-engaged which applies “a performative, process-based approach”(Kester 1), and can challenge aesthetic concepts of the avant-garde object-based art. In order to comprehend

⁶ There are many different kinds of aesthetics, such as Feminist, Everyday, Avant-garde, Cultural Studies. See The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics edited by Jerrold Levinson.

⁷ As discussed earlier the concept of activist and social change agent (I have developed this term social change agent in order to find a different ideology that is not embedded in social constructions of frontline ‘radical’ activist) were developed out of my understanding that the role of an activist and social change agent is to transform the dominant racist, sexist and colonial Canadian (or any) society by providing individuals with tools to resist in local struggles.

⁸ Rooted in Feminist artists and critical thinkers Susan Lacy and Lucy Lippard.

dialogical aesthetics one has to have a comparative aspect, therefore avant-garde art is the contrast nevertheless; I am not stating that either type of aesthetic is superior, just distinctive in its process. However, the works I will be discussing still have elements of avant-garde object-based aesthetics; it is in the analyzing of these artworks that will differ based on the social issues and political performance aspects that are not usually found in object-based art. In order to begin comprehending the framework of dialogical aesthetics, it is important to note the following:

In dialogical practice the artist, whose perceptions are informed by his or her own training, past project, and lived experience, comes into a given site or community characterized by its own unique constellation of social and economic forces, personalities, and traditions. In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged; the artist may well recognize relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist's preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist. What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project (Kester 95).

This type of art practice shifts the primary focus of an individual artist or object, image or system that is challenging the viewer's expectations into a collective or dialogue based upon disruption of perceived social norms. In avant-garde aesthetics the social norms are transformed into social practices, which include the notion that the artist is the sole creator the main concept is created by the artist and is considered to be a new idea, and finally the focus of the artwork is an object to be viewed. A dialogical aesthetic rejects these norms and practices by the artists ability to become part of a process, listening to people participating, and through the overall collaboration of creating a body of work. The final work becomes a "collective interaction"(Kocur & Leung 81) rather than a final shocking project, and the whole process ultimately transforms the role of the artist and artwork.

When examining artwork there are two main concepts to understand in dialogical practices. First, “to define art through its function as a more or less open space within contemporary culture: a space in which certain questions can be asked, certain critical analyses articulated, that would not be accepted or tolerated elsewhere”(Kester 68). The space selected for the project brings people to the table that would not normally participate or would not feel ‘free’ to discuss the issues or artwork without facing some type of ramification. To define art, as a function or practice or process can be risky because avant-garde art is mainly object-based, as discussed earlier which can lead viewers of the artwork to expect something quantifiable or tactile. Considering art as a function instead of an object can change the perception of the viewer by allowing the viewer to participate actively in the artwork. In avant-garde object-based work the viewer is limited to interaction with the physical body of work. In dialogical function-based artwork the viewer is able to speak, act, listen and engage in the entire process of the work. The relationship with the person(s) is drastically altered because art has traditionally been avant-garde object based and the participation of the person(s) has for the most part been limited to viewing. However the role of the person(s) to have an active participation in the entire or a large part of the process is an extreme paradigm shift. The pendulum is rocking towards community-based, socially engaged, collaborative and participatory art projects. This is a welcoming shift to art and aesthetics because art needs to be created by everyday people for everyday people in a critical reflection of ourselves and our society.

An example of critical reflection in a dialogical space is the artwork by April Brass, a young woman from Opaskwayaik Cree Nation (OCN), who ran the OCN Youth House and their programs. Brass is a certified welder who creates large metal sculptures. She is actively involved in the community, with a special focus on young people. Her work is brought to the OCN house

and the adolescents there contribute in discussions around her artwork. Imagine the kind of dialogue that takes place around a giant faceless sculpted person with human dreadlocks. The people involved ask questions such as: Where did you get the dreads? Are they real? How did you make this and why? This allows the community members agency, enabling them to have an active and constructive dialogue around her creative process since they are part of the art discourse.

Brass's artwork suggests the different kind of artist that Kester has described for the reason that "they encourage their collaborators [or community members] to question fixed identities, they do so through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight precipitated by an object" (Kocur & Leung 80). However, in Brass's case, part of her exchange is a shock created by an object (i.e., the sculpture); rather, the difference is the discussion is instantaneous, taking place while the work is in its final stages of creation, which differs from most art gallery practices. This type of action is further compounded by the empathetic insight of the collaborators leading a discussion without the need of the artist. The dialogue that takes place in a space of a youth house is at best an area where they can complain about school, parents, teachers and life, which makes the space sometimes counterproductive and negative. Although the reason for a space like this is to have a positive spin, it is very difficult for Indigenous youth to remain in a healthy state of mind when their surrounding environment is a barrier for them. Brass expressed gratitude that art and creative projects keep many of these young people in a stable and jovial state in their lives. Art is transforming their barriers into creative expression in a youth house that acts as a temporary 'gallery' or art space for Brass's and the young people's artwork, simultaneously acts as a safe

place where intergenerational conversations about issues that would not normally take place in other public spaces.

Another example of a safe space where people meet who do not normally come together is in the creation of the first Cree immersion school in Thompson, Manitoba. The artist, elder and educator, Margaret Dumas who is a resident in the area, envisioned a need for a community concept Cree immersion school. In this northern community where the majority of the population is Cree there was no educational institute that taught Cree as an immersion language. The dream was to stop watching people in Dumas's community lose their language and cultural ties to their Indigenous roots. Therefore the goal was to create a space where key individuals could speak openly about issues surrounding the complexity of loss of culture and language which was simultaneously contributing to high suicide rates, crime, substance abuse, family breakdown and domestic abuse for Indigenous people. Dumas and others facilitated a small group into multiple discussions to finally form Wapanohk Cree Immersion Community School. They brought elders, principals, school board members, parents and government officials to a table to discuss these issues and advocate for the creation of this school. The dialogue that happened formed a community concept school creating a new space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous children would have elders teaching traditional art forms such as beading, sewing and painting within the standard Manitoba school curriculum. The dream in the creation of the school was the hope of empowering people with a strong Aboriginal identity for the upcoming generations of children who would be taught dancing, fiddling, drumming and a six-week outdoor camp. The new syllabus will include community feasts and regular pow-wows to celebrate community spirit and build strong healthy families. This is instrumental in providing Aboriginal people agency and all the tools to resist the negative stereotypes and ideologies and empower people to continue to

hear the beat of their own drum instead of turning to crime, abuse and suicide. However, this does not mean that this school is locked into the monolithic or hegemonic discourse of Western constructions of 'Aboriginal traditions', the school is fluid and in a constant state of flux, in balance with contemporary time, which is vital for its survival in a twenty-first century. This transformation was built on Dumas's creative vision that has revolutionized her community by collaboration and valuing everyone's contributions and thoughts in the process. These attributes are typical of dialogical projects.

A third example of collaboration is a project that fused break dancing and traditional Métis dance. After hearing the voices of the Aboriginal youth at a conference, Mattes decided to go back to her community and begin a conversation about the possibilities of an Aboriginal youth dance group with the Manitoba Métis Federation Youth Coordinator Jason Gobeil. Simultaneously, Gobeil was thinking along the same mindset then they then brought various people to the table such as: government agencies, arts organizations and Aboriginal groups and organizations, they began a dialogue dealing with the issue of youth not being interested in traditional Métis dance. This discussion transformed into a new kind of dance, a fusion of break/hip hop dancing with traditional Métis dance. This sparked an new cohort of young people participating in this new dance genre. After a successful weekend of dancing and rejoicing the group has yet to secure permanent funding however they are a group of people still trying to continue to make this project a success. The concern for young people about learning Indigenous traditions is futile when people are surrounded by pop and commercial culture. However, this creative endeavor was possible by collaborating, listening, evolving and respecting the youth, people with knowledge and a vested interest in passing down and sharing these traditions.

Both works of Dumas, Mattes and Brass are rooted in their political engagement: wanting to change, empower and educate people in their community. Each project involved the creation of a temporary group of people that was linked to the broader community interested in social issues that were impacting their area and people. In the case of Dumas's work many of the people at the table were required to be there and not necessarily shared the idea of change but understood there was a growing problem with Indigenous youth in northern Manitoba. Therefore this awareness brought them to work collaboratively and in a respectful manner. In order to expand the discussion of this temporary group, I will call it a politically coherent community, which will be explained later in the thesis. In Brass's situation the group of young people was much more fluid and flexible it did not have a set goal or concept the youth took the opportunity to act and speak about art, home, friends and school in a place they thought was respectful and did not pass judgment. Lastly, Mattes's project consisted of a core group of people interested in the issue of traditional Métis dance and giving that knowledge to young people. All three situations required committed, interested and passionate agents who brought together people and ideas around the different concerns. None of these projects could have taken place without a commitment to social change and radical brainstorming on behalf of all the people involved. It is this allegiance to collaboration and transformative action in dialogical aesthetics that creates such fantastic art projects by these artists and people involved.

To fully comprehend dialogical aesthetics I must explain the community impact and the intergenerational effects on involved participants and community stakeholders. Therefore, this aesthetic absorbs the artist(s) and participants in "identifying their salient characteristics and linking these to aspects of aesthetic experience that have been abandoned or redirected in some way during the modern period" (Kester 68). This indicates that the artist or individuals involved

in the artwork take into account the amount of time and understand the “cumulative effect of current decisions and actions on future events and generations” (68). In addition, the artist(s) and participants see past the concept of self-interest or self-gain they see past themselves and into the future. Again, these concepts differ from social norms and practices in avant-garde object-based art as a result of being aware of the intergenerational effects. In object-based art the idea is to create commentary surrounding the issue at hand this could have linkages to the future but would not necessarily deal with the impact this artwork will have on future generations of community members, artists or the general public. The foundation of dialogical artwork is the collective workings of all the people included in the project and the impact it will make on these people, their community and the next generation of people.

An illustrative example is involved in the work of Margaret Dumas, a writer, singer, and poet. Dumas was born in South Indian Lake but lives in Thompson; both places are remote northern communities though the former is a traditional Cree community while the latter is a regional centre and industry based town (mining). Dumas’s art is socially engaged for the reason that she elects to channel or focus her art on socially conscious issues. This is derived from Dumas’s philosophy that “everybody plays a role and everybody is important, by what gifts they bring to the table. That’s how Aboriginal people saw it, everybody has a gift and this was acknowledged”(Dumas Interview). The concept of everyone having a gift creates a space where people are honored and respected for what they bring to the table, which allows people to be part of the process of their learning anchored in “a pure reflex of reality” (Freire 87). Understanding the transformation that takes place for people in the area of politicization or as Freire eloquently articulates “a pure reflex of reality”, enables people to understand the “basic importance of education as act of cognition not only of the content, but of the “why” of economic, social,

political, ideological, and historical facts, which explain the greater or lesser degree of ‘interdict of the body,’⁹ our conscious body, under which we find ourselves placed” (Freire 87). This is embedded in experiential and embodied knowledge¹⁰, which is applied to art practices, social transformations and political activism. This allows this discourse to transcend traditional or conventional epistemologies by decoding the internal information. This reflects what everyone sees or wants for the people in their ‘imagined community’ as part of a dream or “untested feasibility”. In this ‘imagined community’ Dumas also states that it is the “artists, storytellers and poets who are leading the way” when we are sitting at the table. “It is their songs, words and stories that lead us in a direction and shape the future” (Dumas Interview). Simultaneously, they are acting as the “brokers or bridge builders” in our current fragmented and shifting Canadian society.

The principals that inform dialogical aesthetics are closely linked to that of Indigenous values and epistemologies. As Dumas has explained Aboriginal values are collaboration, respect, giving, understanding intergenerational effects and building community, which are all built into the framework of dialogical aesthetics. Therefore dialogical aesthetics and their type of art projects make an easy transition into Indigenous art and allow for space to continue to develop into a fluid and flexible genre of art which will include Indigenous artists. The concern for art theories and practices to incorporate Indigeneity has been a major issue for Indigenous artists, curators and theorists. As Todd articulates, Indigenous artists have the right to put forth their own meanings, interpretations, and philosophies of representing Indigenous art. Therefore it will not and cannot perpetuate dominant Eurocentric attitudes surrounding art, representation and “academic colonialism” (Mc Master 21). Todd continues to argue that Indigenous people need to

⁹ Discussed in Freire’s Pedagogy of Hope by Ana Maria Araujo Freire in her research on the history of Brazilian illiteracy.

¹⁰ Discussed in further detail in Emma LaRocque’s “Native Resistance Literature: Survey and Theory”.

verbalize and assert their own scholarship that will 'authorize' Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies and systems (21). By analyzing Mattes, Cutschall, Brass and Dumas and their artwork in the context of dialogical aesthetics, I am contributing to the fusion of Indigenous philosophies and values into art and aesthetics without perpetuating Eurocentric attitudes. The possibility that traditional and contemporary Indigenous values are encompassed in the principals of dialogical aesthetics makes for an easier transition into representing Indigenous worldviews into the realm of art.

Much of Dumas's art is derived from social or emotional issues important to her life, such as her poem/song *Warrior Woman*. This is a poem about the strength of Aboriginal women mirroring what she believes these women contribute to our society. Dumas's poem/song called *Warrior Woman*,

she was a warrior a warrior woman
for the truth she would fight
she believed in what was right
she was a warrior a warrior woman
never really had personal wealth
yet she believed in herself
had so much love to give
taught to so many how to live
she had a lot of charity
and lived her life with dignity
planned seeds of truth to grow
cared about people so
her traditions touched young and old
hardships she endured I'm told
like a tree she stood up strong and free
touched the hearts of you and me
I'll never forget her smile
not for a long while
a part of her is a part of me
yes I know that we will all agree
she was a warrior a warrior woman

- Margaret Dumas (Dumas Interview).

This poem is an indication of the important role that strength plays in Dumas's survival. This feeling and thought is drawn from the wisdom Dumas has touched many Aboriginal women in her past and present. When Dumas has performed this piece, women have talked to her after about how it touched them and it made them think of their mom or granny. The intergenerational dialogue that resonates within people reveals Dumas's ability to access the wisdom from the many strong women in her life and write about it. As Farris-Dufrene argues, "many Native American artists, whether their work is abstract in form or more representational, create art that has social context" (15). Dumas's work draws from concepts of both traditional and contemporary perspectives, which "do not separate art and life or draw comparisons between what is beautiful and what is functional. Art, beauty and spirituality are intertwined in the routine of living" (Farris-Dufrene 15). This allows Dumas's embodied knowledge to be dispersed throughout and it evident in *Warrior Woman* and other works not discussed here. The social context is valuing and respecting Indigenous women in a situation when women are not appreciated for all the labour and contributions that they provide their family and community with. Dumas's poem speaks to the beauty she finds in the feminine resilience and the Indigenous experience in the hardships that these women have faced. The character in the poem is that of Dumas herself and reflects the many women like her. She is not a warrior of the physical battle but of the social injustices she and other people like her have to face everyday.

By Dumas transforming the concept of a warrior into a domestic/activist is a direct action in creating social change. This deliberate act is taken further by Dumas's ability to perform and discuss the poem and the issues contained in it through public forums, which sparks random transactions among politically and non-politically active people. This communication continues after the performance and seeks to educate and empower people who where part of it, who take it

up again to give the information to new people, who then can ponder and can pass this knowledge on. As Cliff Joseph argues, socially concerned artists “must responsibly challenge the dominant powers through our art and our relevant social action...to set an inspiring and empowering example for people to follow as they seek the courage to struggle for liberating social change” (Farris-Dufrene 47-48). Dumas states, in order for her artwork to have an impact it has to contribute to social change, which will influence seven generations. Just as dialogical aesthetics second method indicates that the artwork has to be aware of the future and the intergenerational impact on the people and communities effected. Both examples of Dumas’s work, in the creation of the first Cree immersion school or her songs and poetry contribute to social change and deal with the impact of future generations of Indigenous people in the area of Indigenous knowledge, values and women’s issues. In addition, LaRocque adds that writing and I would add art “is also about social power. How I write [or create] depends a lot on who I write [or create] for”(LaRocque 68). Dumas is creating to empower herself, her family and her community. This makes Dumas an artist aware of the generational impact with a vision for a collective dream for her ‘imagined community’.

Another set of examples of socially conscientious art with concern for the future generations of all people and with special focus on Indigenous issues are the art shows curated by Mattes. This curator has intentionally chosen work with explicit political content that forces the participants to be confronted with subject matter faced by Indigenous people. The first show I will reflect on is Barry Ace’s current body of work that focuses on the development of *Super Phat Nish* as an icon of urban ‘Indian’ pop culture. The images Ace uses rescue the stereotypical representations of ‘Indians’ and draws links to the connection with urban African American culture. The conceptual underpinnings is for Ace is to “imprint his own image on pop cultural

objects used by urban Aboriginal youth including skate-boards, patches, lunch boxes, satchels, hats clothing and other urban pop culture objects. Super Phat Nish becomes the new cool urban guru and role model that reveals that one can maintain their distinct cultural sensibility in the city¹¹”. The event pulled in three hundred people including a large incumbent of youth and ignited much dialogue. One of the pieces that stood out for me was the phat pack, a converted skate pack with wheelless and truckless skateboard. On the opposite side of the grip was a painted phat baby wrapped in traditional blanket and the pack displayed gorgeous intricate feminine feeling beading from Anishnabe culture. All the pieces dealt with pop-culture and where Indigenous youth visualize themselves in this arena. In targeting the young people Mattes has allowed for intergenerational conversations to take place, which allows people to pass on knowledge to the young and old, similar to the Métis/break dancing project. Other work that Mattes has curated with similar Indigenous political context was a local Métis photographer Leona McIntyre, *The Best Man*, featured the work of emerging artist Riel Benn, from Birdtail Sioux First Nation and Métis artist David Garneau’s work *Cowboys, Indians (and Métis?)*. All of these shows brought up incredible dialogues dealing with Indigenous issues and transformed the gallery space into a cross-cultural arena where people expressed concerns for the implicit and explicit issues raised by the shows. Some people chose to discuss among their family and friends, others spoke to strangers and the artists and some decided to become confrontational and hostile. This process allows everyone a voice and participation into the artwork.

Finally, it is important to note that any conversation involving some type of collaboration is not necessarily to be considered a work of art. It is the formation or the intent of the work that constitutes a work of art. Or as Kester states, it “is not the dialogue per se but the extent to which

¹¹ ARTicles. Newsletter of the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba. Brandon: Manitoba, January to April 2005. number 71.

the artist is able to catalyze emancipatory insights through dialogue”(69) and I would add, dialogue that is stimulated around the object or intent. It is important to understand that avant-garde aesthetics has usually relied on a visual object, subject or systems to be viewed and later analyzed; in dialogical aesthetics, it is rather the intent and the process of the project that is being accessed. The relationship with the viewer, participants and the work of art are different because it is “not simply as an instantaneous, prediscursive flash of insight, but as a decentering, a movement outside self (and self-interest) through dialogue extended over time. But a commitment to dialogue, no matter how self-reflexive, signals the reliance of these [art] projects on some common system of meaning within which the various participants can speak, listen and respond”(Kester 84-5). This makes this aesthetic a different and challenging process as compared to past and current avant-garde aesthetics. In order to change the way the viewer or critic analyzes the artwork, there needs to be a shift in the way we perceive and understand it. The first shift is to have a “more nuanced account of the communicative experience: one capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode of discourse that is insensitive to the specific identities of speaking subjects...and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness”(Kester 90). The second shift “requires that we understand the work of art as a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object”(90). In the example I will be discussing there are elements to the artwork that contains a physical entity; however, I will be focusing on the transformative dialogue that takes place in and around the process of the creation of the item and the continuous dialogue that takes place throughout the artwork.

Rielisms, curated by Mattes is a piece of work that dealt with the historical figure Lois Riel. The avant-garde artwork in *Rielisms* is a reflection of different artists’ beliefs and interpretations about Riel and the Métis, which highlights their own and Canadian society’s

cultural concerns. The complexities of Riel become evident as the differences and similarities of perceptions and experiences shine through in the art because this historical person has become an icon within contrasting experiences and ideologies that exist within Canada. For example Riel is or could be constructed as the Father of Confederation, the Founder of Manitoba, a madman, or a rebel. *Rielisms* examines the artistic depiction of 'Rielity' through three time periods: the first, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is compatible with Canada's centennial, the second, in the mid 1980s, when dealing with the anniversary of Riel's execution and the Métis Resistance at Batoche, and the third, with the resurgent interest of the 1990s. The exhibition goal was to facilitate cross-cultural, 'imagined' and inter-community dialogues, and to raise important Indigenous issues and concerns. Mattes's intent was to bridge the cultural divide between systems and institutions such as The Winnipeg Art Gallery, political organizations, the art community, Indigenous people, imagined communities and art theory with Métis people and culture. By using the controversial icon Lois Riel Mattes stirred an uncontrollable pot of stew that would haunt her for a long time. Suffering the repercussions of this volatile stew grew a greater appreciative comprehension of community, activism, and politics. A few of the major ingredients were the backlash from 'presumed' relatives of the great Riel icon, the ban from the Manitoba Métis Federation, the limited role by the Lois Riel Foundation, the absent Métis population in the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery's inability to support the show, and the canceling of the show and programs at other galleries.

The backlash of events released a process that various participants and stakeholders could speak, listen and respond to the complexities, which surrounded the icon Riel and the contested history of the Métis people and culture. The dialogical aesthetic of the work was the communication among the participants, the Métis community, art community, and major

stakeholders. Mattes's goals in her residency at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) and the show *Rielisms* which was part of the work with the WAG were:

to connect with as many members of the Aboriginal community, and to work with the education and communications departments to work towards making the gallery a space in which people would feel they [Indigenous people and communities] had some ownership. This would entail visits to various organizations, inviting people to the gallery for tours, making them aware of the opening receptions and related events, making myself available whenever asked by the Aboriginal communities, finding ways to involve people, and developing related programming. This was all a tall order, and perhaps the greatest challenge during my residency, especially since I had just recently moved to Winnipeg from Montreal, and knew very few people (Mattes WAG Report).

The work in the *Rielisms* exhibition at the WAG experienced a decrease in support with the staff changes, which came with different attitudes towards this project, and related programming was cancelled that would facilitate participation by the Métis community. As Mattes discussed and confirmed with the WAG prior to the exhibition, there was no panel, youth component, national tour, or culturally relevant opening. Mattes stated that she was content with the outcome of the actual show and catalog but states it failed in reaching her target audience, the Métis community of Manitoba, and failed in changing the reputation and the space of the WAG to that of inclusive and Indigenous friendly. Mattes argues, regarding the programs that were cancelled that "this exhibition was a continuation of historic exclusionary museum practice, in which exhibitions are about a culture, and not for a culture. Some of the Métis community responded negatively to the exhibition, and I feel that the programming may have made the exhibition and gallery a more comfortable space for them" (Mattes WAG Report). This semi-collaboration was falling apart a few leaders in the Winnipeg region of the Manitoba Métis Federation did not support the show and instructed members not to attend and somehow the Riel Foundation withdrew any or potential financial support for the project but did attend and support the show, the 'relatives' of

Riel did not support the show and make this very vocal, and the WAG cancelled relevant programs and activities that might have broken some of this tension.

Although Mattes might see these parts of this project as a letdown, I am arguing that the dialogue sparked by *Rielisms* is exactly a part of what she set out to do, with the exception of having programming and having a lot Métis people in the WAG. Mattes's goal was to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue about Indigenous issues surrounding the controversial icon Riel. Therefore not only did the art in the exhibition display the complexities, differences and similarities of perceptions and experiences of Riel, so too did the dialogical aspects in the process of the work. This project dealt with the complex ideologies we as a Canadian society have within contested Indigenous histories and knowledge. Not only did the Eurocentric art gallery institution snub Mattes, so did her imaged political community of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF). This demonstrates the multiple layers that Indigenous people find themselves embedded in. The MMF is a political organization mandated to support its members, which includes Mattes. In this case they failed in supporting Mattes or other members who disobeyed their MMF alliances by clandestinely or overtly supporting Mattes at the exhibition. Based on the principal of people being self-reflective and deciding on what was important to them as a Métis person who decided to attend the exhibition exasperates the MMF or the WAG ability to control the environment and political space. The active participants took on their own role and had agency to speak, listen and respond to the artist, the institutions, community members and the political organizations. By far *Rielisms* is a success in its ability to create dialogue around Indigenous issues and to deal with the absent Indigenous person in institutions, imaged communities and politics. However, this project failed in creating a space that joined the Indigenous community within the Winnipeg Art Gallery and other planned galleries and

programs. As for the Winnipeg region of the Manitoba Métis Federation's lack of backing demonstrates their internal political problems and complex relationship to Riel and their members. As Mattes reflects,

Although I was phased out instead of phased in at the WAG, the residency helped me find that backbone made of steel. It developed after the residency ended, when I felt silenced, and came from the opportunities that came afterwards. Had I found employment at the WAG, I don't know if I would have my backbone made of steel. I don't think I would have had the opportunity to work with the people I did after the residency ended. My backbone came from, and is, the Aboriginal arts community who I have worked with, and existed in. I am happy that the walls of the WAG may be dented. However I am more content that I realized my backbone comes from the strengths of those I consider my community – and that's worth far more than full-time employment at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Mattes WAG report).

This new steel backbone allowed for many of the projects discussed in this thesis because *Rielisms* was Mattes first major show and working experience. It is surprising that Mattes needed to find her backbone because it was always there, or else *Rielisms* would not have become a reality. It is collaborative work such as Mattes' that allows for a communicative exchange that shifts the way artists, critics, viewers and participants deal and react to the work. The creative interactive process situated in *Rielisms* tolerates the fabrication of a space to reflect, respond, listen, engage and react in this artwork as a result of being located in dialogical aesthetics.

To contradict the negative impact the Winnipeg show had in Winnipeg, the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina Saskenawan insisted in taking on *Rielisms*, which turned into a huge success. The gallery gave Mattes agency in the project, which the Winnipeg Art Gallery lacked. The Dunlop Gallery coordinated an Métis Advisory Committee, which was supported by well-known local Métis people such as Maria Campbell. This enabled Métis people some agency and could feel a part of the overall show because there was discussion around food, music and entertainment, issues that Mattes wanted to be part of the Winnipeg Art Gallery show. They had

successful in creating a space where Métis people could demonstrate their culture and learn at the same time. This exhibition at the Dunlop Art Gallery did not continue the “historic exclusionary museum practice, in which exhibitions are about a culture, and not for a culture”. This performance was for the Métis culture and demonstrates the support needed by the gallery or institutions to create an inclusive space.

The second work I will discuss is also curated by Mattes; this collection consisted of three Indigenous artists from Manitoba and three Indigenous artists from Australia, two writers and two curators one from each country. This was Urban Shaman, that is an Indigenous artist run and artist owned gallery, first opportunity with an international exchange, which included Manitoba artists working out of Urban Shaman who would travel to Australia for two weeks and the Australia’s Boomalli group reciprocating. This exchange included an exhibition, workshops, community visits, lectures, and a catalogue. All of this programming was developed from collective discussions about our similarities and differences as Indigenous people. The most common theme throughout the discussions was the relationship to blankets, hence the title of the exhibition was *blanket[ed]*.

From the beginning *blanket[ed]* was a collaborative and self-reflective process where artists and participants could listen and speak in an “exchange based on reciprocal openness”(Kester 90). This group of people had never experienced an international exchange and found that there was a tremendous amount of growth and learning from each other in their lived experience and from all the new people the programming brought to Urban Shaman Gallery. Mattes discussed the success of the exchange regardless of the lack of experience all the people involved had with this large amount of programming and planning of an exhibition. This project had drawn on a new group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people attending the programs and

visiting Urban Shaman, extending the project to general public and Indigenous communities building a more inclusive space. Based on the collective's ability to communicate to groups of people who would not normally participate in art demonstrates this project's ability to transform their dialogue into interactive programming and artwork, which is not a simple task. Since they shared and continued dialogue on the similarities and differences that Indigenous people face in the Canadian and Australian context, it drew people to the project because they could relate and reflect their own lived experience into the dialogue and the physical artwork. The major focus of the communication in the cultural exchange and the interaction with the participants was "atrocities that the blankets represent, and simultaneously use of the blanket for warmth and cultural practice, it became a significant metaphor, with multiple and contrasting definitions"(Mattes & Jones 13) that people could relate to. In order to engage people in the dialogical and object-based art process there needs to be a connection to a concept or entity. Through the cultural exchange the artists found a common ground in the dislocation and layers of cultural identity, which impacted the participants and the public because they could relate based on that same ground, making this work extremely successful. Not only in the mandate of the Urban Shaman Gallery but also in the outcome of the international exchange, Indigenous voices and concepts were rooted in transformative change.

The third work I will examine is an art show called *dies again...* and a monument by Colleen Cutschall. This show included digital photographs from her sculpture of a monument, *Spirit Warriors*, erected to honour the Indigenous people who fought or lost lives at Little Big Horn. The art show was held at Urban Shaman, an Indigenous run gallery in Winnipeg and the curator was Cathy Mattes. Some of the issues that surrounded this work were, intellectual

property, cultural/Indigenous knowledge, and roles and rights of the artist, making this an extremely interactive and collaborative artwork.

The past monument present at Little Big Horn validated the U.S. government defeat and further colonized the area by the statue's presence. In the spirit of the exhibition the man in the monument will remain nameless as an act of defiance against colonization and the glorification of Euro-American war heroes. "In 1991, after years of lobbying, it was made public law that *his* name be removed from the site, and that a memorial that recognizes the fallen warriors be built"(Mattes)¹². The *Spirit Warriors* sculpture at the Little Bighorn National Monument is located near Crow Agency, Montana. The Little Bighorn Battlefield is a national monument dedicated to the violent clash along the Little Bighorn River in southeastern Montana that saw a well known Lt Colonel and 262 soldiers, scouts and civilians attached to the 7th U.S. Cavalry defeated by over 1,500 Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors. The *Spirit Warriors* sculpture will measure 35 feet long by 14 feet high and is being erected as a tribute to those Indigenous nations who fought for their land and freedom. Cutschall states,

I am deeply committed to the effort to recognize all the tribes who lost relatives at the Little Bighorn Battlefield and to Aboriginal veterans who fought for their land and freedom at any time in their history. As a descendent of the Crazy Horse, Black Elk, and Standing Bear tiospaye (extended family), and being from a family of three veterans, and as a mother of a soldier currently serving in the U.S. armed forces, I feel a particular sense of responsibility and desire to publicly acknowledge the human sacrifices that were made and are being made on our behalf. Immediately after the battle at Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull came to Canada with a group of people seeking asylum. That history had a tremendous impact on the history of the Brandon region and of southern Saskatchewan as well. It is important for people to make that connection to the Battle, and to its impact on our history¹³.

¹² Mattes, Cathy. *...Dies Again*. Catalog of Work and Brief Statement. Winnipeg: Urban Shaman, 2005.

¹³ Brandon University. News release Communications. February 17 2005.

Colonization has a long and relentless history for Indigenous people creating a politically loaded situation right from the inception of the monument endeavor. Therefore the community members of several different nations had a vested interest in the outcome of the project as well, the National Parks office, general community members, and the group Friends of Little Big Horn.

In order to comprehend the dialogical aspects of this artwork it is important to understand the issues surrounding it. First, Friends of Little Big Horn made reproductions of the image of the monument without the permission of the artist on t-shirts and other consumer goods. Second, there was some backlash from the communities in the area because they felt that the monument did not represent their nation or Indigenous background, which brought forth the issue of cultural/Indigenous knowledge. Finally, the National Parks Branch did not want Cutschall or the architect John Collins to sign the work, which brought up issues of copyright and intellectual property rights for the artists.

Amidst of all these issues how could dialogue and political performance (I will address this concept later in the essay) not be embedded in the artwork? As Kester's first requirement for a shift to dialogical aesthetics, he states that the artist is looking for a self-reflective dialogue that allows participants to speak, listen and respond. In Cutschall's case, there was community involvement from the beginning based on Indigenous peoples lobbying and commitment to change past colonial wrongs. Second, once the monument was erected people from the outlying communities and other nations placed offerings at and on the artwork, such as sweet grass, tobacco, sage and tied ribbons in the four directions with coordinated colours. The dialogue and written comments of the artist, participants, stakeholders and community members are being documented, which allows for continuous self-reflexivity. In this case it becomes less about the individual artist or object per se and more about the community members, colonialism and

marking land that rightfully is Indigenous-based. It becomes a larger more collaborative and collective vision about Indigenous people and their struggle for self-determination than about a sculpture as the object of artwork. Encompassing all these issues at once will cause backlash from any number of stakeholders; this is why the importance of dialogue is crucial to allow a space where all people can speak, listen and respond. The fact that Indigenous people protested and stated that this did not represent their nation or cultural knowledge revealed to the artist and stakeholders that their voice and ideas need to be represented and reconciled. Concurrently, the critic and viewers must understand, as Kester states, that the work of art is a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object. However, in this case, both objects and communicative exchange are part of the process and artwork.

As stated earlier, this artwork is locked into political performance; however, I am treading on dangerous and contested ground of performance studies and the definition of performance art/artist. Gomez-Pena states:

When performance-studies scholars refer to “the performance field” they often mean something different than what performance artists mean: A much broader field that encompasses all the things performative, including anthropology, religious practice, pop culture, and sports and civic events. While *we* [performance artists] chronicle our times, unlike journalists or social commentators, our chronicles tend to be non-narrative, symbolic, and polyvocal”(21-22).

Cutschall’s artwork falls under the broad umbrella of performance, contradicting what Gomez-Pena defines as a performance artist, since she does not confine herself solely to performance art. Combating political issues and artistic rights propels this work in socially engaged art into political performance. The definition of performance I will use is “ the underlying notion that is any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance”(Schechner 2), Cutschall is locked into performance since her action is presented and highlighted by a series of

events, such as people having interaction with the monument, some people protesting the monument, the dialogue as part of the work, and the confrontations with copyright and reproductions for commodity-sale.

This performance becomes a politically coherent community. It can be situated with reference to the framework supplied by Kester in, “that, it allows us to grasp both strengths and weaknesses of those projects that define their collaborators, *serially*, as socially isolated or disaffected individuals whose collective identification is provided by an ameliorative aesthetic experience administered by the artist”(150). In Cutschall’s project she brought community members, artists and the National Parks representatives to the discussion table, which made the participants into collaborators instead of isolated or disaffected individuals in this project. Cutschall’s ability and willingness to actively listen and be involved in the dialogue and debate surrounding this artwork displaces her capacity to not only act alone as a single artist entrenched only in her art form but to have self-reflexivity with an open mind.

This is not to say that Cutschall’s sculpture lacks artistic integrity; the monument is stunning both visually and in its craft. I am arguing that her artwork is enhanced by her ability to become part of a member of the politically coherent community as an artist and an affected Indigenous person from the area. Cutschall both grounds the artwork in current social political content for Indigenous people and raises issues around intellectual property and the rights to cultural knowledge as an artist. This collaboration with the newly created politically coherent community allowed for a space to have a “more reciprocal process of dialogue and mutual education, with the artist learning from the community and having his or her preconceptions (about the community or specific social, cultural, and political issues) challenged and transformed in turn”(Kester 151). As Cutschall stated in an interview, “I think of myself as a

social activist instead of a political activist. I think that is the position I have always taken with my work. I am not trying to beat politics into people's head. Unless I can change those politics, I'm not going to speak about them often. What I try to do is change it through the content of my work"(Cutschall Interview). Although this project was extremely frustrating for Cutschall as an artist, it is in the struggle to define herself as an Indigenous woman with intellectual rights and access to a vast amount of cultural knowledge that formulates this body of work with rich insight and knowledge in the area of the arts. Cutschall's artwork is socially-engaged in current political performance with the purpose of her work being more than an avant-garde sculpture. In this case the project is catapulted into dialogical aesthetics and an avant-garde object that has "adopted a performative, process-based approach"(Kester 1).

In both *blanket[ed]* and *Rielisms* Mattes are locked in a political performance since Mattes is leading a very politically loaded fight in *Rielisms* and bridging the international cultural divide in the other. Whether the performance is intentional or not, the fact is that in the process of the work it becomes or is in a contested state of performing for the viewer, the participants, the artists and the public. These performances cause a new series of events, for example in *Rielisms* the canceling of programs, other showings of the work and the outcry from the Winnipeg Region of Manitoba Métis Federation. In *blanket[ed]* it was the increase of public involvement in the project and international learning opportunities implicated in the exchange. If the *Rielisms* exhibition happened in the isolated walls of the Winnipeg Art Gallery without Mattes involving any community members or Indigenous groups and organizations, I doubt that the Manitoba Métis Federation would even be aware of the show; it is only because Mattes engaged them in the process and they became part of the political performance that gave them agency to do so. I am not staying I agree with the stance of the MMF or the WAG, quite the

contrary. I am arguing that the MMF was given a voice by the dialogical methods of the project and this gave them agency to think, respond, listen and participate even though they disagreed and ultimately did not support the project. The Winnipeg Art Gallery had too much power, as institutions normally do and controlled the outcome of the project. If the WAG had done something similar to the Dunlop Art Gallery, there would have been a very different conclusion. The dialogue allowed access to the political performance, which provided the MMF opportunity to support or disown, which still involved them in the process of the work.

In *Rielisms* Mattes created a politically coherent community with the Manitoba Métis Federation, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Indigenous people, art community members and the artists. This collaboration with the newly created politically coherent community allowed for a space to have a “more reciprocal process of dialogue and mutual education”(Kester 151). As stated earlier, Mattes had learned about her ‘imagined’ Métis community with her preconceptions and notions about them, which were totally challenged and flipped upside down and transformed in to strength with a new Indigenous art community. The Winnipeg Art Gallery became informed about the complexity of the contested Indigenous history and multiple identities of MMF members and the politics surrounding that organization and still continues to be an exclusive space. The art community normally would experience very different art projects since it was collaborative and involved many people from outside of the usual troupe involved in art politics. Similarly in *blanket[ed]* there was a newly formed politically coherent community within the framework of a political performance. This cross-cultural exchange involved a reciprocal learning relationship and at the same time created a space where “socially isolated or disaffected individuals whose collective identification,” (Kester 150) allowed for them to understand the strengths and weakness of the project and those affected by the work. The collective spent time

teaching each other about each of their multiple identities, first the Canadian context of Dakota, Ojibwa, Lakota, Cree and Métis and then within the Australian background of Dungutti, Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri. The artists and participants assert new meaning into Indigenous history locally and globally through a politically coherent community and perform new ways and multiple layers to the comfortable or plagued blanket in contested Indigenous knowledge and artistic practices.

In framing political performance and socially-engaged art in Indigenous terms, the reader must understand; as artist Nadema Agard Winyan Luta Red Women argues, “ ‘Art’ described in indigenous terms, however, is not separated from tribal life. We make art and we are art” (Farris Dufrene 56). In conversations and observations these three artists felt that their artwork was a part of them and impacted their community since there was no segregation from the role of artist and community member. All of the Indigenous women artists discussed, did not envision themselves as isolated individual artists; rather, their comprehension is that art is not a production of culture or produced as ‘high art’ or for their own individual sake but for their community. As Agard argues, “ As an indigenous artist, my work does not serve its own sake but is strongly connected to my community. It has a relationship with the community and often conveys a teaching” (Farris Dufrene 61). Hence, the examples I have applied to dialogical theory are intertwined with the embodied knowledge of the discussed Indigenous women throughout rural and remote areas of Manitoba, artists who I have embedded their art in dialogical aesthetics and performance discourse. Further, their artwork is a site of “critical intervention”¹⁴ as it is infused with reference to social and outward emotional issues. Site specific art, according to Kwon, “adopts strategies that are either aggressively antivisual – informational, textual,

¹⁴ See Minwon Kwon’s essay “One Place After Another” in Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985.

expositional, didactic – or immaterial altogether – gestures, events or performances bracketed by temporal boundaries” (Kocur & Leung 37). These sites, which are bound in specific areas, are where the critical dialogue is taking place, where community members are reflecting on the concept of “untested feasibility”. It is artists that are rising to the challenge of performing the role of activist or social change agent.

These examples reflect a teaching and creativity that is not only rooted in old school western traditional art aesthetic or avant-garde but also suggest a more collective and nuanced model of art practices. This is the work that is challenging western traditional art aesthetics by creating a politically coherent community that contributes collectively to socially engaged art. Dialogically is not the sole reading of these artworks but one aesthetic that complements and contributes to Indigenous art and values, which I have chosen to focus on. The framework provided in this thesis for the reading of each artwork discussed is only a potential beginning of understanding Indigenous art. This dialogue-based public art is communicating with collaborators or members of that site-specific space selected, for that brings people to the table that would not normally partake or would not feel ‘free’ to discuss the issues or artwork without facing some type of ramifications as stated earlier. Second, the artist(s) and participants see past the concept of self-interest or self-gain; they see past themselves and into the future. As explored throughout the paper, these selected Indigenous women artists are pushing the boundaries of collective and collaborative work and are creating socially engaged art. Hence, this dialogue that is taking place in localized areas of rural and remote Manitoba is creating new kinds of knowledge and ways of educating people about social issues. These women are working towards a more “nuanced model of collective identity and action” (86) that is engaged in dialogical aesthetics and political performance. I hope that I have given you, the listeners, a ‘gift’ by

showcasing and supporting the voices of these Indigenous women artists in our Eurocentric Canadian society.

Nohkom atayohkan 1

Nohkom atayohkan
a crown of sage
covers long strands of
fringed brome hair.

Ravines cut through
the soft leather
of your face.

Your mouth a
sensus pink
wintergreen,
the movement of your long
strong neck
a graceful tree.

Old one with laughing eyes
wrap me in blanked grass
fragrant with sweet pine,
the woman-musk
of your rainfed forest.
Ground my wandering feet.

I want to cup
your breast
a starving suckling child.
I want to drink the black and
white prayer beads
your milk spills.

Nohkom
there are no barren lands
only a searching ayisiniw
snared in you.

- Louise Bernice Halfe

Is this it:

As stated in the early sections of the thesis the intention of the research was built on the premise of community-based and participatory/empowerment methodology. However, these concepts are extremely utopian and unattainable. This is not to dismiss the value of framing the research in these methodologies, rather only to discuss the trials and tribulations within their structure. The first principal in participatory/empowerment methodology as stated by Elabor-Idemudia was that the work needed to be rooted in political action and consciousness raising. The concept behind the thesis was to engage and inform people about the kind of activist-based artwork Indigenous women artists were performing in rural and remote areas of Manitoba. I have attended conferences, local forums and discussions surrounding the work of these artists. Originally I had thought that my action would be more community-based and when I thought about it I realized that I belonged to so many different communities, including my graduate peers, faculty, art producers, family, northern, southern and actual geographical communities. I did communicate to my peers, faculty, and committee members through conferences, committees and through the MAWA report. Somehow, I feel as if I could have done more, or did not communicate enough. I know that I feel a sense of lost because the thesis is nearing its end and I want to continue to discuss these artworks to a fuller extent. Once this document is approved, I will conduct open table discussions about the work in the thesis in the geographical communities affected, to share the knowledge I have learnt and hear feedback to assist me in the dissertation process and to end the chapter of this thesis project.

The second principal discussed was having equal participation and democratic relationships in the decision making and learning skills. Participation from the people being researched was extremely difficult since they were busy in their lives and work. I had hoped that

there would be more of an exchange of thoughts and ideas during the process of writing the thesis however Mattes was the only artist that fully contributed in this context. All her thoughts, ideas and dialogues were instrumental in formulating the thesis and this is evident in the work, since her projects are refined and are strongly rooted in theory, as compared to the reflections of the other artists' work. These women were busy in their lives Cutschall was in Italy with her work and Dumas had left the Cree Immersion School and was working at University College of the North major shifts in their careers. However, I could have done a better job of communicating my need for their fuller participation in the process and the importance of having them as a greater presence in the project. I am fully aware of the circumstances that might impact the research because the artists could not fully participate in the entire process of the thesis. However, when conducting research, the researcher has to understand that sometimes participants are busy and full participation might be highly unlikely. Although this was the goal of my thesis, I fell short of total involvement by the artists but do feel as if they were a large part of the process and had a great deal of impact on the end result. How can a participant have equal and democratic say when they are not writing the actual thesis? This concept was totally unattainable because if the participant could read and interact within the writing process does not give them the ability to change anything. Unless they disagreed with their words as a quote, I would have not changed anything, if I felt strongly about my argument. The most I would have done would be to have stated their thoughts, for example as in Mattes's project *Rielisms*. I disagreed with my advisor and the artist. Does this make the process less democratic and equal? Absolutely, I feel strongly about my position and do not want to bend on the issue. If everyone involved took part in the writing and it was co-authored then the process could attempt at being democratic and equal. But this was not the case with this thesis. It does not mean that I did not

learn from everyone's comments and suggestions quite the contrary, I learned a great deal from everyone's involvement and participation in the thesis or in the presentations of the work.

In the original formulation of the methods and methodologies I was naïve and fresh to the processes of writing a thesis and conducting research. Therefore I actually believed that my process would be democratic and equal. However, I know now that this is not the case, often simply because the people involved might not want to become or care to be full participants in the project, which would make democracy and equality non-existent or impossible. In reflection I do not think that I would be able to give up my ability to make the ultimate and final decisions in the thesis process. Again, I found value in thoughts and suggestions provided, sometimes changing my mind or re-thinking my thoughts. However, I feel that if I did not set out to have a democratic process with my committee members or the participants my thesis would have suffered a great deal and I would have learnt a meager amount. The academic theory provided me with high quality thinking, but the thesis would be extremely flimsy if I did not have concepts and art projects to work from. As well, participants and committee members provided me with strength to have confidence in my embodied knowledge. I am grateful for the participation from all the people involved in my learning process.

The third principal in Elabor-Idemudia's participatory/empowerment methodologies is that all people will feel empowered and emancipated in the research development process. How can people feel emancipated in my research and thesis work when they carry more embodied and academic knowledge than myself? How can I free them? I used my power responsibly but I would argue that I did not hold the power. I can control the end result, though the participants, committee members and peers informed the thesis. Therefore the relationship is much more reciprocal and complex. Mattes, Cutschall and Dumas are all very empowered people with a

great deal of education from institutions, family and work experience. They are all educators with a lot more experience than myself. Both Cutschall and Dumas are older than my parents, which gives them the gift of a great deal of knowledge. In this case how could I empower them? I see a mirror that might reflect some inspiration or teach them something; but empower? I think not. This methodology was designed for researchers who are dealing with vulnerable participants where there is a great imbalance of power. In the original research stage I did not know who I would be researching and therefore it could have been people in a powerless situation. However, if a person is an activist or social change agent, they would have to empower themselves in order to transform their communities. This was a major error in my thinking about methods and methodologies. What should have been discussed was the complex layers and reciprocal relationship that would be formed between myself and the artists.

A few examples of the reciprocal relationship are: learning from their stories in the interviews and interactions, leading the way for young people like myself, seeing different elements or interpretations in their art and being inspired by youthful energy, all of which complicates my ability to have power over my participants. In this relationship I will discuss their work and they will bring forward mine to other artists, arts organizations, schools, conferences, aboriginal organizations and community members. Therefore by keeping in communication, we are informing each other's work. This makes for a much more convoluted connection that collapses the traditional notion of the researcher and the researched. The artists and myself used methods of self-reflectivity and networks of Indigenous knowledge and relationship building. As Burns expresses, in arts informed research "The three principals – lingering, linking, and layering – move together with a non-linear relationship constantly changing and shifting. They are mutually supporting and challenging; together they provide a

useful framework for rethinking approaches to research” (Cole et al 218). We became more of an ‘imagined community’ that built our relations on participation, inclusiveness, self-reflectivity, listening and dialoguing. Although I stated earlier that some of the artists’ involvement was lacking, I still think that their contribution was reflected in this work. It might not have been in the writing, but it was in the conversations that continue to take place. I know in the future my questions and thoughts will not fall on deaf ears because all the women have indicated that they want to keep in contact to continue those dialogues. This is where I see the success in the methodologies: I have tried to build long term interaction with all of the women artists I have spoken with across the province and especially with the artists that participated with my thesis and research.

The second major area I want to discuss is using community-based methodology. The concept of community is a popular and overused term, simultaneously complex and simple, confusing its use of the term. For one person, community can mean comfort, home, identity and geographic space: for another, family, friends and lifestyle. Community is an encompassing concept for the Indigenous women interviewed. All three women had many constructed communities in which they were members, allowing for flexibility in defining the concept and in understanding their fluid relationship within each of those communities. First, community-based research was attainable with great difficulty. All of the women were from different geographical communities and had many created or connections to various people in multiple communities, therefore complicating how a community member could respond and participate in the thesis project. Involving community people was a rewarding painstaking process that I would subject myself to again and again. It is critical to involve people and organizations because they can learn from the work and you can learn from theirs. I could grasp a lot of the

economic issues facing many Indigenous artists and what organizations were gearing their funding towards. In addition, you do not want to overlap with research or programs that currently exist because it really offends people. The more people you communicate with the more people and information you learn from these connections.

In any kind of work, especially research, you need to build healthy and committed relationships or else people will never trust you and your work will suffer. As stated earlier, as a researcher I was able to communicate with rural, remote and Indigenous artists, as a mixed heritage person who grew up in a rural town with ten houses and presently reside in a northern community. Many of these artists expressed concern that they would not have met or granted me the information, if I were an urban or southern-based researcher because I did not share their concerns and could not be trusted on my strong community ties. Another important part of community-based research was to provide an opportunity to give back to the people from whom I was requesting time and information. At each meeting or individual interaction, I answered general questions about their concerns about applying for grants, specific questions about art marking practices, my experiences with art organizations, art queries and questions about almost anything you could think of. Of course I could not answer everything but I tried my best to steer the women in the right direction, presenting them with information about non-profit organizations, arts organizations, artists and other people that might aid them in their questions or could provide insight. This process was greatly appreciated and extremely needed since rural/remote and Indigenous women artists have a lack of resources or access to people in the area of the arts.

In a reflection of the actual report and project with MAWA, there are a few thoughts that have impacted my research and work. First, the MAWA project is a starting point for

understanding and supporting rural and remote artists. The assessments and development strategies in the report were limited based on the massiveness of this project since the geographic location of Manitoba alone is difficult to comprehend and research from. I was not able to reach out to the remote or Aboriginal communities that existed in Manitoba but have been producing art. The tight time frame, the choice of time (middle of winter) and funding of the project made it difficult to reach everyone I would have wanted. Since there had been very little work done in this area, I was starting from scratch and I considered it necessary to connect with the areas where an art collective or council currently existed. However this project is a step in the right direction for art organizations such as MAWA to take. Hopefully, it can translate into committed and continuous support because it is difficult to build trust once it is broken or a weak commitment is attempted. If this happens, rural, remote and Aboriginal people will not continue a relationship or partnership with an organization. Many rural, remote and Aboriginal people are tired of weak attempts at collaboration and want committed relationships to foster growth and development in their communities. Rural, remote and Aboriginal women artists are instrumental in building and developing their community capacity. MAWA needs to develop and foster relationships with women artists in order to build capacity within their organization, art world, Aboriginal people and rural and remote communities.

My final thoughts on MAWA's ability to continue this growth and change are skewed but optimistic because of difficult process of communication between art organizations and artists. Based on MAWA ability and staffing for a small non-profit organization their ability to keep in regular contact has been difficult and had put a great deal of stress on the working relationship with me in the area of the rural and remote project or issues with northern or Aboriginal artists and organizations looking at working with MAWA. This is extremely frustrating because all the

organizations and artists contact me based on my past affiliation with MAWA. Other organizations such as Manitoba Arts Council and the Thompson Art Council, (I sit on a committee for MAC and I am a board of director on TAC) are looking to me to be the communicator with MAWA. This demonstrates the difficulty in working with arts organizations because I am a northern artist and I cannot be in the physical location of MAWA, MAC and other arts organizations in Winnipeg. The restriction of physical space complicates communication, which is already difficult if people are in the same area, therefore it places more stress on my relationships with all of the southern arts organizations. Although hopefully the rural remote report for MAWA will impact spending and programming for Manitoba Arts Council, Canadian Culture Heritage and Tourism and MAWA, the artists affected will not fully grasp this impact for a few years. This impacts my thesis and research because as a young artist and researcher my work is in the building stages and difficult to prove my loyalties and motivation for my support and interest in their communities and artwork. Because these artists and organizations are building and creating their communities they are very protective and suspicious of researchers and southern/urban organizations. Finally, I want to state that there are many challenges ahead for MAWA in implementing and developing relationships with rural, remote and Aboriginal women artists, however it will become a rewarding experience for all of those who participate.

Rural, remote and Indigenous women artists are active members of their communities and are for the most part operating in isolation from the urban and outlying art communities. It is instrumental for art organizations to better meet the needs of these artists since they are producing artwork with little or no support from any artist organization. I want to recognize and validate that art is a reflection or foundation of community since artists are actively participating

in creating, defining and affirming what community is in their artwork and activities. It is all people who are committed to building community and advocate for social change that “know when to form a circle around the fire. No one has to lead. They are paying attention to each other that the moment is recognized and respected by everyone” (Hernandez-Avila 535). I found that so many people contributed to my learning process and final outcome of the work, I don’t know how to begin to reflect on that, except to say: thanks to all the artists, community members, thesis committee members and people that have affected and impacted this project nothing would have come to fruition without your support. In the thoughtful words of Burns, “No matter how much I think I know or how thorough I feel I am in my methodological approach towards a particular project, there will always be multiple perspectives that are not embodied within my study. There is more to be learned. There are more voices to be heard.” (Cole et al 217). I could not have expressed myself better.

Final thoughts...

The goal of the theoretical framework of this thesis was to lead the reader to value and reflect on the dialogical aesthetics of the art performed by Indigenous rural and remote women artists who were committed to social change through their artwork. I have chosen these Indigenous women artists because their work is unvalued and overlooked when it comes to mainstream Canadian avant-garde art. Indigenous artist's struggle in the mainstream art world, as Mattes stated earlier, it is about culture not for different cultures. Indigenous artists have been able to breakdown some of the barriers in the Canadian art world, for example Rebecca Belmore's visit with other Native artists in the international art forum the Venice Biennale. Indigenous artists work in two worlds always being aware of the social, economic, political and cultural ties to Indigenous traditions, situations and communities. The huge responsibility of dealing with these issues is what makes Indigenous art exciting and transforms it into socially engaged art. As stated earlier by Agard, an indigenous artist is not focused solely on the individual but is strongly connected to community. The huge sense of responsibility does not lie on the backs of most artists because they are working within the systems of their social norms, which are usually the mainstream community, and have little connection to Indigenous issues. Artists such as Cutchall, Dumas and Mattes deal with political Indigenous issues because that is their lived experience, which is impacting their families, communities, nations and themselves. Therefore there is no choice. This is similar for male Indigenous artists, which complicates the gendered relationships, as discussed in the earlier section of feminism, activism and identity. As McMaster states, in discussion surrounding Indigenous artists Robert Houle and Rebecca Belmore and I would add equally relevant to the three artists I have discussed: "Each of these artists asserts a kind of sovereignty, which is exercised in their art and practice, placing them in

strategic attitudinal situations, unlike our impoverished ancestors who were heavily controlled by legislation. Contemporary aboriginal artists can make choices and they are essential in the articulation of aboriginal people's consciousness of self-determination" (Rushing, 92). This kind of practice and process cannot be compared to other non-Indigenous artists, not to discredit work by people of color or artwork that expresses oppression; it is just a different kind of responsibility. Cutschall, Dumas and Mattes have understood the importance of pedagogy and how this affects peoples' ability to become enrolled in the educational and creative process, which can provide people with tools to resist, making communities stronger. Additionally, they understand first hand the different barriers that people face when trying to access certain sectors of our society and the importance of conducting artwork that is community-based, participatory and creative because the knowledge generated from these areas aid in the struggle of self-determination and stronger communities.

To further compound these issues is the fact that these selected women artists are living outside of the urban areas, which makes them more vulnerable to being invisible to the urban or the larger Canadian art scene. In essence, this is why I chose to focus my research on these women. There are many talented and socially committed Indigenous women artists in urban areas but I wanted to highlight the kind of work that rural and remote women artists do. Their work has a direct impact on the community because it is smaller and more defined. I could relate and understand better to the work because I have lived in some of these communities, which gives me a greater insight into their layers and complexities. Many artists leave their home community to have supports provided by thriving art urban centres, which allows them to grow as an artist but at the same time robs their community of art and culture. Cutschall, Dumas and Mattes have chose to return, communicate or stay in their home region because they are

committed to inspire and create social change. This is why understanding and reflecting on their work is a learning for all people, in particular Indigenous people and nations. Non-Indigenous artists can learn from their work and can decipher the value of including and collaborating with communities, organizations and people, where people can speak, listen and learn.

The strength that is found in re-building and re-defining many Indigenous communities is evident in Cutschall, Dumas and Mattes's artworks. I have had the privilege of viewing the impact first hand by meeting people affected and who were part of the projects. Although, dialogical aesthetics is a relatively new theory in analyzing artwork, there is a lot of value for Indigenous art and socially conscious artists. Through their organic collaborative projects has grown a new kind of artists that has social context, intergenerational impact and community input. As Berman argues that,

Indigenous collaborations speak not only to a growing form of transnational exchange, but raises awareness that globalization need not give way to universal displacement of those who have long positioned at the margins of the political economy, and of art world recognition. The visual voice asserted in the dialogue between international Indigenous artists challenges the notion of Indigenous artists as "fringe dwellers," and shifts the discourse to their own terms, in their own spaces. In these ways, cultural and artistic exchanges extend a gesture, create a bond, and present new challenges to curatorial [and art criticism] practices. Wherever these exchanges take place – on a bus, in a gallery, or sitting around the kitchen table – new sites of negotiation and creativity spring up in unexpected ways" (Mattes & Jones 34).

Understanding the shift of Indigenous collaborative exchange and dialogical artwork is bridging the cultural divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. It allows for Indigenous artists to create their own space on their own terms, which then educates people on the issues focused on in the specific artwork or exchange. These new sites tolerate people continuing the dialogue long after the visual object is out of sight because it is the process and negotiation of exchange and dialogue that permit people to communicate about social and

political issues. These sites of “critical intervention”¹⁵ are infused with social and emotional issues that create a space where Indigenous artists are able to dialogue about concerns facing their communities and nations.

Since dialogical aesthetics is a newly formed theory it is important to note, that it will still have transformations and criticisms. If the reader needs to be critical of the thesis then allow yourself the freedom to understand the state the theory it is in and the important contribution it is making to Indigenous art. In my opinion dialogical aesthetics is crucial to understanding socially-engaged, political performance and site-specific artwork. To analyze, understand, or appreciate artwork in a transitional stage in rural and remote areas of Manitoba and across the world (the examples that Kester states are international) there needs to be a way of conceptualizing it. As Kester states, his goal is not to create a totalizing analytical system but to offer a theoretical framework. This is where I see my thesis continuing to offer a framework in which these artworks can be read and appreciated. There are multiple ways to view Indigenous art and this is one lens that focuses on the processes and outcomes instead of the avant-garde object. It contributes to the spectrum of Indigenous art, values and knowledge. This thesis locates the artists in context of their community, artwork and art practices, which is rarely the case with Indigenous artists. They are usually placed in the background to be viewed only by few people feeling the token need to have their work as part of the larger Canadian art community. I wanted to tell a story about their work and the importance it is bringing to the art world, academia and communities and to include their story about the context in which their art work lies and its links to social, political, cultural and economic issues. Conversations with people across the province of Manitoba have inspired me to bring this artwork to the forefront and discuss social issues in a

¹⁵ See Minwon Kwon’s essay “One Place After Another” in Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985.

creative and dialogical manner. In my view it was never about the hierarchy of art aesthetics or theories, it was about the people performing the role of activist or social change agent in rural and remote areas of Manitoba and the impact of their art and activist practice on creating new spaces. Art in general has in some cases lost touch with the ground level of society and needs to become more in touch or be created from the 'bottom up'. I needed to express the value and contributions Cutschall, Dumas, Brass and Mattes were making in their amazing art projects. The artwork discussed in this thesis is accessible, yet riddled with layers of complex issues facing the artists and their communities. These Indigenous women artists are setting trends and inspiring young artists like myself. I hope they continue on that difficult journey.

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