



***NAMING OURSELVES AS POPULAR EDUCATORS:  
AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY INTO WEST COAST CANADIAN  
ARTISTS' IDENTITY***

DOROTHY LANDER AND ANITA SINNER

**Abstract**

This multimedia essay combines words and images in a creative performance drawn from our 2009 cross-Canada *Whistlestop Project*,<sup>1</sup> a study of the diverse art practices of Canadian popular educators involved in the women's movement. We focus on the Tofino Whistlestop on Vancouver Island on the Pacific Coast, the most westerly point on this research-by-rail journey, which began on the Atlantic coast. The eight participants at *The Common Loaf Bake Shop* in Tofino represented diverse art forms: arts-researcher Dorothy; arts-researcher and photographer Anita; baker-designer Maureen; painter-collagist-muralist Marla; flamenco dancer Thérèse; baker-mosaic artist Stephanie; poet-writer Chris; and, poet-writer-videographer John. This essay unfolds as a *show and tell* of the research participants' art practices as they constitute popular education in the context of arts-based action research methodology of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to generate personal and collective stories of life-affirming experiences of art as popular education. This video essay highlights the relational art of story-telling and story-receiving through gesture, performance, and symbol.

*Keywords: creative performance, gender, popular education, women's movement, arts research, appreciative inquiry*

As part of a larger study, the Whistlestop Project, this video essay focuses on one whistlestop — Tofino, British Columbia — the most westerly point on our cross-Canada journey, which began on the east coast of Canada in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The eight participants in the Tofino Whistlestop — seven women and one man — embodied diverse artists including bakers, poets, photographers, videographers, writers, dancers, and painters; and art forms, including building and landscape design, mosaic, collage, wall murals, handicrafts, chant, and flamenco. This intermedia essay, which embeds still images, audio and video, enacts an appreciative and relational aesthetics of this diversity (Bourriaud, 2002; Cooperider & Srivasta, 1987 on Appreciative Inquiry).<sup>2</sup> Hyper-linked words to open the videos are highlighted throughout the essay.

This funded research project is concerned with how women construct understandings of gender, artist identities, and women's issues in the context of social movements, including the women's movement. We seek to promote dialogue about gender, arts research and artful expression, and their connections to popular education. Our dialogical research exposes and complicates notions of feminism, feminist art, feminist pedagogy, and the women's movement itself: how women art makers also make meaning of self in the world; how relationships shape creation,

---

1. The Whistlestop Project took the form of a cross-Canada research-by-rail journey with 15 whistlestops, comprising the central piece of a federally funded study of the diverse art practices of Canadian popular educators involved in the women's movement (see [womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com](http://womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com)). The whistlestop metaphor serves as a historical connection of the railway to the movement of settler populations and as a subversive twist on politicians' whistlestop practices in the context of election campaigns. The research team agreed: for west-coast collaborator Anita, the name offers "a claiming of the symbolic male domain on several levels – and [in accord with] an artful method of inquiry, the aesthetic of trans-movement in, with, and through spaces and places of significance to women's lives." For east-coast graduate student collaborator, Paula, *whistlestop* "captures the adventurousness of this project, the historical challenges of organizing across such vast geography, and the powerful connections you/we are making in our work."

2. As an entrée to our research process we offer a **glossary** of the key methodological and conceptual terms as we use them in this essay and as they shaped our guiding questions to participants. We invite you to return to these terms as you encounter them throughout this video essay.

consumption, valuing, and dissemination of their works of art; and, how through this process, issues of gender equity and social justice emerge in our learning, teaching, and practice of art.

We begin this process by introducing the eight participants and invite readers to click on each name for a brief account of the nature-nurture influences in their art practice: arts-researcher [Dorothy](#),<sup>3</sup> also a teacher in university and community education; baker [Maureen](#), also a peace activist and anti-logging environmentalist; painter-collagist [Marla](#), also an advocate for women artists; and flamenco dancer [Thérèse](#), also a practitioner of the healing arts. We include the responses of the other artist-participants—poet-videographer [John](#), also a pediatrician and art-medicine pioneer; photographer [Anita](#), also a teacher and arts-based researcher; baker-mosaic artist [Stephanie](#), also a fierce advocate for parents and children; and poet-writer [Chris](#), also a community activist—to underscore how the relational, including power relations, infuses art practice and artists' gatherings. In this essay, we represent in more depth three research participants—Maureen, Marla, and Thérèse—who serve to illustrate the strong connections between visual culture, gender, and popular education. The responding participants also shed light on the aspects of visual culture and gender situated in this unique grouping at one time and one place on the west coast of Canada.

In Tofino as in all 15 whistlestops, our first criterion for selection of participants was to create a gathering representative of diverse art forms. The process often began with just one person we knew—Anita and Chris have been friends since grade 8—with the remaining participants often emerging as serendipity rather than a planned choice. Anita, as our Vancouver Island point person, put out an invitation for volunteers through the arts groups in Tofino. John, as Dorothy's partner and traveling companion from east to west coast, *volunteered* as videographer for all the whistlestops, including Tofino (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Videographer John Graham-Pole preparing to record the Tofino Whistlestop

### Introduction to the Dialogical Intermedia Study



Figure 2a: The outdoor signage for *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*, Tofino, Vancouver Island

The overall research project focuses on the art of women popular educators—needlecraft, visual arts, music, popular theatre, and writing, especially autobiography—in the context of the women's movement. We conducted 15 whistlestops across Canada to assess the convergence of art, feminism, and popular education in historical and contemporary contexts. In the Tofino Whistlestop, we share moments that demonstrate arts

research in action through the participatory and creative expression of women. As you watch the videos embedded in this essay and its setting

3. The text in purple bold font are hyperlinks to video clips, images, or other external sites.



in *The Common Loaf Bake Shop* (see Figures 2a-c), imagine the aroma of freshly baked loaves wafting up the stairs to our sunlit octagonal space in the turret. The bakery itself is an art form. As our first exemplar of art that makes a difference in community, listen and watch Maureen describing the moment in the design and building process when she knew this was going to be a “**power spot**” for healing and community.



Figure 2b: *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*, owned and operated by Maureen Fraser

This multimedia essay demonstrates how research doubles as creative performance and popular education. The images in the short video clips are out of order and words are mashed up in this rendering. These connecting layers of creative expression are allied with our methodological choice of appreciative inquiry—arts-based, participatory research that brings forward new ways

of learning in community and of disseminating research that represents participants’ voices.



Figure 2c: Maureen and Dorothy at the counter of *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*

## Art as Popular Education

Naming the world in order to change it, so central to Paulo Freire’s ideas of **popular education**, underpins this project of *naming* individual women and their groups/organizations as popular educators, as defined by their use of the popular culture forms—song, dance, handi-crafts, quilting, poetry, fashion, culinary and gardening arts, storytelling, and autobiography. As illustrated in the first short video clips introducing our participants, naming our world began with our introductions. Dorothy invited participants to name their mothers and foremothers by their first names, and to name the “nature and nurture” influences in their art practices. As **John** acknowledges, he did not know his grandmothers’ first names—they were simply “Grandma.”

Naming is also involved in our methodological choices. For this inquiry, Dorothy coined the term *appreciative genealogy* as a braiding of feminist, auto/biographical, arts-based, participatory, and genealogical methods. Appreciative genealogy then is the study of diverse art forms integrated by auto/biography and personal/family narrative, which women artists participating in this study use as popular education. Most of the west coast women participating in the Tofino Whistlestop were more comfortable with naming themselves as artists than as popular educators. For many, popular education was not a familiar concept. Our appreciative inquiry conversation in Tofino qualifies as popular education in that all the participants were involved in the learning process, including Dorothy and Anita as the facilitators, and John Graham-Pole as the videographer. Our popular education process of learners *with* teachers began with each of us naming our own art practices as exemplars of social change in the context of women’s empowerment and women’s rights. Highlighting the connection between popular education and arts-based research, our inquiry used non-traditional learning methods drawn from popular culture, especially story-telling, performance, and a lot of humor.

The immediate evidence of the transformative power of naming came in the closing moments, when two of our west coast artists explicitly recognized their practice as popular education for the first time. Flamenco dancer Thérèse said that she wanted to “borrow [Dorothy’s] word education” to capture what she would take from our inquiry: “Remem-

bering that it does not have to be a lecture but any spark of art, any spark of creative energy can be educational.” Painter-muralist Marla makes a similar connection between art and education: “I think sometimes for us as creative people there *is* an education in this ... trying to show people, yes, this is important because if we did not have this out there this would be a hellish horrible planet. We are the dreamers and creators of what makes it so beautiful.”

### The Tofino Whistlestop: An Appreciative Inquiry

Our group of eight came together at *The Common Loaf Bake Shop* in the spring of 2009, including women involved in the culinary arts, visual arts, literary arts and performance arts. In accord with appreciative inquiry, our conversation began with an invitation to share a story, performance or display that affirmed the power of art in advocating for women. Some participants brought personal artifacts that represented women’s empowerment or rights. Exemplars in the form of stories, symbols, gestures, and performances emerge from the participants’ responses.

Our meeting was videotaped, audiotaped and photographed. Such multi-media “data” stories of quality moments of art in the context of social justice for women and children, accord with anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake’s (1992) definition of art as “the desire to make something special” (p. 60), so integral to the human condition. We chose the research methodology known as appreciative inquiry (AI) because we wanted to evoke exemplary stories of art empowering women and advocating for women’s rights, drawn from the participants’ lived experiences.

Some of the dialogue grows faint against background noise at the bakery, and some of the images blur with the panning of the camera to the next speaker, but at the same time, this rawness of sound chasing images expresses the jerky realities of everyday interactions. During this group meeting we were immersed in the visual expressions and oral conversations that constitute appreciative inquiry. These became part of the research blog, [www.womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com](http://www.womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com), a website to communicate the participants, methods, and results of this research project. The site features art exemplars of popular education across

three generations of the women’s movement, and it is a feedback site for reaching additional artists and popular educators who advocate for women and children in the context of social movements allied with the women’s movement. Alerts of upcoming events and press releases relating to women’s issues as well as organizations and programs for women, complete with hyperlinks to these resources, are available on the blog.

Recognizing the power of individual life stories in concert with the group theorizing and action plans that appreciative inquiry draws out of these stories, we integrate video with text in this essay through the voices, words, symbols, and performances of our participants. By transcribing the conversations of women artists and including their words as a central feature of this article, we seek to position our research as a creative performance, while sustaining the narrative thread for transnational readers whose access to electronic media may be limited. Our performance is an example of *intermedia*, a hybrid expression that crosses genres within arts research, blending aspects of visual, textual, and digital media through analog photography, video and audio recordings.

Whereas the video performance highlights embodied creative expression with voice as a backdrop, we use voice transcriptions as supporting evidence for theory-into-practice, as outlined in the research aims of the overall research project. For example, we concur with feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1996) that *relations* between the sexes is a central consideration in constituting gender identity. We also hold with Judith Butler (1999) in noting how our research participants challenge the cultural norms of gender identity through ‘subversive repetitions’ of the power relations between the sexes. Recall Maureen’s wry tone when she talks about her design choice for *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*, harkening back to “my princess days. ... I’ve always wanted a turret.” Along with the gales of laughter that this remark evoked, and Maureen’s later stories of her role and the bakery’s in the anti-logging protest in 1993, the largest instance of civil disobedience in Canada, she is clearly subverting the stereotypical princess image by repeating it ironically. Maureen is no Rapunzel waiting for her prince to come! Our exemplars pull out threads from the conversation that support the relational pattern of gender, sometimes overlapping with other patterns of difference, especially class, age and generation, and language.



## Methods

We adapt the arts-based methodology, *appreciative inquiry* (AI), which, like popular education, has as its primary tool individual and group sharing of personal stories (see Lander, 2005a; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2007). We invited participants to draw not only on story-telling but also on gesture, performance, and symbol to bring their experiences to life — the authenticity of everyday use. An *unconditional positive question* (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001) defines the subject under inquiry, for example: “Think of a time when you had a [*insert* life-affirming *descriptor*, e.g., inspiring, instructive, authentic] experience in your [*insert* unique work/life *context*].” The theory-into-practice potential of AI emerges from its generative capacity, which shifts the focus from what’s wrong to what works, “from a question of whether a theory corresponds with observed facts to a question of whether a theory offers provocative possibilities for action” (Cowling, 1999, p. 133). Its appreciative stance inspires in participants collective theorizing and plans of action to illuminate what is crucial, and identify what is miraculous—simply “to enact more of what is good” (Cowling, 1999, p. 133).

The diverse artists gathered in Tofino offered insights into what is important to women artists as popular educators in response to Dorothy’s “unconditional positive question” and Anita’s follow-up questions. Dorothy’s initiating open-ended question to each participant took the form of: “Can you think of a time when your art form made a positive, life-changing difference in your own life, or in the lives of women and children and in your community? Or perhaps when you witnessed women’s art making a positive, life-changing difference for themselves and their community?” As arts-based researchers, Dorothy and Anita guided the conversation toward making these connections, using the arts-based research methodology called appreciative inquiry (AI). In order to evoke performance art alongside narrative art, we invited participants not only with the question: “can you *tell* us a time when ...” but also “can you *show* us a time when ...” For example, Dorothy’s follow up question to Thérèse’s story of how she came to include flamenco in her healing arts practice, was “Can you show us the fire?” As arts-based participatory research and popular education, appreciative inquiry focuses on commu-

nity dialogue to discover the resources and values of a program, group, or community as a foundation for imagining, designing, and co-creating a preferred future. In participatory research, autobiography becomes a critically reflexive and dialogical practice that recognizes that story threads through the diverse art forms of popular education. Ellis (2002) advocates personal narratives interwoven with social biographies as the primary data for studying social movements, including mixed genres of “performances, consensual, readers’ and community theater, dance, music, documentaries, photography, multivoiced presentations, multimedia presentations, and art” (p. 403).

## Representing Participants’ Voices through Exemplars

Representing research through exemplars is a common feature of qualitative and arts-based research (see Chenail, 1995; Lindlof, 1995; Mishler, 1990; Neilsen, 1998; Smith, 1990; Vaill, 1998). Exemplars, unlike examples in which any illustration will do, are chosen to “represent” the phenomenon succinctly, and to animate the participants’ and the researcher’s own voice (Lindlof, 1995, p. 268). Exemplars embody the whole approach a paradigm is concerned with, in terms of people, events and physical symbols (Vaill, 1998, p. 147).

Chenail (1995) and Smith (1990) more narrowly extract exemplars from the data to re-present and code the phenomenon around one concept or category at a time. Smith conceives of organizing data representation as “botanizing,” that is, making a collection of “specimens,” of people’s practices and speech acts so as to explicate the concept or category of social activity. Instead of bringing back specimens of flowers or leaves for examination of complex relations within nature, we bring back “texts of or about femininity that give us access to the social organization of these relations” (Smith, 1990, p. 124).

Lindlof (1995) recognizes the rhetorical and narrative thrust of exemplars in that “exemplars make a text ‘eventful’” (p. 267), and “exemplars are very important to the crafting of a rhetorically persuasive research text” (p. 229). Atkinson (1990) also identifies the rhetorical potency of exemplars: “Such ‘forceful’ examples are provided as rhetorical devices which may help the readers enter into the author’s argument”

(p. 91). Mishler (1990) prefers to differentiate qualitative and interpretive approaches from hypothesis-testing experimentation with the application of exemplars in ‘inquiry-guided’ research.

And so it is that we present exemplars as they emerged throughout the process of our appreciative inquiry with the women artists of Tofino, as a way to inquiry into the connections between art and popular education.

### **Exemplar 1: Connecting Art and Popular Education**

*One cinnamon bun at a time.* (Marla)

**Maureen** changed from her career as a social worker—and the “negativity that surrounds that job”—to operating a bakery in Tofino, where she was “then surrounded by people who are happy, everybody is happy around food.”

Maureen: The bakeshop has become the environmental hotspot. ... I guess I identify cinnamon buns as being a—if there was a *connection between art and education*—the peace camp created here in 1993, the largest incident of civil disobedience in Canadian history [against the clear cutting logging operation on Clayoquot Sound]. And each day during that summer, the bakeshop sent 24 cinnamon buns, they were picked up every morning by one of the peace camp[ers]. That was our specific connection all summer long with the peace camp—plus peasant bread and other stuff. And then the constant educational information that continued to be given out at the front counter—[to] everybody that came through that door: “This is what is going on, this is the part you can play, this is how important it is.” I self identify this as the role I’ve been able to play. I’ve only been able to play that role because of the bakery products that I’m producing, that bring people in the front door.

I love being able to share this space—the warmth and the

colours. ... I was quite often dealing with artists from my political places. ... There is a difference here between people with an artistic sensibility—and I certainly didn’t identify myself as having that sensibility—and people I was normally engaged with, who were these political practical people, who I had spent a couple of decades with. ... Now I kinda get why my engagement with artists for the last 20 years. I felt like I was sliding off some way, connecting.

Dorothy: Can you think of some other groups that used this venue as their cauldron for action?

Marla: Does the Chamber of Commerce count?

Maureen: Our Chamber of Commerce does. ... It was an absolutely critical period when the women, business women of Tofino, got together and took over the Tofino Chamber of Commerce.

Marla: That is exactly what is happening right now [in nearby Ucluelet].

Maureen: That’s what made it a radical transition, which was the main kingpin in starting the whole environmental movement, and assessment. The Chamber of Commerce was the start of that. We just went to the meeting, the AGM, one year and took it over absolutely—the President, the Vice-President.

Marla: One cinnamon bun at a time! [Laughter]

Dorothy: Artful places teach, I feel that is the theme I’m going to take away with me.

Environmental activism is allied with both the arts and the women’s movement (Clover, 2000). Feminist educators and health professionals (notably Florence Nightingale) have long recognized the symbiotic relationship between caring for people and caring for the earth

(see Schuster, 1990). “We as humans inhabit, are integral to, and are in exchange with a universe pulsating with life, vigor, zest, and birthing” (Clover, 2000, p. 28). The business women of Tofino taking over the Chamber of Commerce adds another layer to Darlene Clover’s observation about the connection between popular education and the arts, revealing that it is not only “feminist adult educators [who] have long understood the way in which community arts can make ‘visible’ the invisible in society—how they can stimulate dialogue around women’s productive and reproductive roles in society which have been systematically ignored or marginalized” (p. 21). The west coast women of Tofino remind us that women from many walks of life have this “long understanding.”

The cinnamon bun exemplar is reminiscent of Felshin’s (1995) observations on the convergence of activist art with the practice of freedom: “As a practice, it [art] often takes the form of temporary interventions such as performance or performance-based activities. ... Whether the forms of these activities are permanent or impermanent, the process of their creation is as important as its visual or physical manifestation” (p. 10).

## Exemplar 2: The Personal is the Political

*These are all the names that women have been labelled.* (Marla)

Women’s auto/biography as emancipatory practice maintains a critically reflexive perspective in keeping with the slogan from the 1960s: “the personal is the political” (Mansfield, 2005). The following exchange between Chris and Marla points to the political potential of dialogue for critical reflection, or “critical consciousness,” to use Paulo Freire’s (1973) popular education term.

Chris: I think I would have found the whole thing [of writing] a little easier if I was a guy, no offence [addressed to John] but I do.

Marla: Oh my favorite topic!

Marla responded with her personal narrative of the challenges of being recognized (and paid) as a visual artist in a man’s world. Maureen responded with her observations of women’s conflict at the bakery counter. As Margaret Ledwith (2005) argues, it is just such personal narratives that are central to praxis and “a critical stage in the process of collective action” (p. 258). Marla’s story reveals a deeply reflexive process of “weaving critical connections between personal lives and the structures of society which differently shape life chances” (pp. 258-259). Moreover, this “narrative approach engages with the personal as political by linking voice to narrative through our ‘little stories’ ... that make the vital connection between the deeply personal and the profoundly political” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010, p. 125). Witness Maureen and Marla engaged in Freire-style naming of dehumanizing realities in order to transform them.

**Marla:** We [artists] are worth more dead than alive. ... People constantly want to bargain with you. ... It’s usually the people who have no reality on what you sweat over, and literally stayed up nights being sleepless on the whole process. That’s where you get really weird comments: “It is paint by number.” ... Women in the arts, **it’s a harder journey for us**. One, because I think we’re in some ways perceived as not serious. **A guy does what you do**, he is more serious. He makes money, he get[s] **the prominent thing**. Ok, I gave birth to two boys and I hope they make it in the world but my journey is a hundred times harder than what my son is going to go through. To get notices in galleries and get the same kind of money that guys make. I don’t know, I may be wrong on this but I think the vast majority of critics are male, which has a hell of a lot to do with it. How did they ever get to be the voice of what’s right and what’s good or whatever?

**Maureen:** How many new chefs are female? It’s now recognized but still the leaders in the field are men. It’s taken to an art form by men. I think that’s changing but it’s a harder road. ... There’s some confliction that women have—you know, I see it at the



counter every day. Women say it looks fabulous but it's going to make me fat. There's a whole conflict at the counter that men don't have. But still, there's a general positiveness—a joy that gives recognition back to me.

Marla (referencing her painting, see Figure 3):



Figure 3: Icon by Marla Thirsk,<sup>4</sup> 2008 ([www.marlathirsk.com](http://www.marlathirsk.com))

Around this, the women you are going to see are the names that women have ever been labelled. ... But the most disturbing images that I found when I was gathering all these things together were actually my son's skateboard magazines. Some of the pictures in there are of young girls, taken when they were very, very drunk, their skirts pulled up really high, their pants half down. The one that I've got in there is a girl who was very drunk and she is completely naked on a skateboard. ... We're still perpetuating this, but yet we're still the **Madonna** image.

4. ICON: Size 36 x 40"; Medium: Mixed media acrylic with collage, gold leaf and Letraset lettering.

Through their stories, images, and performances, Marla and Maureen reinforce the “personal is political” but also remind us that “the reverse is just as true—the political is personal” (Ellis, 2002, p. 403). Social movement research, including research on the women's movement and environmental movement, has tended to “concentrate on abstraction and collective perspective” (ibid). Popular education through appreciative inquiry connects collective action to “personal biography and emotionality ... allow[ing] us to tie abstract movement theory to the personal stories of those who enact movements” (ibid).

### Exemplar 3: The Embodied Learning of Performance Art

*All emotions are allowed to be expressed. ... It's not about being pretty and proper.*

*Viva el Flamenco!*

Thérèse: I'd been working really hard 20 years now [in the healing arts] and I wanted to do something more physical. I love flamenco dancing and it's very complex music and very beautiful. I started dancing and soon I was hooked. **Flamenco** is not about being pretty and proper. It's about expressing what is not always allowed in other types of dance—your anger, your sadness, your passion, your fire. So it give[s] me that way of expressing myself and I taught a little bit—young women getting ready to go to Spain—that with their body, they could express themselves, such a gift. When we do local performances here, it feels like that too, a way of expressing in our body, that it's ok to be angry or whatever else we want to express. There are some men who do flamenco, but mostly it's women, and all emotions, it's very feminine that way. All emotions are allowed to be expressed. ... It's like tap dancing except it has a lot more fire. **Viva el Flamenco!**

Critical autobiography constitutes genealogy in the embodied interplay of power and knowledge. Thérèse's description of the



transgressive power of flamenco in expressing emotions (see Figure 4) that might not be allowed in “pretty” dance movements, illustrates this interplay: “the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault, 1980, p. 39).

Figure 4: Thérèse, Flamenco Dance at *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*, Tofino, March 2009

#### Exemplar 4: Relational Art for Relational Learning

*When I watch flamenco dance it is me up there! It is all of us and there is no barrier.* (Chris)

The Tofino Whistlestop offered abundant evidence of Nicolas Bourriaud’s (1992) belief that human interactions and social encounters are the creative material of art. Listening and attention are central art practices in popular education and participatory inquiry and we knew that Marla had been listening attentively to both Stephanie’s and Maureen’s stories. She responded to Stephanie’s comment—“*I don’t know how we are going to change stuff [in Ucluelet] but at least we know each other better*”—with her hands flying: “*One cinnamon bun at a time.*”

Maureen connects the healing qualities of the bakery and Thérèse’s dance to its impact on the community when she talks about the creative process of designing and building the bakery: “There is a single tree down below us in the middle that Thérèse was dancing on top of. A

single tree holding it all up, all of that when ... just the post and beams were here.” But it is perhaps Chris’s “thank you” response to Thérèse’s dance (see Figure 5) that reminds us that we are hard-wired for relational art, or as Ellen Dissanayake (1992) explicates in *Homo Aestheticus*, “human social existence is based on sharing and reciprocity, giving and receiving. ... When gifts are given, offerings made, wealth displayed, they are made special, arranged to show their sumptuousness and beauty” (p. 107). Visual display has been “one of the primary arenas for development of the arts, not only in gift-giving but also in self-presentation where one’s own appearance is a kind of ‘gift’” (p. 108).

**Chris:** If you have ever seen her dance, she absolutely embodies that. When I see flamenco dance performances, with other dance performances I might be sitting in the audience saying why isn’t that me up there? When I watch flamenco dance it *is* me up there! It is all of us and there is no barrier, it is so good! So thank you for doing that.



Figure 5: Thérèse dancing on top of the single tree at the centre of *The Common Loaf Bake Shop*.

Chris’s experience of watching flamenco is reminiscent of “not only a multimedia performance, but a multimedia *duet*” (p. 86) that Dissanayake poses as a human birthright, based on her research on mother-infant interactions across cultures. Chris’s response to flamenco dance is akin to this human universal of “mothers, or caregivers, subtly adjust[ing] rhythmically patterned and dynamically varied visual, vocal, and gestural behaviors to the infant’s own changing visual, vocal, and gestural expressions of emotional state” (p. 86).



### *Significance to Visual Culture and Gender*

The Tofino Whistlestop manifested the research project's specific aims of linking valued art practices of women popular educators to current women's issues. Our art exemplars present possibilities for popular education practice, policy and future research, befitting the slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights." Witness Maureen and the role of her cinnamon buns in the environment and peace movement of the early 1990s, in which the members of the peace camp were mostly women and the loggers entirely men. Marla makes the point that her son's skateboard magazines still perpetuate the paradoxical images of women as Madonna and whore. Artists as the executive members of the Chamber of Commerce mark a shift from earlier generations of the women's movement when most of the members and leaders of community organizations were male. The Tofino Whistlestop augments our interactive, multi-media website by presenting diverse art forms favoured by historical and contemporary popular educators allied with advocacy for women. It offers a resource for developing a critical analysis of cultural "difference," including class, race, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, language, rural/urban, able-bodied, age—through the lens of gender. Consider francophone Thérèse teaching younger anglophone women about getting in touch with their body and their emotions through the **"fire" of flamenco**: "Viva el Flamenco," as she says. With reference to all the research participants featured in the video clips and text, the Tofino Whistlestop reinforces the use of auto/biographical art forms in contemporary popular education and public policy. Art and autobiography play an exemplary role in the business women of Tofino taking over the executive positions in the Chamber of Commerce.

The Tofino study challenges a romantic belief that much of the current **creative energy** in feminist activism comes from outside of Western Europe and North America "in the vibrant networks of women's groups, gender institutes, and feminist coalitions in Africa, Asia and South America," featuring the politico-cultural performances of music/theatre/dance groups and art collectives (Call for Submissions, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 2006, see [www.poems-and-poetry.com/category/press-releases/page/2](http://www.poems-and-poetry.com/category/press-releases/page/2)). The braiding of methodologies—that include

appreciative inquiry, autoethnography, and critical auto/biography—render this research an original, politically-situated approach to popular education practice and policy. The *Women's Studies Quarterly* issue that came out of this call for submissions on *activisms*, includes an article on gender inequity in the art world (Dumlao, Kaufmann, Mysliviec, & Polashencki, 2007). Marla's satirical representation of gender inequities in the Canadian west coast art world is the stuff of the *Brainstormers* art collective ([www.brainstormersreport.net](http://www.brainstormersreport.net)), who "through public performance, exhibition, publication, internet, and video has forced discussion on ... the New York art world's refusal to accept female artists as the equals of male artists" (p. 145).

The sign of a successful inquiry from the perspective of the Canadian east coast researchers was particularly vivid in Tofino. In the midst of our goodbyes, these Canadian west coast artists and popular educators already were abuzz with ideas for a larger gathering of the arts in Tofino—dancers, painters, singers, bakers, gardeners, drummers, poets, and photographers and ... and ... and.

### **An Invitation**

Given the purpose of this study and the active engagement of participants in this research, we would like to invite readers and viewers of this multimedia essay to join this conversation and blog on these issues and more. Please visit our website: <http://womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com>

We look forward to your responses and we hope you will add yourself and other popular educators and/or women artists who share a concern and interest for sustaining feminist perspectives. We invite your stories as women artists, artists concerned with feminism, and your responses to the stories of others. We are working to build this site into an online community that includes researchers, academics, students, popular educators, and perhaps most importantly, the general public.



## Glossary

(Return to beginning)

**Art.** In accord with evolutionary anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake's definition in *Homo Aestheticus* (1992), art and creative expression are relationally constituted human universals, a hard-wired aptitude that infuses all cultures and attends all major human transitions. Nicolas Bourriard (1992) takes a similar position in *Relational Aesthetics*: art is located in human interactions and social encounters (see Jones, 2006).

**Arts-based Research.** Also known as arts-informed research, "a way of redefining research form and representation ... to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible. The methodology infuses the languages, processes, and forms of literary, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). Arts-based research practices are in play during all phases of the research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation (Leavy, 2009, p. 2).

**Intermedia.** A hybrid expression that crosses genres within arts-based research, blending aspects of visual, textual, and digital media through analog photography and audio recordings.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI)** (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). A five-step (5-D) participatory, change-oriented, arts-based action research methodology that illuminates, enables, and transforms the subject under study:  
*Define:* Establish a conceptual and contextual frame, using an unconditional positive question;  
*Discover:* Value the best of what is;  
*Dream:* Envision what might be; *Design:* Dialogue what should be;  
*Destiny:* Innovate what will be.

AI draws on personal and group sharing of positive stories, gestures, performances, and symbols to uncover the resources within a community as a basis to imagine and co-create optimal futures (Whitney, Cooperrider, Garrison, & Moore, 2002).

**Unconditional positive question.** An essential component of Appreciative Inquiry, which DEFINES the subject under inquiry, and initiates the DISCOVER phase, e.g.: "Tell us of a time when you experienced/witnessed an [*insert life-affirming descriptor*, e.g., inspiring] event/activity that led to group action, swayed public opinion, or even influenced public policy." The question is unconditional in that it requires an openness to learn, asking people to "let go of their 'givens': what they consider to be real, true, and certain ... and journey into the unknown. ... People become curious rather than contentious, listeners rather than insisters, and co-creators rather than naysayers" (Whitney, Cooperrider, Garrison, & Moore, 2002, p. 179).

**Exemplar.** The representation of data in arts-based research that draws attention to the content and process of embodied participants doing the inquiry. Unlike examples, exemplars are selected for their spot-on relevance to the focus of inquiry, which, in turn, is determined by how authentically they represent and animate subjects' and researchers' own voices (Lindlof, 1995). Exemplars are consistent with Lorri Neilsen's (1998) "academy of the kitchen table," a call for an inquiry process that "displays our lives rather than conceals them" (p. 152) that forces us to name power relations: "the tensions and the power of working together at the same level, facing each other, eye to eye" (p. 159).

**Popular Education.** A teaching methodology often associated with Brazilian literacy educator Paulo Freire and defined in terms of his book titles: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973). The participatory learning process, which starts with participants (learners "with" teachers) each identifying and describing their own personal experience to a group of learners, is congruent with Appreciative Inquiry. Aimed at empowering people who feel marginalized socially and politically to take control of their own learning and to effect social change, the process distinguishes it from formal education (e.g., schools) and informal education (learning by living). (see *The Popular Education News*, November 2005: <http://www.popednews.org/newsletters/definitions.html>). Popular education is allied to art through

its use of non-traditional learning methods drawn from popular culture art forms, e.g., song, fashion, dance, poetry, murals, and banners.

**Gender.** A non-fixed category of identity, evoking Judith Butler's (1999) assertion that all identity is performative. Thus gender is produced through the repeated performances of cultural norms of femininity and masculinity and the binary (il)logic of male/female sexed bodies. Gender categories of identity/subjectivity are never fully constituted, and consistent with Butler's notion of subversive repetition, subjects resist, refuse, and rework normative (and unjust) identity categories, thereby reconstituting themselves (see Lander, 2007).

**The Women's Movement.** Also known as the *feminist movement*. Although we use the definitive article "the" throughout this essay, the movement is not a monolith. The goals and campaigns of the movement on such issues as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, voting rights, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, vary from country to country, e.g., opposition to female genital cutting in Sudan or the glass ceiling in the minority world (see [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/feminist\\_movement](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/feminist_movement)). We favor the term "generations" over the convenient division of the modern movement into three "waves" (see Jacob & Licona, 2005; Purvis, 2004) while recognizing the latter's conceptual value:

- the first wave: separate-spheres, maternal feminism (19th and early 20th century);
- the second wave: radical feminism (1960s), small group work, consciousness-raising, sexual and reproductive politics, anti-colonial struggles, and civil rights;
- the third wave: young women, also known as grrrls, transnational post-feminism (21st century), multiculturalism, transgender relations, identity formation, and Internet, military and bio-technologies.

Our own writings challenge these categories by pointing out many instances of transgenerational feminism manifest in common art practices (see Forsythe & Lander, 2003; Lander, 2005b; Sinner, 2010).

## References<sup>5</sup>

- Atkinson, Paul (1990). *The ethnographic imagination: Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Borriaud, Nicolas (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Les Presses du Reel.
- Butler, Judith (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chenail, Ronald (1995). *Presenting qualitative data. The Qualitative Report*, 2(3). Retrieved from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-3/presenting.html>
- Chapman, Valerie-Lee (2003). Conker(quer) time again: How to win at boys' games. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 17(2), 20-38.
- Clover, Darlene (2000). Community arts as environmental activism: A labour and environment case study. *Convergence*, 33(4), 19-31.
- Cole, Ardra, & Knowles, J. Gary (2008). Arts-informed research. In A. Cole & J. G. Knowles (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 55-81). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cooperrider, David L., & Srivastva, Suresh (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In W. A. Passmore & R. W. Woolman (Eds.), *Research in organizational change and development* (Vol. I, pp. 129-169). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Cowling, W. Richard (1999). A unitary-transformative nursing science: Potentials for transcending dichotomies. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 12, 132-137.
- Dissanayake, Ellen (1992). *Homo aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Dumlao, Maria; Kaufmann, Elaine; Mysliviec, Danielle; & Polashenski, Anne (2007). Brainstormers and gender inequity in the art world. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 35(3/4), 144-149.

---

5. The practice of using the full first names of authors in the Reference section is itself an exemplar of visual culture and gender. While otherwise conforming to the APA style guide, in accordance with feminist bibliographic procedures, we take as our model Valerie-Lee Chapman's (2003) poststructural analysis of women working for change in university adult education.

- Ellis, Carolyn (2002). Being real: Moving inward toward social change. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), 399-406.
- Forsythe, Angela M., & Lander, Dorothy A. (2003). A reflexive inquiry of two non-smokers: A trans-generational tale of social gospel and social norms marketing. *Reflective Practice*, 4(2), 139-161.
- Foucault, Michel (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). New York: Pantheon.
- Freire, Paulo (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, Paulo (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Harding, Sandra (1996). Gendered ways of knowing and the “epistemological crisis” of the West. In N. Goldberger, J. Tarule, B. Clinchy, & M. Belenky (Eds.), *Knowledge, difference, and power: Essays inspired by Women’s Ways of Knowing* (pp. 431-455). New York: Basic Books.
- Jacob, Krista, & Licon, Adela C. (2005). Writing the waves: A dialogue on the tools, tactics and tensions of feminisms and feminist practices over time and place. *NWSA Journal*, 17(1), 197-205.
- Jones, Kip (2006). A biographic researcher in pursuit of an aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)presentations in “performative” dissemination of life stories. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2(1), 66-85.
- Lander, Dorothy A. (2005a). Appreciative inquiry. In L. M. English (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of adult education* (pp. 63-68). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lander, Dorothy A. (2005b). The ribbon workers as popular educators: [Re]-presenting the colours of the Crusades. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 37(1), 47-62.
- Lander, Dorothy A. (2007). Performativity. In G. L. Anderson & K. G. Herr (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of activism and social justice* (Vol. 2, pp.1108-1111). London: Sage.
- Lander, Dorothy A., & Graham-Pole, John (2007). The appreciative pedagogy of palliative care: Arts-based or evidence-based? *International Journal for Learning Through the Arts: A Research Journal on Arts Integration in Communities*, 2(1), Article 15. (Theme Issue on Health Care) [On-line]. Available from <http://repositories.cdlib.org/clta/ita/vol2/iss1/art15>
- Leavy, Patricia (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Ledwith, Margaret (2005). Personal narratives/political lives: Personal reflection as a tool for collective change. *Reflective Practice*, 6(2), 255-262.
- Ledwith, Margaret, & Springett, Jane (2010). *Participatory practice: Community-based action for transformative change*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Lindlof, Thomas (1995). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ludema, James D., Cooperrider, David L., & Barrett, Frank J. (2001). Appreciative inquiry: The power of the unconditional positive question. In Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury (Eds.), *Action research: Participatory inquiry & practice* (pp. 189-199). London: Sage.
- Mansfield, Sue (2005). Researching women’s auto/biography as emancipatory practice. In Jim Crowther, Vernon Galloway & Ian Martin (Eds.), *Popular education: Engaging the academy* (pp. 110-122). Leicester, UK: NIACE.
- Mishler, Elliot (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in narrative studies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(4), 415-442.
- Neilsen, Lorri (1998). *Knowing her place: Research literacies and feminist occasions*. Great Tancook Island, Nova Scotia: Backalong Books.
- The Popular Education News. (n.d.). “What is Popular Education?” Definition of the Month from back issues of *The Popular Education News*. Retrieved from <http://www.popednews.org/newsletters/definitions.html>
- Purvis, Jennifer (2004). Grrrls and women together in the Third Wave: Embracing the challenges of intergenerational feminism(s). *NWSA Journal*, 16(3), 93-123.
- Schuster, Eleanor (1990). Earth caring. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 13(1), 25-30.
- Sinner, Anita (2010). Negotiating spaces: The in-betweenness of



becoming a teacher. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(1), 23-37.

Smith, Dorothy (1990). *Texts, facts, and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling*. London: Routledge.

Vaill, Peter (1998). *Spirited leading and learning: Process wisdom for a new age*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Whitney, Diana, Cooperider, David L., Garrison, Maureen, & Moore, Jean (2002). Appreciative inquiry and culture change at GTE: Launching a positive revolution. In R. Fry, F. Barrett, J. Seiling & D. Whitney (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry and organizational transformation* (pp. 165-180). Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

### **About the Authors**

Dorothy Lander is Senior Research Professor of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Her teaching and research practice focuses on the art of women activists as educators and learners in the women's movement across three generations, encompassing peace, temperance, suffrage, cooperatives, art-in-medicine, palliative and hospice care.

Anita Sinner is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University. Her research interests include arts research methods, life writing, teacher culture and digital media.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to the authors at [dlander@stfx.ca](mailto:dlander@stfx.ca) (Lander) and [anita.sinner@concordia.ca](mailto:anita.sinner@concordia.ca) (Sinner)

### **Funding Acknowledgement**

We gratefully acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting this research.