

# **Identity, Image and Meaning Beyond the Classroom: Visual and Performative Communicative Practice in a Visual 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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## **Volume 1**

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this Thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree.

Signed.....Date

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# Table of Contents

## Volume 1

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
A Practitioner's Journey	4
Questions to be Addressed by the Research	8
Significance of the Research in Terms of its Relevance to Trends and Issues in Theory, Research and Practice	14
Overview of the Research Approach	24
 <b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	 <b>34</b>
Subjectivity, Identity and Culture	34
Communicative Knowing, Reflexivity, Art, the Artist and Identity	49
Identity, Visuality, Representation and Embodied Knowing	62
Visual Art Education: Ways of Knowing and Meaning-making	79
Visual Art Curriculum in Australia: the NSW Context	97
 <b>Chapter 3: Methodology: Visual Inquiry Informing Qualitative Methods</b>	 <b>114</b>
Through the Eyes of an Artist Educator	115
Defining the Visual Art Inquiry Study	117
Inquiring with a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodology Using Image and Text	119
Data Handling	130
Longitudinal Document Analysis of ARTEXPRESS Works	134
Case Studies	137
 <b>Chapter 4: Results Stage 1, Part 1, Longitudinal Study</b>	 <b>146</b>
Introduction: Seeing, Imagining, Reflecting and Communicative Participation	146
The 'who am I?' question	147
Visual Learning Montages and Messages on Identity	154

<b>Chapter 5: Results, Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study</b>	<b>189</b>
Case Study Student 1 - Abby: 'The expressive me'	193
Case Study Student 2 - Patrick: 'Inside the piano and inside me'	203
Case Study Student 3 - Ceara: 'What I'm not' portraits on Australian culture'	208
Case Study Student 4 - Joe: 'Behind the mask, the comic as allegory'	217
Case Study Students 5 - Pete and Tom: 'Making things and expressing things'	225
Case Study Student 6 - Beth: 'My name is Vern: Identity Change, The Eighth Day'	233

## **Volume 2**

<b>Chapter 6: Results, Stage 2, Meta-inference: Identity as a personal Expressive, Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking</b>	<b>243</b>
Visuality, Identity and the Personal Expressive Narrative	245
Visuality, Identity and the Social and Culturally Constructed Expressive Self	258
Visual Performative Pedagogy	272

<b>Chapter 7: Discussion: Performative Visual and Communicative Practice Post-secondary School Visual Art Learning Context and Beyond</b>	<b>298</b>
The Art of Visuality and Learning about Self and Others	300
Visual Culture and Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Self Narrative and the Skill of Visual Performative Communicative Knowing	303
The Skill of Visual and Performative Communicative Action: Visuality, Identity and the Constriction of Personal Expressive Narratives	308
Visuality, Citizenship and Ethico-aesthetic Dispositions	315
Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency	325
The Value of the Visual Art Learning Experience Beyond Schooling	332
Reflecting on Limitations and Future Directions of Study	337

<b>Chapter 8: Reflections and Conclusion</b>	<b>348</b>
Repositioning the Value of Visual Art Education for Social and Cultural Sustainability and Personal Validity	348
Visual Art Curriculum and Visual and Performative Communicative Practice	349

Seeing in Context: Identities, Visual Culture, Visuality and Visual Communicative Competence	352
Imaging, Representation and Relevance: New Technologies and Citizenship	354
Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency	356
Creative Imagined Becoming, Reflexivity and Ethical Knowing	358
<b>References.....</b>	<b>364</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>413</b>
A Letter to Principal/ Information Statement	
B Consent Statement for Student Nominated Participant	
C Nominated Participant Interview Questions	
D Copyright Permission for use of Student Images	
E Photographic Recording of Images Consent Form	
F Student Nominated Participant Interview Questions and Consent Form	
G Teacher Interview Questions and Consent Form	
H Categories of Identity Explorations in ARTEXPRESS Exhibitions Years: 1991, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005....	<b>424</b>
I Montage (M.4.1): Visualising Self, the Self Portrait.....	<b>433</b>
J Montage (M.4.2): Visualising Self, the Self Portrait.....	435
K Montage (M.4.3): Visualising Events.....	437
L Montage (M.4.4): Visualising Events.....	439
M Montage (M.4.5): Tangential Visibility.....	441
N Montage (M.4.6): Visibility as a Cultural & Social Discursive Identity Construct.....	443
O Montage (M.4.7): Visibility as a Cultural Discursive Construct- Identity, Ethnicity & Conformity.....	445
P Montage (M.4.8): Visibility Reflecting on the Social and Ethical Self ...	447

### List of Tables:

Table 4.1 Identity Category Sets by Year	152
Table 4.2 Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative and Abstract Object Studies	153

Table 4.3 Comparing Identity as Expressive Personal Narrative with Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Construct	153
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### **List of Figures:**

Figure 3.1 Mixed Qualitative Method Model Design incorporating Empirical and Reflective Methods and Iterations	129
Figure 3.2 Multiple Triangulation Perspectives of the Student Learning Journey	139
Figure 7.1 A Model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom	329

### **List of Montages:**

Montage M.6.1 Visualising Self: the Self Portrait	250
Montage M.6.2 Visualising Events	258
Montage M.6.3 Visualising Self through Reflecting on Others	264
Montage M.6.4 Visuality, Identity and the Socially and Constructed Self	270
Montage M.6.5 Patrick (2002) Montage of Visual Process Diary	288

### **List of Images:**

The images of student works have been reproduced in this thesis for the purposes of criticism and review and the originality of the student works acknowledged.

Sayarath, J. "Just Me, Just Life, Just Different; But Just Like Everybody Else"	154
Goldthorp, K. "Visual Art Process Diary"	156
Pike, T. "Street Spirit"	159
Thomas, K. "Revolution with no resolution"	160
Eades, K. "The Boys"	160
Baka, P. "My Life My Mind"	162
Moyle, J. "Michael"	167
Park, H. "My Mother's Story"	168
Collinson-Smith, R. "Youth Harmony, Grace Strength"	169
Ingleby, S. "Dangerous Looks"	174
Valentine, R. "ING Magazine: The Rise of the Metrosexual"	175
Cakal, A. "I wore the veil from the age of ten"	177

Plummer, M. "Why this life?"	181
Moffit, A. "The Hero Within"	183
Abby, "Swimming at the Baths"	194
Abby, "Reject Recycle"	196
Abby, "Mixed media studies from Visual Art Process Diary	197
Abby, "Extract from Visual Art Process Diary, working drawings"	200
Patrick, "Presto"	202
Patrick, "Visual Art Process Diary Images"	203
Patrick, "Adagio"	204
Ceara, "Melbourne Cup Day Madonna No. 2"	212
Ceara, "No Stopping Gai"	212
Ceara, "Melbourne Cup Day Lady No. 1"	213
Ceara, "Ceara, legend in her own time"	214
Joe, "Extract from The Comics Revelations"	218
Joe, "Extract from The Comics Revelations"	219
Joe, "Extract from The Comics Revelations"	220
Tom, "Isms of the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century"	227
Pete, "My Bathroom Sink"	228
Tom, "Boy climbing ladder"	231
Tom, "Memories of sharing adventures with Pete and friends"	233
Beth, "The Eight Day", detail	236
Beth, "The Eight Day", detail	237
Beth, "The Eight Day", detail	239
Beth, "The Eight Day, My Name is Vern", detail	242



## **Abstract**

Visual Art education, in an increasingly globalized visual world, is gaining significance for its contribution to the intuitive, critical and creative aspects of student learning and meaning-making. This awareness is foregrounded by a realization that tomorrow's world will be increasingly dominated by the triumph of the image, multi-modal practices, technologies and visual culture. In this context, the development of an ethico-aesthetic disposition through visual contemporary communicative capacities might be regarded as essential to modern meaning-making. The research seeks to reveal the impact of studying Visual Art for the adolescent student and its value to them in terms of its contribution to their personal, social and cultural understandings beyond the classroom.

This research represents a qualitative examination of a post-compulsory Visual Art curriculum in New South Wales, Australia that has shifted from a modernist perspective to a conceptual framework informed by contemporary art practices and by a Habermasian theory of communicative knowing. The research presents its findings in the form of, first a meta-analysis of a longitudinal study of the ARTEXPRESS exhibition spanning 15 years of student learning outcomes from the Visual Art curriculum and, second, a case study of 7 students who reflect on the value of the Visual Art learning to them beyond school. The study employs a critical hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, using image and text analysis as data. The methodology bridges traditional educational research methods with Visual Art practices by employing arts-inquiry as a qualitative research method. It uses the montage as a visual communicative platform informed by narrative perspectives to present the results.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators, together with the entire world community, are growing in consciousness of the arts as a significant player in developing the attributes and skills that citizens will require in order to be effective participants of tomorrow's rapidly evolving world. The public welfare benefits that accrue from the arts' intrinsic values are increasingly being seen to constitute a central role in generating wider benefits (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaris & Brooks, 2004; National Review of Visual Education, 2006).

Through analysis of ARTEXPRESS student artworks, reflective journals and interviews, the research identified that the skill of visual communicative proficiency links explicitly to the performative act as it emerges from each student's desire and affectivity. In turn, this act is demonstrated to be beyond the knowledge of Visual Art cultural practices, being shaped by critique and power relationships in society. Self-portrait as narrative and subjectivity production were seen by the students as legitimate means of communicating meaning about self and other. The understanding of the logic of the relationships between visual technical activity, embodied material processes and conceptual understandings as contemporary communicative practices was valued by students and parents for its capacity to mediate societal and cultural values, as well as ethical practice and citizenship.

Visual and performative communicative practice links identity, image and meaning. In this study these practices supported self-agency and the creative development of multiple, reflective returns. Visual artmaking is presented as supporting the development of creative possibilities. In turn, an understanding of the endless ways in which imaging and communicating can represent self, truth, reality and existence benefit the individual and society quite beyond the bounds of the traditional classroom.

**Identity, Image and Meaning  
Beyond the Classroom:  
Visual and Performative Communicative  
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**Volume 2**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION: Positioning Visual Art Learning as an Essential Aspect of Student Learning in the Twenty-first Century.**

Vision is positioned as a primary sensory way of imagining and experiencing the world (Eisner, 2001a; Haraway, 1998; Kosslyn & Sussman, 1996; Stafford, 1996) and the visual is being claimed as central to the cultural construction of life in contemporary society (Rose, 2007). In this context, the twenty-first century is being identified as a time when the forces of globalization and new technologies have positioned the image as an important communicative force, increasingly occupying all cultural spaces (Barker, 2000; Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2005; Handa, 2004; Mirzeoff, 1998; Szerszynski & Urry, 2006). The claim that postmodernity is an ocularcentric phenomenon (Mirzeoff, 1998, Rose, 2007) positions the image as central to meaning-making and cultural production. Increasingly, we are articulating how we see ourselves in visual ways, with individual identity emerging from the increasingly visual culture that constructs the individual from many and varied visual experiences (Rose, 2007).

As society acknowledges the role of culture in shaping the individual, so too there is an acknowledgment that cultural constructs are taking visual forms. Learning forums increasingly acknowledge the role of multiliteracies practices in education (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Kalantzis & Cope, 2001) and, in so doing, acknowledge the increased significance of a critical visual literacy. A pivotal attribute for an individual's participatory action in contemporary society will be to understand the ways in which images communicate meaning, shape one's identity and inform one's values and beliefs.

Social narratives are now increasingly ocular and present to the individual, through new imaging technologies, capacity to record events, produce events and transmit events as visual images with increasing speed and visual intensity. To be a capable, autonomous and responsive citizen in society will require the individual to develop a sense of ownership and participation linked directly to an individual's

capacity to read the world both as a real, or unreal and imagined, phenomenon. It will require students to participate in the construction and deconstruction of visual meaning and to learn to interpret, manipulate and construct meaning through creative imaging practices or by communicating in images.

Understanding self is now being positioned as a visibility skill with 'seeing' linked directly to 'being'. Visuality, a term identified as characterising the skill of thinking and communicating in images (Rose, 2007; Stafford, 1998), is now presented as the ability to construct understandings of the world as complex forms of visual narratives. The creative and fluid activity of imaging practices now experienced by everyone significantly impacts on the perceptions of the experiencing audience and so occupies everyone's lifeworld. Individuals can now record every life event as a digitised image; they can store and retrieve their own visual memories, and those of others, and transport these images with speed across the world. Similarly, media images, both virtual and real, come to each of us on a daily basis and form a strong component of one's lifeworld.

The visual lifeworld of each individual shapes subjectivity or identity. As identities are being presented as forming through a process of "inter-subjectively recognised self-identification" (Habermas, 1976, p.107), signified by "signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (Barker, 2000, p.166), young people will need to be able to actively engage and respond to their increasingly aggregated visual reality. Kellner (1992) and Mcquillan (2000) claim that subjectivity production is also linked to the phenomenon of the narrative and, within an increasingly visual world, these narratives are presented to us as complex and ever-changing arrays of images and aesthetic forms. An individual is increasingly linked to the mobile, free-floating and elastic phenomenon of contemporary life. In this context, subjectivity is no longer fixed or stable (Featherstone, 1995; Mansfield, 2000). An individual in a postmodern society might, therefore, need to acquire visual creative reflexivity in relation to understanding self and others.

The image is now being presented as a new scientific tool, a cultural signifier and a form of social discourse and narrative, able to represent knowledge and operate as an agent to shape identities and behaviours. Meaning as image circulates the globe, shaped and mutated by both cultural activity and cultural contexts. Images transfer to us messages about our beliefs, desires and feelings. Visual culture is central to the production of identities and is positioned in this research project as inclusive of “all those visual artefacts, natural forms and ways of thinking that make up perception in our everyday life” (Schirato & Webb, 2004, p. 5). In addition, traditional and new imaging practices or technologies are identified as significant contributors to the active shaping of representations of self informed by high art, media, television, film, video and animation.

How we see, what we see, and how the world is represented to us shapes who we are. Visual culture is significant in its capacity to transfer hegemonic identity constructs. Images are also seen as having agency (Jones, 2007) or being able to provide sites of resistance or provide productive, transformative learning spaces. In these spaces, through image production and/or image interpretation, the visual is playing an important role in how we learn about the world and how we are able to understand ourselves (Freedman, 2003).

The skill of visuality, or the ability to critically deconstruct and construct images to make meaning (Meskimmon, 1997; Stafford, 1996) is, therefore, fore-grounded as an important attribute for all students in the twenty-first century as issues of subjectivity take a pictorial turn. Being visually critical will involve having the capacity to, “think about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relationships in which it is embedded: and that means thinking about the power relationships that produce, are articulated through and can be challenged by ways of seeing and being” (Rose, 2007, p. XV). Artmaking is both a methodology of visual research (Sullivan, 2005,) or inquiry, and a pedagogical meaning-making tool. It has begun to enter general learning conversations from English curriculum, to design studies and cultural studies. This research seeks to reveal the learning outcomes

from a pedagogy of the visual (Handa, 2004), with Visual Art being presented as embracing both the critical and performative role of imaging. This role is presented as developing young people's capacity to participate in society informed through the exploration of "visibility as being".

### **1.1 A Practitioner's Journey**

Through my work as an artist, community artist and art educator, I have, on many occasions, sought to understand what it is about the Visual Arts that draws so many to its practices. In particular, I have concentrated on examining what it is about the creation of visual images and associated Visual Art practices that, for many, becomes essential to their understandings about self, others and their wider environment. Most significantly, this has emerged through my perception that students are increasingly finding that working with images from their own lives and the wider media constitutes a compelling activity.

Over many years of observation of students studying post-compulsory Visual Art in schools (students between the ages of 16 and 18), I have observed the way in which working with images and materials has increasingly helped students gain insights into their own realities, their past and present world, friends and families, and wider social or political issues which concern them at that time and impact on their future intentions.

Some time ago, I was given the following quote by a long-time art education colleague (a Visual Art teacher of some 30 years) who wanted to share with me what I believe was, for him, a testimony to the value of Visual Art education to students. The letter (an extract can be found below) was written by a student to their teacher. It was written after completion of the final post-compulsory school examinations set by the New South Wales (NSW), Board of Studies Visual Art examination within the Department of Education and Training, Higher School Certificate (HSC). It reflected on the student's learning prior to moving to university

studies. The student expressed appreciation for what had been learnt in Visual Art classes. This letter has formed the basis of my initial questioning concerning the importance of making meaning in the visual arts and has guided me through this study. The words of the student represent much of what many students find is unique about the knowing that is characteristic of the visual arts, although many students have difficulty enunciating what this knowing is.

*...Art can teach you things about yourself that no other subject that I know of can- It can provoke thought and take it away. It can develop in you new paths of judgement, new ways of thinking that other subjects fail to do.... Art constantly leads me down new paths of fascination and inquiry even now. It teaches you about process, not about algebra, and that is something that can stay with you for the rest of your life. In art classrooms, I learnt that art is not defined by how well you use the ink of a pen, or how well you sculpt a piece of wood...It is this idea that is perhaps most important about HSC art. There are no specific answers to specific questions, as there are in many other subjects. No one can tell you how to process your ideas or create a work of art...Never forget the enjoyment of sculpture, of feeling the material underhand, of working with it-of becoming it. Never forget, and never underestimate the power of art.*

(Extract from student letter)

Eisner (2001b), on viewing the work of post-compulsory Visual Art students, was impressed by the quality of their visual inquiry. He viewed the annual state-wide travelling exhibition of selected student work titled, ARTEXPRESS and commented:

*What impressed me most about ARTEXPRESS was the quality of the student work. It not only had technical sophistication, it displayed and embraced a level of meaningfulness that is all too rare in the teaching of art and work produced at any level of schooling. The students clearly had*



*something to say and the work serves the purpose of saying it as only the visual arts can do.* (Extract from the introduction to '*The Role of the Arts in the Transformation of Consciousness*, Eisner, 2001a, p. 6).

Eisner (2001b) not only acknowledges the quality of the student works being produced, but also highlights the quality of the pedagogy in the Australian Visual Art education context. He draws specific attention to the way students are able to achieve what he describes as 'meaningfulness' towards saying 'it', or making meaning about self through performative material means. In making these comments, Eisner (2001a) reinforces his own research into the transformative nature of Visual Art education for students.

This research draws on Eisner's research but grounds its inquiry more in the reality that visual narratives informed by visual culture have increased in importance in the lifetimes of these students and that "modern forms of understanding the world depend on a scopic regime that equates seeing with knowledge" ( Rose, 2007, p. 2). In addition, it aims to provide evidence to support the increasing debate that finding a voice or agency for young people will not only require an understanding of how various images hold interpretive possibilities, but also that such understandings must be grounded in visual inquiry methodologies that are performative and emerging from an engagement with symbolic and material forms. Such a position acknowledges that meaningfulness lies deep within a materials practice and becoming or producing subjectivity is grounded in making or doing.

Subjectivity production is, therefore, presented in the context of this inquiry as being shaped by visual, performative and iterative acts which are internalised and affect our outlooks and behaviours (Bolt, 2004; Bulter, 1997; Deleuze, 1990; Grierson, 2003). One's identity is thus embodied or contained within the image(s) and is also significantly formed outside of itself by other social and cultural agencies (Abbinnett, 2003; Bauman, 2004). The transformative nature of Visual

Art-inquiry practices with discursive, creative and performative capacities is presented as being able to inform subjectivity production (Deleuze, 1990).

This research seeks to inquire into the value of Visual Art learning for students beyond the classroom within the context of the NSW Visual Art Syllabus. The research will focus on the link between making, exhibiting and interpreting artworks as a conceptual approach to visual artmaking that acknowledges the link between the students' lifeworld, the artworld, visibility, communicative action and a moral consciousness (Habermas, 1990).

## **1.2 Questions to be Addressed by the Research**

The research aims to reveal the value and nature of the learning encountered in the Visual Art classroom as it informs personal, social, cultural and ethical understandings. It seeks to identify the kinds of visual spaces and visuality students explore when they are encouraged to work with contemporary artmaking practices. In particular, it will focus on the visual learning experiences of post-compulsory secondary students in NSW, Australia, who studied Visual Art for their HSC and were either selected, or were eligible to be selected for the final annual state-wide ARTEXPRESS exhibition.

The Visual Art syllabus in NSW represents a site where critical and self-reflective visual practices are encouraged through a Habermasian construct informed by the conceptual framing of artist, world, audience and artwork (McKeon, 1994). In this interpretivist and critical learning site students are encouraged to understand that images can present multiple truth claims. The students are also introduced to both modernist and postmodern approaches to constructing visual meaning (Emery, 2002).

This site will be explored for its legitimacy as a significant communicative platform being used by young adults for the understanding of self and others in contemporary society. It will also be examined for the nature of the pedagogical experience and how it supports a personal inquiry into self. Further, to this it will seek to understand the value of this learning to the student beyond the classroom.

Visual culture and the skill of visuality as defined in this research is presented as a dominant communication platform which increasingly transfers society's beliefs and values. Students studying the NSW Visual Art syllabus develop an understanding of how past and present Visual Art practices construct social representations of the world and how the history of visual artistic practices can

affirm, critique and disrupt all visual cultural signifiers. The NSW Visual Art syllabus is presented as a site of inquiry into the ways students use images as symbolic representations and culture products to inform identities. It also examines how a critical and self-reflective understanding developed through doing informs becoming.

The research asks, how do students use their artmaking as a form of personal visual narrative? How is the skill of visuality or critical and self-reflective visibility, acquired in the postmodern classroom and does it support students' understandings of themselves and their society? How do such artmaking practices inform the production of subjectivity and contribute to what Guattari (1995) describes as an "ethico-aesthetic" understandings?

If the "seeing" acquired through a postmodern understanding of artmaking develops a student's critical and self-reflective positioning, through performative acts, can this learning claim to be valid and usable for the ongoing exploration of identities? If so, what are the characteristics of this learning and what are the characteristics of the pedagogical experience that support such learning?

Finally, if visual artmaking is a valid research and inquiry tool (Sullivan, 2005), how successful is it at supporting the construction of personal values, beliefs and well-being? Do the products of such a learning environment provide evidence that students have used their artmaking to explore beliefs and values? Did students, parents and teachers see artmaking as a significant tool for the development of ethical understandings and well-being during adolescence? Do teachers and parents value this learning as supporting the processes of identity exploration? Finally, reflecting on their visual learning, have the students seen the skill of visuality as significant and relevant to them beyond schooling?

The research will seek to reveal the way teachers have constructed what Eisner (2004) refers to as a "pedagogy of making" within a Visual Art syllabus, framed

through the theoretical model of communicative action (Habermas, 1990) and informed by postmodern and modern constructs of meaning. It will further seek to identify how such a critical, self-reflective and expressive approach to meaning-making is informed by the conceptual framing of the student's lifeworld, the artworld and the audience in a student-centred studio learning environment. The research also aims to identify how students use complex technical and artistic content, inter-related knowledge and cultural constructs to create products which have strategic personal and cultural relevance (Cunliffe, 2005). The research may then provide an insight into the way a Visual Art curriculum, grounded in critical, self-reflective and expressive thinking nurtures an ethico-aesthetic (Guattari, 1995) understanding. It may also inform how narratives as image and form are a significant performative tool in constructing and communicating meaning in the twenty-first century.

### **The hypothesis:**

Self narrative or subject orientations emergent in postmodern Visual Art curriculum have relevance for adolescent youth in negotiating who they are as individuals and citizens in the twenty-first century. This knowledge is presented as significant in the context of current social practices that increasingly present the, "other" as a visual representation. The skill of visibility developed through artmaking facilitates subject and object orientations and the understanding of self as a cultural construct.

Subjectivity production as image(s) provides a voice or agency for the student that supports the autonomy of the individual and informs ethical understandings. In terms of one's whole life education, understanding how cultural values, ethical and citizenship understandings can be negotiated through visual inquiry and aesthetic sensibilities would seem to be a fundamental knowing in a visual society.

The focus of this research is to provide insight into the possible contribution of Visual Art education to meaning-making and student subjectivity production for the

post-compulsory secondary education student. It seeks to examine the learning facilitated by an interpretivist and student-centred pedagogy. It aims to substantiate the claim that, within current post-compulsory secondary school Visual Art practices in NSW, students are increasingly orientating their inquiry around an understanding of self and their world through an expressive and a discursive visual orientation. More specifically, does such an orientation provide a valid and significant way of thinking and making meaning for the students in a contemporary society? Finally, is the skill of visuality developed through making valued by the student and their parents as a tool for mediating one's lifeworld beyond school.

The questions to be answered by the research are framed within the experiences of students who have studied in the context of the NSW Higher School Certificate Visual Art examination, and who participated in the ARTEXPRESS exhibition experience. It will seek to reveal some of the voices of the students who experienced the examination and pedagogical phenomenon, the teachers who facilitated the learning and the parents of students who observed the learning.

The research project is reflectively positioned to review the substantial evidence of past ARTEXPRESS exhibitions and individual case studies to identify the nature and form of the inquiry within this critical and self-reflective learning culture. The range of questions asked aim to address the nature and relevance of visualising as a practical way to construct new meanings and to identify the dispositions it nurtures. It also investigates how the performative material experiences helped students investigate questions about self and society.

### **The Questions:**

1. How does Visual Art inquiry provide a means to bridge the spaces between 'school' life and 'real' life, and between differences of self and other..." (ARTEXPRESS, 1997)? To what extent is there evidence that students use their artmaking to negotiate between aspects of their lifeworlds? What do the positions of inquiry look like as evidenced from the learning outcomes of HSC students over an extended period of time?

2. Is there evidence to substantiate student teleological intent, in relation to socio-cultural thinking? How significant is narrative or the self-portrait in a postmodern Visual Art curriculum? If self narrative is significant, how many choose to take this positioning and what other positions are taken? What are the key characteristics of these intentions and where do they situate student learning? To what extent does the personal narrative reveal deep understandings about self and other?
3. Is there evidence that Visual Art students use their inquiry with “intentionality”, in order to meet practical ends in relation to critical social understandings and ethical judgments? In reconciling positions about self, or other, do they use a process of mutual recognition or “putting themselves in others’ shoes”, thus using a logic to test their feelings and thoughts against those of others through an embodied action? How does artmaking inform the students’ emergent understandings about personal and public values, beliefs and social behaviours? How does the skill of visuality support the understanding of self as a socially and culturally constructed being?
4. What are the characteristics of a Visual Art learning environment when the development of the skill of visuality and materiality are the central conceptual tenets? How are aesthetic and ethical understandings nurtured and produced through the ‘pedagogy of making’ (Eisner, 2004)?
5. What value did students place on their learning as members of a Visual Art learning community when they were at school, and what value do they place on the learning now? Does it still have relevance to them in their lives today? Are students conscious of the way they learnt to critically observe, make and exhibit to transmit meaning and communicate beliefs and values about themselves and society?

6. Is there significant evidence to claim that the development of a critical self-reflexive practice through imaging represents an authentic platform of inquiry for youth and is it a legitimate form of communicative knowing (Habermas, 1976) beyond the classroom?
7. Do the students and parents consider the skill of visuality important as a way to experience the outside on the inside? This question is positioned within the context of the image gaining currency in communication, visual culture and popular culture (Duncum and Bracy, 2001; Mirzoeff, 1998; Rose, 2007).

Most broadly the research seeks to examine the impact of a Visual Art curriculum that positions visual culture production as an inherently social and technical activity which forms a part of our daily lives (Dissanayake, 2001), and is increasingly a significant domain of knowledge. Finally, it seeks to gain insight into how the skill of visuality informs students' understandings of multiple truth claims. In addition it seeks to understand how they use their intentionality in artmaking to explore their personal visions and how this informs their socio cultural beliefs and values.



### **1.3 Significance of the Research in Terms of its Relevance to Trends and Issues in Theory, Research and Practice**

In the twenty-first century, educators and communities are asking what are the significant attributes and skills that citizens will require in order to be effective participants of tomorrow. It is giving renewed attention to how to develop students' capacities to engage sensitively and creatively with learning that supports self-efficacy and respect for others. The intuitive, critical and creative aspects of arts learning and meaning-making have gained renewed attention as, increasingly, research is identifying that an understanding of one's world is dependent on knowing how the individual and contemporary society communicates its values and beliefs. In a world dominated by the triumph of the image, multimodal practices and visual culture (Duncum, 2001; Mirzoeff, 1998), being visually literate is now seen as fundamental (Kalanis & Cope, 2001; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Visual Art education is charged with the responsibility to transfer to tomorrow's generations the capacity to understand how its practices and thinking processes, as a form of cultural production, can inform the legacy of our very own existence with relevance to contemporary life.

Increasingly, governments are concerned with the human, as well as economic wealth, and attention is being drawn to skills, education and social structures. Garnaut (2006) in his article "Australia You're Rolling in It" published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reflects that a broader definition of wealth might include assets such as the environment and the arts: "wealth might include such assets as natural resources and aesthetic qualities" (p. 1). International research in recent years has looked closely at the contribution of the arts, seeking to make links between the skills and benefits acquired in arts learning contexts, and their transferability to the wider educational development of the child and beyond childhood, to the world of work. Research reports range from issues of creative dispositions, creative cultures, creative workforce and academic success at school, through to intrinsic benefits such as self-efficacy, values, beliefs and

social cohesion. Significant reports that have shaped the debate in Australia include: *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999/2000); *All our Futures: Creativity Culture and Education* (NACCCE, 1999-2001); *Gifts of the Muse, Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* (McCarthy et al., 2004); *From The Information Economy to The Creative Economy: Moving Culture to the Centre of International Public Policy* (Venturelli, 2004); and *Building Creative Capacities for the Twenty-first Century*, World Conference on Arts Education (UNESCO, 2006).

Recent international research such as *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002), *Creative Cultural Education*, *All Our Futures* (NACCCE, 1999-2001) affirms the essential role of the arts in the learning and development of every child. In Australia, *Education and Arts Symposium, Backing Our Creativity, Education and the Arts* (Australia Council for the Arts, 2006) collectively identified that creativity and the arts have cultural benefits essential to the vitality and creativity of our future students. An indicator of a nation's future general prosperity can be measured by a citizens' capacities to respond flexibly and compassionately to the rapidly changing world they live in. The recent World Conference of Arts Education (UNESCO, 2006), *Building Creative Capacities for the twenty-first Century* has the strategic goal to position the arts as essential learning, emphasising the educational, social and cultural benefits of arts education to the individual child. The basis of the goal is Article 26/ 31 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which identified the role the arts play in the development of human personality and in the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNESCO, 2006). The strategies of the conference represented an indication of a growing consciousness by the world community, reaffirming that the arts have a significant role to play in the twenty-first century.

Current research projects and reports on the arts have been mostly government-generated. They show a strong interest in the instrumental value of the arts: it is said that they help individuals to socialise better, learn better and make better contributions to our productive society as described in *Champions of Change*

(Fiske, 1999/2000). Thus, the arts are valued as a means of achieving social and economic outcomes that are not about art 'per se' or indeed the development of ethical dispositions which significantly contribute to an individual's personal identity or sense of citizenship. The intrinsic value of the arts, as generative and critical practices that enrich individuals and communities' cultural well-being, is acknowledged, but generally seen as a benefit that accrues to the individual ( NRVE, 2006, Bamford, 2006).

*Gifts of the Mus'* (McCarthy, et al.,2004) reviewed recent research literature and concluded that most of the empirical research on the instrumental benefits of the arts suffered from a number of conceptual and methodological limitations. It was instrumental in approach, output-orientated and quantitative, mostly directed at public-sector management. The report identified that previous reports failed to recognise that public welfare benefited from the arts' intrinsic values. In fact, the researchers claimed that intrinsic benefits played a central role in generating all benefits.

In Australia, most recently, the following reports are currently informing the wider debate around the arts and their value to Australian life: *Promoting the Value of the Arts* (Bamford, Newitt, Irvine & Darell, 2005); *Backing Our Creativity, Symposium final report* (Australia Council for the Arts, 2006) and *Educating for the Creative Workforce: Rethinking Arts and Education* (ARC & Australia Council for the Arts, 2007). Public policy research in Australia also draws attention to the issue of social and cultural sustainability. Jon Hawkes, in his book, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (2002), posits that cultural vitality is essential to a healthy and sustainable society. The arts depend on society and, reciprocally, society depends on the benefits of the arts accrued from their critical and intuitive commentary and analysis of contemporary society. The focus of the later body of research by Hawks (2002) is to contribute to the debate on the benefits of the arts generally to the individual and society.

This research project seeks to further inform this field of inquiry, specifically in relation to the role of Visual Art education in this debate. It will inquire into the value of the development of a visual performative and communicative skill for the individual as it informs their participatory capacities in an ocularcentric culture of the twenty-first century in Australia.

Eisner (2001a) has continually emphasised the transformative capacities of the arts in making conscious private feelings into public consciousness. He cites the importance of qualitative ways of bringing to our consciousness our experiences and using our imaginations to grapple with issues of importance both to the individual and society. Working with visual media provides a very significant platform upon which to test assumptions about self and the world (Denson & McEvilly, 1996; Eisner, 2001a).

While the evidence to date appears to substantiate the view that artmaking has a transformative capacity (Abbs, 1991; Brady, 2001; Eisner, 2001a; Greene, 1995), none of the writers have to any large extent unpacked the phenomenological practice of using imaging as a legitimate platform for the construction of identity. Nor have they explored the extent to which more postmodern orientated visual art curriculum and current technologies allow students, through reflection, to “identity sample” (Avgitidou, 2003). As Slattery (1995) argues, the self-portrait (in all its forms) as visual inquiry can be used to explore subjectivity and test cultural assumptions, thus allowing the individual to experience a deep ecology of learning. Recent work by Slattery & Rapp (2003) connects ethics, postmodern curriculum, sustainability and human rights. This research attempts to address, through their ideas on curriculum and education, the importance of individuals developing personal, contextualised or situational ethical solutions and challenges deontological systems in society such as morals and religion.

It could be argued that a significant reason for emphasising the development of a visual aesthetic and a visual communicative capability in the individual is in direct response to the increased forces of globalisation, authority and control experienced and communicated through visual media representations. As visual culture increasingly influences our ideas, beliefs and values and actively shapes culture and democracy, there is a strong argument that understanding self is increasingly defined by current visual technologies and its unique epistemology. Visual culture, in contemporary society, presents representations of the world often as reconstructed, fake or as a form of hyper-reality. The constant quest for new ways to attract, influence and affect an individual's desires through visual media representations presents reality more as a shifting process, disconnected, significantly shaped by the outside, and actively in construction. Gaining the skills to care for one's self increasingly includes the skill to interpret critically the relationship between the image and the spectator or audience and learning to make personal meaning from images.

Visual Art education is significant in the attention it gives to cultural identity and images as agents for the shaping of both our personal and collective social identities, values and beliefs. Traditionally, Visual Art research has been informed by psychology, philosophy and aesthetics, and its historical expressive practices. This study aims to reveal how curriculum and student work is increasingly informed by different "fields" (Bourdieu, 1977) such as cultural studies, visual culture and postmodern communicative practices. It will also acknowledge the increasing role of subjectivity research, and how visual inquiry is deeply connected to one's phenomenological experiences and ontological understanding as processes that shape our growing and becoming.

Visual Art inquiry explores the intersections that emerge from current representational practices informed by personal insights and feelings. Artists preoccupy themselves with understanding how representations and beliefs reside in visual clues and consistently explore ways to disrupt current boundaries of

understandings to express both personal and collective feelings and desires. Artists are often presented as capturing the struggles of an individual within a given time and social context. Their commentary can touch on issues of current debate, and their inquiry can deepen society's understandings about the individual's struggle to see themselves and others in contemporary terms. Visual Art practices are a culturally grounded form of performative and material inquiry.

The inquiry methods used by visual artists have been presented as providing agency for human knowing (Sullivan, 2005), and may also prove to offer a similar form of agency to Visual Art students as they make meaning about themselves and others in their increasingly visual world. Visual Art learning in a postmodern curriculum may be shifting from a focus on the importance of how images look or are aesthetically and formally constructed, to what they can do for the adolescent student. Visual Art curriculum within a postmodern context might present as a platform where the individual is able to use their senses, imagination, intelligence and the skill of visibility to engage actively with the construction of self.

In NSW, the Visual Art curriculum is essentially the only curriculum, across a wide range of senior curriculum offerings, which can claim to offer students opportunities to use their intuitive insights gained through visual and materials handling. It is not a curriculum built on the modernist notions of self expression or formalist legacies, such as fundamental design principles, exclusively. It is a curriculum with an underlying studio based pedagogy that necessitates critical, hermeneutic and self-reflecting positions in student artmaking. Multiple framing orientations in the curriculum support generative ideas that acknowledge multiple truth claims and the negotiated construction of beliefs and values. Each framing orientation presents Visual Art in context and offers a range of related knowledge-seeking strategies to construct meaning. Visual Art practices in the NSW Visual Art curriculum support visual meaning-making and socio-cultural understandings and appear to be increasingly informing personal understandings of self and others.

The NSW Visual Art curriculum, and the associated travelling exhibition of senior student works, ARTEXPRESS, has over the past 10 years, gained international critical acclaim for the quality and sophisticated learning outcomes of its students (Eisner, 2001b). The curriculum has established itself as a postmodern oriented curriculum which provides intellectual rigour and depth of material engagement through which modernist notions of truth and certainty are challenged and individual student voices are heard. It is therefore an important curriculum in which to situate an inquiry into the power of a postmodern Visual Art studies to contest notions of fixed identity and to explore how students use their studies to test, construct and explore their emerging self.

Research points to the benefits of visual education beyond visual competency to cognitive competencies and critical thinking (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000). However, most of this research focuses on learning within school contexts with little understanding of how this learning and the dispositions developed, transfer beyond the classroom. Claims have been made that the generic skills and cognitive competencies acquired in the Visual Art classroom will benefit students throughout their lives (Yerbury, 2004). A small research project was carried out in NSW in 2003 which gathered a range of past ARTEXPRESS contributors and tracked their current vocational status and their reflections on artmaking (ARTEXPRESS, 2003). While providing a brief window into how students value making Visual Art beyond school, the research aimed to illuminate how studying Visual Art had provided vocational pathways to further study and career options, touching briefly on other benefits, such as developing confidence and creative thinking skills.

The NSW Visual Art curriculum aims to balance the development of unique visual technical skills and generic vocational competencies with the deep personal insights acquired through critical and expressive sensory, visual and material engagement. It aims to extend Eisner's arguments on the uniqueness of visual arts learning as a process of self-invention. It moves beyond some of the modernist

assumptions connected to notions of the unique self implicit in Eisner's (2001a) writing, towards addressing the capacity of visual artmaking for hermeneutic and processual understandings about subjectivity production.

This research project aims to highlight the ways that students who work within a postmodern orientated curriculum engage in generative representational activities through critical and self-reflective practices. It seeks to identify how these practices operate and how such activities commence a dialogue with self that supports an understanding of a decentered and multifaceted self. It further seeks to inquire into the value of the recent shift in the NSW curriculum from a single artwork assessment to the "body of work" (Brown, 2002). The "body of work" (a collection of artworks in multiple representational forms such as drawings, video, painting, etc), is positioned to provide a legitimate contemporary practice that allows students to engage with both intuitive and discursive understandings and the relationship between these ways of knowing. The research aims to show how these practices provide a legitimate site for the interrogation of self and a site to negotiate one's ethical understandings about self and others. In addition it provides a site to develop one's intrinsic, creative reasoning capacities, such as to inform critical cultural understandings.

In seeking to validate the inquiry about the value of making meaning in visual forms beyond the classroom, the research has been contained within the context of the NSW HSC and ARTEXPRESS experience and its past students. It is further grounded by a unique learning context in the senior years of schooling which has contributed to a student's deep learning about self within a community of practice. It acknowledges the way student visual artmaking outcomes, as artworks, have been circulated in the wider society through the ARTEXPRESS exhibition. It acknowledges that student artmaking has been given value by the examiners, parents, teachers and curators of ARTEXPRESS over a sustained period of time, thus contributing to a unique form of adolescent cultural production. This unique field of practice is significantly contributed to by all past art students who make



meaning and present a voice about their personal adolescent experiences of self, peers, family and society generally.

The research anticipates that it may be able to shed a more contemporary light on the position of the NSW HSC student voice on the work of educational philosophers such as Greene (1995) who have been re-visiting Dewey's (1934) concepts of ideals and imagination in his book *Art as Experience*. The reason is that they give rise to issues related to social values and re-examines what the arts have to teach us about the way we live ethical lives (Jackson, 1998; Slattery & Rapp, 2003). Eisner (2001b) argues that the most telling manifestation of educational consequences in any field emerge out of the school setting rather than in it. He recommends looking to life outside school to find out whether studying Visual Art has had an impact on a student's well-being and life through its capacity to provide insight into human knowing. This research seeks to find evidence that the visual art learning has been significant to the student beyond the classroom.

The study will go beyond the modernist writings of Dewey and Eisner and examine how media, contemporary arts and popular culture are reshaping our orientations to the world as both audience and participants. Furthermore, it will attempt to show how the aesthetic and critical dimensions of learning in a unique curriculum are being emphasised, giving primacy to the students' experiences as the starting point for an authentic personal inquiry and the celebration of the self-conscious individual. This study seeks to bridge the disciplinary areas of Visual Art practice, visual culture and the field of cultural studies to better understand and inform how Visual Art education can contribute to the negotiation and construction of student identities and ethical behaviour.

The research will be underpinned by an understanding that society's values are the basis upon which all else is built and how values are expressed in our culture and schools contribute to this cultural reproduction. Gaining a cultural awareness and understanding of one's identity are relevant to the individual and to all students.

Students need to find ways to mediate the forces that actively contribute to their own identity formation from the position of the world they inhabit. Thus, postmodern orientations of self and understandings of subjectivity are now central to meaning-making for all individuals. Most importantly this research seeks to emphasise specifically the unique epistemology of the Visual Arts and the cognitive contribution of visualisation and visual expression to an individual's ways of inter-subjectively knowing, through intrinsic and critical, self-reflective knowing in a secondary school context.

#### **1.4 Overview of the Research Approach**

This research aims to reveal the impact for the adolescent student of the experience of engaging with their lifeworld through Visual Art inquiry and its relevance to the individual in a visually saturated society. The research is grounded in the context of the students' personal inquiry occurring during the making of the HSC artworks and their reflections, on their learning and pedagogical experience after school. It will attempt to reveal how their HSC learning informs meaning for them about themselves and others. It will seek to reveal the ways in which the individual can make connections through imaging, to invent ways to make meaning when issues of ambiguity are present in their lives. It seeks to understand how this critical and reflective visual inquiry informs the personal in relation to the social and cultural aspects of living and its benefit to the student beyond the classroom. More specifically, it asks whether a curriculum grounded in more contemporary arts practices with a visual pedagogy that encourages critical, hermeneutic, reflective and aesthetic thinking can provide relevance and agency for students.

Agency, in this context implies the *priori* of the subject or agent and that the choices and actions (McNay, 1999; Salih, 2002) that the subject takes affects their identity or subjectivity production and constructs existence. Performative acts or agency as artistic and aesthetic understandings are presented in the context of a postmodern curriculum as affecting the production of emancipatory discourses (Denzin, 2005) that are informed by the reflexive turn in education and arts discourse (Finlay, 2005). Postmodern curriculum is presented as having a significant impact on the development of ethical understandings (Slattery & Rapp, 2003) and informing ethico-aesthetic dispositions (Guattari, 1995).

The qualitative methodology used in this inquiry harnesses the ideas of Denzin (2005) that researchers are increasingly looking to how artists work in performative ways from the personal towards the more general. In this process they intentionally select representational forms which best communicate their concepts to their audience. This thinking has been intersected with the experiences of the

participants in the HSC Visual Art curriculum in NSW, Australia and has been informed by Sullivan's (2005) Framework of Visual Arts Research. Sullivan's research framework identifies visual artists as empirical, critical and interpretive thinkers. These domains of inquiry provide structure and agency informing art practice. Art practice being informed by these domains is thus described as a site "where research problems, issues and contexts originate" (p. 94) and these problems are grounded in the studio experience and material practices.

Stage One of the research employs traditional qualitative methods such as a longitudinal document and image analysis of ARTEXPRESS exhibition catalogues across a 14 year period and their related documents have been employed along with an analysis of a multiple site case study of a sample of past students. Stage 2 seeks to bring together the results of the two aspects of the Stage 1 analysis in a meaningful way that acknowledges the significance of students' images as a performative and communicative site through analysis of written texts and interview transcripts. Stage 2 is a meta-inference process which has employed the critical and hermeneutic approach as well as the performative capacity of visual arts-inquiry through the use of montage to describe what constitutes the phenomena of an adolescent student artist researching their own lived experiences.

The montage process (as image and text) allows the researcher to overlay student images from both the longitudinal image analysis and the case study. This helps to interpretively construct the results of the meta-analysis in ways that facilitate the complexity or multiple learning outcomes, while simultaneously grounding the results in the realities of the adolescent student learning context. The montage communicates the research findings in a form which acknowledges the communicative capacity of the image. The meta-inference uses the concept of researcher as bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), to inter-textually connect the images and words emergent from the analysis of this complex phenomenon. The montage or bricoleur process allows the layers of meaning to be stitched together and, through the personal insights of the researcher, find a solution that resonates

with the way the researcher has been informed by their own eyes as artist educator and the learnt craft of being an artist.

#### ***1.4.1 Inquiring with a Critical, Hermeneutic and Phenomenological Methodology Using Image and Text***

The inquiry seeks to interpret the phenomena in terms of how the performative material practice of artmaking informs a student's subjectivity, social and cultural understanding as subjectivity production. It draws on phenomenological ideas that the relationship between perception and its objects is not passive, but interpretively constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and referenced in qualities (Eisner, 1991). It is grounded by the assumption that the inner nature of artistic, aesthetic and social life of an individual (artist) often resides in the experience of it (Deleuze, 1990; Nielsen, 2000).

The research methodology draws on a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 & Plager, 1994) and a critical, hermeneutic understanding (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Researchers orientating themselves from a hermeneutic or interpretivist approach acknowledge that understandings are constructed from an individual's interpretations of their own unique lifeworlds. When overlaid with a critical hermeneutic understanding, the researcher acknowledges that many discourses such as ideologies, politics and religion shape societies, their resultant cultural forms and interpretive orientations. A critical understanding acknowledges the way such discourses control and order society, are inter-subjectively constructed and impact on culture and identities. It acknowledges that individuals are shaped by the context of their own social and cultural understandings as they are reciprocally informed by their own actions and those of others. Together these approaches aim to provide a discerning analysis and interpretive position of how cultural critique can inform the way cultural texts, such as television, media, fine art and film, reveal power dynamics and construct identities.

A critical hermeneutic understanding furthermore, acknowledges that perception itself is an interpretive act framed by assumptions about the purpose of texts or images constituted, within the phenomena of student artists researching their own lived experiences. Such experiences are informed through visual performative and communicative practices as the student produces artworks. This process reveals the personal learning of the students and their desire to communicate points of stability in their understandings and refine their meaning for an HSC examination and the ARTEXPRESS audience.

#### **1.4.2 The Montage**

The research draws significantly on image as text, along with written and spoken language. It interprets the Denzin & Lincoln (2005) analogy of montage as an appropriate construct to support the interpretive findings and aesthetic conceptualisation of the research. Montages in qualitative research are usually created from other realities. Images, textures and texts from these realities are then edited and reworked to reveal new insights about the way these images and texts can work to generate new meanings and relationships. As a tool for conceptual development, the montage has flexibility. It provides spaces for many “different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). These voices can be edited, reworked, adjusted or aesthetically re-balanced quickly as new iterations reveal new turns.

Images of student learning outcomes from the HSC Visual Art examination (1991-2005) form a large proportion of the qualitative data being used in the study and will be handled as a text. It has been argued that images have been used extensively by society as a communicative tool and, as such are as much an integral part of culture and language, written and spoken, as they are Visual Art tools. Images can be used in many different ways, namely to question, to imagine, to critique, to theorize, to narrate, to explain, to teach, to represent, and to express the full range of human emotion and experience. Like words and speech they contain part of who we are, who we think we are, and influence who we become.

Images are integral to questions of identity and purpose. While the interpretation of images is central to this study, it is the inter-textuality of the montage with its capacity to link meanings in ways that juxtapose voices (image, spoken and written texts) to extend the interpretive and aesthetic possibilities that form the basis of its selection as a research tool. The montage tool is used in Stage 1, Part 1, the Longitudinal Study (4.0, p. 146) and in Stage 2 Meta-Inference (6.0, p. 243)

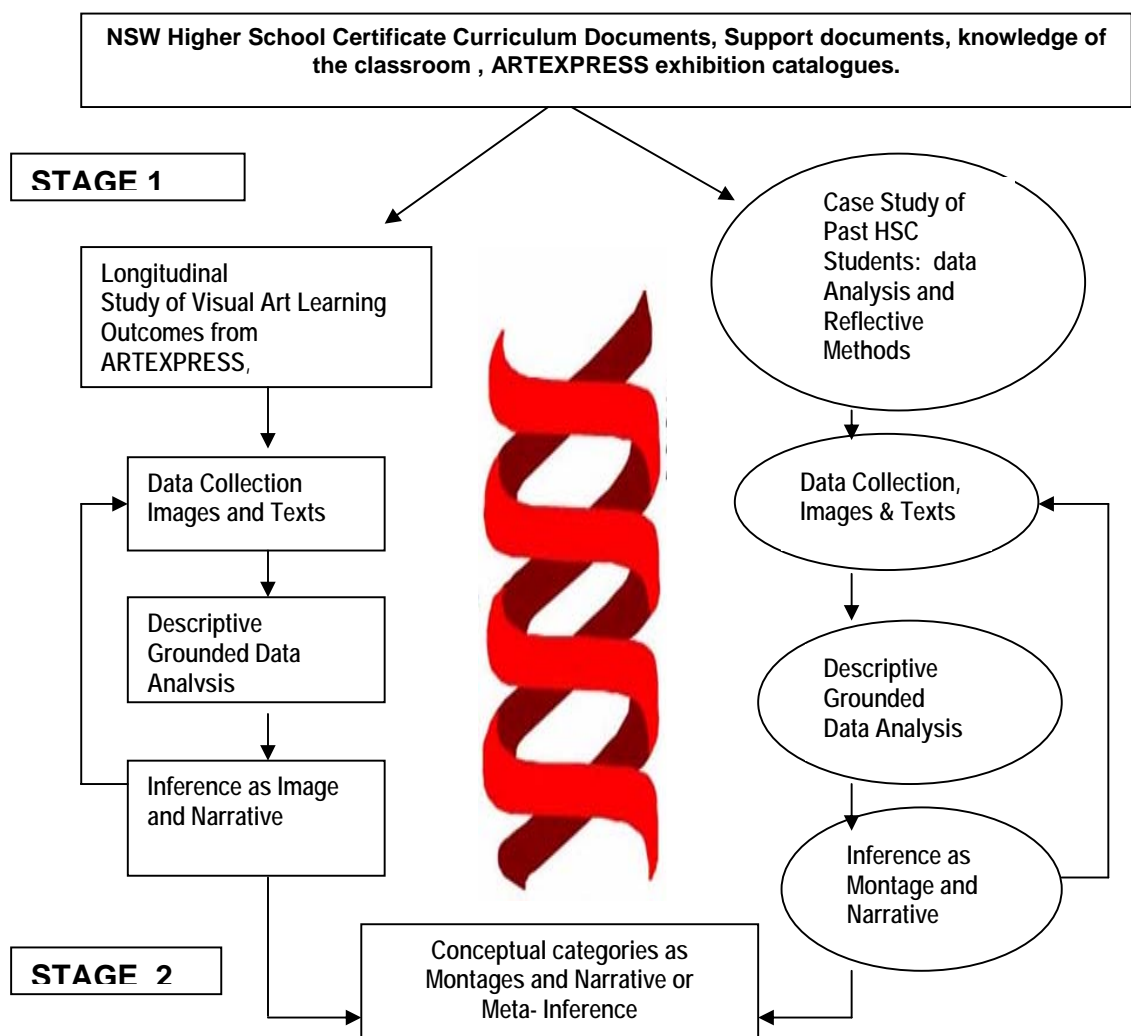
Texts, as both written and spoken word, complement and deepen the researcher's understandings which are revealed initially through the students' images. The text data has been gathered from a variety of sources. In the longitudinal study, these include: student artist statements in the ARTEXPRESS catalogues and accompanying critical essays, and other documents including syllabi, support teaching materials and teaching programs. The case study sites include the same related data as the longitudinal study, the artist statement and related educational documentation and critical writings. In addition, deeper insights were gathered from other text data sources such as student interviews, parent and teacher interviews and the texts within the Visual Art Process Diary (VAPD) documents. These data sources have potential to reveal the way students emotionally engage with their making, narrate their learning, critically evaluate the value of this learning, and reveal how their making informs subjectivity production and ethical dispositions. The researcher has used NVivo, a qualitative management data tool, to analyse rich text data sources in organised, coded and modelled ways to reliably construct conceptual ideas (Richards, 2005). This analysis is overlaid with images to form the interpretive possibilities revealed in the Stage 2 Meta-Inference phase of the research.

### ***1.4.3 Research Stages***

The research emerged as a two-phase process as the best way to manage and interpret the emergent findings from the longitudinal and case study sources. Originally, there was a clear logic to commence the research by gathering data and beginning the analysis from the longitudinal image and text analysis. What

emerged was a need to allow the researcher space to develop inferences from the descriptive analysis in a cyclical and iterative way, informed by the second case study phase. This would allow the researcher to stay “flexible, adjusting and iteratively working towards a methodology” (Eisner, 1991, p. 170). This process is illustrated through an adaptation of the qualitative and quantitative conceptualisation model from Tashakkori and Teddie (2003, p. 688). The model has allowed the researcher to utilise the mixed qualitative methodology that incorporates empirical and interpretive/reflective methods and iterations in a logical and relational way. This process is represented by Figure 3.1. below:

**Figure 3.1 Mixed qualitative method model design incorporating empirical and reflective methods and iterations**





#### ***1.4.4 Limitations and Generalisability***

The Stage 1, Part 1, longitudinal analysis used student images and artist statements from ARTEXPRESS works as the core data for comparative interpretive analysis. These were further supported by analysis of educational documents such as syllabi and observations made by the researcher. The analysis also included other published articles about this exhibition, including the introductory essays in each catalogue which document reflective comments by prominent educationalists on the ARTEXPRESS phenomena and current educational issues. The researcher acknowledges that the artworks and artist statements have been “co-constructed by student and art teacher” (ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 22) and the concepts and experiences represented have emerged with contribution of (significant others).

In addition, the curatorial process for ARTEXPRESS filters the themes and content displayed annually to the public for the purposes of presenting representative quality student learning occurring in the HSC Visual Art classroom across NSW. Secondly, curatorial processes operate to meet curatorial limitations of exhibition venues, for equity purposes, for the professional development of teachers and to present future students with examples of quality learning outcomes and emergent trends in contemporary student artistic practices. Over the history of the ARTEXPRESS exhibition, students have been exposed to a wide range of possible learning outcomes across the broadest possible array of media. One of the significant phenomena about the ARTEXPRESS exhibition is that it has developed its own distinctive contemporary adolescent student genres and history that have contributed significantly to the development of an ARTEXPRESS, HSC Visual Art culture.

The selection of the case study participants in Stage 1, Part 2 (5.0, p. 189) was not on the basis of belonging to the first longitudinal study group of works selected for ARTEXPRESS. Only two of the seven student participants in the case study had their work exhibited in ARTEXPRESS. Selection, following ethics

procedures, was on a referral basis from Visual Art classroom teachers. Their selection was dependent on the student's communication skills, high learning outcomes and their willingness to participate. More importantly, the Visual Art teachers perceived that the students they nominated could articulate to the researcher their range of Visual Art experiences. The participants, typical Visual Art students came from a selection of regional and country government secondary schools in NSW. The selection of case study students was made to enhance potential generalisability arising in the Stage 2, Meta-Inference, where selection on the basis of typicality is far more likely to support emergent claims (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000).

The case study aims to provide in-depth different contexts and allow multiple insights into the way student artists use visual art inquiry to understand self. Each different student context reveals a unique insight into the phenomenon of the HSC experience from the position of the student (artist) and a significant other, parent or teacher, who also observed the journey. The case study aims to explore the intentions of the student through a multiple triangulation process involving a variety of perspectives of the student learning journey (Figure, 3.2, p. 139), including the analysis of the art products and/or art diaries (VAPD) and student interviews. Additional perspectives were gathered through an interview process with the students' nominated (significant other), who was either parent or teacher. The interview was gathered after the student had left school, bringing a reflexive perspective to the learning journey and the previous visual pedagogical experience.

Limitations to the management of the study occurred in a range of ways throughout the study involving access to students, teachers and parents. The research model was planned in such a way that there was flexibility to operate within such limitations.

In Stage Two, a meta-inference emerged from a synthesis of both strands of the empirical data analysis in Stage One. The results of the inquiry are revealed as montage and descriptive text narratives, as the combination of the two representational forms best informs the interpretive inquiry. The montage is conceptualised to focus on differences, complexity and the connection between the utterances of the students in the study as they inform student subjectivities and communicative practices. As bricoleur, the researcher has drawn from multiple perspectives and narrative forms presented by the students and other commentators on the student learning to piece together images and words as montage. The research accepts that the various types of data are representational and resonate the nature of the phenomena, rather than conceptualise it (Eisner, 1991; Sullivan, 1998; Nielsen, 2000).

The collective ARTEXPRESS narrative is informed by commentators and the dialogic interviews with the students, parents and teachers. The interviews have captured the collaborative relationships of the student and teacher, the personal learning insights of the students and their parents, and the intentions behind the students' desire to select their topics of inquiry. The final narrative as a meta-inference will result from the iterative and generative nature of the artistic inquiry, the narratives as montage and the descriptive text. The phenomenon of subjectivity production is systematically developed and categories as relationships are revealed through the centrality of the aesthetic experience informed by a process of critical reflection and interpretation of meaning as artworks.

Despite the limitations, the research supports the claims by Slattery & Rapp (2003) that the inter-relationship between hermeneutics and subjectivity can connect critical, technical and empirical knowing in meaningful ways for students. The research can highlight how, through artmaking or imaging, students can engage with life and others through reflexive conversations. These conversations involve making images and exhibiting images, as both performative processes provide the student with the communicative means to engage with their own ethical processes

and measure their ideas against the communities that surround them. A subjectivity and aesthetic educational orientation will see imaging and exhibition as a meaningful and legitimate means of meaning-making. Fellow classmates, teachers, parents and the wider community will provide an audience for the critical development of visual performative and communicative practices. Personal agency will be informed by the conversations of life that surround such practices.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Subjectivity, Identity and Culture**

#### **2.1.1 *Being and Subjectivity***

Questions about identity and desire, who we are, what we want, what we like and how we feel preoccupy Western thought. Philosophers have defined subjectivity in terms of reason, human spirit or the act of perception. Questions about identity have become personal and theoretical problems connected to the way each individual perceives and is affected by their world. Recent thinking has come to see self or one's subjectivity as an active construct, dependent on how we 'see' our world and others in it. An individual's lifeworld shapes their subjectivity or identity and is formed through a process of "inter-subjectively recognised self-identification" (Habermas, 1976, p. 107). This is signified by "signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (Barker, 2000, p. 166) which are increasingly inhabited by images.

How we perceive ourselves has been shaped historically by the way different thinkers have positioned their ideas on the self. The complexity of our current cosmopolitan, globalised, technical and changing lifeworld finds the individual being imagined in terms of free-floating (Featherstone, 1995), many and mobile (Mansfield, 2000), or as forming in web-like (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) relationships and assemblages that aggregate the self. Mcquillan (2000) and Kellner (1992) claim that subjectivity production is also linked to the phenomenon of the narrative. Within an increasingly visual world these narratives are presented to us as a complex and ever changing array of images and aesthetic forms. It is an essential aspect of being human to ask questions about the relationship between the thinking, feeling and the spiritual (inner) self.

The work of Immanuel Kant (1788) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* brought forward the notion of a transcendental awareness or transcendental ego-self which precedes conscious experience. This pure, original, unchangeable self is the ground from which all experiences emulate. The self in Western thinking came to

be seen as fundamental, stable and a rational “I” or empirical self. This Cartesian legacy of rational thought and objective truth shattered that aspect of the legacy of the Enlightenment that emphasized individual experience and one’s emotional and aesthetic experiences as the basis for grounding all meaning. This former thinking about self had dominated much of Western thought and presented self as a fixed and self-aware entity or subject, with matters of feeling and emotion presented as subjective idealism.

The subjectivity debate continued around the ideas presented by Freud (1976) and Husserl (1960) where self was presented as having the capacity to shape one’s world. Freud’s work fractured the unified Cartesian subject (Barker, 2000). Self was constituted by a conscious ego, rational and socially aware, and by the unconscious ‘inside’ which functioned on a symbolic logic other than reason. Furthermore, the philosophical ideas of Husserl (1931, 1969) drew attention to how all our perceptual experiences, unconscious or conscious affect how we see self and how we act in the world. Self-knowledge is therefore, a movement, a coming-into-consciousness and the object of the subject’s increasing capacity or desire for self knowledge. The work of Husserl on phenomenology emphasized a priori of experiences or primal intuition of individuals about their world. For the phenomenologist, there is no dichotomy of an “inner world of private experience” and an “outer world of public objects.” The self is seen as the result of a changing stream of impressions and thoughts. Even our experience of the body results from mental impressions open to interpretation. All experience appears to refer to “something beyond itself,” (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p. 2) or ‘other’ located within the self.

Husserl’s thinking grounds subjective knowledge as part of one’s intentionality or conscious existence, where pure inner intuition is the essence of experience. He states:

I experience myself here in the first instance as 'I' in the ordinary sense of the term, as this person living amongst others in the world.... Turning inwards in pure reflection, following exclusively 'inner experience'...I obtain a pure descriptive knowledge of the physical life as it is in itself, the most original information being obtained from myself, because here alone is perception the medium ( Husserl, 1931, p. 14).

One's subjectivity and perceptual experiences connect the individual to the objective world. Through intentionality and a process of self validation, after reflection (reflexivity) and a re-alignment of one's inter-subjectively formed self, one could choose to modify one's identity. The subject can therefore know self only through knowing other. This process of self-recognition constitutes its own self-consciousness. Knowing self, or self-consciousness, is a desire to know the 'other' within self. However, Husserl's phenomenological ideas, still contained the idea of the unique and definable self.

Thinking on subjectivity as fixed or unchanging began to be challenged further by the phenomenological work of Heidegger (1962) and the critical theory focus of Habermas (1968) who extended Husserl's (1931, 1969) ideas on phenomenological experiences. The lived experience for Heidegger could not be separated from hermeneutic understandings gathered from referential experiences such as our cultural beliefs and social practices. Self began to be seen as constructed in relation to the inter-subjective meanings that define an individual. In a changing world, consisting of a changing body (either maturing or aging), and a changing set of cultural values and social structures, the self is also changing and adjusting. The idea of one's identity as emergent and existing, or being, came to be seen as an embodied cognition (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991), with no separation of the mind and body.

The individual was now constituted by an enactment of their bodily experiences connecting experience, expression and understanding. We understand ourselves and others, through the ways our own experience or personal memories connect to the collective memories and expressions of the past. Meaning about self is presented as hermeneutically formed from the combination of these lived experiences. Knowing that one's identity is a flux or process does not necessarily mean that one is equipped to manage a fluid state, or that one has the skills to realign. As a consequence there developed a sense of anxiety as questions began to arise about whether identity or individuality was really built on freedom and spontaneity.

### **2.1.2 Subjectivities as Becoming**

'Subjectivity' is a term used to represent an "abstract and general principle" (Mansfield, 2000, p. 2) which allows us to understand how our inner world of feeling and sensitivities is connected to our social existence and natural world. Our subjectivity is active in constructing how we "see" our world and others in it. One's identity is thus constituted by its own image which has formed outside itself by other social and cultural agencies (Abbinnett, 2003; Bauman, 2004).

The work of Nietzsche (1973) and Foucault (1980) has given attention to the way the subject is shaped by knowledge and power. The thinking of the former has influenced philosophical thought, cultural theories and semiotics where language is seen as a powerful signifier of the constituted self. The latter sees subjectivity formed from the relationship within human contexts, shaping and being shaped by society. It was Nietzsche who first began to explore ideas around the thought "that nothing is given as real except our world of desires and passions" (p. 66), and that one's 'will' is the essential force which moves an individual and affects others thus shaping who we are. Alternatively, Foucault (1980) came to see the individual in a process of "subjectification" conceived by histories and open to manipulation and control by systems and social organizations, where the forces represent power.



That the subject is autonomous and self-constituting is now debated (Baudrillard, 1983), and self is being presented as a mythological linguistic form (Barthes, 2000), or containing contradictory, schizoid characteristics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of a mobilised society. One's subjectivity is no longer seen as a spontaneous act expressing an individual's inner truth but constructed by the legacy of our historical past. Deleuze (1990) when commenting on the positions of both Nietzsche and Foucault noted that one's will or forces are not sufficient in themselves to establish an identity. He proposes that the shaping of one's identity is dependent on the ways in which forces (both internal and external) arise and combine or link. Thinking about self as singular is being presented as an inadequate way to represent the complexity of an individuals' engagement with political, social and philosophical understandings and similarly, these multiple subjectivities are seen as unstable and fluid.

Being, for Deleuze is seen as multiple and different and formed by a "disjunctive synthesis" (Deleuze, 2004. p. 205) in a creative, dynamic space and time. Extending the earlier phenomenological ideas of Husserl (1931, 1969), an essential aspect of subjectification is self-reflexivity and Deleuze sees this as similar to Nietzsche's (1973, 1990) idea of the "eternal return" (Deleuze, 1994), where each returning sees all previous subjectivities being dissolved. Building on Nietzsche's ideas, Deleuze presents us with the idea that the process of subjectification is establishing a way of existing or being and that there is a "tendency for human life to form images of itself" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 95).

Colebrook (2002) elaborates on this idea by using the example of "the image of the rational mind" (p. 32) which has already informed our ideas about subjectivity. In this sense, one's subjectivity is open to one's capacity to find ways through existing power and knowledge constructs and to deconstruct and to invent possibilities or new ways of existing. One is no longer a single subject, but multiple subjects or subjectivities, with the creative capacity to form new subjectivities. The individual and groups may constitute themselves as subjects through the processes of

subjectification. What counts in such processes is how they elude both established forms of knowledge and assimilate new knowledge, even if, in turn, they engender new forms of power (Deleuze, 1990).

Habermas (1976), drawing on the field of critical theory and cognitive psychology, has also challenged the idea of the autonomous ego and emphasizes the role of socialization and history in an individual's identity. He presents the ego identity as dependent and able to obtain "free access to the interpretive possibilities" of a society's cultural traditions (p. 93) through reflective performative actions. He speaks of an ego identity as unconstrained rather than autonomous and able to access the inner nature of self through aesthetic forms of expression (prelinguistically). In obtaining performative action, he also draws attention to the expressive and creative tendencies in life itself towards becoming. Nietzsche (1973) too, refers to this creativity as a "will to power" (p. 67). Self is therefore presented as being in constant process of creative becoming. The self is culturally, socially and historically located and open to multiple interpretive possibilities, with the individual a critical, creative and expressive active player. Bourriaud (2002) hypothesizes that artistic production presents as a model of sociability. In this context, artmaking is an activity that produces existence through the performative relationship between signs, forms, actions and objects. Artmaking, as creative becoming, has a role to play in informing identity as it emerges from our relationship with our aesthetic, ritualized and shaped life.

### ***2.1.3 Self-Identity as a Performative Process***

Much of the optimism of modernism and enlightenment thinking, which hailed human creativity, rationality and scientific exploration, has since been debunked by postmodern thought. Issues and myths related to identity are gaining critical prominence (Barker, 2000; Denson and McEvilley, 1996; Giddens, 1991). Modernist aesthetics was organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to

generate its own singular vision of the world. Denson and McEvilly refer to modernism as venerating “individuality and unique production” (p. 210). The culture of individualism which provided us with the idea that there was an empirical truth, and the self as an unchanging essence, has faded. The self is now being presented as precarious, contradictory and unstable, being reconstituted and dependent on the discourses and actions that operate within culture and society.

Lyotard (1984) presented this position as the loss of ‘grand narratives’ (dominant social structures and formal belief systems). In this context we find ourselves left with the development of a postmodern thought which finds the existence of ‘self’ to be merely a linguistic and cultural construct. Furthermore self is being presented as ‘free-floating’ (Featherstone, 1995), being formed and reformed from within the society and culture which surrounds it (Marcus, 1992; Mato, 1998). Identity is now what we make of ourselves within society, and we create our own beliefs and values (Barker, 2000; Habermas, 1976; Mansfield, 2000; Rhode & Platteel, 1999; Robinson, 1999). This consequently places new demands on the individual’s notions of self as perceptual reality is increasingly dislocated, visual, virtual and mobile, and issues of identity become increasingly central and critical.

Subjectivity as a product of history and the cultural practices of society has been central to the thinking of both Habermas (1976) and Foucault (1980). Habermas claimed that the myths and legacies of the past are only a backdrop for cultural production which is central to one’s understanding of self. An individual’s identity is produced through the process of socialization and the child integrates themselves into a “social system ... by appropriating symbolic generalities” (p. 74) from a full cultural and communicative repertoire.

Foucault (1980) similarly finds culture to be ‘historicised’ and sees social discourse as a productive force where knowledge and power relationships operate as agents to shape identities and behaviours. For Foucault, subjectivity is a discursive production and he argues that cultural representations and institutional practices

have the power to control beliefs and shape identity. The subject, therefore, might take on a variety of positions, each operating differently according to the spaces the individual inhabits, and each having its own associated speaking practices and representational forms. One of the examples presented by Barker (2000), to support this approach is that of schools. A school demands that the individual conform to the regulatory conventions of timetables and classrooms, be supervised by teachers who make judgments on the student's academic abilities, and each individual be graded in relation to others. This shapes our beliefs about how intelligent or otherwise we are and informs the student's representation of themselves as stupid or bright, dumb or clever.

For Habermas (1976) the above example would illustrate his proposition that "The basis for the assertion of one's own identity is not really self-identification, but inter-subjectively recognized self-identification" (p. 107). This anti-essentialist position provides us with an image of the ego accomplishing self-identification through performing interactions, which require the individual to identify themselves through asserting their own identity. Self-knowledge is therefore a movement towards becoming or a coming into consciousness. It is a continual process performed by our practical ego to maintain itself. The individual is thus always in a process of being and becoming and inquiry into the arts of self, as an aesthetics of existence, looks to transformative arts-inquiry practices where the creative and performative act produces self (Deleuze, 1990; Peters, 2005). Peters exploring Foucault's ideas presents the idea of the aesthetics of existence as an ethical self-constitution where the choices and actions in these creative spaces shape our lives. Mel (2000) refers to the ritualized activities in creative acts as exploring the liminalities or the spaces 'betwixt and between' the act of becoming.

Most recently, attention has been given to the idea of self as body which is constructed discursively by cultural practices. In our imagined uniqueness we see ourselves (our bodies) as providing corporal validation of who we are. We have a physical presence and unique distinguishing features which we validate through

our senses. We have medical histories and tax file numbers. Foucault (1980) began the focus on body and identity when he focused attention on institutional control of the body through manipulation and surveillance and through his work on gender as historically and culturally specific. Self-identity and the body has also been the focus of feminist writers such as Kristeva (1982) and Butler (1997) who take a gendered perspective on subjectivity and assert that sexual difference has been central in organizing society. This line of thinking reveals and elaborates on the way the personal or inner self is constantly being presented with gendering roles of behaviour from the outside and how this changes from culture to culture. Self is presented as a discursively formed subject where the inner “sexed subject” has been “formed by the ‘outside’ of family” (Barker, 2000, p. 173).

This work highlights the complexity of understanding one's identity when the private, public or political consequences impact on the individual and their working life. It draws attention to the difficulty of the individual at times to differentiate between the subject and the object. For Butler (1990, 1997) one's subjectivity is now seen as gaining recognition through the bodies (or forms) we inhabit in the world and through the forms or work we create in the world. While acknowledging the corporal, Butler (1990) finds “the fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy” (p. 71).

Identities are therefore, bodies of constructed knowledge and cultural sites, which are influenced by the many representations of being (knowledge), presented to the individual and the way the individual constructs images of self from these representations. Media images and popular culture which represent hegemonic constructs about gender roles in society have been central in much of the discursive debate in cultural studies. Questions about culture and ideology within

cultural studies are central in any investigation of subjectivity and identity, along with the signifying practices of the culture and its representational forms.

This thinking has also been explored by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who have attempted to present the idea that there is no fixed truth, knowing subject or simple representations of the self. Therefore, there is no division between the forms of representation in the real world, which include all cultural forms, and, on the other hand, the field of performative subjectivities (artists or authors). They conclude that “We think that one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside” (p. 23). They present the idea of being, as the individual in process of becoming. Bodies are assemblages which are multiple and mobile. They expand, connect and have no fixed points; they are “rhizomic” (p. 25). This botanic form used by Deleuze and Guattari is random, heterogeneous, decentred in its quest for survival. In this way it is unlike the common accepted metaphoric structure of a tree or root which is singular in purpose, often used to describe the development of an individual or of knowledge. The assemblages establish connections between certain multiplicities of the three fields of reality, representations and subjectivities.

Becoming is therefore a process of “inventing new possibilities of life” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 45) and a body is formed through its relationship with other bodies, eventually investing in the possibilities of new images of self. This thinking attempts to represent the dynamism and instability of thought, the chaos of life, the interpenetration of things in one’s personal life and in the broader society. An essential aspect of an individual’s capacity to produce or construct self is dependent on their capacity to make choices and take actions or develop agency (Salih, 2002) in relation to the evolving self.

#### **2.1.4 Seeing Possibilities, Becoming**

*“Truth is producing existence” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 134).*

The significance of the new reality of contemporary life and of postmodern thinking is the requirement for each individual to develop the capacity and dispositions, or

agency that will equip them to deal with the infinite possibilities of truths as they present for each individual. It moves us beyond the idea that structures and identities can be fixed truths or that they will take knowable forms (Mansfield, 2000). Each event shapes an individual and all truths are in a state of constant instability, decomposing and recomposing endlessly. Because one is constantly in a state mobility, it is essential that one is aware of how this state of being affects us and shapes our identities.

Szerszynski and Urry (2006), in their most recent sociological research draw our attention to the mobility and visibility (ways of seeing and being seen) in current cosmopolitan society. Our world now consists of the capacity to 'travel' corporally, imaginatively and virtually. We consume many places and environments, we are curious about many locations and events and we are more prepared to take risks when we encounter 'other' (p. 115). The new realities require us to have the ability to map our own culture and society and to be able to reflect upon and make judgments about our complex world of places, events and histories. Most importantly, the new visibilities and mobilities are changing how we 'see' or 'be' in this world. It is therefore, not surprising that Deleuze and Guattari (1987), drawing on the work of Nietzsche (1973) and other writers such as Schon (1983), Zimmerman (1998) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) have refocused attention on creativity, idea generation and the arts. Creativity, or original thinking, has increasingly gained equal status with logical reasoning which has led to the acceptance of original thinking being taken more seriously within the broader field of education (Robinson, 2001; Reilly, 2002). More specifically creative visualization is taken to be a defining feature and expectation of visual education (Brown, 2001c).

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) in *Creativity, Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, presents the idea that the force of creativity is the main power which affects the destiny of all forms of life and shifts existing representations of self. Drawing on the analogy of genetic change in biological evolution, he posits the

idea that memes represent society's cultural equivalent. Each generation must learn these cultural memes or imitations such as languages, theories, songs or values. More specifically, a culture contains its own symbolic rules or generalizations which can be creatively altered. If these ideas are validated, they have the capacity, to not only shift the individual, but also they can innovate into new cultural forms and new representations. It is the creative energies of the individual(s) and the forces of reciprocity which move and change cultural practices and shift existing representations of self. The creative imagination has made possible everything from the invention of new technologies to cloning, genetic engineering to popular youth culture and cosmetic surgery.

For Deleuze (1990), artists, like philosophers work creatively with ideas. They work with self-moving thought, beyond reflection, to create new sensory forms and evolve new concepts. The act of imaging or the creation of an artwork is a performative act where ideas are given visual and aesthetic representation. Deleuze gives the example of the creation of a portrait. The artist projects mental conceptual ideas about the subject and produces a likeness rather than reproducing or repeating the perceptual reality. Becoming as a creation or new representation requires tracing pathways between impossibilities towards new solutions. "Thinking is in the first place seeing and talking, but only once the eye goes beyond things to 'visibilities', and language goes beyond words or sentences to utterances....then thinking is a capacity.... and thought is a strategy" (p. 95). For Deleuze becoming is a verb that is communicative and contagious (p. 238), made up of assemblages and connections which are multiple and constantly repeating yet, with each repetition there is difference and divergence. Existing is therefore presented as a "work of art". A work of art is more than information and communication, a work of art, makes direct links between the concept and our percepts and affects, between what we see, say, feel and desire. The subject enters into a relationship with an object in order to represent a moment where all the random and unique conditions of that moment are affected by history, science, society, culture, politics and their sensory and aesthetic responses.



Reilly (2002), writing on 'arting' and knowledge, links knowledge and imagination. He identifies that imagination and sensation have a role to play in the debate about the nature of knowledge. Reilly draws on the thoughts of Heidegger (1956) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who see the artist as the origin of an artwork, but also the artwork as a force informing emergent meaning for the artist. Through the generation of new concepts and representational forms of self, generated through embodied actions, an individual can develop an aesthetic and creative understanding of everyday existence. Artmaking, as cultural production, is presented as the act of connecting and relating all aesthetic activity (Bourriaud, 2002) in life. It is shaped within society rather than the modernist notion of it being emergent from an independent or private space or teleological position.

#### ***2.1.5 Producing Subjectivity and the Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm***

In giving consideration to the ideas of developing dispositions which will allow individuals to deal with multiple subjectivities, attention turned to thinking about the capacities of the individual to equip themselves to deal with the processes of becoming. This involved how they could begin to understand the inextricable links between self and the social and cultural practices they experience. Foucault's (1980) thinking on subjectivities has significantly influenced notions of truth about self and presented ideas around self "where knowledge is a form of power implicated in the production of subjectivity" (Barker, 2000, p. 145). These ideas present us with a thinking which dismisses any possibilities that developing an identity involves a personal dialogue with self. It presents us with the idea that an individual would need to investigate all aspects of their society's social and cultural beliefs and power constructs. Individuals in developing their own personal narratives would need to discursively engage in a dialogue about the ways others attempt to shape representations for us. It would involve analysis of how others see us, the ways we represent ourselves and how all these work to develop in the individual a sense of self.

For Habermas (1976), understanding self represents the rejection of an ego identity and the development of a critical position by the individual which allows for interrogation and a discursive positioning of self. This positioning has the potential for an individual to obtain free access to multiple interpretive communicative possibilities of cultural and aesthetic traditions (p. 93). This position was further elaborated by Habermas (1990) as he attempted to focus on the ways our intuitive and emotional selves also contributed to selfhood. Identity was presented as emergent from our reflective responses to our personal realities differentiated from individual lifeworlds and worlds. This sense of self is dependent on our capacities to mediate our physical, emotional, cultural and social consciousness within our individual lived experiences. It also requires thought on how to best reflect on and give consideration to the care of self and others as socio-ecological ontology.

Self-concept has become a significant area of discussion as consideration is given to the well-being of the individual and to how one can work with the complexities of an assembled self. There is an increasing importance being placed on the capacities of the individuals to understand how their unique self is being constructed (Eisner, 2001a; Gergen, 1971; Haraway, 1998). This also requires an understanding of how an individual emerges from beneath the many interpretive layers of meaning that connect them with the affective responses to life. These responses have been drawn from their past personal experiences of family and events, and their present realities which all have the potential to shape the future. Ideas about self have moved beyond a generalist fixed notion of self to a wider range of concepts of self that include self-esteem, self-concept and self-image.

Guattari (1995) presents us with the notion that we need to consider the social and mental ecology of the individual as they develop a realization of self-autonomy as social transformations happen over time. This requires creative capacities and form from an assemblage of different domains of thought. The action of producing subjectivity will require the application of “reason, understanding will and affectivity” (p. 103). He presents a new ethico-aesthetic paradigm to be considered. He

proposes the production of subjectivity, as a creative act, will require responsibility for the “creative instance” (p. 107). The enunciation process is presented as requiring consideration of how the collective territories of the assembled self are formed. The emphasis is no longer placed on being but on the manner in which one produces subjectivity as “creative processuality” (Guattari, 1995, p. 31). As images increasingly fill cultural spaces artmaking is presented as providing agency for the individual. Artmaking is therefore presented as a creative and performative act that connects the body and mind with an individual’s lifeworld.

## **2.2 Communicative Knowing, Reflexivity, Art, the Artist and Identity**

The world constantly presents and represents itself to the individual as events which seek to be ordered into structures, systems and reasoned consequences. In reality change phenomena are presented to each individual through the experience of mobility, in our relationships and in the wider world of physical experiences and events. The postmodern condition presents us with the picture of an individual confronted by the realities of a seemingly outwardly-ordered and controlled society which, in reality, is experiencing rapid and relentless change punctuated by the randomness of life events. Society is now confronted by the fractured and variable nature of all experience and a desire to find creative or flexible means to navigate this change (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994, 1996; Robinson, 2001), and in so-doing transform self through performative means (Butler, 1990, 1997; Eisner, 2001a; Grierson, 2006b; Lovell, 2003; McNay, 1999).

For the evolving adolescent, the fractured and random nature of change reality is compounded by a desire to find the means by which to explore the possibilities of becoming an adult. To do this they must reconcile the presenting world of multiple experiences and future possibilities that are increasingly presented as visual representations. As identification of self often resides in the visual clues of one's lifeworld, finding one's identity through visual representations may be an important place to explore identity (Jones, 2007). Rasmussen (2006), in her work on subjectivity, sexuality and secondary schooling, describes the need to give consideration in adolescence to subjectivity construction. Such a process considers our physical bodies, the narratives (personal and cultural) that shape us and our performances or personal actions. Finding a framework that will allow a prolonged encounter between self, other and society in ways that support and work in a dynamic relationship with one's emotional and imaginative life is a necessity. Such a mechanism, and its resultant cultural practices, will need to be perceived by the adolescent student as authentic. It will also need to address the discourses and actions that construct them. Furthermore, it will need to allow the individual to

represent their realities and ground them in ways that provide relevant representational practices and communicative strength.

The subsequent sections of the literature review extend ideas about the construction of identities, drawing on current philosophical and interpretivist ways of knowing in arts-inquiry and Visual Art education. This is done in order to reveal the relevance of aesthetic material arts practices, such as painting, sculpture and its other multi-modal forms, as a legitimate representational field for the twenty-first century with performative capacities. It will expand on the significance of visual arts-inquiry practice as a meaning-making platform (Eisner, 2002a; Grierson, 2006 b). It will present Visual Art education as a representational practice that accommodates expressive imagination in the creation of more resilient and flexible identities. It will consider how the performative nature of this material practice informs personal and social agency, or student choice or actions as becoming through doing.

### ***2.2.1 Evolving Self and Communicative Action***

Questions about who we are and how we come to live the lives we do, have always been central to self inquiry (Mansfield, 2000). We have always been aware of how events in our lives, our emotions and perceptions affect our relationships and the decisions we make. Living or being human always finds us in particular situations at particular times discovering and understanding our world through our senses (Deleuze, 2004).

To find a way to reconcile a world which continues to present us with new situations, we need to consider the interpretive possibilities which emerge from the framework of our social lifeworlds, the communicative forms of the society and their expression (Habermas, 1968). Phenomenological inquiry seeks to explore the intentionality of one's conscious perceptual experience through original and pure descriptive knowledge (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991; Husserl, 1931; Thompson, 2003). Phenomenology also separates itself from scientific realism or

perception as mere appearance or representation. It acknowledges a priori of individual perception, intuition and experience. It rejects empirical notions of truth, and seeks to explore intuition and more interpretive understandings of the world through the conscious self. It is concerned with understanding how the everyday, inter-subjective world (lifeworld) is constituted.

In *praxis* terms, interpretive or hermeneutic understanding is concerned with a prolonging of openness. While a hermeneutic understanding may never be able to eliminate all of the contingencies which present to the individual, the development of a critical reflective disposition is presented by Habermas (1968) as a process which allows an individual to attend to and resolve questions about the emerging self. Consciousness constructs an individual as much as it perceives the world. The self is constituted by the legacy of human existence, by one's habitual interactions and by confronting new realities, which find truth not in any objective reality but "at the maintenance of inter-subjectivity of mutual understandings" (Habermas, 1968, p. 176). Reflexivity is presented as a disposition essential for understanding self.

The ego does not accomplish its self-identifications in a propositional attitude. It presents itself to itself as a practical ego in the performance of communicative actions; and in communicative action the participants must reciprocally suppose that the distinguishing-oneself-from others is recognised by those others. (Habermas, 1976, p. 107).

For Habermas (1976), the adult ego emerges from its interdependent functioning in society and nature. This ego is unconstrained and able to demonstrate the ability to construct new identities which move an individual to a point of harmony with their old identity. How we interpret our identity is drawn from what he describes as the "discursive formation of will" (p. 93). This moves the individual beyond an interpretive analysis of the cultural framework of one's existence, into what he describes as the ability to obtain "free access to the interpretive possibilities of the

cultural tradition” (p. 93). To be able to do this requires that one is able to draw not only on the discourses of the wider cultural script through reflection, but also through participation in aesthetic forms of expression. This will enable the individual to develop an understanding of self through reasoned inductive avenues, to gain what he calls communicative access to the inner nature of self.

In *Communication and the Evolution of Society* Habermas (1976), drawing on the field of cognitive development, proposes that the young adult is able to apply reflexive norms to understand individuality and ego. Reflexivity allows the adolescent to move beyond the ability to assimilate the symbolic generalizations of society to be transformed. The transformative process allows individuals to assert their identities independently of concrete roles, particular social systems and behavioral norms. It is the degree of reflexivity which distinguishes adulthood. An identity is thus produced through socialization, where the individual integrates into a social system through cultural practices. The individual is required to utilise the skills of critical reflection about symbolic generalizations and create new representational meanings through what Habermas refers to as communicative action.

Habermas (1976) was conscious that the development of communicative action would require an individual to acquire the capacity to reach into one’s inner self through the aesthetic forms of expression which were active and culturally appropriate to the individual’s context. Similarly, arts education writers such as Dewey (1934), Eisner (2002a) and Abbs (1995), identified that an aesthetic, creative and expressive engagement within appropriate cultural forms provides opportunities for a prolonged encounter with self. The importance of arts-inquiry as an expressive, interpretive activity that informs self has been identified by many philosophers such as Habermas (1976), Heidegger (1956, 1962), Deleuze(1990) and Derrida (1998). In the context of multiple identities, this would see an individual working towards reconciling the complexities of one’s inter-subjectively complex life and appropriating creatively what ever conceptual, symbolic and representational

forms best met their deepest inner sense about who they are. Individuals, would therefore, also need to develop skills and understandings about how to access their inner nature in order to make personal expression from the forces which shape self. Arts-inquiry is being identified for its capacity to actualize such multiple understandings and generative meanings (Deleuze, 1990; Finely, 2005; Grierson, 2006b; Reilly, 2002; Sullivan, 2005).

### ***2.2.2 Phenomenology and Seeking the Epistemic Functions of Artmaking***

Phenomenology draws heavily on our perceptual understandings through seeing, hearing and touching, as well as other phenomena such as feeling, imagining, remembering and judging. To experience openness implies one must suspend judgment and continue to learn where there is no certainty. Artists employ this strategy when they shape materials into representations. The sensuous engagement with materials provides a medium through which to channel and continually align and reaffirm emergent understandings. The encounter between materials, actions and representations connects self with one's culture and its representational forms. Artists use the strategy of reflexivity to explore self-knowing and generate meaning (Grushka, 2005). In artmaking the conscious self engages with the other in self, to explore imaginings or projections and speculative understandings (Jones, 2007).

When one makes art or engages in the act of art inquiry through material visibility or practice, the body is the centre of orientation. In this position the subject places self at the centre of the inquiry (object) or engages in a process of understanding from a logo-centric position. This logo-centrism places one 'behind the sign' which represents, through symbolic expression, an external objective reality.

For Husserl (1969), this external reality is not "in my space or anyone else's as phenomenon, but exists as objective space" (p. 174) and its constitution for Husserl is a collection of inter-subjectively perceived appearances grounded in various contexts. For Husserl, each ego has its own domain of perceptual



experiences which are perceived from a certain orientation, or individual meaning-making system:

The body then has for this particular ego, the unique distinction of bearing in itself the zero point of all these orientations. It is thus that all things of the surrounding world possess an orientation to the body, just, as, accordingly, all expressions of orientation imply this relation. (Husserl, 1969, p. 185).

For Habermas (1968), like Husserl, these signs (whether linguistic communication or symbolic interaction) are situated, limited and reveal a specific character, or capture what he calls general norms which communicate this external reality.

While the signs embody the identity of the ego, it does not manifest itself directly and clearly through them, but indirectly within them. The subject seeks to reconcile perceptual and intrinsic experiences with the inner self as an aesthetic imaginative expression. Such an inner process, can move to consciousness the individual and “the ego towards reflection and an understanding of identity” (Abbs, 1994, p. 21).

### ***2.2.3 Knowing Self Through Interpretive Expressive Possibilities***

Habermas (1990) places greatest emphasis on experiential expression “for expression can contain more of what goes on in the mind than can be revealed by any act of introspection” (p. 167). Enactment as expression for Habermas, remains intimately rooted in the context of a spontaneous life. It is this expression, which occurs within the act of artmaking that can offer a unique experience. Some might argue an essential experience for all. For Heidegger (1956) and Derrida (1998) art forms reveal truth from within the actions of making and in the reflective encounters which recur, concur, repeat and invert. The openness of the process while often exhausting as well as exhilarating, makes possible the growth and development of one’s sensibilities (Abbs, 1994).

The phenomenological tradition of a relationship between the mind, the body, the environment, space, time and the mediated world has been emphasized by arts educational writers such as Eisner (1972) and Dewey (1934). In 1934, in his work *Art as Experience*, Dewey sought to find answers to what presented in his generation as the immense amount of external ordering of society. This approach

looked to fine art and the imaginative experience as a way for each individual to find a unified self and subsequently a unified society. While the thrust of his ideas was the quest of a unified self, a position now seen as untenable, he did begin the legacy of thinking about the importance of thoughtful action in a qualitative expressive experience for each individual, specifically children (Jackson, 1998).

For Dewey (1934) and subsequent writers, an important value of arts education lay in the unique contribution it makes to an individual's experience and understanding of the world. It combines intuitive and expressive knowing with the skill of objective and perceptual observations. Through the differentiated symbolic aesthetic forms, it deepens and refines our senses and is inherently cognitive, interpretive, non-discursive and ethical (Abbs, 1991, 1994; Cuncliffe, 2005; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1972; Gardner, 1990; Langer, 1957; Neilson, 2000). Eisner (2001a) shares Dewey's (1934) view that an art experience has the potential to allow for the exploration of one's inner landscape. An art experience is able to focus on the internal self, the subjective side of the individual to explore the uncertainty of life through expressive and symbolic codes which make up human experience. Visual Art education through material experiences provides creative ways to represent and reveal self (Eisner, 1991, 2001a; Finley, 2005; Grierson, 2006b).

#### ***2.2.4 Artmaking: Transformative Cultural Practices, Agency and Performative***

*Pedagogy* Artists have always been identified as having a capacity to present their experiences more poignantly and effectively than others (Heidegger, 1956; Deleuze, 1990) and communicate new relationships between self and society. Artists actively contribute to the evolution of culture through the production of memes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Eisner, 2001a). Memes are units of cultural information that each individual must learn if a culture is to continue. Like numbers, songs and recipes, images as memes need to be learnt and creatively explored in order to understand how they affect cultural practices. Memes as representations are shaped by our senses, cultural experiences, beliefs and individuality. In postmodern debates, representations or how we see ourselves are not an act of mimesis or copying of the real but an aesthetic, creative expression, or

conventionalised construction of the “real” (Barker, 2000, p. 137). Thus, artists seek to illuminate their world and experiences by searching for meaningfulness beneath and beyond appearance while working with the interdependent phenomena of the shared cultural script of a society(s).

Most recently the production of representational forms as artmaking has been conceptualized within the larger debate around personal agency and the performative self (Butler, 1990; Bolt, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005; Jones, 2007; Lovell, 2003; McNay, 1999). Butler argues that the self is constituted through the reiterative performances of everyday life and that the individual is constituted and dependent on the enactment of a society’s norms or practices. Finding a personal voice or agency requires that the individual utilize what Lovell refers to as an “ensemble” (p. 2) of performances. These acknowledge multiple communicative processes within a society such as speech, action, language and art. Jones links imaging, as representational production, to the performative act of becoming and claims that making images is an important place to explore identity.

Performative pedagogy reframes educational enterprise, as a change phenomenon. It is made up of ongoing narratives and performances, rather than an accumulation of linear and disassociated epistemologies (Warren, 2007; Elliott, 2007). The theory of performative pedagogy is not about a pedagogical style, but the way classrooms can provide students with spaces or sites for an engagement with possibilities (Pineau, 1994). This has been extended by other writers who have linked performative pedagogy with critical understandings of power and the politics of identity and the lived experience (Alexander, Anderson & Gallegos, 2004). Eisner (2001a) defines work in the visual arts as a way to not only create performances and products, but also “it is a way of creating our lives, by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture”(p. 8). Whatever the modality being employed by the artist, they use their material practices to connect their ideas to reveal self through powerful concepts as symbolic form (Langer,

1957; Perkins & Gardner, 1989; Perkins, 1994). Artists reveal self through personal validation of images as symbols of their own cultural script rather than through accepting or copying more generally shared narratives. This practice enables the individual to find communicative relevance through creative, generative inquiring acts which lead to the development of a personal voice or agency.

Bourdieu (1977) links cultural production to social reproduction. He identifies the central role of education in developing, in the individual, an understanding of how institutional or social norms operate and affect the formation of the individual. Personal transformation, or the development of new identities, requires that an individual work through the interpretive possibilities of mimetic cultural activity by employing reflective practices. Eisner (2001a) refers to Visual Art education as a transformative process, “the process of learning how to invent yourself” (p. 7) informed by the very communicative practices and visual representations that surround the individual. Linking performative pedagogy and the visual has been taken, within the literacies debate by Kress (1998) and Achilles (2003), to acknowledge that new technologies of communication require a capacity to not only critique visual texts, but also the skill to design or shape meaning through visual performative means.

Knowledge is gained through the process of technical, contextual, and critical orientations in artmaking within the hermeneutic cycle which is socially grounded (Sullivan, 1998, 2005). The act of researching and transforming consciousness through liminalities and possibilities of materials and through the active manipulation and construction of new representations and new concepts, is the performative activity of visual artmaking. Representing and revealing self through new technologies and contemporary art practices is being argued as increasingly more accessible for all (Aland, 2004).

### ***2.2.5 Artmaking and identity***

To understand artmaking as research, social action and cultural practice, the artist must: “grasp the meanings that constitute the action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 191). Grasping the meaning or finding what it is that you want to know, requires a focus on self. This focusing process opens up a commentary which ranges from personal, spiritual, aesthetic and cultural, to historical perspectives, and might or might not have initial conscious intentions on the part of the artist in relation to self.

To communicate with personal relevance, artmaking requires that the artist make self the subject of their inquiry. Within the postmodern society, self and identity as the focus of inquiry have gained critical prominence (Denson & McEvilly, 1996; Holman Jones, 2005) along with a return to a focus on conceptual figurative forms of representation and performative practices, and away from the abstract modernist legacy. Within the field of visual art research, Sullivan (1998, 2005) has identified that artists use many means through which to communicate and research aspects of self. Artists can and do use themselves as the site of research. When artists are the subject, they are open to choose a range of methodological approaches, such as autobiographical, self reporting and variations of documenting. It is this autobiographical (or self) reporting perspective which appears significant when considering the transformative potential of creating and communicating through visual imaging as a way to understand one’s identity (Hamilton, 2006).

Whatever the intentions of the artists the process of artmaking requires that there be established a dialogue between the experience, the emergent representations, the ideas and the artmaking experience itself. Achieving openness requires that the creator of the images is able to grasp the way that meanings emerge through the action of creation. Eisner (2001a) sees the creation of representations as a process of stabilization where inscription and editing through material practices or representational acts make possible a dialogue with the emergent images or forms.

The act of artmaking is presented as a platform upon which to test philosophical assumptions, drawing both on the rational and intuitive ways of knowing, while

validating and finding meaning in the act itself. The conceptual artist, Kosuth (1981), in deconstructing contemporary art practices, draws on the Habermasian (1976) notions of the reflective hermeneutic circle. He identifies art as a spiralling circularity practice, where hermeneutics and concrete reflection both are connected and reciprocal. The activity of making art is not autonomous and art can be seen as a sign, an experience of the world, and as a designation which points to the unique form that it takes. "Art, as a locus of activity, is neither above, nor beyond lived experience, nor is it parasitic to it. It is part of it, because consciousness is discovered through reflection" (p. 63).

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) refers to this process as autotelic, a process that is able to reveal deep personal understandings about the world and the satisfied self through the fluid actions of creation. Csikszentmihalyi sees this activity as increasingly an aesthetic and ethical behaviour for the individual. Artists give enormous attention to the action of reflection within the process of creating in order to deconstruct the communicative possibilities being revealed (Kosuth, 1981; Sullivan, 2005).

#### ***2.2.6 Visual Artist as Reflective Self- Learners and Cultural Communicators***

Seeing and knowing as imaging is increasingly gaining prominence as a relevant way to communicate the natural and social world (Stafford, 1996; Schirato & Yell, 2000; Schirato & Webb, 2004). Images both convey meaning and make meaning. Learning how to decode images has become an important visual literacy. Understanding how images are encoded and the way images make meaning requires that we examine the way visual arts use imaging to convey facts, concepts, symbolic systems and forms.

Artmaking is presented as cultural production, informing truth for the artist. Images become symbols of intense personal meaning which represent the artist's phenomenological construction of visions of self and society. Artists acknowledge that their images and ideas are not completely unique, but are constructed (Vygotsky, 1971, 1978) and embody traces drawn from a vast image bank of world cultures. Artists' work embodies constructs of self, relative to history, culture,

beliefs and interpretations and ideas which are relentlessly processed through a transpersonal mind (Denson & McEvilly, 1996) or transcognitive processes (Sullivan, 1998). Self and society are parallel and vital agents that inform each other through analysis and critique. All images used by artists undergo a personal validation. This validation process connects the image to the inner self affirming Neitzche's (1973) idea that nothing is 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions and we create our own beliefs and values (Robinson, 1999; Rhode & Platteel, 1999).

Contemporary art practices find artists critically aware of the above phenomenon. It leads them to manipulate actively the socially discursive nature of the images and metaphors that they employ in their artworks. For the artist/ researcher, this action must be seen as intentional content in terms of the system of meanings to which their images belong. Historically, the artist as original thinker has been presented as the critical commentator of cultural and social practices. Whilst arts activity carries a legacy of transgression (Giroux, 2001) or defiance in terms of adherence to existing social and cultural norms, it can be seen as a representation process of revealing self and meaning-making.

The concept of art production as a meaning-making process captures Lovat's (2004) claim that searching for truth is a methodological act or *praxis* as much as it is a theoretical act. He states that "coming to know the truth involves engagement of the whole person, not merely cognitive action or even inter-subjective experience" (p. 7). Artists through representational acts, that connect cognition and action, refine their communicative awareness about themselves shaped by the way their work is viewed. It acknowledges that, over time, others interpret the symbolic and intentional aspects of their images and this will impact on the conscious and intuitive new actions of the artist and his/her awareness of self.

Artmaking as aesthetic and material, representational practice accommodates the instability and susceptibility of images and supports the individual's emergent inter-subjective understandings as communicative action (Habermas, 1990).

Representations evolve and are refined through the process of making images, reflecting on the possibilities of meaning and on others' interpretive understandings. Arts-inquiry provides a community and the individual with a means through which to mark their identity against a collective cultural history. Artists employ reciprocity by exchanging their own beliefs and values with those of others to articulate and communicate life concerns. The material forms of art inquiry are presented as acts of continual re-representation (Bolt, 2004) of self or "becoming" (Grierson, 2006b). Deleuze (1990) presents the artistic act as subjectivity production, while Jones (2002, 2007) refers to a process of becoming through doing.

Artists repeatedly explore truth as becoming. They re-search self through a performance of engaging in the act of communicating via essentially collective signs or representations which they personally validate and manipulate. The act of making requires "a balance between attendance to the more necessary forms of a structural technicity and the desirability of a more aesthetic reflectivity" (Lovat, 1999, p. 123). Visual Art education, through contemporary practices of aesthetic, communicative and reflective knowing, reveal the interpretive dimensions of self and other for the student. Artistic knowing acknowledges personal feelings, experiences and opinions and that the creative forces of self are referential.



### **2.3. Identity, Visuality, Representation and Embodied Knowing**

Vision is positioned as a primary sensory way of experiencing the world (Haraway, 1998; Eisner, 2001a; Stafford, 1996). We cannot dismiss the way that knowledge throughout history is shaped by the representational forms created within a culture. It also involves the interpretative possibilities and layers of meaning which have evolved around the functions of images, the role of aesthetic understanding and the artist. The twenty-first century with its “ocularcentric culture” (Rose, 2007, p. 10) has seen an increase in imaging and communication technologies. With this has come the reassessment of how images are redefining identity as ways of seeing the world (Berger, 1978; Jones, 2003, 2007) and how social conditions affect visual objects (Rose, 2007). More importantly, education must recognize the strong purchase of images on everyday life and learning. We cannot neglect to examine the power of the perceiving subject and all its objective forms, whether real or representational.

Visuality has emerged as a term with increasing currency as it is used to describe the experiencing of “the outside on the inside” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 181) in response to the complexities of a rapidly changing and transnational visual commodity society. Subsequently, self is being redefined as constructed from the constantly changing stream of visual impressions and experiences (from the outside) which impact on one’s consciousness, corporal being and both subjective and emotional world (on the inside). Rose (2007) draws attention to the visual “cultural turn” (p. 7) in cultural studies research. Her work details the way images visualise or make visible social and cultural difference and how the viewer or spectator takes particular viewing positions. The individual is broadly interpreted as being significantly constructed by embodied and sensory-based ways of knowing, which take visual form (Finely, 2005; Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2005). With the emergence of the primacy of the visual, seeing and being seen, or visibility as identity, is an important aspect of self (Jones, 2007). There appears to be a need to develop in the individual an understanding of how images or visual cues construct identities or

self-image. In doing so there is also a need to develop technical and critical skills to understand how images actively constitute and reveal self.

### **2.3.1 Identity, Visuality and Embodied Knowing**

The cornerstone of Western philosophical thought and truth contains the tradition of the unitary subject. Representations stood in the place of the absent object and representations of self were attempts to fix and stabilise an identity in a knowable form (Mansfield, 2000). Current thinking sees individuals as no longer autonomous and acting independently to shape the outside, but reacting and acting with the forces which externally shape them. In this context identity “is an essence which can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles” (Barker, 2000, p. 166). Subjectivity and identity are now seen as closely connected. Concepts about self, which relate to expectations and opinions of others, or the wider society, affect our perceptions about self.

For Habermas (1976), the understanding of self is a process where one’s own identity is not really self-identification, but “inter-subjectively recognised self-identification” (p. 107). From this positioning an individual should therefore be imagined in terms of many and mobile (Mansfield, 2000) or web-like (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) relationships and assemblages that aggregate the self. As current thinking rejects the idea that we can ever separate things from one another or find a truth, we find identity as a construction relative to history, culture, beliefs and interpretations. Individuals must now reflectively navigate a range of presented truths as they journey towards an understanding of self. The form of one’s identity is now presented as unstable and susceptible to a continuum of new constructed, meaning-making possibilities.

Working through and towards an understanding of one’s identities is now seen as the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become people. Mcquillan (2000) and Kellner (1992) have both identified that subjectivity production is linked to the phenomenon of the narrative. The individual as an

aspect of being sustains a narrative about and with self, while being confident to reconstruct one's identities when required. Identity is now both personal and social and the forms of its representation as visual messages are a significant constituting agent. It is now possible for individuals, at any given time to hold a series of photographic images of themselves which illustrate a range of contexts in which they constitute themselves relative to others. Images such as, the family photo, on holiday with friends, the work's Christmas party or shots of sporting or cultural activities are illustrative of this phenomenon. Over time the foreground may always capture the individual, but the background or the dominant other might shift.

While visual perception is a primary way of connecting to the world, it is not separated from those other sensory organs which allow us to engage cognitively with the objects that surround us. People respond and experience images in ways which draw on all their previous understandings (Denson & McEvilly, 1996; Sullivan, 1998). This might be in the form of a picture book or an iconic image found in a church, or on a television, along with all associated images (in the book, in print media or on the television) and includes all cultural objects (Freedman, 2003; Duncum, 2002, 2003, 2004). If an image is originally interpreted and connected to feelings such as fear, anxiety, pleasure or identity, then any subsequent new images will carry its history. It can be associated with the original history of the image, all previous experiences of similar images and these will subsequently form part of our new meaning about the image being presented. Armstrong (1998) argues that images when contextualised as cultural forms also have their own agency, or capacity to act as sites of resistance, as well as hegemonic sites that communicate the dominant messages of a society.

The image is being presented as a new scientific tool, a cultural signifier and a form of social discourse, able to represent knowledge and operate as an agent to shape identities and behaviours. Meaning about self as image circulates the globe "conveying information, affording pleasure and displeasure, influencing style, determining consumption and mediating power relations" (Rogoff, 1998, p. 15).

How we see, what we see, and how the world is represented to us shapes who we are (Berger, 1978). The visual, as a knowledge domain, is playing a more important role in how we learn about the world and how we are able to understand ourselves (Freedman, 2003, Handa, 2004). Images connect our understanding of the representation through their cultural contexts and they transfer to us messages about our beliefs, desires and feelings. This thinking builds on the major criticism of traditional epistemologies which link seeing with knowing, and which pursue the activity of observation and analysis to be a rational activity that disconnects knowledge from feelings, creating a disembodied truth (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991).

Varela et al. (1991), working in the field of cognitive science and human experience, have coined the term 'embodied action' (p. 173). This depends on the kinds of experiences that come from having a body with various sensory capacities. Secondly, Varela et al. believe that these individual sensory motor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context (p. 173). Our phenomenological consciousness, which manifests as vision, pain, memory and imagination, for example, informs our perceiving self and subsequent actions and must be seen as whole while functioning (Ginsburg, 1999). Body and mind, are thus fundamentally and inseparably a part of our lived cognition or consciousness. Current thinking about visuality and seeing is linked to understanding how our intuitive and embodied knowing informs our understandings of the world and our subjectivities (Meskimmon, 1997). The act of creating visual representations and making meaning is, therefore, far greater than the application of a skill, problem-solving strategy or the creative or innovative idea. For Varela, et al., embodied knowing requires reflection where the mind and body are brought together. They distinguish the phenomenological idea of embodied knowing from Husserlian phenomenology, which they describe as disembodied or unmindful reflection as it continued the tradition of reflection "only upon the essential structures of thought" (p. 28).

The argument for thinking about visuality as an embodied knowing draws very strongly on the phenomenon of the new media world which informs our consciousness through strong sensory processes, connecting directly to the individual through ideas and emotions. The twenty-first century will need to address education and training for the “new imagist” (Stafford, 1996). This approach will acknowledge that images are increasingly doing the conceptual work across a wide range of communicative fields, such as medical technology to iconic digital interfacing. Expressive and interpretive imaging is increasingly influencing society. A concrete example is the way history is increasingly being documented as video or film. Knowledge is mediated through the way information and events are being packaged and presented to us from specific ideological positions and by the frequency and emphasis of the reoccurring images. Obtaining different angles on any given political moment or environmental phenomenon can be as simple as flicking the television channel or seeing another film.

### **2.3.2 Imaging, Re-representing, Selfhood and Becoming**

Recent phenomenological attention in the postmodern context of ordinary experience presents self as a continuous experience of reflective and performative action. For Barker (2000), it is the process of becoming and for Heidegger (1962) “being-in-the-world” (p. 32). This thinking gives attention to ideas of embodied cognition, or embodied reflection, a reflective action which is mediated between self and the objective world of representations through performance which makes transcendence beyond self possible. It acknowledges the intuitive role of perception, which operates both internally and externally and the way consciousness works with constructed interpretive possibilities (Roy, 2003). The individual is now being presented as always in a process of becoming (Barker, 2000) and images being attributed to becoming within a social context of the exchange of meaning (Rose, 2007).

Deleuze (1994), in *Difference and Repetition*, presents us with the concept of selfhood as a flow and “identity as internal to the idea of self” (p. 24). He states that it unfolds as pure movement, creative, repeating and operating in a dynamic space

and time which corresponds to the idea. In his collaborative work with Guattari, Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) expands his ideas of selfhood to be merely the collection point of infinite and random impulse and flows which are transitory and dynamic.

Building on the phenomenological tradition, Deleuze (1994) places emphasis on the interpretive possibilities of knowing and on the importance of reflection in knowing the world and self. Like other postmodern thinkers, he challenges the systematic, hierarchical structures and truths presented from empirical positions. For Deleuze (1994,) a representation essentially implies “an analogy of being ... the universality of being – is repetition and difference” (p. 303) and is the best way to capture his vision of the idea of becoming. In his writing, Deleuze frequently returns to contemporary art practice(s), or art, stating that it is a form best able to explore contemporary society and a de-centred existence.

Deleuze (1994) provides us with a concrete example of this in his reference to the work of pop artist, Andy Warhol. Warhol is recognized as beginning the pop art movement and made art as repetition famous, through his many repeated, yet different, portraits of celebrities. These were constructed by the repeating processes of photographic printing and silkscreen printing. A famous example is his Campbell’s Soup can works. They are constructed of mundane and repeating soup can representations. He pushes copy, and the copy of the copy and all possible multiples of the copy as re-representations or new meanings.

Artworks have the capacity to offer us, the viewer and perceiver, insights into the multiplicity of representations, which Deleuze (1994) sees as reality. “The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image, without resemblance” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 295) or a new re-representation (Bolt, 2004). There is an acknowledgement that each individual art work or image creates a new representation and operates as a unique representational form which can be re-interpreted and experienced at multiple levels by the viewer.

The Warhol example is presented as a form of contemporary art practice that sees the artist critically interpret reality to the point where art can rise beyond mundane repetition to profound repetitions of memory and provide a platform upon which an individual freedom or agency can be expressed. The Warhol icons become a simulacrum or re-representations as hermeneutic practices. They have subsequently been interpreted as offering multiple meanings and possibilities able to represent the individual or the collective consciousness and beliefs of contemporary society.

From the audience, or spectator position artworks, when viewed, leave the domain of simple representations and become an experience for the viewer, to create their own experience and undergo a recreation (Dewey, 1934). Artists are aware that this process presents the maker and viewer with an understanding that meanings have no finality, or ultimate resolution, but the experience of undergoing such a process is revealing. The qualitative dimensions of such an experience have the potential for difference and different intensities at each encounter by the individual. Similarly, the act of creation embodies possibilities and probable dimensions.

Art practices are canvasses for the recreation of new emergent possibilities. Vygotsky (1971), in his work, *The Psychology of Art*, finds the purpose of the phenomena of art arising “originally as a powerful tool in the struggle for existence” (p. 245). He sees much of the work that art achieves for the creator as being a means of release for powerful passions which cannot find expression in everyday life. He presents art as a psychological means for working towards balance at critical points of our behaviour (p. 247). For Vygotsky, “art is presented as a creative act of overcoming the feeling, resolving it, conquering it” (p. 248). Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life (p. 249). It is the technique or form which will provide the means to mediate between our subjective

worlds. The image as representation is a powerful cultural, social and personal signifier.

Thinking about identity requires recognition of the role of others in the process, and that identities use representations to continuously validate self. Creation (of self) is a process of perpetual loss that is necessarily formative and productive. It does not occur outside of feelings and emotions and “occurs in a groundless existence where everything comes from intensity-linkages-resonance-forced movement; differential and singularity; complication- implication-explication; differentiation-individuation-differentiation; and question-problem-solution” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 285). These are the conditions of real experience. Identity formation is now seen as a creative and organic process entailing differentiation between the self, not-self and other (Steyn, 1997).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have presented some of the most inventive and adventurous ideas in recent philosophical and cultural theory (Mansfield, 2000, Colebrook, 2002), to open up greater understandings of how the creative self is constituted. Deleuze and Guattari have imagined the complete abandonment of any idea of a coordinated selfhood. For them “self is merely the collection point of infinite and random impulses and flows, that overlap and inter-cut with one another, but that never form any but transitory and dynamic correspondences” (Mansfield, p. 136).

The process of creating connects an individual to the phenomenon of existing, expressed by Nietzsche's (1973) ideas that “no representation is absolute”, that “infinite representation does not free itself from the principle of identity as a presupposition of representation” (p. 49). He poses that the process of becoming or identification occurs through desire, denial, affirmation and negation. Representations, as images, present a medium through which the infinite possibilities of self can become concrete and accessible forms which embody the



experience of moving towards knowing self. This is the personal or autoethnographic performative capacity of the arts (Holman Jones, 2005).

If one accepts the outcomes of this thinking, then it would necessitate that an individual will need skills to be able to work with representations of self in ways that provide creative and performative solutions to mediate between self and the objective world. It is not surprising that philosophers have given attention to the creative arts' capacity to access intuitive understandings. Visual Art educators consistently reinforce the experiential, intuitive and reflective intelligences developed in visual arts practices which enhance conceptual and cognitive skills (Eisner, 2001a; Fiske, 1999/2000). The intrinsic value of the arts to the individual (McCarthy et al., 2004) which provide the capacity for empathy, meaning and emotional stimulation, are presented as having significant personal and hence public value. So too, the role of imagination and creativity are being presented as key components of existing and as such essential in the twenty-first century (Robinson, 2001).

### ***2.3.3 Artmaking and Becoming***

Postmodern artmaking gives attention to the way representations form a living mythology of consciousness. Art practice, as research, is both critical and reflective and shifts seeing to knowing (Sullivan, 2005, p. 3). Inquiry in art practices draws on the imaginative and intellectual work that artists perform while inquiring into everyday life and constructing knowledge about self and society. Thinking in the arts also examines the problematic nature of representations and their role in cultural production. Postmodern contemporary practices are presented as aesthetic self-consciousness (Barker, 2000), going beyond mere representations to creative cultural transformations (Cunliffe, 2005). Contemporary art practices redefine notions of artist and audience, challenge high culture, give attention to consumer culture and the new processes of the construction of social identity (Barker, 2000; Rose, 2007).

Current thinking about arts practice could be seen as a “discourse about experience” (Gergen, 1971, p. 94), where equal emphasis is placed on making as a validation of thinking and conceptualizing, and as records of process or as events in time (Mel, 2000). Sullivan (2005), in his framework for visual arts knowing, finds that artists work with practical and theoretical/conceptual understandings and the creative and interpretive practices are central to making. He acknowledges the logo-centric position of the making as a form of autobiographical knowing or artist-self as the research site. He identifies that a phenomenological way of knowing, for an artist, resides specifically in the creative, experimental, abstract and immaterial spheres of knowing of the artist that operates between ideas, forms and situations (p. 129). This knowing is presented as mediated through a materials knowing which forms representations of the world, supporting the ideas of Bolt (2001, 2004) on re-representation.

Bolt (2004) presents us with the idea that art provides a material practice which produces existence. Imaging produces reality, “the act of imaging has power to materialise the facts of matter. Thought this way, imaging in art practices could be posited as a productive materiality” (p. 168). In arriving at this position she draws on the thinking of Heidegger (1962) who finds that the essence of art lies in its socially constituted meaning. The power of art is a sign that colours our experiences of being and, when performed, is a mode of revealing self that enables truth to be set in process (Bolt, 2004; Grierson, 2006b). Sullivan (2005), using a research orientation, describes the artist as a participant in action, rather than participant observer in an attempt to emphasise that artistic knowing is a valid form of knowledge generation.

Like the action research models developed from the work of Schon (1983, 1996), based on the ideas of “reflection-in-action”, and “reflection-on-action” artists generate knowledge through iterative re-representations. These include hermeneutic cycles of reflection from both subject and object orientations. In the processes of imaging, meaning is encoded through spontaneous, tacit and automatic material understandings that swell from the mass of one’s previous

experiences. The distinction between action and observer is presented by Sullivan (2005) to emphasise that the knowledge generated through making is different and more creatively powerful than any created from a second referential framing. Interpreting the product of another's experiential world (the artwork) from the position of audience (observer reflector), while providing hermeneutic understandings, will always frame the knowing from the limited interpreting possibilities of another's experiential world and actions.

An artist's identity is constituted, therefore, through performative acts, the production of countless re-representations as bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 87) that respond to the cultural rituals, myths and beliefs which shape the individual. This process has multiple crossings from subject to object and from each of these to any number of other possible representations. The subject enters into a relationship with objects (representations) in order to represent a moment where all forces form interconnections and towards the creation of a new assemblage. As art, therefore, goes beyond representation to re-representation, it is presented as a material ontology (Bolt, 2004). It is a productive action, where becoming harnesses the imagination and discharges endless signs and images (Want, 1997). The individual critically reflects upon these and intuitively responds in expressing a dialogue with existence. The action enacts existence, and allows the individual to respond to their realities and reconcile emotions and experiences which for Deleuze (2004), is the capacity to find voice.

Subjectivity in artmaking enacts the active field or spaces where the self is constituted. It is in this space(s), this active field of liminalities (Mel, 2000), that we may seek to find what it is that constitutes who we are. Csikszentmihalyi (1994) calls this the finding of the point of self transcendence or "flow". He likens it to playing a musical instrument when one feels at one with the cosmos, or of the painter when one is fully conscious but unself-conscious. Varela et al. (1991) call this mindfulness/awareness practice, drawing on the Buddhist tradition of selflessness or egolessness, a heightened experience of perception where thinking, emotions and bodily sensations become pronounced (p. 62). The

grasping towards an ego-self occurs within a given moment and moves continuously through and around moments of experience. Finding voice may well be the process by which the aggregate and evolving self can find an essence of the ego self within the “dependent, impermanent, everyday personality” (p. 64).

Art practices allow the phenomenological experience of performance or enactment to give expression to existence. Much of the work that art does is to look at life beyond the everyday function of existence to be able to see possibilities. This amounts to considering becoming, not as a preconceived end but as a testing of generalities, extending understandings and finding new meaning. An individual can use artmaking processes to experience becoming through the working and reworking relentlessly, and through a process of re-representing personal and culturally significant signs find new ways to see and make meaning.

#### ***2.3.4 Visuality, Visual Culture, Representations, Self-Signification and Visual Art Practice***

Visual cultural orientations have become important in the twenty-first century as, increasingly, our cosmopolitan world is dependent on understanding how the image and text within cultural practices shape our conduct and construct our self-representations (Rose, 2007). The space or territory in which the self is constituted is now seen as also being inhabited by a vast bank of images, seen through particular lenses which serve distinct subjectivities (Barker, 2000; Stuken & Cartwright, 2001; Rogoff, 1998). The cosmopolitan phenomenon sees one's lifeworld now as a collage of ever-increasing hybrid, visual and auditory experiences that happen in a time and spatial compression (Barnett, 2003).

Increasingly visual culture discourses in visual education are focusing on how imaging and new media practices in our consumer society are shaping the individual (Tavin, 2005). There is a need for youth to learn to navigate the representational complexities of this trans-national commodity society in order to

answer questions such as 'Who am I?' or 'Where do I fit in this world?' Aguirre (2004) draws our attention to the study of visual culture and its value for social reconstruction through aesthetic education, as it informs self-creation and all cultural activity.

Visual culture practice concerns itself with the study of how visual experiences are presented to us and how they influence cultural production and subjectivities or identities. It champions the significance of visual representation (Duncum, 2003; Freedman, 2000, 2001) to cultural meaning-making and the importance of understanding seeing as a visual experience. It also requires an understanding of the image as a contemporary form of knowledge presentation in education. It presents us with the notion that visual images and the visualising of things have a significant role to play in learning and images are greater than an information medium. It is a distinctive phenomenon, which is more than words can say (Livermore, 1998). In this sense, the visual attempts to present the sublime as "generated by an attempt to present ideas that have no correlative in the natural world for example, peace, equality, or freedom" (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 9). Seeing and visualizing are no longer simply concerned with representing the natural world, but critically interpreting the vast world of trans-global representations that we process daily. These present us with emotion driven messages about what we desire, who we should be, how we should dress and act, what we should buy and what we should value.

The phenomenon of cosmopolitanism in popular (visual) culture, is characterised by a shift away from bounded and unique cultural communities. It involves an intensified mixing of the signs, symbols and activities of compressed cultures and an intensification of and speeding up of this phenomenon (Held, 2004).

Understandably, this fluidity brings instability in terms of identity. The individual is now described as 'free-floating' (Featherstone, 1995) and paradoxically finds him or herself entrapped in the constant dilemma of having tirelessly to confront the self while searching for an equilibrium (Hegel, 1979). There is nothing solid left

from which to form a stable identity and the multiplication of images and other cultural goods reflects society's need to produce new ways to read culture (Featherstone, 1995).

For Barnett (2003), cultural institutionalised practices through discourse and narratives in the global culture are aimed more at shaping conduct than presenting individuals with opportunities to exercise free will. Understanding self requires that we develop capacities to find ways to gain “free access to the interpretive possibilities of cultural tradition” (Habermas, 1976, p. 93). In the twenty-first century understanding self is increasingly dependent on understanding how the image and text within cultural institutionalised practices (art galleries, images as symbol systems in the media, telecommunications, popular culture and Visual Art education) shape our conduct and regulate forms of one's subjectivities (Barnett, 2003). One's lifeworld is now a collage of ever-increasing hybrid, visual, auditory experiences that happen in a time and spatial compression. Tavin (2003, 2005) in recognising the influence of popular (visual) culture on Visual Art education, emphasises the need for art educators to consider hauntological shifts occurring in the field, such as a separation between fine art and popular (visual) culture and media art practices. He draws attention to the work of Derrida (1976) and the significance of the trace of voices, epistemologies and temporalities that haunt art history and art practices. This requires an awareness of how the past, present and future come together in actualising contemporary cultural practices.

Giving consideration to the idea that popular (visual) culture and the visual is a significant voice on youth identities, recognition must be given to the full repertoire of signifiers and normalizing effects of a global meaning-making system (Venturelli, 2004). It is increasingly important, for youth, that they develop the capacities to mediate all the messages presented to them. This requires the development of their critical and intuitive understandings of how these communicative systems operate. In addition they need to express personal understandings of themselves and their wider community through interpreting how cultural practices inform art practices and identity. Markello (2005), in her research on visual culture, art

education and identity, emphasises the links between visual culture, personal identity and communal identities.

Stafford (1996) argues that the voices of the past acknowledged the interdisciplinary modes of thinking, such as imaging, writing and spatial reasoning, in the time of the Enlightenment, and that they have only been separated in the quest for institutional power over knowledge. This is best presented in the arguments of Drucker (1999) who considers the incongruence of using linguistic analogies when engaging in design or art criticism; “substituting not only a word for an image, but a linguistic premise for a visual one” (p. 1). Her writing argues that, given the global world of digital technologies and new modes of electronic mediation, design and fine art have significant experiences to offer education generally. Art experiences are rich and multimodal. They employ tactile and spatial cognitive thinking, creative or imaginative original thought and expression, along with utilising the hands in shaping new aesthetic understandings.

Stafford (1996) also argues that the shift from the lens to a digital culture requires the integration and bridging of the fields of the arts, sciences and humanities. This explosion of multimedia or multimodal practices is necessitating the central positioning of visualization and, she laments, the continued low status of the intelligence of imagery (p. 73). Visuality as a term being discussed by designers and art educators (NRVE, 2006) addresses the combination and synthetic cognitive and physical functioning in informing interdisciplinary understandings that cross between science, art, politics and literature. It stresses the need and urgency for understanding how visual culture and media mixes are presenting information in visual forms (Bruinsma, 1997; Handa, 2004). Most present a similar position to Stafford (1996):

I believe that only a serious training in visual proficiency will allow us to assimilate, integrate and understand a holographic and multidisciplinary reality increasingly filtered, transformed and synthesised through three-dimensional imaging. (p. 22)

In the broader reference, Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005) who work in the field of visual anthropology and film, see questions of mimesis, or representations of cultural practices as increasingly questions about the relationship between representations and the epistemologies of the senses (p. 18). They cite current contemporary visual art and anthropological practices as converging, moving beyond a critical understanding, to knowledge and understanding drawn from experience and sensory immersion. “Being there” and knowing, is achieved through engagement in practice, or anthropology as art (p. 27) is a positioning that is increasingly being interpreted as about embodied or sensory-based ways of knowing, rather than taking the more disembodied perspective of critical observer. This thinking reaffirms current educational art practices which emphasise that a deep knowledge requires that one is able to understand how images are transformed. This needs to be understood both from the position of maker and audience in the vernacular of the individual. Such a position moves us towards consideration of a pedagogy of the visual that is informed by “epistemological, historical, technological and the typographical” (Handa, 2004, p. 4) as the importance of the visual enters all lives and all classrooms.

Discussion now hinges on the production of knowledge within the visual and performative act. Bonsiepe (1997) discusses an interpretation of the role of visibility emphasizing the way new imaging works with the material and semiotic universe. For Bonsiepe, what makes hypermedia so interesting is the play of visibility and discursivity and the need for youth to develop greater critical and reflective capacities to see the tension between discursive language as texts and the image (p. 5). Thompson (2003) refers to the work of contemporary artists as the “intellectual manipulators of visual codes that signify truth claims” (p. 1). He talks about artists engaging in strategic visibility, a reflexive practice between theorizing and doing. Researchers examining the nature of the knowledge generated by artistic practice have identified that art and design practice generate knowledge as cultural practice that responds to other epistemological fields, and



that it is significantly informed by imagination and sensation (Reilly, 2002; Wolmark, 2002). Sullivan (2005) sees the artist as theorist and visual practice as a purposeful creative pursuit, with the potential to make new meanings from a critical examination of related theory and research practices.

The writers above affirm the unique contribution of arts-inquiry and its value as a generative and imaginative knowledge tool. They have also identified the necessity to provide authentic visual cognitive practices or visual pedagogies that connect epistemologies, critical skills, imagination and feelings as demonstrated by the knowledge produced by the art and design community. They further emphasise the imperative to give greater agency to visual representations of knowledge and to arts-inquiry given its significance as cultural practice (Stewart, 1995). They acknowledge that visual perception is a unique and important kind of thinking with contemporary currency where objects are explored intensely, selectively and with inference (Arnheim, 1974, 1992, 2003; Goldstein, 2001; Handa, 2004). Eisner (2001a) and Aland (2004) extend these ideas to argue that the computer is providing unparalleled access to transformative possibilities through digital technologies and multi-modal practices. In such visual spaces opportunity for a critical, reflexive and performative visual pedagogy emerge to provide authentic embodied engagement with visual imaging mediums.

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## **2.4: Visual Art Education: Ways of Knowing and Meaning-making**

In Australia and internationally, Visual Art education is being positioned to play a significant role in appreciating and understanding the visual elements of contemporary society (AIAE, 2004; Sahasrabudhe, 2006) and in the individual development of the child. Current directions in Visual Art education have a focus on visual cognition and the critical social perspectives of learning which impact on classroom practices (Carroll, 2002; Crouch, Chan & Kaye, 2001; Darts, 2006; Freedman, 2003; Tavin, 2001, 2003; Tavin & Hausman, 2004; Williams, 2004,). The current visual art and design curriculum and pedagogical research focus on postmodern ideas and present critical perspectives in Visual Art. This approach provides significant attributes and skills for the development of deep understandings about how art, in all its current and past forms, communicates and shapes culture, informs beliefs and the civic behaviours of an individual while developing the visual literacy skills to communicate in multi-modalities. Visual art curriculum contributes to the wider field of cultural production through visual art practices and their institutions (Duncum 2002; Duncum & Bracy, 2001; Emery, 2002; Hawkes, 2002). Reflecting on contemporary visual art practices, the current pedagogical focus supports cognitive responses that are critical, intuitive, expressive and interdisciplinary in focus.

The argument now presented is that the value and status of this field of learning in society exists not in artworks per se but in the unique visual experiences and personal and social understandings inherent within making art, design and craft works and their representational forms (Eisner, 2002 b) as they inform personal characteristics (Carroll, 2002) and well-being (Mason, 2004).

“Arts education offers rich and complex learning opportunities and powerful developmental experiences for ‘young people fostering cognitive, social and personal competencies for lifelong learning and fulfilment” (National Review of Visual Education, Special Report, 2006a).

To emphasise this shift in focus, the term ‘visual’ in pedagogy (Handa, 2004) is emerging as an essential addition to reinforce the significance of visual cognition to

learning. As research emerges, Visual Art education practices grounded on postmodern principles are seeking to demonstrate that the new curriculum orientations focusing on reflective practice (Cary, 1998) have the capacity to be greater than entertainment or even expression to ethical behaviours (Crouch et al., 2001; Cunliffe, 2005). They are emerging as offering understanding and knowledge that supports the ordering and illuminating daily aesthetic experience (Graham, 2000).

The contribution of Visual Art education to the development of an individual's creative, intuitive, expressive and visual cognitive processes is being recognised (Paterson & Stone, 2006) along with its contribution of self understanding (Markello, 2005) and citizenship (Tavin, 2005). Visual education continues to emerge as an important means by which student learning is enhanced for the child beyond the visual art classroom to whole learning performance in school (Bamford, Newitt, Irvine & Darell, 2006; Betlam & Bolitho, 2002; Carroll, 2002; Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999/2000). It has also been shown to contribute to the active construction of an individual's values, beliefs, identities and ethical understandings (Cary, 1998, Crouch et al., 2001; Cunliffe, 2005; Feldman, 1996; Freedman, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2004; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005,).

#### ***2. 4.1 Visual Epistemology, Knowing and Visual Art Education***

Visual Art education represents a curriculum which links the essential relationship between an individuals' need to communicate their feelings and understandings about their visual world and society's need to find a collective means of representing this force. Aristotle believed in the power of art to actively contribute to one's understanding about nature, aesthetic response and self and to be a civilising force on the human race (Schneider Adams, 1996). Dissanayake (1995, 2000) presents the idea of art as a form of biological behaviour which is necessary for the maintenance and continuity of human society.

In Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of education he identifies the act of criticism as central to the role of artmaking in social life and its role in arousing in

the viewer a range of emotional responses as well as rational and moral precepts (p. 254). His statements strengthen the idea that art is beyond being ornamental in its functioning. Visual Art education writers continue to link the relationship between aesthetic ideas and ethical judgements developed in the social learning environment of the classroom (Cunliffe, 2005; Darts, 2006; Eisner, 2001a; Feldman, 1996; Freedman, 2001; Greene, 1995). Many writers express the ideas of Feldman (1996) and Vygotsky who further argue that there is no better cognitive platform to learn “that our subjective feelings and the world’s objective requirements are joined in meaningful work” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 114) than when one creates art works.

Referring to the work of Dewey (1934), Feldman (1996) seeks to extend Dewey’s thinking of artistic “seeing”, which was largely an “external and contemplative” positioning (p. 117). Feldman elaborates, claiming the essentially phenomenological experience of artmaking as making sense or giving meaning to one’s reality is paramount. He, like Eisner (2001a), reaffirms that knowledge has an existence outside of words and its transformative capacities and its potential for ethical contemplation lie within the technical, imaginative and aesthetic choices artists make within the performative act (p. 109).

Pearson (2001), arguing from a more postmodern curriculum perspective identifies the mutual benefits of the two major thrusts of Visual Art education being presented today. Firstly, the cognitive role of artistic engagement in developing creativity and artistic thinking informs an individual’s journeying, the process taking form as visual representations. This approach, being one traditionally taken by many art teachers, locates the journey within private and personal investigation, giving mystery to the creative act and attempting to position creativity solely in the act of the performance itself. The second form is the development of a sense of knowing, artistic knowing, as it informs visual cultural practices and one’s sense of belonging. All artists operate within a community and artistic practices inform identities and contribute to one’s

understanding of self and others, which informs social cohesion and illuminates difference (Hawkes, 2002).

Pearson (2001) echoes other writers such as Eisner (1972, 2001a), Dorn (2005) and Sullivan (2005) who argue strongly that the significant value of art education lies not in the study of its artefacts (the historical or critical study of art works) or by the socially institutionalised functions attributed to artwork (curator or critic as examples) alone, but in the activity of making, embodied practice which should emerge from a critical reflexive engagement with making. This more contemporary positioning would see Visual Art practices crossing epistemic boundaries, contextualised and cognisant of the complexity of all symbolic and cultural capital globally.

#### ***2.4.2 Ways of Knowing in Visual Art Curriculum: Visual Perception, the Qualitative Experience and Communicative Action.***

Eisner's (1972) seminal publication *Educating Artistic Visio*, drew attention to the need in education to focus on the development of one's visual sensory modality. He emphasised the need for all students to be able to understand how visual perception connects to the world of feelings and emotions. He drew together the link between what he calls visual constancies, or the ability to critically make associations and generalizations about images, with one's expressive and emotive responses to the qualities of visual forms. He agreed with the work of Arnheim (1974, 1992) on the importance of the mind in developing representations, and that perception is a mindful activity.

As Visual Art education centres on perception and creation, it should be central to all education. Eisner (2001a) affirms the intrinsic link between an image's capacity to communicate feelings and the child's capacity to use expressive qualities. Along with others, he emphasised the importance of perception as a central cognitive activity (Perkins, 1994). He also recognised the importance of the link between thinking in

making and studying artworks as both provide powerful sites for developing thinking dispositions (Robinson, 2001; Tishman & Andrade, 1995; Tishman, Perkins & Jay, 1995). For Eisner (1972) artistic learning is “not an automatic consequence of growth but rather a product of complex forms of learning” (Sahasrabudhe, 2006, p 11) which involve multiple cycles of perception, creation and reflection across three key domains of the Productive, the Critical and the Cultural. Over the years, Eisner (1972, 2001 a; 2001b), along with Gardner (1990) has consistently argued against the Platonic legacy of behavioural reductionism and technical models of human behaviour dominating curriculum. Eisner (2002a, 2002b) and Brown and Weate (2002) reinforce the value of the expressive aspects of human development identified by Gardner (1990) and the importance of this unique intelligence inherent in Visual Art education.

Post-modern visual education curriculum practices with a socio-cultural lens have shifted the emphasis in learning towards the critical qualitative experience and self as central to meaning-making. This re-emphasises its productive and performative capacity explored through critical and self-reflective practices (Brown, 1997; Grierson, 2003; Bolt, 2004). The modernist, antiquated idea of the body-mind split had a curriculum which focused on knowing how, emphasising the cognitive knowledge of facts and procedural skills and practices from the traditional (fine arts). It also had a focus on the instrumentalist role of the arts, such as art critic, historian or artist (Parsons & Blocker, 1993, Abbs, 1995). Modernist Visual Art classrooms emphasised the more literary content of arts practices, such as aesthetics, image analysis and art history as separate to making. This approach is now seen as limiting.

Emery (2002) asserts that many Visual Art teachers see postmodern practices as directly challenging the notions of creativity, self-expression and individualism, which have been presented as the foundation of Visual Art education. Freedman (2000) describes this modernist legacy of analytic, aesthetic formalism, applied to image analysis as simply the “sensory coupling with the elements and principles of

design” (p. 316) which she sees as no longer meaningful. She is mindful that such a position would disrupt hegemonic perspectives of the modernist aesthetic and challenge many Visual Art educators.

Postmodern thought from a critical pedagogical perspective, relocates aesthetic value from the “formalist, stylistic and iconic properties of the particular art object to the viewer’s experience thus constructing aesthetic value” (Cary, 1998, p. 340). Similarly, in the modernist tradition, artmaking referred to the exploration of the design principles as they applied to a variety of visual experiences and modern art movements. This position is the opposite to a knowing that draws into focus the way knowledge is critically constructed in a given historical, cultural and personal context, through the employment of integrative thinking skills (Sill, 1996), material experiences and performative practices. Brown (1997) emphasises that art educators scaffold student learning through the development of aesthetic relationships that link, concepts, values and judgements through “performative or enactive knowing” (p. 40).

Performative critical orientations move beyond ‘empirical-analytic’, idealism or ‘knowing that’ to ‘historical-hermeneutic’ or ‘knowing how’ (Habermas, 1976). These two orientations together emphasise one’s interpretations of meaning in artworks or how an artwork communicates effectively. Postmodern curriculum gives attention to how the dimensions of social, historical, psychological, philosophical, aesthetics, and their associated epistemologies, are long term continuities of thought and are part of living. They acknowledge Habermas’s (1976) third type of knowing, the critical or self-reflective knowing, which has continued to gain significance in postmodern Visual Art education curriculum. It is this thinking that relies on perception and reflection (Winner, 1991), where learning grows out of production and feeds back into it. This self-reflective process is more able to address the discontinuous and blurred boundaries of art practice, art theory and the divisions between high and low art, art and craft, or uniqueness and individuality.

Eisner's (1972) domains of artistic learning, the productive, the critical and the cultural (1972, p. 65), have continued to form the basis of curriculum in Australia. However, there has been a shift to incorporate the socio-cultural and postmodern dimensions. These include multiple framing perspectives such as popular visual culture, postmodern orientations such as pastiche, parody and multi-culturalism to co-exist with more modernist formal structures and expressive orientations (McKeon, 1994). This curriculum construct has been further informed and deepened by the insertion of Habermas's (1976) critical hermeneutic ideas, and has focused significantly on the development of a student's critical and self-reflective capacities during the process of artmaking.

Artmaking is presented as a form of social production (Greene, 1995) or communicative action (Habermas, 1976). Students in the Visual Art classroom are socially engaged (Dart, 2006) and carry out a dialogue with themselves, their mentor teachers and their classmates about their cultural identities, their social actions and the way artists communicate across multiple discourses (Freedman, 2000). Post-modern curriculum orientations see students interpretively constructing new meanings with a strong emphasis on making within the context of understanding. The social and cultural contexts of the artist's and their audiences work together, to give meaning to one's interpretation of an artwork.

More recently, there has been a re-emphasis on the primacy of visual cognition and its metaphoric functioning in society. All human beings "literally see in our mind's eye" (Eisner, 2001a, p. 8) and work with representations. The processes of encoding and decoding (Sandell, 2005) are now essential in visual pedagogy. If we are to understand a contemporary society that is dominated by visual metaphor and communication, we need to acknowledge seeing as an embedded experience, inseparable from human beliefs, values and creativity, and furthermore that it is critically constructed.



This kind of practice is slowly being referred to as *visuality* (Bonsiepe, 1997; Meskimmon, 1997; Thompson, 2004), a visual cognitive position, which is acquired via the agency of engagement with visual media forms. This is a cognitive positioning, which makes representational claims grounded in an individual's aesthetic assertions and is validated through the truth of one's and others' experiences in life. Bonsiepe (1997) refers to this form of cognitive orientation as *strategic visuality*, which involves a reflexive practice between theory and doing. Visual pedagogy represents a unique praxis which makes a truth seeking disposition possible. It is informed significantly through the logic of tools, reflective, embodied, material processes, as much as it is through conceptual understandings. Praxis in this context also draws of the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986), where praxis is described as greater than the combination of theory and practice. It is an educational process based on reflection that embodies a commitment to truth seeking and respect for others. It is a learning process that requires a degree of risk taking and prudent judgments on how to act, relative to others, in specific situations. Visual Artmaking experiences contain the immediacy of the qualitative experience, the reflective production of meaning and the performative act as communicative action.

#### ***2.4.3 Visual Culture, Popular Culture and Socio-cultural Knowing in Visual Art Education***

The more recent inclusion of a socio-cultural epistemology in art practices has seen the discourse on visual culture, along with the interdisciplinary nature of postmodern art practices, revolutionise pedagogy globally and has significantly impacted on Australian Visual Art curriculums.

Visual culture, within a postmodern visual education orientation, gives specific attention to images as representations of meaning and argues that they carry with them the cultural assumptions and practices which govern the whole life of society and their communities. Images as cultural practice perform intellectual, spiritual

and aesthetic work and communicate tangible and intangible expressions (Schirato & Webb, 2004). They also focus on the social construction of men, women and their social relationships (Barker, 2000). It is a field of study that gives consideration to how current global forces and consuming behaviours shape identities (Ramamurthy, 2003), and how social and cultural ways of knowing are constructed and shared across communities (Vygotsky, 1978). Visual culture has increasingly entered the discourses surrounding current Visual Art education practices (Bauerlein, 2004; Buhl, 2005; Duncum, 2001, 2002, 2003; Freedman, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2003; Tavin, 2001, 2003; Tavin & Hausman, 2004) and opened up debate on popular culture (McCarthy et al., 2003) and visual cultural practices.

Equally important is the debate positioning Visual Art curriculum from a more radical instrumentalist position. This view looks beyond its fine art or craft and design functions and modernist legacy, to the study of all cultural artefacts as objects open for critical analysis, semiotic reading, discursive viewing, or consuming. For Deleuze (1990), “We are definitely moving towards ‘control’ societies” (p. 174). As deregulation of society promotes corporate ideologies, individuals are subject to the forces of desire and the influence of the gaze.

Visual culture in visual education acknowledges the reciprocal influences of media, popular culture and arts multimodal practices (Duncum, 2004). It highlights the necessity to consider all the institutional roles of the arts beyond its fine art legacy. These include the argument for the critical semiotic deconstruction of visual culture artefacts (Ashton, 2001). This is based on the rationale that in a world dominated by visual signs, Visual Art education “should provide that major part of the curriculum where students can explore visual codes and meanings” (p. 38) and take on a world view in relation to the values and beliefs carried by images (Knight, 2006).

Critics of this position argue that the visual culture movement is largely social and political in its motivation (Kamhi, 2004; Tavin, 2005). Questions related to consumerism, gender, race, ethnicity and society are to do more with difference, individualism and disharmony rather than seeking answers to deeper and more fundamental questions about human existence and harmony. These writers contend that “discursive approaches block the more emotional and intuitive function of arts knowing and aesthetic considerations which art teachers have seen as defining art itself” (Kamhi, 2004, p. 3). In addition, it is argued that this approach, which is predominantly a critical discourse would shift the current emphasis in Visual Art education on the skills and knowledge of production, in favour of more literary decoding functions (Kamhi, 2004) focusing on issues related to social problems and mass media (Francini, 2002).

Critics of the invasion of art education by visual culture and interdisciplinary approaches to visual education are cautious about the hazards of using a semiotic language or cultural and politically discursive approaches in visual education (Bauerlein, 2004). They are also concerned about its illegitimacy in terms of invading a student’s ontological practice and aesthetic experience, through the imposition of other discourses, specifically political agendas and the devaluing of high art ideals (Eisner, 2001a). Tavin (2005), advocating for a critical performative pedagogical experience in Visual Art education acknowledges the history of arguments against the new breed of art educators. Tavin (2005) refers to the work of Smith (2003) who states that visual culture art education is “inherently talk-oriented, anti-capitalist and engages students in socio-political-economic-proceduralism” (p. 112). Tavin (2005) emphasises that much of the debate about aesthetics is located in high art ideals and often the visual culture discourses “strip away the culture that belongs to students and reconstitute the boundaries of good taste and social order” (p. 102). In advocating for visual culture art education and addressing the issues around the term visual culture and its related pedagogy in art education, Duncum (2002) presents the possibilities of the emergence of a new transdisciplinary field in its own right. He argues for a visual culture art education, which has three strands, imagery, visuality and the social contexts of imagery including histories of imagery (p. 19).

Freedman (2003), in her book: *Teaching Visual Culture. Curriculum, Aesthetics and the Social Life of Art*, summarises the key aspects of a curriculum which has a socio-cultural orientation and a visual culture focus. These include art as cultural production, art as fluid and temporal and art contextualised within notions of democratization and concern for others. She argues that art often presents as conceptual conflict and is about representations and multiple readings. Both visual art and visual culture address these issues which are essential to understanding contemporary society and self.

Visual culture in Visual Art education protagonists argue the importance of acknowledging that the world of visual culture is part of the wider world of popular culture and the habitus of youth. They also argue that Visual Art education has a role to play in the development of an understanding of this new epistemology (NRVE, 2006). There is also agreement with Janks (2002) that there is a need to reinforce the affective domain of making when working from a visual culture perspective by emphasising the role of “desire and identification” (p. 7) and “aesthetic embodiment” (Duncum, 2004. p. 18). Most importantly, this approach allows students to understand that the whole of one’s sensate life is the raw material of visual arts expression, meaning-making and social communicative functioning and the way visual culture pervades student life (Ulbricht, 2005). It also has a role to play in testing a wide diversity of claims about value and worth of ideologies in society through human agency and this includes that of the students themselves and their peers. Others find the evangelical pursuits of visual culture from a cultural studies perspective as having the potential to focus on a disembodied creed. This exploits the ignorance of the Visual Art education community whose insights have historically lagged behind contemporary developments in art and culture (Brown & Weate, 2002, p. 46).

#### ***2.4.5 Cultural Agency, Ethics, Creativity and Citizenship in Visual Art Education***

Visual Art education as cultural agency, within artistic production and contemporary contexts, provides a relevant means of connectedness between self and the wider society. It focuses on how being a responsible self is shaped by how one values and positions self or develops a self-concept (Saul, 1997), and how one creatively responds and celebrates cultural difference (Gunew & Rizvi, 1994) and a creative community life (Bott, 2006; Hawkes, 2002).

In particular, Visual Art education is giving attention to how to develop students' capacities to engage creatively with learning in environments that provide opportunities for thoughtful participatory understanding about self and other as a citizen of the world, or as a member of one's national or local community. Aguirre (2004) argues that the importance of visual culture to aesthetic education is that it involves the aesthetic experience, the understanding of art as life narratives and its important value in social re-constructivism or self-creation. Increasingly educators are reflecting and identifying that an understanding of one's world is dependent on knowing how contemporary society communicates its values and beliefs informed by economic, environmental, cultural and political forces. Visual Art classrooms and their related curriculum are providing opportunities that allow young people to creatively monitor their life and mediate the social and cultural influences of society visually (Dart, 2006; Markello, 2005; Newbury, 1996).

Current postmodern-oriented Visual Art educators elaborate and posit the idea that an important value of a visual education is the way that art develops critical reflection and self-conscious awareness (Freedman, 2003). This along side visual cognitive invention allows students to see connections, extend meanings and thus think creatively. Collins (1990), Csikszentmihalyi (1994) and Robinson (2001) affirm this thinking and argue that the development of a creative trait is linked to the maintenance of creative cultures. They contend that it is as critical to nurture creativity in practical contexts as it is to nurture imaginative conceptual understanding. They argue that if human evolution is to continue, it will require

individuals to live up to increasingly complex images of themselves in an increasingly shifting and unstable world.

In visual expression, creativity is associated with the ideas of transgression and risk taking (Giroux, 2001; Eisner, 2001a). Eisner presents artmaking as a platform upon which to creatively test assumptions about self, peers and the wider society. Drawing on the term, “phronesis” from the Greek meaning practical wisdom Eisner (2001a) and Cunliffe (2005) see artmaking as a practical and regulatory means where students can employ their inventive skills and techniques to address questions about self within the broader moral framework of society. Cunliffe further identifies visual art cognitive practices as the development of patterns of intellectual behaviour or thinking dispositions. These demonstrate: inquiry, reasoning, sensitivity, reflection, critical thinking and imagination which are acquired when students are exposed to knowledge of their social, physical, cultural and spiritual worlds. Cunliffe, writing on the need to nurture this strategic intelligence builds on the work of Tishman, Jay and Perkins (1993) who expand the ideas of Habermas (1976) on communicative knowing and self-regulated learning. Drawing together this thinking, Cunliffe (2005) and Knight (2006) emphasise that Visual Art education now embraces the socially discursive nature of knowledge and the theory that individuals are motivated and develop learning dispositions. This occurs when they are provided with learning environments which foster meta-cognitive awareness and give attention to intellectual endeavours. It is in such an environment that creativity can develop and students learn to apply their intelligence in strategic ways.

Habermas (1990) looks to the performative attitudes of the participants and emphasises the importance of feelings over more discursive approaches to ethics. He affirms the importance of practical ethical decisions being made about the good life by an individual within the context of their life-world and shared cultural values. Furthermore, he emphasises the primacy of ethical life over morality and the limitations of simply a hermeneutic reflective insight. He advocates the importance of practical discourses grounded within inter-subjectively shared ethical understandings. This shifts the ethical thinking from a teleological position of “what can I do” to a

deontological perspective where individuals critically justifies their decisions and action within a framework of what are the common intentions of the group, community or culture (Habermas, 1990, p. 71) or mutual visibility.

Learning occurs when an individual is confronted with habitual patterns of behaviour which are being disrupted and when they use their imaginative capacities are able to adapt and transform their current knowledge of the world. In practical terms, Visual Art students working through issues generated from a socio-cultural perspective, regularly employ a range of visual techniques which can often include shock, visual irony or humour to entertain, confront and communicate deep personal or socially precarious issues. The function of reflective and creative thought can transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt or conflict. The making process allows the individual to work through ideas, beliefs and values. It allows them to edit and affirm their thoughts into a communicative form that is made meaningful for themselves and others (Eisner, 2001a).

The Visual Art classroom is presented as providing opportunities to allow students to encode and decode through dialogical means (Markello, 2005), the meaning of society's images and ideas. This occurs through both image analysis and image creation (Sandell, 2005, Dart, 2006) in a studio context which is a unique learning community. Visual education is presented as reflecting the capacity in the critical qualitative field to demonstrate active and regulated democratic practice with transformative and emancipatory consciousness (Cunliffe, 2005; Duncum, 2001; Eisner, 1991; Freedman, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

Arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2005) is also presented as a learning context that informs the importance of the artfulness of pedagogical inquiry that honours and values all life experience (Gradle, 2006) and its ritualistic behaviours. In arts-inquiry approaches, the importance of the aesthetic is affirmed as it relates to the vernacular of an individual's everyday life (Dissanayake, 2000). In this context,

children investigate how the transfer of values and belief systems operate in their own reality. For youth this will be strongly linked to the way popular culture and new technologies, visual imaging and media represent realities and communicate messages as representations, and mediate information, style, desire and consumption (Duncum, 2002, 2003, 2004; Rogoff 1998).

#### **2.4.6 Postmodernism, Self Reflexivity and Identity in Visual Art Curriculum**

*We are not what we are. We are what we make ourselves. How to “make” ourselves in a world that lacks the coherent strategies and narratives to change it [the world] for the better* (Rhode & Platteel, 1999, p. 1).

The rise of the concept of self and identity are central themes in postmodern society and in contemporary visual art curriculum. Modernity has seen society reject traditional social structures and formal belief systems, along with grand narratives. So too, Visual Art curriculum has shifted to provide frameworks which allow students to explore the ways in which all boundaries, social, political and cultural, are now blurred. Visual education, with a postmodern orientation, provides opportunities to explore the ways that ideologies seek to control and influence society, and the ways that identities can be explored or, for Edley (2001), negotiated and won.

Postmodern art practices in the fields of visual art present artists as constructing their own vision of self, or society, largely from personal experience, or personal mythology. All artists are required to ‘personally validate’, rather than simply borrow from a generally shared or accepted cultural script (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994). This positioning makes representations of self problematic (Barker, 2000). Postmodern art practices are described as aesthetically self-consciousness, concerned with language and questions of representation and concerned with an exploration of the uncertain character of the real. They present us with a compilation of fragmented multiple discourses and challenge audiences to question how they construct meanings. It is characterised by a jettisoning of linear narrative structures in favour



of montage and simultaneity, and an emphasis on the value of the aesthetic experience, creativity (Robinson, 2001) and integrative thinking skills (Sill, 1996).

Feldman (1996) presents the notion of embodied meaning, linked intimately to the unique knowledge experienced by the individual. This then takes shape from real world experiences of the artist through progressively critical and abstracted codes via symbolic imagery or physical forms with the implication of resolution in meaning (p. 104). This reflects connectedness, as it bridges the individual life, family, school and society. The meaning of self is constructed through an interrogation of new possibilities relentlessly processed through a transpersonal mind (Denson & McEvilly, 1996, Sullivan, 1998). Artmaking is a process, whereby the self and others are parallel and vital agencies of mind when working with images (Sullivan, 1998). The idea of artmaking providing a platform upon which to test assumptions about self is now a central tenet in postmodern Visual Art curriculum.

#### ***2.4.7 Possibilities for Postmodern Visual Art Curriculum as an Agency for Understanding Self: Beyond Transformation to Becoming***

Current thinking on Visual Art curriculum draws together Habermas's (1976) theory of communicative action, a focus on identity drawn from subjectivity theory (Mansfeild, 2000) which emerges from the field of cultural studies, and the discursive inquiry of contemporary arts practices. Visual Art and postmodern pedagogy employs visual pedagogical practices which address issues of knowledge, power, equity, inclusivity, sensuality and expressive understandings. This is combined within an understanding of how the art of teaching, as a cultural activity (Freire, 2005), is informed by the visual culture debate (Duncum, 2002; Freedman, 2000; Mizoelff, 1998; Parks, 2004; Tavin, 2005). Attention has been given to the kinds of praxis and reflective action (Emery, 1996; Grushka, 2005; Schon, 1983; Sullivan, 2005; Van Manen, 1991) which will centre the student's own seeing, making deep personal meaning through heuristic inquiry (Emery, 2002) about self within a legitimate personal context.

Visual Art education presented as discursive, expressive and performative practice positions artmaking as cultural agency and points to a pedagogy that posits media, representations and culture in the democracy debate (Barnett, 2003). We also see Visual Art education positioned in the critical citizenship debate (Freedman, 2001; Tavin & Hausman, 2004; Tavin 2003; William, 2004) with a focus on cultural agency (Hawkes, 2002). This new construct of Visual Art education adds a further dimension to the already acknowledged authentic and legitimate medium of artmaking for transformative learning (Eisner, 2001a). It seems to deepen students' potential to challenge assumptions about existence, reason and the contemporary world view. Within popular culture and the broader cultural and social context, this represents a vital function in the formation of a moral consciousness, individual wellbeing and citizenship (McCarthy et al., 2004). It links the personal (private) and the public because arts knowledge is both instrumental and intrinsic to one's communicative capacities (NRVE, 2006b).

Subjectivity is now presented as a continuous movement towards gaining the ability to understand oneself in all its complexities. It now requires each individual student to continuously investigate at the boundaries of one's perceived identity which is constituted and made meaningful within one's culture. Understanding one's identity may better be described as being shaped through the reiterations by society of the norms of that culture and by the iterative processes of an individual's self-conscious performance in the society towards the possibilities of becoming (Deleuze, 1990; Colebrook, 2002).

Barker (2000) states that identity is a performance made up of multiple narratives about self which we need to help us to gain autonomy of self. Trying to find a self-identity as fusion is a bad positioning strategy (Haraway, 1998). An individual, therefore, requires a praxis which supports the continuous interrogation and negotiation of one's personal narrative which, particularly for youth is ongoing, multi-directional and resolved and continuous. Bolt (2004) presents the argument that we should consider how representations in artmaking are the artist working in

process. Creating artworks is the process of being re-presented and re-constructed and artmaking is a performative praxis or action that facilitates reflection-in-action and on-action (Grushka, McLeod, Reynolds, 2005) towards becoming.

In seeking to identify ways that the phenomena of identity can be addressed, the role of the visual artists and contemporary arts practices and their performative power may have a role in contributing to self-creation (Aguirre, 2004). The thinking presented is that postmodern art practices, providing aesthetic self-consciousness, multiple positions and multiple productive outcomes, can provide a sound mechanism for developing a healthy and dynamic relationship between the shifting self and the discursive nature of representations in the emerging visual society. Understanding self may best be achieved through a more embodied and multi-sensory responsiveness and practical engagement via material practices. The performative power of multiple imaging practices available in Visual Art education might be a valuable tool to assist students in meaning-making about self and others while being responsive to contemporary cultural practices.

## **2.5 Visual Art Curriculum in Australia, the NSW Context**

### ***2.5.1 Ways of Knowing in Visual Art Curriculum: The Shift from Modernism to Postmodernism and its Impact on Curriculum and Shift to Identity Issues***

As education curriculum is now recognised as an agent of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977; Dewey, 1934; Emery, 2002; Greene, 1995) visual education is emerging as a focus of discussion as society is increasingly aware of the importance of the visual in communication. As a curriculum discipline, Visual Art has a discrete body of knowledge and pedagogy which in most recent times has emphasised not only its function in preparing students for vocational pathways and its instrumentalist outcomes, but also its validity in terms of the current emphasis on communicating individual meaning-making via imagery and text. It is able to provide students with an art-based inquiry practice (Finley, 2005) which researches current social and cultural phenomena. This inquiry crosses personal experiences, time and cultures and presents inquiry findings through critical and expressive means. Of equal significance is that, in NSW, the student ARTEXPRESS exhibition is now one of the most popular annual exhibitions at the NSW Art Gallery. Emphasis in Visual Art curriculum is now on visual art as a “powerful and pervasive means by which students make images and objects to communicate aesthetic meaning and understand from informed perspectives” (QSA, Draft Senior Visual Art syllabus, 2006).

Models of Visual Art curriculum in Australia are currently presented as providing both modernist and postmodern co-existing practices (Bates, 2000; Emery, 2002). Recent curriculum statements continue to shift curriculum and the teaching and learning of Visual Art education further from its modernist roots. In modernist curriculum, there was a clear methodology of observation through to abstraction, emphasising the aesthetic structural elements, and evolving ideas of abstraction and expressive freedom. Art classroom practices focused on the exploration of materials, design, problem-solving and expressive approaches to art-making coupled with formal analytical strategies to uncover meaning in artworks. The function of Visual Art curriculum was primarily seen as essential in holding up the

institution of fine art. It focused on developing personal expression and freedom of thought that promoted independence and met democratic goals of free choice and aesthetic freedom. Modernist ideas in visual education emphasised self-expression and aesthetic understanding with the teacher promoting originality and autonomy.

There continues to be a healthy debate about postmodern orientations. Critics are concerned that the movement will undermine the Western aesthetic canons of fine art and the meta-narrative of art history and formalist criticism (Greenberg, 1973). Arguments for positioning Visual Art curriculum towards a more postmodern position look to the critical pedagogical perspectives that “relocate aesthetic value from the formalist, stylistic and iconic properties of the particular art object to the viewer’s experience thus constructing aesthetic value” (Cary, 1998, p. 340; Tavin, 2005). For some, the more discursive approaches are seen as undermining the deep legacy of the autonomous individual and the expressive and creative foundations of art (Bates, 2000; Lowenfeld, 1950; Read, 1943).

This legacy is strong and current curriculum continues to give attention to the development of the students’ unique character and autonomy promoted through pedagogical learning opportunities that allow for creative, intuitive self-expression and unstructured art experiences (Lowenfeld, 1947). Recent research continues to find the arts learning environments are providing reflective and problem-solving opportunities, while developing strong skills which support the discovery of new and unique ways of working (Hunter, 2005). These characteristics have been identified as important for the development of creative and innovative thinking (Robinson, 2001). The postmodern curriculum continues to emphasise the journey towards autonomy through more aesthetic, intuitive, expressive and informed perspectives, while acknowledging the importance of critical interpretive understandings.

Contemporary curriculum in Australia is increasingly driven by this postmodern oriented curriculum that reflects contemporary art practice. It engages the students in knowing the world through a personal socio-cultural lens. This shift centres

learning towards the critical qualitative experience and self as central to meaning-making. Sullivan (2005) presents contemporary arts practice as research and Eisner (1991, 2001a) has long argued that visual education provides a platform for engaged transformative learning which has strong implications for educational practice generally. Artmaking as arts-based inquiry provides a method of social inquiry which requires imagination, perception and interpretation of the qualities of things, as well as the mastery of skills of artistic representation (Finley, 2005). Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005) argue that contemporary visual practices, interpreted broadly as embodied and sensory-based ways of knowing framed by a critical lens, provide opportunities to combine the imagination-as-experience with social representations. Engaging in the activity of copying and re-working representations of the world is a powerful way of “getting a hold” on understanding one’s world.

Postmodern orientations in curriculum place the individual within a socio-cultural paradigm of learning which aims to build on each student as “cultural capital” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Learning is orientated to focus carefully on the perceptual experiences of students, their social interaction within communities of inquiry and their capacity as more critical philosophical inquirers (Wilks, 2003). Postmodern Visual Art education curriculum addresses issues of aesthetics, cultural pluralism and contemporary issues such as gender (Emery, 1996). It also addresses the tensions and sensibilities about meaning along the continuum from high and low art. It adopts a methodology which allows students to iteratively move, in their personal inquiry, towards points of stability through critical analysis and image manipulation.

Restructuring of Visual Art curriculum in Australia over the past 10 years has attempted to shift away from the nurturing of hegemonic practices. These privileged Western aesthetic traditions of art are seen as antithetical to cultural preservation (Emery, 2002; Mason, 2004). Concurrently, visual art curriculum writers have drawn on philosophy to develop a conceptual structure that provides authentic interpretive and reflective learning experiences that bridge the artworld and the lifeworlds of the students (McKeon, 1994). Pedagogical outcomes present knowing as the narrative of

‘knowing how.’ When studying visual art, the subject content of school and life are central investigative themes as students move towards personal lifeworld autonomy in a productive learning environment. The NSW Board of Studies Visual Art Syllabus structures the learning to have flexibility “to cater for the need, interests and abilities of individual students” towards autonomy (NSW Stage 6 Visual Art Curriculum, 2000, p. 1).

Visual art curriculum shifting towards postmodern orientations gives attention to the development of meta-cognitive thinking strategies (Cunliffe, 2005; Knight, 2006; Tishman, Perkins & Jay 1995) and the integrative thinking skills (Sill, 1996) of the students through multi-modal forms of expression. Through practical learning and a variety of materials and media skills, students are encouraged to reflect about their own learning while understanding that knowledge is limited by each individual’s views and experiences. Discursive and critical positions present truth as not absolute, but relative to each student’s lifeworld. Knowledge and learning are hermeneutically constructed and how we learn and understand the world depends on how we look at things, or see the world. Learning in the visual arts moves students toward the self-determining learner and personal meaning-maker. It nurtures the performative capacity of visual art practices through critical, self-reflective and expressive practices. The modernist, antiquated idea of the body-mind split is now replaced by the voice of the creator who deconstructs and re-constructs meanings emerging from both discursive and intuitive understandings.

### ***2.5.2 Deconstructing the Philosophical Approaches Informing the NSW Visual Art Syllabus***

During a major period of curriculum reform in NSW the original Visual Arts 11-12 Syllabus (1996) has been redeveloped and moved towards embedding the critical and interdisciplinary discourses that inform contemporary arts practice. This has been a conscious attempt through the syllabus structures, content and learning outcomes to provide a broad, flexible, contemporary and authentic learning environment which has relevance to the student participants in the twenty-first

century. While meeting the broader aims of the NSW Board of Studies examination requirements for the NSW Visual Art syllabus through Stages 4, 5 and 6, it aims also to “contribute to the critical and reflective armoury of the individual beyond school years” (McKeon, 1994, p.15) and aims to have lifetime relevance.

The architects of the syllabi have drawn heavily on the philosophical thinking of Habermas (1968) and on the theory of Danto (1964). Because the syllabus is orientated in contemporary arts practice and critical communicative knowing, the syllabus acknowledges that for many students visual art experiences at school may have little to do with vocational ends. It is presented as having a significant amount to do with developing learning dispositions, intuitive, imaginative and critical understandings through the productive, reflective transference of experiences underpinned by practical visual cognitive skills. More importantly, it draws on the tenet of many previous visual educators including Dewey (1934), Eisner (1972) and Greene (1995), that being educated is marked by a disposition towards a reasoned and imaginative understanding gained through interpretive practices (Sill, 1996).

Visual Art education is presented as providing an alternative to empirical, instrumentalist ways of knowing and understanding. The NSW curriculum is structured in a way that allows for a broad set of outcomes and a full range of interpretive possibilities by the teachers designing learning experiences. It has shifted the focus away from specific content or skills acquisition, in relation to the development of representational forms, towards more conceptual underpinnings. These are informed by a conceptual framework in order to focus on wider learning outcomes such as sensitivity, subjectivity, personal autonomy, authenticity and responsibility (NSW Board of Studies, Visual Art Stage 6, Support Document, 2000).

Visual art practices in NSW syllabi have been organised and described under three kinds of practices, art-making, art criticism and art history (Eisner, 1972). Using the



terms “making”, “critical study” and “historical study” the syllabi aim to present artistic practices of the wider professional field of artist, designer, craftsperson, critic and historian as models for learning. The three approaches provide ways for students to engage with visual arts fields.

Teachers use the above components along with content cues. The latter include: subject matter, ideas and concepts, representational forms such as drawing through to sculpture or digital photography and knowledge of materials and techniques. These components sit within the broad conceptual framework. The conceptual frame:

propose ways to understand and investigate relations between and amongst the agencies of the artist-artwork-world–audience. The functions or agencies when considered in the light of the structural, subjective, postmodern and cultural frames generate content for making and studying artworks. (NSW Stage 4-5 Visual Art Syllabus, 2003, p. 8)

The subject matter is generated from the student’s lifeworld and ranges from “my world” to “places and spaces”, to “living things” and “cultural or social issues”. McKeon (1994, 2001) unpacks the philosophical underpinnings that have informed the current and previous syllabi through her discussion of the role of art history within the Visual Art Syllabus as an authentic learning experience connecting the artworld and student lifeworlds.

McKeon (1994) describes the influences on the syllabus structure as being informed by the intersection of Habermasian (1976) theory of knowledge, informing human action and Danto’s (1964) artworld theory. Using Habermas’s communicative knowing theory, the writers of the syllabi have aligned and intersected the technical, practical and critical fields of interest with analytical, hermeneutic and emancipatory or communicative ways of knowing. Students are encouraged to use their analytical skills to deconstruct meanings in artworks across time and cultures. Students then use this knowledge and their emerging skills with media to develop practical ways to represent their ideas through the

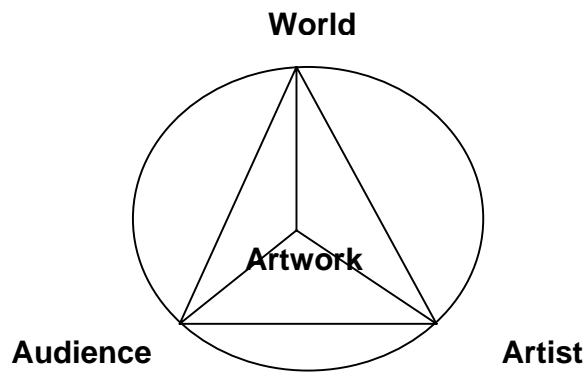
representational forms available in contemporary arts practice. For the students studying for the Visual Art HSC examination in NSW, it has provided an arena for “connecting in a direct and profound way with things that happen in their everyday” (Sullivan in ARTEXPRESS, 2002, p. 8).

Along a continuum from naivety to sophistication through K-12 schooling, the students studying Visual Art develop their analytical, interpretive and communicative skills towards an ability to understand how concepts convey ideas in powerful ways. They develop an understanding for the way images and symbols, in the form of artworks, are presented as representational forms which can have multiple meanings. They learn how artworks convey ideas and artists communicate their intentions to others through concepts. Concurrently, this critical capacity is performatively acquired through making artworks. In the making process, students learn that each decision about an image or its intended meaning is negotiated between themselves, their teachers, peers and others. Through self-reflection, students learn that aesthetic and ethical decisions are linked and they learn to value the way images communicate power and subsequently how they too can make meaning through exercising ethical choices.

The syllabus is oriented around the conceptual framework which is used to generate relational meanings to inform the key practices of artmaking, art criticism, art history and the frames. This artworld model (Danto, 1964) is presented as an authentic representation of the practices and processes of visual arts as a domain of the humanities (McKeon, 2001, p. 8).

The following diagram (Figure 2.1) illustrates how the syllabus presents the teachers and students with the relationship between artist, world, audience and artwork. Each area provides agency for inquiry and the triangulated possibilities between artist-artwork-audience or world-artwork and artist for example provide valid ways to inform interpretive meanings.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual frame (NSW Visual Art Syllabus, Stage 4, 5, and 6,)



The above framework (NSW Visual Art Syllabus, Stage 4, 5, and 6, 1999, 2003) acknowledges the relationship between the artist, the audience and the world as they inform the intentionally made art object. McKeon (2001) describes the phenomenological relationship between the artwork and the audience, world and artist as “interpretive accumulations” (p. 6) for the purposes of hypothesising contemporary and historical meanings. Rentz (1999), in a curriculum workshop, offers teaching and learning activities that work with the conceptual frame in ways that pose questions for the exploration of relationships between two or more parts of the conceptual framework. Students would be encouraged to “investigate, analyse, and interpret the artwork and issues related to it.....This may include examining how issues have emerged in the field of art over 20 to 30 years and how they have impacted on the forms of artworks, the nature of the audience, the roles of the artist and the world represented” (p.21). Similarly, Slade (1999) by foregrounding the conceptual framework in relation to the artwork of artist Cindy Sherman worked with issues arising from her exhibition. These included the body, horror and beauty, identity, representation/figuration, the anti-aesthetic, fragmentation and curatorial roles and artistic practice (p. 23). The conceptual framework provides enormous flexibility and provides non-linear ways to approach

the study of artworks and the making of artworks. The triangulation process provides a rigour for both teachers and students. The conceptual framework is also a mechanism whereby students, when making and re-representing self via their artmaking, can legitimise their interpretations about their own lifeworlds.

The content of artmaking, art criticism and art history is further deepened through the additional dimension of frames as curriculum organisers. These are explained below. Students studying or making an artwork conceptually position their inquiry at the centre of the communicative understanding between self, audience, world and artist and consider the discourses generated from these perspectives within a range of critically framed positions (NSW Board of Studies, Visual Art Stage 6 Support Document, 2000, p. 6). These include: the subjective frame exploring the aesthetic experience, perceptual beliefs, imagination and the human experience; the structural frame which investigates systems of visual communication, semiotic systems as visual literacy and visuality as thinking and meaning-making in visual forms; the cultural frame which acknowledges the defining role art plays in building a society, communicating community beliefs and establishing cultural identities such as race, class and gender and finally the postmodern frame where students investigate a range of themes that address issues such as the death of painting, technological progress, globalisation, new image-generation, to the slippage between high (fine) art and low (popular) cultures (Weate, 1994). The postmodern frame also encourages students to consider the way contemporary artworks cross, combine and recombine, ignore and flout conventions of visual art practice and the frame encourages the students to deconstruct and construct artworks that employ irony and parody to rupture established definitions of art.

As well as employing these broad curriculum organisers art teachers are charged with making learning experiences relevant, meaningful and authentic for the students. To this end, the themes studied by the students embrace a diversity of cultural perspectives and are usually grounded in the personal, while providing “imaginative and intellectual insight into issues that know no national borders”

(Sullivan, 2003, p. 9). Units of work may range from issues of identity to relatives, friends and family, through to issues-based inquiry around the environment, science, gender, media or personal tragedy. Whatever the thematic investigation, students will study how other artists have tackled similar issues and will be encouraged to explore the unique ways that these artists are able to communicate ideas through the visual. As they move through this deepening opacity of educative experience, they draw on the cumulative legacy of the world of images and text, and the study of art history to inform their artmaking.

To ensure Visual Art education remains authentic and engaging as a meaning-making system for their students, art educators embrace the full repertoire of genre possibilities afforded across the contemporary visual experience. They employ traditional, modern and contemporary practice to encourage new possibilities for performative action by their students. Students, over time, deepen their understanding of the ways materials and techniques allow artists to work across and beyond the conventional platforms of painting and sculpture to include multiliteracies and multi modal meaning-making systems (Duncum, 2004). These can include sound, sight, movement, video, animation, installation and the interactive platforms.

Students are encouraged to investigate across history, science, philosophy and literature and to examine continuities and changes in society. They use this knowledge to deconstruct how images are presented, and are encouraged to actively manipulate and synthesise ideas towards clearer personal intentions about their own meaning in their artworks and what they want to communicate to others. McKeon (1994) presents the development of intellectual autonomy as the ultimate aim of the curriculum. Students are encouraged to move towards an emancipatory-communicative knowing through authentic self-reflexivity in artmaking. Visual Art curriculum focuses on students becoming personally engaged with image production and its consequences. The structure of a syllabus allows students to select their subject matter and the forms of its representations. Students combine

their subject matter and its selected representation form with one or multiple framing orientations, to ultimately create an artwork that is true for them.

McKeon (1994) provides a description of Habermas's communicative knowing and critical interests as they apply to Visual Art education when units of work are oriented around an "I to me" connection of the world:

The human interest in autonomy and responsibility.

The unity and interested employment of reason.

A balanced synthesis of autonomy and responsibility.

In accomplishing self-reflection reasons grasps itself as interested.

Self-reflection releases the subject from dependence on power. (p.21)

In contrast to more traditional Visual Art education curriculum, postmodern art education practices are becoming increasingly more popular for students as this framing and its aesthetic orientations reflect more closely contemporary life (Francini, 2002). The postmodern framing rejects notions of image unity, singular origins, singular ancestry or bounded nationality. Given the strong emphasis on contemporary practices in the current syllabi and the increasingly multicultural nature of the Australian classroom, students are drawing on more and more ways to explore expressively the multiplicity of self and society. In order to do this, programs draw on the full range of postmodern practices including appropriation and re-contextualisation of images from history using popular cultural contexts to make new meanings (Guest, 1999). The juxtaposition and layering of multiple images to make new meaning in complex ways are increasingly an aesthetic characteristic of contemporary practice. The visual art classroom offers modern and contemporary practices which facilitate authentic production. Increasingly, discussion about Visual Art curriculum that acknowledges postmodern orientations is being presented as a discipline. This discussion acknowledges also the importance of pedagogical tools to discern and deconstruct the dominant conditions of visual production and the legitimisation of certain authorities (Grierson, 2003).

Teachers working with the NSW Visual Art curriculum generally approach the design of learning experiences from the position of its relevance and connectedness to the world of the student. Gooding-Brown (1997) comments that “the theoretical grounding of the Visual Arts syllabi, combined with the practical wisdom of teachers in NSW, is what makes the production and assessment of students’ artworks so successful in NSW” (p. 6). She further emphasises the sophisticated aesthetic understandings fostered in this curriculum encourage students to explore self and difference. Such an approach to teaching and learning links the ideas of a performative pedagogy, student as artist (Eisner, 2004), teacher as artist and the ethico-aesthetic classroom (Sellar, 2005) as it supports subjectivity production (Guattari, 1995) and focuses attention on student responsibility and autonomy through artmaking.

### ***2.5.3 ARTEXPRESS and the NSW Higher School Certificate Examination.***

The culmination of studying the Visual Art syllabi in secondary schooling in NSW is through the Higher School Certificate examination. The external examination is based on the submission of a ‘Body of Work’ (N.S.W. Board of Studies Visual Arts Stage 6 Support Document, 2000), plus a written examination paper. This is a recent shift from the traditional exhibition of a single, highly-resolved work and a written examination. The shift follows concern for “the validity of apportioning grades to only one submitted ‘major work’ in the HSC” (Brown, 2001c, p. 8) or for one work to legitimately reflect contemporary arts-inquiry. Selected high quality student works or Body of Work (BOW), form part of the ARTEXPRESS exhibition which travels across NSW, showing in major regional and city art galleries in the following year.

The works selected for ARTEXPRESS effectively express an idea or concept and display evidence of well-considered and innovative handling of media and techniques by the students. The exhibition “ARTEXPRESS is a hybrid beast, always encumbered by the demands of educational bureaucracies, schools and

competing arts venues” (McKeon, 2004). However, each year, the curatorial teams manage to display works that explore ideas based on personal experience, feelings, beliefs and social influences through material investigations:

At the heart of ARTEXPRESS sits the simple reality that the exhibition is an educational process, directly linked to a series of high profile art events. ARTEXPRESS is in effect a meeting ground between the high school art room, governed by the Visual Arts HSC curriculum and examination, and the final professionally mounted public exhibitions. For stake holders this is sticky territory (ARTEXPRESS, COFA, web site, 2004).

ARTEXPRESS represents the high standards and diversity achieved by Year 12 Visual Arts students in NSW schools. The continued excellence of the annual ARTEXPRESS exhibition is the “outcome of a rigorous Visual Arts curriculum that builds on study from Kindergarten to Year 12” (ARTEXPRESS web site, 2006). Over an extended period of time, the exhibition has gained international status as being representative of the intellectual and professional quality of student learning in the NSW Visual Arts syllabus (Sullivan, 2003). The works chosen for ARTEXPRESS are a representative selection from over 12,000 examination submissions each year (ARTEXPRESS web site, 2006).

The following comments by Sullivan (2003), in the foreword essay of the 2002 ARTEXPRESS catalogue, are echoed each year by those who are asked to reflect on accumulative learning of students studying HSC Visual Art in NSW:

Unafraid to tackle topics that dealt with issues of personal and public importance these imaginative excursions were presented with remarkable virtuosity and skill and offered viewers a sharp reminder of the vision and voice of the young. The range of subject matter not only revealed their wisdom and wit, but the diversity of cultural perspectives captured also



indicated that these artists were informed and concerned young citizens of the world. (p. 9)

Over the years ARTEXPRESS has aimed to demonstrate the complexity and artistic identity of the students through providing a diversity of artmaking learning outcomes. Its interest has predominantly been in “representing the complexity of meanings in student works, than in presenting an elitist display of ‘prize winning’ performance” (Brown, 2001c, p. 10). It is possibly this aspect of the curatorial or selection process for the exhibition(s) that gives its reputation as an authentic representation of student learning and the reason why it has maintained educational credibility with both visual art educators and students.

#### ***2.5.4 Art Inquiry, Subjectivity, the Body of Work (BOW)***

The shift in contemporary visual art inquiry from a single examinable artwork to a body of work formalised in the NSW Stage 6 Visual Art Syllabus in 2001 reflects a clear shift in curriculum thinking. It moved from the production of a single resolved artwork, presenting the autonomous being as represented by a single object or form, to the subject being represented as multiple objects which may even be in the form of unresolved collections of ideas. The conceptual framing underpinning a student’s art inquiry currently necessitates that students create a range of representational forms. These explore how their subjectivity, or an understanding self, is constructed within a social and cultural framing that is dependent on the many ways in which we actively see ourselves.

The final HSC examination currently requires that students produce multiples of art images and forms produced over time (a period of 12 months) which are subject to hermeneutical, critical and reflective processes by the student. It is a very conscious way for students to examine the temporal, physical, social and cultural agencies which impact on their subjectivity and it is central to achieving the learning outcomes. These outcomes are encapsulated by the syllabus as follows:  
Students

- engage in sustained, reflective inquiry;
- apply the conceptual framework during their inquiry;
- use framing positions to inform their making;
- select and develop subject matter and forms in particular ways as representations in art-making;
- demonstrate conceptual strength and coherence when selecting the pieces for their body of work and
- demonstrate technical accomplishment, refinement and sensitivity appropriate to their intentions with the body of work (NSW Visual Art Syllabus, 2003, p. 12).

The Body of Work promotes generative creative practices in the adolescent student. It encourages authentic engagement with materials and representations that connect explicitly to the student's world, made meaningful through personal, social and cultural inquiry. The critical performative pedagogy underpinning the artmaking now generated by the possibilities of this curriculum accommodates an arts-based inquiry research model (Finley, 2005) which grounds its interpretive practices as a form of qualitative inquiry. In this form of inquiry the symbols are dense, opaque and present visual symbols in ways that are intended to convey their full expressive meaning (Eisner, 2001b).

Underpinning the examination of the Body of Work is the desire that this learning process will be a vehicle for the disclosure and exploration of one's own subjectivity. It acknowledges the significant contribution to this endeavour of the secondary Visual Art teacher who is present as a collaborative partner and tutor forming what Brown (2001c) describes as "one of the most culturally sensitive relationships in the senior school" (p. 9). It is a way for the student to gather evidence in visual and/or text form of how their intuitive, critical and expressive understandings have been evidenced during this study period. It aims to represent the intellectual and expressive outcomes of this inquiry as communicated meaning.

The process of creating a Body of Work provides scope for the full range of personal orientations and opportunities to critically engage with cultural and social discourses if students so choose. In this way, art inquiry has the capacity to embody truth, or put another way, allow for critical ethical inquiry which can express the personal truth of the students. It represents interpretive positions related to self, is trans-historical and operates with the subtext of the Body of Work as the embodiment of self and deep understanding (Brown, 2002, p. 62).

In addition, students with significant assistance from the teacher are required to consider issues related to the curatorial and presentation aspects of their Body of Work. Selection depends on “which artworks best reveal a range of practices, and understandings of that practice over time and evidenced through critical reflective judgements that characterise “a coherent understanding of practice” (Visual Art Stage 6 Support Documents, 2000, p.6). The selection, resolution and refinement processes are aimed at promoting further clarity for the students in terms of intentionality. They are encouraged to consider the examinable outcomes which seek to measure their judgements in relation to conceptual strength and technical skills supporting intended meanings.

To support this process of artmaking the students are required to maintain a Visual Art Process Diary (VAPD). Its primary function is to document the intentions or ideas of the students and to reflect on the ongoing making process through critical inquiry. The critical inquiry is to provide evidence for the way in which the students have explored the research inquiry practices of other artists or displayed evidence for their own patterns of visual and textual inquiry. The diary is “considered as a site for the development of know-how” (Visual Art Stage 6 Syllabus, 2000, p. 30). It plays a significant role in developing understandings and judgements. It can take a wide range of forms, from sketchbook to portfolio, and may include: “drawings, paintings, sketches, annotated diagrams, notes and conceptualisations, critical comment, re-conceptualisations and reflections, photographs and collections” (Visual Art Stage 6 Syllabus, 2000, p. 29). It is intended as a teaching and learning

tool and a place to take risks and investigate subject matter, interests, issues, concepts and processes. It supports the Body of Work and remains a valued resource for some aspects of internal school assessment.

The NSW Visual Art curriculum has a philosophical underpinning which facilitates the development in students of a critical performative approach to visual art inquiry. Students achieve this through art criticism, historical and cultural investigation and visual analysis generated by the conceptual framework towards the performative expression of meaning through the making of artworks. This research methodology or pedagogy of inquiry, models authentic visual arts-based contemporary inquiry. Over an extended period of practice, production, assessment and public exhibition the new curriculum, with its more critical and hermeneutic orientation, has developed into a well-publicised cultural learning practice and dynamic event demonstrating cutting edge Visual Arts education (Gooding-Brown, 1997).

Students from across NSW have access to the forms and products of this inquiry and curriculum through visiting the exhibition or by studying the annually produced catalogue. They use the well-documented products of this inquiry as their reflective starting point for their own inquiry. The ARTEXPRESS exhibition has become so well established in NSW that it is now seen as a cultural phenomenon of the accumulative learning of visual arts students in the NSW Higher School Certificate. The legitimacy of the exhibition in the eyes of the public and the students is testimony to the capacity of such a performative pedagogy to reveal and communicate students' ideas and beliefs.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY: VISUAL INQUIRY INFORMING QUALITATIVE METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

Qualitative researchers are increasingly looking to the ways in which artists work through the personal towards the more general and intentionally select representational forms which best communicate their concepts to their audience (Denzin, 2005). Eisner (1991) draws our attention to how the “qualitative, artistically created forms can convey meaning” (p. 31). More recently, Finley (2005) reaffirms Eisner’s original claims for arts-based inquiry as a legitimate form of research identifying the claim “I am doing art” to mean “I am doing research or vice versa” (p. 685). Sullivan’s (2005) research has further informed visual arts-inquiry as a transformative research methodology and identifies the complexity and currency of Denzin’s observations.

This qualitative research study aims to reveal the impact for the adolescent student of the experience of engaging with their lifeworld through visual art inquiry. It seeks to understand how this reflective research practice informs the personal in relation to the social and cultural aspects of living and its benefit to the student beyond the classroom. More specifically, it asks whether a curriculum grounded in more contemporary arts practices, with a critical personal orientation and strong conceptual underpinning, can provide relevance and agency towards emancipatory discourses (Denzin, 2005). It is appropriate, therefore, that the methodology used in this inquiry harnesses the ideas of Denzin as they intersect with the phenomena of study.

Sullivan’s (2005) *Framework of Visual Arts Research* (p. 95) identifies that artists take three positions in their inquiry: the empirical, the critical and the interpretivist. These positions provide structure, action and agency respectively and visual art practice is a reflexive meta-theoretical practice. The performative capacity of visual arts as an inquiry strategy is informed by images and texts and underpins the qualitative research methodology of this study.

### **3.1 Through the Eyes of an Artist Educator**

This qualitative research project is situated in the site of late adolescent school student's visual art-based inquiry. The study will use two main data sources: first a longitudinal document study of student learning outcomes gathered over a fourteen year period from published ARTEXPRESS catalogues; and, secondly, a case study (Stake, 2000 a, b) with multiple in-depth sites featuring seven students who have completed their school studies and are now able to reflect on their previous school learning experience. For the purposes of remaining open, or "coming clean" (Guba, 1990), the researcher will take a philosophical hermeneutic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher acknowledges that, as an interpreter of the data, she is informed by her own socio-historical bias and that this will significantly shape the inquiry in significant ways.

The researcher comes to the study with the eyes of an artist/educator of twenty-five years whose tacit knowledge of the value to the adolescent of artmaking is strong. The researcher's position is further informed by her research work on artists as reflective self-learners and cultural communicators, through an examination of the qualitative aesthetic dimension of knowing self through reflective practice in artmaking (Grushka, 2005). More importantly, this research revealed to the researcher the intensity and passion with which the artists were prepared to use their aesthetic abilities to excavate and mediate the events in their own lives.

This background has led the researcher to pose initial questions which formed the basis of the research project. Could adolescent visual art students also use their artmaking, informed by cultural discourses to support meaning-making about their lives in a similar emancipatory way? Did the students perceive the learning as a relevant personal meaning-making form of inquiry? Confirming questions about the nature and value of student learning in Visual Art education beyond the classroom is thus informed significantly by an understanding of the thick and murky nature of

such an endeavour, as well as from the researcher's position as an "educational connoisseur" (Eisner, 1991, p. 189).

The study requires this researcher to find a pathway through the more conventional text analysis approaches to qualitative research and her strong understanding about the way meaning in visual arts is inter-textually connected when meaning-making is occurring. The concept of the researcher as bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) had immediate application. The idea of a "pieced together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (p.4), and where the solution is an emergent construction, resonated with the way the researcher had learned the craft of being an artist.

As an artist, the researcher is familiar with the ideas of innately crafting together an aesthetic solution by harnessing the strategies of inquiry in ways that reveal image and narrative (Tierney, 2000), as life experiences construct in non-linear ways. The choices of which strategies to use are emergent during the inquiry and are dependent on the questions being asked. Image analysis, conversations and texts all reveal to the researcher interpretive possibilities informed by the inner expressive, intuitive forces of the researcher who shapes the way the images or representations emerge. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) present such a process as "montage" or editing, blending, overlapping or improvising towards the formation of a new creation and draw on the idea of quilting. In the quilting process, one is involved in the overlaying and stitching together of pieces of interpretive representations to make a whole, then embellishing with overworking, creating fine detail and aesthetic nuances.

In describing the creative interpretive practices of the qualitative inquirer, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) seek to bring the qualitative researcher closer to the nature of performative practices of artists whose strategic and self-reflexive orientations provide a personal voice through the creative process. Stacy Holman Jones (2005) in her work on auto-ethnography, draws attention to the increasing need for critical,

interpretive and qualitative research. She states this should be personally performative and take on multiple perspectives as ways to represent the phenomena being researched.

This inquiry brings together a range of perspectives. These include: the student artist and a significant other who has observed the learning phenomena; the collective evidence of professional curators and educators who have collated and published what they believe is the depth and breadth of quality learning outcomes in Visual Art education in NSW as reflected through the ARTEXPRESS exhibition; and document analysis of curriculum and curriculum support materials; the perceptions of an artist/educator who comes to the data already aware of the intellectual, aesthetic and intuitive journey in visual artmaking and who uses iterative processes which reflect the craft of the artist and the qualitative researcher.

### **3.2 Defining the Visual Arts-inquiry Study**

Informing the commencement of the inquiry was the awareness by the researcher that the outcomes from the secondary Visual Art curriculum in NSW had shifted in quality and in content focus since the implementation of a more critically-oriented curriculum. There was a possibility that the increasingly more figurative, socially and personally insightful works were the outcome of this shift in curriculum orientation underpinned by contemporary art practices. Students appeared to be using their art forms more as a voice. The method of inquiry sought to answer the following broad questions: Does visual art inquiry in the secondary school working with an interpretivist and postmodern curriculum, provide a legitimate research site for the investigation of a student's world? Is there evidence that students are using it as a valid platform upon which to explore their identities? Do the products of this inquiry or learning provide insight into the way they critically self-reflect? Finally, what is the nature of this engagement in terms of aesthetic and ethical decision-making? These questions have informed choices about which data to investigate and what to investigate. They also guided when and how best to gather evidence



that can inform, through deeper insight, any emancipatory benefits that might flow from such visual art inquiry for the student, either at school or beyond.

A mixed qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate way to gather the range of empirical data needed to investigate each of the key questions. It sought to take a wide initial scoping of the field through an examination of HSC learning outcomes in Visual Art and then to follow with a more in-depth investigation through a multi-site case study approach of the bounded phenomena (Stake, 2000b) of HSC Visual Art inquiry.

In seeking evidence that students use their visual arts-inquiry as a valid platform upon which to explore their identities, the study aimed to examine comparatively and longitudinally the learning outcomes of the top ten percent of students who had studied Visual Art for their HSC in the NSW Higher School Certificate, spanning a 14-year period. It examined the aims and student learning outcomes before and after the implementation of the syllabus that shifted to multiple framing positions (NSW Board of Studies Visual Art Syllabus, 1996). Relevant were two years of data prior to the implementation of the current NSW Visual art curriculum (1991 and 1993), data from 1997 early in the new curriculum and all years from 2000 to 2005. Each year, a minimum of 200 student works are recorded and catalogued by the NSW Board of Studies. These data were further informed by critical reviews and visits to the relevant exhibitions to gather valuable insights into the quality and physicality of the students' works over this period.

The findings from this analysis informed the second iteration of the empirical research, namely, the multi-site case study. Each of the six sites of individual student work and individual approaches to visual inquiry would provide more personal insights into the value of the performative act to the student. The multi-site case study sought to reveal what emancipatory value the practice of artmaking was to the individual students at each site. Put another way, does the performative act of creating images provide a voice for the student and do students place

emphasis on the final representations or on what the generative representational acts have done for them in understanding self? Using a case study method (Stake, 2000a; Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000), the research captured the discrete visual learning journey of seven students at six case study sites, who had completed the heterogeneous Visual Art HSC examination and left school. Two were representative of the longitudinal ARTEXPRESS study group while the other five students had produced quality learning outcomes. The case study sites of the past HSC Visual Art students were at different distances, of one to five years, from the initial experience. The sites were informed by a range of materials dependent on the rich context of each site in the case study.

The researcher has used a multi-layered, continuous descriptive and interpretative process that acknowledges ontological complexity and the limitations of simple triangulation (Kinchelo & McLaren, 2005). It draws on a wide range of materials that include critical documents related to the field of study informing other data sources such as students' artworks, the student's working Visual Process Diaries (VAPD), in depth interviews with students about their visual art-based inquiry and an interview with a significant other who journeyed with the student during the creative period. This significant other was a friend, teacher or a parent. It also acknowledges the significant cultural and historical legacy of the ARTEXPRESS phenomenon on each student and the educational dynamics of each student's lifeworld.

### **3.3. Inquiring with a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodology Using Image and Text**

The inquiry seeks to interpret the phenomena in terms of how this performative material practice of artmaking informs a student's subjectivity and social and cultural understanding as transformative knowing. It draws on Husserl's (1960) phenomenological ideas that the relationship between perception and its objects is

not passive, but interpretively constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) as well as referenced in qualities (Eisner, 1991). It is grounded by the assumption that the inner nature of artistic, aesthetic and social life of an individual (artist) often resides in the experience of it (Deleuze, 1990; Nielsen, 2000).

In seeking to identify evidence about how the students use their visual inquiry to make epistemological transformations about themselves and the world, the research project will gather empirical data from a range of perspectives. The perspectives used in this research are adapted from the work of Reinhartz (1983) on phenomenology as a dynamic process. Evidence of transformative phenomena in the research will be gathered by:

1. the **experiencing person** as performative action in the form of artworks and their words-as-artist statements, writing about their artmaking and speaking reflectively about their making, and by the significant other who observed and participated in the learning;
2. the **researcher**, in a personal grasp (understandable) of what is being communicated by the student artist or their significant other parent, teacher or friend;
3. the **researcher**, transforming personal understandings into systematic and reasonable themes, categories and relationships grounded in the data;
4. the **researcher**, presenting a reasonable and cogent interpretation of the findings (meanings) to a wider audience.

### ***3.3.1 Hermeneutic and Critical Hermeneutic Inquiry***

The research is informed by both a hermeneutic and critical hermeneutic understanding. Taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Plager, 1994), the research aims through a discerning analysis and interpretive position to consider what constitutes the phenomenon of student artist researching their own lived experiences. The focus is on observations of life

informed through imaging as representations achieved through performative processes and supported by relevant other texts. This approach to the research task aims to convey “a deeper essence, or nature of the phenomena” (Neilsen, 2000, p. 9), and a deeper insight into the student artist’s intentions beyond the immediate interpretative analysis of their images or forms. It is also aimed towards a constructed approach that connects the multi-voiced texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) of the students (their artworks, their artist statements, interviews and diaries) through “researcher-as-interpretive bricoleur” (p. 189). This approach connects in more authentic ways, through an empathetic identification with the participants’ social life-world.

The approach also acknowledges that making an artwork reconstructs experiences to better develop the thick texture of one’s own life (Neilson, 2000). Understanding the students’ intentions in their inquiry (whether personal or public) might be dependent on the extent to which students wish to communicate their feelings and beliefs to an audience. It may or may not be explicitly revealed in all data sources. Indeed, some of the intentions of the student artists, beyond fulfilling the expectations of the teacher and an examination could be hidden. This is much the same as artists, who might or might not choose to reveal some of the intentions of their artworks (Grushka, 2005) or be explicit about the symbolic connections or subjective responses in their works.

The study methodology also draws on a critical hermeneutic understanding (Kinchelo & McLaren, 2005) that acknowledges perception itself as an interpretive act framed by assumptions about the purpose of texts or images. Consideration is, therefore, given to cultural critique and discursive forms that reveal power dynamics within social and cultural texts. How they inform the historical and cultural boundaries of an artwork are also examined. More specifically, all the student artworks were interpretively analysed, giving consideration to the purposeful intentions of image and material selection and their refinement for an audience.

The research will acknowledge that many students working within the culture of this specific visual art learning experience will be familiar (to a lesser or greater extent) with the power of the image to present ideological positions. This research will combine traces of arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2005; Sullivan, 2005) and cultural studies, which acknowledges the relationships between image, text and power (Barker, 2000; Kinchelo & McLaren, 2000). It uses the philosophical hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which acknowledges that interpretation by both the researcher and the student artists is a basic aspect of our experience of life and that we are connected to the histories and traditions of our past (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Plager, 1994; Tierney, 2000).

Understanding requires “engagement of one’s biases” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 195) and is actively and mutually produced as an interpretive position. The researcher becomes a virtual participant in the interaction in order to understand it (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). The inquiry needs to be sensitive to the culture of the learning experience, the culture of adolescence and the unique family and education backgrounds of the individuals in the study. It can be seen that these impact on the subject matter and forms of the artworks. In the longitudinal study, the researcher was limited to socio-economic information revealed through the type of school the students attended, whether a state public school or private school, and through its location, such as Sydney metropolitan or country NSW. The context of the students’ inquiry is often revealed in the subject matter of their artworks. This was further informed by the experience of the researcher who has extensive insight into a wide range of school visual art learning environments. The six study sites draw on similar information as the longitudinal study but it will be possible to gain a much deeper insight into the students’ families, their lives and interests, the ways they approach visual art inquiry and the importance of the learning experience.

More specifically, student artworks in this research project are bound by the limitations of an educational institution and a curriculum that present the field of study and shape the pedagogical environment. Teachers present the art world to

students, provide the materials and facilitate the experiences. To varying degrees, they monitor and respond to students' ideas and this sees the teachers presented as co-constructors of meaning (Brown, 2001c) and as a significant other in the inquiry and creative process. Both teacher and student work within the bounds of educationally and socially appropriate content and the physical limitations and time constraints that the examination requires. All the empirical evidence in the form of student artworks acknowledges the teacher as co-constructor. The sites have the potential to reveal how this is played out in the learning.

All meanings in this research project are further informed by the inquirer's interpretations that are relative to their own phenomenological experiences and belief systems and by the interpretive positions presented by the student artist, the audience, the critics or curators. The trustworthiness of the inquiry requires the researcher to be alert continually to her own biases and subjectivities (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) and the myth of objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), acknowledging the interpretive positions presented across all the data sources.

The methodology needs to ensure that there are mechanisms or critical reflective opportunities (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998) to assess continually and develop a raised consciousness about all the empirical evidence and the emergent findings for such biases. In relation to interpretive analysis of student images, the researcher tested their interpretive reliability against that of another artist educator. In a sample of 50 student works, it was found that the interpretive differences were not significant. On the basis of this trial the researcher has proceeded in the categorising of images in the longitudinal study to use a process that identifies the opposite poles of possible meaning and takes a conservative final interpretation, ratified by the artist statement.

### ***3.3.2 Image and Text Montage as a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method***

For an artist, the analogy of montage used by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) is familiar. Emme (2001) argues that the skill of visuality, that of critically working with

the visual to support conceptual ideas, is “precisely the appropriate tool for twenty-first century research method” (p. 57). The artist using montage deconstructs images for semiotic and expressive meanings, and then selects those representations and texts that are most appropriate in order to construct a new aesthetics of conceptualisation. Montages in qualitative research are usually created from other realities. Images, textures and texts from these realities are then edited and reworked to reveal new insights about the way these can work to generate new meanings and relationships. As a tool for conceptual development, the montage has flexibility. It provides spaces for many “different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). These voices can be edited, reworked, adjusted or aesthetically re-balanced quickly as new iterations reveal new turns.

The final emergent form is reliant on a pragmatic approach to the investigation coupled with sensitivities and intuitive understandings about the phenomena being explored. The crafting of qualitative research “brings psychological and emotional unity-a pattern-to an interpretive experience” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). The phenomenological interpretive paradigm of this study will use both images and text and the processes involved in montage to craft and reveal the iterations that inform the inquiry. The participatory approach (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) to the inquiry sees the researcher actively working with the texts and images, in both the longitudinal document analysis and the case studies, to explore emergent meanings about student visual art inquiry.

### ***3.3.3 Image Analysis***

Images form a large proportion of the qualitative data analysed in the study and will be handled as a text. Images have been used extensively by society as a communicative tool and, as such, are an integral part of culture and language both written and spoken. Images can be used in many different ways, to question, to imagine, to critique, to theorize, to narrate, to explain, to teach, to represent, and to express the full range of human emotion and experience. Like words and speech,

they contain part of who we are, who we think we are, and influence who we become. Images are integral to questions of identity and purpose:

Like other aspects of sense making, how images create meaning is a dynamic process involving dialectical negotiation or interaction between the social and the personal aspects in any given culture.(Weber, 2002, p,1)

The study will give consideration to the ways that student image(s) from the visual art classroom form patterns in both the exhibition catalogues and the case study sites. These patterns are not static. Like language, they change and should, therefore, not be seen as transparent, but as constituted at the very site where the meaning is created (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). This meaning is created in the context of a secondary HSC Visual Art classroom that addresses a range of epistemological framing positions. The latter include postmodernism, the formalism of the modernist aesthetic, expressive and subjective knowing and the socio-cultural perspective or context. Consequently, student images and texts in the study can have discrete or blended elements of all of these positions or premises.

In the descriptive analysis, coding and categorising phases of the visual data, consideration will be given to how both the symbols and interpretive meanings of the artwork stand alone as an interpretive position by the researcher as critic and audience. The image will then be examined in light of the associated text in the form of artist statements for other intended meanings. Like the images, the artist statements have been significantly shaped by the classroom teacher. Together, they inform an overall interpretive position. In the longitudinal study, the researcher will acknowledge that the artwork and the artist statements are intended for the public or examiners.

In the case study sites, the artworks presented for examination and their associated artist statements will be analysed as outlined above. In addition, further interpretive possibilities will be revealed through the student's VAPD and using other student artefacts. These will allow for a deeper interpretive analysis in



relation to the emancipatory nature of the student inquiry by revealing the following: the reflections and discussion with the students about the intended meanings of their artworks, insights from the teacher about the selection and choice of symbols and images, and from the parent who may provide deeper insights into the other possible personal interpretive understandings of the students' symbolic work. Finally, all these insights will shape an understanding of the role of the teacher as co-constructor of meaning and the students' ultimate intended meanings. For example, the teacher or parent might well reveal other intended interpretive meanings that are not immediately assessable by the researcher as critical observer. These will subsequently inform the ontologically complex nature of the phenomena through bricolage (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). These interpretations collectively present a multi-perspective approach iteratively shaped into a rich narrative.

#### **3.3.4. Text Analysis**

Texts, as both written and spoken word, complement and deepen the researcher's understandings revealed initially through the students' images. The text data have been gathered from a variety of sources. In the longitudinal study, these include: student artist statements in the ARTEXPRESS catalogues and accompanying critical essays; other documents including syllabi, support teaching materials and teaching programs. The case study sites will include the same related data as the longitudinal study, the artist statement and related educational documentation and critical writings. In addition, deeper insights will be gathered from other text data sources such as student interviews, parent and teacher interviews and the texts within the VAPD documents. These data sources have potential to reveal the way the students emotionally engage with their making, narrate their learning, critically evaluate the value of this learning, and reveal how their making informs their understandings of self. The researcher will use NVivo 7 (QSR, 2006), a qualitative management data tool. The tool allows analysis of rich text data sources to be organised, coded and modelled in an efficient and creative way to reliably construct conceptual ideas (Richards, 2005).

The results of the inquiry will reveal its findings through a montage of image and text narrative as the combination of these two representational forms best inform the interpretive inquiry. The research will need to accept that the various types of data are representational and resonate the nature of the phenomena, rather than conceptualise it (Eisner, 1991; Neilsen, 2000; Sullivan, 1998). It will focus on the differences and the connections between utterances and on the recurring ideas and beliefs revealed in the images. It will seek to confirm the emergent ideas about the above from an analysis of the conversations and other affective responses such as a genuine and felt enthusiasm, frustration, anxiety or joy. Together all of the above inform the final emergent ideas. The form of the inquiry will capture the discreteness of each artist and will be grounded in the essence of the student's personal or authentic journey.

### **3.3.5. *The Montage***

Analysis of the data from both the longitudinal study and the case studies will inform the montage of works generated during the inquiry. The montage process will be multiple, and embody the images, textures and texts from the students, the narratives of the participants and the researcher's ideas working in an iterative process. The images and narratives as phenomena are reflexively studied, worked over and layered, generating new meanings and constructing conceptual relationships. The bricolage process acknowledges the ontologically complex nature of the inquiry process. This "ontological complexity undermines traditional notions of triangulation" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 319) and acknowledges that the portrait of the phenomena of HSC Visual Art inquiry will reflect the particular lens of the researcher, the social, cultural and psychological complexity of each student's learning context and lifeworld journey. The researcher as bricoleur will be sensitive to the ontological and epistemological contexts of visual arts meaning-making.

The montage will allow the researcher to construct rich textual relationships between the images and words to generate interpretive constructs. These aim to

communicate the complexity of interpretive meanings, the mythologies of symbolic possibilities generated by the student images and the complexity of the students' conceptual ideas. The montage process locates the researcher in the relationship between the individual student and their meaning-making contexts. It allows the researcher to connect the multiple methods used in the research to reflect the multidimensional nature of student learning in HSC Visual Art inquiry.

Initially, in the longitudinal study, images will be compared across the fourteen years and coded into broad categories for heuristic purposes, seeking points of convergence and divergence between the images and their related statements. Later, after independent case study coding, both data sites will be collectively compared and categorised. This process will circulate throughout the inquiry, connecting the emergent ideas, produced at both sites as montage constructs embodying and situating the research event as art (Bolt, 2001). Finally, this will be translated into a rich tapestry of interwoven threads that will provide strong images and a thick and coloured texture of the nature of the meaning-making in Visual Art inquiry for HSC Visual Art students. The finding will thus be evident through the montages and the associated narrative text.

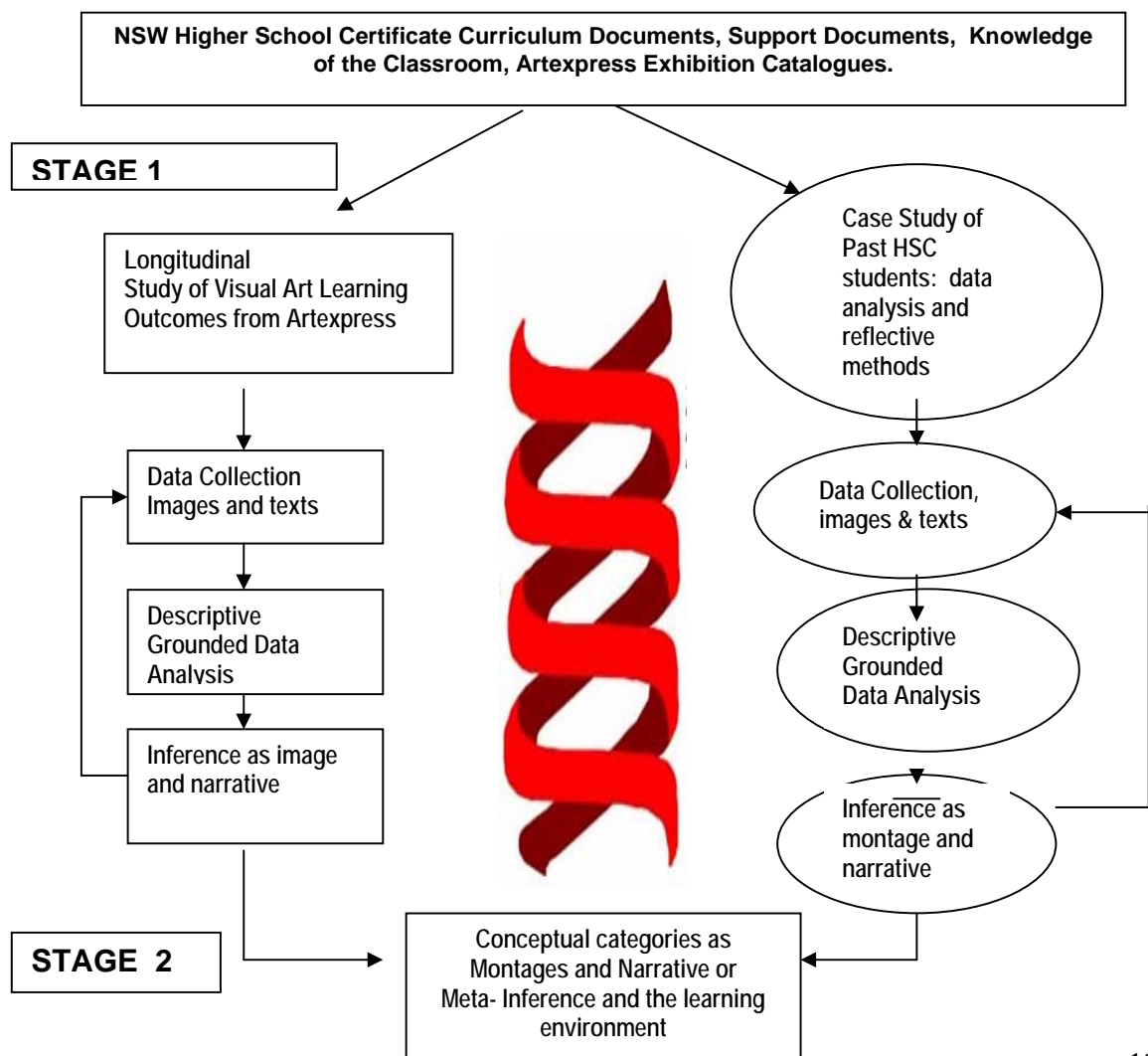
### ***3.3.6 Designing the Research Phases***

The research study emerged as a two phase process as the best way to manage and interpret the emergent findings of the data from the longitudinal and case study sources. Originally, there was a clear logic to commence the research by gathering and beginning the analysis from the longitudinal study. What emerged was a need to allow the researcher space to develop inferences from the descriptive analysis in a cyclical and iterative way, informed by the second case study phase. This would allow the researcher to stay “flexible, adjusting and interactively working towards a methodology” (Eisner, 1991, p. 170).

This research process of this project is illustrated through an adaptation of the conceptualisation model from Tashakkori and Teddie (2003, p. 688) which was

originally designed for a mixed methods model for social and behavioural research. The adapted model has allowed the researcher to present the mixed qualitative methodology in a logical and relational way. This process is represented by Figure 3.1 below, which identifies the phenomenological inquiry using a sequential qualitative model design incorporating empirical and reflective methods and iterations. The organisation and sequential logic described in the model allows for a double helix reflexive spiral relationship between the two data sources, each informing the other. In each phase, the data were recorded digitally as both image and text using the software programs NVivo and Photoshop.

**Figure 3.1 Mixed qualitative method model design incorporating empirical and reflective methods and iterations**



### **3.4. Data Handling**

The data in the research study have been organised initially as sets of digital imagery (texts) with supporting document texts. Data from document and image text sources have been a significant aspect of this research project. Richards (2005) identifies that increasingly these data sources provide the opportunity for detailed and fine analysis and are significant when the researcher is studying a phenomenon.

In the longitudinal phase, data were initially analysed by year using the emergent descriptive coding categories essential to a qualitative project (Richards, 2005) and to the construction of themes or ideas. This same descriptive coding occurred in the case studies. Handling the images in categories assisted in the management and later manipulation of these categories as concepts developed. All stages of the process were recorded as journal notes which contained emergent questions, reactions to interviews and visual and textual notations. The two sets of data have been logically managed as discrete data sets in the first phase of the research. As Figure 3.1 above illustrates, these two sets of data are finally organised as separate conceptual inferences supported by montages and narratives. In the second stage of the methodology, these two data sets are combined to present conceptual categories as montages and narrative or meta-inference. The spiral demonstrates how inter-textual, inferences emergent from the two data sources as ideas are scaffolded using the tools in the NVivo 7 (QSR, 2006) software program to support the process of revealing the intricate ways that student identity is shaped.

#### **3.4.1 The Ethical Processes**

Setting up the research project required consideration of the ethical issues that surround the many processes. The longitudinal data were obtained from archival sources in the public domain contained either within the ARTEXPRESS catalogues or in related syllabus or support teaching materials such as programs. The main questions in the study concerned themselves with student learning outcomes,

evidenced from these public domain data. Teaching quality and teacher materials, while important, were not a significant factor in the study. The researcher chose to limit the teacher programs to those officially supplied by the NSW Board of Studies as exemplar support programs because they reflected best the collective position represented in the current curriculum. While the researcher acknowledges that students have been exposed to a range of pedagogical positions, insight into this was best accessed through the student or teacher interviews. The most significant ethical consideration was in acknowledging that the images of students' works and related artists' statements will be reproduced in the research project for the purposes of criticism and review and that the originality of the students' works would be acknowledged through the referencing procedures and with their permission where appropriate.

The case studies required the researcher to adhere to all ethical requirements of both the university and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The researcher was unable to approach a student directly. All students who participated in the study came to the researcher through a process of referral from a classroom HSC Visual Art teacher, with the knowledge and permission of the high school principal who allowed this referral.

The researcher fully disclosed the nature of the research to the principal and the classroom teacher in written form (Appendix 1. Invitation to Participate; Appendix 2. Letter to the Principal). The referral process required the teacher to contact the student who then gave permission to be contacted by the researcher.

On making contact, the researcher organised to interview the student in the first instance. At this point, the student was emailed or mailed all relevant research documentation to read in advance of the interview. This included: the open-ended set of questions (Appendix 3 a); Consent Statement asking for a pseudonym and permission to use the artworks, diary and interview for research purposes (Appendix 5) and informing them they could decline the offer to be interviewed

before the start or during the study; and copyright permission to use the students' images.

The interview took place in an appropriate location which complied with the risk management requirements of the university. At all times, the researcher considered the location in a way which made the experience easy for the student, parent or teacher. The student was asked to bring to the interview their artwork, or photographs of it and their VAPD. The interview was audio-taped, photographs taken if applicable and a copy of the diary secured. Opportunity was provided for the student to select images or texts that they did not want used (Appendix, 6, Photographic recording of images consent form).

On completion of the interview, the students were asked if they were willing to nominate another person to be interviewed who had been close to their learning journey. They could nominate a parent, their teacher or a friend. The student was then given an appropriate time to seek approval for this to occur before the researcher contacted the person. The next interview again considered the respondent and their convenience. These interviews were conducted at the school or the student's home and were compliant with the approved risk-management strategy. Similarly, the parent, teacher or friend was given the written open-ended questions in advance of the interview (Appendix, 3 b).

On completion of each interview, the images were recorded, interview audio tapes transcribed and field notes recorded. The field notes gathered basic information such as the location, time, length of interview, and date of the interview. Additional notes were taken, recording intuitive and descriptive impressions of the interview environment and the participant. Additional notes gleaned from the informal conversations, and in some instances, additional photographs of student works were also recorded.

### **3.4.2 Limitations**

Limitations to the management of the study occurred in a range of ways throughout the inquiry. They came in the form of ethical limitations in terms of access to participants and in the form of limitations to the data sets, such as a participant losing their VAPD. In some instances, there were considerable limitations in terms of accessing the participants for interview, such as those related to the teacher in a busy school day or discovering that a participant was overseas. At these times, the researcher used alternative strategies such as email or telephone conversations. The research model was planned in such a way that there was room to operate within such limitations.

### **3.5 Longitudinal Document Analysis of ARTEXPRESS Works**

The first phase of Stage 1, the longitudinal qualitative inquiry of ARTEXPRESS documents, aimed to take a broad sweep at the already published or publicly accessible data, students' HSC Visual Art learning outcomes since the commencement of the curriculum reform of recent years. The exhibition catalogues provide historical evidence and a contextual dimension (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) to the study. The participants represented in the catalogues are students between the ages of approximately 17 and 18 years who exhibited in ARTEXPRESS, a public travelling exhibition between 1991-2005. It focused on 1991-1993 as the years identified as representative of student works prior to the reform. The student works identified between the period, 1997-2005 were representative of student learning after the curriculum reform. The data available involved approximately five thousand student artist statements and their corresponding artworks. The participants were documented in art exhibition catalogues which contained visual records of the artefacts in the form of photographs, digital images and video material, which were supported by student artist statements.

The descriptive image and text analyses of the student artist statements sought to validate intuitive ideas and tacit knowledge about the impact of the Visual Art



curriculum on students' increasing tendency towards using their work as a significant meaning-making tool. This analysis sought to investigate research questions related to issues such as: Did such a critical performative pedagogy produce learning outcomes that were personally validating? Was there evidence in these learning outcomes that students had developed sensitivities towards knowing self and valuing the way that making art allowed them to mediate between self, family and their wider role in society?

The catalogue images were analysed and described, based on the assumption that each image contains evidence of the inner nature of the artistic, aesthetic and social life of an individual (student artist). This is revealed through the performative act of making or experiencing (Deleuze, 1990; Nielsen, 2000). The effectiveness with which they communicate these understandings to an audience is dependent on the artist's capacity to produce work with imagery and symbolic meanings that are accessible to the audience. They are also dependent on the viewers' or researcher's own interpretations and phenomenological experiences. As previously stated, the longitudinal image and text analysis of the inquiry embraced both a critical (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) and philosophical hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Plager, 1994) to this process.

The analysis of the images was further informed by the postmodern phenomena that have underpinned the NSW Visual Art Curriculum (Weate, 1994) and exemplified by stylistic markers, such as "aesthetic self-consciousness/ self-reflexivity; juxtaposition/ montage/ bricolage; paradox/ ambiguity/ uncertainty; intertextuality; the blurring of genre boundaries and irony, parody and pastiche" (Barker 2000, p. 154). The analysis also used the work of Grude (2004) who analyses student artworks on the basis of postmodern principles such as appropriation, or eclecticism, juxtaposition, re-contextualisation, layering and using image and text interactively. The researcher used all the above-mentioned techniques to inform the gaze or how the artist positions the viewer to comment on

socio-cultural notions of hegemony through stereotypical representations of both men and women set in varied contexts.

The images and student artist statements formed the core material for comparative interpretive analysis and these were further supported by educational documents such as syllabi and observations made by the researcher. The core material also included other published articles about the ARTEXPRESS exhibition, including the introductory essays in each catalogue which document reflective comments by prominent educationalists on the ARTEXPRESS phenomena and current educational issues. These include an acknowledgment that the works and artist statements have been “co-constructed by student and art teacher” (ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 22) and have been part of a curatorial process. There has been a shift in the most recent years from an individual artwork to a body of work (collection of artworks) as a more authentic representation of the learning during the HSC years (Brown, 2001).

Student images were analysed, described and grouped initially according to whether the artwork used the human image or interpretations of the human form as a platform for inquiry (figurative). This choice was refined by the Haraway (1998) definition of the figure as a form or self-identity as fusion, multiple or constructed as opposed to the figure as a study of pure objectivity such as figure and movement or the analysis of the figure using a cubist style. Student works, such as landscapes, still life, story illustration and design were also excluded as non-figurative if there was no evidence, either in the artist statement or in the images that they linked to the life of the student. Figurative works provided the strongest indicator that students were centring their inquiry on the self.

The works meeting the figurative criteria included: the obvious self-portrait; images of others, in tangential relationships to the artist, such as family members or extended community; images of places and objects with intimate meaning expressed as emotions or actions; and aspects of society or life journeys such as

death, aging, war, conformity, or being a refugee. Objects, landscapes, places, spaces and media or cultural references were included if they connected directly to the student. Generally, they were selected if the narrative told by the artwork was directly or referentially connected to the life of the student. The images were described and analysed for the specific purpose of developing a portrait of the site and identifying categories in the meaning-making. The selection of images and texts were refined and blended creating a montage as part of the process of “editing the emergent narrative” (Eisner, 1991, p. 190).

### **3.6 Case Studies**

The second phase of Stage 1 data collection supporting the longitudinal document analysis involved six case studies of students who had successfully completed their Visual Art education through studying the NSW Visual Art examination, the same examination experienced by the students from the longitudinal document study. It sought to gain insight into how a critical visual inquiry strategy, harnessed through performative meaning-making, influenced them during school and beyond their final school years.

These case studies sought to gain depth of insight into how students used visual art inquiry to navigate the ways society constructs and constrains individual subjectivity (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), specifically during adolescence. This analysis assisted the researcher to investigate the research questions: What kind of socio-cognitive inquiry was central to the students’ artmaking and was it a legitimate and effective way of better informing their own personal values and beliefs and general well-being? Did the identified benefits of this form of visual inquiry have significance and relevance to them after schooling? Finally, were they able to value the ways of knowing in visual artmaking?

The case studies provide a purposeful sampling and in-depth study of exemplary “information-rich cases” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180). They were not selected for

the purposes of generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Stake, 1995). An interpretivist approach to an inquiry rejects generalisations as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience.

It provides a slice from the lifeworld that is the proper subject matter for interpretivist inquirer... every topic must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense and order, structure and meaning (Denzin, 2005, p133-4).

There is no typical Visual Art student and no typical pedagogical environment. Students take from their encounters of learning with their teachers different insights and connect these to their unique life experiences. However, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) argue that selection of the more typical case studies informs knowledge of the typical. Given that the longitudinal inquiry examined student artworks that had been through two refining selection processes, those of examination marking and then a curatorial selection process, it could be argued that they may not reflect the broader population of HSC Visual Art students.

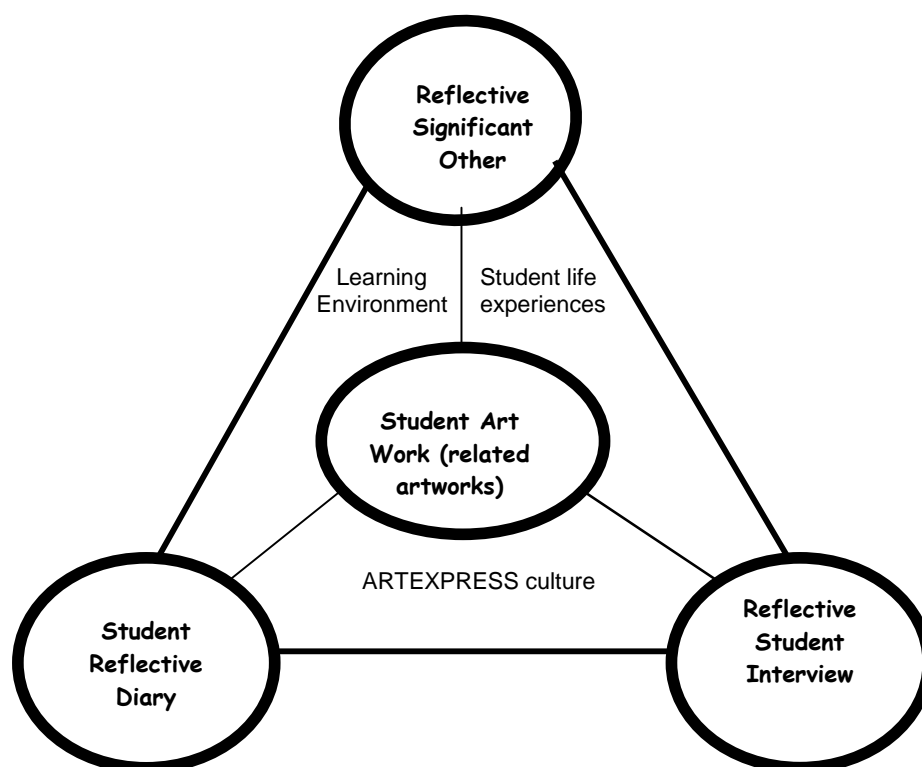
The selection of the case study participants was not on the basis of belonging to the longitudinal study group. However, two of the seven student respondents have had their work exhibited in ARTEXPRESS, while another pre-selected (selected during the examination phase, but rejected at the curatorial phases). Selection, following ethics procedures, was on a referral basis from the HSC Visual Art classroom teachers. Their selection was dependent on the student's communication skills, high learning outcomes and their willingness to participate. More importantly, the teachers perceived that the students they nominated could reveal to the researcher their personally rewarding experiences. The participants were, typically, successful HSC Visual Art students and came from regional and country government secondary schools in NSW. The selection might support the ideas of Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) that "choosing a site for research on the basis of typicality is far more likely to enhance the potential generalisability of one's study than choosing on the basis of convenience or ease of access"

(p. 79). It could be concluded that the construct created from these case studies has application to other students using visual arts-inquiry to inform self.

The case studies aim to provide different contexts and allow for multiple insights into the way the student artists use visual art inquiry to understand self. It also allows personal insight into the phenomenon of the HSC experience from the position of the student (artist) and a significant other, parent, friend or teacher who also observed the journey. The case studies aimed to reveal the intentions of the student through a triangulation process involving the analysis of the art products and/or art diaries (VAPD) and through interviews with the student after leaving school. An additional perspective on the student learning has been gathered from the student's nominated significant other and this brought another perspective to the learning journey. The interviews sought to inquire into the importance and relevance of the learning and the learning environment through a reflective process, either by the student looking back on their artmaking or from the reflections of the close observer, either parent or teacher. No student nominated a friend.

The study used triangulation to substantiate and support the various forms of descriptive data gathered across the range of data sources in each case study. This process is illustrated below in Figure 3.2 Multiple oriented triangulation perspectives of the student learning journey.

**Figure 3.2 Multiple triangulation perspectives of student learning journey**



The case study respondents were asked to meet with the researcher at a quiet location of mutual convenience and neutrality, if possible. There was a degree of flexibility in this arrangement as the researcher was conscious that there would be a degree of “hierarchical inference” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 82). The student participants in the study were in tertiary education or were about to commence tertiary study, and the researcher was a tertiary teacher. As a result of a conscious decision to allow for flexibility, some student interviews were carried out in a quiet office or in the home of the student. All parent and teacher interviews were at the convenience of the participants, and were carried out at the school or in the home where it suited the respondent. If the student nominated their parent as the significant other, the parent interview took place at the student’s home. Parent and student were invited to participate together or individually, the decision being entirely that of the student. Two participants, one student and one parent found it

more convenient to respond to the interview questions using email. The researcher then engaged in an informal dialogue over the period of the study focusing on the case studies based on the same set of interview questions used in the interviews.

### ***3.6.1 Case Study Interviews with Student, Parent and Teacher***

Each case study was informed by two in-depth interviews. During the first interview the students were given a broad set of 19 open-ended questions that formed the basis of an informal interview (Appendix 1). The second interview was with the nominated friend, parent or teacher (Appendix 2), and they had 14 open ended questions. The interview was intended to discover “what people have to say about their activities, their feelings and their lives” (Eisner, 1991, p. 183) and, in particular, the ways that they used images to make meaning and explore their identity, emotions and beliefs. The student interview was designed to deepen the researcher’s understanding of the empirical data that the student brought to the initial interview, while also informing the interpretations emerging from the longitudinal study. These data included, if size permitted, the major student artwork, additional sketches, student photographs of their artworks and the student’s VAPD. The interviews were an essential component of validating the researcher’s immediate analysis of the meaning of the student’s artworks and it also informed the researcher’s interpretations about the supporting VAPD. Both the VAPD and the associated artworks were digitally recorded as visual evidence of the student’s learning. The interview was able to probe from the student their own reflections on the meanings in the artwork and the ideas documented in the VAPD, reinforcing the trustworthiness of any of the researcher’s interpretations.

Discussion about the images and the processes of making the images for both the artworks and the VAPD provided an excellent starting point for the interview once immediate information about the respondent was established, such as name and years since they had completed their HSC. The interview questions had been carefully planned to begin as a gentle probing narrative by asking questions such

as: "Can you tell me about your HSC artmaking journey?" The artworks and VAPD provided an immediate entry point into this narrative.

The interview questions used language that allowed the interviewer to empathise with the student, but they were structured in such a way as to reveal cognitive and affective knowledge about the learning. In summary, the interview comprised questions about:

1. The student's schooling and their visual art HSC learning journey.
2. The themes and the techniques the student explored in their artmaking.
3. What images and symbols the student used and how they used them.
4. How important images were to the student and to the wider community.
5. Whether their HSC artwork tells them something about who they are. On reflection did making art help them understand who they were at the time?
6. How important the learning was to them.
7. How did the students learn in the classroom and how important was the teacher in the development of their ideas.
8. How important was HSC Visual Art to them in relation to their whole education? Here students were asked to rank the importance of this on a scale of 1-10, 10 being very important and valued, 1 not important at all.
9. Whether making artworks helped them understand self, others, family or society.
10. Did HSC Visual Art teach the student anything about their beliefs and values? Again on this question students were asked to rank the importance of this on a scale of 1-10, 10 being very important and valued, 1 not important at all.
11. Finally they were asked an open question around what was special about the learning and whether the interviewer could talk with them again if necessary.



Questions were, wherever possible, leveraged off a specific aspect of the artwork or the VAPD ideas and images. Using this technique, the researcher could immediately empathise through a discussion about materials and other related questions such as “how did you do that?” Or, “what did you want this to mean?” Questioning like this helped the researcher establish a “naïve approach” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 80) where no assumptions were made about the quality of the work or the significance of an image but gave the researcher a range of ways to connect immediately with the student.

The second interview was with the teacher, parent or friend. Empathy was essential as the researcher entered the personal space of the respondent, sometimes physically by visiting the home or the classroom, while at other times by probing for personal values and beliefs. The researcher needed to share some of what had been gathered about the student with the teacher, parent or friend to begin a dialogue and connect to the position of the respondent. As the researcher had been both a HSC Visual Art teacher and parent of a child who had studied the NSW HSC Visual Art syllabus, empathy was easier than otherwise might have been possible because they were able to “give a little of self away” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 85). However, care was taken not to allow personal values to impact on the respondent’s own narrative about the particulars of the student learning or its perceived value to the whole education of the student. The narrative of the parent and/or teacher was used to corroborate with the findings of the researcher from other interview data.

As with the student interview, the major artwork produced for the exam was the common starting point for the parent, teacher or friend interview. It served as a “warm up” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1994, p. 71). The questions by the researcher then followed broadly those described above for the student respondent. The questions then moved to the respondent’s perceptions about the learning of the student and were pitched towards gathering an alternative perspective from that of the student. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed the researcher to probe with

deeper questions, such as elements of the learning journey that might have been difficult or caused anxiety for the student.

Opportunity for reflection on the learning environment with the student-nominated participant, parent and/or teacher, was also possible. Particular questions in the interview Student Nominated Participant Interview (Appendix 3a) were specifically designed to open conversations around broader issues such as the pedagogical philosophy of the HSC Visual Art teacher and the perceptions of the parent in terms of what constituted a successful learning environment for their child. These were triangulated with the student descriptions of their own perceptions of what makes a successful HSC Visual Art learning environment from their own experiences. The following questions from the interview were used as leverage for descriptive insights into the pedagogical environment:

- Question 6. What can you tell me about the learning environment you had when they were studying visual art? On reflection could you comment about any of the following, the learning environment, the teachers, the fellow students, the content or any other factors that made it a valued experience? If it was not a valued experience, why not? Were there any particular good or bad aspects? What were they? Can you find examples to elaborate on the points you are making?
- Question 7. Can you tell me a little about how the participant used their diary? Do you think they valued it?
- Question 8. In your opinion, has “doing art” contributed to the participants understanding of themselves or the world? Elaborate if you can on any incidences or conversations you may have had about art and life with them.

While all questions provided opportunities to delve into a greater understanding of the learning environment, the researcher aimed specifically to use much of the information from these questions in the meta-analysis stage. In this stage both the analysis and findings from the documented longitudinal study will be combined with the case study findings to inform how the HSC Visual Art pedagogical environment

supports the individual in critically and expressively working towards an understanding of the interpretive possibilities of their subjectivities.

### ***3.6.2 Artworks, VAPD's and Other Support Material***

The artwork(s) were the central empirical evidence in each of the case studies. The primary image used was the major artwork or body of work for the HSC Visual Art examination. Secondary images, often of equal importance, were also gathered from either the student respondent or the teacher or parent. These included related drawings, prints or design portfolios of images that were either produced during the two years of senior study for the HSC or since leaving school.

Each case study also provided opportunities to gather additional support materials, the most important of these being the VAPD. Each student was asked to bring this to the interview. However, had the researcher designed the study in such a way that if the VAPD or other support materials were not available, it would still be possible to triangulate the major artwork(s) and the two interviews. All the images in the case studies (both those in the VAPD and the completed artworks) were analysed using the same criteria as the longitudinal study which involved the figurative critique as previously described.

The VAPD which contained word and text presented interpretive difficulties as much of its content was not produced for an audience, but rather personal reflections. Whenever the diary formed part of the empirical evidence, the researcher relied on the student respondent interview to support the trustworthiness of any interpretive findings.

## **Conclusion**

The methodology used in this study employed the interpretive practices of the qualitative inquirer with a hermeneutic and critical hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. In Stage One, the empirical evidence was gathered from the longitudinal study of ARTEXPRESS documents and multi-site case studies. The

researcher, working with a descriptive analysis, employed a reflective process that developed inferences in an iterative manner. The inferences emerged as conceptual categories which were represented as montage and narrative. In Stage Two, a meta-inference emerged from a synthesis of both strands of the empirical data analysis in Stage One. As bricoleur, the researcher inquires from the range of multiple perspectives that inform visual art practices and ways of knowing. They include the social, cultural, critical and expressive. They present a cogent interpretation of the findings as narrative informed by the montage as image and text. The final narrative supported by the montage reveals the researcher's systematic development of categories and relationships to inform the complexity of a hermeneutic exploration of student identities through the performative and material practice of visual artmaking.

## **4.0 RESULTS: STAGE 1, PART 1: LONGITUDINAL STUDY**

*What might this youthful and mindful art teach us? It seems to me that incursions into the human psyche, identity politics, notions of location and place, and cultural critique are all well within the orbit of these young voyagers (Sullivan, 2003, p. 9).*

### **4.1 Introduction: Seeing, Imagining, Reflecting and Communicative Participation**

Our sense of self is dependent on our capacities to mediate our physical, emotional, cultural and social consciousness within our individual lived experiences. For Habermas (1990), one's selfhood or identity emerges from our reflective responses to our personal realities differentiated from individual, ever changing lifeworlds. What may be defining, therefore, about contemporary culture is the development of a capacity to be more reflective (Barker, 2000) or, for Habermas (1976), rejecting an ego identity and developing a reflective interpretive position of all our cultural and aesthetic traditions through interrogation and discursive positioning on self. Truth about identity is, therefore constructed relative to history, culture, beliefs and interpretations. In the context of this belief, the individual must now navigate and re-represent self in the process of personal meaning-making, thus demonstrating active democratic practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The research aims to gain a more exact comprehension of the phenomenon of visual artmaking as a tool for identity negotiation and its relationship to other aspects of meaning-making for the adolescent student. It seeks to illuminate the forms that such learning takes when a curriculum allows students to work in a personal, critical and expressive way to make meaning. It further seeks to explore and describe the kinds of risk-taking students engage in through the process of creating and re-creating images in a studio based learning environment where teacher and student explore concepts developed through a day-to-day relationship.

To approach these overarching questions the research has specifically asked whether students who have studied Visual Art in NSW for their Higher School Certificate (HSC) have used their artmaking as a performative site for understanding self. If so, what emphasis do adolescent Visual Art students place on the exploration of their subjectivity? Do students develop dispositions of “sophisticated aesthetic understanding and critical thinking” (Gooding-Brown, 1997, p. 7)? Do these dispositions demonstrate direct relevance in their lives both at school and beyond? More specifically, it asked whether there was sufficient evidence to substantiate the hypothesis that a curriculum with an aesthetic, critical, reflective, hermeneutic pedagogical orientation to artmaking would support personal lifeworld autonomy able to respond to our rapidly changing world. Is there evidence to substantiate that performative material understandings contribute to a creative and reflexive thinking in relation to socio-cultural thinking? Put another way, do students intentionally use their material and technological practices as an inquiry mode to meet very practical and personal needs in terms of testing values and beliefs, and what issues preoccupy them in doing this?

To begin to answer these questions, the research initially sought to analyse the learning outcomes from the NSW Visual Art curriculum through a longitudinal study of HSC ARTEXPRESS student exhibition works spanning a period of fifteen years, from 1991 to 2005. During this period, there had been a significant curriculum shift, commencing in 1994, from a curriculum that focused primarily on the intuitive, expressive and modernist approaches to studying art, towards in 1999 a personal, interpretivist and critical socio-cultural lens of inquiry that embedded the “Conceptual Framework-Agencies in the World” (NSW Stage 6 Visual Arts Syllabus, 1999, p. 23). This inquiry was underpinned by more postmodern ideas such as critical awareness of images as powerful communicative tools with capacity to transfer ideological positions.

This construct was paralleled by the introduction of new technologies (four dimensional studies) opening ways for more relational aesthetic understandings. This was achieved through the introduction of a conceptual framing and four agency orientations. The agencies reinforced to students the

complexity of different and multiple voices operating on the ways that meaning-making is produced. The multiple meaning-making interpretive positions included: the intentionality of the artist; the world or context in which the artist worked; and the ways that audiences, such as art critics and the general public responded to a specific artwork or art generally. More specifically, they learned that, as artist, one must consider the audience and carefully critique and reflect on what it is they intend to communicate.

It is also important to emphasise that, in the senior years, students are encouraged to set their own inquiry questions grounded in the experiences of their junior schooling. The curriculum does not dictate any subject matter or materials per se, and students are encouraged to select topics and technologies that are authentic to their own life experiences and that are achievable within their school context. Students are thus asked to consider meaning-making or visual inquiry driven by their own personal intentions, the artwork's communicative and interpretive possibilities and how the wider art world and society influenced their material, technological and semiotic practices.

The Longitudinal Study described in this chapter draws on the empirical data analysis of the ARTEXPRESS catalogue documents. The student artists referred to from these documents will be referenced in two ways: by the catalogue title, year and page number such as (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, p.29), or, by the name of the student to which an image(s) or artist statement refers. In the latter case it will be referenced as student name, year of exhibition catalogue, title of artwork and page number, for example (Duy Tan Ly, 1997, *Identity*, p. 29). In the case of the catalogue data which is only recorded as a digital resource no page number will be entered.

#### **4.2: The 'Who am I?' Question**

*'My painting concerns my reflections on the experience of discovering who I now am...' (Duy Tan Ly, 1997, Identity, p. 29)*

In the longitudinal study, the images and artist statements as texts were compared across the fifteen years and coded into broad categories for heuristic

purposes. The analysis and grouping of each student artwork (approximately 1,800 images of student artworks) was on the basis of establishing one primary interpretive position about each artwork's meaning. This point was established from a negotiated position based on the interpretive image analysis of the researcher, strongly influenced by the position presented by the students in their artist statements or the titles of the artworks. It was also informed by other data sources such as curriculum documents and critical writings which confirmed general subject matter around the categories of people, other living things, objects, places and spaces, events and issues and theories (NSW Stage 4 and 5 Visual Arts Syllabus, years 7-10, 1994). The data were grouped using descriptive categories that characterised the kinds of inquiry and subject matter that the students were using as they emerged across the fifteen years. The categories were identified on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self-referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act.

The broad groupings emerging and refined through subsequent re-visits to the data were:

- Self-portrait or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self, self and family, or childhood;
- Images that represented tangential relationships to the student, such as friends, extended family, community and peer groups, represented along a continuum from strong expressive responses to detailed observational interpretive studies;
- Images of personal place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy that represented significant experiences informing self, such as the beach, the farm, home, the bedroom and also including animals;
- Student experiences represented as feelings or emotions, as opposed to descriptions of people or places. These included relationships, events and explorations into the subconscious self;
- Representations of life journeys as a basis of self-reflection; these included expressive works that researched issues on birth, ageing, life, death, illness and well-being;



- Images of others and studies of people as a basis of self-reflection;
- Issues related to religion and spirituality as a basis of self reflection;
- Images that communicated social commentary and included issues such as the media, war, immigration, isolation, conformity and politics;
- Images that communicated issues related to postmodern ideas on self-construct, power and knowledge and included themes such as gender equity, beauty myths, media portrayal of women and image as representing ideological positions;
- Images representing cultural constructs of the self, crossing inquiry areas such as history, ritual, cultural beliefs and practices and ethnicity;
- Representations of nature and the environment as object studies;
- Representations that deal with issues of science and art;
- Postmodern critical studies of aesthetics and art;
- Abstract or analytical works: either figurative or object studies that were not clearly identified as connected intimately to the individual. These included landscapes, still life, illustrations, studies of form and design objects (if not specifically identified as critical works). Generally, these could be classified as drawing from the modernist tradition, either empirical analytical studies, studies of colour or form, expressive description or abstract expressionist works.

While all artworks could be classified as containing personal expressive, analytical and intuitive aspects of an individuals' lived experiences, for the purpose of this study, to differentiate the students' intentions certain works were classified as representative of more objective and analytical modernist positions. These works were generally non-figurative such as a landscape painting or ceramic work, but did include analytical figurative studies. It included artworks accompanied by statements such as "the main focus of my series was to capture the stillness of certain inanimate objects" (Ren, 1997, *The Still*, p. 110); "the realisation of 2-dimensional images being transformed in 3-dimensional form" (McDonald, 1997, *Homage to Picasso*, p. 53) or "the tactile nature of oil paint, the richness of chroma, textural possibilities...helped me translate ...early winter Lithgow afternoons" (Holt, 2000, *Early Winter Lithgow*

*Intrigue*, p. 23). If a landscape, still life or design work was identified in the artist statement as having personal or critical significance, it was grouped as images of personal place or cultural critique recognising the critical, interpretive and expressive response of the students' actions.

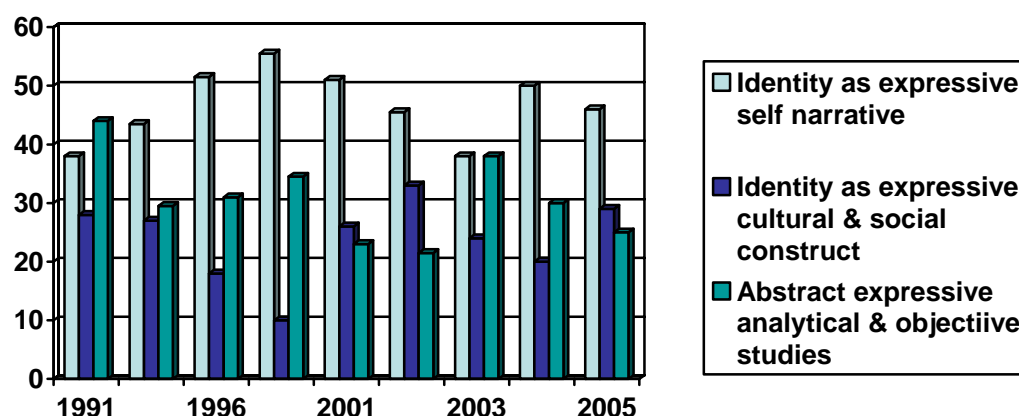
The findings from this analysis are recorded in Appendices 4.1: 1991 Categories of Identity Exploration in ARTEXPRESS Exhibitions (p. 424) to 4.9: 2005: Categories of Identity Exploration in ARTEXPRESS Exhibitions (p. 423). In each representative year, the total works published were categorised using the descriptions above and percentages calculated.

These categories were further refined for the purposes of statistical analysis into three larger categories: Identity as Expressive Self-Narrative; Identity as Expressive Cultural and Social Construct and Understanding Self through Abstract Expressive, Analytical and Objective Studies. In the first category, Identity as Expressive Self-Narrative the images subsumed included self-portraits and all other images that had either a specific or tangential relationship to the artist. The artworks in this grouping included both modernist and postmodern approaches to self-narrative such as personal images of themselves, other people, places of intimacy, images of feelings and events, journeys, images of others and representations reflecting religious or spiritual meaning.

In the second category, Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Construct, artworks were representative of more critical, interpretivist approaches to inquiry into self. Examples of this are self as a critical cultural construct and narratives. The narratives parodied cultural phenomena and reflected community values and beliefs such as rural, urban and suburban life, gender roles and identity. It also included the wider category that dealt with issues about society more generally such as war, hunger, disaster, loneliness and isolation. All other categories were collected together as the third category, Abstract Expressive Analytical and Objective Studies.

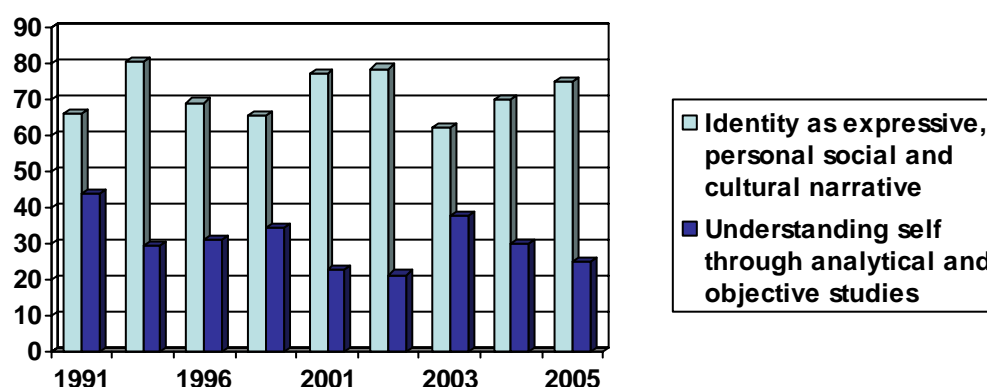
Table 4.1: Identity Category Sets by Year demonstrates the distribution of student works in these three categories across the representative years from 1991 to 2005. Of most significance is the substantial shift in focus away from the more abstract, objective, illustrative approaches following the implementation of the new syllabus. The shift during the years 1994-2001, following the implementation of the new syllabus, demonstrates the increased emphasis that students began to place on reflecting about self through visual narrative forms, the most dominant being the self-portrait.

**Table 4.1: Identity Category Sets by Year**



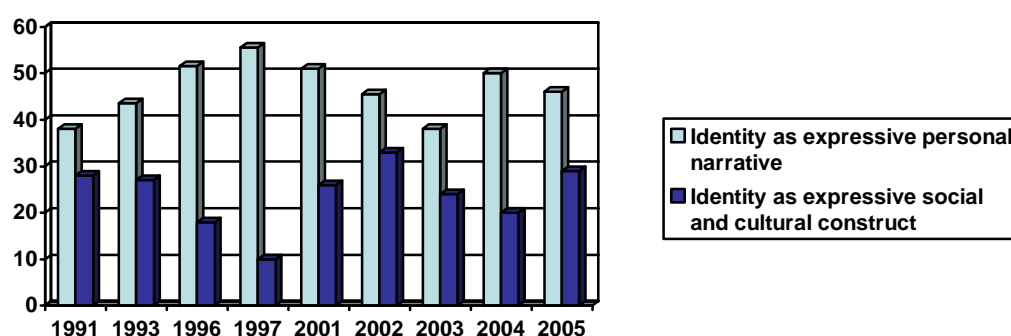
In Table 4.2: Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative and Abstract Object Studies below, the first two categories have been combined and compared to the category of understanding self through Abstract Expressive Analytical and Objective studies. This analysis reveals that over 70 % of students over the fifteen-year period elected to focus their visual art inquiry explicitly around some form of personal reflective narrative and engaged with the big question “Who am I?” as illustrated by the titles; *Identity*, Duy Tan Ly’s (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, p. 29), *I am the Product of all that I Produce*, Justin Stambouliah (ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 31) or *I Wore a Veil from the Age of Ten*, Ayla Cakal ( ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 21).

**Table 4.2: Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative and Abstract Object Studies**



A further comparison was carried out between the two categories that focus on personal reflective narrative as shown in Table 4.3: Comparing Identity as Expressive Personal Narrative with Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Construct, below:

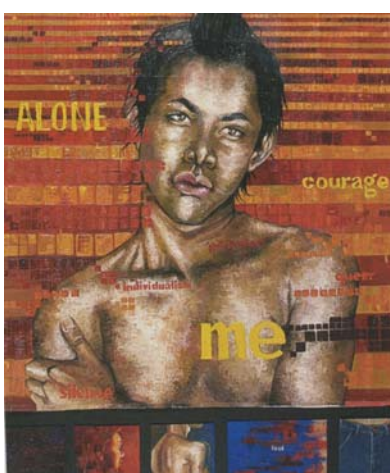
**Table 4.3: Comparing Identity as Expressive Personal Narrative with Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Construct**



This comparison reveals, in very broad terms, that the majority of students have driven their inquiry into understanding self from a more personal expressive self-narrative, but does not reveal the extent to which the shift in curriculum focus has informed the kinds of inquiry lens used by the students. Was this inquiry more reflective, more critical and more aware of interpretive

possibilities? The categorisation does, however, show that a significant number of students, approximately 47% of the total across the years studied, chose to represent either themselves, their family and friends or their places and experiences of significance. A total of 24% could be classified as representative of seeing self driven more specifically from a postmodern lens, taking a strong critical cultural and social construct to understand the phenomenon of self.

Table 4.3 is only useful in so far as it is an indicator of the significance and confidence of the students in using one or other lens to understand their world. The division between the two categories, using this form of analysis, cannot be seen as evidence indicating significant shifts in teaching or learning outcomes. It has been strongly limited by the categorisation process itself which has forced an artwork into one or the other category. Such categorisation is immediately in difficulty when forced to consider the expressive critical self-portrait that addresses the “Who am I?” question from both positions. The two positions are, first that of the deeply personal, feeling self, and, second from the position of understanding that how others see them has a lot to do with social stereotypes and the way words and images work to construct and support certain positions. This is seen in the later work below by Justin Sayarath (ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 99).



Justin Sayarath (2003), *Just Me; Just Life; Just Different; But Just Like Everybody Else* [painting], ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 99.

For the purposes of analysis, such a work was, in the first instance, classified as a self-portrait, but clearly deals with the complexities and struggles of

understanding self as a gender construct and could have been representative of a work addressing a critical cultural perspective. However, despite the category choice made, the overarching issue is that the primary lens of inquiry is through personal experience. The student inquiry remains intensely focused on “me” for very practical reasons, and subjectivity is revealed as a complex and deeply felt issue.

The tables presented above provide a broad overview of the distribution and comparison of the treatment of the subject matter. They cannot, however, reveal the richness, strength and depth of the performative experience for the student as evidenced in the painting above. Such a thorough exploration of one’s subjectification is revealed only when the viewer contemplates the interpretive possibilities of each student artwork, supported by the student’s words or through access to the visual inquiry process and its impact on the student. Insight into the learning from this lens is revealed in the case study. To reveal the richness of visual meaning-making in the longitudinal data, the researcher needs to consider how the examples as interpretive construct categories, when pieced together, represent the complexity of the learning.

This interpretive construct will take the form of a meta-visual and descriptive narrative where the researcher uses student learning outcomes as constructed learning montages supported by a critical descriptive narrative. Each of the eight montages will represent different fusions or insights into some of the important lenses used by the students. They aim to focus on key subject matter and shifts in the way the students approach their inquiry as emerging from the longitudinal study. The montages will be referenced as appendices (M.4), the number of the montage (M.4.1) and the specific student work within the montage (M.4.1.1). The montages will be located in Appendices (Vol. 2) and referenced as (M.4.1 – M.4.8, p. 433-448).

### **4.3 Visual Learning Montages and Messages on Identity**

The following analysis and discussion will attempt to summarise and present the richness and range of the ways the students have engaged with issues of their

subjectivity. It will attempt to demonstrate the appropriateness and legitimacy of visual inquiry and its associated technologies and material practices as a vehicle of communicative knowing about self, culture and the increasingly global society. It aims to reveal how students work across a range of insightful approaches to commence a dialogue about the emergent self as questions addressing the following: who they are, how their life experiences and choices inform an understanding of self, and how other relationships and events affect the choices and the decisions they make. The narrative descriptions will resonate with the reader as they address aspects of the students' creative engagement in the active and complex construction of their values, beliefs and identities. The artworks will present as marks or moments where artistic and aesthetic choices affirm possibilities.

#### **4.3.1: Visualising Self: as a narrative of subjectivity, 'underneath me'**

*...I wonder if anybody notices me anymore? I feel invisible, continuously ignored + rejected by society. What do I need to do in order to be accepted for the individual I am?... my only friend at the moment is my artwork. I'm its creator and it obeys me (an extract from the VAPD of Kim Goldthorp, ARTEXPRESS, 2002, p. 20)*



Art inquiry as a phenomenological experience does not distinguish between the mind and our bodily sensations, as all constitute experiences of embodied truth and the making process is an active agent in knowing self. In seeking ways to see self and actualise in the world, student artists, like professional artists draw on their phenomenological perceptual understandings and their material practices to transform their experiences into communicable forms. The act of art inquiry, or seeing, representing and re-presenting, is deeply embedded in the expressive ways that artists process perceptions of their environment. This connectedness to the process of inquiry through engagement with materials and technologies is etched in the close-up drawing study of Kim Goldthorp's

eyes (above and in Montage 4.2.6, p. 435). It is re-affirmed by the placement of a personal photograph of himself next to the eyes accompanying his statement above. Through conscious repetition and choice, he works and re-works ideas, words and forms and considers the forces which shape self and inform his questioning eyes. His complete BOW is represented by a series of drawings and paintings linked by a ladder which, he states, has great significance and provides a powerful metaphor for his journey to understand himself as he searches towards being “accepted for the individual I am” (Kim Goldthorp, ARTEXPRESS, 2002, p. 20).

This artwork captures the intentions of many of the students in the Longitudinal Study who use their artmaking as a means to define themselves as different and to understand who they are relative to the world around them. Through productive means they actualise and affirm their unique and independent existence through the decisions and choices they make when imaging. In Kim’s (2002) artist statement, he describes his conceptual practice as an exploration of the spiritual, a journey, a struggle and a series of choices and a “freedom to search” (p. 20).

Portraits of self, or self as the central imagery and subject of exploration, constitute a recurring and consistent theme in ARTEXPRESS exhibitions and have become a defining feature of the culture of HSC Visual Arts study. Each year, many students choose to struggle and investigate the “who am I?” questions through the self-portrait. This inquiry reflects humanity’s persistent fascination with our emotional and psychological self through representations of our face and our bodies. Subjectivity as visual representations has an ongoing fascination for the adolescent as one’s unique physicality reflects a unique personality. Portraiture is an obvious choice for many students who seek to interrogate themselves through affective, intuitive and critical means. Montage 4.1 (p. 433) and Montage 4.2 (p. 435) based on this approach, contain representative student works from 1991 to 2005.

Creating a self-portrait is not an easy task for anyone. Throughout history, artists have chosen to create self-portraits but many have found such an



undertaking too exposing and prefer to represent others as this is a less confronting vehicle for understanding self. Particularly for adolescent youth, such an undertaking is highly likely to make the student vulnerable in terms of their audience and their peers. Yet, for many, such vulnerability ironically brings with it strength and confidence. For Eun Joo Lee (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, M.4.1.7, p. 433) the emotional complexity of her work has allowed her to “overcome difficulties to do with my different background as a Korean immigrant in a new country” (p. 76). Carla Middleton chose to confront and communicate her psychological and physical myclonic epilepsy (ARTEXPRESS, 2003, M.4.2.5, p. 435), “a condition I have integrated into my adolescent life” (p. 95), while Duy Tan Ly’s work *Identity* (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, M.4.1.4, p. 433) concerns his reflections and incorporates “the me that was and the me that I hope, or fear, will be” (p. 29).

Others chose to focus on adolescence as a period of exploration to adulthood, Ivon D’Ornelas (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, M.4.1.6, p. 433) in her 1997 work *After Dark the Real Me Comes Alive*, is a personal study of an ethnic family’s expectations of their daughter and her desire for freedom. The Sam Wolff-Gillings (ARTEXPRESS, 2005, M.4.2.4, p. 435, detail), 2005 BOW is a series of photographs where he is represented in multiple reflective positions in locations where his body and the environments surrounding him are literally covered in the graffiti of his written thoughts. His works are titled *Mistakes* and they take the viewer on a journey through the student’s reflections on the trials of being an adolescent and the optimism of moving forward from the lessons learnt that are symbolised by him swimming out into the ocean, his body literally marked with the experiences of the past.

Others take a more speculative investigation of self. *Street Spirit* by Toby Pike (ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 28), represents an exceptional series of works communicating the emotions experienced as a youth fights to hold himself together while watching the world destruct. Using photographic manipulation to blur reality and fantasy, the works show how imagination and representational forms provide spaces to explore one’s capabilities and projected possibilities

about self. The artist is positioned as both the controller and controlled, capable of enormous power while at the same time vulnerable, despairing and reflective. The student grasps the power of humanity, people's impact on the world and the enormity and consequences of individual choice.



Toby Pike (2001), *Street Spirit* [digital media], ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 28.

Another extremely vulnerable and adventurous, significant and common position taken by the students is the intense investigation of oneself as a socially discursive and constructed being. Artists seek to understand self as both critical observer and social commentator informing one's subjectivities. *Sit Down, Shut Up and Have a Cup of Tea* (Hicks, 2002, p.107; M.4.2.3, p. 435) by Jessica Hicks is representative of the self-portrait that communicates multiple positioning of self through the use of deconstructed and re-contextualised images. It asks the audience to look beyond the immediate first glance to ponder and look into the ambiguity and complexity of what defines a woman. *Sit Down, Shut Up and Have a Cup of Tea* is a work comprising three images of female beauty, one loosely appropriating Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1482), another, an oversized, distorted close-up of a woman's bare stomach and breasts, and the third loosely representing the three Greek mythology goddesses symbolic of destiny and fate. The artist statement reads: "This painting is about whatever you feel when you look at it. For me, it is a continuous exploration of self, with no real conclusions. About what it is to

inhabit a body, voyeurism. The bottom line is this is me, you are you, regardless of anyone else” (ARTEXPRESS, 2002, p.107).

*Revolution with No Resolution* (Thomas, 2003) below engages the audience with questions about self, sexuality, change, personal stability and offers an insight into the “power role of the male, and the unnecessarily submissive nature of the female” (p. 49). The viewer connects to the work as a powerful self-portrait, questioning and engaging the viewer in the inquiry about identities, ethical behaviours and the role of society in projecting hegemonic ideas about conformity, gender roles and youth.



Kayla, Thomas (2003),  
*Revolution with No Resolution*  
[Collection of Works],  
ARTEXPRESS, p. 49.

Analysis of the themes represented in the student work highlights a preoccupation with reflecting on how society’s normalisation practices are enacted and its performative influences impact on one’s evolving ethical behaviour and constituted self.



Kerryn Eades (2003), *The Boys* [painting],  
ARTEXPRESS, p.108.

*The Boys* (Eades, 2003, p. 108) is exceptional in that it provides insights into the rights of passage for the student and marks this defining moment. Through an investigation of a family's social generational drinking behaviours, the young adult works through the normalising behaviour that connects a family as he reflects on and affirms an aspect of self. Connecting these relationships across three generations is achieved through the act of layering and constructing an accumulated image of many identities as one, with the past simultaneously part of the present. There is an affirming moment in this work, when the student elects to place a photograph of himself in the frame, making it a strong and purposeful autobiographical statement

#### ***4.3.2 Visualising Events: Informing Self-Narratives as the Actualisation of Both the Present, the Past and the Future Embodied.***

Artworks as visual narratives can also capture aspects of the defining choices that students make when they choose to explore the emergent self from actual experiences of places, spaces and events. These choices combine with the accumulated reflective memories of the student's past and other realities to represent images of personal and powerful significance to them. How they choose to inquire into self and narrate life in relation to phenomena such as events, time and place involves making conscious connections between aesthetic experiences. It also involves conscious choices about which technologies can best support their conceptual inquiry.

Many students select to work with more traditional genre such as "the figure" or "the figure in the landscape" or "interiors." In these works, students bring together remembered and imagined experiences with the real perceived world or their desired realities. The student work titled, *Flow of Life* (Genet, 2003, M.4.3.3, p. 437) depicts the lone figure in the landscape and draws on the Western landscape tradition and the symbolism of the mountains, the river, flowing water, time and eternity, representative of "the significance relationships have on our existence; the road they take us on from adolescence to adulthood" (p. 71). Another, titled, *My Mother* (Knight, 1991, p. 19; M.4.3.2, p. 437) aims to capture and hold the imagined "romantic, intimate and warm feelings about my mother's life, as seen through the innocence of childhood." A Chagall inspired work, it depicts an

imagined narrative of her remembered experiences with her deceased mother which the student recognises as “fantasy-like,” connecting the past with the present, and the depiction of childhood memories actualising the realisation of the “transience of life” (p. 19).

The montages M.4.3 (p. 437) and M.4.4 (p. 439) also include students who have chosen to use the camera as the framing tool best able to grasp aspects of the present, future and the past simultaneously while travelling through interior and exterior worlds. These students choose to represent a variety of perspectives supported by the use of combinations of traditional and digital photography, film and mixed media studies where both image and text support the conceptualisation of the student’s ideas. *The Long and Winding Road* (Brayshaw, 2003, p. 20; M.4.3.8, p. 437) is a coarse-cut linear graphic of a man depicted as two artworks, youth and adulthood in juxtaposition. Each image is surrounded by the Beatle lyrics that inspired the work.

The artwork, *Imprints of Life’s Journey* (Naddaf-Meli, 2003, p. 30; M.4.3.6, p. 439), works with the power of the close-up shot. Photographic images are translated into photo real drawings emphasising the physicality and uniqueness of ageing through a focus on line, hands and eyes. *Being and Nothingness* (Entwisle, 2005, M.4.3.5, p. 437) also questions the very existence of being through captured shots of a man moving through the journey of a mundane working life. The painted images are framed stills of this reality and represent moments of endless repetition.

The work *My Life My Mind* (Baka, 2003, p. 121; M.4.4.7, p. 439) is representative of students’ works with a focus on memory and place. It is an interactive work that “explores the shift which takes place both physically and mentally” (p.121) when one contemplates returning to a place of childhood significance. The narrative is told through a compilation of sequenced digital images that capture the journey, the states of mind encountered on the journey, “anticipation, aversion, memories and longing” and “the sense of freedom and possibility conveyed through the open spaces of the ocean and the waiting boat” (p.121).



Paul Baka (2003), *My Life My Mind* [interactive], ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 121.

Cantrill (2003, p. 54; M.4.4.3, p. 439) has chosen to explore traces of her childhood through a detailed drawing of the old farm machinery and discarded weathered domestic objects all piled under a gum tree on her father's farm. While working through the drawing, she chose to tell her narrative through "conversations" about the aesthetics of the Australian landscape with Australian artists, Bulldog and Smike, Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton respectively. Such a process allows the student to bring her past into the present through a conscious, aesthetic journey.

The artwork of Brendan Plunkett (2001, p. 28, M.4.4.6, p.439, detail), as six self-portraits, presents another focus on place. The digital works represent interior mental states. The manipulated face of the student is off-centre and leads the viewer deep into mindscapes that represent surreal and imagined visual worlds of still water, rocky places and man-made, chaotic interiors and exteriors that take the viewer into the human psyche.

Students have also chosen to explore their subjectivity through representing places of intimacy filled with objects of defining personal significance. The student's bedroom is often representative of such a space. In this space the mind can reflect on the familiar and the imagined, as represented in the works *The Artist Bedroom* (Henriksen, 1991, p.15, M.4.4.2, p. 439) and *Still Life* (Hutchings, 2005, M.4.4.1, p. 439). Here, the student has chosen to place her/himself amidst the objects and surroundings that signify who they are. Henriksen has deliberately placed herself in the work as an aspect of its reality. The personal space contains a detailed visual description of the room filled with individually-crafted items and artists of significance chosen to accompany her. For Hutchings, it is his music, books, school tie, working canvasses, and his absent presence as the forensic

form, which reveal the significance of the space, its memories, and traces of activity and a sense of self.

*Bondi Tides* (Murphy, 2001, p.74; M.4.3.1, p. 437) is a speculative work defined by a unique experience of place. The beach location is the springboard for the student to explore concepts “to do with the passing of one summer or the span of a day at the beach... followed by deterioration through old age” (p. 74). It addresses the possibilities of a projected reality through an intense study of the human form, the landscape and scale. This work demonstrates how the photographic lens captures both detail and distance and allows the student to access ideas of multiple perspectives and framings within a time continuum. Through an observer gaze, the student presents the audience with a series of framed insights concerned with the weathered skin of aging, youth, love and summer light, the reflective daze of the sun and the surf, symbolic of time, and experience washing over you.

Time, spaces, patterns and rhythms of existence are explored primarily through the device of the self-portrait. Students choose to intensely investigate consciousness and patterns of daily existence, such as relationships, travel, time, communication, consumerism and desire, as pervading elements of our lives. Particularly in the city, the pace of life and media overload, confront our sensuality and challenge truths. Students exploring this territory have selected generally to position themselves as participants and use new media, such as video, animation, advertising and the web as their platforms of communication. Their messages are intensely revealing of the condition of adolescence and change, intensified by the pace and the compression of the new realities of a globalised society. The *Brain Train: Inside Insanity* (Bunce, 2004) is a self-portrait with multi framing, music, overlaying of images, text media, and the video journey. The student questions what is the norm, how communication, advertising, perception and illusion are all elements of the lived experience in contemporary society. The train races on, the text flashes “deluded”, “minding”, “sanity”, as points of reference and, while the music repeats the rhythms, the train rattles past and the voice says “hello”.

The video *Zero Infinity* (Lyndon, 2004) also confronts the hyper-reality of the media and questions how we make choices, which journeys we travel and how media programmes our realities and the confusion this presents. For these students, media and the virtual world provide rich territory in which to ask questions about possibilities and existence. The two works described above could have been filmed in any city around the world. The viewer needs to look closely to identify any local contexts. It is the confronting cosmopolitan nature of these works and their familiarity that connects many viewers. Each viewer personifies the journey yet, paradoxically, it is uniform, and the mundane actions of the participants who enter or exist at any time challenges the very nature and meaning of existence in contemporary society.

Then there are the intensely revealing video images from the work, titled, *All Day I've Built a Lifetime* (Davidson, 2001, p. 16, M.4.4.5, p. 439). The work reveals for the viewer the mundane activities of a young girl as she acts out the rhythms of her daily domestic ritual. Her words uncover another dimension of her interrogation as a girl defined by the relegation of women to the inevitable cycle of daily washing. "The day-to-day domestic grind and the internal monologue... the video might appear as simply a girl doing the washing, but the normality of these slow, almost mesmerising images, emphasised by the rhythmic editing is important because it reveals that these two levels (the good and the evil) exist at the same time" (p.16). Open to interpretation by the viewer, the artist statement and the images reveal a personal struggle as she defines herself as female within the hegemonic construct of female domesticity.

Students who select to represent time, places and spaces in their work might choose single or collective defining events of significance. They seek to study the phenomena of existence, over time and within spaces. Students who choose to inquire into the territory of past, present and future realities as a deliberate and performative act tend to find ways to feature themselves in their compositions either symbolically or intentionally. In this way, they make the journey personal and unique. Students enter these worlds as the traveller, the observer or the storyteller. The familiar or the mundane events of the everyday have been the



preferred backdrop of accumulative significance through which they define their difference.

#### **4.3.3 Tangential Visibility: Seeing Other and Reflecting on the Ethical Self**

*These wood engravings were inspired by black-and-white photographs taken of a friend. I tried to achieve a sense of dislocation and self-analysis, which combined to bring about a stronger understanding of individuality*  
(MacPherson, 1996, p. 29; M.4.5.3, p.441, detail).

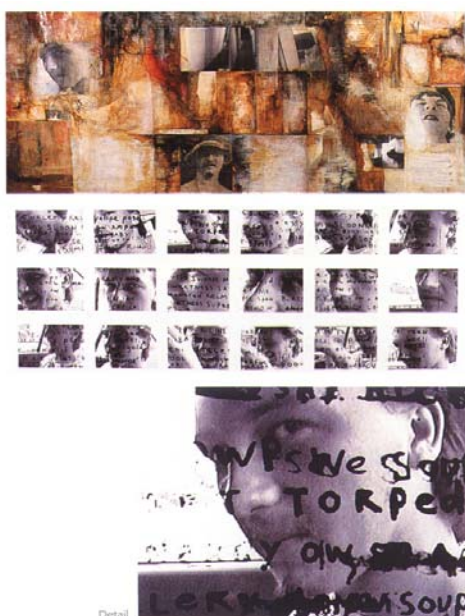
A group of students have focused on those aspects of themselves which have been significantly shaped by their inter-subjective experiences. The montage M.4.5 (p. 441) contains a range of images of student works that are representative of some of the dominant themes chosen by this group of students. A number of students engaged with representational choices that reflected significant personal encounters with others, such as family members or close friends. The actions of these individuals and the students' responses to them have been influential in their understanding about people, life and living. It is not surprising, therefore, that the content and context of these student works are directly connected to the ways their daily lives intersect, converge and inform their inquiry of self.

Observing the shaping of others, or tangential visibility, provides opportunities to begin to assess and evaluate how their own ethical engagement with others, and the actions or choices they make, impact on their future and define how they live their lives. It also provides insight into the ways that the accumulative actions of others, over time, have impacted on the ways they operate within society. Through the performative processes of observing, selecting, defining, refining and re-representing images, the narratives of others provide reflective possibilities about self.

The ways that students have oriented their inquiry in relation to tangential visibility has shifted over the years. Initially, students simply chose photographs or images of interest without stating any conscious intention in relation to their audience. In the work, *Hang Me in a Gallery* (Gavey, 1991, p.13; M.4.6.1, p.

443), the student's artist statement describes the reason for selection of the image as a "childhood photo of great character" (p.13). The statement gives detailed description of the technical issues surrounding the production of the image such as "it was a challenge to capture shadow, depth and proportion" (p.13). Her intentions, however, when she reworked the image as a painting, were more likely to have been to comment on issues of conformity and the school uniform as she chose to depict a very humorous portrayal of three non-compliant students.

Compare the work previously described with *Self-portrait with Friends* (Crouch, 1997, p.14; M.4.5.4, p. 441). Here, the student is able to articulate his/her intentions to study themselves and "the two people who have been influential in my life" (p.14). A later work by Jolanda Moyle, *Michael* (2001, p. 25; M.4.5.2, p. 441), articulates a deeper personal motive to capture the intense reality of her brother suffering from mental illness. The following technical commentary applied to *Michael*: "I have used different aspects to present his character as juxtaposed parallels of physicality and psyche. The houseboat represents the past and its place in his current state. The wheel is seen as the force which rolls us on, symbolic of our way of life, and the way to deal with negative experiences ... the work intimately delves into the inter-subjective relationship between myself and my brother" (p. 25).



Jolanda Moyle (2001), *Michael*  
[Collection of works],  
ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 25)

Students working in more recent years have not backed away from communicating on issues that have so profoundly shaped their own and their family's lives such as '*Michael*'. Indeed, the work, *Sophie* (Carter, 2003, p. 121; M.4.5.5, p. 441), is equally representative and, in fact, demonstrates the capacity of new technologies such as film to provide visual anthropological insights into significant issues that impact on students. *Sophie* documents "the repetitive behaviour in a well-adjusted and happy intellectually disabled girl" (p. 121). Georgia Carter has openly communicated the intimacy of her relationship with Sophie, revealing the performative experience as "particularly emotional and satisfying for me as Sophie the 21-year-old-star of my film is my sister" (p. 121).

One of the most common themes is the desire to reconcile one's affective intuitive self with the legacy and traces of self to be found in the physical and psychological embodiment of family members and relatives. This has been either through a study of a family's past histories, mythologies and experiences, which they have either shared in reality, or shared as the collective narratives and history of family. Students often elect to represent such inquiry through an intense investigation of portraiture and personal landscapes telling stories which have, to some degree, defined them. *My Mother's Story* (Park, 2001, p. 26; M.4.5.8, p. 441) and *My mother wears a jellyfish in her bra* (Batt, 1997, p. 10; M.4.5.7, p. 441) are representative of such a group of works that looks carefully at how history and family events have shaped and continue to shape their approach to life and define who they are. *My Mother's Story* is a collection of images by Hannah Park, each containing a photo of her mother depicting the choices she has made as an immigrant and the consequences of these choices. In each frame the portrait of the mother takes a reflective stance.



Hannah Park (2001),  
*My Mother's Story*  
[Drawing],  
ARTEXPRESS, 2001,  
p. 26)

*My Mother's Story* displays significant aspects of her life: "treasuring her Korean culture; reflecting on the past; aspirations for the future; the displacement; the longing to return" (p.121). The student is also able to project the personal to the universal and talk of the "inevitability of change" (p.121). The viewer can easily access how the making process for this student has provided a way to reflect on choice and assess and evaluate the lives of both mother and daughter. *My mother wears a jellyfish in her bra* (Batt, 1997, p. 10; M.4.5.7, p. 441) is another deeply performative work. Through a very expressive and humorous drawing, the student reveals in her artist statement her personal resolution and affirmation about illness. Sarah Batt chose to show "how disease can affect a person-physically, mentally and emotionally...I also have unresolved emotions I had to work through ... through continued experimentation ... breast cancer should not be immediately associated with death and shame" (p. 10).

One would also develop a personal position about one's identity by reflectively responding to one's individual realities and by testing assumptions about self through others from a greater distance. In many respects, this is the preferred and safest position taken by students. By not representing self, students are possibly given a greater freedom to make stronger statements about ethical issues that have impacted and shaped themselves and those around them. *My Friend Ben* (Zapf, 2002, p. 96; M.4.5.6, p. 441) confronts issues of identity as they are shaped significantly during adolescence by media, music, fashion and peers. The words "customised", "labelled", "choice", "isolated", "misfit" and "individual" punctuate the background of this multi-perspective painting. The student, Christian Zapf, comments, "my work is concerned with individuality and the ways we choose to define ourselves and how others define us" (p. 96).

It must be noted that photography and associated digital visual technologies have opened up the possibilities for a wider range of students to collect and

record visual traces about family, friends, moments and experiences that are constitutive of one's defining self with ever-increasing accessibility.



Rebecca Collinson-Smith (2003), *Youth, Harmony Grace Strength* [Photography], ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 21)

In its purest inquiry, the photographic work *Youth, Harmony Grace and Strength* (Collinson-Smith, 2003, p. 21) captures the essence of what constitutes friendship, community, diversity and individual identities. A compelling series of images, they capture the cultural richness of Australian society and some of the collective defining identities of youth. This is a youth who communicates, through the gaze, to the viewer, both a reflective and questioning position.

#### **4.3.4 . Visibility as a Culturally and Socially Discursive Identity Construct**

A postmodern curriculum that centres the conceptual frame of the artwork, artist, world and audience, extends the objective, expressive and intuitive responses in artmaking to include the possibilities of meaning-making opened by a more critical and reflective stance. The way that artists and the wider world of visual media use the gaze to communicate to an audience has become a tool of significance for students. Understanding self through semiotic and symbolic representations is increasingly recognised as an essential skill. Students not only grasp an understanding of the way that the gaze has been used historically by artists to communicate dominant ideological positions but, through critical and performative actions, are able to use their visuality in active ways to interrogate their world and their behaviours. As a tool for expressive, critical and performative visibility, artmaking is very effective when students choose to interrogate self for personal emancipatory motives.

This area of analysis has been broken into three sub-categories, namely: how students critically interrogate the way the phenomena of cosmopolitanism and specifically, the media and popular culture in contemporary society, shape self; how cultural norms and behaviours of their parents and wider cultural ties impact on adolescent identities; and how social histories have shaped self.

The percentage of students selected in each of the above categories over the years has shifted slightly. For example, in 1991, 26% of student works represented this combined category, and in 2005, the percentage was 29%. Adolescent students have always asked questions about their families and their past, including about where they were born, where their parents were born, what religion they were and what their grandparents did or where they lived. What is evident when comparing the artworks from across this span of time is a strong shift to a more critical and emancipatory stance. This shift has been from a representation of the phenomenon as passive observer, to that of an active participant.

***Media, popular culture and subjectivities:*** The impact of cosmopolitanism or the phenomena of global media and urbanisation, is ensconced in all our daily communications and behaviours. Youth cultures are no longer remote or isolated but increasingly influenced by a range of signifiers within global popular visual culture (Barker, 2000). This culture presents a complete meaning-making system (Venturelli, 2004). Students in this study are representative of the generation that inhabit this global cultural landscape and reflect concern for ethical dilemmas that arise from the commodification influences that shape their behaviours, beliefs and values.

In their desire to take control, youth break free and define themselves as individuals who are active in contesting the normalisation of society through subcultures. Media play a dominant role in supporting the industry of youth subcultures, their behaviours and the ever-changing representational possibilities of resistance as a consumption imperative. Both are complicit in manipulating reality and changing patterns of identification, disrupting and blurring identity boundaries and sexualities. Visual Art students who decide to

inquire through the popular culture lens find fertile areas for investigation. As energetic activists in this fluid culture, they explore topics such as beauty, health, relationships, the environment, fashion, music and the forces of stereotyping, gender exploitation and desire.

Defining one's individuality requires self-reflexivity and an understanding of how others perceive self. Montage 4.6: Critical Cultural Construct (p. 443) contains a range of artworks representative of such issues and illustrates a movement towards the students developing a performative stance in relation to the forces that shape them. *The Disillusioned Bride* (Goby, 1991, p.13; M.4.6.1, p. 443) is an example of an early work tackling the stereotyping of gender roles. The bridal dress is a symbolic representation of marriage and contains messages from brides before and after marriage. It aims to "move beyond the bridal look" (p.13). While the artist statement does not explicitly refer to the critical nature of the inquiry, the student has articulated his/her inquiry into gender role perceptions through a self-reflective practice, "I learned to be aware of a mental image, trial an idea, view it, discuss and evaluate with others before taking the next step" (p.13).

The work *Engendered Fantasy* (Bankier, 1993, p. 2, M4.6.2, p. 443) directly addresses the issues of body politics through the female nude and states that "Images of the human figure appear in all aspects of popular culture and form a basis for the stereotypical roles expected of each gender" (p. 2). When positioned beside with the photographic work of Imran Kamal (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, p. 52; M.4.6.3, p. 443), the viewer can see a defiant stance by the students against the constant pressure to define self by parents, relatives and society during adolescence. The, "what do you want to be when you grow up" question has been answered by Kamal in the following way "My answer began with four male stereotypes ...I studied the stark works of Chuck Close and Robert Mapplethorpe ...I chose the medium of photography ...I struggled with how to display and aid viewer interpretation, I hope the work does not need explanation" (ARTEXPRESS, 1997, p. 52). The body of work contains six full length self-portrait photographs. Four frames show the strong hegemonic expectations of his family. He is dressed in an academic gown, a suit, jogging

gear and in conservative casual attire. The perception of the successful young male is juxtaposed by the transvestite and the spy disrupting any possibility of a stereotypical conclusion.

Extending on this theme is the work *Marilyn Monroe-A Dime a Dozen* (Court, 2001, p. 55; M.4.6.5, p. 443). Her photographic images of characters all wear the “Marilyn” wig aiming to raise questions about race, gender, and even species. She has adopted a “Warholian guise of ‘Marilyn Monroe’ to convey and support my ideas of media overkill, Western influences and feminine mystique” (p. 55).

*You are What you Wear* (Genner, 2001, p. 18, M4.6.6, p. 443) is an example of how students interrogate the devices used by marketing and media to promote specific gender constructs through fashion statements that facilitate consumerism and define the female adolescent. The student has photographed herself in her own product *You are What You Wear* T-shirts and has set about the process of merchandising her concept ... “using mass media techniques of the fashion industry to explore our desire to use accessories to define ourselves within our consumer-driven society” (p.18). The work is intensely personalised and internalised as the artist engages through creating, wearing, photographing and manipulating the very images and products of the consumer world which have helped define her ... her final note ... “without you I am nothing” (p.18). This theme has been explored on many levels and very differently by other students reflected in titles such as *Who ever Controls the Media-The Image - Controls the Culture*’ (Davids, 2002, p. 16-17) and *Are You Consumed* (Caroll, 2004; M.4.7.9, p. 445). The latter work uses the newspaper format to frame overarching statements about media, capitalism and the consumer society. By using the front page layout ideas and the universal “newspaper wrapped” human, he aims to reinforce society’s obsession with consumption and ask questions about our world.

*Beauty* (Giang, 2003, p. 21; M.4.6.4, p.443) explicitly makes the process of commodification personal and particular. The calendar titles *My Breast are your Fortune* satirizes the traditional nude calendar often found in male workplaces.



Her graphic artworks reveal her understanding of the discursive nature of image and text across cultures. Through her investigation of the sexual portrayal of women and the exploitation of desire by the media, she reveals how such representations present a particular construct of women. The words on her calendar read, “Buy Me, Wear Me, Drive Me, Use Me, Date Me, Smell Me, Eat Me, Love Me, Watch Me” and image and text supporting commodification, “use me, I’ll change your life” (p. 21).

*Dangerous Looks* (Ingleby, 2003) is a work which appropriates Andy Warhol’s famous Campbell’s Soup can icon re-contextualising it, labelling it FAT, and creating a bricolage of images that depict the wounds of cosmetic surgery and raises issues of bioethical behaviour as well as question “what is beauty?” The hand of pain and a young face in agony torn by the multiplicity of forces that impact on one’s identity complement the signs of surgery. For the student, it represents a work commenting on “modern society’s obsession with beauty and the risks people take” (p. 43).



Samantha Ingleby (2003), 'Dangerous Looks' [Collection of Works], ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p.43.

Another emerging genre represented in ARTEXPRESS is the satirical parody of media through the meta-magazine design. The works *Ballywho* (2002, p. 107; M.4.6.7, p. 445) and *Mesh'* (2005, M.4.6.8, p. 443) both critically confront blatant advertising. *Ballywho* was created as “a reaction against the objectivity of popular media and the loss of individual identity through consumerism” (p. 107). *Mesh* was created as a magazine for men from a woman’s perspective. “I have created a world of famous people, showing the power of the magazine industry and how easy it is to make an average person look famous” (Gorgiojski, 2005).

A final example is the work by Rose Vallentine who, through the production of her own magazine, has explored “the new demographic of the metrosexual, their values and ideals” (Vallentine, ARTEXPRESS, 2004). The *Rise of the Metrosexual* is a collection of very sensitive and genre specific portraits that investigate self and others through the power of the gaze and a commercial construct.



Rose Vallentine (2004)  
*ING Magazine: The Rise of the Metrosexual* [Graphic],  
ARTEXPRESS, 2004.

What is most significant about the genre works analysed above is that the students master the graphical and semiotic skills of the media industry. Through a very personal and intimate performative experience they are able to use the technologies of vision in much the same way that media and marketing agencies use them to shape others. Framing their visual inquiry as both a social and cultural critic, they are able to assess and evaluate how personal choice affects both their external and internal self. Most importantly, the students are increasingly interested in placing themselves into the experience to engage in a more emancipatory way with the forces that shape them.

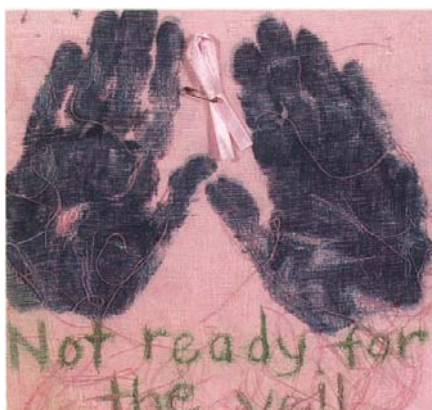
***Cultural constructs and subjectivities:*** Characteristic of youth is their questioning of social power constructs and their desire to validate their own culturally-located behaviour. It is imperative for them that they have the opportunity to express and, to some extent, take control in the quest to define oneself as unique, special and having a purpose for both self, family and the broader society. Following the pattern emergent across all data categories, the

student works have shifted over the fourteen-year period of analysis from fixed, singular representations to more complex, multiple representations capable of showing complexity, ambiguity and fluidity. More importantly, there is a trend in the recent works towards the developing of a capacity to be able to affect their own perceptions of themselves in active ways rather than demonstrating a more passive reflective stance. This shift has been in tandem with students developing the skills to work with both traditional and new technologies, and contemporary art practices as encouraged in the recent Visual Arts Syllabus. The Montage 4.7 illustrates this shift. *Wog Rituals* (Lazaridis, 1991, p. 21; M.4.7.1, p. 445), a print, mixed media work captures a fixed, defining moment in childhood. In this artwork, the student is positioned as passive observer, looking back as receiver of the effects of his/her cultural past in shaping self. The work was “expressing the personal feelings related to my ethnic background” (p. 21). Contrast this work with *(Matriarchy) My Mother’s Daughter* (Salamonsen, 2005, M.4.7.5, p. 445), where the student uses still photographs to capture herself in the act of undressing from the kimono to symbolically represent independence, difference and action.

In affirming a more active performative role, the artworks are either broadly satirical, social and cultural commentaries, or deeply personal and creative responses to the cultural forces that define them. *Suburban Reality* (Kenyon, 2003, p. 123; M.4.7.2, p. 445), an animation, and *The Bloke and His Dog* (de Teliga, 2001, p. 158; M.4.7.3, p. 445), are both strong expressive characterisations. They take a humorous approach to asking questions about the values and beliefs embedded in the cultural rituals of the suburban Australian and how they affect their identities. *Suburban Reality* is a digital animation about stereotyping in Australian society. In this artwork, the student has selected to work within the genre of animation, using his own characters to explore suburban hegemonic constructs of identity. In so doing, he demonstrates his capacities to critically deconstruct social signifiers of identity and stereotyping generally as they operate within Australian culture. Through humour, aesthetic and technical skill this work demonstrates the performative nature and power of characterisation in artmaking.

*The Bloke and his Dog* (de Teliga, 2001) requires no less capacity for critical reflection, and the series of black and white drawings supports the resolution of issues surrounding cultural behaviours through humour. The traditions of irony and satirical cartooning are employed to represent funny, grotesque, ugly-yet-very-human characters as symbols of the “Australian middle class, beer-swilling, pie eating yobbo ... and his dog” (p. 158). Both works demonstrate a skilled creative response to an affective understanding of the unique subject in the presence of others as a spring board to understanding emerging identities.

*I wore the veil from Age 10* (Cakal, 2003, p. 21; M.4.7.4, p. 445) and *(Matriarchy) My Mother’s Daughter* (Salamonsen, 2005, M.4.7.5, p. 445) are both intensely personal, symbolic works that link grandmother, mother and daughter in the process of exploring one’s cultural identity. Cakal (2003, p. 21) works with polaroid images of her grandmother, mother and herself and with textiles. In the detail of her work below, she makes a simple print of her hands on fabric. The hands represent her identity, the fabric women. Under the hands she writes the words ‘not ready for the veil’. The title of the artwork, *I Wore the Veil from the Age of Ten*, taken from her grandmother’s words, and the representational acts, printing and writing, affirm Cakal’s cultural identity. Combined they make a strong simple image that allows the viewer to experience the weight of cultural tradition on a young Islamic girl in contemporary Australian society.



Ayla Cakal (2003) *I wore a veil from the age of ten* [textile and fibre], ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 21

*(Matriarchy) My Mother’s Daughter* (2005) is a photographic series that tells a personal narrative of individuality and independence: “I explored the notion of cultural identity ... I wear a traditional kimono, acknowledging my heritage and

exhibiting the customs of subtlety and modesty that are the cornerstones of Japanese culture ... by contrast the act of undressing represents the emergence of a new identity within myself as an Australian” (CD ROM).

Conformity and the struggle to be unique is a preoccupation for many adolescent students who live in a mass-produced, commodified and ordered, or timetabled, existence. Patterns, events and cultural behaviours of society all contribute to the way we travel through life and how we choose to see ourselves. Visual Art students exhibiting in ARTEXPRESS have developed a disposition which encourages them to see self as referential to their own journeys and those of others. When they begin their inquiry, they choose carefully where to position themselves to explore societal expectations and normalisations within the ambiguity and uncertainty that is the habitus of contemporary society. *Conformity is a Valid* (Schembri, 2003, p. 46, M.4.7.6, p. 445) is a collection of 9 photographic works. The central imagery is the portrait of the girl in white neutral underwear, presented as a full body identity photo (hinting to the issue of surveillance in modern society) projected over bar codes, black silhouettes and outlined figure forms. She comments;

*Each so-called individual can be seen as a paper doll, a manufactured toy,*

*Each subjected to the power of the institution,*

*Each to be shaped, cut and moulded,*

*Each to fit neatly into the grids of social expectation and acceptance.*

(p.46)

The exploration by Schembri (2003) aims to analyse these concepts within changing society. What is particularly powerful about these works is the communicative capacity of the images to reflect the student's conscious intentions to stand out from the norm. It is a self-portrait. The student gazes outward towards the audience, her stance defiant, strong and purposeful. This theme is echoed again in *Plastic Majority* (Kerr, 2003, p. 77; M.4.7.8, p. 447), a work about “consumerism, uniformity, coercion of the masses and the importance of preserving individuality ... I wanted to make a statement about my own individuality”. The mannequins are all smiling, all uniform, “... the

human is the only one with an expressionless face...I stand apart in my self-portrait" (p. 77).

The works representative of this particular category concern themselves with how the student is constructed by cultural patterns and behaviours. They seek to be different and they are conscious of their capacity to explore change through their creative acts. Stapleton (2003, p. 48; M.4.7.7, p. 445) asked "What do you want to be today?" (p. 48). She challenges gender stereotypes and her work plays with the ambiguity of our perceptions. The works represent the desire of youth to resist and challenge agencies of power and to validate their own culturally-located behaviour. It is an imperative for them that they have the opportunity to express and, to some extent, take control in the quest to define oneself. Exploring the rich visual world of contemporary society is an obvious starting point. It allows them to focus on the personal and the particular to define difference and purpose of themselves with their immediate family and the broader society.

***Framing inquiry: from the multi-dimensional to the particular and the personal:*** Much of who we are has been shaped when events punctuate our lives that require us to reflect, assess and make choices. Students across all the years analysed in the longitudinal study have used their visual artmaking to take forays or expeditions into a wide range of inquiry topics that have directly or indirectly touched them. These also require them to engage with questions about existence from a more worldly perspective. Each inquiry requires them to trace the historical origins of images and ideas and to find new personal imaginative conclusions or present particular interpretations of future imaginative possibilities. Montage M.4.8 *Visibility, Reflecting on the Social and Ethical Self* (p. 447) represents examples of how students have framed their inquiry from the more universal to the particular and the personal. It demonstrates the variety of the learning outcomes of a curriculum that supports multiple and inclusive ways of seeing the world. Each of the framed positions presented has been echoed many times, in many ways, by many students and demonstrates their creative capacities to look behind themselves, to look sideways and to project to the future as ways of knowing self. In seeking

personal understanding about the world students navigate constructed visual interpretive possibilities from many roles, including philosopher, historian and personal narrator, ideological critic, protagonist, and anthropologist.

One of the constant narratives across all the years, not surprisingly, is the students' inquiry into the institutional practices of school life and its impact on them. *Educated emotional conflict* (Mackie, 1997, p. 24; M.4.8.1, p. 447) explores the confinement and institutional constraints of schools through a satirical examination of the traditional school photo. In this new take on the class photo, students are re-represented as resisting conformity, being cheeky, non-attentive, rebellious and disrespectful. The reinterpreted school photo "is just a representation of educated emotional conflicts that constantly arise in everyday school life" (p. 24).

*Daze in a life* (Sinclair, 2001, p. 30) is a series of photo realistic framings, a self-portrait, where the student re-represents himself through aspects of the mundane, everyday ritual of the school day. He wakes, travels to school, moves through lessons, past his friends, he studies and returns home. Each frame a reflective grab, sometimes he is observed or observes his own reflection, while at other times, he looks out at the audience or inward to a distance horizon. For others, the institution of school is the perfect backdrop to inquire into peer rejection and the feelings of alienation and isolation. *Isolation and Alienation* (van Drempt, 1997, p. 41) is set in the school yard, the subject separated and rejected by his/her peer group characterised as imaginative beasts appropriated from an imaginary horror film. For others the constraints of preparing for their final exams becomes the perfect metaphor for expressing the universal feelings of tension, fear, anxiety and hope.

The universal theme of human conflict reoccurs each year. Often, it is in direct response to current world events or issues closer to home, such as *Peaceful Protest* (Belousovia, 2001, p. 12) which comments on the peaceful protest that turned violent. Most choose to take a questioning stance. To ask the "why?" and "what for?" questions, or to reflect on what it is about being human that produces this phenomenon. The three works selected in Montage 4.8

demonstrate how students take a particular event, or phenomenon, and inquire from a very personal perspective. *Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong* (Hipsley, 1997, p. 21; M.4.8.2, p. 447) emerged from the personal encounters of a student after visiting and travelling through Vietnam. She reflects on how the Vietnam War had deeply affected the innocent lives of so many. *Fomori: The Dispossessed* (O'Connor, 2003, p. 30; M.4.8.4, p. 447) explores the universal cycle of invasion and dispossession through the symbolism of the mask. The student has used the Celtic myth, Fomori, as the metaphor for all outcast people, each chilling mask piercing, vacant and powerful.

For some the questions surrounding war and the dispossessed are extremely personal and the events of war have shaped them and their families. The *Crying Refugee* (Mironov, 2001, p. 24) is described by the student as “not a political statement [it] is a very personal account of a family who want to belong” (p. 24). It depicts shifting from the issue of dispossession to one of emergent identities of an entire family represented by a collection or album of family photos performatively expressed through interpretive drawings.

The work *Oppression Resistance Asylum* (Park, 2001, p. 75, M.4.8.3, p. 447, detail) is a blatant representation of political realities and the aftermath of the 1950s Korean War. It represents a particular event made deeply personal by the student. Working with pencil and the media articles of the time she has used “distorted and ripped newspapers, intensive red slashes and detailed self-portraits” (p. 75). As a refugee descendant, each portrait of the series of three is deeply questioning, two portraits gaze intensely at the viewer, while the third seeks answers elsewhere. *Why this life?* (Plummer, 2002, p. 32) reflects on a grandfather's childhood, the Bosnian War and how they have come to live their lives in Australia.





Plummer (2002), *Why this life?* [photography], ARTEXPRESS, 2002, p. 32.

What is most striking about such a work is how new technologies allow the complexity and layering of reality to be visualised. The student articulates how he has brought the history and traces of his grandfather's past into his own reality. "I have used images of personalised objects like a shoe and a toy bear printed onto a georgette screen to convey the human losses of war. This process has softened the focus of each image as a visual metaphor for lost memories ... [this has] led me to explore the subjective dimensions of memory and the way images recapture the atrocities of war" (p. 32). The striking reality of the hand and gun, captured in recent time, brings the viewer very close to this reality.

Exploring ideologies as the critical and reflective protagonist is another recurring theme. *Madonna del simplicity* (Collins, 1997, p. 94; M.4.8.5, p. 447) appropriates one of many Madonna and Child iconic works from art history. She comments on the "breakdown of truths upheld in the iconic image through a post-modern perspective and her role as a child" (p. 94). Her artist statement addresses the complexity of developing such an archetypal mother and child relationship. She reflects, [It] "cannot be achieved by formula or simple instructions" (p. 74) and her work uses the analogy of patterns, sewing and construction. Others directly confront the issue of bioethical behaviour as represented by *Vivisection* (Maxfield, 1991, p. 23; M.4.8.7, p. 447). The image of the chimpanzee, reminiscent of Francis Bacon's disturbing psychological studies of the human psyche comments on the "disturbing, unethical, human infliction on defenceless, often bewildered domestic animals" (p. 23).

The works *Die Krafanlage* (Elder, 2001, p. 72; M.4.8.6, p. 447) and *Future* (Berry, 2003, p. 121; M.4.8.8, p. 447) both explore the world of science, technology and the human imagination. *Die Krafanlage*' meaning "power plant", represents the thoughts of the student about the "amalgamated evolution of humans and technology" (p. 72) while *Future* the "convergence of man and machine" (p.121). Both students work with traditional and digital technologies while *Future* moves us closer to our present realities as this interactive work directly confronts the audience. The interactive platform engages the audience with futures technology and requires them to literally navigate its structure and consciously choose how to proceed.

Others, like the artwork *World Vision* (Lee, 2003, p. 94; M.4.8.10, p. 447) directly aim to present to their audience their own personal ethical position. Lee comments: "I strove to convey a need for equality of all races on Earth" (p. 94). Her representation of the globe and her treatment of imagery is strongly figurative and her text conveys a clear message, "Tolerance is total acceptance of others' uniqueness".

The comic book genre has a special place in ARTEXPRESS. It is represented annually and it might take the form of a critical exploration of the genre, focusing on issues around its legitimacy as a fine art medium or a popular culture art form, or it might require the mastery of its semiotic expression as a tool for personal and social narrative. These issues are explored through the traditional form as the comic strip or new technologies and genre, such as Japanese anime. The issues treated by students who select this genre are no less powerful or personally poignant than any other art forms represented above. In fact the popular and accessible symbolic imagery and the mythologies of the comic genre are now deeply entrenched in our youth culture narratives and students, along with many parents, find such works immediately accessible.

In the work, *The Hero Within* (Moffitt, 1997, p. 32), the student rhetorically asks, "Do the pages of a comic book translate into real life?" He uses himself as a focal character, "I undergo a superhero metamorphosis, escaping into a world of illusion where I can beat the bad guy and save the day" (p. 32).



Andrew Moffitt (1997), *The hero within* [drawing], ARTEXPRESS. 1997, p. 32

The imaginative adventures and superhero antics confront the ethical choices of everyman and explore the moral codes of society. This superhero depiction appropriates the famous American World War 1 conscription image of Uncle Sam with the famous caption “I want you!” Moffitt’s caption reads. “Remember you can help in the fight against crime.” While the student remarks “through imagination and the ability to escape contemporary reality, everyone possesses a hero within,” the audience is left with a range of interpretive positions as such a powerful image carries a legacy of subliminal possibilities.

Using the same genre, Calvin Luk’s work titled *MPD, Mental process Diary* (2002, p. 27; M.4.8.9, p. 447) is a parody on the Visual Process Diary. It “seeks to take the audience behind the scene into the psychological world of the artist during the process of art creation” (p. 27). It is produced as a comic strip and the audience is to immerse itself in the narrative and share the intense psychological, expressive experience depicted by the events in the life of a stylised super heroine, who at times, can conquer the world. At other times, she appears fractured, broken into many pieces. Her fragments could be interpreted as creative thoughts which move through space in all directions as she “tries to make sense of the world” (p. 27).

## Conclusion

Visual art inquiry has the capacity to bridge those spaces between school life and “real life, between differences of self and other ...” (Gooding-Brown, ARTEXPRESS, 1997).

The longitudinal study results have provided a window into the diverse ways in which adolescent Visual Art students consciously and consistently chose to inquire into their lives through artmaking. Many students have used their inquiry to focus on those aspects of their reality which have significantly shaped them up to, and including, this critical period in their lives. The student works selected to represent the learning outcomes across the years studied also shifted to a stronger contemplative and reflective orientation. The students have used their artmaking to clarify everyday intuitions with an increasingly critical awareness of its performative capacity in helping them to evaluate and communicate their everyday actions and project their futures.

From the categorisation and percentage calculations of the student works studied, there is significant evidence to substantiate the claim that subjectivity issues are a significant preoccupation in their inquiry. Students harness a wide range of artistic genre practices to answer the “who am I?” question. The majority of students approach the question from the position of a self-narrative. The self-portrait, in its many interpretive and expressive practices and traditional and contemporary forms, is the defining characteristic of an ARTEXPRESS exhibition and is central to the HSC Visual Artmaking culture of inquiry. Students seek to inquire into their psyche and their intuitive and expressive self in order to find out what is ‘underneath me.’ This analysis identified a shift across the years towards an understanding of self as a constructed entity and an increasing number of students are using new technologies and relational aesthetics through the concept of a body of work to represent self as an assemblage of many moments, states and actions. Each work represents a strong intuitive and expressive response to their world. While the research has identified the self-portrait as the main tool to investigate identity, students have also been shown to investigate self through other orientations. These include, the visualising of events which have significantly shaped them, tangential visibility and visibility as a culturally and socially discursive construct.

When students orientate their inquiry from an events perspective, they cover topics from the profound to the mundane. They might reflect on the death of a mother, or contemplate the phenomenon of mental illness by studying their

brother, or they might research past events such as immigration and its impact over time on their families or their own identities. They might also inquire into existence through the repetitions of daily practices, such as domestic tasks, travel and the daily routine of school. Excavating their memories of childhood through detailed studies of places and spaces of significance through drawings, photographs, film or installation is another significant orientation.

Tangential visibility sees students focus on how their inter-subjective understandings of the world inform self. This orientation provides a very powerful way to assess critically and interpretively what you do in the world in terms of understanding others' actions. While all artmaking practices carried out by the students reveal a reflective communicative practice, the focus on tangential visibility is more directly connected to moving beyond the ego-self. This assists the student to understand how others exist as a way of informing one's ethical actions in everyday life. This deep contemplative state is established through an engagement with observing others, observing self, observing how others have been represented in the past. In addition it assists students to see how the vast world of visual, cultural and social practices can facilitate reciprocity. An intense visualisation of self and others sees students seeking understandings of concepts such as aging, adolescence and friendship. The reflections of one student are representative of many:

*I tried to achieve a sense of dislocation and self-analysis, which combined to bring about a stronger understanding of individuality*  
(MacPherson, 1996, p. 29; M.4.6, p. 443-4).

Individual visibility as a positioning of the accumulative actions of others is achieved through the performative processes of researching, observing, selecting, defining, refining and re-representing images as the narratives of others. Such orientations can open up conversations with one's self about one's uniqueness and about how making choices impact on the future and define how one might choose to live life.

An increasingly popular frame for seeing the world is through using the skill of visibility to interpret our culturally and socially constructed self. Taking a critical and discursive approach to artmaking and images as ideological

representations has provided a rich and authentic field of enquiry for many. Students selecting this orientation have focused strongly on popular culture, the media and social power constructs. This sees them fascinated with the concepts of desire and the way the gaze informs subjectivities. They are keen to interrogate images, deconstruct artist intentions and, through the performative practices of artmaking, actively validate their own culturally located behaviour. The skills of appropriation, parody and irony, along with new technologies and multiple image techniques, have seen the students move beyond notions of a fixed identity and present audiences with a wide range of ways to re-represent themselves as critical dynamic changing entities.

They accept as commonplace the multiple hybrid cultural products of their world while simultaneously resisting the phenomenon's capacity to stereotype them for niche-marketing or hegemonic socialising purposes. Finding pathways to personal emancipatory action is a "valid concern" (Schembri, ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 46). Manipulating one's own image and re-representing reality is a powerful tool. "I stand apart in my-self-portrait, only revealing to the world a part of my face looking on the Plastic Majority of our society" (Kerr, ARTEXPRESS, 2003, p. 77).

A significant observation from the longitudinal comparative analysis is that, increasingly, new technologies and contemporary art practices are allowing students to simultaneously grasp the way the past informs the present. It also allows them to see how they can creatively and imaginatively speculate on the future or test future actions and possible new realities. The photograph and digital-imaging techniques have made accessible many concepts which have in the past been difficult for young artists to achieve. The concepts of reality, time, multiplicity and change are difficult with traditional fixed representational mediums such as painting and sculpture, and require a level of expertise not usually evident in the majority of students studying Visual Art in senior school. In the work, *All Day I've Built a Lifetime* Davidson's (2001, p.16; M.4.4.5, p. 441), artist statement reveals how the simple video monologue with rhythmic editing can demonstrate for her what she sees as revealing "two levels (the good and the evil) exist[ing] at the same time" (p. 16). For Wade (ARTEXPRESS, 2001) a claymation 'allows me to

present a world as if seen through the eyes of a child' (p. 66) and *Brain Train: Inside Insanity* (Bunce, 2004), is a self-portrait with multi-framing, music, overlaying of images, text media, and the video journey which captures the complexities of multiple perceptual realities on a moving train headed for the city.

The conceptual framing of artist, world, audience and artwork and its related contemporary practice have been able to provide students with the conceptual spaces and material practices to study visual representations of the world. For an increasing number of students the focus of a critical, hermeneutic and reflective curriculum and its performative pedagogy has encouraged self-inquiry and agency. The increased focus on self-portrait or the conscious decision by many to place themselves within their narratives in very explicit ways, across all of the genres represented in ARTEXPRESS, is evidence that they are using it to mediate their life experiences. It is, therefore, not surprising that, increasingly, the content and context of student works in this longitudinal study have moved away from the landscape, still life and traditional portrait as fixed representations of reality to the body of work that opens up the possibilities of many representations of self.

ARTEXPRESS exhibitions are providing a powerful tool for learning and, over the years, this phenomenon has produced its own cultural art practice. ARTEXPRESS represents a student exhibition that demonstrates how students intentionally use their inquiry to meet very practical and personal needs in terms of testing values and beliefs and the issues that preoccupy them. It is the voice of adolescent youth across NSW, as portrayed by Duy Tan Ly's work *Identity* (1997, p. 29; M.4.1.4, p. 433), which concerns his reflections and incorporates "the me that was, and the me that I hope, or fear, will be" (p. 29) and demonstrates to audiences how artmaking is a legitimate way to mediate life.

## 5.0 RESULTS: STAGE 1, PART 2: CASE STUDY

*Experience is qualitative, multidimensional, and inclusive; it includes 'a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness (Deleuze, 1995, p.141)*

### 5.1 Introduction to Case Study

Commentators of ARTEXPRESS over the years have all made significant claims to the value of the Visual Artmaking experience to students as a way to bridge the lifeworld of school and childhood with the realities of working life and adulthood (Brown, 2001c; Gooding-Brown, 1997; McKeon, 1994; Sullivan, 2003; Yerbury, 2004). Furthermore, they claim that teachers in the Visual Art classroom actively tailor their teaching to encourage the emerging interests of students (Brown, 2001c, p. 9). In addition, the teacher and student co-construct the student's conceptual representations.

The shift towards the encouragement of a body of work in the most recent Visual Art Syllabus in NSW has further reinforced the appreciation that artmaking has less to do with the prize-winning performance (Brown, 2001c) and more to do with developing a visual communicative agency. This approach allows students to see the diversity and complexity of possible aesthetic solutions to their inquiry challenges. Finally, the students who study Visual Art are presented as having developed an imaginative and risk-taking disposition which supports transformative learning and an inventive capacity (Eisner, 2001a), while being sensitive to the ethical nature of this decision-making (Cunliffe, 2005). Working with images and their symbolic intentions and productive possibilities allows the student to reflect in positive and empowering ways towards personal agency. The visual pedagogical experience can be a powerful performative attraction for some students to continue their study of Visual Art in their senior years.

The longitudinal analysis in Stage 1, Part 1 has revealed that the majority of students studying the NSW Visual Art curriculum have concerned themselves with issues that inform their subjectivities. The ARTEXPRESS exhibition, which displays the depth and breadth of the quality learning outcomes from



this curriculum, has developed into a particular adolescent visual art culture. This visual learning culture is characterised by the emergence of particular genre styles that connect strongly with the diversity of the lifeworlds of the school student in Australia. Students work within these genre styles across the spectrum of more traditional artmaking practices such as sculpture and painting to photography, animation, installation and film. The ARTEXPRESS exhibition is aesthetically orientated to the figurative, reflecting the fascination of the adolescent with their developing adult physicality and their adult subjectivities. It also demonstrates that students are evaluating and balancing the relationship between the realities of their emotional and rational self within a complex world of relationships.

Stage 1, Part 2, provides an in-depth analysis of student work through the case studies of seven HSC Visual Art students. The case studies provide insight into how students, working within the constraints of this unique curriculum and the external examination, have used visual art inquiry to support their emergent subjectivities. They reveal the way the students position their inquiry in broad terms and how they find a particular focus or subject matter through which to drive their more personal emotional and expressive needs. They furthermore reveal the way each student approaches the acquiring of a sense of positive agency and ethical orientation through the development of their capacities towards a more reflective interpretive understanding (Barker, 2000; Habermas, 1976; Slattery & Rapp, 2003).

The analysis of seven students, who had successfully completed their NSW HSC Visual Art examination during the past six years, provides an insight into their unique learning journeys in six different visual pedagogical learning environments. The students in the case studies are representative of the broader population of Visual Art students who have found learning in Visual Art to be an authentic, valid and totally engaging learning activity.

Through an analysis of each case study, the researcher aims to reveal a deeper understanding of how each student approached their Visual Art works and the emphasis the students placed on a socio-cognitive and/or expressive-

intuitive inquiry approach. Students were asked to consider meaning-making or visual inquiry driven by their own personal intentions, the artwork's communicative and interpretive possibilities and how the wider art world and society influenced their material, technological and semiotic practices.

Some of the issues explored included whether the students saw their inquiry as a legitimate and effective way for them to affirm their own personal values and beliefs. What subject matter or content did they explore and did taking such a focus support their general well-being or affirm their perceptions of themselves? Did the identified benefits of this conceptual and material visual inquiry have significance and relevance to them after school? What does the student think about the value of a Visual Art education and how have others, close to the student, valued this learning for the student? Have the students gone on to nurture their developing visual creative disposition and what relevance have these skills developed in a visual pedagogy been to them in navigating their lives?

The seven student profiles within the case study will be presented using the following format:

1. The student's Visual Art learning context, highlighting immediate family and other experiences of relevance along with the school context of the student's learning. This is coupled with an overview of the value of Visual Art learning to them during their school years and specifically their HSC studies.
2. The artwork's meaning and the student's intentions both personal and public, as revealed through an analysis of the artwork(s) and VAPD imagery and texts. This descriptive analysis of processes and imagery draws on the critical hermeneutic deconstruction of the student artwork and writing, and the student and parent interviews, to reveal a greater depth of understanding of the visual learning process for the student.
3. The value of Visual Art learning beyond the classroom, drawing on both the reflective views of the student, the parent and the classroom teacher where applicable.

The descriptive montage of the student's HSC Visual Art learning journey connects the multi-voiced texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) of the students (their artworks, their artist statements, interviews and diaries), with the perspectives of significant others in the learning journey of each student. The other voices are of a parent or a teacher, or both depending on the desire of the case study student. Each case study montage presents the "researcher-as-interpretive bricoleur" (p. 189). It aims to present an empathic insight into the unique learning journey of each student, the importance of their imagery and symbolic intent. It also provides insight into how they have worked with their images and the materiality to form and refine their understandings of their social life-world and its meaning. Finally, it is important to know how the skills they have learned in Visual Art are valued by them now after they have moved on in their lives.

## 5.1 Case Study Student 1 - Abby: The expressive me

*My artwork ended up being more of a journey sort of style...I guess portrait*  
(Abby, 2006)

### ***The HSC Visual Art Learning Context and its Value for Abby***

Abby attended a co-educational inner city government high school in NSW in a regional city centre. She completed her HSC six years ago and her favourite courses were Visual Art and Drama. While Abby valued the learning in both subjects, her mother reflects that possibly “drama had the greatest impact on Abby as a person, because she was a very quiet girl and has now got a wonderful confident approach to all aspects of life and is a wonderful public speaker”. For Abby, studying Visual Art was “essential ... I think it’s who I am ...it’s offered me so many opportunities to be artistic and [to be] creative, I am now studying Visual Communication at university. I think so many things have developed from that.” Abby very much enjoyed attending her local high school for its widely different socio-economic demographic.

During her HSC studies, Abby completed two different series. “I ended up drawing myself in the local ocean baths which is my favourite place to go”. The painting of Abby at the local ocean baths portrayed her love of swimming and the spaces and events that surround her memories of this place formed a “strong part” of her. The second series of paintings were strong expressive landscapes of the city that she felt defined who she was, the city she grew up in. Abby described the work as an “abstract expressive city portrait”, where she focused on expressing the concept of renewal after the closure of a significant industry in the city.

Abby found traditional styles of painting “not relevant for her”. Instead, she was attracted to the expressive styles of Robert Rauschenberg, Jackson Pollack, Brett Whitely and Jasper Johns. It was the work of Jasper Johns that inspired her to use text in her second series of paintings to extend the possible interpretive meanings associated with the images. Reflecting on what was different about studying Visual Art, Abby states, “it was about my journey

focusing on myself ...as opposed to other subjects... it showed me a different path to intelligence [other than Maths and Science].”

Abby’s mother saw the most valuable aspect of her daughter’s HSC Visual Art experience as one that made her “extremely self reliant, sufficient and independent ...[Abby] would take herself off to the galleries, exposing herself to the art world”. She also worked with two quite different styles which her mother thought “reflected a diversity and a confidence [in her approach to artmaking and life]...which she valued. “

### ***The Artwork No. 1: Swimming at the Baths***

The first series of preliminary drawings for her first painting focused on studying the human image, the initial focus was “looking at the female form.” She was particularly interested in how the media represented the female form. Her study of media images was not a conscious discursive examination of how the image acts to transfer hegemonic behaviours. It was more a study of the different expressive styles with a focus on realism. She explained this by stating the study of the figure was “more about me being young, myself, wanting to sort of access that style I guess.” Reflecting on her work five years later, she saw it as possibly an indulgent content. She recalls, “I just wanted to do a painting about me.” The artwork ended up being a composition of two panels about her daily activity of swimming each morning. “Me diving in, swimming, resting on the blocks, that sort of thing...the work ended up being more of a journey sort of style...I guess portrait.”



Abby (2000), *Swimming at the Baths*; painting

The [water] is an “amazing place. Like it’s there and it just never ends.” On choosing to do a self-portrait, Abby reflects, that it was “almost essential to me I think ...I was delving into what I represent as a person during that time.” To grasp a sense of the real Abby during this period, she “focused on a little aspect of myself which I guess at that time was a really big thing. Year 12 was very stressful ... it’s a hard time with friends ... I think focusing on something that was really serene and really cool and calming to me was like, almost a vessel for just, you know, relaxing.”

Abby reflected and evaluated the success of her work in her notated diary. “I am very pleased with my final picture. I think that I have captured the serenity whilst still creating a sense of involvement with the water ... I also wanted to develop the concept of the multi layering of the architectural nature of the baths ... I thoroughly enjoyed this aspect of the painting even though I did find it an enormous task” (Extract from Abby’s VAPD, 2000).

### ***Artwork No. 2: Reject, Recycle***

Abby’s second painting series was a far less personally stressful pursuit. This series was selected for ARTEXPRESS. It began as a landscape study, however, Abby found “exploring the theme of landscape ... a bit boring ... I would like to base it on something more personal... abstract expressionistic portrait with each board representing aspects which are individual to me ... I want to represent the reinventing, rejuvenating and remodelling which creates a city.”

To achieve this goal, Abby focused on the industrial landscape of her city. She used expressive angular forms, mixed media, text layered and overworked to present a strong conceptual position about her industrial city. She aimed to study the aesthetics of the landscape, by focusing on the concepts of “re-cycling”, “re-inventing”, “re-developing” and “re-constructing” rather than the negative ideas of rejection and loss.

Reflecting on the fact that this landscape had always had negative and unattractive connotations for her, she was interested in revisiting it from a “more

positive side.” The industrial aesthetic was one she had grown up with and she was keen to express the machinery and building that were “such a strong part” of the city and her world. Her aim was to portray a sense of energy and renewal through an expressive treatment of the colours, textures and forms that define this landscape. She discovered that “the so called dirty nature of the industries actually was composed of many vivid colours and strong shapes that were conceptually excellent...re-inventing these shapes and colours into vivid layers was enjoyable.”



Abby (2000),  
*Reject Recycle*;  
painting, as seen  
on the  
ARTEXPRESS  
postcard (2001).

### ***Processing ideas and assessing actions***

Both of Abby's VAPDs are filled with the same energy and life that you find in her paintings. Her mother reflects that “the diary was a vital part of her development and it was used extensively to experiment and express ideas.” It contains studies of painting techniques, mixed media experiments, colour exercises and small prototype studies. Abby resolved a lot of her ideas before working on a larger scale (see images below).

In all her experiments, Abby used images taken from a wide range of media sources, juxtapositioning images, textures and texts. These are layered and over-worked often translating the realism of the image into more expressive and interpretive solutions that challenge the original aesthetic or conceptual idea.

It is in her diary that she reflected that she “pushed the boundaries in terms of conceptual ideas” and she stated in her interview, “[To work conceptually] was a

real challenge for me ... I was happy with how it went ... I was proud then [to be selected for ARTEXPRESS]...I think I am more proud now.” In working towards achieving resolution of her ideas, her diary reveals her constant study and critical analysis of the concepts and aesthetic ideas of other artists combined with her own ideas and media studies. Described by her mother as a “very private document”, Abby’s diary is packed with images, reflective comments and statements of intent about how to proceed in her learning. The two pages of the diary below are typical of her conceptual and material experiments and reveal her skill at integrating media images into her collages. It also shows how she integrated texts and reflective statements about herself into her work as broken bites of poetry that juxtapose against strong textures and forms as complementary visual descriptions.



Abby (2000), Mixed media studies from VAPD

When asked to what extent the artwork was about the personal Abby, she articulated how the performative actions of creating an artwork or re-representing images is personally affirming about her own sense of self, both in the context of her socially constructed sense of self and her inner sense of being. Abby comments:

“I didn’t have any real hang-ups or unresolved issues ... [even though] ... I come from a divorced family ... I think there is a huge amount of



personal expression in the style and the way in which I project meaning but sometimes the meaning behind it is not so much personal ... I don't [consciously] try to reveal the real personal aspects ... may be subconsciously it is quite personal but I don't really think about that too much, I just ... I don't know, it's more an action. Its more just what comes out [on the canvas]." (Interview with Abby, 2006)

### **Beyond the Classroom**

Abby was interviewed for this study while she was in her honours year at university studying Visual Communications. She comments "I feel very confident with myself as a person and intellectually so. I think [studying Visual Art] was just the beginning - the first step I guess." On what has been most special about studying Visual Art, Abby states: "It's a very powerful force for me personally. So I think the learning has just been ... essential to what I am today."

Developing and creating ideas and extending the possibilities of these ideas has been the most exciting aspect of Abby's work as a designer. For Abby being creative is "like a muscle" that she needs to use regularly. She reflects that during the high school years she felt it was just developing. At high school "we were given small things to focus on and you come up with small ideas". For Abby it was only when she was in her final HSC study year that she felt that these ideas had a chance to grow and develop.

Her own idea generation as an adult designer comes from linking word associations and images. From the word, she moves directly to an image. Her images build and grow "like the thesaurus ... one word and then what all the other meanings of it are ... image association ... [I play] in images ... all images." Imagination is central to her way of thinking and working. When asked about its value in school, she stated, 'I think its essential...literacy...many things come from [the visual] it's such as essential starting point for everyone'.

When asked to what extent developing her imaginative capacity has helped her in later life Abby is convinced of its value. Reflecting on her fellow students at

university, she sees that there is a difference between the students who came to her Visual Communication program without a Visual Art background: "I think that the people with the technology background have really struggled with concepts and ideas and it's limited them, whereas [for me] it's something that's going to just grow and develop."

In terms of social and cultural understandings and daily actions, Abby's mother comments that studying the history of art and the societies and cultures of the world was a significant benefit to her daughter when she travelled through Europe while at university. "Abby has a strong sense of the role of the art world and the importance of communication through art". Her mother believes that, in terms of significance to Abby, it would be measured as ten, being most significant. "Abby is also aware of the relevance of [visual] expression to the development of human values and ideals and their ability to grow through art and social reflections that occur in the art world" (mother).

Abby was "absolutely astounded and felt privileged to be able to experience [the history of Europe] ... I knew the ramifications ... I knew the history behind what I was seeing." Abby did not study history at school "all my historical knowledge came from art." Reflecting on the friends she travelled through Europe with, Abby states "neither of them had a clue about art or anything creative ... [I] noticed that my friends were very closed-minded, I guess."

Abby also talked of her travel friends' tentativeness when they encountered change or an unscheduled occurrence and their inability to find new solutions to the randomness of the everyday encounters of travelling. Abby explained that studying Visual Art offers one "so much in so many different ways that when things pop up and little misadventures occur ... I seemed to roll with the punches I guess. Where as I think a lot [of my friends can't] ... I'm the only one who has ever been creative ... they wish they had it ... I think they almost think of it as a talent that you were born with as opposed to something that develops." Studying Visual Art and cultures in different parts of the world has taught Abby to understand how people express themselves, how she is able to express

herself and the skill to take risks and find new solutions to problems that emerge in the everyday.



Abby (2000), Extract from VAPD, working drawings.

## **5.2 Case Study Student 2 – Patrick: Inside the piano and inside me**

*I really like it [my artwork] because it expresses myself and my feelings, even if I am not an artist or a very good drawer or painter. (Patrick's diary, 2000)*

### ***The HSC Visual Art Learning Context and its Value for Patrick***

Patrick attended a co-educational public high school in NSW in a regional city centre. He completed his Higher School Certificate (HSC) six years ago, his favourite subjects being art and music. The school is representative of many inner city public schools; it has a long established history, a wide socio-economic demographic and, in his mother's eyes, the Visual Art department was "under resourced".

For Patrick, the HSC experience was difficult and he "felt blank for a fair while." His personal life, the study and expectations on him during this period were heavy. In terms of its value on the scale of one to ten, with ten being extremely valuable, he gave it a ten. For him, studying Visual Art was "as important as [his] music studies." His mother saw his secondary schooling as a difficult time for him and, like Patrick, she saw artmaking having great value to him. "I don't think he would have survived school without the outlet of his art ... I think he actually contemplated suicide ... he wasn't sure what was going on for him." His excellent results in music and art helped him achieve his university study goal and, on completion of his HSC, he went on to study management and international studies at a university in Sydney.

### ***The Artwork: Adagio, Allegro and Presto***

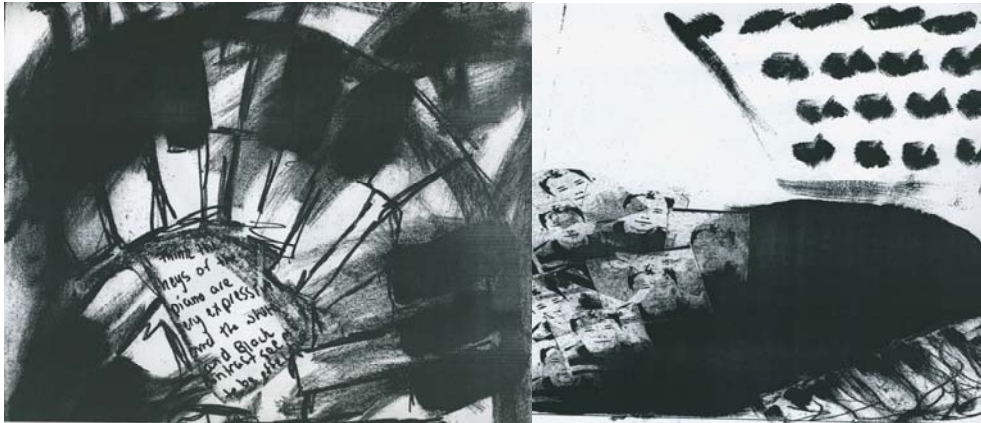
Patrick produced a triptych of three self-portrait paintings. In each image, he plays the piano and he titled each work after musical expressive terms, "adagio", meaning slow time, "allegro", meaning a brisk speed and "presto" meaning quick. Each work was to represent aspects of him and his reflections on his life's journey. "I sing and play the piano ... this was my main form of escaping during the HSC ... This area was very close to me."



Patrick (2002). *Presto*; painting (2000).  
A symbolic landscape capturing his  
expressive response to his realities.

Patrick's diary reveals that, during his study, he was working very strongly on the symbolic meaning of visual images and appropriating a range of stylistic forms of expression. He drew on the work of Matisse, Braque and the futurist artist, Carra. The theme of Patrick's artwork is echoed by other students who have a strong interest in the performance-oriented art practices such as music and drama. "The main focus for my [HSC Visual Art] journey was to maintain a theme of music and specifically my piano through a body of works." His love of the black grand piano became a strong aesthetic in his work. All his working drawings and final paintings are predominantly black and white.

His diary is notated with images by artists who work with fractured and constructed images of the piano and by photographs of artworks he has seen featuring the internal workings of the piano. They echo the rhythm and structure of the machine and the images were assembled using the contrast of the black and white keys, the silhouette forms and black shape of the baby grand piano combined with his profile.



Patrick (2000).  
VAPD

Patrick punctuates his images with the texture, gloss and the warmth of shellac that he used extensively both in his diary experimentation and the triptych paintings. “For the majority of my art making process, the pieces were black and white, using a mix of charcoal and paint.” “[I] only added colour towards the end.”. “I added colour to the work as it was starting to depress me.”

His main intention was to communicate to the audience his love of music and life. “Music, personality and movement were the main forms of representation needed to display how I felt at the time.” His images move from a more realistic treatment to a freer and more expressive quality. The third painting views the pianist from above and looks inside the piano and its workings. “Although the main theme [to the audience] was suggested concerning music.” the deeper sub-text concerns his expressive engagement with his thoughts and feelings about his life and his sexuality, more specifically “my sexual preference at that time was a bit hazy.”

The final work moves from the artist to the landscape of his mind, represented symbolically by an expressive landscape-like scene, derived from the original inside of the piano. It is here in the expressive and strong repeating lines that repeat back into the canvas spaces that he plays with the forces of life and explores his own inner landscape. It appears again in his treatment of his repeating silhouette (illustrated below). This theme remained hidden to both

audience and the readers of the diary (including the teacher) and was “only noticeable to myself.”



Patrick (2000). *Adagio*; painting. The image detail illustrates his expressive treatment of colour and form and the power of repetition for emphasis.

Like many artists, Patrick chose to work with images in ways which offered multiple interpretive possibilities, some intentionally for an audience, others more deeply personal. The selection of images was careful and he “worked with images and photos [that he] felt represented a mix of feelings.”

### ***Processing Ideas and Assessing Actions***

His diary became an important tool in his inquiry. His own image, captured with family and friends during his life, appeared in many repetitions and manipulations throughout. He notes many as “photos for ideas and influences” ... his pop who died, nanna in her younger days, him as a baby. His face has been worked and overworked endlessly and he comments on the images that best met his expressive needs. “This is one of my favourite photos due to the movement and blurriness.” At times, his face has been removed, or overworked. Other pages are covered with photocopied images of cut up and manipulated sheet music, shapes of pianos, the keyboard and hands. Many compositional studies for his paintings are found throughout the diary. Each composition resolves different aesthetic ideas, each allows the visual space to work as a canvas for personal exploration. Hands became a significant study alongside the shape and structure of the piano. “I like hands a lot because they are peaceful and do a lot ...hands will be in my major work.” (VAPD) Commenting on his final work he said:

My third artwork in my triptych explores the inside of the piano from where the keys are to the back of the piano, from three angles all

different. It will be black and white and the inside copper strings will be coloured shellac. I might make this work slightly blurry but I am not sure. (Patrick's diary, 2000)

His mother commented on the significance of the diary to Patrick and the extensive time he spent inside this document. "I think the diary was important to him". "I would ask, 'How come you put so much time into this when you've got to put so much time into the actual major work?'" For Patrick, the diary became the blueprint of his work and his mother "got a shock to realise the thought and planning that went into it." She commented on the way Patrick had worked with many ideas, and "layers" of thought.

Commenting on his diary, Patrick noted "I tried to be consistent with my thoughts although sometimes it was hard, as I just wanted to paint and forget the justification of it all." "As time went on I realised the diary was not only a source of ventilation for my work but a good way to understand certain themes through areas of my work." "Numerous tests and thoughts were presented in the diary" but most were not finally used. "I found it confronting having to justify everything." Reflecting back after a number of years, Patrick comments "... in time I realised it did support my work and was necessary."

The Visual Art learning environment of the classroom for Patrick meant that he could have "the support of other students" and he felt class was "great." However, he felt he did his "best work when [he] took the pieces home for the holiday period.". During this longer period of time to focus, he used his family and close friends as his critical audience. He talked about his work mostly with family where he found good support and he talked to the "teacher, and people I trusted.". In the end, he liked his art work though, at times, he felt strong hatred towards it:

My overall major work is quite personal with the three works blending and linking successfully and a huge emphasis on power and music. I like the overall effect ...it portrays my emotions accurately. (Patrick, interview, 2006)

His final reflections on his major work after some six years were:



The imagery of self portrait although vain in its exterior was more a way of representing honest perspectives on the subject. Although the actions were abrupt and expressive the facial image and posture was calm and focused. The inside of the piano its views and angle was a metaphor of life...and [I gave it] 'human qualities. (Patrick, interview, 2006)

### ***Beyond the Classroom***

At the end of the learning journey Patrick commented:

I absolutely hated my major work. I couldn't comprehend putting so much time for what was the final result. I now look back five years later and realise how important the work was for me to undertake and that I really appreciate its representation and underlying themes that I hold very close to myself. (Patrick, interview, 2005)

Commenting on his Visual Art HSC learning his mother sees the art inquiry process as a "very personal journey ... he was finding his sexuality." She reflects, "I don't know that he really liked himself at that time, but he likes himself now."

Patrick has taken the skills learnt in his Visual Art classes with him into adulthood. He uses his artmaking as a tool to understand himself and events that arise in his life. For his mother, [Doing the artwork] "was a turning point of getting in touch with himself and where he was at". He continues to use art making, his mother comments: it is "a big outlet you know" and "he is still drawing and it's his 5<sup>th</sup> year of university." "If something big happens, he usually expresses it through art. He'll do a piece of art, that's his outlet....I think mixed media is his thing."

The experience of artmaking during the difficult adolescent years has Patrick's mother convinced of its importance to young people. Reflecting on the difficult period of adolescence for Patrick she comments:

I know he wasn't really opening up and talking about it. So he was expressing ... [it] ... he was getting it out with his painting ... If he hadn't had a vehicle to get it out and express himself and then eventually start to talk ... I think for other people too, but particularly for kids, and

probably particularly puberty, I think it's a good outlet, a way for them to express themselves and get some of whatever is pent up inside ... because it's very personal ... you can't always open up and talk to people about it." (Patrick's mother, interview 2006)

He has developed a reflective sensitivity and his mother states that she thinks "he processes a lot of that through his art. I think he can talk about things a lot better now, I think at that age he got things out on [the] canvas." As an adult, he is comfortable with himself, with everything and comfortable with his family. For Patrick, he has used his artmaking to work through very personal ethical issues and his artwork has provided him with the spaces to explore, test and contemplate his choices and actions in life. He has been able to take very personal incidents that have reflected society's prejudices towards homosexuality (he has experienced taunting and assault) to find, through his art ways to assess and resolve such experiences. His works display a strong power and strength, expressive and intuitive understandings, while showing a fluidity and movement that is difficult for young artists. His HSC artworks have allowed him to work through his past and help him mediate his current situation. His works celebrate life and *Presto*, the title of his final painting is the surprising achievement.

His willingness to adapt, risk new ideas, try new experiences and work in new creative ways finds him currently in Barcelona studying. He is doing a comparative study of gay life in Spain and Australia. With that, he is taking art and film and his mother observes, "He is speaking Spanish ... it will flow into his art and music ... it will all come together ... even give him the vehicle to get to where he wants to go and have the income that he wants to have and continue with his art and music ... He [can] find balance and expresses himself in all aspects of life."

### 5.3 Case Study Student 3- Ceara: 'What I'm not' portraits on Australian culture

*I wasn't sure what I was, but I knew that I was Australian, but there were so many things about the culture that I did not understand and weren't part of me, but I decided to do them anyway. (Ceara, 2005)*

#### ***The HSC Visual Art Learning Context and its Value for Ceara***

Ceara attended a co-educational public high school in a regional centre of NSW. It has been six years since she finished her schooling and her favourite subjects were Design and Technology and Visual Art. Coming from a family of artists, her world had always included art galleries, creative festivals and concerns for aesthetics and imagination. The value of art as a way of knowing and expressing the world had always been encouraged. She had had many opportunities to develop her skill base in Visual Art outside of formal schooling, the significant being photography and printmaking.

For Ceara, the challenge of being successful in Visual Art was significant. She selected a large mixed media work and a series of prints for her body of work. The scale of the painting, which was a mixed media work, gave her the challenge of working with a range of materials. Her printmaking developed her technical graphic skills and allowed her to work with photography, collage, silkscreen printing and block printing. She chose to approach her visual art inquiry through a critical cultural window and extensively work with appropriated imagery.

Understanding Australian culture and, in particular, understanding the phenomenon of the Melbourne Cup as an Australian ritual helped Ceara's insight into human nature. Understanding the values of others helped her assess her own beliefs, particularly her identity struggle. "I was an American citizen ... I had been born in Australia ... I wasn't sure what I was, there were so many things about the culture that I did not understand and I wasn't part of, but I decided to do them anyway." The journey took her into the study of religious art, religion, American and Australian popular culture, the media, the horse racing

industry, and the effects of gambling, drinking and crime on the individual and society.

### ***The Artwork: Our Lady of the Melbourne Cup***

Having a strong understanding of the way artists and the art world work to communicate ideas to an audience provided Ceara with the confidence to tackle the creation of an artwork that could appropriate the intentions of one of the great artistic genres, religious art. Her contemporary relief iconic altar was to be representative of the sport of horse racing. “I chose the religious work because of the whole idea of sport and religion. I juxtaposed Australian culture and the iconic Madonna.” “I wanted it to be like an altar piece [but] religion wasn’t part of my family.”

The idea for this exploration was the culmination of a series of different human situations or events that strongly influenced Ceara at this time. While studying, she worked casually in a supermarket. Here she met many people who represented a world far removed from that of her immediate family and friends. From the perspective of her stepmother, Ceara’s prints were “definitely about a subjective response to the characters she met and were definitely social comments.”

The impetus for her iconic altar major work developed from another incident, outside a local tavern on Melbourne Cup Day when Ceara saw a drunk lady, who she explained, “was extremely drunk and abusive and her hat was squashed ... it struck me ... what of this phenomena in Australia, how we love sporting events ... the Melbourne cup thing.” The events and rituals that surround the sporting phenomenon then became the basis for her inquiry. Ceara reflected on the irony of her work, as “I am not really a sporty person.” What Ceara had done, was choose to explore her own world through an understanding of what it was not. In trying to understand her own developing values and beliefs, she assessed them against a culture and social practice that she had never experienced and that, in many ways, was alien to her life style and experience.

### ***What is Melbourne Cup Day?***

To Ceara it is:

A day to flaunt whatever you've got and more,  
A day to get all made up, feel rich, feel lucky in a lucky country,  
Bet your money  
If you lose it doesn't matter  
If you win it's your shout of VB  
Everyone get drunk.

Melbourne cup is not really about horses,  
It's about celebrating nothing,  
Calling in sick,  
Stopping everything to listen to the race,  
Waving fists and pounding feet.  
Wearing frills, flounces and polka dots  
About dresses, suits, shining shoes,  
Getting drunk on champagne,  
Feeling rich even if you lost,  
Even if you're not  
Most importantly it's about – a wonderful hat! (Ceara's Diary, 2001)

*Our Lady of the Melbourne Cup* was a mixed media iconic work. "This is about me, my perspective on Australian Culture." She has appropriated the central panel from Moulin's Triptych 1498-99. She re-contextualised it into her own environment. Gai Waterhouse, a successful horse racing trainer, is her Madonna, her symbolic Australian sports woman. She was to symbolise women, sport, mothers, society and glamour. Ceara also played with the possible meaning of Madonna and the idea of women, not as the sports person, but in the supporting role, "Always mothers at the soccer."

*Our Lady of Luck* (the Madonna of Horse Racing) is wearing a necklace that has horse shoes on it for good luck. The heart of the iconic Australian racehorse, Phar Lap is also included in the imagery as symbolic of passion and strength. These, and other such representations of Australian sporting

mythology, she found most fascinating. The work is heavy with appropriated symbolism, each representative of another aspect of cultural inquiry.

On religion and gambling, Ceara has worked with the idea of the TAB as the priest's home and the track its church. In her diary, there is evidence of the questioning of many of the Australian rituals and ceremonies such as demonstrated by the following poem from her diary:

Anzac Day-war-memorial-two up  
Australia Day-invasion-white settlement (should it be celebrated?)  
Queens Birthday-monarchy-nobody cares  
And what of the Melbourne Cup as a ritual?

There is a questioning of Australian Values:  
What is white? What is our country made of? Who are we? I am a first generation Australian ... I have dual citizenship ... I am looking at this from an outside perspective. (Ceara's diary, 2001)

Reflecting on her work after five years, Ceara states, "I don't think it has a lot of me in this work. It's about something I was never a part of. I have never actually been to the races in my whole life. And I did my entire thing about something that was sporty... an event like that...it helped me [get through my HSC] because I picked something that was not personal." The work's main purpose was to present to an audience the phenomenon of the horse racing industry as a cultural ritual in Australia. "One lady thought that I was making a statement about how sporting culture had taken over from religion in a negative way ... but I never really saw it as a negative or positive. I just saw that sport was like religion."

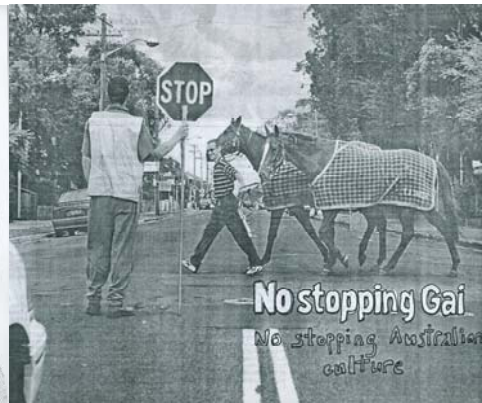
### **Appropriating Images, Creating Collages and Layering the World**

The methodology of inquiry used by Ceara was to research widely through the study of historical imagery. She would then critique the images and appropriate those she felt best suited her more popular culture and expressive perspective. I "spent a lot of time doing experiments ... I did a lot of printmaking collage ... I

spent a lot of time not really knowing what I wanted to do.” She describes herself as a “gatherer ... little bits of picked up paper and pictures.” These fragments of her world as images and texts were then rationalised, organised and layered. “Layers of glue with collage between layers-layers of society-race, religion all coming together to celebrate a holiday festival–Melbourne Cup Day.” She finds images and ideas across the broadest spectrum of popular culture’s representational forms. She investigates the media, from racing tips to betting tabs, from stable talk to the society column, into the world of pony clubs, gambling and pub culture, Melbourne Cup Day culture.



Ceara (2001). *Melbourne Cup Day Madonna No. 2*; Silkscreen print, detail



Ceara (2001). *No Stopping Gai*; Photo montage and text (Ceara's diary)

The detail of the silkscreen print *Melbourne Cup Day Madonna No. 2* above is in juxtaposition with the image *No Stopping Gai* to demonstrate the depth of Ceara’s investigation and her flexibility to use what ever imagery she felt most appropriate for what she wished to express. In the image, *Melbourne Cup Day Madonna No. 2*, she features her expressive, grotesque representation of the drunk lady she drew from the tavern. The “one behind her shouting is from [another hotel], shouting with the crowd for her horse” on Melbourne Cup Day. *No Stopping Gai* is a page from her diary, it is a recorded perception of one of her visualisations about this phenomenon.

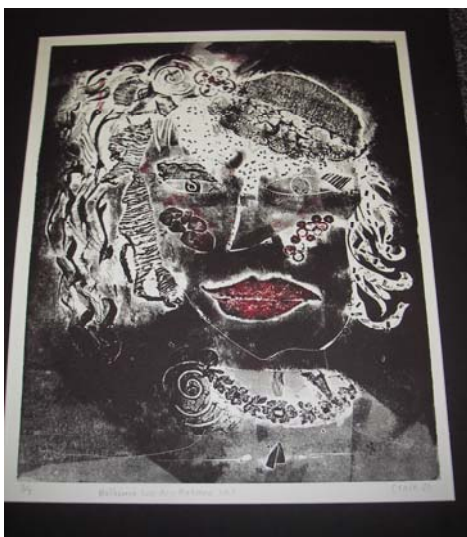
### ***Portraits of the Melbourne Cup Lady, Capturing the More Personal and Subjective Self***

For her body of work Ceara presented her large mixed media work and her print series. Ceara completed the print series early in her HSC study year. This gave her a greater fluidity and freedom to explore a wide range of emergent ideas.

The images in her diary, her silkscreen prints and collagraphs, demonstrate that Ceara was an exceptionally prolific worker. Her diary is full of re-representations of the printed image of the *Lady with the Hat*, demonstrating the capacity of the hand print process to accommodate randomness and emergent ideas.

Notations in her diary about ghost prints and odd printing errors opened up new expressive and interpretive possibilities for Ceara. She often reflected on the meanings generated by her images: “cold face, printing is so cold, especially when the image is a drunk.”

The portraits of ladies in hats are strong expressive works that contain much of Ceara’s immediate subjective responses to drunk or aggressive women. Titled *Melbourne Cup Lady No. 1*, the image below is “very masculine, she is very dark because she is evil.” It was through her *Ladies in Hats* series that many of those aspects of life that Ceara found difficult were mediated.



Ceara (2001). *Melbourne Cup Day Lady No. 1*, Collagraph.

However, it is in her self-portrait that she takes a more intentional and closer look at the “Who am I?” big questions. Extracts from her diary reveal some of her questioning as she looks for a “sense of meaning in everyday life ...



habitual practice ... Is it possible to generalise about the beliefs, values customs of a nation? What does being Australian mean? I am Australian.”

The work *Ceara legend in her own mind* is a metaphor of her own journey of inquiry. In the image below, the appropriated 1955 lady from an American National Geographic magazine has Ceara’s face superimposed in the collagraph.



Ceara (2001). *Ceara legend in her own mind*, silkscreen print.

She reflects in her interview the following: “While I am telling my story you can see my influences, the jet aeroplane and the text about the American navy signifies my American heritage, the horse my British (actually Scottish) heritage (the horse comes from a book printed in England, also where ‘this is my wonder book and retold for little children comes from’. The Australian Council for the Arts symbol signifies Australian culture - it is one of the institutes which gives us our culture.”

### ***Beyond the Classroom***

One of the key lessons Ceara has taken with her from her Visual Art education has been the “value of using visual art to tell a story.” The visual narrative remains strong in her philosophy and current approach to her communications design studies. She is concentrating on developing her skills on how to “make images that appeal to others or that others may find interesting rather than passing on her feelings to the audience.” For Ceara, visual language is everywhere you go, there is “always something to decipher, signs and things

like that” and “I don’t think there is another subject you could do [images in].I never learned to do any of those things in any other subject.”

Reflecting from the perspective of mother and friend, her stepmother saw herself “as the person she discussed them [her ideas] with at home.” Visual Art was a “valuable experience” for her. “She is very private, but her artworks are very reflective of her.” She still uses her visual skills and her imagination “all the time” in productive ways.

After studying Visual Art at school, Ceara reflects: “I think it made me very resourceful. Doing a combination of Visual Art and Design and Technology subjects really made me believe that you can make anything you want. I don’t know how to describe it.” “When I socialise with friends that didn’t do art, they might say something like ... ‘how would you ever do that?’ and they have no concept of how to do it because they have never studied it... it’s what you learn in the making.” “I think the history and the making are both very important” and “I think studying art made me aware of a lot of different things ... it makes you culturally aware.”

When asked what is special about art, Ceara stated, “I think the creativity ... I love the physicality of it. I love working with paints.” When she reflects on what she can do from her studies in Visual Art that her colleagues who did not study art can’t do she says: “I can use pastels or a piece of paper, I can scan it into my computer and I can use it like that ... you can visualise thinking something and can actually make it.” Our friend “can visualise something, but she can’t think how to do it. I think it’s in the process. I think it’s both [a combination of making and materials]. I think in art you are encouraged to think differently whereas in other subjects you are not.”

The study of Visual Art has given Ceara a “strong understanding of the way the visual informs and is informed by society and culture” and her HSC study demonstrates that she has developed the skill to use her artmaking to help her reflect on a wide range of cultural, social and ethical dilemmas that confront her.

As for understanding the everyday, the habitual and the unique, Ceara is “more comfortable portraying the family or others, rather than herself.”

#### **5.4. Case Study Student 4 Joe: Behind the mask, the comic as allegory**

*I think [studying Visual Art] taught me that imagination is a very, very powerful thing...it gives you the freedom to do anything and to get all these things that are running around in your head on to paper...that to me is the best part about art. (Joe).*

##### ***The HSC Learning Context and its Value for Joe.***

Joe studied in a country NSW high school. He completed his HSC in 2003. Living a distance from town on a rural property, he had a fair amount of time to himself and reading comics became a significant pastime. The world of the comic genre is much of what defines Joe. He loves to read comics, and has a deep knowledge of their history and artistic heroes. He is a skilled cartoonist and he has a passion to work in the industry one day. It has been two years since Joe left school and he has continued his artistic studies and his graphic skill development by studying for his Diploma of Fine Art at the regional technical college.

For Joe, the selection of what to do for his major work was simple. His inquiry was to investigate the legitimacy of the comic as an artform. His challenge was how to present this content in a way which would validate its artistic and intellectual worth and, in more pragmatic terms, ensure he could gain a high mark for his HSC studies. On a more personal level, he wanted to find a way to defend his passion and aspirations to be a cartoonist to his parents, his friends and to his teachers. He used a very simple logic, to “prove that comics are an art form ... I thought it would be more prominent if I did it in a comic book form.” His teacher confidant comments,” This artwork is a personal reflection. Joe is recording his thoughts visually and understands only too well that the form in which he has presented his work is one that will invite scrutiny.” Presenting his ideas as a comic would place him outside the mainstream forms represented in ARTEXPRESS.

The final form of his body of work was a comic book. Titled, *The Comic Revelations*, the work is a critical insight into the history of the comic book genre, produced by Joe’s publishing company T-shirt Comics in full digital colour. The comic book is an allegory about Joe. He is the protagonist, Doughy,

in many guises. Each comic character allows him to explore aspects of himself. When asked about using himself as the protagonist, he replied, “My teacher at the time said, ‘Well, why don’t you just draw yourself?’ ... I was a bit shy at first and didn’t want people saying, ‘oh you just draw yourself’” ... I thought, if I put a character in there that’s not me, its going to look like I’m trying to hide a bit. I thought well this thing I’m doing is something I believe in ... I wanted to be there and say, well this is what I think.”

The comic begins in Joe’s present reality in the form of Doughy, the teenager consumed by his passion for comics and the perceptions of his family and wider community who see it as “rubbish”. The opening quote by James Morris, “Why, when the two greatest art forms in the world, literature and art, come together to make the ultimate hybrid, do people call it crap?” is the preface to the comic.

### The Comics Revelations

The allegory reveals a critical insight into the comic genre and the life and imagination of Joe through his many voices. The voices of Joe are: Joe the critical narrator; Joe the reflective voice, full of unlimited possibilities; and Joe the protagonist, Doughy. As the story unfolds, Doughy is in the reality of his home environment consumed by comics. His mother’s actions and words set the scene. In three frames, the reader can grasp some of his identity struggles. “Why don’t my family understand my love of comics and why does the wider society see me (and those like me) as a loser?” He reflects “comics in most people’s eyes are a thing for geeks and nerds ... only losers and ‘fan-boys’ read them.”



Extract from *The Comics Revelations*, (Joe, 2003, p. 2)

Shifting quickly to the main theme of the comic, Doughy, as protagonist leads the reader into the journey ... "here we go, welcome to the world of the comics."



Extract from '*The Comics Revelations*', (Joe, 2003)  
"so many people simply discard comics" (p. 3)

He introduces the three main sections of the comic. The first section focuses on things that are comics that people don't realise are comics, looks at the history of sequential and pictorial narrative and explores the world of contemporary action film. The second section explores why comics have been brushed aside and is a critical investigation into the way the media presents the comic in the fine art debate, "they claim the art found in comics shows no feelings or emotions." Finally, he discusses three key tools of the comic in support of his argument that the comic is an art form. With the help of his assistant "the beautiful Eve" (in reality his critical friend and classmate) dressed in casual clothes with a hint of superwoman, they discuss these features in a conversational style, both at times playing presenter. Eve looks at the iconic nature of the comic characters such as Phantom and discusses its power as a psychological tool:

Because of the iconic value and lack of realism in a comic character, the reader can identify with that character better. Your subconscious mind can project your face onto the characters, filling in those distinguishing features that the character lacks with your own so you feel more apart of the story. This is called character identification.



Extract from *The Comics Revelations*, (Joe, 2003, p. 9)

Doughy, in disguise, introduces the device of the mask. “By covering up a person’s most distinguishing feature, the face, with a mask, or in this case make-up, gets rid of any sort of identity under the mask.” This allows the reader (and Joe) to project their face and personality under the mask, therefore becoming part of the story. Finally, he argues that the comic character can show emotions and provides a range of clear arguments to support his position. After stating their arguments, Doughy and Eve sign off and hope “you enjoyed the ride.” The final two frames bring them back to the reality of the bedroom and Mum reflecting on their story. “Hmm, interesting, at least now I know why you love those things so much, but as for those Kung-Fu movies?” Eve and Doughy, together, say “We’ll see.”

The artwork’s journey spanned the real time of the creation of Joe’s HSC artwork. For Joe, it allowed him to travel back into the past seeking validation of his present reality. It allowed him to place himself into his characters. Doughy, the presenter, is a handsome young man, successful, confident and knowledgeable. As the masked superhero, he has special powers and a strong will to help society. His characters open up many possibilities for him for the future. Joe reflects, “imagination is a very, very powerful thing.”

### **Heroes are Very Moral ... Comic Heroes are Today’s Mythology**

Two years after the HSC experience, Joe reflects more broadly on how his interest in comic art has influenced his ideas about himself, art and the world.

Still strongly committed to the comic genre, Joe sees the comic (and its related forms such as film) as a "better form of communication than a single art work... the narrative side of it is very strong ... probably the strongest attribute." Joe is fascinated by how the characters and time work in the genre. In the comic, time is compressed, the vortex factor, "your mind is sort of on a video" and "your brain plays it for you in your mind." It fills in the missing sequences, and you travel all the way through the spaces. It is in these spaces that Joe's imagination, as an artist, is at work with the help of the mask. The "mask takes away the real personality of the characters and, because you don't have any real defining features, [the reader] can put their own personality in under it. It's more like a philosophical thing I suppose." Using the mask, Joe builds situations which allow him to work through his own values and beliefs.

When portraying events and action, Joe can consider how things are set up, "it can be the last punch that destroys the world and you can put things in or leave them out depending on how important they are." He can create scenarios which allow him to consider how human nature operates. "I did a drawing of a bloke in costume that wasn't supposed to be any specific character ... I am really against racism ... I gave him a speech bubble that said 'what colour do you think I am under the mask?'... if they knew there was a black person under the tight tights they might think differently".

Much of Joe's diary is taken up with his own critical narrative about the semiotic functioning of the comic and an examination of comic artists. "The thing I find comics deal with the most is the human factor." Joe's fascination for the link between the power of the image to communicate feelings and the connection between the superhero and the concept of "everyman" is revealed in his diary and through his interview. The characters "all have huge powers, Spiderman you know can jump around ... half the time he's Spiderman trying to save the world but on top of that he's still got his sick aunt to worry about, he's got girlfriend problems, he's a complete loser, he has no friends so they are these real people ... I think it makes you realise that even if you have these huge powers and stuff, it doesn't make you any different to anybody else. I think in that way, it makes you more humble about yourself."



### **An Authentic Learning Experience**

Being in a country high school meant Joe had a limited access to other people with similar interests. Following his own strong feelings and using his initiative, Joe gathered around him a very supportive group of critical friends, his teacher, his class mates, his sister and his colleagues from the Oz Comic Action Forum on the internet encouraged him in his learning.

From his teacher's perspective, "to be truly authentic all work should connect to the student's life and experiences beyond school". "I try to provide [the student] with evidence from other artists who support their inquiry." For Joe's teacher, who was very aware that taking such an approach to HSC study would be stepping outside the acceptable HSC artwork format, a "good learning environment is an important aspect of nurturing students' confidence to take risks, try new ideas and ask questions." "Developing relationships with students and an early understanding about their personal goals is very important and, certainly for Joe, it was one of the discussions that proved most valuable." Joe's work reflects his ideas and beliefs and the responses and support of those close to him.

The VAPD is extremely important to student development. According to Joe's teacher it is "a window that allows teachers to acquaint [themselves] with concepts that interest students and help them to build their ideas and convert them into various forms." "Joe's VAPD allowed him to experiment and develop characters. The diary is an imperative reflection tool and, given the [extended] timeframe, students can continually track their own development." Extracts from his diary reveal that Joe was having substantial discussions about his concepts and his technical approaches with his critical friends online. The online Oz Comic and Graphics Forum, is a discussion forum set up by people of all ages interested in the comic genre. The following examples, all postings, demonstrate the support he received from his wider community of critical friends beyond the classroom.

The following are notated in Joe's VAPD "Relics and suggestions from the Oz Comics & Graphics Action Forums":

Quote from Tom:

Here's a suggestion, why not include a small picture of the cover of 'Understanding comics' when you first mention it on page 5. It's a very good work which will help reinforce your argument. (Oz Comics and Graphics Action Forums, posted 8.53 am, on July 23, 2003).

Quote from pinkfluffycamel:

Damn straight, all is good, nuts to the teachers and what they think, they just help to strip you of your individuality and turn you into an obedient soul dead conformist member of Australian consumer culture'..

Do your comic I say, I did in 98 and got into ARTEXPRESS, I had typos, the art work was pretty lame ... I'm just saying, how can you judge art in the first place, do what you want and good on you for doing so... Eh I'm done... You go boy." (Oz Comics and Graphics Action Forums, posted on 7.32 pm on July 11, 2003)

Joe replies..."Ooooooh, yeah! Thank you for the kind comments camel. I'm glad you guys think it's as worthwhile as I do!"

Creating a comic was something Joe had wanted to do for a long time and he noted "even if it doesn't get into ARTEXPRESS, I'm proud of it!" For Joe's classroom teachers, 'helping students forge a link between their making and their ability to understand how the work relates to their lives beyond school makes the work significant.' From Joe's perspective, "I've had to defend my work a lot ... in defending it, that personal connection with them [the comic characters] has sort of come through more." So too, the insight into Joe's strong emergent learning disposition which sees him valuing honesty, resilience and risk-taking.

### **Beyond the Classroom**

When asked about the value of his HSC learning to him beyond the classroom, Joe said he found it sad that people do not appreciate the "artistry of things,

whether it's painting or a portrait of someone or putting a door up." He went on to say: "What I am saying is that everything is an art within itself and if people don't appreciate, it makes everything a lot cheaper ... less valued." On images and the media, he said he has learnt their value, "You can use them for anything." "If I hadn't studied art I would not have known how powerful they are." On studying visual art: "No other [subject] gave me the space for my imagination, not really... [visual art] encompasses everything you do ..."

When asked whether doing this artwork for his HSC told him something about himself Joe laughed and replied, "yes! It told me I'm very stubborn. It told me I definitely believe in what I'm saying."

### **5.5. Case Study Students 5 and 6 Pete and Tom: Making things and expressing things**

Tom: when I was younger I used to like making things all the time

Pete: ever since I was a little kid I used to always just draw stupid little pictures

#### **The HSC Visual Art Learning Context and its Value for Pete and Tom**

Pete and Tom are twin boys. Their artworks have allowed them to articulate their realities through the imaginative use of materials from their environment, performatively expressed through their passion and need to work with their hands. They both studied Visual Art for their HSC in 2005 at a co-educational government senior college in the suburbs of a regional city of NSW. The college has a very large Visual and Performing Art learning department and facility. The Visual Art classroom has been modified to resemble a studio environment. In this environment, students can do painting, drawing, photography, digital photography and animation, sculpture and printmaking. They are each allocated a small individual space to call their own and where they can work alone.

Students are encouraged, in their first year of senior study, to explore a wide range of media experiences in order to extend them from what the teachers describe as the “cultural vacuum” that many of the students have experienced. Visiting the art gallery and connecting with artists is an important focus of the senior college. The boys’ mother commented on how much they loved the college. She stated that “they felt more grown up ... they liked the compact arts learning environment ... there were always several teachers available to talk with ... lots of other students around, not just art students.”

Tom’s sculptural work titled *Isms of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* was selected for the ARTEXPRESS regional touring exhibition in 2006. Both Pete and Tom took the following year after their HSC to work and reflect on their futures both having achieved well academically. At the time of the interview they had left school for about six months and were both employed in part-time jobs where their practical skills were recognised.

Both boys ranked their Visual Art experiences as significant. On a scale of one to ten, ten being most significant, their mother gave the experience a ten for

both boys, although she felt Tom found it more significant. This may have been due to additional opportunities afforded Tom. Tom was selected to study sculpture over his summer break at the National Art School in Sydney. This significant learning experience strengthened Tom's love of the figure and his resolve to do sculpture for this body of work. At one stage, Tom was thinking of not doing Visual Art for his HSC, but he realised he would miss it as "he enjoyed it so much."

The boys chose to explore their very different conceptual ideas through their early childhood love of constructing and working with lots of materials. Both boys produced sculptural pieces that connected in very different ways to their personal realities and the practical experiences that shaped them. Their teacher reflected: "Tom started his idea at home—when he was a youngster they had a lot of scooters and bikes and parts and I got the impression that's what the backyard was like – lots of sculptural resources around."

### **The artworks: *Isms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and My Bathroom Sink***

Tom's major work *Ism's of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, is an abstract and symbolic work. The structure is made from bits of the bikes and scooters of his childhood. He described his work for ARTEXPRESS in the following way. "In my work, I examined individual artists and art movements. Dadaism - Duchamp and Tinguely, at first. From this, I came up with the construction of bicycle frames and wheels. To make my work stronger, I incorporated images from 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings, from artists such as Khalo, Dali, Miro, Picasso, Warhol and Munch." All of the images made of clay that hang from the main structure are "symbols from the 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings" that Tom studied in theory. He worked with "little faces of Miro" and "Miro's star, Dali's clocks", "Frida Kahlo's bird" and Munch's scream image.

Tom comments: "I originally wanted to do a figurative work, have little figures crawling through my sculpture. It was meant to be a sort of tribute to when we were young, the figures were going to represent us, me and Pete and a couple of friends that we used to play with all the time. We used to just collect junk and

stuff like that ... I was thinking about my childhood,” hence the immediate link to the material experiences of this youth which remain in his final sculpture.

However, the concept was limiting so “I started to look at Robert Klippel ... they looked similar to Miro’s paintings, I decided to shift and make my forms out of clay, when I put the Miro moon on I decided to leave them white clay.”

Appropriation became his way of connecting to his world. His construction had a Miro aesthetic and he picked carefully symbols that had a personal meaning.

The clay pieces are wired on to a structure which can be disassembled using clamps. “It’s not really a tribute but more a collection of symbols from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”



Tom (2005). *'Isms of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'* [sculpture].  
ARTEXPRESS 2006 Regional  
Touring Exhibition

Pete’s work has been described by his teacher as an “autobiographical narrative”, “him and his surf culture.” It is a ceramic tile installation with bathroom sink. The images on the ceramic tiles surrounding the sink are hand painted by Pete and depict satirical cartoons commenting on popular beach culture. The representations reflect Pete’s surfing world. His work was conceptualised after a visit to a fine art studio. He explains, “I was looking at youth culture in \_\_\_\_ and the type of activities that go on. Originally I looked at everything, beach, cars, shopping, going out, parties and that kind of thing ... I focused on \_\_\_\_ because I knew it pretty well ... from what I saw in town ... I sketched down a lot of things just to get ideas. I used to build up kind of little narrative pictures and that kind of thing, mostly satire about the beach.” He knew from the start that the work would be autobiographical and “he did it in a fun way ... and the perception was the blonde hair falling in front of the eyes and the surfboard ... that whole culture” (teacher).



Pete (2005). *My Bathroom Sink*, ceramic installation



Pete (2005). *My Bathroom Sink*, ceramic installation, detail of ceramic tiles

Pete's work was inspired by popular *Sydney Morning Herald* cartoonist Leunig, and by a local artist Michael Bell, whose work is described by critics as "suburban obsession" (John MacDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sept 30, 2006) and "an antic spirit ... deliciously funny" (Smee, *The Australian*, Sept 23, 2006). Pete also drew on the work of Mambo artists such as Reg Mombassa, made internationally famous for their satirical characterisation of many aspects of Australian culture, including surf culture. He describes his art as "your average day at the beach and what you see." On reflection Pete noted "I had one significant page in my diary where I built up a basic idea of what my tiles were going to look like and how I was going to set it out and all that kind of thing."

The image of himself (seen in the detail photo above top right) definitely came first, "that came early that was the first one I did." The narrative, as you read the tiles, tells the story as described by Pete:

The surf one at the beginning that's sort of the morning I get up and have a morning surf, and then I might spend the whole day at the beach. It's just got the girl there sitting in the sun and she ends up getting pretty sun burnt. I've got the guy just here, going for like a morning jog ... I've got images of the harbour ... The life guard blowing up at somebody for not swimming in the flags ... body surfer that you see a lot of ... there's lots

of kids going among the rocks ... it was kind of like your average day at the beach and what you see.( Pete, interview, 2006)

The scenes include much that is close to Pete. It also includes memories of his father, when he was a “nipper” and “many of his friends”. The sink Pete cast in fibreglass (he has been repairing fibreglass surf boards for some years) and the images on the tiles and curtains are developments of his sketches applied using image transfer techniques. When asked what other ideas would you like to try next Pete’s reply, “No I reckon I could probably expand on what I have done.”

### **Processing Ideas and Reflecting on the Authentic Experience**

Both boys have approached their artmaking with a fresh honesty that reflects their strong observational and problem-solving approach to life. From their mother’s perspective, “I think [art] gives them space to [ be imaginative], I know it’s a structured course the same as any other, I mean there are things you have to do in the HSC ... it’s not all drawing ... there is more space to explore.”

Pete found the HSC Visual Art experience “hard going” when compared with Tom, who was given a great outside learning experience that motivated him beyond his immediate world and opened up a wider range of possibilities. Pete’s “world is quite insular in that respect ... his work is about his life surfing” (mother) and he spent a lot of time trying to get started. Pete’s final work evolved from his own world, he was comfortable in representing the flows and rhythms of the events of his life from a humorous perspective. The familiar gave him confidence and his greatest challenges lay in finding how to best present his concept and solve the technicalities of glazing and find workable and aesthetic solutions.

Tom’s new learning experiences took him well beyond the possibilities of his classroom and, while he was clear on his choice of medium, namely sculpture, his conceptual journey was far more complex. Prior to this learning experience, Tom thought art was “mostly painting”, and he had spent most of his time sketching his figures and working with layers, textures and shellac and solving ideas in his visual diary. “I was going to do the figures ... I did a lot of really big scribble drawings and then made figures from wire.” They were personalities,



his friends with “little back packs made from nuts and bolts.” The ideas “linked to the time when we spent days tinkering, the four of us.” Towards the end of year 11, he became interested in the work of Giacometti and his wire figures. He used his small wire and wax figure works on his submission for the National Art Summer School. This experience provided a turning point for Tom, as he explained: “When I came back from art school there was a page [in my visual art diary] that was completely different to anything in front of it and I just sort of started.”

The artwork Tom produced at the National Art Summer School during this time is exceptional. Tom did a figure climbing a ladder. It is a powerful work, the strong figure reaching upward and climbing. Constructed of ply and pine wood, the work is lifesize and demonstrates Tom’s significant material handling skills. As an observer, one cannot but interpret this work as a symbolic representation of Tom’s journey through the HSC and beyond. The ladder is a universal symbol used by many artists. It bridges and links ideas and the climber is always moving towards a point of focus.

In many respects, Tom found the work that he completed at the National Art School to be far more personally rewarding than the work submitted for the HSC. This is the work that lives with him; “He still reflects on this artwork... thinking about reworking the coloured chalk” (mother). Tom, however, found it difficult to articulate the symbolic meaning that an observer would immediately grasp. As with many artists, the subconscious intentions are not always immediately visible and being only six months out from the HSC experience this was not a surprising outcome.

Tom’s approach to his artwork always meant he had to personally validate his imagery and, at times, this was difficult in his HSC work. Tom’s strong ethical approach to understanding himself and his world is best demonstrated in an example that his mother provided about how Tom selected his “coming of age” tattoo. “Tom just got a tattoo [when he was on holiday] ... it’s a Leunig cartoon character on a wave ... just a line drawing so simple ... its off a T-shirt we bought him two years ago, it has a little poem with it ... he just loved it ... The

poem is something about getting away from those who would straighten me or something like that ... the character is doing his own thing ... the tattoo had real personal meaning ... he would never choose it if it wasn't really a part of him."



Tom (2004). *Boy climbing ladder*, sculpture

When Tom began his final large sculpture his diary became less important. Tom reflects, "the diary started to get really empty because I was just mostly using my hands." His diary became "a plastic box with a lot of stuff in it ... it was stuff I could use in my sculpture ... lengths of wire, rusty wire, un-rusty wire" and he worked on his sculpture in his corner of the art room.

From their mother's perspective, both boys spent time in their diaries, sketching and writing and she observed that "a lot of reflection took place during the making, not so much in the diary." Although Tom was successful in gaining what for most visual art students is the ultimate prize, namely an artwork in ARTEXPRESS, the large wooden figurative sculpture he did over the summer is still seen by him as the more authentic experience. Possibly this work captures more of Tom, more of the inner spirit, more of his own realities and future rather than a more intellectual, rationalised artwork.

### **Beyond the classroom**

For Tom and Pete's mother, studying Visual Art has been significant in the twin boys' education and has helped prepare them for working life. For both boys, she has seen Visual Art as helping them develop an "inventive mind" and "doing big projects at school has helped them gain confidence to plan and organise." Some of her thinking behind why others may not take on the challenge of

learning in the Visual Arts is “because you have to come up with an idea.” For her “that’s why some kids don’t do it ... they think ‘oh, I don’t know if I’ll be able to come up with the ideas’ and I think coming up with the ideas is an important skill to learn really. Art certainly did that for the boys.”

The brothers have very clear ideas about the value Visual Art has for them. Tom sees that Visual Art teaches you to “think in a different way”. In art, “a lot of it is up to you what you do, which is good, there’s a lot of work involved.” In art, one has to “think more about things and analyse how things have been put together.” For Pete, there is a great satisfaction that comes from “just being creative ... You’re relaxed ... while doing it.” Visual Art is a “lot more personal ... you get to be by yourself ... I enjoyed experimenting.” Both boys have gained enormous satisfaction from the journey through the unknown which comes about when one creates an artwork. Pete reflects “you kind of get your first idea in your head and you think that’s’ pretty good and then by the end of it you’ve gone through all these different stages and it looks better [than what you originally thought of].” When asked did that worry him his reply, “no not at all ...it was good.”

### Postscript

Tom finally worked through his need to represent his journey from childhood through adolescence. After finishing his HSC, he went back to exploring his wire figure ideas. This was the artwork he was working on before going to the National Art School in Sydney. He produced a sculptural work of playful figures exploring the world, taking risks, climbing, balancing and flying. One figure climbs highest, as illustrated below.



Tom (summer, 2006), ***‘Memories of sharing adventures with Pete and friends’***, wire sculpture.



## **5.6. Case Study Student 7 - Beth: My Name is Vern: Identity Change, The Eighth Day 2005**

after being labelled by society, she made up her own name

### ***The HSC Visual Art Learning Context and its Value to Beth***

Beth studied for her HSC in 2005 in a large comprehensive co-educational government high school in a city north of Sydney. Her passion had always been music. At the time of making a decision about taking Visual Art for her HSC, she was already an accomplished singer and song writer and her creative focus for senior study was to be her year twelve music studies. She explained:

I never wanted to do Visual Art, everyone told me I was crap. And I didn't mind, I didn't mind and I thought, "I can't draw, I really can't draw at all", and so yeah... There was nothing else to do [for an alternate study elective]... so I jumped into art... and I just loved it. I loved it. It was the best. I even ended up liking it more than Music.

(Beth, interview, 2006)

Much to Beth's delight, at the end of her studies her body of work was selected by the NSW Board of Studies for ARTEXPRESS in the first round. Her teacher reflects that the only difficult aspect of Beth's study was that she was convinced she was not very good and that her work was not very sophisticated. Like all aspects of Beth's life she embraced the subject immediately even carrying the reservations she had about her skill levels. "Her ability to experiment and play with media set her immediately above the other students and in a way gave a real impetus to the whole class. Her ability to communicate about and understand critical and historical [aspects of art theory] was outstanding" (teacher).

Commenting on Beth's learning her teacher stated: "Beth's learning journey was really complex and layered. She was already creating wonderful poetry and music that was a personal statement about her beliefs and her commitment to religion". In her artwork, "Beth was naturally able to use signs and symbols to express her meaning and was very much aware of the value of mixed media and gestural painting." Beth was also "very aware of the cliché that religious

symbolism can portray” (teacher). After studying Visual Art for a while, Beth worked out the powerful way that the visual can communicate a message and resolved, “I don’t want mine just to be a pretty painting.”

### ***The Artwork: The Eighth Day***

The idea for Beth’s body of work was originally to produce a visual representation of the seven days of creation, as seven individual painting panels. She aimed to interpret the text from the Bible in a personal and unique way. Her inquiry led her into the semiotic world of symbolism and signs in order to find a new and contemporary way to communicate the concepts of the creation story. It was an attempt for her to gain a better understanding of its universal significance to so many religions. “I wanted to do something that was representative of creation, I was originally just doing that ... Then came my other panel ... One of the girls said ‘just call it the eighth day and do it’ that’s how it started off”, the eighth painted panel.

What began for Beth as (what she thought) an inquiry into the symbols used in Visual Art and the construction of a visual narrative of creation turned into a complex personal journey. On her travels through the HSC Visual Artmaking process and learning journey she sought answers to many questions that ranged from Who am I? and What is life? to Why am I here? It was also to help her find ways through her “troubled thoughts”. Some of these thoughts were related to friendship matters (which caused her considerable anguish during her HSC year), others were concerned with the way society constructs and sets expectations for all, especially teenagers, and how to find “freedom” and ways to move forward in life.

Beth decided to create seven separate panels for each day of the creation story. She chose to number them in different symbolic rhythms and representations. For example, the number seven was represented as a number symbol and as the letter “seven”, in different colours and scales. Each panel numbered differently to one another. Beth constructed her panels over the seven month period, she introduced additional symbols, texts, colours and textures that carried through each work as a sub-text. This sub-text represented

traces of her voice and is sometimes a symbol of personal significance, while, at other times, it is a strong gestural mark, or signature. These marks appear and disappear behind layers of expressive paint and impasto. Each panel carries hints of the spaces, emotions and ideas that Beth worked and reworked during the production of the panels.

Beth had been strongly influenced by the expressive abstract American painter, Rothko, and clearly aimed to evoke a mood of spirituality in her work through the reworking of her coloured panels. The first four panels below represent the division of dark and light, night and day, the creation of earth and sky, the separation of the land and sea, the formation of the sun, earth, moon and planets. Beth punctuates each canvas with strong contemporary symbols such as the cartoon symbol for explosion, and the word BANG and the collaged light bulb and the word "light." Water and sky are represented not only by the strong watery blue but by the label peeled off a Mount Franklin mineral water bottle, while, earth, sea and green are represented by the recycle logo. She places herself right in the picture by her caption "I see the sun" and "it was good". The panels one to four can be seen below illustrating her use of numbers, colours and contemporary symbol systems.



Beth (2005), *The Eight Day*, painting. Detail of panels 1-5.

Grabs of text found in her diary and hidden in the layers of her painting speak of her poetic style.

Splitting boundary partition, transformation

Blue sky that's all I see on a grey old winter (day two)

I see the breeze through the trees it's the effect you have on me, I see the effects of the wind but I have never seen the wind (day 3)

Believe in me (day 4)

The juxtaposition of images and texts is a powerful communicative tool that she uses skilfully and prompts the audience to think twice about the possible intended meaning. Day Five and Six, dealing with the creation of all living things and man in the likeness of god having domination of all other living things prompts Beth to ask more questions.



Beth (2005). *The Eighth Day*, painting.  
Detail panels Day 5-6

The popular culture creation Superman is represented overlaid with the words "Man can". The *Time Life* magazine front page and feature article is about astronauts and man's quest to conquer space. It has been ripped out, glued onto the canvas and over worked along with images of celebrities and stereotypical constructs of women. Hidden on the surfaces of the canvas, Beth's voice echoes "this product not tested on animals" (Day Five) and the words 'friendship, relationships, love' are written on the Day Six panel along with a repeated stencil image of an iconic female form. This popular toilet door sign for the ladies in her work is representative of universal woman and gives us an insight into Beth's skill to appropriate imagery with humour. Of the effect she

wants on the seventh day, she writes, ““White base ... really pale, light colours ... nothing, just really misty, fluid and calm ... empty”. A torn newspaper caption glued to her thoughts for Day Seven reads “Traditional belly dance a part of life.”

***Great Mysteries, the Eighth Day***

*I'd just done an album so I used all the lyrics from my songs ... it was a point of vulnerability for me to just brand my lyrics on things...I was fully putting myself out there ... it was a big thing ... the last panel, this was like, this is me kind of thing*

The eighth panel represents Beth's current reality (detail below). “The atmospheric beauty and peace of the first days are juxtaposed with the distress and anxiety of the Eighth Day or the twenty first century. Beth writes in her diary, ‘What have we become? Eighth day ... 21<sup>st</sup> century generation ... breath of life ... living being’ (extract from diary).

This is an accumulation of all of her thinking during year twelve. A completed section of the Eighth Day panel has been ripped from a magazine, photocopied and over worked. It represents a single reflective male. The page around him is filled with comments about “the prevalence of ridiculous and archaic belief systems ... religious fundamentalism and political extremism ... and the solution ... a satellite based mind-ray that dissolves inflated egos and shatters unreasonable belief systems”, the text signed by Mombassa (Australian artist). She has then ripped another text, from another source “Great Mysteries”, and glued it on top. Then, around this printed text frame, she has hand written (in red) her lyrics and thoughts in a free-flowing style, “no more troubled thoughts when you're here, there's a peace residing now you're near.”





Beth (2005), *Eighth Day*,  
[painting/mixed media]. Detail Reg  
Mombassa, inset and text.

Much of her inspiration for the overall layout and conceptual presentation of the Eight Day panel has come from her study of the work of Tracey Moffat, an Australian artist who uses her art to make powerful social commentary. One of the images from Beth's diary, (Job Hunt, 1976) is of an aboriginal boy, dressed in school uniform, wearing a tie. He leans against a brick wall, alone, isolated reflecting on the possibilities of ever being employed. Next to this text Beth has written her ideas about the stress and anxiety in life and about "the complexity of today's society, miscommunication, misinterpretation and what of an individual's future?"

Processing ideas much closer to Beth's reality she echoes the following thoughts:

They say, perfect skin hair... is this all we've become?

You'll never amount to anything

He's not worth the effort

You were a mistake

His UAI was below 50... she disowned him

I believe in you

I love you

I'm so proud of you

### ***The performative experience***

Both in Beth's diary and in her artwork, she was able to develop her own mechanisms or technologies to search for ways to use the visual to express her ideas, feelings and future thoughts about her own reality. Working both critically and intuitively with a burgeoning knowledge of contemporary imagery and symbols, she has been able to refine a way of connecting her words and her images that express her own approach to life.

In describing the very spontaneous way she worked on her canvas, she writes:

The teacher would say "just think about it, think about it"... I would go in and just do it ... and would change it like 5 times, I'd just work really quickly and so I suppose that in my head I had a picture of what I wanted it to be ... most of the time it never turned out how I had visualised it ... I had to embrace the way I worked.

Paint and its fluidity appealed to Beth. She describes her style as "a lot of collage and a lot of sketchy text, [with] heaps of text and like, I used a lot of impasto to build up the plaster, I just used whatever". She happily layered up her surfaces, washed them in the sink if she was unhappy with the result and colour mixing became a new-found wonder.

On the benefits of working performatively with materials, Beth comments:

The different slashes that I used kind of reflected the way I was feeling ... When I was painting I was really calm. But I feel the emotions and the troubles with my friend had kind of come out in it because some of it, sometimes [my painting] would turn really dark and then ... I'd try to bring it around to the positive.

Much of the depth and life in Beth's painting comes from her reworking her surfaces from a dark canvas to one that is coloured and light.

From her teacher's perspective, Beth's diary, along with her bible, went everywhere with her. She sometimes misplaced it and would sit deep in thought about where and when she lost it. It always turned up. Beth's teacher comments:

Beth used her diary extensively and really valued it as a learning experience and embraced the ideas that I fed her through wonderful experimentations in her diary... Beth and I had many conversations about art and life and they were always about the positive perspective that art can bring to a person's world and about how good it felt to paint and draw and create something that is visually successful ... we laughed about that a lot ... she used to joke that her artwork wasn't really good ... I was just being kind ... until ARTEXPRESS! Beth thoroughly enjoyed the freedom of the art room ... She would frequently bring friends to the room to see her work and was very giving to other students with good advice and positive feedback. (Beth's classroom Visual Art teacher)

Beth was a star in Visual Arts and her teacher reflected, "It was just luck that she turned up on my doorstep needing to fill a subject. I often wonder what would have happened in her life if she didn't do art as I truly believe that it has had a significantly positive impact on her life."

From Beth's perspective, "I loved the art room, I felt like I could be myself and anything ... if you want to just cover yourself in paint and roll around of the canvas that's fine ... she [the teacher] was so good and she just accepted that I just want to do something different and she knew exactly what I was thinking ... she ended up being my favourite teacher ... she just knew me ... she showed me everything ... 'no fix this up,' or whatever 'no I think you should go in this direction' and I would say 'no I don't want to' which was good. A good visual art teacher is someone who doesn't do it."

### ***Beyond the classroom***

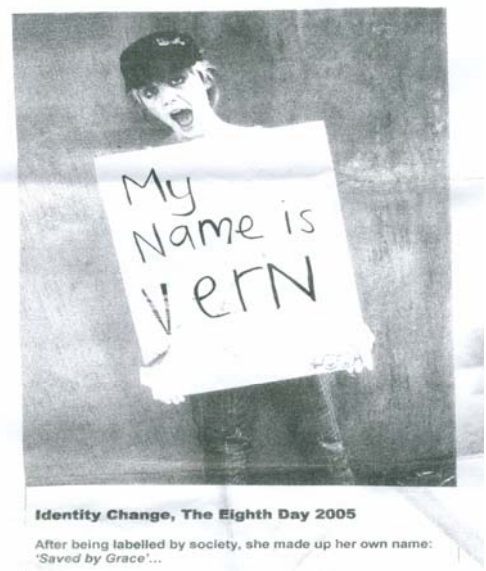
Beth found the Visual Art experience to be a very revealing one and she took ownership of the experience. She gave it a ten for importance to her. It opened up a whole new way of seeing the world. Visual Art's biggest value was that "everything has artistic value". It has not changed her fundamental values or beliefs but it has changed her perceptiveness, "What's special for me ... the visual thing it's huge."

Beth's teacher believed she learned about "communication and how to deal with difficult issues through art." Beth "developed a sense of embracing the values and beliefs of others through the study of art and through the relationships that she developed in the classroom with students that she had not been that familiar with before Art."

What Beth will miss is being "part of that messy creative buzz that is the art room." What became important was the satisfaction from the physical involvement in materials: "it has become very important to me." While tackling a very broad area of inquiry, Beth realised that the way to really understand the phenomenon was to approach it from a particular viewpoint. The best learning for Beth came when she made choices that required a considered personal response. The final outcome of her work brought her to a self-portrait which she labelled "Identity Change, The Eighth Day 2005". She gave herself a new name; she took a photo of herself, affirming her new name and made it a part of her final collaged painting, the Eighth Day.



Beth (2005). *The Eighth Day*, painting, detail of self portrait



### ***Postscript***

Beth spent the first half of 2006 studying Visual Communication at university and took the later part of the year off to reflect on her future. In her final comments about where she is headed in life, she comments, "When I go back

to communications ... I'll focus on digital media." Art has made "me more aware of what was happening and the way that I could just express myself."

## **6.0 RESULTS: STAGE 2, META-INFERENCE: IDENTITY AS A PERSONAL EXPRESSIVE, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NARRATIVE IN VISUAL ARTMAKING**

### **Introduction**

In Stage 2 of the analysis process, the researcher will refine the inferences that have emerged from the separate analysis of Stage 1, Part 1 and 2 of the empirical data. By applying a meta-inference, the researcher will bridge the emergent findings about the learning outcomes of this unique Visual Art curriculum with the insight and potency of the experiences identified in the case study. This will be further linked to an analysis of the visual and performative material practices developed in the Visual Art classroom emergent from student, parent and teacher interviews. A visual and performative pedagogy is presented as a significant approach to support student learning as it informs the performance of self. It will elaborate on the two identified ways that students in the Visual Art classroom develop their understanding of the world in an ocularcentric society (Mirzoeff, 1998; Rose, 2007). These ways include first, using personal experiences and/or a second, critically social and culturally constructed expressive narrative to inform emergent identities. It will also give insight into the visual and performative pedagogical environment and the ARTEXPRESS culture that aims to develop skilled and effective visual communicators. As effective visual communicators, students will be able to read the signs and symbols of their society and understand the intrinsic and expressive value of artmaking as a vehicle to reflect on the liminal, or transitional nature of their experiential world. The research will demonstrate the way students articulate how they see themselves emerging from the visual culture that constructs them.

The meta-inference will attempt to reveal how students' works with their past and present frames of reference, as a child and adolescent, towards the actualisation of their future as an adult. It will seek to demonstrate how the performative material practices of artmaking allow the students to work in very practical ways recording, decoding and encoding the visual complexities of their life experiences. Visual artmaking presents aspects of a student's reality, and embodies future aspirations. The exhibition promotes the skill to develop

communicative competence and convey to an audience how the young artists are imaginatively forging their unique identities.

The *Meta-inference* will aim to present the conversations that the students have had about their desire to be different, unique individuals. As well, it will describe the dialogue they conducted between themselves and their audience and reveal how this dialogue informed choices and ways to proceed through life with aesthetic and ethical sensitivity. The findings will be punctuated and supported with montage. In combining the images and texts as montage, a narrative will emerge through which the researcher aims to succinctly present the complexity of the possibilities of student voices as visual actualisations.

***The montage as an inference tool.*** The montage has been used in this analysis to provide succinct perceptions and understandings of the different realities of the students who study HSC Visual Art. The bricolage technique reveals how the students use their artmaking to find spaces where meanings can be renegotiated during their material and performative practice. In these spaces, the students call into question many issues about the social and cultural values and events that inform their understandings of themselves, as well as reflect and assess the possibilities and consequences of choices made. The product of their inquiry as iterative re-representations presents the viewer with a rich and imaginative array of ways that the students mediate their lifeworlds. It furthermore reveals how this generative process moves the student towards a strong and positive understanding of who they are and how they have come to be.

The *Meta-Inference* will involve the researcher collapsing the boundaries between the case studies, their visual narratives and their texts with the images and associated texts from the longitudinal document analysis. The montage relies on the presence of disjunction, disassociation and juxtapositioning. Employing the skill of visuality, the researcher will work in a performative way to creatively construct for the reader the researcher's insight into the many voices that are operative in the visual narratives, the VAPDs and associated interview data provided by the students, parents and teachers. This will demonstrate how

the philosophical, aesthetic and technical practices in visual artmaking form a kind of practical, visual and material logic that informs our social, cultural and ethical selves. This section of the results will include performative montages that aim to capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

### **6.1: Visuality, Identity and the Personal Expressive Narrative**

In seeking ways to see self and actualise in the world, adolescent student artists have a fascination with their physicality and their psychological and emotional selves. Seeking information about their subjectivities is a conscious, preoccupying activity for Visual Art students when they are exposed to a curriculum and cultural practice (the ARTEXPRESS exhibition), that encourages inquiry through the personal towards the more universal. This communicative and performative approach to learning guides the student towards a critical and reflective understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of society and its visual cultural practices.

The analysis of the case studies of the seven HSC students and the longitudinal analysis data reveal this pervading drive of the students to fulfil their desire and passion to find their unique and defining selves. This is also evidenced by their need to be accepted and acknowledged for their difference and their desire to find a legitimate place in the wider scheme of life. Refining and crafting an adult identity required them to reflect and assess the multiple ways in which they are perceived and through which they perceive their world. It required them to deconstruct the personal events and actions that have defined them within a broader social context. Students regularly use this information to actively constitute or re-represent their reality in visual form. Visual Art as a performative space provided a means by which the individual student could deal with emotional realities, the temporality of daily existence, the multiplicity of perceptual realities and the agencies which seek to shape them. Artmaking is presented by the students as affecting the development of their creative and positive dispositions and supporting their understanding of being a valued, productive and unique young adult.



### **6.1.1 Communicating and Visualising My Desires through the Self Portrait**

One of the most obvious and readily accessible ways to inquire into what makes one both human and a functioning member of society is to study intensely oneself. One can do this in many private ways, quietly reflecting on one's actions at the end of the day or by taking the time to discuss issues of concern with parents or friends. The act of focusing intensely on self as the subject, and reflecting on the images of self as a referential object of study for a sustained period of some ten months, is quite another. Many adolescent Visual Art students in this study freely elected themselves as the study focus or inquiry position.

The "who am I?" question was foregrounded by many students and is evidence of the adolescent desire to affirm self. Analysis shows that they have been able to sustain this engagement, refining their perceptual awareness of themselves over this extended period. The research showed students reflecting on the good, bad and complex nature of the event-shaping in their lifeworld. This demonstrates firstly, the need of students to find ways to mediate their life. Secondly, it shows that Visual Arts is providing a very useful tool for such an investigation. To have the confidence to share their struggles, personal fears, values and concerns so explicitly and powerfully with an audience (both within the safety of the classroom and friends and beyond to a wider audience) is testament to the Visual Art experience which provides a space for such possibilities and a learning environment that nurtures sensitively this inquiry.

"My work is an emotionally complex one. It is an attempt to integrate all the different experiences that have formed my character" (Eun Joo Lee, 1997, p. 76; M.4.1.7, p. 433) is representative of the orientation taken by many students. It has been expressed as "My work is a visual metaphor for one's journey to create who they are as a person, avoiding the pressures and social standards of society" (Banicevic, 2005; M.4.2.2, p. 435), or "*Subtexts*, explores the underlying meanings associated with growing up, and the journeys undertaken by teenagers in general" (Wolff-Gilling, 2005; M.4.2.4, p. 435).

The complexity and variety of the inquiry and the issues they chose to investigate revealed by the analysis are as rich as the sum of human experience while, at the same time, being a very honest adolescent viewpoint.

My major works are going to be that of poetry, printing, painting & stuck on media. Issues that I want to touch with my piece of work are my spiritual growth, where I belong in this world, faith hope and my battle not to conform that is if all goes to plan. (extract from student diary of Pieter Neve, Inside ARTEXPRESS, 2005)

The topics explored range from: articulating the struggle to find meaning and legitimacy in a society whose culture is vastly different from their childhood experiences; seeking independence from the perceived confinements of family; mediating the psychological fears and pressures of studying for external examinations; pondering how to deal with peer rejection or the perceived burden of all normalising behaviours. The impact of this desire on each individual was most eloquently explored by White (2003, p. 83; M.4.2.7, p. 435) in his work *Trapped in the Wake of Your Existence*, where he dealt with his “struggle to be recognised” as an individual in a world where his identical twin represented his “mirror image” (p. 83).

Others delve into the cultural and social agencies that shape them to find their sense of self. They too struggle with issues and events that are currently impacting on them in significant psychological and emotional ways. *Just Me; Just Life; Just Different; But Just Like Everyone Else* (Sayarath, 2003, p. 99), is a most eloquent example of such an approach. In his self-portrait, Sayarath directly faces the audience to confront them with his questions and his concerns about the cultural constructs of gender representations. So too, Jessica Hick’s work, *Sit Down, Shut Up and Have a Cup of Tea* (2002, p. 107; M.4.2.3, p. 435) confronts the audience and challenges notions of beauty and body image through her very frank and personal insight into her unique struggles. She reflects, “For me it is a continuous exploration of self, with no real conclusions ... about what it is to inhabit a body, voyeurism” (p. 107). Whichever position

the students choose, analysis of both the case study students and the longitudinal data reveals a strength and confidence by the students in the production of an artwork that presents a resolved and considered position of their adolescent perspective of the world.

What is most revealing in the analysis, beyond the sheer number of students who select an autobiographical approach, is the richness and depth of their inquiry and the skilful way they understand how to use the power of the gaze to engage the audience. Analysis shows they consciously regulate, sensitively, how close they are prepared to allow the audience to come into their private world. Some use their eyes to pierce those of the audience and communicate directly their position; Goldthorp's (2002, p. 20; M.4.2.6, p. 435) eyes confront the audience with his personal wrestle with himself and he asks, "Haven't I proved myself? ... What's wrong with me? ... If I think, I worry more ... I feel isolated and alone" (p. 20). Carla Middleton's eyes meet the audience and she uses this strong connection to convey and express "the emotional and physical aspects of myclonic epilepsy, a condition I have integrated into my adolescence" (2003, p. 95; M.4.2.5, p. 435).

Other students take on a more reflective stance with their eyes not directly meeting those of the audience. They allow the audience to enter their space but not completely as they reveal some possibilities and allow the audience to interpret possible deeper, more personal intentions. They offer and communicate to the audience a level of insight into themselves that is comfortable for them. Shuang Chen's drawings titled *Myopic* inform us that she has "signed her portraits with a strong symbol of my identity" (2005; M.4.2.1, p. 435). Yet her delicate and sensitive studies and the different tilts of her head and reflective gazes lead us to her genetic lineage and the speculative potential of the glasses as more symbolic of her Chinese heritage.

Patrick's triptych of self-portraits and piano are similar symbolic identity studies. The audience is allowed into his passion for music that defines his outer self.

However, his internal expressive landscape-like studies of the inside of the piano are more symbolic of his inner self. It is in the spaces between each expressive mark and the rhythms of the repeating lines that Patrick works on a deeper sub-text, his sexuality. He reveals through his interview that he intentionally developed this level of symbolic expression “only noticeable to me” and that, while an audience might see such a study as a “vain” preoccupation, it was for him a way to express an “honest perspective of the subject.”

Similarly, Eun Joo-Lee (1997, p. 76; M.4.1.7, p. 433) also uses the image of herself and her piano as the point of departure for her investigation of self. In her case, it is an “attempt to integrate all the different experiences that have formed my character” (p. 76). In particular, she incorporates symbols that link her Korean culture, her Christian beliefs and her new Australian identity. Like Patrick, she manipulates photographic images, re-representing them through collages during both the process phases and as a representation of multiplicity in the final artworks.

A similar theme is approached by Erin Black (2005; M.4.2.8, p. 435) in her paintings *Narcissus, I, II, III*, where she tries to capture moments in time as points of stability through taking photographs of herself and her “cherished possessions.” “Narcissus depicts transition from the perception of self to the acceptance of ‘selves’; like Narcissus’s reflection on the water’s surface, such is the ever-variant self” (2005, M.4.2.8, p. 435). For Ronald Kim (1997, M.4.1.8, p. 433) the self-portrait is about “capturing the alienation and isolation that I was feeling after an unbearable event ... I have tried to record my emotions by allowing the spectator to visually observe the ‘empty gaze.’” These examples demonstrate a developing disposition for curiosity and sensitivity to self and life, the skill of self-reflection, patience, attention to detail, and awareness of what defines the private and the public which represent lifelong skills necessary for the responsive adult.

The Montage 6.1: *Visualising Self, The Self Portrait*, below, is a juxtapositioning of image detail from the longitudinal analysis next to a detail of one of Patrick's self-portrait repeating-profile images used in his triptych *Adagio, Allegro and Presto* (2000). The longitudinal study student images are *Narcissus I, II, III* (Black, 2005, M.4.2.8, p. 435) and *Illusions of Something Else* (Kim, 1997, p. 25; M.4.1.8, p. 433). Overlaid are extracts of student text that clustered in the Stage 1, Part 1, Longitudinal Study, and its categorisation in *Montage M.4.2: Visualising Self, The Self Portrait* and connect to the Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study student voices.



*Montage M.6.1: Visualising Self, the Self Portrait*

### **6.1.2 Visualising and Reflecting on Self through Locating Self in the Events of Life, Places, Spaces, Moments and Events**

Life is a series of perceptual events. Some of these events punctuate our lives in very significant ways, while others flow over us in the repetition and rhythms

of daily life. We are defined by our observational sensitivities, by the choices we make and by the objects and people that surround us, or by the places and spaces we inhabit. The skill to intensely observe and understand how these events affect our responses to our world is central to the Visual Art learning experience. The study analysis reveals that many of the students were fascinated by how these events contributed to their own becoming, from both the micro, personal reflective position, towards a more macro position. In both orientations, students developed a communicative consciousness, evaluating their actions and feelings against those of their family, their peers or the wider community. Investigating a sense of place and events is increasingly catapulting the student from the home to a trans-global awareness of social, cultural and political issues and events.

In conceptual terms, the analysis revealed that the students dealt with this aspect of their perceptual reality in very direct, as well as in more abstracted ways. This sees them either consciously placing themselves, or personal symbols of the defining self, in the framed experience for the viewer to observe, such as placing themselves in the landscape, interior space, or world. Alternatively, they positioned themselves as the active observer and commentator, observing rather than being observed, making other situated events the subject of their inquiry. From whichever window they chose to observe the world of events, they were developing the skill to see detail, difference and commonalities. The reflective and performative nature of artmaking allowed the student to take the time to observe intensely and reflect on how these patterns, or punctuated moments, actions and choices have impacted on their sense of self and their emotional responses to them. Their subject matter demonstrates the play of time, people, places and events on their reality as always being tangential to self.

***A Sense of Self Captured in Places, Spaces and Moments.*** Intensely studying the visual forms of the present, and one's situated habitus, as both commentator and actor, is a significant orientation. Analysis of the longitudinal study shows that there are many recurring themes that students revisit over the

years. The self-portrait is always a given, as it constitutes a key subject matter within the curriculum and it is perennially popular. Another recurring theme for students is their personal and private world of places and spaces, often the bedroom. The bedroom is commonly studied subject matter in junior years and, at the senior level, it reveals how this specific focus on place is very affirming for adolescent students. Often, examining their retreat or the private world of their bedroom, is an opportunity for the student to study their “immediate frame of reference” (Hutchings, 2005) and, conversely, study themselves.

In Stephen Hutchings *Still Life* (ARTEXPRESS, 2005; M.4.4.4, p. 439) he is the director of the narrative. He leaves the audience clues to the activities that define him, like his school tie and his music, both objects which for him are representative of who he is. He invites the audience, through the eye of the forensic investigator, to enter his space. The audience is directed to seek out the empirical, visual clues that define the inhabitant, their preoccupations and their values. For the audience, he leaves selected traces of his presence, visual clues about the kinds of activities that define him. We are drawn to the work fascinated by the objects that he has chosen to represent himself, by the way he has ordered his space and by his choice to leave only his silhouetted form.

Similarly, for Joe, the bedroom represents his private, secure known world, his world of comics and his studio. It is fascinating that it is from his bedroom, rather than the classroom, that, he begins his critique on the value of the comic as an art form and his artwork's validity as a legitimate art form in ARTEXPRESS. From the security of his known world, he confidently launches his own narrative about the contemporary communicative value of the comic as art, and it is the point of his return, his reality.

Abby and Pete studied their favourite place, the beach. The images that they selected carry deep, defining qualities that inform their habitus. They carefully record and study the physical forms, sensory events and personal interactions that they see significantly contribute to their identities. Abby devotes pages of

her diary to the manipulation of images taken of her swimming at the ocean baths. Endless texts, collages, over-worked photographs and magazine cut-outs, along with commentary on technical experiments and notes, support her emerging aesthetic work. Abby uses her composition to mark her special and “amazing place”. She studies her physical form swimming in the space. The representations of herself become, for her, a metaphorical journey. Submerged and moving, she is “relaxed”, the water “cool and calming”. Here she was able to “delve into the person” she was during her HSC year, her self-portrait.

Both Abby and Pete express a simple yet powerful desire to represent themselves in places that have been significant in defining who they are. Abby presents us with very expressive figurative works, while Pete fills his installation with a comic narrative of his beach life. Both demonstrate the skill learned in Visual Art of being able to refine one’s sensory capacities to reflect intensely on their personal world while communicating to an audience more universal narratives about existence.

Photography and film are increasingly being used to capture the aesthetic and the anthropological experience. New technologies and contemporary media and art practices allow many students greater access to the world of visual representation. New media also support students who might feel that their skills in drawing limited their capacity to be successful in Visual Art studies. This is confirmed by Beth, a student who had never studied art before, and who entered senior school believing she to be a bad drawer. What she discovered was that art was “all about meaning and subjectivity ... and I loved that.” Beth concentrated on her skills as a very effective poet and writer, combining them with the skill of selecting and manipulating found images and photographs with a newly-discovered expressive and material understanding of painting.

All the students in the case study used their cameras to capture and record either images of themselves or the flow of existence that passed by them. The camera lens and its framing capacities gave the students greater freedom to



record the micro-world of textures and line, or the macro-world of objects and landscapes, working in tandem with their intuitive and expressive visualising and forming skills. Analysis of the diaries, and many artist statements, revealed that the photographic process allowed them to take multiple images that could then be manipulated either digitally, or they became one of many collage materials that were copied, cut, ripped, glued, painted and then re-worked. The endless repetition of re-worked photographic images in student diaries reveal the liminal nature of images as they seek ways to represent and communicate their intentions, feelings and imagery.

More importantly, the camera gave the students access to the way others have observed them throughout their lives. The photographic image, like a drawing, is a permanent visual point of reference. Students now have ready access to a vast store of photographic images of themselves taken by family, friends and even the media. Each student has access to the technologies that can convert these images into a wide range of imaging forms, from a photocopy to a morphed animation. Many of these images mark defining events in the students' lives, such as birthday parties, first day at school, holidays, relationships and travel. They also record significant associations, such as the home, the dog, the car, the bush or the sea. Others seek out images from past lives, grandparents, images of foreign places and unknown relatives as their starting point in the quest to define their own space and place in the world.

The more contemporary technologies of visual exploration are allowing students to explore the physical and metaphysical space that we inhabit in more challenging ways than exemplified in the examples above. ARTEXPRESS works, such as *Zero Infinity* (Lyndon, 2004) and *Urban* (Cildirogio, 2004), use digital photography, film and video to challenge much of what we have come to accept as the limitations of our physical world through their explorations of virtual realities. New technologies and the virtual spaces they create allow students to experiment and speculate on the consequences of their actions through collapsing their present realities into the past and the past and present into the future. Joe finds time to be a very interesting tool in his work with

comics and animation. “Time is a weird thing because it’s sort of like watching Dr Who when you rewind ... its like a vortex, it can be as much time as you like ... your brain plays it for you ... with comics you can put bits in or take bits out depending on how important they are to what you are trying to do.”

Still others seek to speculate on the possibilities of travelling through the landscapes of the mind. Paul Baka, *My Life, My Mind* (2003, p.121) and Brendan Plunkett *Series of Six Self Portraits* (2001, p. 28) found in *Montage: M.4.4: Visualising Events* ( p. 439) venture into visualising travel through the mind using digital and video technologies. Baka (2003) aimed to capture visual encounters and mental responses as he returned to his much loved childhood home, and Plunkett (2001) constructed speculative landscapes of the mind into which he physically travels, “intending to create a disturbing self-portrait” (2001, p. 28).

***A Sense of Self Captured Through Visualising, Observing and Reflecting on Events.*** For many students, the events that impact on them are referential to the humans that occupy the spaces with them. They provide a lever to speculate on the future of life more generally from the perspective of how to co-exist in the world, as both an individual and a collective citizen of the globe.

Students such as Lauren Murphy and her work *Bondi Tides* (2001, p. 74; M.4.3.1, p. 437) captures a visual study of people, time and movement collapsed into a series of frames. Her work explores the movement of the waves over the body, the movement of the sun, light patterns, the textures of skin aging, the intensity of heat and light, to the movement of time through life and the relationships that punctuate the spaces, “the passing of one summer or one span of day at the beach” (p. 74). The drawing series looks at “adolescent sexual awakening ... adult maturity ... and aging” (p. 74). By the overlay of images she cleverly juxtapositions collected moments of the past into the present reality of the viewer.

Other students sought to capture the past and to hold onto memories of much cherished events and relationships, such as *My Mother* (Knight, 1991, p. 19; M.4.3.2, p. 437) or Tom's desire to express the freedom of play, friends and a childhood lost. Brayshaw (2003, p. 20; M.4.3.1, p. 437) and Garzaniti (2004, p. 74; M.4.3.7, p. 437) go to places that have been negative experiences seeking reconciliation and ways forward. *Shoo Fly Don't Bother Me* (Millington, 2004) aims to come to terms with being "the discarded child", while Garzaniti in *What Lies Within* deals with her personal struggle with self-mutilation. "I worked with the medium of printmaking as the cutting of the linoblock reinforced the idea of cutting oneself" (p. 74). The time to study and reflect on the aesthetics of daily existence has also been a significant focus for many of the students. *All Day I Live my Life* (Davidson, 2001, p. 16; M.4.4.5, p. 439) a video captures the "internal monologue ... good and bad ... exist [ing] at the same time" (p. 16).

The desire to portray and reconcile global events which impact on individuals and their identity is a strong recurring theme. Analysis of the longitudinal content of ARTEXPRESS exhibitions reveals that student learning outcomes provide a platform for students to mediate the impact of significant political and environmental issues on the individual. This analysis is further strengthened by an examination of the selected student work for the new website "Inside ARTEXPRESS". The student work, *Oh No! Not the Environment* (Inside ARTEXPRESS, Kojima, 2005), comments on "the burning environmental issues of our planet through the technique of the postmodernist."

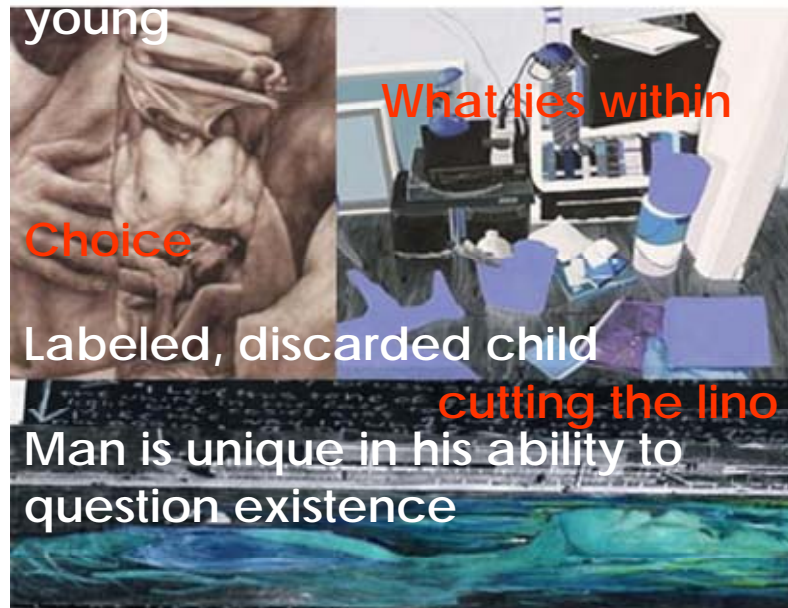
*Oppression, Resistance Asylum* (Park, 2001, p. 75; M.4.8.3, p. 447), *Fomori: The Dispossessed* (O'Connor, 2003, p. 30; M.4.8.4, p. 447), and *Why this Life?* (Plummer, 2002, p. 32) capture the direct impact of political events on the destinies and identities of immigrant or first generation young Australians. *Fragments, Remnants of Memory* (Mizrahi, 2002) is "fragments of my life ... photographic images ... my life in Australia and Israel ... sense of privacy in what has been erased ... my teacher encouraged me to extend the expressive potential of my ideas ... to take risks ... part of the process of resolution" (p. 30).

The development of a disposition, towards the skill of careful observation and reflection of one's environment, with sensitivity towards the way that events and people have impacted on one's current circumstances, is a life-long skill. Being able to place these events into a life-long continuum and in balance with one's subconscious self has helped many students appreciate and balance the events in their lives. The techniques of the artists (themselves and those they have studied) have provided them with visualising skills to find their voice about issues beyond self.

Abby's took the opportunity in her artwork to investigate the world in detail and from many angles. She reflects that it developed a capacity to be "more open to ideas and experiences." Her journey through the production of her artwork was seen as "pushing the boundaries in visual expression" and opening up "conceptual challenges." Five years on, she has identified that this capacity to reflect and explore an understanding of one's existence through the physicality and materiality of making art has informed her critical capacities to understand how you 'see'. It affects how you engage with the world. "It is a very powerful force for me personally ... so I think ... the learning has been essential to what I am today."

The *Montage 6.2: Visualising Events*, below contains juxtaposed images from the longitudinal analysis combined with detail of one of Abby's conceptual working images that informed her final self-portrait series. The montage contains a detail of the student images in *Bondi Tides* (Murphy, 2001, p. 74; M.4.3.1, p. 437) and *Still Life* (Hutchings, 2005; M.4.4.1, p. 439). Overlaid are extracts of student text that clustered in the Stage 1, Part 1, Longitudinal Study, and its categorisation in *Montage M.4.3: Visualising Events* and connect to the Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study student voices.

My mother died when I was  
young



I used colour as a medium of  
joy & expression

#### *Montage 6.2: Visualising Events*

### **6.2: Visuality, Identity and Social and Culturally Constructed Expressive Self**

Many students found that the best way to depict their assembled subjectivities was by representing themselves as framed moments in a shifting landscape of life. Sometimes alone, while at other times situated; sometimes the subject being observed, while at other times the observer and commentator; one is always reflective. A significant proportion of students have chosen to examine how the phenomena of identities are shaped by an individual's unique inter-subjective experiences, and how these mesh with the cultural and social agencies and expectations that surround them. They choose to position their inquiry in the contemporary context of their visually-mediated world. They frame themselves as actors who explore the zone where the tangent of the individual private world intersects with the greater mass of the collective identities of a society and its cultural practices.

The Visual Art curriculum facilitates the skills not only to select a subjective framing orientation but also to encourage students to explore other frames, such as the cultural or postmodern frame. Evidence from the longitudinal study and the case study reveal a significant shift in the way that students now seek to represent their reality. Drawing from the collective body of all cultural and aesthetic practices, including popular culture and fine art practices, the students are using their critical lens to inform more sensory-based ways of knowing. Students learn to combine their critical and imaginative responses to their actions, and those of the people around them. Using the skills of logical analysis and reflexivity, they comment on their own lives and relationships, and how the increasing hybrid forms of imagery activity in media practices constitute who they are as social and cultural citizens.

There are two key orientations that can be derived from the meta-analysis. Firstly, the students comment on people who are “influential in my life” and how wider social constructs filter into this space. Secondly, they seek to actively contest the agencies operating in wider society that shape them significantly. Assessing and evaluating these forces relative to self is an essential life skill.

#### ***6.2.1: Visualising the Actualising Self through Reflecting on Others and Developing Ethical Awareness***

The longitudinal analysis of ARTEXPRESS works identified that a significant group of students elected to inquire into how their inter-subjective awareness of a significant person in close proximity to them has impacted on how they now see and act in the world. This group of students predominantly chose family members, such as grandparents, mothers, fathers, siblings and peer friends. Through observing and reflecting on how they have lived or are living their lives, they heightened their understanding of how to mediate between their own sense of ethical behaviour and the wider norms of society. They work through relationships connected by experiences as diverse as birth, death, illness, displacement, cultural difference, mental illness, alienation by peers and

society, and the general pace of life. Personal emotions, such as fear, anger, loneliness and frustration are all very legitimate and important human responses worthy of being reassessed on a continuing basis. These feature predominantly in ARTEXPRESS.

Many of the adolescent student works analysed in the longitudinal study have found that studying the behaviours of others and their personal responses to them is a compelling and revealing preoccupation. *Michael* (Moyle, 2001, p. 26; M.4.5.2, p. 435), *Sophie* (Carter, 2003, p. 121; M.4.5.5, p. 441) and *My mother wears a jelly fish in her bra* (Batt, 1997, p. 10; M.4.5.7, p. 441) typify many students who use their own private worlds and inter-subjective experiences as subject matter. Intensely studying mental illness, a sibling with an intellectual disability and illness respectively, provided an opportunity for a student to reflect on her values and beliefs. "I wanted to look at how disease can affect a person-physically, mentally and emotionally. I also had unresolved emotions ... I hope my work conveys a hopeful message-that breast cancer (or any disease really) should not be immediately associated with death and shame" (Batt, 1997, p. 10).

Understanding how others, particularly people who represent the special or unique, respond to life in difficult times informs and affirms to them ways that they might approach life. Georgia Carter (2003), in her artwork *Sophie* made a particularly important point in her video about humanity, namely that all people, including her intellectually disabled sister, have similar desires and needs and everyone can find a way to live a satisfying life. More affirming is the action of communicating this belief to others. She states: "My major work was particularly emotional and satisfying for me as Sophie, the 21-year-old star of my film is my sister" (p. 121).

Each year, many students approach their art work willing to investigate such private territory about themselves, their beliefs and their relationships with others and most parents are supportive of this journey to adulthood. Patrick's

mother, reflecting five years on, about Patrick's self-portrait said: "I think it was a turning point of getting in touch with himself and where he was at." While Ceara's mother related: "I see art as definitely being an outlet for her ... she is more comfortable portraying her family than herself."

*My Friend Ben* (Zapf, 2002, p. 96; M.4.5.6, p. 441) and *Self Portrait with Friends* (Crouch, 1997, p. 14; M.4.5.4, p. 441) are able to demonstrate the artists' capacities to appreciate friendship but also their ability to observe and communicate what is unique and special about others. *My Friend Ben* is not only a study of a close friend but also allows the audience to see the artist's own struggle to reconcile the way that popular culture and the media shapes and "customises" the individual. The artist statement by Minto MacPherson (1996, p. 29; M.4.5.3, p. 441), accompanying his wood engravings, talks of his success in being able to achieve a "sense of dislocation and self-analysis" (p. 29) and an understanding of his individuality through the inter-subjective experiences of having a friend, photographing his friend and his subsequent translation of the original representations into prints. The performative activity of analysing, critiquing and re-representing the characteristics of his friend, and transforming them into an expressive response, has informed the intra-subjective self. The title of MacPherson's work is *Knowledge of Self*.

This orientation is similar to that taken by Ceara. Ceara was seeking insight into her own subjectivity and values, not by studying a close friend but by carrying out a deep investigation of herself through the analysis of "a culture I was not really a part of ...I did my artwork on a person who had nothing to do with me ... a person who was ...very dark looking ... masculine ... evil ...she seemed to typify everything at the end of the day." The linoprint she titled *The Drunkard*, a study of one person she casually encountered, was the starting-point for her later investigation into Australian values. At first, it seems a random place to start, given that many artists work with a logic that sees them begin with the personal and work towards the universal. The interview revealed that the works commenced at a time when Ceara began her first part-time job as a checkout operator. It was her first experience away from the sheltered life of family and



friends and common shared values. Confronting the reality that many people had very different behaviours, values and beliefs from her own triggered her inquiry into what she believed.

Being a very private person, Ceara was reluctant to use any self-imagery. She admits that it was a conscious decision not to do anything “personal” in her HSC work. Her mother believes Ceara’s work is “very subjective ... more than she cares to say it is ... and that’s another protection of [the] privacy thing too.” Ceara and her mother both reveal that, in fact, she had used her artmaking to delve into many aspects of her adolescence, exploring her feelings about family, friendship, school and work. Her studies of women in hats were “actually works that she’d done about her own experiences working in casual jobs and different human situations ... they are definitely ...social comments ... and different cultural sort of works” (mother).

Her artwork became her voice and in the security of her bedroom/studio, she spent hours working on her drawings, prints and major artwork. To this day, Ceara uses her bedroom as her personal space, her mother reflecting “she had a whole room for her visual diary ... well actually two rooms ... Ceara is by nature a recorder and she likes to put things together and see how they look.” She would cover the entire walls with images and ideas. Over the space of many days and nights living with and reflecting on her images, she is then able to refine and clarify her ideas related to self-identity, Australian cultural identity, cultural practices such as religion, gambling, drinking and then shift into a discursive investigation of the media industry and its role in the transference of these values.

*My Mother’s Story* (Park, 2001, p. 26; M.4.5.8, p. 441) and *Matriarchy, My Mother’s Daughter* (Salamonsen, 2005; M.4.7.5, p. 445) are representative of a genre style developing in the HSC Visual Art culture that is allowing many students to reconcile the values and beliefs of their traditional culture and the experiences of dislocation and isolation of their parents with their own

experiences and emergent identity as young Australians. The ARTEXPRESS exhibition regularly presents related themes that capture issues of cultural representation. Secondly, it demonstrates to potential HSC senior students how to use their artmaking to mediate different cultural and social values, the feelings associated with personal conflict and the realities of difference. Students in this study, who chose to represent issues of cultural identity, used an approach that saw them analyse and study the cultural practices and the rich symbolic and aesthetic traditions of their first culture. They then juxtaposed them with Western symbolism and the cultural behaviours that they observed around them. More significantly, they placed themselves and/or their family into the picture with confidence. Salamonsen (2005; M.4.7.5, p. 445) demonstrated this when reflecting on her video, “I explored the notion of cultural identity looking at the strong influence of my mother ... I wear the kimono ...undressing represents the emergence of a new identity.” It is through this intense reflection about their relationships, behaviours and choices of action that the students are able to develop sensitivity towards their developing ethical disposition.

Ayla Cakal (2003; M.4.7.4, p. 445) in her body of work, *I wore the veil from age ten* developed using the textile medium includes manipulated photographic images of her grandmother “her culture, and religious traditions and identity” (p. 21). During the process I considered my mother’s and my own cultural identity’. When you juxtapose the title of the work *I wore a veil from the age of ten* with her simple yet powerful printed hands in the stop position, it is not difficult for the audience to interpret the student’s dilemma about her values and beliefs. What is significant is the confidence that she has to make this statement and reflect on the intellectual and emotional security of her classroom where she resolved her understandings.

Learning how to moderate one’s own behaviour, and interact with others as the acting subject, is essential in adolescent development. Many of the students studied used their artmaking and the skill of reflexivity to rationalise their values, beliefs and actions and measure them against social norms. Habermas (1990) describes the development of such communicative action in the adolescent as

the skill of developing their moral and practical capacities to assess how they should respond ethically to their world.

The Montage 6.3: *Visualising Self through Reflecting on Others, Developing Ethical Awareness*, illustrated below, connects students' visualisations with events and the experiences of others that shape self. It contains the juxtapositioned images from the longitudinal analysis, combined with detail of one of Ceara's Melbourne Cup Hat Lady collagraph portrait series. The montage contains a detail of the student images in *Michael* (Moyle, 2001, p. 25; M.4.5.2, p. 441) and *Friends* (McGuinness, 2005). Overlaid are extracts of student text that clustered in the Stage 1, Part 1, Longitudinal Study, and its categorisation in *Montage M.4.5: Tangential Visibility* and connect to the Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study student voices.

### The relationship between myself and my brother



*Montage 6.3: Visualising Self through Reflecting on Others, Developing Ethical Awareness*

### **6.2.2: *Visuality, Identity and the Socially and Culturally Constructed Self***

One of the main preoccupations of adolescent youth is the search for ways to define one's individuality and ask truth questions about self. This requires critical self-reflexivity which is an increasingly complex task as imagery and artifacts in popular culture and the consumer driven society exploit the need to conform to one's peers in order to meet the consumption imperative.

Increasingly, students are exploring the skills of the artist, media photographer and designer to present their discursive understandings of how subjectivities are presented to a popular culture audience. These are exemplified by the student work, *Are You Consumed* (Carrol, 2004; M.4.7.9, p. 445). This collection of works appropriates Barbara Kruger's now iconic billboard art works and uses the media, newspaper format, by working with image and text, to frame statements about capitalism and the consumer society. By using the front page layout ideas and the universal "newspaper wrapped", human Carrol aims to reinforce society's obsession with consumption and ask questions about our world.

Data from the analysis of the category of *Identity as expressive and cultural and social construct* are rich with examples of students working with postmodern stylistic markers, such as parody, irony, satire, narrative and appropriation. The techniques are combined with the depth and breadth of visual art and media technologies and the skill of the gaze to present them as active rather than passive participants. The works characteristically demonstrate the desire of youth to resist hegemonic practices in the search to validate their own culturally located behaviour.

With this imperative, it is little wonder that the notion of conformity or cultural identity preoccupies a significant group of students in the study. Joshua Kerr's *Plastic Majority* (2003, p. 77; M.4.7.8, p. 445) and his statement, reflected the perspective of many other student works, "I wanted to make a statement about my own individuality" (p. 77). What is particularly powerful about these works is the communicative capacity of the images to deal with issues of subjectivity in

contemporary society. Each work is a re-representation of the student, each demonstrating the student's significant skill of visuality by critically using the images, techniques and technologies of the media that seek to shape them.

This approach has given birth to a range of exploratory works by students who have used the technologies of vision to explore their world as social and cultural critic. Student artists chose topics as diverse as gender, cosmetic surgery, fashion, genetics and history, to domesticity and social role expectations (M.4.6, p. 443). Those seeking to investigate issues of gender construct and sexual preference often work with this orientation. *Who do you want to be today* (Stapleton, 2003, p. 46; M.4.7.7, p. 445) investigates the role of gender stereotypes in modern Western society and *Incurable* by Chantelle Blake (2005) is about "blame game ... victimisation ... I challenge the audience to interact with my work ... 'the queer=cool' debate has been a driving force" (Inside ARTEXPRESS, 2005).

The work *Dangerous Looks* (Samantha Ingleby, ARTEXPRESS, 2003) demonstrates how a postmodern orientation with a strong focus on media and consumerism provides rich visual territory for exploration. Samantha appropriates Andy Warhol's famous Campbell's soup can icon, recontextualising it, labelling it FAT and creating a bricolage of images that depict the wounds of cosmetic surgery. So too, the works *Beauty, Marilyn Munroe-A Dime a Dozen, Mesh, You are What You Wear* (M.4.6, p. 443) all approach an understanding of their private inquiry from a particular angle on media and the gaze.

Works such as *Ballyhoo* (Hlavacek, 2002, p. 107, M.4.6.7, p. 443) and *Mesh* (Gorgiojski, 2005; M.4.6.8, p. 443) are excellent examples of a genre style in ARTEXPRESS that critically comment on popular media and the loss of individual identity through consumerism. They work from the orientation of the designer and present their artwork in the format of the magazine. By becoming the editor and artistic director, Gorgiojski (2005), in her work *Mesh*,

demonstrates how one is able to participate in the process and assess one of the ways that identity formation is shaped. I “created a world of famous people, showing the power of the magazine industry and how easy it is to make an average person look famous” using digital technologies.

Analysis of the artworks in the case study by Beth and Ceara highlight equally inventive approaches demonstrated through the appropriation of images and symbols from the media. Each of the students used the media as a source of symbolism and imagery. Ceara and Beth delved back to the 1950s to find their images of women who were representative of modernity. Ceara became the successful career woman in her self-portrait titled *Ceara Legend in her Own Time* (2000), while Beth used the images of 1950s women from *LIFE* magazines and juxtapositioned them in her Sixth Day panel next to the first man on the moon.

Beth’s artwork displayed an “outstanding ability to understand the critical and historical [use of symbolism]” (teacher) to skilfully tell her contemporary story of creation. In panel three she peeled off a mineral water sticker from a water bottle and placed it into her composition as the universal symbol for water. In panel four, she found an image of light bulbs and glued them in and, in panel five she juxtaposed a cut-out image of Superman, man in the image of god over worked with the words “I can.”

Another very popular orientation is to comment on self and society through parody and irony taking a comical perspective on patterns, events and cultural behaviours that are significant points of personal reflection. Like Ceara, these students choose to deconstruct their own identities through the careful observation of the hegemonic behaviours around them, with the iconic representations of the typical Australian being a rich starting point. *Suburban Reality* (Kenyon, 2003) and *The Bloke and His Dog* (de Teliga, 2001) (M.4.7.2/3, p. 445) are both excellent examples of students’ capacity to critique man and his cultural habits. Kenyon’s digital animation, *Suburban Reality*, aims

to “depict real life in a fun way reflecting the style of such films as *Toy Story*” (p. 123).

De Teliga’s own reflections of his drawing were revealed in comments from his VAPD published in ARTEXPRESS, 2001. *The Bloke and the Dog* series is a parody of the typical Australian Bloke who, despite his middle class background, often readily identifies with “the beer-swilling, pie eating yobbo ...The dog is a representation of the average man’s basic instincts for food, sex and marking his territory” (p. 81). The examiners have commented on the strong performative links between making a perceptive social comment and assessing one’s personal sense of self. Commenting on De Teliga’s ability to bridge the gap between fine art traditions of expressive drawing and satirical cartooning, the examiners state: “number of works show a more immediate response to the body and more resonant and personal emotional experience” (Examiner Comments, ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 81).

Pete and Joe also work with parody and narrative using the cartoon form. In very different ways, both tell stories about the way that cultural practices define them. Pete’s narrative was a satirical study of his own behaviours and youth-surfing culture. He has been influenced by popular *Sydney Morning Herald* cartoonist, Leunig and local artist, Michael Bell. Both artists comment through the eye of the comical narrator. Pete also drew on the work of Mambo artists, such as Reg Mombassa, who were made internationally famous for their satirical characterisation of many aspects of Australian culture, including surf culture. He describes his art as “your average day at the beach and what you see.”

Joe is also passionate about the comic art form and its visual conventions as a valid communication tool. He is also clear about the capacity of the narrative and its characters to transfer beliefs and deal with the “human factor”. His insight was revealed through his analysis of the role of the masked comic

heroes, such as Superman, Batman and Spiderman. The mask provides the reader with a way to, “put your own personality under it” (Joe). For Joe:

It's more like a philosophical thing ... Spiderman, the mask is just basically a red circle with two huge eyes in it ... the face of the mask doesn't change but there is still so much going on under there ... comic hero's are today's mythology ... hero's are very moral. I mean ... with great power comes responsibility. And I think comics are a very morally building thing for young people ... they sort of make you want to do the right thing ... Peter Parker, half the time he's Spiderman trying to save the world but on top of that he's still got his sick aunt to worry about, he's got girlfriend problems, he's a complete loser, he has no friends so they are these real people. I think it makes you realise that even if you have huge powers and stuff, really, it doesn't make you any different to anyone else. I think that in a way, makes you more humble about yourself. (extract from interview with Joe, 20/12/05)

All the works described above have deconstructed and re-contextualised text and image to ask the audience to look beyond the immediacy of their first image association in order to ponder the ambiguity and complexity of the issues that surround identity formation for the adolescent in contemporary society. As subject matter, they chose to critically examine the discourses and narratives that surround their culturally-institutionalised lives and use the visual practices that reflect contemporary communicative practice. The students are aware that they are constituted by their inter-subjective experiences and the wider cultural practices of society. They are eager to move beyond immediate encounters in their lives to actualise their own realities through what can only be described as an intense and sustained engagement with understanding the relationships between the inner self and the outer world of experiences, between thought and world. The students have used their critical imaging skills to reveal the relationships between the personal and the particular, and how these inform more universal understandings about how to relate to their environment and others.



The Montage 6.4: *Visuality, Identity and the Socially and Culturally Constructed Self*, below connects students' visualisations of their culturally and visually mediated world with events and the experiences. It contains images juxtaposed from the longitudinal analysis with a detail of Beth's Eighth Day panel from her creation painting series. The montage contains a section of detail from the drawing *Plastic Majority* (Kerr, 2003, p. 77, M.4.7.8, p. 445) and a textile and print image from the body of work titled, *I wore a veil from the age of ten* (Cakal, 2003, p. 21; M.4.7.4, p. 445). The juxtapositioned text overlays the bricolage imagery and projects key ideas and concepts categorised from the Stage 1, Part 1, Longitudinal Study, *Montage M.4.7: Visibility as a Cultural Construct: Identity, Ethnicity and Conformity* and connects to the Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study student voices.



*The Montage 6.4: Visuality, Identity and the Socially and Culturally Constructed Self*

## Conclusion

The meta-inference reveals how artmaking, as a visual and performative material practice, supports a process of reflective connectivity between the past

and present framings of the student. It connects the child to the adolescent and moves them towards the actualisation of their future as an adult. Students with access to new imaging technologies, media and traditional fine art practices find Visual Art a very practical and accessible way of recording the complexities that make up their present reality. They combine images with written text and multimodal forms of communication. The performative and visual communicative skills acquired by the students in this study have helped them to develop an effective means to communicate to others their beliefs and aspirations. The critical and self-reflective skills that inform their understanding of the socially and culturally constructed self have been combined with intuitive and creative energies to reveal how self has been imaginatively and uniquely forged.

The research reveals the value of Visual Art for the development of a relational logic between experiences, ideas and reflections. The embodied experience nurtures sensitivities about self and others towards a creative and ethical disposition. Art inquiry connects the student to the visual world of memories, people, events and environments. The liminalities revealed to students, through image production and material practices, transforms visual and performative knowing into a powerful communicative, intuitive and ethical practice operating at the threshold of understanding self.

### 6.3 Visual Performative Pedagogy

*I believe that very few [visual] art students start off believing that they're HSC major work [body of work] is going to be related to them (Joe's Visual Art classroom teacher)*

ARTEXPRESS as a student Visual Art exhibition has a history of some 20 years. During this time, it has achieved international recognition for its presentation of exemplary Visual Art learning outcomes in secondary schooling and a unique performative pedagogy. In NSW, each year, commentators echo a similar sentiment to Stanley (2005) that "ARTEXPRESS presents student works that display developing philosophical ideas, strong emotions and concern for what is happening in the world." This is supported by classroom teachers, like Joe's, who comment: "students seem increasingly interested in portraying the issues of their expanding worlds ... Technology has played an enormous role in the desire of students to represent their world visually and with meaning."

The following analysis supports ARTEXPRESS commentators such as Sullivan (2002), Yerbury (2004) and Stanley (2005), in affirming the significance of the visual and performative pedagogy in the NSW Visual Art classroom. There is a consensus of opinion that the students develop sensitivities to others or mutual visibility, along with communicative actions and reflexivity towards becoming.

This section of the meta-analysis brings together all the conversations around ARTEXPRESS and the Visual Art HSC learning journey, from the perspectives of the Visual Art classroom teachers, the case study parents and students, and from the outside position of researchers and commentators on the ARTEXPRESS experience. It will strive to encapsulate what the case study students, parents and teachers found special and unique about the curriculum and the learning experience. The perspectives gathered in this study are not all positive in terms of the quality of all aspects of the learning experience and, for some students, their learning environments were not ideal in terms of resources or the pedagogical experience. Abby's mother, herself a Visual Art teacher, found Abby's experience to be extremely limiting in terms of personal support, yet Abby valued many aspects of her classroom experience, mostly the studio learning, the diversity of the students, their different values and their different

approaches to life. Tom's and Pete's mother saw the boys' senior college experience as a more adult learning experience and a very positive one. It was valued for the individual learning focus of the classroom, the studio learning environment and the rich conversations and advice that the boys gained from being exposed to a number of classroom teachers, as well as the constant structured and unstructured learning conversations with teachers and fellow students. There is a huge contrast between the two classroom environments described above, and the style of teaching experiences of both Tom and Abby, yet both achieved excellence in Visual Art learning outcomes and both were selected for ARTEXPRESS.

The phenomenon, the ARTEXPRESS exhibition, and its unique culture and youth genre styles are a significant catalyst for the Visual Art classroom teacher and the student. Each year, students are challenged by the concepts and skills emulated in previous years. All of the students featured in the case study referred to their visits to previous ARTEXPRESS exhibition(s) and each used it to benchmark their own personal expectations. Beth, who began her study of Visual Art in the senior years, reflects: "I always looked at ARTEXPRESS stuff ... I thought I could never do that ... I loved it." It was for Beth about "meaning and subjectivity." She discovered that "Art is political as well ... that's how I started thinking, now I don't want mine to be a pretty painting ... I want it to have a strong message." In her busy, messy and crowded learning environment she dared to move out from her visual diary. Covering her canvas and "herself with paint", she moved towards the possibility of making a "positive statement" and experiencing her realised dream of being pre-selected for ARTEXPRESS.

In this study, the process of referral, from the principal of a school, through to the Visual Art teacher and then, to the student and parent opened up the possibility of gathering a range of perspectives on the learning environment. This section of the meta-analysis describes the collective learning experience as a representative picture of what the powerfully affirming Visual Art learning experience is and how it is nurtured. It will reveal insights into how the curriculum and its related pedagogical strategies are developing proficient visual communicative citizens. It will also reveal how the performative and

material practices of the Visual Art learning environment are supporting the development of the whole student through its connectedness with their own world. It will aim to reveal how the performative pedagogical approach in Visual Art develops sensitive and positive dispositions through an appreciation of its intellectual and unique form of visual ethical reasoning.

### ***6.3.1 The Role of the Curriculum, the ARTEXPRESS Culture and its Contribution to a Performative Pedagogical Classroom Practice***

The Visual Art curriculum at the core of this study has a conceptual structure that provides authentic interpretive and reflective learning experiences that bridge the artworld and the lifeworlds of the students (McKeon, 1994). When students commence their study of Visual Art, in their junior years of secondary school in NSW, they begin with subject matter drawn from their immediate experiences as the main investigative themes. The central tenant is that understanding the artworld and engaging in the material and performative inquiry will enable them to appreciate how the visual informs a wide range of communicative practices in contemporary society.

If students choose to apply themselves to their study, they can develop levels of proficiency that allow them to express their own understandings of the world through the expressive and communicative capabilities of imaging in its many representational forms:

Through the investigation of the relations between and amongst the agencies of the artist- artwork- world – audience and through engagement with these agencies in a productive learning environment the student can move towards personal and individual lifeworld autonomy. (NSW Visual Art Curriculum, Years 7-10, 2000, p. 1)

The statewide ARTEXPRESS exhibition showcases the best of student Visual Art learning outcomes. For many students, their parents and the wider community this popular exhibition is a most accessible example of how artworks communicate to the wider society. For many school students, visiting ARTEXPRESS on a school excursion represents their first exposure to an art museum and an art exhibition. Similarly, parents often find the school Visual Art exhibition or an ARTEXPRESS

exhibition their first taste of the art world. The exhibition which is held annually in schools, regional and state art galleries, demonstrates how displaying a resolved artwork is a very legitimate means through which the students are able to critically reflect on the effectiveness of their own and others' artwork in communicating to an audience their ideas and values.

Students studying Visual Art at all levels appreciate that an exhibition or "exhibiting", is a core component of their resolved learning experience, "everyone looks at it [ARTEXPRESS] all the time" (Beth). The pseudo ARTEXPRESS exhibition held at each school annually, prior to the final examination, is the point of final resolution of most students and the stage where their productive energies and reflections must embrace the critical responses of the audience beyond the security of the classroom and the teacher. Each school models the exhibition concept through either school and/or community art exhibitions. Commentators on the ARTEXPRESS exhibition see it as providing for parents and the community insight into how the choices that students, teachers and the exhibiting institutions of ARTEXPRESS make "mirror more authentically the influences of time, reflection, failure and revision that characterise the works of artists" (Brown, 2001, p. 9).

What is unique about the ARTEXPRESS phenomenon is that the curators and examiners of the NSW Stage 6 Visual Art examination are very mindful of the way that students use their artmaking activities to excavate their own worlds in very honest and open ways. They present each year to the next generation of budding young artists and the wider community the best technically and conceptually resolved student artworks. They ensure that the works are representative of majority and minority values in the wider community, while demonstrating innovation and the creative spirit.

Each montage, created in Stage 1, Part 1, of the longitudinal study, reported in Chapter 4 (p. 146) contains the depth and breadth of this curatorial process and emphasises the unique way that students approach the mundane, the familiar and the different. A strong sub-theme emerging from the ARTEXPRESS analysis, is that the curators have been keen to demonstrate how artmaking has

been an identity-affirming process not only for the majority of students, but also for its capacity to affirm a sense of self for students whose life experiences are more unique. The Visual Art experience teaches students to “value others and accept individuality” (Beth’s teacher).

These experiences include life-changing events, such as issues of gender, death or illness, dislocation, discrimination or war. As with a good novel or movie, more universal themes are often more powerfully conveyed through the unique, the personal and the particular. Each year, across all the works selected for ARTEXPRESS, there are powerfully affirming student works done by refugees and first generation Australians. Works such as *Cultural Change* (Joo-Lee, 1997, p. 76; M.4.1.7, p. 433), *Identity* (Tan Ly, 1997, p. 29; M.4.1.4, p. 433), *My Mother’s Story* (Park, 2001, p. 26; M.4.5.8, p. 441) and *I wore the Veil from Age Ten* (Cakal, 2003, p. 21; M.4.7.5, p. 445) are representative of students who have found the experience of artmaking a very affirming personal journey to understand their emerging new identities. The works selected are excellent examples of the many ways that students assess and reconcile their own values and beliefs, informed by personal past experiences and their present realities. The curators promote examples of inclusivity that celebrate the special, unique and different and encourage the audience to look beyond the immediate first impression to the unique story of every student.

The ARTEXPRESS exhibition has slowly raised the profile of the student artist and the annual exhibition is one of the most popular at the Art Gallery of NSW. The voice of the student artist, and the complexity of their conceptual and technical mastery, is now viewed as significant and legitimate as the students display “representational autonomy” (Brown, 2001c, p. 10). Having gained such status, the exhibition and its curatorial practices now come under the critical eye of the student. Meanwhile, the exhibition catalogue as an educational resource, and the genre styles it presents, now forms part of the classroom learning culture that is open to the critique of both teachers and students.

The Visual Art curriculum, having exposed the student to the central role of the art critic and the institutional practices of the art gallery as a cultural gatekeeper

makes a fertile and accessible area of critical investigation. The institution of ARTEXPRESS has itself become a part of the critical discourse in the artroom. Criticism is rife among students who wish to challenge some of the legitimised adolescent voices being communicated in the exhibition over those of others.

Joe was very clear about his major work expressing his doubts that the comic form had no perceived legitimacy in terms of ARTEXPRESS. He was aware that the exhibition was about “popular culture ... [and] ... the fact that few comics get represented ... in ARTEXPRESS”. He also had a ‘huge gripe’ about the way that fine artists appropriated the style of the comic artist. His commitment to his belief in the comic was so strong that his teacher comments: “he put everything on the line, his potential HSC result for his belief in the popular cultural art form of the comic”. He believed that he had chosen an art form that would not be viewed well by the examiners. While he was not selected for ARTEXPRESS, he did gain an excellent examination result.

Liam Grealy (2003, p. 43; M.4.6.9, p. 443) also viewed ARTEXPRESS as presenting the more conventional voice. He was keen to make a strong comment on establishing his identity as a young, white, middle-class male and to challenge “society’s preconceptions and the willingness to categorise based on ethnicity.” Influenced by African-American visual artists and hip hop artists, as well as previous ARTEXPRESS exhibitions, he directed his artwork to “both my society and the curators of ARTEXPRESS” (p. 43). The texts in his paintings revealing his position:

I am not an ethnic  
minority I am not  
struggling with  
suicidal tendencies I  
am not challenging  
the macho  
preconceptions of  
female beauty  
I am white I am  
middle class will you



still let me in? (Greal, 2003, p. 43)

Such comments as those above indicate the legitimacy of the ARTEXPRESS exhibition, not only to the wider community but to school students across NSW. It is also playing an active role in providing a voice for school students and an important venue for communicating current adolescent perspectives on life, society and culture. Such an immense body of excellent artworks provides evidence of a curriculum and its pedagogy that shows that senior school Visual Art is strongly “grounded in a competent grasp of the discipline, theoretical knowledge, techniques and the criteria of the HSC” ( ARTEXPRESS @ COFA, 2005).

### **6.3.2 Mediating the Adolescent Identity in the Performative Visual Learning Environment**

*Teachers afford students the time and opportunity to create work of deep personal significance. Having one's views and visions validated is a powerful incentive to learn. (Sullivan, 2003, p. 9).*

There is a consensus across all the teachers and students interviewed in this study that the most successful artworks have been produced in a learning environment that allows the students to connect in deep and meaningful ways with their own personal life experiences, their passions and the realities of their world. It is the teacher who facilitates the context of the learning and guides the students' personal discovery. It is also in this environment that students mingle, discuss and create. It is in this learning space that each student is provided with the intellectual and material means to visualise and enact their ideas, beliefs and desires and to understand the complexity and shifting nature of their existence.

The triangulations between the artist-artwork-world-audience, the conceptual frame positions of the subjective, the cultural, the structural and the postmodern, combined with a depth of multimodal performative practices, provides non-linear ways to approach the study of Visual Art and the making of artworks. Students are now required to submit bodies of work which are more revealing of an iterative, multi-faceted and developing artistic practice. These

works mirror the random patterns of life and events that constitute our evolving understanding of ourselves. The artworks are positioned in the centre on this construct as the point of reflective return. It is the performative material practices of the artmaking process that become the mechanism through which the students' re-representing self is affirmed and resolved. Each new iteration affords the student an understanding of the liminal nature of self. This moves them towards a more resolved understanding of the interpretive possibilities of their complex and multiple lifeworlds.

The power of the performative Visual Art space is that it allows students to see the "big picture" from somewhere in the particular. It provides them with technologies for both analysing or decoding and rendering form, or encoding (Sandell, 2005) in order to interrogate self. It introduces them to the world of the visual and its cultural legacies from the past and the present and its potential in the continuum of their future communicative practices. It teaches them that they have a personal point of vision, and to understand why they have come to see the world in such a particular way, and that this view can be very different from the views of others.

All the Visual Art teachers in this study affirmed the findings of the Stage 1 Part 1, Longitudinal Study and Stage 1, Part 2, Case Study analyses, finding that students are increasingly driving their intense and sustained inquiry from a personal perspective. Beth's teacher saw this as directly linked to the syllabus which she describes as "excellent ... providing a whole range of students with an academic option that also has connectedness" and "the themes they choose to study are those that relate to themselves, it may be global or very personal, personal experiences, reflections on personalities, issues they feel strongly about." Tom and Pete's teacher comments:

I don't think there's another subject as unique as Visual Arts. I think we sit alone and I think we've been, over the years trailblazers ... our subject has always been based on concept and it's not bogged down in a syllabus that promotes content ... it's skill based and we're teaching skills and we can do that across many different ways and many different areas.

All the teachers interviewed in this study felt strongly about the unique way the Visual Art learning experience helps students engage with their world. This is expressed succinctly by Joe's teacher:

The link that the students forge between their making and their ability to understand how the work relates to their lives beyond the school makes the work significant. I have found that students that have not had significant experiences are those that do not even begin to explore concepts, especially those relating to self and [do not] situate themselves firmly in the materials and techniques.

Joe's teacher also makes an interesting observation commenting: "I believe that very few [Visual] Art students start off believing that they're HSC major work [body of work] is going to be related to them". Joe's teacher further comments that: "students usually look for a particular frame (not the subjective frame) and it is through the 'research' or 'inquiry' processes of their practice, their search for intention, that the students arrive at the subjective frame."

The above is substantiated by Tom's and Pete's teacher from the case study who is a Head Teacher of a Creative and Performing Arts Department in a senior college. This teacher prepares approximately 60 senior Visual Art students each year for the Visual Art HSC examination and has now been teaching this subject for twenty-three years. He believes that the search for intention by the student is all connected to what he calls "the issues of ownership." For students to produce high quality artwork, they must be empowered "from the very beginning to the end ... I think that comes back to the subjective frame. I have a student at the moment doing ... computer graphics and she is talking about 'Oh, I go up to the farm on the weekend and I have photos of the swing,' and then that's coming back into the artwork she's putting together. So it's their environment, but beyond that I think that it's that subjectiveness."

Students studying Visual Art come to realise that they can position themselves as both the acting subject creating possibilities and that their representations of self and the world also become the objects of their critical reflection. The repetition of this iterative process of creation, reflection, recreation or re-

representation to resolution lies at the heart of classroom practice of which the exhibition is the final communicative act. Student works present “multiple perspective, layered relationships, constructing and expressing meaning in a unified form of representation” (Yerbury, 2004, p.7).

Working individually and collectively with the students, the teacher is able to move them towards the realisation that understanding self can be a process of interrogating the world through the study of artists, society and culture and through artmaking. Beth’s paintings, particularly the *Eighth Day*, demonstrates how even a student who comes to Visual Art late in her schooling when provided with such a learning environment, can grasp the relationships between critical understandings, intuitive and performative action, as a process of affirming her beliefs and identity. It has also helped her validate her own position relative to more universal beliefs. One of the many artists that Beth studied was the contemporary indigenous Australian artist Tracey Moffat. In her interview Beth comments on how the series *Scarred for Life* had an enormous impact on her. “She did all different tragic life experiences ... real life stories ... being raped and traumatised by their parents ... I was so impacted by her work.”

Beth talks in her interview about her personal journey to reconcile how current beliefs, ideologies and events in the world manifest in very negative ways and how she would position herself. She describes how she deconstructed the ideas and techniques in the Moffat series and reworked them to make her own meaning. “I did exactly the same format that she did with her photos with a little caption underneath and the date and so I put a picture of me and I put ‘Beth Robinson-Born into Sin, Saved by Grace.’” Beth placed herself into the context, and swapped over the dark ideas for more positive ones that reflected her Christian beliefs. The resolution of her ideas came through the process of constant reworking of image and idea, “I would always add stuff, paint over it, add stuff...etcetera.”

Beth had been provided with a learning environment that gave her confidence to explore her personal beliefs in a very open and critical learning context. The

way that her teacher approached Beth's individual study is reflected in the teacher's quotes below:

Beth's learning journey was really complex and layered ... Beth learned about communication and how to deal with difficult issues through art. She developed a sense of embracing values and beliefs of others through her study of art and through the relationships that she developed in the classroom with students that she had not been familiar with before art ... Beth now has an understanding of the communication of feelings and values through art and a deep understanding of how art reflects changes, values and issues of the world. (Beth's Visual Art classroom teacher)

Brown (2001c), commenting on the interactions between the teacher and the student in the Visual Art class that spawns the ARTEXPRESS outcomes, sees it as "one of the most culturally sensitive relationships in the senior school"(p. 9).

What are the qualities of such a learning environment that nurtures such sensitivities in a student about themselves and those around them? What insights can be gleaned from the students' comments about this learning that has made them so confident, about their learning in Visual Art, so confident, in fact, that when asked to be a part of this study, most felt no need to be identified by a pseudonym. They were still "very proud of their work" (Abby), "they never forget their experiences" (Pete and Tom's teacher) and were still re-affirming much of what they discovered about themselves during those adolescent years in the Visual Art classroom. "I look back five years later and realise how important the work was for me to undertake and that I really appreciate its representations and underlying themes that I hold very close to myself" (Patrick). The exhibition process and the examination are both factors in the development of such self-assured positions in the case study students. Bringing an artwork to a point of conceptual and artistic resolve is central to the communicative process for the Visual Art student. The role of the art teacher in such a curriculum is to nurture the performative and reflective process and

develop sensibilities in the students that support communicative knowing outcomes.

### **6.3.3 The Studio Learning Environment**

*I try to set up a classroom for the senior students that a 'studio-like' space. (Joe's teacher)*

The defining feature of this learning in Visual Art, alluded to by all students and teachers in the study, was the creation of a learning environment that was collectively defined as a "studio space". This term has come from the professional art world. In the secondary school context, it takes many forms and each student experienced a different version of the studio space. The teachers in this study while aware of the physical, administrative and resource limitations of their studio spaces described their studios more by the range and quality of the learning experiences, the freedom they offered for experimentation and by the nature of the learning relationships they were able to foster.

Teachers in the study commented on the environments they had created in the following ways: "My philosophy has always been to try and provide them with as many experiences as possible and that's why here we are doing sculpture and ceramics and digital and the whole gamut of artmaking experiences" (Tom's and Pete's teacher), "they have a studio-like space ... I encourage students to use art language during all classroom discussions and regularly workshop a variety of techniques and material experiences" (Joe's teacher) and "a freedom" to explore their own imagination and that of their fellow students and to become "independent learners" (Tom's and Pete's teacher).

Beyond the freedom to elect their own authentic content for inquiry many of the teachers and students in the study, along with commentators such as Yerbury (2004), described the studio spaces as offering "learning environments of quiet reflection and intense personal inquiry" (p.10) as a key defining characteristic of the learning environment. The studio space can broadly be defined as an open, semi-structured community of independent learners in an inclusive setting which caters for a range of activities from robust group discussions, to technical and material demonstration, to the performative solitude of the individual worker.

These studio spaces, in some instances, such as Tom's and Pete's senior college, offer individual learning bays that the teacher sees as supporting ownership and authentic Visual Art inquiry. When senior students do not have access to a special space, teachers often create what might be seen as virtual studios that are constructed and collapsed according to the rhythms of the school timetable and the flows of the students such as those created at Beth's school. Teachers in these contexts are creative in their efforts to open up these spaces and nurture interactions between student groups. Beth's teacher, who teaches at least fifty percent of all senior students in her comprehensive high school, even finds potential studio spaces in the corridors. Access to practical reflective spaces means providing students with open facilitation spaces whenever there is the time and the opportunity, such as before school, during scheduled lessons, lunch breaks and in study periods.

The students in the case study all spoke of the opportunities for learning that were created by the informal learning communities afforded by these random and free-flowing gatherings in the artroom, often comprised of both senior and junior students. Even in what could be described as a crowded and often chaotic movement of activity at Beth's school, she reflects on its freedom: "I loved the art room. I felt I could just be myself and anything ... [here] anything goes ... [my teacher] was so good and she just accepted that I wanted to do something different ... she just knew me." Beth would spend at least four of her study periods in her studio space each week. Tom's and Pete's mother reflects on how the boys "loved" their studio space. "I think they had a different relationship with their [Visual Art] teachers [than other teachers]!"

#### **6.3.4 Co-constructing the Learning in a Safe and Supportive Environment of the Studio Artroom**

*Art teachers insist their role is interactively tailored to the emerging interests of individual students. (Brown, 2001c, p.9)*

Analysis of the data from the interviews and document sources reveals that the energetic dialogue about the world, artworks, audiences and artists, between the teacher and student around the production of an artwork in the

studio environment, nurtures the co-construction of many excellent learning outcomes across the senior years. Revealing the complexity and legitimacy of this learning in assessment terms has always proved problematic for Visual Art teachers. Bodies of work or a collection of work, has now been recognised as the most authentic means to embed the shift to a philosophical understanding that acknowledges that interpretive understandings multiply critical and expressive solutions. This shift away from the single resolved artwork enables examiners to see the development of the learning relationship between teacher and student more easily. It also allows the student to demonstrate the generative conceptual and technical, visual and communicative proficiency over time.

Brown (2001c) identifies that “the single artwork conceals some of the significant educational contributions to artmaking that ought to be declared” (p. 9) through the exhibition of more than one resolved artwork. As such, a Body of Work (BOW) could be represented as a series of photographs, a collection of drawings and paintings, or a film, animation or video, demonstrating the depth and complexity of the issues explored by students in the Visual Art classroom. Brown also emphasises that this learning takes place through a teacher’s “collegial collaboration in the production of student ideas” (p. 9) occurring in the studio space.

Sullivan (2003) describes such learning encounters as “intellectual jousting” (p. 10). In this space, students critically and intuitively respond to all the experiences presented by the teacher and the wider classroom. Such a learning environment encourages the voice of the creator who deconstructs and re-constructs meanings from both discursive and intuitive understandings that evolve from a considered and reflective engagement with ideas and the materiality of visual modes of production. All the parents in this study agreed that these spaces were highly motivating for their children and that artmaking is an “incredibly important vehicle” (Tom and Pete’s mother) to express ideas.

The learning relationship between the Visual Art teacher and the Visual Art student(s) is one that develops an intellectual bond of trust. From the teachers’



perspective, “We provide an environment in which it is safe for students to play seriously and express themselves openly through an on going and active conversation with materials and with us as teachers” (Teacher comment, ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 22). The teacher in the Visual Art learning context of the student is seen as the significant other. There is also an acknowledgement that there can also be other players, such as fellow classmates, other teachers, parents and friends, who also critique as audience or position themselves as a co-constructor of the learning. Tom and Pete both confirmed this in their interview, conveying how they felt “they could talk to all the art teachers about their ideas” and that they “really enjoyed the atmosphere and conversations with their peers.”

Developing this understanding requires individual discussions and the dedication of a considerable amount of time to the facilitation and the exploration of issues relating to something that is important to the student. For Joe’s teacher, one of two who influenced his learning, such a discussion “proved to be most valuable” as she continued to “present evidence for Joe that supported his beliefs.” She provided him with reference material and literacy strategies from other commentators on the art of the comic such as Scott McLeod and she supported his desire to make a strong personal statement about the comic genre, popular culture and fine art.

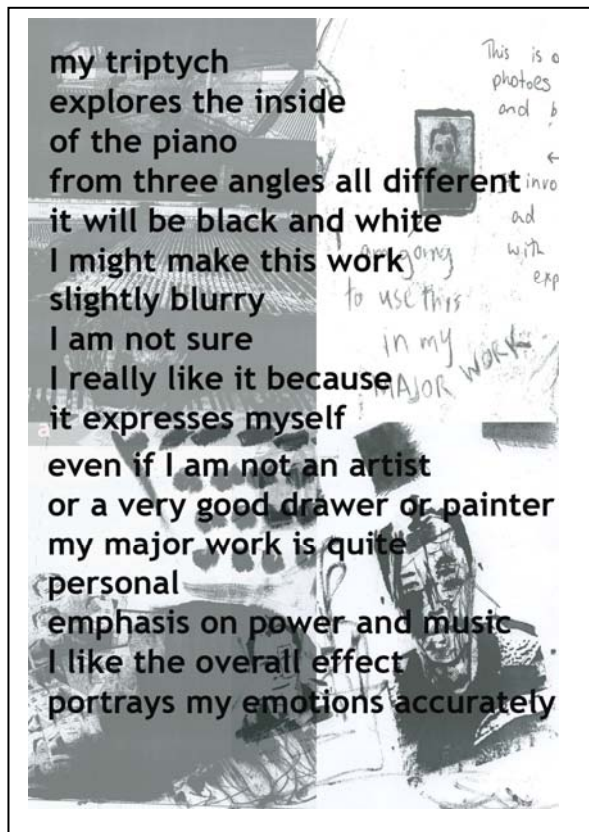
Beth describes energetically her enthusiasm for these encounters, “Yeah the learning thing ... I would do something and she would like approve it ... I’d finish a panel and she would say ‘no fix this up’, she directed me most in year 11 ... A really good Visual Art teacher is someone who doesn’t do it ... she did hardly anything physically on my painting ... and she understands that everyone is going to be different ... she knew Katie would be over there doing her fine painting and it would take three hours ... and ...she knew I was over there sloshing away.”

The integrity of the relationship between the teacher and the student in the co-constructed learning relationship can best be described in terms of how the students saw this learning relationship. All the students in this study perceived

the artworks as their own, conceptually and aesthetically. All the students talked about their own learning journey and artmaking as a process of personal validation. Joe confirmed this in his statement “I am going to do it how I feel comfortable ... I let my own style come through.”

Art teachers see themselves as facilitators who mediate between their perceived understanding of the intentions of their students and their desire to support the student towards a conceptual and aesthetically resolved visual expression. In this process the VAPD is seen as a “window into the concepts and interests of the student” (Joe’s teacher) in these learning environments. The VAPD is a specified pedagogical tool used to support the assessment of a student’s learning and has been confirmed by both the students, parents and teachers as a very useful tool for the documentation of ideas. Patrick’s mother comments on how the diary was very important to him. She once asked “How come you put so much time into this when you’ve got to put so much time into the actual work?” She recalls Patrick’s reply: “it’s like the blueprint for the work.” Joe’s teacher also affirms the importance of the learning that occurs in the diary space. “The VAPD is extremely important to student development as it allows personal exploration and builds confidence and concepts in a form that allows students to share their thoughts visually. Joe’s diary allowed him to experiment and develop characters...it is an imperative reflection tool, given the timeframe [of ten months] students can continuously track their own development ...I think the diary was very important to him.”

The diary represented to both the students and the teachers an intermediary learning space and it was often far more revealing in many instances than the often heavily symbolised final artworks. In the VAPD the students articulate their intention, in a more personal and private way. Here, they “build ideas and convert them into forms” (Joe’s Art teacher), as they reflect and build confidence. The montage below (M.6.7), from Patrick’s diary, demonstrates how intentions, images and texts merge through reflection towards statements of personal resolution.



M.6.5. Patrick (2000),  
Montage of VAPD

In the case of Ceara the large artwork had long since been disassembled and her diaries were now treasured memories of her learning, five years on.

The VAPD is also a reflective visual and text-based learning tool for the student and also provides a rich source of information about the desires and directions of the student's learning. In each case study, the diary was an essential validation tool for the researcher between the conversations with the students and their parents and the analysis of the artworks. Similarly, the analysis of the diary presents for the teacher another aid to support conversations into the student's past and present thinking facilitating connections and links between concepts and aesthetic reasoning. It is a powerful tool and teaching aid in such a heavily student-directed and reflective learning environment. As Beth identified, however, it is often difficult to leave the security of exploring to begin the task of translating this learning into an aesthetically resolved artwork. Such a process requires special learning support.

### ***A community of reflective, ethical, personal and emotional learning***

Providing a safe and secure learning environment is particularly important when students choose to use their BOW to explore personal and ethical issues. These can range from global injustice to mental health issues or significant personal tragedies. Reflecting on the Visual Art studio environment in her school as a “sanctuary” for her students, Beth’s teacher describes atmosphere as one of “community”. In this community, “students share ideas and values”, as she works towards the creation of a “safe and comforting environment” where there is a sense of “individual achievement and most importantly creativity.” The most important thing for her is the relationship between all three, the community of learning, fostering creativity and providing a safe place where there is a “valuing of beliefs.” She comments: “students convey to me that art lessons are the most valued [in their school experience, and] they frequently refer to the fact that they learn about tolerance and acceptance in the artroom.” In the artroom, she states: “they learn to respect the art and values of a wide range of cultures and develop an understanding of how art reflects the wider social structure of the world.”

The intensity of ethical investigation within a Visual Art classroom community can be further revealed through the narratives of Joe’s classroom teacher whose stories are representative of many other Visual Art teachers. “One student chose to explore the issues related to a car accident that occurred during the HSC year and involved a group of friends [she was not in the car].’ The artroom filled with “great tension” as “some students felt anger towards the driver (their classmate).” The student who produced the work approached her personal inquiry with intense resolve and many of the raw and personal issues for the student and her classmates were ever present as visual reflective prompts throughout the year. In this sense, her classmates were her critical and communicative audience where she negotiated all the other possibilities and interpretations that emerged in the casual and informal dialogue about ethics and behaviour with the other students. As an aside, this work was successfully resolved to a level of aesthetic and communicative proficiency sufficient to be pre-selected for ARTEXPRESS.

Joe's teacher also told the story of a particular student with a mental illness whose only motivation to stay at school was to complete her HSC Visual Art. The "process had meant a great deal to her even though it had proved to be a very difficult time to explore her position on these issues." These stories are not unique and many of the ARTEXPRESS student artworks presented in Stage One, such as *Myclonic Epilepsy* (Middleton, 2003, p. 95; M.4.2.5, p. 435), *My Mother wears a jellyfish in her bra* (Batt, 1997, p. 10; M.4.5.7, p. 441) and *Michael* (Moyle, 2001, p. 25; M.4.5.2, p. 441), are public testimony to the very personal nature of the student learning which would have occurred in similar studio learning spaces across the state of NSW.

### **6.3.5 Creating Reflective and Performative Spaces and Ethical Dispositions**

*Ethics is a set of optional rules that assess what we do, what we say, to the ways of existing involved.* (Deleuze, 1990, p.100)

The teachers interviewed in the study had very strong ideas about their role in nurturing the development of the reflective, ethical disposition in their students and student agency. Parents, students and teachers found the performative pedagogy that operates in the Visual Art classroom a positive and affirming practice that informs the self. In the performative space, students discover that meanings emerge and truth is not absolute, but relative, to each student's lifeworld. In the Visual Art classroom, students develop sensitive, aesthetic and ethical behaviours. The learning occurs on two levels, namely, in the classroom community and in the personal performative spaces.

Joe's teacher, like many other Visual Art teachers, "encourages the students to adopt a personal story when considering the production of an artwork" and she believes "that personal narrative is a meaningful position for students to consider." Her teaching strategy is to present students with evidence of how other artists, including ARTEXPRESS artists, have approached similar issues or questions about themselves and their world. These examples are always discussed within the context of the time, location, social context and the personal life of the artist in which they have been produced. Tom's and Pete's

teacher affirmed that the curriculum that the teachers work with in NSW schools supports the grounding of their learning investigations from “within themselves, from a personal point of view, from the subjective frame, I think.”

Joe’s thinking on the matter represents the collective voice of the students in the case study who were asked what is the most valued aspect of their learning in Visual Art in relation to the product or the process (or learning). Joe replied, “the growth definitely because I was able to do something that I wanted to say for a long time and I thought I’d be creamed for saying it but the exact opposite happened. That was sort of an eye-opener I think.”

Patrick’s mother reflected on how important the process of affirming self through artmaking was for Patrick. Through his art, he has not only been able to resolve issues about his sexuality, “get it out in his painting”, but he had discovered much about his aesthetic and personal need for balance in every aspect of his life. “I think he processed a lot of that [his values and beliefs] through his art ... He can talk about things now he is older ... at that time he needed a vehicle to get it out and express himself and then eventually start to talk ... because its very personal ... feelings ... particularly ... for kids and probably particularly puberty, I think it’s a good outlet, a way for them to express themselves.”

The student learning in the study also extended beyond the classroom, beyond the teacher to the parents, the critical friends, family and the school community. Each student in the study used communicative capacity to express beliefs and values against the wider norms of the extended family and community. Both Tom and Pete were intent on using their artmaking to explore ideas around mutual visibility. They chose to explore how their personal feelings about the importance of their friends, family and the environment were viewed relative to the extended community and the bigger picture of Australian society.

Pete studied the satirical observations of Australian artists on beach culture to try to understand his own cultural identity. Tom explored modern symbolism in search of ways to depict his own world and both boys were fully committed to

exploring their beliefs and ideas through very practical and personal means. This way of knowing the world was affirmed by the parent who commented that, for the boys, “everything’s ... got to have a meaning ...it’s got to come from you.” The things valued in their lives were those things that they had become “attached” to in their lifeworld. For Tom and Pete, it was the environment and the creative experience and practical understandings they had learned to value since childhood.

Both boys echoed the sentiments expressed by the teachers in the study. Students, when faced with the prospect of foregoing Visual Art in their senior years to pursue more vocationally rewarding subjects, feel very strongly that they must continue their practical and expressive learning experiences. Tom’s and Pete’s mother commented: “I think it gave them an opportunity to learn about themselves, to discover what they enjoyed about Art ... it gave them a bit of time too [in their pressured year] ... Tom realised if he didn’t do it he would miss it and that was because he enjoyed it so much.” On Pete’s work, “[Visual] Art probably helped him get straight about ... things [like the environment, friends and his surfing culture].” Joe’s teacher reflected on how one student used the artwork to reconcile childhood issues related to identity and community in an Aboriginal community. The student’s mother was “just so thankful they [the parent and student] were able to revisit that time in their life because a lot had happened since then ... his mother has personally thanked me.”

Many student journeys are sensitive and teachers are very aware of the need to protect such a vulnerable process.

Once it’s resolved or they feel its resolved, they are quite happy to put it out there... Sometimes I can see where they are heading before they can, and I make sure that they have been introduced to all the skills and getting competent with the skills that they are going to need to complete the task... we look at other artists, and how they have dealt with similar situations. (Joe’s teacher)

Brown (2001c) highlights this concept of giving the student time and space by explaining that, in the studio learning environment of the Visual Art classroom,

there is room for students to pause and to find a certain amount of freedom to ponder on whatever is important to them. In this space, the learning is “interactively tailored to the emerging interests of individual students” (p. 9).

### **6.3.6 Revisiting the Artwork**

Revisiting their artwork and their HSC Visual Art learning journey after twelve months or five years, the students all talk fondly of the challenges, failures, experiments and final satisfaction they had from producing and exhibiting their artwork to family, friends and the community. The reflections of the students confirm that the learning for them was deeply personal, enormously rewarding and authentic. It connected their everyday experiences with profound understandings about themselves, their immediate personal relationships and with the events and happenings of their global community. For all of them, Visual Art provided them with agency and a way to mediate the experiences of their world.

What they take with them into their adult lives from these experiences with their teacher, learning facilitator and mentor is the way the performative and reflective experience developed their understandings of themselves as individuals. It taught them an appreciation of their emerging creative dispositions, how to be task-oriented, logical and an innovative thinker and clear about their communicative intentions. It also taught them to be resilient and persistent in achieving these goals over a sustained and managed period of time. The artistic process is long and often filled with self-doubt, students learn to be “persistent”, develop an “inventive mind”, “do something big and stick with it,” (Tom’s and Pete’s mother) towards resolution.

For Joe, it gave him a “freedom to do anything and to get all these [ideas] that are running around your head on to paper ... That to me is the best part about art.” Joe learnt that he was “stubborn” and that to communicate his beliefs he would need to be proficient in his capacities in the comic genre. During his study, he developed a very critical awareness of how popular culture and fine art are active agents in the production of everyday culture. He also learned the literacies and visual proficiencies of an accomplished cartoonist and storyteller.



Finally, he explored his personal belief in honesty and integrity through his decision to use himself as his main character because he “wanted to be there and say, well this is what I think.”

Abby enjoyed “pushing the boundaries ... understanding the conceptual ... it was a real challenge for me to be able to do that and to be able to succeed in doing that.” Directing her own path was an essential part of the value of the experience, “I feel very confident with myself as a person and intellectually so I think that sort of was just the beginning - the first step I guess [to understanding self].” Looking back, she is still “very happy that [she] could paint that ... I’m still glad that it ended up that way.”

When asked whether there were any regrets about studying Visual Art, Beth replied “No way!” Reflecting on Beth’s learning and character development her teacher stated, “[Visual Art] gave Beth a whole new dimension to her life and she loved being a part of that crazy messy creative buzz that is the artroom. She grew significantly as a person and will always now engage in artistic pursuits ... as she has a deeper understanding of how art reflects the changes, values and issues of the world.” Visual Art learning and the ARTEXPRESS experience helps young people express ideas and affirm and strengthen their character.

### **6.3.7: *Visuality and the Performative Visual Learning Environment, Developing Visual Proficiency***

*We are made up of relations, and experience makes sense to us only if we understand the relations in practice between conflicting schemes of the said experience. (Semetsky, 2005, p. 89)*

In the earlier section of this meta-analysis, there was significant evidence to demonstrate that working with the technologies of the visual has provided the students with extraordinary communicative capacities. They are able to express their understandings of themselves as individuals and how they have come to be who they are in the complex and often conflicting schemes of their ever-changing world. The performative pedagogy revealed in the analysis is presented as powerfully identity-affirming. It is an environment that supports the

students in the development of a creative, ethical and positive disposition towards affirming self.

Conclusions that have emerged from the analysis of the case study are that the Visual Art curriculum structure provides the framework for each student to find a way to critically evaluate the events that occur in their lives and find agency. The visual learning takes particular vantage points and students mediate them in very personal ways. From such an orientation, students learn that life is a complex web of relationships and experiences; that agency is constituted through a capacity to employ critical skills to understand how different relationships can present in conflicting ways; and that intuitive insight and creativity help in finding ways to reconcile between these forces. More importantly, students learn that increasingly, the values and beliefs of the wider community are being presented to them through visual technologies and that the critical and expressive visual skills they have developed will help them mediate and communicate their intentions with proficiency. "It actually made me more aware, I felt more aware of what was happening and the way that I could just express it...in the *Eighth Day*" (Beth).

Each of the students in the case study can be located in the longitudinal categories identified in Stage 1, Part 1. Patrick and Abby have positioned their inquiry about the emergent adult and the unique self that lies underneath the surface and communicated this through the visualising of themselves and their environment in the form of the self-portrait. They focused on their physicality, and their emotional and psychological selves captured in their special moments, either playing the piano or swimming each morning.

Tom chose to orientate his understanding of self in his artworks through a strong use of abstract and symbolic forms. The forms and images, deconstructed and re-constructed from the vast cultural diversity of visual symbols were contained in the collective existence of mankind. He has actualised his desire to hold onto the friendships and memories of play from his childhood while symbolically portraying himself as the universal man, reaching towards the future. For Tom, his strong abstract human form on the ladder

could be interpreted as his journey towards the imminent HSC, the inevitable journey from adolescence to adulthood or about the aspirations and the desire to reach his personal goals.

Pete has a narrative to tell about his surfing culture and himself, and he chooses to tell his story through a satirical eye and a love of the comic, the comic character and the comedy of life through both personal and tangential relationships.

Joe, Ceara and Beth are fascinated by the way that culture shapes them and those around them. Beth and Ceara have a passion of understanding how images construct realities. They play with the juxtaposition of images and texts and energetically inquire into the way that the media presents realities in their desire to understand their own beliefs and values. Joe's passion to understand how culture shapes and communicates values and beliefs is channelled through his total commitment to the genre of the comic, and his love of characterisation as a narrative tool.

The students in the case study represent many other students, and their artworks are evidence of their skill in producing and communicating their realities about who they are. Each student has been able to explain how studying Visual Art has encouraged him/her to orientate their vision from more than one position, to pause and, in the moments of reflective return and before action, consider the possibilities.

Each student displayed the phenomena of resistance and questioning that typify the disposition of the adolescent. They found authentic and legitimate ways to reconcile the important events that were impacting on them during their senior years of schooling, their environment, their families, their friends and the events that shape them. Visual Art taught them to consider critically the agencies in society and culture that are active in constructing both a hegemonic and normalising profile of the individual. Most importantly, they spoke of the confidence and strength they had gathered from experiencing liminal spaces and the performative materiality that is captured in the Visual Art learning site.

They valued the material practice and the reflective spaces provided in the artmaking experience. They spoke of their journeys towards a reconciliation of their immediate desires within the wider operational sphere of life. Artmaking was, for each of the case study students a significant learning experience. Their reflections of the HSC Visual Art experience and the choices they have made since leaving school demonstrate their potential capacity to continue using this critical, reflective and intuitive logic in creative relational ways.

The Visual Art curriculum in NSW offers a structure that encourages a safe, collaborative, critical and reflective learning environment, together with the performative material experience, to facilitate personal agency for each student through artmaking. The accumulative evidence from both Stage 1, Part 1 and 2 demonstrates the depth, significance and power of this learning to the student while Stage 2, Meta Analysis, reveals how this learning is realised through the development of visual and communicative proficiency which both the student and parent valued highly.

This analysis has shown how students, teachers and parents were able to articulate the legitimate role of the visual in constructing understandings about self and its authentic role in communicating values and beliefs in the twenty-first<sup>t</sup> century. All expressed the value of the skill of visual proficiency to the individual in allowing them to authentically engage with many of the forces that shape them. Each student in the case study reflected on the value of their acquired visual and communicative competencies in helping them to understand their own adolescent experiences and movement towards adulthood. They saw the skill of visuality as a legitimate means of fostering their capacities to rationally and intuitively mediate the complexity and conflict of relationships of life experiences in a visually saturated twenty-first century. The performative material experience was treasured for its capacity to mediate their values and beliefs and help them creatively respond to their everyday experiences. These skills have helped them to make sense of their world and their personal desires and were valued as having life-long relevance.

## **7.0 Discussion: Performative, Visual and Communicative Practices in a Post-secondary School Visual Art Learning Context and Beyond.**

*Subjectification is an artistic activity distinct from and lying outside, knowledge and power*  
(Deleuze, 1990, p. 114)

### **Introduction**

In a world of accelerating change, students will need to develop dispositions that provide them with the capacity to respond in imaginative and positive ways to express their feelings and considered thoughts about themselves and the world around them. Attending to issues of subjectivity through various semiotic registers is increasingly important, as mass media creates global infusion (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Deleuze, 1990, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Kress, 1998, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998; Mansfield, 2000) and subjectivity is increasingly a machinic assemblage of energy, time and space (Guattari, 1995). The research has revealed that a visual and performative pedagogy, facilitated by a postmodern curriculum, can support ethical awareness towards citizenship understandings. The learning outcomes from the curriculum identify that creating and exhibiting artworks develops communicative competence within a socio-cultural paradigm of learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). In this environment, the teacher acts as cultural worker (Freire, 2005) and the artistry of teaching as performative pedagogy is emphasised (Pineau, 1994; Sellar, 2005; Warren, 2007).

The performative nature of arts learning is increasingly being identified as providing students with individual receptivity and multiple narrative capacities of imaging possibilities (Alexander, Anderson & Gallegos, 2004; Finley, 2005; McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood & Park, 2003; Warren, 2007). The research has identified that visual artmaking supports an aesthetic and ethical orientation in understanding (Deleuze, 1990; Guattari, 1995). This is facilitated through a reflective and discursive consideration of feelings and reasoned understandings. Through performative material acts the students express personal and communal meaning framed within the shared cultural heritage (McCarthy et al., 2004) of the visual world. Visual Art curriculum, with postmodern orientations and a visual culture focus provides the visual,

reflective and performative material practices (Walker, 2004) that connect the student directly with the new virtual technologies and visual communicative practices of the twenty-first century.

The findings from this research into the NSW Visual Art curriculum, its pedagogy and its student learning outcomes, have identified, through an analysis of ARTEXPRESS and Case Study students, that students are increasingly asking: “who am I?” questions and using their artmaking to explore subjectivity possibilities presented as self-narrative. Across the years studied, 1991-2005, students have shifted their study focus significantly from modernist notions of abstract expressive representations to more expressive figurative multiple self-narrative or figurative perspectives. Significantly, seventy percent of all students in this time period chose to inquire directly into their personal worlds and use their classroom artmaking as a social, reflective and technical activity. The narrative form allowed them to critically and intuitively inquire into what constitutes self through authentic means.

The following discussion will address the major research questions investigated in this study as outlined in Chapter 1. The research sought to investigate whether Visual Art inquiry has the capacity to support the negotiation of self and ethical understandings, through an understanding of one’s personal experience shaped within a socio-cultural paradigm. Furthermore, it sought to inquire into the nature of the performative pedagogy in the NSW Visual Art classroom, and whether the skill of visibility and the dispositions it fosters bridge the spaces between school life and real life. The questions in the research centre around:

1. The nature of learning in a curriculum, informed by the theory of communicative practice and postmodern constructs. Does the curriculum provide the opportunity for the generation of creative possibilities of self and provide a voice or agency to the individual, through a personal narrative orientation?
2. Inquiry into the teleological intentions of students in relation to socio-cultural thinking as they inform the production of subjectivity. What are the key characteristics of these artmaking intentions and do students employ mutual visibility logic to their inquiry? Does the performative act

of artmaking, as narrative, reveal deep understandings about self and other?

3. Visual Art inquiry, as visual and performative communicative narrative supports the development of ethical and aesthetic judgments. It asks whether the students use artmaking to reflect on the production of subjectivity or identity, as they inform values and beliefs and social behaviours.
4. The characteristics of a Visual Art performative pedagogy and its learning community. How are the skills of critical, self-reflexive imaging practices and communicative competency developed to support the construction of a “mutable and ongoing ensemble of narratives and performance” (Pineau, 1994, p.10)
5. Thinking dispositions and communicative skills developed during the study of Visual Art. It asks: are these dispositions perceived by past students and their parents are relevant to the lives of the student beyond school? How significant do they rate the ability to express and communicate using images? Do they continue to use images or thinking as image? Does their artmaking move them towards positions of reconciliation?

### **7.1 The Art of Visuality and Learning About Self and Others**

The study aimed to reveal the nature of the learning situated within the embodied experience of making images for post-compulsory students in the Australian, NSW Visual Art HSC. The site was explored for its legitimacy as a relevant meaning-making platform for young adults about self and the value of the learning beyond schooling. More specifically, it aimed to investigate the kinds of seeing or visual epistemology that the students explored and developed while studying the Visual Art curriculum. It sought evidence for the claim that when a curriculum provides a conceptual framework, it constructs an interpretive and reflective relationship between the artist, the artwork, the world and the audience. In other words, it can bridge the artworld and the lifeworlds of the students (McKeon, 1994).

Furthermore, it explored the qualitative learning experience of “seeing” or “visualising” through the activity of artmaking as a valid form of socio-cultural research (Sullivan, 2005). It examined how students, as artists, inquire into the social actions and cultural practices of their world and how they grasp the meanings of their activity as affirming action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Grasping the meaning, finding what it is that you want to know, requires a focus on self through perceptual, self-referential and self-reflexive acts (Kosuth, 1981). Such processes were observed being used by students, to open up an expressive commentary, which ranged from personal, spiritual, aesthetic and cultural, to historical. In this capacity, imaging represents to the students a powerful cultural, social and personal signifier and informs a meta-physical construction of social reality (Searle, 1995).

The results of this study have also been framed by the current research of McCarthy et al. (2004) in *Gifts of the Muse* which reports that the arts generally promote individual receptivity to new perspectives and tolerance for others. These are two significant benefits that can contribute to studying in the arts (p. 69) within a creative and aesthetic paradigm. In socio-cultural terms, Visual Art education, in this study, was identified as nurturing artists/designers as personal communicators and culturally and socially sensitive citizens. In this capacity, artmaking was observed as a unique epistemology that supported the acquisition of visual creative possibilities as they inform individual subjectivities. The evidence extends Eisner’s (2001a) ideas that the arts provide a unique way of knowing which transforms consciousness, through the qualitative experience, informing beliefs and values and one’s unique individuality. It identified that the performative actions of artmaking supported multiple and inconsistent realities and ideas. The reflective and creative dispositions developed in Visual Art provided connectivity between conflicting beliefs, values and actions towards the production of multiple self-narratives.

The research identified that a focus on the concept of agencies in the artworld, embodied in the intentional and functional relationship between the artists, their artworks and their communicative actions, promoted, deep personal socio-



cultural understandings. Research evidence identified that the performative pedagogy, in this curriculum context, was seen to nurture a social and moral ecology (Guattari, 1995). The claims made by the curriculum that, in the relationship, “artmaking, critical and historical study, students learn to value the role of Visual Art in cultural practices and the significance of expressive representation providing insights into themselves, art and the world” (NSW Stage 6 Syllabus, Visual Art, 1999, p.12-14) were supported.

The students and parents confirmed that Visual Art provided a means of dialectically acquiring visual and communicative proficiency. The overall findings of the research identified that learning, in the NSW Visual Art curriculum, focused on the qualitative perceptual experiences of students and the influence of fine art, popular culture and the media. Students in the study were encouraged to draw on life experiences as they inform the realities of their world, the relationships of knowledge and power that underpin visual systems, and the interpretive possibilities that surround all visual phenomena. Visibility was identified by the students as an important critical and expressive activity that they identified as being increasingly significant to them in its own right (Collins, 1990; Rose, 2007; Stafford, 1996; Sullivan, 2005) and as being an authentic semiotic practice.

This communicative practice was identified as useful in navigating the adolescent experience and the communities of inquiry found in the Visual Art studio-learning classroom. It allowed the students to project their ideas, values and beliefs to a wider audience through artmaking. The findings from this research support the hypothesis that proficiency in the skill of visuality, achieved through performative material practice, the kind of learning observed in the artmaking outcomes of Visual Art in NSW post-secondary schooling, is significant in informing critical self-actualisation, agency and positive dispositions.

Visual Art, as agency, developed new creative vantage points, or visibilities that were framed by the culture of the student. The student saw these as authentically orientated to their reality. Finding ways to communicate personal

desires was a significant learning objective. The study has been able to reveal deep insights into how the students use their expressive, performative actions as tools that “bring(s) the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 249). In so doing, they demonstrate sensitivities towards inclusivity, consensus and democratic practices. The evidence further supported Sullivan’s (2005) claim that Visual Art practices provide structure, action and agency respectively and that it is a “reflexive meta-theoretical practice” (p.95).

## **7.2 Visual Culture and Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Self**

### **Narrative and the Skill of Visual and Performative Communicative Knowing**

The first question in the study sought to identify the potential of the NSW Visual Art curriculum to provide opportunity for the generation of creative possibilities of self and provide a voice or agency to the individual through a personal narrative orientation. The students who studied the post-secondary NSW Visual Art curriculum revealed that they had developed the capacities to mediate their visual global world when events presented as inconsistent or conflicting. The students developed a critical understanding of the importance of the field of cultural studies, and many explored the relationships between image, text and power (Barker, 2000; Schirato & Yell, 2000; Schirato & Webb, 2004; Kinchelo & McLaren, 2005) and used this understanding to validate their own realities.

Students in the study demonstrated a critical knowledge of the visual and how media imaging practices contribute to the cultural collision of belief systems, social values and cultural identities. Evidence from the research revealed that students drew on the full range of visual symbolic heritages to represent their narratives. Many students worked directly with issues of cultural identities, such as the works, *Cultural Change* (Lee, 1997, p. 76; M.4.1.7, p. 433), *Myoptic* (Chen, 2005; M.4.2.1; p. 435) and, *My Mother’s Story* (Park, 2001, p. 26; M.4.5.8, p. 441).

Visual Art students in the NSW Visual Art curriculum studied both the institutionalised practices embedded in the fine art field and how images (as symbol systems) and artefacts, in the media and popular culture, are significant in an understanding of art, society and culture. Juxtaposition and appropriation as skills within visuality were strongly represented and appeared as central tools in the development of students' critical understandings about images, power and meanings. The skill of visuality was applied across the full repertoire of symbols, signs and commodities, drawn from both fine art and popular culture contexts (Barnett, 2003). Students demonstrated their ability to understand how values and meanings are attached to cultural images and understood how these images mutate and can present conflict in contemporary, visual communicative practices.

Visual culture perspectives present the importance of understanding "seeing" as a visual experience (Duncum, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; Freedman, 2000, 2001, 2003). Evidence from the research demonstrated that students appreciated the influences of cultural production, understood the Westernising impact of media on all cultures and were aware of how visual representations impact on subjectivities. Students appreciated that all images are mutated into popular culture iconography and this understanding is significantly represented in the student works studied. In the category, *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative*, and in Table 4.3, *Comparing Identity as Expressive Personal Narrative with Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* (Table 4.3, p.154), the evidence revealed that students have used imagery from personal experiences, whether in public-private (family or self), work-leisure or social-cultural experiences to demonstrate the fragmented, disjunctive, plural and fluid ways that people now define themselves through images.

Stage 1 research evidence, in the category *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative*, when compared with the alternative category of *Abstract Expressive, Analytical and Objective Studies*, compared in Table 4.1 (p. 153), demonstrated that the learning outcomes of the new curriculum developed critical understandings of visual culture and society in the students.

The personal narrative approach displayed the enduring understanding that visual images and the visualising of things is greater than a medium for information in society.

Many students demonstrated their capacity to understand how the visual attempts to present the sublime as “generated by an attempt to present ideas that have no correlative in the natural world-for example, peace, equality, or freedom” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 9). Such concepts were often the focus of student works, for example, *Identity* (Duy Tan Ly, 1997, p. 29; M.4.1.4, p. 433), *Jacobs Wrestle* (Goldthorpe, 2002, p. 20; M.4.2.6, p. 435) and *Michael* (Moyle, 2001, p. 25; M.4.5.2, p. 441). *Michael* demonstrated Moyle’s skill in working with concepts of love, inclusivity, mental illness, physicality and self, connecting her experience and sense of identity through the film and multi-modal genre as “edited visual moments” (Moyle, 2001, p. 25) following the appropriated style of the media as image and text.

The communicative activity described above is not primarily concerned with differentiating knowledge and power communicated through semiotic systems, such as the media. Students demonstrated how images can be approached from a critical, self-reflective and expressive understanding and can be used to communicate and enact knowledge claims about self. For the students in this learning context, the structural or technical skills of artistic production appear secondary to conceptual skills and feelings. The conceptual and the expressive approach to learning, together, represented deep reflexivity about the possibilities of self being conveyed. Such learning demonstrated that students used their artmaking as a reconciliation process between self and other, informed by visual cultural activity. Genner (2001, p.18), in her artist statement on her work titled *You Are What you Wear*, graphic design (M.4.6.6, p. 443) comments: “I have created my body of work using the mass media techniques of the fashion industry to explore our desire to use accessories to define ourselves within our consumer driven society.”

Engaging with the concepts and content of new media and contemporary art practices inevitably necessitates a new understanding of the relationships between media, markets and citizenship (Barnett, 2003). This was demonstrated by the students in the study who critically confronted the way that visual iconography challenges global and local cultural identities. Exemplified in the sub-category, *Identity as Expressive Cultural and Social Construct*, students asked questions about the maintenance of citizenship rights. Strongly evidenced on the montage M.4.6 *Visuality as a Cultural and Social Discursive Identity Construct* (p. 443) students demonstrated engagement with issues of democratic access, including issues of ethnicity, gender, equity, identity, beauty, role stereotypes and class.

Visual culture and visual tactics are a significant contributor to our everyday experiences and the extraordinary proliferation of images contribute to both the homogenisation of culture and resistance by its consumers. The phenomenon of new image creation and the forms of this domination are best described as operating in “rhizomorphic and disjunctive global flows” (Deleuze, & Guattari, 1987, p.11) and are significant agents in subjectivity issues (Barker, 2000; Bolt, 2004). Students in the study actively engaged in boundary-blurring meaning about self through image manipulation. The students in the category, *Identity as Expressive Cultural and Social Construct* (Table, 4.3, p. 154), all engaged in critical and intuitive responses to how new cultural, semiotic and symbolic mixes impact on their identities “conveying information, affording pleasure and displeasure, influencing style, determining consumption and mediating power relations” (Rogoff, 1998. p. 15). Who we see and who we do not see informs our understanding of self. Works such as *What do you want to be?* (Imran Kamal, 1997, p. 52, M.4.6.3, p. 443), *Beauty* (Ming Giang, 2002, p. 21; M.4.6.4, p. 443), and *Mesh* (Gorgiojski, 2005; M.4.6.8, p. 443) are representative of this. Students in this category displayed their understandings of how the image plays a significant role in presenting images of normalisation, as well as actively disrupting and manipulating within the “market place of identities” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 78) for the purposes of power and consumption.

All the students in the study demonstrated their capacities to use the performative power (Bolt, 2004) of the image and they were actively able to use their visibility skills to constitute performative aspects of their own identities. In *Mesh*, the student articulates “I created a world of famous people, showing the power of the magazine industry and how easy it is to make the average person look famous” (Gorgiojski, 2005). The contribution of visual education to student understanding of how their subjectivities are incomplete, transitional and fluid, and how the skill of visibility is a cognitive necessity in the continual adjustment of the affirming self, is clearly demonstrated.

The category, *Identity as Expressive Social and Cultural Construct*, forms the second subset of *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* (Table 4.3, p. 154). It was the second most popular visualising or “seeing” lens after the self-portrait and personal events, places and spaces represented in the category, *Identity as Expressive Personal Narrative*. Of the total number of students in the longitudinal study, popular, social and cultural inquiry represented 24% of all students, and has steadily increased in its popularity over the years since the inception of the new curriculum.

Students in this group were seeing self as driven more specifically from a postmodern lens, focusing on a critical examination of the cultural and social construct. Many students had actively chosen to represent minority perspectives or actualise their own identities through the construction of representations that placed them in the position of being the challenger of hegemonic constructs, or the central narrator of the allegory. The students, with confidence, quite literally, positioned self as the central image generally accompanied by the appropriated imagery that connected them to their social commentary as in *Marilyn Monroe-A Dime a Dozen* (Court, 2001, p. 55; M.4.6.5, p. 443). In this series of portraits, the student artist represents herself and her friends in the context of future possibilities, creatively exploring “barriers between race, gender and even species” (p.55).

Cultural concepts and images become important when one considers that, in the twenty-first century, we are increasingly dependent on understanding how

the image and text within cultural practices shape our conduct and construct our self-representations. For Habermas (1976) identities are constructed relative to interpretations of history, culture and beliefs and are “dependent on free access to the interpretive possibilities of cultural tradition” (p. 93). Popular culture is now an agent of, and a medium for regulating forms of “free subjectivity” (Barnett, 2003, p. 96). Results from both the Case Study students and the learning outcomes from the longitudinal study indicate that the students have developed the skill to be receptive and sensitive to their own desires and those of others with responsive behaviours that display insightful observations, conceptual development, sensitivity to their world and flexible reflective learning. The results acknowledge the important role art plays in educating the imagination, consciousness, thought and feeling as well as the intellect. The students in the study developed critical, expressive and material understandings that acknowledged the multiplicity of identity shaping influences that were creatively forged and explored through artmaking.

### **7.3 Skill of Visual and Performative Communicative Action: Visuality, Identity, the Construction of Expressive Personal Narratives**

The second inquiry question considered the students’ teleological intentions in relation to socio-cultural thinking, as they inform the production of subjectivity. It sought to identify the key characteristics of the students’ artmaking intentions as they supported the students’ need to understand self through the deployment of mutual visibility logic. The research asked whether the performative actions of the students, as personal narrative, revealed deep understandings about self and other. The results from Stage 2, *Meta-Inference: Identity as an Expressive Personal, Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking*, were able to elaborate on the different ways the visual narrative worked as an apparatus of subjectivity. *Communicating and visualising my desires through the self-portrait* (6.1.1, p. 246) revealed the performative actualising of self as the self-portrait. *Visualising and reflecting on self through locating self in the events of life, places, spaces, moments and events* (6.1.2, p. 250) revealed self-narratives as

the actualisation of the memories and relationships as past, present and the future embodied.

These results differ from the results in 6.2 *Visuality, Identity and Social and Culturally Constructed Expressive Self* (p.258), where visibility of self is informed by a discursive understanding of the cultural and social self-construct. The visualising self, as personal expressive narrative, reveals how each student has used their art inquiry as embodied cognition (Varela et al., 1991) bringing the mind and body together through a unique life journey.

An examination of the data affirmed that artmaking commenced from the intentional act of self-validation, as a figurative artwork, or self-portrait. This was a direct and intentional act of re-representing self. The process commenced with an intense visual examination of themselves and the production of inter-subjective understandings through images of others and their world. Artworks were predominantly foregrounded by the self-portrait or figure and the student manipulated the scenes and events as imagined possibilities. Life was explored as a flow of connected, inter-subjective relationships, visual memories and feelings from the past and present perceived realities and imagined future possibilities. The places and spaces of the world of experience, including the physical environment, the psychological and spiritual space, relationship fields, happenings or events, connections between objects, images, symbolic meaning and feelings.

The Case Study students were able to reveal, through their diaries and interviews, how they sustained their inquiry towards a reconciliation of self and others by re-working the figure(s) and shifting or re-working the framing fields, backgrounds or points of reference. Beth, one of the Case Study students (5.6, p.233), was highly articulate in expressing the intensity of her desire to explore her truth-seeking disposition about self and society. This was achieved through the self-portrait and Beth's newly acquired semiotic world of expressive images, words, and meanings.



*The Eighth Day*, Beth's final painting in her *Creation* series, can be seen as demonstrating how the act of placing the self within the inquiry, supports the desire to affirm self through the performative skill of visuality. The painted last panel has an image inset of a photograph of Beth. She is holding a placard stating *My Name is Vern* and beneath her image (which appears like an image from a magazine), she has the caption, "After being labelled by society she made up her own name: Saved by Grace." This image appears as a small collaged section of her larger work titled *Identity Change, The Eighth Day*, whose main message is the chaos of the twenty-first century and her wish for a positive outcome for society through "HOPE". Placing self in the referential frame represents her intentions and the visualising practices of the Case Study group.

The work described above exemplifies the need of the individual to creatively attend to big picture issues from somewhere in the particular (Denson & McEvilly, 1996; Mansfeild, 2000). From here, one can commence a process of interrogation and iteration which can see a continuously expanding realm of possibilities made up of personal feelings, experiences and opinions. These are informed by the self and move beyond self to transpersonal and discursive understandings. The study identified that students inquired about their world from a teleological, or auto-affirmation (Guattari, 1995) orientation, while concurrently seeking ways to reconcile their self, affirming desire to understanding how they "fit" or "don't fit" or exist in broader socio- cultural terms. In so doing, they excavated images from the vast bank of both personal and public imagery.

### ***7.3.1 Bridging the Events of Life as Self Narrative through Performative and Visual Communicative Proficiency***

The analysis of the Longitudinal Study (4.0, p.146) of student-learning outcomes from the NSW Visual Art curriculum has revealed that there is significant evidence to substantiate that the learning culture of the post-compulsory secondary Visual Art classroom, in NSW is developing students with performative and visual communicative proficiency. The self-narrative is the primary inquiry tool evidenced in the category, *Expressive Personal, Social and*

*Cultural Narrative.* Through the narrative, students perform their realities and gain a conscious understanding of the capacity of artmaking to touch the other within self (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991). Ontological knowing, within this research, is informed by inter-subjective understandings. It lies at the heart of communicative competence (Lovat, 2001) and is performatively realised through material experiences.

The BOW assessment task, for NSW Visual Art curriculum, requires the student to be able to demonstrate complex and multiple solutions to their learning, moving beyond notions of a fixed identity or fixed truth claims. The work titled *Revolution is No Resolution* (Thomas, 2003: Digital Photography, p. 49), below, demonstrates how the self-portrait, as a performative act, communicates both socio-cultural and ethico-philosophical concepts from two positions. Thomas (2003) has worked with concepts, such as beauty, freedom, equality, identity and truth. These concepts tend to be image-less, however, in the context of a teleological act, the student explores these concepts as a personal narrative-framing. She uses the gaze to construct meaning (Mirzoeff, 1998; Schirato & Yell, 2000), firstly, by positioning herself as the outside observer critiquing hegemonic constructs of beauty. Then, as the protagonist in the self-portrait, taking a reflective stance, she confronts the audience revealing her inner and private concerns about the beauty myth. In this artwork, Thomas displays her capacity to critically engage with discursive understandings (Greirson, 2003) around signifying gender constructs, actively contesting normalising behaviours while simultaneously revealing her disposition towards a reflective and truth-seeking desire. Thomas demonstrates a more considered hermeneutic understanding gathered from the referential experiences of art history, cultural studies and visual culture and is revealed as a self-narrative of contemplative reflection.



Thomas, Kayla (2003, p. 49),  
Digital Photography,  
*Revolution with No  
Resolution*, Collection of  
works

Image-creation, juxtaposition, appropriation and manipulation, are presented as strategic, critical and productive acts (Thompson, 2004) or re-representations (Bolt, 2004). They demonstrate how, through artmaking, the student has moved beyond a single notion of “the stabilisation of the idea or image which subsequently makes possible a dialogue with it” (Eisner, 2001a, p. 9) to the performance of multiple possibilities as narratives (Warren, 2007). These conversations, about the self, draw from many and varied referential frames as postmodern Visual Art curriculum draws on a wide range of interdisciplinary fields.

The research analysis has revealed that students who use their visual and performative, communicative proficiency or artmaking, as a personal and technical activity of inquiry were able to actualise their own identities. More significant is that this was not an oblique connection and students consciously elected to place themselves into the subject-matter of their representations, either as self-portrait or through an explicit tangential link, such as friends, family, places of significant or profound events.

The increased student capacity to display sensitive and positive insights into their own realities and those of others correlated with the intentions of the NSW Visual Art curriculum reform. The introduction of the new syllabus centred on a performative material practice, in direct referential relationship with the inter-subjectively negotiated understandings of self as artist and social commentator.

### **7.3.2 Visuality and New Technologies**

Analysis revealed that the students used new imaging technologies to record themselves, their friends and memories. From an analysis of the techniques used by students across the 15 years of visual data, the camera, the photocopier and computer have increasingly provided students with new avenues to seamlessly and effortlessly explore multiplicities of self. These appear often as juxtaposed visual memories that are easily accessed and manipulated. The research results affirm that senior secondary Visual Art students who use digital technologies “visualise more easily ... reflect closer connections between classroom and the world beyond ... schooling and become futures-oriented” (Aland, 2004, p. 13), and that visuality is an important critical and sociological research tool (Emme, 2001; Stankiewicz, 2004).

Patrick’s diary (5.2, p. 203) represents an excellent example of the way that students connect new and old technologies expressively and use new technologies to quickly allow the cut and paste process to create imaging repetitions that affirm existence. The actions of cut and paste, drawing and gestural painting connect feelings and social realities. Patrick’s diary is littered with evidence of his constant reflective-return behaviour. This sees him using multiple images of himself and regularly re-visiting central questions about the defining self. Images from his childhood are mixed with images of himself during his study years, accompanied by text as reflective and intended actions. The expressive overlapping of his profile in his *Adagio* painting and his use of colour and space take the viewer deeper into the lightened void of the background, hinting at his future imaginings.

The evidence of iterative activity affirms Derrida’s (1998) ideas that artforms reveal truth from within the actions of making and in the reflective encounters which recur, concur, repeat and invert. The openness of the process, while often exhausting as well as exhilarating, makes possible the growth and development of one’s sensibilities (Abbs, 1994). The deep personal understandings evidenced in Patrick’s three paintings *Adagio*, *Allegro* and *Presto* were made possible through a sustained expressive engagement with

an inquiry question and the iterative process of refining personal intentions through visual communicative practices. On reflection, years later, Patrick speaks of his artmaking as helping him find his subjectivity through the creative act offering positive ways to work through his feelings towards reconciling self, a practice he still uses today.

The analysis of the Case Study students revealed that the practical realities of their worlds had been increasingly captured as multiple photographic images. Each student worked from the particulars of their own existence through multiple re-representations towards understanding an ontological reasoning about their self as a non-fixed and changing entity. The interviews and VAPD also revealed the complexity of the performative act of visuality. This action involved the assimilation and accommodation of many ideas (McCarthy et al., 2004, p. 77) and all the students used their artmaking to meet this end. Patrick used it to reconcile issues of sexuality and identity, Joe to affirm his belief in self and the comic genre as a legitimate art form, and Abby to find ways to express a sense of self in the places and moments that defined her as a unique individual. Ceara chose to explore her values and beliefs against those of the world beyond home, whilst Tom and Pete found ways to express their individuality emergent from their past and present experiences. Finally, Beth sought ways to reconcile her values and beliefs, passions and friendships with those around her.

All the Case Study students valued the skills that they had acquired in relation to their creative capacities to explore the unknown. They saw the skills that they had learned in Visual Art supporting them in the randomness of life events and in imagining the possibilities of an unpredictable future. "I think it's [Visual Art is] essential ... literacy ... many things come from [the visual]. It's such as essential starting point for everyone" (Abby, 2005 interview). Artmaking informed ideas, beliefs, and attitudes and provided an opportunity to refine intentions in relation to social understandings.

The Case Study students (5.0, p. 189) manipulated images and forms of self as a characterisation, realism or imagined other, in personal and expressive ways.

They placed themselves referentially with the people, events and places that surrounded them. When analysing the data, it was possible to place each student in the Case Study within the analysis categories of the research, thus allowing the threads to be drawn between the intentions of the Case Study students and those in the Stage I, Longitudinal Study (4.0). It can therefore be concluded that all students classified in this study within the Stage 2, *Meta-Inference: Identity as an Expressive Personal, Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking* (p. 243), displayed a level of visual and performative communicative proficiency that saw them able to actively engage in the production of subjectivities through the creative possibilities afforded through imaging of self.

The findings of this study have confirmed that Visual Art, as a performative process, allows the individual to understand self and others by inserting one's own life world into every form of expression of one's own and others' lives. Our actions, expressions, language and social history connect to our personal memories and the collective memories and expressions of the past. New imaging technologies increasingly allow more and more students to access, revisit and re-represent the multiplicities of self.

#### **7.4 Visuality, Citizenship and Ethico-Aesthetic Dispositions**

The third research question sought to inquire whether the Visual Art curriculum developed aesthetic and ethical understandings. Was there evidence from the longitudinal study that the learning outcomes of the students demonstrated a focus on an exploration of values and beliefs? Did the in-depth Case Study reveal that students were able to enunciate, through their artmaking, their VAPD and their interviews, that they also engaged in ethico-aesthetic (Guattari, 1995), decision-making as they revisited issues of subjectivity during artmaking?

Evidence of such a learning disposition would support Eisner's (2001) proposition that expressive outcomes heighten awareness of one's inner landscape. Guattari (1995) claims such a disposition fosters the emergence of a logic of non-discursive intensities, that move the student beyond rational actions

or regulatory behaviours, towards an orientation of knowing or truthfulness. This ethical orientation emerges through expressive modes of communication informed by inter-subjective understandings (Habermas, 1976). Did students put emphasis on their artmaking's capacity to work through personal, unsolved issues? Were their thoughts and actions strategically used to construct and reconcile new meanings? Did the students develop performative and communicative proficiencies that demonstrated the reconciliation of ideas and beliefs from a truth-seeking disposition?

The conceptual framing, central to the NSW Visual Art curriculum, requires that students, as acting subjects, give significant attention to the actualising self that is constantly being re-represented during image-making. It requires them to reflect on the relationship between the rational, critical self and the intuitive or expressive self, towards re-representation of the accumulation of life's experiences as imaging. Students are encouraged to justify their ideas and intentions through negotiated or consensus means, "observing inter-subjective valid norms that link reciprocal action" (Habermas, 1976, p. 118) and by working with the interpretive possibilities of images. An artwork is only valid or meaningful in as much as it holds the capacity to communicate successfully to an audience possibilities that have reciprocal vibes.

Students studying the curriculum are also required to develop an understanding of how images operate to communicate meaning. They are required to grasp how artists work constantly to develop new communicative possibilities through material and technological means and to reflect on the artwork's success, within constructs of knowledge and society. The resolution of an artwork to exhibition, therefore, requires students to justify their intentions against those of their audience and thus wider society through communicative competency (Habermas, 1976).

Visual Art education writers link the relationship between creative aesthetic ideas, ethical judgements and self-actualisation developed in the socio-cultural performative learning environment of the classroom (Cunliffe, 2006; Eisner, 2001b; Feldman, 1996; Freedman, 2003). They argue there is no better

cognitive platform to connect subjective feelings and the world's objective requirements, than through the kinds of meaningful social and ethical inquiry found in the arts (Abbs, 1994; Cuncliff, 2005; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1972, 2001b; Feldman, 1996; Gardner, 1990; Langer, 1957; Neilson, 2000; Vygotsky, 1971).

Visuality (Bonsiepe, 1997; Emme, 2001; Meskimmon, 1997; Thompson, 2004) is presented as a strategic, visual cognitive position, which is critically and expressively acquired, via the agency of engagement and actualisation. Visual media forms are the voice or "image co-extensive with reality" (Bolt, 2001, p. 19) and Visual Art students must acquire visual and performative communicative proficiency, or the skill to visually communicate to their audience their intentions in a critical, expressive and effective manner.

The results of this research affirm that the iterative and performative nature of the artmaking process, in the context of the Visual Art studio-learning environment, provides opportunities for sustained reflexive contemplation. It is in the reflexive spaces and the expressive acts that students engage with the production of self, a process that supports the actualisation of self-efficacy. This is demonstrated in *Results Stage 2, Meta-inference: Identity as an Expressive Personal Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking* (6.0, p. 243) where the students used their self-narrative orientation to produce their own realities through visual communicative proficiency.

The research identified that this could be broadly categorised as oriented from an aesthetic understanding of self constructed from the events of one's personal life world, informed through their relationships with others and the world of sensory experiences. This is illustrated in *Visuality, Identity and the Personal and Expressive Narrative* (6.1, p. 245). It is also demonstrated when students chose a more critical discursive orientation that critiques the self. This position is emergent from a broader notion of one's lifeworld, intersecting with society's capacities to shape personal beliefs and self-concepts as illustrated in *Visuality, Identity and Social and Culturally Constructed Expressive Self* (6.2, p.



258). In both categories, students were all actively inquiring into self through a disposition of openness that allowed the personal and the particular experience to be reconciled against the phenomenon of a wider collective world of experience and beliefs.

Visualising subjectivities was identified as a core learning outcome of the Visual Art curriculum and the results revealed that students demonstrated their skill to assess and evaluate personal events and feelings along with wider social agencies and norms that shape them through a truth-seeking disposition. An excellent example of this outcome can be seen in the artwork titled, *Just Me, Just Life, Just different, But Just Like Everybody Else* (Justin Sayarath (2003, p. 99).

The results, furthermore, confirm that artmaking can be seen as a practical and regulatory means wherein students can employ their inventive skills and techniques to address questions about self within the broader moral framework of society through a kind of practical wisdom (Cunliffe, 2005; Eisner, 2001a). Analysis of the data from the VAPD and interviews demonstrated patterns of intellectual behaviour or “thinking dispositions” that used, or relied upon the skills of inquiry, reasoning, sensitivity, reflection, critical thinking and imagination. Students in the study addressed issues that spanned: personal feelings and events; aesthetic patterns of living and contemplation; social mechanisms, behaviours and expectations; and issues of humanity such as inclusivity, war, peace and equality. These orientations occurred across time and cultures. The students drove their inquiry into their own existence through the creative production of subjectivity which demonstrated their capacities for “reason, understanding, will and affectivity” (Guattari, 1995, p. 103), identified as essential skills in the continual process of becoming.

The Case Study (5.0, p.189) analysis confirmed the importance of visual, performative and communicative proficiency in fostering subjectivity awareness. All six student artists, through their VAPDs, their narrative artworks and interview data, displayed confidence in their unique and individual ways of

knowing, reasoning and communicating. The artmaking process revealed for the students their sensitivity to the unique and different, their strength and commitment to their emergent beliefs and their strong sense of self as it is shaped by society. Ontological knowing was affirmed and connected through the performative act of artmaking.

More specifically, the results identified that inter-subjective awareness was a compelling and recurring aspect of subjectivity production which linked directly to students heightened sensitivities to others as revealed in the analysis of the Longitudinal Study (4.0, p.147) in the category *Visualising the actualising self through reflecting on others and developing ethical awareness* (6.2.1, p.259). A strong theme of ARTEXPRESS was seen in students demonstrating their feelings about themselves and others. This required them to 'get a hold' on understanding their worlds, through engaging in the activity of copying and re-working representations of the world. Re-representing self through imaging provided a powerful way of working with life experiences (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005), especially when dealing with topics as diverse as birth, death, disease, displacement, cultural difference and mental illness.

Re-representing aspects of the emotional self also informed understandings of personal feelings and relational aspects of emotional responses. Student artworks illustrated the need and desire to reconcile social aspects of human behaviour such as; anxiety, displacement, loss, anger, fear, loneliness, mistakes, frustration, tranquillity, peace and harmony. Friendship and cultural practices such as religion, drinking, racing, schooling, fashion and media (M. 1, 2, 3, 4) were represented in many of the student works.

#### **7.4.1 Citizenship and Democracy**

In the broadest sense, developing personal agency and active citizenship is bound up with the individual's capacity to regulate and care for oneself (Foucault, 1980, p. 50-51) and, reciprocally, one's community as one navigates the forces that regulate and shape the individual and society. In the Rand Report, *Gifts of the Muse, Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*

(McCarthy et al., 2004), it was identified that previous investigations into the benefits of the arts primarily focused on the arts' instrumental value and failed to examine art inquiry and its capacity for investigation of social, cultural and ontological issues through reflective practices. This later approach might have public welfare benefits in terms of the individual development of each person's ethical and civil behaviour.

The research was able to categorise the ways that students actualised their world through a focus on subjectivity or identity. Visual Art inquiry helped the students to bridge the spaces between the realities of their own consciousness and their identities with those of their classmates, friends, family and wider society, employing self-portrait or self-narrative. This approach requires one to develop a personal position about one's identity by reflectively responding to individual realities and testing these assumptions about self against those of others. Increasingly, these assumptions are negotiated against the backdrop of a discursive visual world, shaped by media and popular culture and new visual epistemologies.

Both the Stage 1, Longitudinal study (4.0, p.146) and the Case Study (5.0, p.189) analysis, identified that artmaking helped the students in this study to refine their capacities to differentiate between the personal, private and the public operating self. The depth and variety of narratives reveal their awareness of the complexity and multiplicity of voices that inform beliefs and behaviours. They also demonstrated an awareness of what Habermas (1990) refers to as "mutual visibility" (p. 71); such an awareness points towards a respect and appreciation of others. This was exemplified most strongly by Patrick who was most articulate in his description of how he used his artmaking to reconcile his inner feelings and emergent beliefs. He used his visual communicative skills in ways that were sensitive to the public examination system, his teacher, family and friends, yet were still effective in helping him resolve his own private concerns. Visual Art supported creative ways to reconcile between self and others and proceed through life with aesthetic and ethical sensibilities.

Analysis of student artworks from ARTEXPRESS, interpreted and categorised as *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* across the 15 year period identified that the personal, reflective, narrative was a legitimate means through which to mediate personal ethical issues and social responsibilities. Thirty percent of the approximately 3,000 students studied, who were exhibited in ARTEXPRESS, chose not to expressively communicate and explore issues of beliefs and values through a subjectivity positioning. The research is unable to identify whether these students used other arts-based performative platforms, such as drama, to actualise self. It can be identified that both students, Abby and Beth, used more than one performative arts platform and their desire to actualise self through artmaking was no less intense because of this. Abby was very successful in her drama studies and Beth a talented singer songwriter who used reworked texts of her songs in her paintings.

Approximately a third of all the students in the category *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* explored self through a discursive imaging self-referential informing a wider social and cultural perspective. Students in this category explicitly elected to explore how contemporary and popular culture shaped their own identities and those of others and many dealt with big picture issues such as citizenship, democracy, freedom, power, consumption, capitalism and the media. They used the performative capacities of artmaking to challenge hegemonic constructs about self. The remaining two-thirds elected to present their understandings from a more immediate and personal referential to the world from an events and relationships perspective.

The in-depth Case Study provided an opportunity to examine the students' lifeworld devoted to artmaking in their senior schooling years and their reflections about the impact of their Visual Art study and practice, since school. Analysis of their images and text followed the same interpretive orientation as the Longitudinal Study students and provided the opportunity to look more intensely at the characteristics of the Case Study students' learning. Case

Study students demonstrated how their intentions were as much to do with their desire to understand their own existence, as to examine the artistic, aesthetic, social and cultural forces that inform the study of Visual Art, or to do well in an external examination.

All the Case Study students were identified as belonging to the group inside the house of occupants identified as demonstrating the characteristics of excellence in Visual Art learning outcomes as identified in the ARTEXPRESS participants in the Longitudinal Study. All the Case Study students occupied the same large room in the house as the Longitudinal Study students categorised as *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative*. The occupants in this room all demonstrated visual, performative and communicative proficiency.

Case Study students demonstrated their own sense of logic, order and expression towards their primary desire to understand the adolescent self and the people and events that intersected with their reality as a personal narrative. As such, they could inform generalisations about the kinds of thinking all students in the Longitudinal Study experienced (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000) who worked with visual narrative. It might also be possible to assume that the characteristics of visual, performative and communicative practice, as it informs an ethico-aesthetic, could be similar for all the 3,000 students that also shared the room *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* of ARTEXPRESS exhibitors. It may also be possible to assume that in other Visual Art education houses, students who might not have achieved the same level of learning outcomes as the Longitudinal Study students, but selected the same large room of personal, expressive, social and cultural narrative, could also demonstrate these characteristics. More importantly it could be possible that performative acts, such as those demonstrated by students in this study, could relate to the bigger neighbourhood outside the Visual Art house (Bresler, 1998).

#### **7.4.2 Revealing the Ethico-Aesthetic Orientation Through the Performative Visual Experience**

Understanding how an ethico-aesthetic approach informs subjectivities through artmaking was most clearly revealed in the Case Study students, Ceara (5.3), Joe (5.4) and Beth (5.6). The students came from quite different schools and family backgrounds, but all worked across strong discursive image and media vantage points. They used these vantage points to validate their own subjectivity and ethical positions, while exploring broader social values and beliefs. The results from the analysis of the three students reveal that they explored the following themes, while reconciling their own beliefs and values during their HSC years. The themes included: friendships, religion, popular culture, leisure, media and power, creation, ancestry, national and personal identities, love, morality, responsibility, obligation, duty and expectations. These demonstrated their active exploration of their reasoned and practical capacities to ethically respond to their world.

Ceara's appropriated and juxtaposition imagery in her self-portrait takes an intentional and closer look at the "Who am I?" big questions. This is her own attempt to performatively express her beliefs and values from an ethico-aesthetic perspective. The following extracts from her diary reveal some of the questioning that accompanied her energetic imaging production, as she looked for a "sense of meaning in everyday life ... habitual practice ... Is it possible to generalise about the beliefs, values, customs of a nation? What does being Australian mean? I am Australian" (Ceara's VAPD). This example demonstrates how a student can work from the personal and private through a reflexive process to make operational her ethico-aesthetic disposition in relation to wider citizenship agendas.

Of significant interest in this study is the link between the skill of visual, performative and communicative proficiency, agency and ethical behaviour. The findings of the Visual Art learning outcomes and the reflexive capacities revealed in the Case Study demonstrated that students were able to use their artmaking to affirm understandings about their identities. Artmaking also developed a positive ethico-aesthetic disposition and actively helped create and affirm beliefs and values (Barker, 2000; Habermas, 1976; Magolda, 1999;

Mansfield, 2000; Rhode & Platteel, 1999; Robinson, 1999). An ethico-aesthetic was achieved through images of self-affirmation. Saul (1997) argues that being a “responsible self” (p.37) is shaped by how one develops a positive self-concept. All the works studied demonstrated that the students confidently presented themselves creatively responding to their own cultural realities and celebrated difference and similarity in productive ways (Bott, 2006).

Dewey’s (1934) original ideas found in *Art as Experience* see artistic activity as a constant and moving force that informs the expressive self and, as such, has a practical and important role to play in communicating aesthetic and ethical understandings about the experiencing self. This has been affirmed in the findings of *Gifts of the Muse* (McCarthy et al., 2004) and reinforced in this research. McCarthy et al. also emphasise that behavioural change is not produced by a single activity or influence, but through a process of “linking experience and relationships to beliefs and attitudes that help form intentions, and eventually behaviour” (p. 82). The in-depth Case Study students identified that they would make active associations between oblique experiences towards affirming their own beliefs and values. This can be illustrated in Ceara’s work *Melbourne Cup Day, Madonna 2*. In this work, the energy and excitement of the Melbourne Cup Race is juxtaposed with the negative and angry drunk lady. The process of intentional juxtaposition is used to reconcile conflicting or opposing positions and to generate new understandings. The series of prints around the Melbourne Cup, Australian identity and values, emerged over an 18 month period of creation and refinement. It evolved through endless conceptual and expressive material iterations and the themes of citizenship, values and identities were repeated and revisited constantly.

The conclusions of McCarthy et al. (2004) are shifting the debate on the benefit of arts learning experiences to the individual. The value of the performative learning experience is reframing educational enterprise (Pineau, 1994), with the individual lived experiences central in the social praxis of learning. Performative visual learning centres and maintains the dialogic relationship (Freire, 2005) between self and others through the creation and exhibition process. In this

process, the student as artist presents truth claims and these are hermeneutically explored by parents, teachers and classmates. The reciprocity of the exhibition, as communicative action, informs a student's actions, values and beliefs. All the Case Study students confidently discussed how their artmaking had been a very useful tool to help them conceptualise cultural and social issues. They all identified how their artmaking supported them in their understandings about themselves, their friends, families and beliefs during their adolescent years.

## **7.5 Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency**

The fourth key research question in this research study sought to investigate if the Longitudinal and Case Study analysis evidence identified that the students used their artmaking to produce subjectivities. If so, what type of pedagogical environment supports the production of subjectivities? If Visual Art is a form of social production, what are the characteristics of this performative learning environment and how were dialogues fostered between the private inner world of the student, their classmates and their mentor teachers about the students' cultural identities and their social actions?

These questions draw specifically on the analysis of the Case Study students' interviews and the conversations between the researcher and the nominated classroom teachers and documented commentaries on the NSW Visual Art learning environment. The analysis also sought to identify what the parent's perceptions of the type of pedagogical practices they perceived were experienced by their children and what dispositions they believed were nurtured in the Visual Art classroom. It further sought to present evidence of the acquisition of the skills of critical self-reflexive practice which have been presented as essential for communicative action (Habermas, 1976) and an ethico-aesthetic disposition (Guattari, 1995). There is no attempt to present these findings as a generalised statement of all pedagogical practices in all



post-secondary Visual Art classrooms in NSW. The Case Study insight might, however, provide insight into Visual Art classrooms that offer a mix of both modern and post-modern pedagogical teaching practices (Bates, 2000; Emery, 2002).

### ***7.5.1 A Visual Performative Learning Environment***

Learning in the post-compulsory Visual Art curriculum in NSW occurs in what the Case Study participants describe as a studio learning environment that nurtures the performative and co-constructed nature of knowledge. This occurs in a community of inquiry described as studio-based learning. This finding supports the current commentary that a curriculum grounded in an arts-based research construct, based on heuristics (Finley, 2005), supports creative invention and meaning-making.

The performative and co-constructed nature of the learning occurs in an environment described as a space where understandings are negotiated (Eisner, 2001a). It is a site for the development of a kind of creative deception (Brown, 2001b; Thomas, 2001) between student and teacher. In this co-constructing learning community, teachers are seen by students as significant facilitators of their learning, yet all the Case Study participants claimed ownership of the learning. Ownership of the learning by the student, in this study, was attributed to the capacity of the classroom teacher to “encourage the students to adopt a personal story when considering the production of an artwork” (Joe’s classroom teacher) with the personal narrative representing a meaningful position for students to consider and connect directly to subjectivity positions.

Through a sustained engagement with conceptual ideas and material forms students were nurtured to find original and personal solutions to their inquiry questions in an environment of trust. Sullivan (2003) describes the studio learning environment as providing “moments of great reflection and intense personal inquiry” along with “intellectual jousting, tutorial challenge and mentoring” (p. 10) that he claims are only found in the Visual Art classroom.

Case Study student Joe, (like the other students in the study) agrees, commenting, “If I hadn’t studied art I would not have known how powerful [images] are...No other [subject] gave [me] the space for my imagination, not really....[visual art] encompasses everything you do.”

The skill of visuality, observed in the learning outcomes of the students, is developed through what this research describes as a visual performative pedagogy (6.3, p. 272). It is developed in a reflexive, hermeneutic, critical and conceptual learning environment. Visual performative pedagogy centres the artistic act of creating and reinforces expressive mastery. It involves both critical and intuitive knowing as an essential aspect of developing one's capacity to understand the events and experiences of the actualising self. Bonsiepe (1997) refers to this form of cognitive orientation as strategic visuality, which involves a critical reflexive practice between theory and doing. This unique *praxis*, which makes a truth-seeking action possible (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) is informed through the logic of tools and reflective, embodied material processes, as much as it is through conceptual understandings, making experiences thus contain the immediacy of the qualitative experience, the production of meaning and the agency of performative action.

In the NSW Visual Art curriculum, the making of the artwork is centred and referential to the personal life of the artist, the world or context in which imaging produces new meanings and the study of Visual Art practices across periods and cultures. Meanings and feelings are embodied cognitive (Varela & Shear, 2000) re-representations (Bolt, 2004) of the student artist’s communicative capacities and each student transfers interpretive understandings to an audience through self-reflexivity in the artmaking process (Walker, 2004).

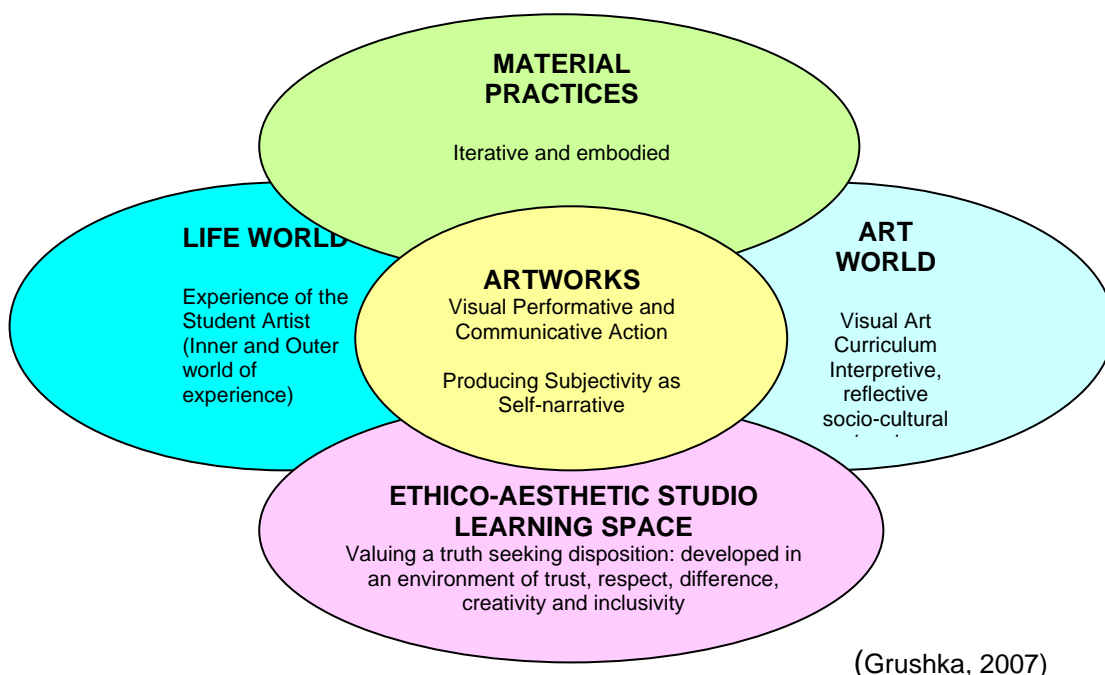
Analysis of teachers’ conversations indicated that students are nurtured through their learning to pay attention to their subjective or expressive selves. From the teachers’ perspective they see that they provide a learning environment where it is “safe for students to play seriously and express themselves openly through an ongoing and active conversation with materials and with us as teachers” (teacher comment, ARTEXPRESS, 2001, p. 22). Such conversations take place

in spaces where students are afforded the opportunities to mediate the events of one's existence, towards becoming, as the iterative and creative production of subjectivities. This only occurs when students are provided with opportunities for sustained engagement, where the influences of time, reflection, failure, and revision (Brown, 2001c, p. 9) support the negotiation and reconciliation process occurring between student, teacher and other audiences. It is achieved through a learning disposition that is "embracing [of the] values and beliefs of others ... [the] study of art, and through ...relationships ... developed in the classroom with students" (Beth's teacher) and the visual and performative act of imaging as artmaking.

The Figure 7.1 below A Model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom developed by the researcher illustrates the explicit reflexive connections between and across framing positions required in a critical art *praxis* (Cary, 1998) present in postmodern curriculum where artists communicate across multiple discourses (Freedman, 2000).

The intuitive, reflective act is informed by the iterative activity occurring in the visual performative and material act of making an artwork. It connects the inner and outer world of experience of the student and is informed by socio-cultural and critical inquiry orientation which produces subjectivity as narrative (Warren, 2007) in an ethico-aesthetic construct.

**Figure 7.1 A Model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom**



### **7.5.2 Characteristics of Visual Performative Pedagogy**

The findings of the Meta-analysis *Visual Performative Pedagogy* (6.3, p. 272) identified that the learning for the students is characterised by the following pedagogical attributes.

**1. Visual performative learning space.** This was a creative, reflective and expressive learning space that encouraged individual knowledge production through co-constructed communicative competency. Students and teachers worked towards “a balance between attendance to the more necessary forms of a structural technicity and the desirability of a more aesthetic reflectivity” (Lovat, 1999, p. 123). It was characterised by the opportunity for sustained personal reflection in a dialectic intellectual environment. The socio-cultural inquiry environment valued material practice, contemplation, reflexivity and critical problem-solving. The repetitions and possibilities sensitively emerged as ethical choices were constitutes through inter-subjectively negotiated learning and a relational logic. Visual communicative proficiency demonstrates the ability for detailed and complex descriptive and observational skills where the exhibiting artworks communicate

sophisticated critical and interpretive connective narratives about possibilities about self and other.

**2. Production of subjectivities as imaginative becoming.** Over time and through the realisation and refinement of intentional imaging acts and iterative processes students demonstrate the skill to interrogate the phenomenon of inquiry. The multiple reflective acts of adaptation see students work towards a reconciled position that they are confident to communicate to others. These acts demonstrate the students' capacities to develop resilience; they work with an understanding of liminalities or the transitional, fluid and constant evolution of emergent ideas. Through expressive actions, material actualisation and sustained engagement students explore connectivity within artistic practices, to creatively actualise self as process. They learn to value possibilities, flexibility, the reflective return and understanding that each line or action repeats, yet is never repeated in the same manner. The BOW, along with all creative acts, indicates to students the multiplicity and creativity of intentions and solutions. The lesson of valuing creativity as a lifelong skill is explicitly taught as a means to understand the evolving self.

**3. Developing ethical dispositions.** In an ethico-aesthetic, performative studio space, students develop the dispositions of reason, understanding, will and affectivity (Guattari, 1995). These are developed in an environment that nurtures intellectual and emotional trust and the sharing of ideas and values. Tom and Pete confirmed this in their interview, conveying how they felt "they could talk to all the art teachers about their ideas" and that they "really enjoyed the atmosphere and conversations with their peers." This orientation develops sensitivities towards truthful expression of personal intentions and actions with Visual Art teachers rewarding and valuing such behaviours.

Visual Art students learn the complexity of global values and beliefs relative to their own evolving personal beliefs. The structure of learning links the personal and the particular to the universal through the development of inquiry where understanding reciprocity is a key component of visual communicative proficiency. Students learn through exhibition and reflection of their technical,

material and semiotic knowledge and skills that all communication and understanding are inter-subjectively constructed. The process of re-representation (Bolt, 2004), of which the actions are symbolic of an individual's desire to return to points of significance towards actualisation, confirms the actualising self and affirms beliefs.

**4. The development of self-efficacy and truth-seeking dispositions through visual communicative proficiency.** The skill of visual communicative proficiency is the capacity to present a personal and unique voice. This skill develops when students are provided with sufficient space and time to focus on and interpret the forces that significantly shape them. In so doing, they gain an appreciation of the role of visual artmaking as a vehicle for personal, social and cultural agency.

Visual communicative proficiency as self-efficacy is the ability to see one's own potential futures, through a truth-seeking disposition linking past and new experiences (McCarthy et al., 2004). Re-representing through personal, visual narrative affirms subjectivities and provides agency as choice and action. Students are taught explicitly how the forces of reciprocity operate in visual communicative practices and are developed through critical, intuitive and reflexive semiotic practices. Students produce images as the acting subject and reflect on their images as objects of interpretive possibilities, and their choices effectively project their desires directly to their audience. Such actions refine artistic and personal intentions through interrogation, ethical decision-making and critical inquiry.

Producing a BOW over a sustained period taught the students in this research how to be resilient and sustain energies over time in contemplative ways. It developed their potential to use forethought towards creative solutions. As inquiry orientates from the particular to the personal and universal, students constantly reflected and worked through speculative truth positions to personal resolution. "Once it's resolved or they feel it is resolved, they are quite happy to put it out there" (Joe's classroom teacher), the action of putting it "out-

there” for the other, or the public and accepting criticism and debate strengthens personal affirming acts and regulatory behaviours.

The visual performative pedagogy, identified in this study, aimed at achieving an ethico-aesthetic orientation to learning. In the performative studio space students develop truth-seeking dispositions through the skill of reciprocity linking past, present and future events towards imaginative becoming. Such findings confirm the McCarthy et al. (2004) study that one of the key strengths of the arts is association learning, that links “past and new experiences, that promotes assimilation and accommodation and promotes positive attitudes and behaviours” (p. 80).

The Stage 2, Meta-Inference: *Identity as a Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking* results revealed the conversations and positions of the students about their desire to be different and unique. The Case Study students all affirmed how their Visual Art learning supported their desire to find a personal pathway towards a positive approach to life. It also provided them with a strength and confidence to proceed through life with aesthetic and ethical sensitivities, regulating and shaping their own individual beliefs and attitudes.

## **7.6 The Value of the Visual Art Learning Experience Beyond Schooling**

The final question in this study was to examine the perceived value of Visual Art learning to the students from the reflective position of looking back on this learning experience. The Case Study students, parents and teachers were interviewed to gain multiple perspectives and “information-rich cases” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180) in response to this question. It was not possible to gain the three perspectives on all students, but there was always the possibility of triangulation across the thoughts of the student, evidence in student artworks and the thoughts of either a parent or teacher and the perceptions of the researcher. Considerable attention was given to the different insights connected to the perceived experiences of each participant.

From the experience of the researcher, the Case Study students represented typical successful Visual Art students and it could be concluded that the experiences of these students could inform insights into other successful students (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). The Case Study students ranged from six years to eight months from their post-secondary school Visual Art experience. The key questions sought to inquire into whether the NSW Visual Art curriculum conceptualised around communicative knowing (Habermas, 1976) and so bridged the artworld and the lifeworld of the student (McKeon, 1994).

The study sought evidence to affirm the Gooding-Brown (1997) assertion that the students who study Visual Arts education in NSW develop a “sophisticated aesthetic understanding and critical thinking” (p.7) and that this skill also develops sensitive, reflective and ethical dispositions relevant in terms of a preparation for life. Did the students and parents perceive these to be benefits that stretched beyond the classroom? Did the study of Visual Art offer a level of behavioural and attitudinal awareness not possible or as relevant in other learning contexts? Did the students in the study find artmaking a legitimate means of mediating their personal, social and ethical decisions in an increasingly visual age?

The results of the Stage 1, Longitudinal Study (4.0, p.146), affirmed that students who used their artmaking as self-narrative were making profound links between their personal life experiences, their inherent sense of self and the realities of co-existing in the world. As discussed previously, the Case Study students belonged to the same room *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* as the other 3,000 students in the Longitudinal Study. Belonging to this room makes possible other links between the Case Study students and the students in the category, *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative*, who used their visuality skill to produce subjectivities as visual personal self-narrative. Such generalising links make possible a dialogue between the Case Study artwork of Patrick and Beth with that of Longitudinal Study students Foster (2004), Saunders (2004) and McGuinness (2005). The example groups the four students across data,



categories, gender, time and musical interests to demonstrate how the students used their emotional and intuitive understandings and the performative potential of music and visual artmaking to support their visual self-narratives and desire to understand self.

From the students interviewed, it was clear that the older students, furthest from the learning experience, were better able to identify the virtues of their Visual Art learning experience in relation to their life journeys. Those closest, Beth, Tom and Pete, who had recently completed their HSC Visual Art study, were able to clearly articulate the meanings in their artwork and its link to their adolescent world. They talked about how they used it to help them through the struggles of the “who am I?” questions and feelings about friends and relationships during adolescence. This was confirmed by parents and teachers.

Abby and Patrick, who had completed their HSC studies four years previously, were the students furthest from their schooling experience and were more able to reflect beyond the benefits of artmaking in their adolescence to artmaking as a central tool or technology (Foucault, 1980) in affirming self in adulthood. They spoke of their developed reflective dispositions and how they noted they had a more intuitive and creative approach to life than those around them, such as their ongoing school friends who had not studied a creative discipline. Abby talked at length about perceptive insight, creativity and intuitive awareness as an adult being the development of a thinking “muscle” which gave her the skill to respond to the randomness of life events in a more fluid and responsive manner. She spoke of her travel experiences and her ability to encounter new experiences with excitement rather than fear or nervousness. Both Patrick and his mother, and Ceara and her mother, spoke of the benefits of artmaking to the development of mechanisms to support positive understanding of the complexities and multiplicities of life. Through art, Patrick’s mother comments, “He [can] find balance and expresses himself in all aspects of [his adult] life.”

All the students interviewed were quietly confident young adults with a strong sense of self-efficacy. One of the most striking aspects of the conversations with the students was the considered and careful way they responded to the

questions, always taking time to ponder before commenting, taking a reflective stance about themselves, their life and their futures. At the same time, the students displayed energy for life and an excitement and passion for their current studies and future careers. While the Case Study group of seven students were taking very different life pathways, all articulated the need to work with their hands and minds and could not imagine their adult lives without some form of creative and performative activity. Ceara, Beth, Abby and Joe had all taken visual communication professional study pathways, Patrick was undertaking a business and marketing pathway, while Tom and Pete were embarking on environmental and social planning studies. Each career choice was seen by parents and students as a career option that provided opportunities to use their problem-solving and creative skills in applied practical ways towards the benefit of society as a whole.

Analysis of the Case Study students demonstrated that artmaking at school and beyond was a means to mediate and make meaning of their own realities. Through artmaking, they learned to respect others and moderate their own behaviour in the context of how their actions intersect and communicate to others, an essential skill in adolescent development. Tom and Pete's mother, commented on how studying Visual Art helped them to "sort themselves out." Ceara's and Patrick's mothers also believed artmaking was a valuable process in understanding self during adolescence. They commented repeatedly on how both Patrick and Ceara were energetic and productive makers during adolescence. Artmaking was seen by both parents as being the most effective way for their children to resolve issues of self, as both tended not to be talkers but quite private, doing people.

Issues of personal beliefs and values for all the students were intrinsically bound up with their creative energies, desires and expressive acts of artmaking and living which constituted their subjectivity. All the Case Study students spoke of the relationship between their creative energies, the spaces they inhabited and the events and experiences which connected to their understandings of self. Abby clearly articulated how finding her sense of self was linked to her desire to illustrate the spaces and events that captured her life. This reflective

and performative activity communicated her inner need to find balance between self and others. Her powerful self narrative, as “Abby the swimmer”, producing subjectivity, is mediated through a subject-object relationship with her painting. Self-actualisation is achieved through her will and affectivity and the “energetico-spatio-temporal coordinates” (Guattari, 1995, p. 25) of her existence.

In her interview, Abby spoke of the importance of engaging with her physical body, her mind and her understandings about her needs and emotions as they are enacted in the representational process of painting. Abby “focused on a little aspect of myself which I guess at that time was a really big thing. Year 12 was very stressful ...it’s a hard time with friends ... I think focusing on something that was really serene and really cool and calming to me was like, almost a vessel for just, you know, relaxing.”

Ceara, Beth and Joe also strongly connected the discursive and the affective, in their personal explorations of ethical understandings that encompassed issues such as behaviour, relationships, religion, citizenship, social systems, leadership, moral codes and identity. They transferred their intensions through re-representational acts. Beth explained her personal experience by stating: “I was fully putting myself out there ... it was a big thing ... the last panel, this was like ... this is me kind of thing.” (Beth; interview, 2006). All the Case Study students revealed how their ethico-aesthetic reasoning was bound up with their technical, critical and historical understandings. Having the ability to use their artmaking skills to creatively find possibilities and ways to exist in the world is one of the most significant skills they have taken forward with them into adult life from their HSC studies.

Beth, who had completed her HSC studies most recently, related that, “Art has made me more aware of what was happening and the way that I could just express myself.” For Patrick, who had completed his HSC five years previously, his mother comments, “[Doing the artwork] was a turning point of getting in touch with himself and where he was at ... [it is] a big outlet you know ...he is still drawing ... it’s his fifth year of university ...if something big happens, he

usually expresses it through art. He'll do a piece of art, that's his outlet ... I think mixed media is his thing" (Patrick's mother, interview, 2005). Visual communicative proficiency is a life-long skill that all the Case Study students valued and their Visual Art learning provided relevance and agency towards emancipatory discourses (Denzin, 2005) for each student.

### **7.7 Reflecting on Limitations and Future Directions of the Study**

In undertaking this study the researcher was required to find a path through the more conventional text analysis approaches of qualitative research and inter-textually connected visual meaning-making through a critical hermeneutic and phenomenological approach to the inquiry. Attention to the sustainable claims of the research have been addressed through a comparative investigative process between the longitudinal study of Visual Art learning outcomes, as evidenced in the ARTEXPRESS annual exhibition, and an in-depth Case Study of seven past Visual Art students who encountered a similar learning experience. In addition, there has been an attempt by the researcher to inform this research approach from the position of a qualitative researcher employing the creative interpretive practices as bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The results presented in this study have attempted to present the complexity of the phenomenon of inquiry and to provide, through the Meta-Analysis Stage 2 of the study, a creative interpretive and performative communicative understanding. The montage is presented as a representational form that embodies critical hermeneutic understandings and voice of both the students in the study and the researcher about adolescent subjectivity production. The montages and descriptive passages aim to resonate the students' understanding about their identities and how Visual Art, as social and cultural inquiry, provides a productive context and a means of developing transformative understandings about themselves during adolescence.

The results of the study from *Stage 2, Meta-Inference: Identity as a Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking* reveal that the

students used artmaking to critically examine the discourses and narratives in their culturally institutionalised lives and to reflect on the events that surrounded and impacted on them. They used their visual *praxis* to produce meaning and the performative and communicative aspects of artmaking to produce subjectivities. The student learning outcomes and conversations with students, their teachers and parents identified that they were very aware of the importance of sensitively and critically understanding the inter-subjective experience and its importance to them in navigating their lives.

Most significant was the strong evidence from the *Stage 1, Longitudinal Study* (4.0) interpretive analysis results that identified that students used their artmaking to creatively actualise self or engage in subjectivity production. This is evidenced not only in the strength of the visual artworks produced by students, but in their statements about their artmaking. The following extracts confirm this orientation: “My work is an emotionally complex one. It is an attempt to integrate all the different experiences that have formed my character” (Eun Joo Lee, 1997, p. 76, M.4.1.7, p. 433); “My painting concerns my reflections on the experience of discovering who I am now” (Duy Tan Ly (1997, p. 29; M.4.1.4, p. 433) and “*Subtexts* explores the underlying meanings associated with growing up ... and the journeys undertaken by teenagers in general” (Sam Wolff-Gillings, 2002; M.4.2.4, p. 435).

While all the literature surrounding ARTEXPRESS emphasises the representative nature of this exhibition, one must be conscious of the fact that curators and examiners, who select the final ARTEXPRESS works, will wish to present the most effective learning outcomes of their current curriculum. This action is primarily for the purpose of showcasing learning outcomes, for teacher professional development and as a teaching resource for the classroom. Such motivations could produce a bias in their selection towards more socio-cultural learning outcomes over more modernist expressive artworks, as both pedagogical practices co-exist in Australian schools (Emery, 2002, Bates, 2000). The selection of student works across the fifteen year period was a strategy to identify such patterns. The Table 4.1: *Identity Category Sets by Year* (p.152), does indicate an emphasis in the number of works in 1991 in the

category *Identity as expressive cultural and social construct*, however, this is prior to the implementation of the new syllabus. This is more likely representative of a contemporary art focus occurring more broadly in society and demonstrating how Visual Art practices in post-secondary schooling in NSW parallel artmaking practices in the broader community.

The statistical trend illustrated in Table 4.2, *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* and *Abstract Object Studies* (p.153) is of most interest. It illustrates a shift away from *Abstract expressive analytical and objective studies* to '*Identity as expressive self narrative*. This trend has steadily increased during the period focused on in this study from 1991-2005. It demonstrates the shift from an understanding of self as a fixed, resolved, singular image or representation to multiplicity of representations or framing orientations of self. The shift has been supported significantly through the introduction of the BOW as an assessment tool and the framing orientations in the curriculum. The BOW reflects a processual creation where imaging as re-representational practices are used by students to illustrate multiple perspectives on becoming. More specifically, students are better able to demonstrate visually that they were actively using their artmaking for the purpose of producing subjectivities through a variety of forms to communicate their intentions.

Students have traditionally used the self-portrait as a genre in Visual Art learning, but its traditional function has been an intra-subjective, inward orientation, rather than an inter-subjective focus on reciprocity. What is significant in this study is the complexity and ethico-aesthetic exploration of subjectivities produced by students. Students produce their new contemporary expressive self-narratives through the application of a full repertoire of new technologies and communicative practices. The majority of students elected to drive their Visual Art inquiry through a performative exploration of relationships, society, culture and events to construct meaning about themselves and others. In doing so, they found artmaking a powerful means through which to actualise self-knowing and produce their existence. Visual communicative proficiency, explored in this study, requires the skill to critically and intuitively reflect on the

events that punctuate one's life and those of others through communicative knowing. Studying how artists, through history, have sought to answer similar questions about society and culture within a discursive context, informs the inquiry situated in a student's present space and time.

There is no typical Visual Art student in this study and no typical pedagogical environment. Each student takes from encounters of learning with their teachers, different insights and connects these to their unique life experiences. However, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) argue that selection of the more typical case studies informs knowledge of the typical. The Case Study students selected for this research were generally representative of and belonging to the room in the Visual Art house, identified in the Longitudinal Study as *Identity as Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* and created artworks as visual personal narrative. It is therefore possible to make clear links between both groups, as they both achieved what this study has identified as visual communicative proficiency. Visual Art students who achieve visual communicative proficiency have developed the skill to be receptive and sensitive to their own desires and those of others with responsive behaviours that display insightful observations, conceptual development, sensitivity to their world and flexible reflective learning. Through this skill, they acquire a truth-seeking disposition and the life-long capacity to find voice and produce existence or becoming (Deleuze, 1990).

The link between subjectification or identity formation, as an artistic activity, towards developing an ethico-aesthetic disposition is a central finding of this study. Students in the *Stage 2, Meta-Inference: Identity as a Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative in Visual Artmaking* developed a strong sense of "mutual visibility" (Habermas, 1990, p. 71) through the act of performative visibility and refining and communicating ideas and beliefs through the BOW and exhibition process. The production of meaning-making about self and an audience (or other) revealed the generative and refining of the self-referential and critical reflective act of the artmaking. This finding confirmed the McCarthy et al. (2004) findings that students who study the arts develop greater individual receptivity to new perspectives and tolerance for others, so

demonstrating the explicit link between private benefits flowing to social benefits.

The study has clearly demonstrated the powerful educative capacity of a Visual Art curriculum that links socio-cultural inquiry, critical reflective practice and expressive outcomes through visual communicative proficiency to support the production of subjectivity and creative ethico-aesthetic dispositions. The arguments presented in the research, in regard to the increasing dependency on contemporary society to communicate visually, the increasing need for all students to develop reflective capacities, ethical dispositions and creativity to support the important role of Visual Art for all students as a means of producing subjectivities and supporting responsive citizenship.

The research also indicates that further research is necessary to explore, what level of visual communicative competency should be essential for all students in compulsory schooling. What are the associated curriculum dilemmas (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, Park, 2003) and pedagogical consequences if visibility shifts to a more central relationship with interdisciplinary ways of knowing? Learning contexts are now recognised as requiring the skill of visibility to inform creative, reflective and truth-seeking dispositions in the new literacies of the twenty-first century (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Do all beginning teachers, across all stages of compulsory schooling, have levels of visual communicative competency necessary to provide performative visual experiences for their students? In order to understand current visibility capabilities of pre-service teachers, research will need to occur into their visual communicative competency levels when pre-service teachers commence their teacher education courses.

This study has been able to present a preliminary model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom (Figure 7.1, p. 328). Further longitudinal case study research of students and teachers is required to identify best practice in visual performative pedagogy. Further research would seek to identify how visual communicative competence develops and moves towards visual communicative proficiency. It would aim to



validate the current findings within a wider range of specific learning sites. What are the explicit strategies used by Visual Art teachers in the studio classroom sites to promote communicative capacity and self-reflection that Lovat (1999) identifies as critical to the development of a social conscience? What are some of the strategies used to promote creative self-reflection through the visual, as it informs personal morality, an ideal quality being identified for the next generation? How do the teachers, in practice, promote positive attitudes and accommodating behaviours over time in the Visual Art studio learning environment? What are some of the strategies teachers use to support students towards self-narrative forms of artmaking through critical social inquiry? What visual, performative pedagogical strategies do they use to link the personal and the particular to more universal understandings about existence? What role does performative pedagogy play in the development of a truth-seeking disposition and do teachers explicitly nurture this characteristic in the visual performative learning space?

The study has identified that students with visual communicative proficiency have a reflective disposition and a clear understanding of the role of Visual Art in the production of culture. They understand how artworks convey interpretive possibilities and they have developed sufficient visuality skills to use artmaking in performative ways, demonstrating the capacity to find multiple understandings. This process is achieved through a critical examination of the discourses and narratives that surround their culturally institutionalised lives through imaging practices. How much attention to Visual Art education in compulsory schooling is required for students to gain visual performative competency? In an increasingly visual society, should education systems give greater consideration to visual performative competency?

The findings of this research demonstrate that Visual Art education has the capacity to develop individual receptivity to new perspectives and tolerance for others. It demonstrates that the students can make clear associational connections between their actualising behaviours and the wider society in which they operate. There is, however, a need for more case studies to seek detail of

self-regulatory behaviours developed in the Visual Art classroom and exhibited as more communally-minded values (Yerbury, 2004).

Further research would seek to identify the ways that teachers nurture the visual self-narrative as a platform for subjectivity production in compulsory schooling. It could seek to identify, through an in-depth study, the way that students make explicit associations between self, relationships, events and behaviours in their lives. It also could seek evidence of visual communicative competency in students across a range of levels of schooling and the link between visual communicative competence, greater individual receptivity to new perspectives and tolerance for others. It would seek evidence to explicitly link the private benefit of visual communicative competence to the social benefits of the classroom, the school and the community.

To answer these emergent questions, it would be necessary to complete a longitudinal study that addresses possible claims of “positivity bias” (Winner in Viadero, 2005, p. 8) in this research, as all the students, teachers and parents experienced positive educational benefits from the Visual Art learning experience. Such a study could consider the impact on students who did not develop visual communicative competency. Tracking control groups of school students over time and across curriculum experiences would be beneficial in supporting claims that visual artmaking explicitly connects and associates the events of a student’s life with wider social values and beliefs of society. This would assist in demonstrating the significance of attaining visual performative and communicative competency.

An alternative study could examine current levels of visual communicative competency being achieved in students on completion of the mandatory study of Visual Education in NSW schools. If the skill of visuality is emerging as a central critical literacy in contemporary visual culture (Duncum, 2004; Freedman, 2003) and communicative practice (Stafford, 1996), what are the implications for education generally? What are the implications across other learning areas that are increasingly recognising the role of the visual in making meaning and communicating ideas, beliefs and values?

One of the unexpected findings from the study was the significant number of young new citizens to Australia who used their artmaking to deal directly with issues of identity. This might have been a conscious inclusive policy taken by examiners and curators of the ARTEXPRESS exhibition, however, it remains a significant finding given that cultural identities are now colliding with more frequency and that society is experiencing this activity in some unsettling ways. Many communities are seeking ways to help young people assimilate and reconcile differences, while forging new subjectivities. Students in this study who were representative of this group include Ronald Kim (1997, p. 25, M.4.1.8, p. 433); Ivone D'Ornelas (1997, p. 15, M.4.1.6, p.433); Shuang Chen, 2005, M.4.2.1, p. 435) and Hannah Park (2001, p. 26, M.4.5.8, p. 441).

Ceara was the only first generation Case Study student and her exploration of her values and beliefs was more to do with an exploration of adolescence, popular culture and differing Western values, rather than the reconciliation between discrete cultural groups such as Asian or Middle Eastern with Australian and other Western cultures. Both Asian and Middle Eastern cultures were represented in the Longitudinal Study of ARTEXPRESS (4.0, p.?). There would also be significant benefits gained for education and society more generally from research into how visual communicative proficiency has supported students towards tolerance and understanding of others, while forging their own visual identities.

Another significant group in this study were those who used their artmaking to deal with significant personal emotional experiences or events, such as illness, alienation or isolation. Students representative of this group included Lauren Garzaniti (2004, p. 74, M.4.3.7, p. 437), Patrick, Case Study student (5.2, p. 201) and Carla Middleton (2003, p. 95, M.4.2.5, p. 435). These students were working to reconcile deep personal emotions and conflicts through reflective and expressive visual means. Patrick was the only Case Study student who could have been classified as using his artmaking to meet more extreme personal emotional needs. This is by no means underestimating the personal struggles of each of the Case Study students in forging their adult identities.

Patrick's mother clearly identified the difficulty that many adolescent students have in talking about their anxieties, or of sharing their struggles during adolescence and how Visual Art can help in 'sorting oneself out' (Tom's mother).

The causal relationship between performative acts, mediating behaviours, nurturing dispositions and well-being were hinted at in the interview with Joe's Visual Art teacher. She highlighted that artmaking supported insights into personal conflicts, emotions and desires, while helping individuals reconcile their actions against those of the wider society. This area of research could also be a focus for further research with more in-depth cases of students, like Patrick, who did not pursue career pathways in Visual Arts related industries, to identify how the learning shaped the students and provided them with a platform upon which to inquire into their beliefs, values and attitudes? Did they value it as a legitimate form of communicative practice after schooling? Was the skill to "see" or critically self-reflect and creatively respond to the world visually a benefit to them?

Finally, the research conducted in this study has been unable to make any substantial claims about the power of visual communicative proficiency as life long learning for both groups of students identified above. Possibilities for future research include the ways that visual communicative competency, as a life-skill, supports the well-being and social development of individuals of all ages. Furthermore, as identified in the study, Visual Art also has the potential to help individuals produce new subjectivities in response to changing life circumstances, whatever these might be. There exists the possibility to study the social benefits of developing visual communicative competency for a range of groups of individuals identified as being at risk in our society. These include aging populations, students at risk within educational institutions, rehabilitating individuals dealing with extreme life-changing events and new citizens, as visual communicative competency links ethical behaviours as a means of "assessing what you do in terms of ways of existing in the world" (Parr, 2005, p. 85).

## Conclusion

This study has identified how subjectification, as an artistic activity achieved through visual communicative proficiency, lies outside of the knowledge of Visual Art and cultural practices or the power relationships that shape society and its systems (Deleuze, 1990). Producing subjectivity is linked explicitly to the performative act or re-representing, as it emerges from each student's desire and affectivity. Producing self, through Visual Art, requires an understanding of the logic of relationships. Relational understandings occur between materials, technologies, the production of meaning as image and the performative act. In terms of one's whole life education, acquiring the relevant skills to understand visual communicative practice is increasingly important in our society. Cultural values, ethical practice and citizenship understandings through negotiated visual inquiry now seem to be a fundamental way of knowing and communicating.

In the creative act of artmaking, students can reflect on the metamorphosis of becoming, as it reveals itself through their ongoing embodied performative acts. The Visual Art learning outcomes examined through the Longitudinal Study of ARTEXPRESS (4.0, p.?) and the Case Study (5.0, p.189) have demonstrated how students move towards an emancipatory-communicative knowing through authentic self-reflexivity in artmaking. The Visual Art syllabus in NSW focuses on students becoming personally engaged with image production, the concepts that connect them to others through personal social and cultural inquiry and to the act of clarifying and communicating their ideas to others through exhibition. Exhibiting or reflecting on their artwork, as the object, in the communicative action, makes possible a continued dialogue between themselves, their teachers, their friends, parents and the wider community.

Analysis of the data revealed that the students who attained visual communicative proficiency were conscious of the power of the visualising performative act as a process in which they can play in the virtual and explore the actual. Understanding self is anchored in appreciating and understanding difference, as drawn from the traces of humanity found in the experiences of

living and the rich world of images. Students explore their own solutions to inquiry issues from their personal and particular position, as discreet from the ordinary, in a prolonged and open reflexive space. Prolonging openness in the reflective classroom space requires teachers to provide an environment where trust and respect are reciprocally nurtured between classmates and the teacher.

In the visual performative learning space, students are encouraged to produce multiple imaging ideas. Each idea is “pregnant with all the differences that the never-before-actualised virtual is capable of precipitating at any (and all) time(s)” (Boundas, 2005, p. 192). The students in this research found that the Visual Art learning experience developed their self-esteem, nurtured their creative and positive dispositions and provided them with the skill of visual communicative proficiency. This skill had significant transferability and was seen as an asset to them in their later lives, as they tackled the ebb and flow of their adult lives.

Building social capital through performative visual communicative competency could be an increasingly important and authentic means of expression and communication towards social and cultural agency. When Beth was asked is there anywhere else in the school where you can experience this learning, Beth replied, “No way!” As the multiliteracies agendas (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001) increasingly impact on all classrooms, there could be an urgent need to better understand visual communicative competence. Visual communicative competence throws attention on how the unique social experience of the performative act of re-representing as imaging produces subjectivity and informs transformative learning.

## **8.0 Reflections and Conclusion**

### **8.1 Re-positioning the Value of Visual Art Education for Social and Cultural Sustainability and Personal Validity**

The centrality of Visual Art education to the wider education debate, in relation to subjectivity production and communicative capacities in a visually mediated reality, has emerged as a significant finding in this research. Visual Art education gives attention to an ethico-aesthetic paradigm of thinking (Guattari, 1995) and attends to artistic qualities of learning found in arts-based inquiry (Eisner, 2004; Finley, 2005). This *praxis* embodies a commitment to the socio-cultural activity of teaching (Freire, 2005) and the development of reflexive and truth-seeking dispositions in students. It embeds an understanding that the mutable production of meaning occurs through ongoing assemblages of narratives and performances (Pineau, 1994). Visually and creatively producing representations of self and others in narrative forms, within the context of each individual's lifeworld, supports the development of creative and reflexive dispositions, emerging identities, ethical behaviours and sense of wellbeing.

Visual media contributes significantly to contemporary life. To sensitively understand the way that the visual shapes society requires a reflective, critical consideration of feelings and reasoned understandings that develop communicative capacities (Habermas, 1976, 1990). These must be authentic for the adolescent and adult of the twenty-first century. The value of the arts generally is emerging for its significance in developing creative minds (Robinson, 2001), innovation and interpretation skills (Lester & Piore, 2004), self-confidence and communication skills to equip students for life (ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, 2007). Issues of subjectivity production through various semiotic registers, particularly the visual, have been identified by the students in the research as a legitimate means of navigating the world.

Visual Art education has provided the students in the research with a means to find their unique and different space, to shape imaginatively their fluid world.

Visual and performative pedagogy has been identified as providing such sites. In these sites, the student is able to develop an ability to challenge and express communal meaning, develop a shared cultural heritage and explore social beliefs and values (McCarthy et al., 2004; Finley, 2005). Visual artistic activity that acknowledges the inter-connective nature of learning and the complexity of an individuals' socio-cultural lifeworld is presented as supporting the students' capacity to actualise their existence.

The research has identified that Visual Art inquiry, in a post-compulsory curriculum, framed by Habermas's theory of communicative action (1990), expressed as visual and performative communicative proficiency, supports subjectivity production. Visual and performative communicative practice, as a meaning-making system, acknowledges the role that the visual plays in a material and consumption-oriented society. Students in the research have demonstrated that the production of meaning, as performance and exhibition, has taken place in an environment of mutual visibility and has been personally beneficial beyond the school years as a means of creatively mediating their lives.

## **8.2 Visual Art Curriculum and Visual and Performative Communicative Practice**

In contemporary life, communication and learning are now made more accessible through visual-imaging technologies. The research identified that a student who studied a post-compulsory NSW Visual Art curriculum, where the central tenet was the development of the skill of visual communicative action, developed visual and performative communicative proficiency. Visual Art education provides a unique, complex meaning-making and inquiry system that focuses on subjectivity, creativity, reflexivity and self-consciousness as they inform the wider dimensions of our knowledge society. Visual knowing, developed in the context of contemporary artistic practices, is an expressive, hermeneutic experience that nurtures critical inquiry and reflexive behaviours through material re-representational practices.



The students who attained visual communicative proficiency were conscious of the power of the visualising performative act as a process where they can play in the virtual and explore the artistry of the production of multiple possibilities of meaning. Students explored these possibilities and the potential consequences of their thoughts and actions, through exhibition. Student inquiry focused on the centrality of subjectivity as narrative, for the production and representation of meaning. Inquiry ranged from the personal, through the particular, to the more universal, where issues of self and other were explored with artistry, sensitivity and empathy.

Artmaking activity, sustained and enriched through the application of expressive qualities, was possible in a studio-learning context. In the studio-learning site students developed new creative vantage points, or visibilities. These were framed and made meaningful within the authentic cultural contexts of the student, the classroom community of inquiry and from a wider knowledge of the world. In this site, the students were able to critically and honestly consider and communicate their own realities through visual meaning-making. The predominant multiple self-narrative form provided students with a way to negotiate and bridge the events of their lives and their complexities. This was developed through a critical dialogue process, acknowledging the relationship between themselves and others. The material performative act as artwork, produced over time, provided an opportunity for a prolonged and open reflexive space. Students refined these understandings through intuitive material practices that embodied and nurtured truth-seeking dispositions.

The research results also acknowledge intuitive knowing (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1972, 2004; Gardner, 1990; Neilson, 2000). This knowing is grounded in an interpretive epistemology that underpins individual inter-subjective constructs and is communicated through cultural practices. The research findings support Sullivan's (2005) claims that Visual Art inquiry, located in the studio experience, has legitimacy in its own right as a research and meaning-making tool. The results confirm that when contemporary Visual Art practices give focus to one's critical, visual and performative capacity, as an inquiry

strategy, artmaking becomes a powerful embodied tool for personal exploration of possibilities in subjectivity production.

Through intentional artmaking acts and a desire to represent all aspects of consciousness to oneself and others, students demonstrated their capacity to make judgements on personal actions in specific situations. Students in this research worked across a range of performative strategies to visualise self. The students broadly used their artmaking to create expressive visual self-narratives. The visualised events, as self-narrative, were the actualization of both the past, present and future embodied. A significant finding was that students consciously elected to place themselves into the subject matter of their representations, either as self-portrait, personal symbolic referencing or through an explicit tangential link, such as friends, family, places of significant or profound events. These actions demonstrate that the skill of visibility allows one to see others as referential to self, supporting mutual visibility and an empathic orientation. Finally, the student's artmaking represented their visibility of self, as a cultural and socially discursive identity construct, that considered aesthetic and ethical responses with citizenship orientations, constructed in the process of becoming.

The results of this research shift existing ideas on Visual Art learning as a form of transformative learning towards the stabilisation of self (Eisner, 2001a), to the self-narrative as transformative inquiry informing a more fluid concept of becoming. This study has strongly supported the idea that visual and performative communicative proficiency develops in the students a reflexivity that encourages the possibilities of many and varied ways of understanding self and others. Students in the research demonstrated creativity, complexity and reflexivity as they developed their socio-cultural understandings. These were supported by the immediacy, multiplicity and flexibility of new imaging technologies.

The notion of the student artist acting performatively through discursive and interpretive understandings of the constructed, actualising self is a central finding. This idea moves the value of Visual Art education out of what Sullivan (2005) describes as a legacy of self-expression in modern art. The results confirm that contemporary Visual Art practices informed through communicative action (Habermas, 1990) acknowledge the trans-personal and mutual symbolic production of meaning. Artmaking thus becomes a powerful personal narrative tool in the students' vernacular for the production and ongoing re-representation of self as student voice with value beyond school.

### **8.3 Seeing in Context: Identities, Visual Culture, Visuality and Visual Communicative Competence**

Imaging is a primary meaning-making and communicative tool, and is inextricably linked with man's scientific, social and cultural evolution (Dissanayake, 1995), with "seeing" as imaginative visualisation a primary way of knowing. This has provided agency for our capacities to make symbolic meanings that inform our understandings of society and self. Contemporary society is increasingly flooded with images communicating society's ideologies, truths, culture and ethical understandings (Barnett, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998; Saul, 1997; Stafford, 1996) and education is increasingly conscious of the importance of the visual in new multi-modal communicative practice (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Kalantzis & Cope, 2001; NRVE, 2006).

Visual culture contributes significantly to socio-cultural understandings and the adolescent communicative vernacular. Visual culture is significant in presenting images of normalisation as well as actively disrupting and manipulating identities for the purposes of power and consumption with moral consequences (Stafford, 1996). A significant aspect of the NSW Visual Art curriculum studied in this research is its recognition that visual culture is a significant contributor to contemporary society. The research analysis revealed the authentic integrative nature of visual communicative practice as a bridging field in socio-cultural inquiry. This result is evidence of an emergent shift in the value of Visual Art education. The research identifies that there is a need to consider a re-

orientation in education from a linguistic referential to consider the way new and traditional imaging technologies, visual culture and contemporary multi-modal forms, such as photography, video, media arts, popular culture and installation art are increasingly being seen as relevant cultural texts and sites of cultural production.

The self-portrait, collective portraits or figurative representations have surfaced in this research as powerful adolescent autobiographical or narrative positions. They present a personal language that actively affirms self. Simultaneously, these artworks have provided the student with technical skills in new media communicative visual practices that are an important aspect of contemporary language. All students demonstrated differing and effective ways of dealing with the complexities of life presented through visual media forms, the skill of visuality connected directly to both private and working life.

Making practical decisions about one's actions and attitudes in life is increasingly complex in our visually saturated society. The business of imaging in a contemporary communicative Visual Art classroom, the focus of this research, orientates students to work across a wide range of particular lenses and ideologies which provide many possibilities and personal insights about humanity. Visual and performative communicative competence and its related, creative and ethico-aesthetic dispositions were strongly identified by the Case Study students as life skills that supported their reflective becoming. Imaging was seen as a legitimate form of communication and an important aspect of their own continuing expressive self-narrative. Imaging practices, as socio-cultural inquiry and personal exploration, continued to be used after schooling by many of the students as their preferred communicative practice to support subjectivity production and as a means of processing and reconciling emergent conflicts.

### **8.3 Imaging, Representation and Relevance: New Technologies and Citizenship**

Cultural images of identity, whether nationalistic, domestic, sporting or private, carry deep associations and sensory experiences that inform a society's values and beliefs. The NSW Visual Art curriculum studied in this research recognises the significance of contemporary arts inquiry's capacity to draw on all past art histories and theory, and all cultural and social phenomena, to make new meaning. It also recognised that contemporary literacy is a multi-modal practice and that the wealth of visual global culture and other communication forms are readily accessible via new technologies and that these inform citizenship agendas.

Students demonstrated an awareness of the inappropriateness of the substitution of a linguistic premise for a visual one in a world dominated by new visual technologies. Mixing imaging techniques and technologies in multi-modal forms was the norm in the Longitudinal and Case Studies. New visual technologies provided the students with efficient, fluid, instant and multiple imaging capacities for repeated returns to the emergent self. Cut, copy and paste rhythms, in unison with the application and overlay of expressive, lines, colours, free shapes and forms created by the hand provide ever increasing new aesthetic possibilities for the students. Similarly, this is the case with new technologies being seamlessly integrated with more traditional materials such as paint, ink, paper, clay and wood inline with contemporary artistic practices.

Re-representing self and others in complex relationships was also made more immediately possible by the use of juxtaposition and appropriation. Using these core techniques, students manipulated photos, sketches, paintings, scanned images, digitised drawings and captured camera frames. The childhood photos were presented in many cases as the most significant and relevant narrative evidence that linked emotions, events and descriptive insights about self. The practices of drawing on childhood imagery demonstrated that repetition, return, refinement and expressive opportunity provided through imaging supported the

desire to explore the re-representation process of the actualising self. New imaging technologies allowed multiple possibilities for repetition and transition with difference or variation reinforcing the possibilities of flexible solutions and new ways to visualise reality.

New imaging technologies have made the processes related to imaging and communicating in images more immediate, more effective, more manipulative, transferable and accessible as a communicative platform than ever before. Using new technologies were shown to bridge the traditional gap perceived by many students between the “gift” and skill of drawing and its traditionally slow technical development in Visual Art education. The immediacy of the camera and computer were identified as relevant, popular, efficient and sophisticated visualising tools that supported the conceptualisation and representation of ideas and forms.

New technologies, like the traditional visual meaning-making tools, support the observation, recording and communication of our experiences in the world. Contemporary art practices present new multi-modal ways to express realities as ontological understandings (perceived ideas, beliefs, and values) and to transfer these beliefs and values to society. Visual and performative communicative competence can therefore be relevant for all students. It might also be one of the more significant and legitimate communicative schooling practices in the future as we shift towards multi-modal communicative platforms in an increasingly visualised society.

Socio-cultural inquiry as artmaking, for the students in this study, was not primarily concerned with critical issues of knowledge and power. While attention is given to the investigation of the image as a cultural symbolic system and to an appreciation of the differences between good and bad art, technical artistic abilities and new stylistic repertoires, for many, this was accessed primarily through their intuitive understandings. The data from the Longitudinal Study revealed that the critical deconstruction of images and the techniques of artists were primarily to support the exploration of the possibilities of self connected to reflexive intuitive acts of re-representational

invention. This learning is concerned with reconciliation between self and other, feelings, beliefs and values, informed by personal social and cultural activity. The implications from this study are in drawing attention to the necessity for all students to acquire visual and performative communicative competency in a visual society and the importance of exhibition as performative narrative.

#### **8.4 Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency**

Visual Art learning, in this research, occurred in a studio learning classroom environment, described as a visual performative learning space characterised by arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2005). A pedagogical environment is created for students where there is enough latitude in the curriculum and in teachers' facilitating approaches to learning, to support the students' exploration of a significant research question. This is explored through the assessable BOW which is developed from a position of personal interest, desire and choice informing more universal truths. The performative learning space supports and nurtures subjectivity-exploration through artmaking as a co-construct of students' embodied past and their present life experiences.

The performative pedagogy is characterised by opportunities afforded by teachers for sustained personal reflection in a dialectic intellectual environment. The social-cultural inquiry and the material practices, as artmaking, provide significant critical reflective moments, large enough to reflect on the intuitive and reasoned actions of the maker. In this learning context, students explore problems of relevance, inter-subjective possibilities of meaning and through a developing relational logic (between concepts, materials and technical practices) seek positions of reconciliation between their beliefs and values and those of others. The meta-analysis revealed that the majority of students used *Personal Expressive Social and Cultural Narrative* (Chapter 4 and 5) to refine and communicate their ideas and their intentions were filled with burgeoning possibilities.

Prolonging openness, in the reflective performative classroom space, requires teachers to provide an environment where trust and reciprocity among peers and the teacher are maintained. These characteristics were affirmed by students, parents and teachers who had experienced the performative learning in the Visual Art classroom in NSW post-secondary schooling. The Case Study students all demonstrated that they valued highly the skills of creativity, flexibility and reflection acquired in the classroom. All Case Study students articulated that Visual Art epistemological understandings had shaped their overall approach to learning and they used these skills in both their everyday life and workplaces beyond the school experience.

The skill of visual and performative communication is presented as the skill to critically and intuitively see detail, to see difference and to see commonalities. It also involves being able to take the time to intensely observe and reflect on how these patterns or punctuated moments, actions and choices have impacted on the sense of self, the evolving personal narratives and the emotional responses and beliefs emergent in their daily life. The Visual Art teacher facilitates and supports this process of generative personal discovery, helping students find ways to actively communicate and express the complexity of this process, the joy and pain that comes with the search towards discovering aspects of self in a refined and revealing manner. Through the performative act of re-representing self as narrative, students used cycles of intention, action and reflection in endless referential, iterative ways, linking their thoughts and feelings to the ideas, beliefs and values of others. These beliefs were then communicated with resolution to an audience.

The results of the Longitudinal Study of student learning outcomes from the ARTEXPRESS exhibitions as a BOW demonstrated the development of the students' skill to refine their sensory capacities. Refined sensory capacities developed through failure, reflection and revision towards a refined position, as exhibition is central in Visual Art learning. As identities need to be constantly actualised, students in the study demonstrated they had developed the significant skill of artful ways of seeing and knowing ourselves (Eisner, 1991; Finley, 2005) and used their artmaking to actualise their identities and reconcile



events in their lives. The results of this study might well support the McCarthy et al.(2004) position that arts learning supports a student's personal ability to link experience, relationships and beliefs and attitudes, and that these important private benefits flow through to the community.

### **8.5 Creative Imaged Becoming, Reflexivity and Ethical Knowing**

As the world demonstrates an appetite for the consumption of new cultures and increased physical mobility, we will continue to be transported into a new global consciousness, collapsing time and space realities and colliding cultures and ideologies. The ontic experience is increasingly being presented as a multiplicity of realities that are being forever re-constituted and change is the constant. Schools must teach students how to confront and explore these experiences which are often contradictory realities and increasingly presented to us through multi-modal practices.

Students, it is argued, need to develop a confidence and sensitivities about who they are in relation to the world of localised experience which shapes their values and beliefs and beyond, to those of other communities and nations. This activity is requiring the individual to develop aesthetic and ethical dispositions that will need to be mediated through authentic communicative practices. The skill of visual and performative communicative proficiency is presented as an increasingly essential skill for all, as new visual technologies project us into an increasingly mobile cosmopolitan society.

Of equal challenge is for the student to develop a disposition that will provide one with positive agency towards processual self-creation. Being able to conceive of one as becoming requires the skill to understand one's past, deal with the realities of the present and imaginatively approach the future through authentic means. The development of creative or imaginative capacities is presented as an essential disposition in an individual's learning armoury to confront the realities of the present and find ways to approach the future (Collins, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Grierson, 2006a, 2006b; Robinson, 2001; Schon, 1983; Zimmerman, 1995). These claims are being argued

alongside the development of reflexive and ethical thinking dispositions that support personal agency and provide ways to respond and exist in our physical, emotional, cultural and social lifeworlds.

The research identified that the students with visual and performative communicative proficiency found ways to construct and produce subjectivity and to carry out a dialogue with themselves and others through making and exhibiting artworks. Many students in this study gave attention to the reconciliation of their experiences through the skill of critical observation, reflection and complex creative connectedness. They addressed issues of diversity and randomness and found creative ways to harness both the mind and body with open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity. They also saw this activity as grounded in a vernacular of relevance.

The actions and processes of the students in re-representing self through artmaking was one of generative personal meaning-making that supports ontological and epistemological practices that inform identities within the complexity of the social fabric (Kinchelo & McLaren, 2005). Students in this research spoke confidently of their creative energies and how this disposition had prepared them to reconcile events in their own lives and was helping to support their working adult life. They demonstrated self-reflection, patience, persistence, attention to detail, and awareness of what defines the private and the public, all life-long skills necessary for the responsive adult.

The research further identified that all students in this study, who sought to answer the “who am I?” questions, demonstrated critical expressive orientations that recognised knowledge and power relationships in imaging practices throughout history and across cultures. The Longitudinal Study and the Case Study students both displayed evidence of powerful self-affirming statements about their personal realities, referential to the world around them, through the application of sensitive thoughtful behaviours. Students in the research demonstrated and affirmed strong links between the reconciliation of realities and feelings related to displacement, change, conformity and difference. It also provided an opportunity to develop the balance between conflicting events,

anxiety and differing values and belief perspectives or reconciling feelings associated with significant life events such as illness, death, birth, isolation, loss, elation, love, hatred and war. Most specifically, Visual Art encouraged careful consideration of these events and feelings related to adolescence, the emergence into adulthood and self-efficacy.

The skill connects directly to ethical practices as visual and performative communicative competency requires the development of a habitual reflexive and creative behaviour towards the refinement of one's own intentions within the context of one's lifeworld. Each student made substantial generative contributions to adolescent cultural ethical practices that surfaced as developed socio-cultural reasoning and the students understood which artworks to share with the public and which should remain private. Such a skill equips students to be aware of the role that aesthetic and ethical understandings and judgements have in sensitising them to the visual communicative twenty-first century and preparing them to respond to this reality beyond a level of banal acceptance.

## **Conclusion**

This research has highlighted how a Visual Art curriculum, as a visual and performative communicative practice, develops an authentic artistry of thinking. The learning evidenced demonstrated that the students had found artmaking a relevant vehicle for conceptualising and communicating the existing self. The research demonstrated that "seeing", within a dominant visual web of cultural signification, is increasingly countering linguistic contemporary communicative forms. Visual performative proficiency, as a unique *praxis*, is presented as providing a relevant intellectual, spiritual and physical medium that demands the skills of critical observation, intuitive understanding and reciprocity of ideas supporting understandings about values, beliefs and citizenship. Making an artwork and exhibiting artworks embodies re-representational acts that produce subjectivities.

The research has identified that when a curriculum is constructed to continuously require students to validate meaning-making against existing

constructs of their own realities, through performative material practices, the iterative processes force students to reconcile their own beliefs with those of others. The conceptual framing of artwork–artist-world- audience requires the student to continuously self-reflect and build associations between personal observed realities, against the backdrop of the semiotic, social and cultural legacy of the history. The performative, studio-oriented classroom supports the dialectic activity, where all ideas are encouraged and students begin to investigate interpretivist options and generate possibilities towards considered actions.

The students who had developed visual and performative communicative proficiency, beyond competency, were able to demonstrate the skill to interrogate the past, grounded firmly in the present realities of their lives and loves. The development of the capacity to use artmaking to embody all of one's past experiences, towards a reasoned and reconciled future and to communicate these as actions in a contemporary visual context, had benefits for the students in this research as they moved beyond school. Students who used their artmaking as a means of producing subjectivity demonstrated aesthetic and ethical understandings and were creatively futures-oriented.

Finally, the research identified that the skill of visual communicative proficiency links explicitly to the performative act as it emerges from each student's desire and affectivity and is beyond the knowledge of visual art cultural practices, shaped by power relationships in society. The production of subjectivity requires an understanding of the logic of the relationships between the technical activity, embodied material processes and conceptual understandings. Visual performative practices support multiple, reflective returns and an understanding of the endless possibilities of ways of imaging and communicating to represent self, truth, reality and existence.

### **Postscript**

Behista Joya was a Visual Art HSC student in 2006. Her self-portrait was selected for ARTEXPRESS, 2007. She was born in Afghanistan and Joya fled

with her parents to Australia when she was four. An image of her in front of her work below titled “Forever Dirt” draws on her experiences of displacement and war and was featured in the *Sydney Morning Herald, Weekend Edition*, “Young artist’s journey from dirt to sandstone” (February, 10-11, 2007). She comments in the article “In [Islam] we believe that people are made from the earth” (p. 3) and her work connects her performatively to her experiences as a child of war. Reflecting beyond self she comments that for all children of war, “it is like the world has damaged them and they stay dirt for ever ... What happens to you as a child affects what you become.”

The work connects her experiences to those of the artist, Cy Twombly, who she studied during for her research for her HSC Body of Work. Joya selected an artist who had worked with a similar inquiry question and the boats in her painting are symbols of the refugee boat people appropriated from Twombly’s painting, *Studies from the Temeraire*. Her triptych is a personal, expressive social and cultural narrative. Painting her self- portrait and the boats as symbols of other refugee stories has allowed her to “let it [the suffering in the world] out through artwork” (Joya, 2007, p. 3).



Joya, Behista (2006),  
*Forever Dirt*, [Painting]

A high academic achiever, Behista intends to continue her tertiary studies in the arts, through film studies. Film studies, as visual narrative, opens up possibilities of connecting with the emergent research fields of visual ethnography, visual anthropology, visual sociology and visual culture (Pink, 2007) through photography and film-making. This performative field will develop her skills of visual and performative communicative proficiency and support her continued search for the possibilities of truth, reality and existence.

The self-narrative was identified in the research as an approach to learning that displayed the enduring understanding that truth, values and beliefs can be communicated through artmaking. The skill of visuality was identified as offering more to students than the ability to access and communicate through new media technologies. Visual and performative communicative proficiency enables students to explore concepts that require them to address deep personal questions about humanity and existence. Subjectivity understandings, developed over time, through reflection, multiple iterations and new generative imaging practices, embodied understandings of the complexity and contradictory aspects of becoming. Central to this finding was the importance of the imagination and creativity to individual agency and a positive perspective on becoming.

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## **Appendix A**

The Principal  
ADDRESS

### **Letter to the Principal**

#### **Re: Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project (01/10/04)**

Dear .....

I am writing seeking your support to agree to members of your visual art teaching staff being involved in this research project.

I am particularly keen to interview teachers with a depth of experience of the Visual Arts HSC process and their perceptions of its value to students in the development of student identity, or in its contribution in other ways during adolescence, beyond simply preparing for the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

Approval for this research has been granted by the Department of Education and Training and it will not involve any current school students. If you wish your staff to participate it will require you to forward on to them an invitation to participate (supplied with this letter) and acceptance of the invitation by the teachers is entirely voluntary. If the teacher accepts the invitation the interviews may be carried out either in a school office space or outside the school premises in an environment suitable to the teacher and out of school hours where ever possible.

The second part of the project seeks the teacher to refer on an invitation to past school students they have taught who they believe have had significant learning journeys and who would make suitable participants in the research.

It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the understanding of the value of this subject to students beyond the classroom. In accordance with the DET research guidelines you will be forwarded a short summary of the study findings on completion, should any of your staff accept to be a part of the research project.

Please find attached to this letter a copy of the Information Statement and the Invitation of offer for the teachers.

Thanking you for your time and consideration of this matter,

Regards  
Kathryn Grushka



**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**  
**in an**  
**HSC Visual Art Research Project**  
**Information Statement**

You are invited to take part in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Kathryn Grushka from the School of Education at The University of Newcastle. Kathryn is conducting the research as part of her Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Professor Terry Lovat from the Faculty of Education and Arts at The University of Newcastle

The purpose of the project is to gather information about how the study of visual arts in senior high school contributes to the development of student identity, or contributes in some other way during adolescence, beyond simply preparing for the Higher School Certificate (HSC). In other words, her research seeks to know whether studying or doing practical work in art helps in self-understanding or dealing with relationships with family, friends and others, assists in dealing with their surrounding culture, media and visual literacy or, finally, addresses in any way their own developing beliefs and values.

**Project Volunteers**

To assist in this work, Ms Grushka would like to interview some teachers who have taught HSC Visual Art for some time and students who have recently studied Visual Arts and if possible a close friend of family member of the ex student who has shared the student's learning journey. She asks that you might participate or nominate some potential participants (past HSC students) who would then be approached and asked if they might wish to take part.

**What will I have to do?**

**If you are an art teacher** you will be asked to complete a short series of questions as a written response or you can agree to a short interview. You will also be asked to contact and forward a copy of this letter to two of your past visual art students who you consider have had significant and interesting learning journeys during their study of Visual Art for their HSC. If you do not wish to participate yourself, this decision will be respected, however you may wish to inform past students of the project, who may wish to be involved. The researcher would appreciate you contacting them first to make the initial introduction to the project, this can be done by phone or email and you could share this letter with them. The student may then contact the researcher at the contact details provided above.

**If you are a past visual art student** to participate in the project you will be asked to agree to a taped interview about your learning journey while studying the HSC and asked to agree to have your art work and the accompanying visual process diary photographed. If you choose to participate in the first interview, you may be asked to do a follow up interview and to agree to the nominating of another person who may have shared that learning journey with you to be interviewed. It could be your past

teacher, a parent or a friend. Agreeing to a follow up interview or nominating another person to be interviewed is not essential and you do not have to agree beyond the first interview if you do not wish to.

**If you have been nominated by the student** you will be asked to respond in a taped interview to a series of open questions about the students learning journey at the time of studying the HSC Visual Arts course. If possible the student may participate in this interview with you or they may listen to your comments.

All interviews will be at the convenience of the participants. We cannot promise you any benefits from participating in this research except the possibility of insights into your own understandings of inquiry through the visual arts and an opportunity to share how this journey benefited you.

**If I agree to participate how is my privacy and rights protected?**

To participate is entirely your choice. If you agree to volunteer you will be asked to give signed, informed consent. Only those people who give informed consent will be included in the project. Whether you decide to participate or not, your decision will not disadvantage you in any way. If you are a student studying at The University of Newcastle it will have no impact on your assessment. If you do decide to participate, you will be able to withdraw from the project at any time, without giving a reason and may withdraw your data. If any images are used in the research copyright consent will be requested from the visual art student.

Under no other circumstances would the comments made by you be shared with any other research participant. The nominated participant would be assigned a pseudonym or code name to be used throughout the entire research project to ensure anonymity.

At all times actions will be taken to assure your privacy, confidentiality or anonymity as a participant. From the signing of the initial consent form you will be asked to provide the researcher with a Pseudonym (Code name). This will be used on all records of data collected and stored by the researcher and in the writing up of the project. Data will only be accessed by the researcher and will be safely stored for a period of 7 years.

The information will be used in the thesis to be submitted by Ms Grushka for her Doctor of Philosophy. It may also be used in papers in educational or related journals. Information about the participant will be in a descriptive form (either text or image) using the original code name to be nominated by you. You will be provided with a synopsis of the findings on completion of the research project and, on request you may read the entire thesis or any related papers.

Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, you may contact the researcher. If you would like to participate, please email, phone or write to the researcher at the contact information provided at the top of the letter and indicate how you wish to communicate with the researcher. The researcher will then contact you to make an appointment to interview you.

Complete the attached Consent Form and return it in the reply paid envelope (provided), or via email with an attached short statement that states your consent to participate. I will then contact you to arrange a time convenient to you for the interview.

Thank you for your attention. If there are any questions that you would care to ask, please feel free to contact me or Kathryn Grushka via the contact details provided.

***Thank you for considering this invitation.***

Prof. Terry Lovat  
Faculty of Education & Arts  
The University of Newcastle  
Phone: 49214021;  
email: Terry.Lovat@newcastle.edu.au

Ms Kathryn Grushka  
Faculty of Education & Arts  
The University of Newcastle  
Phone: 49216583  
Email:  
Kath.Grushka@newcastle.edu.au

*This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H- 925-1204.*

*Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, telephone (02 492 16333, email [Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au).*

## Appendix B

### Consent Form for the Research Project: Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project (01/3/05)

*Researchers: Professor Terry Lovat and Kathryn Grushka*

#### Consent Statement for Student Nominated Participant

***I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.***

*I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.*

*I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.*

*I consent to:*

- \* *participate in an interview*

YES/ NO

- \* *Agree to shared interview with the student*

YES/ NO

- \* *I nominate the following pseudonym*

*I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.*

*I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.*

***Print Name:***

***Signature:***

***Date:***

#### CONTACT DETAILS

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project: Interview with past Student**

In giving consent I am happy to participate in an open-ended interview based loosely around the following questions:

1. What is your name and how many years has it been since you studied HSC Visual arts?
2. Tell me about your HSC art making journey.
3. Can you walk me through the experience of making a Visual Process Diary. Are there significant pages? Why?
4. Why did you choose the topic or theme?
5. Tell me what your artwork was about? Were you happy with your HSC art work? What other ideas or themes did you explore before you resolved to use this final idea? Why did you choose this medium and imagery?
6. Was using your imagination and important process for you?
7. Did making art help you understand how images are used in everyday life?
8. What do you now know about images and the media that you might not have known if you hadn't studied art?
9. What does your artwork tell you about yourself? Is using your imagination still important to you?
10. If it was a good experience for you, can you reflect on the learning environment, teachers, content or any other factors that made it a valued experience? Was it special? Why? If it wasn't why not? Were there any good or bad aspects? What were they? Can you find examples to elaborate on the points you are making?
11. How did you learn in the classroom? To what extent did the teacher influence your ideas? Did anyone else influence you?
12. Has studying visual art helped you to read the world?
13. On reflection has this undertaking contributed to an understanding of your personal narrative? Elaborate on life before the HSC and your artwork and the impact after this experience.
14. Do you consider visual art to be an important aspect of your whole education? Can you give an example? How important on a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) was what you learnt?
15. Do you believe it taught you anything about your beliefs and values? Can you give an example? How important on a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) was what you learnt?
16. Do you consider it helped you understand aspects of yourself, your friends, family and the possibility of informing your understanding of human nature and society, elaborate?
17. What is special for you about learning in the Visual arts?
18. Are there any other things you would like to add to the interview?
19. Are you happy to talk with me on another occasion?

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D**

### **Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project: Copyright Permission for use of Student Images**

I \_\_\_\_\_, Pseudonym (Code name) agree to image(s) of my HSC artwork or images from my Visual Art Process diary being reproduced in this research project or in subsequent published research articles for the purposes of critique and review and reporting the outcomes of this research project.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign below the statement which best suits needs.**

\* To protect my privacy I would prefer that the researcher acknowledge my images under my nominated pseudonym. Note: the use of a pseudonym provides the researcher with an impartial and non-personal way of discussing your work relative to the objectives of the research project, and other student's work.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\* I am happy for my real name to be acknowledged when ever the researcher uses my image(s). I acknowledge that this will no longer protect my anonymity in the project.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\* I am would prefer my real name to be acknowledged when ever the researcher uses my image(s), however I would like to read the context in which my image and real name is to be used. I acknowledge that this will no longer protect my anonymity in the project

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project Photographic recording of images consent form

I \_\_\_\_\_, Pseudonym (Code name)

Am happy to allow my artwork and my visual process diary to be photographed or photocopied.

I agree that all my images may be reproduced for the purposes of this project and associated published papers.

In acknowledging the respect of my privacy I nominate the following images may not be used in publications:

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix F**

### **Image as meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project Interview Student Nominated Participant (friend, family member, teacher or other)**

In giving consent I am happy to participate in the shared open-ended interview with the student based loosely around the following questions:

1. What is your name and your relationship to the HSC Visual art student? How many years have you known them?
2. Tell me about how you perceived the HSC Visual art experience of the participant. On a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) what was the value of the experience? Can you give examples of incidences when the experience was difficult or easy for you or the participant?
3. Can you elaborate on their learning journey?
4. Overall do you think the participant was happy with their HSC artwork? What other ideas or themes do you think they explored other than the final resolved images? Why did these come to mind?
5. How do you think they valued this subject relative to the others they studied for the HSC? On reflection, which was the most significant to them, which was the least significant to them? Can you give me a reason why you arrived at this answer?
6. What can you tell me about the learning environment they had when they were studying visual art? On reflection could you comment about any of the following, on the learning environment, teachers, fellow students, content or any other factors that made it a valued experience? If it wasn't why not? Were there any particular good or bad aspects? What were they? Can you find examples to elaborate on the points you are making?
7. Can you tell me a little about how the participant used their diary? Do you think they valued it? Can you remember anything significant about it... its size, the images in it, were there many words etc. Was it a shared document or a private document?
8. In your opinion, has 'doing art' contributed to the participants understanding of themselves or the world? Elaborate if you can on any incidences or conversations you may have had about art and life with them.
9. Do you consider visual art to have been an important aspect of their whole education? Can you give an example? How important on a sliding scale of 1-



10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) was learning for them

10. Do you believe it taught the participant anything about their beliefs and values?  
Can you give an example? Possibly for their artwork or an incident from life?  
How important on a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) do you think studying art was to their learning about beliefs and values?
11. How has studying art informed them about the world?
12. Do you consider studying visual art helped the participant to better understand aspects of themselves, or their friends, or family. What about bigger issues like understanding human nature or society, elaborate if you can?
13. Are there any other things you would like to add to the interview that you think are important that I haven't asked?
14. Are you happy to talk with me on another occasion?

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### **Image as Meaning: HSC Visual Art Research Project Research Project: Interview or written response by HSC Visual Art Teacher**

In giving consent I am happy to participate in an open-ended interview based loosely around the following questions and I will not use student's real names in my answers.

1. How many years teaching HSC visual arts have you had?
2. Approximately how many HSC students have you had in that time?
3. Have you marked the practical visual arts or written examination?
4. Tell me about how you perceived the HSC Visual art experience for HSC visual art students? On a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued) what is the value of the experience do you believe for them (overall judgments is OK)? Can you give examples or incidences of students you have had where the experience was easy, difficult, intense or profound for the student?
5. What ideas or themes do you think are the most important to students? Some examples please.
6. How do you think they valued visual arts relative to their other subjects studied for the HSC? On reflection from your years of experience and personal understandings of visual art students is it significant why? If it is not significant for some students can you give examples of why this might be so?
7. What can you tell me about the learning environment they have with you?
8. On reflection of this learning environment what is most important the art teacher, fellow students, content or any other factors?
9. How important do you think the Visual Art Process Diary is to students generally? How do you value it as a learning tool?
10. In your opinion, has 'doing art' contributed to the participants understanding of themselves or the world? Elaborate if you can on any incidences or conversations you may have had about art and life that stand out in your experiences.
11. Do you believe it taught the participant anything about their beliefs and values? Can you give an example? Possibly from a students artwork or an incident from the classroom? How important on a sliding scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important to 10 very important and valued).
12. Do you emphasise narrative or autobiography in the way you approach teaching art? If so why?
13. Do you consider studying visual art helped the participant to better understand aspects of themselves, or their friends, or family? What about bigger issues like understanding human nature or society, elaborate if you can?
14. What approach is most important for you to achieve authentic learning?
15. Are there any other things you would like to add to the interview that you think are important that I haven't asked?
16. Are you happy to talk with me on another occasion?

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I

### 1991 CATEGORIES OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITIONS

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry** .(Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self- referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions.

**YEAR 1991 (total number: 112)**

Self-Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious).	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self-inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>27%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self-reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
	<b>2%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>		<b>4%</b>

Self Narrative 38%, Identity as Social Cultural Inquiry: 28%, Total 66%; Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 44%

## 1993 CATEGORIES OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITIONS

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry.** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions.

**YEAR 1993 (total number: 137)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>12%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>2%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>1%</b>		<b>2%</b>

Self Narrative 43.5%, Identity as Social Cultural Inquiry: 27%, Total 80.5%; Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 29.5%

## 1996 CATEGORIES OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITIONS

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry.** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positionings.

**YEAR 1996 (total number: 205)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>11%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>1%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Self Narrative 51.5%, Identity as Cultural Inquiry:18%, Total 69%; Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 31%

## 1997 CATEGORIES OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITIONS

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positioning.

**YEAR 1997 (total number: 290)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>30%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
0.5%	2%	2%	3%	1%	0.5%	1%

**Self Narrative 55.5%, Identity as Cultural Inquiry: 10%, Total 65.5%;** Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 34.5%

## 2001 CATEGORY GROUPING SETS OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITION

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions).

### YEAR 2001 (total number 163)

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self (music, semiotics)	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>16%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>10 6%</b>

**Self Narrative: 51%; Identity/ Cultural Construct: 26%; Total 77%;** Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 23%

## 2002 CATEGORY GROUPING SETS OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITION

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** (Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions).

**YEAR 2002 (total number 188)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self (memories)	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity-self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>3%</b>

**Self Narrative: 45.5%; Identity/ Cultural Construct: 33% Total 78.5:** Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 21.5%



## 2003 CATEGORY SETS OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITION

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions

**YEAR 2003 (total number 253)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>

**Self Narrative: 38%; Identity/ Cultural Construct: 24%; Total 62 %. Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies) : 38%**

## 2004 CATEGORY GROUPING SETS OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITION

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions).

**YEAR 2004 (total number: 286)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
14%	12%	11.5%	8%	4%	14%	16%
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
4%	0	2%	10.5%	0.5%	1.5%	2%

**Self Narrative: 50%; Identity/ Social Cultural Construct: 20% Total 70 %;** Non figurative (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 30%

## 2005 CATEGORY GROUPING SETS OF IDENTITY EXPLORATIONS IN ARTEXPRESS EXHIBITION

**The Human Image or Interpretations of the Human Form as a Platform of Inquiry:** Figurative works are grouped on the basis of the artworks representing explicit self referential connections to life as an expressive, critical and performative communicative act in contrast to more objective and analytical modernist positions).

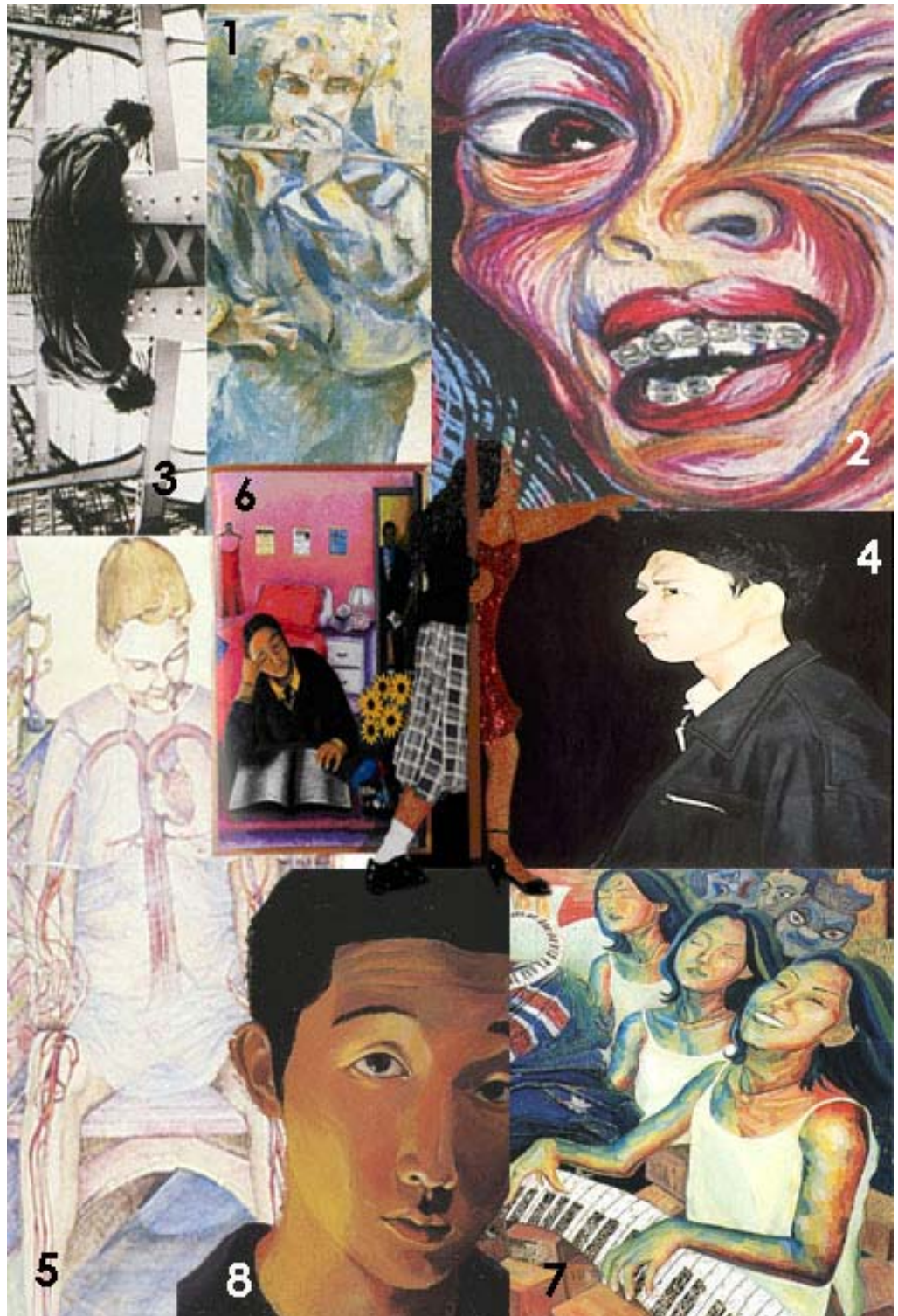
**YEAR 2005 (total number: 290)**

Self Portraits, or autobiographical/ narratives that may include images such as self and family, childhood	Tangential relationships to self: such as images of friends, extended family community, expressive connections	Personal Images of place(s) or objects as locations of intimacy informing self	Representational images of personal feelings, emotions as the subject as opposed to the person. (relationships, events, subconscious,	Issues and postmodern constructs of gender etc in society as a platform of self inquiry	Cultural Identity- self as cultural construct (history, culture, ritual)	Abstraction, figure or object studies, Landscape, still life, illustration, studies of form, design object as basis of self reflection (Modernist Tradition) expressive/ analytical
<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>17%</b>
Journeys of Life as basis of self reflection (life/death, aging)	Images of others in society as a basis of self reflection	Social Comment Issues as basis of self reflection (media, war, conformity, politics)	Nature, Environment/Man as basis of self reflection Object studies	Religion & Spiritual as basis of self reflection	Science a& Art as basis of self reflection	Postmodern reflection of art/aesthetic
<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7%</b>

**Self Narrative: 46%; Identity/ Cultural Construct: 29%; Total 75%;** Non figurative inquiry (including empirical analytical portrait studies): 25 %

## Appendix J

### Montage (M.4.1): Visualising Self, the Self-Portrait



## Montage (M.4.1): Visualising Self, the Self Portrait (Texts)

1. **Benjamin Quilly (1991, p. 30), Self Portrait of Art, Painting.** My work was executed rapidly and spontaneously after completing several months of preliminary drawing. I have always been challenged by intuitive personal expression. I have been influenced...particularly by Brett Whiteley, Egon Schiele and Margaret Woodward...By observing their expressive manipulation of form which still displays a strong sense of draughtsmanship I was able to resolve my composition and appreciate the contribution they have made to art in my society. The painting on the easel in my work is a work by Miro. Through his work I am confronting or perhaps questioning art itself and my possible place in it.
2. **Carolyn Meagher (1993, p. 21), 'Brace Yourself', Painting.** My artwork was based upon years of painful experiences of wearing mouth braces. I've tried to capture the inner torment one goes through in this act of beautification. The portraits are of students at Kincoppal who are suffering the same cruel fate, the addition of hooks, padlocks and chains seems to convey how torturous this act of dentistry is and adds shock value to the grimacing faces. I looked at Albert Tucker and his portraits of suffering for ideas of composition, technique and distortion. The work of the Expressionists also influenced the way I applied the media in a gestural way which gives the effect of anguish.
3. **Karla Gonzales (1991, p. 14), 'Human Kaleidoscope', Photography.** In creating Human Kaleidoscope I [wanted] to portray part of my life in such a way that it would be refreshing to me and interesting to the viewer...My best result was the reversing of negatives and duplicating both original and reversed images, showing the same mirrored symmetrical patterns when placed altogether. In doing this I [had] to match tones of the photos exactly for the four prints, making sure the reversed photos were exactly the same as the originals. Focusing a reversed negative is...difficult. I solved my compositional problems by finding the single photos that were going to work best with the kaleidoscope effect.
4. **Duy Tan Ly (1997, p. 29), 'Identity', Painting** My painting concerns my reflections on the experience of discovering who I now am, after coming from a distant and different culture. The images are self-portraits, incorporating the me that was and the me that I hope or fear will be. The dark background and the uncertainty of the future. The figure, enveloped in strong chiaroscuro, is almost overpowered, obscured by the weight of the void. The things I have forgotten are things destroyed, but they were deeply part of me, so where am I now?
5. **Jane Hirst (1993, p. 13), 'Inside Myself', Painting** I have always been fascinated with the structure of things and what makes them work. In my artwork I have tried to connect the internal systems and the external influences that affect my life. In exploring this subject, I prepared two works, one executed in oils and the other rendered in pen, watercolour and gouache. In the oil painting music was the dominant theme and the pen/watercolour work highlights my love of science. In doing the work I was influenced by many artists, most notably the Russian artist Pavel Tchelitchev whose series entitles 'Landscapes of the Human Body' inspired me with its energy and vibrancy.
6. **Ivone D'Ornelas (1997, p. 15), 'After Dark the real me Comes Alive', Painting.** My work depicts how ethnic families in our society today pressure teenage females to excel. Most of these girls are forbidden to go out, as their families try to protect them from the perceived evils of their new country. Acrylic paint was used as I wanted to create a strong bold painting. Real objects were added in parts to heighten the reality. My work literally shows Cadesjah in two different spheres of reality. One is the boring world of 'As' and the other 'after dark' alluring world of drugs and alcohol. I used relief sculpture to move her between these two worlds. But who is the real Cadesjah?
7. **Eun Joo Lee (1997, p. 76), 'Cultural Change', Painting.** My work is an emotionally complex one. It is an attempt to integrate all the different experiences that have formed my character. There is the sadness and disorientation I feel at being unable to overcome difficulties to do with my different background as a Korean immigrant in a new country. There is also the joy I have in being able to overcome these problems and achieve the realisation of my own talents through my faith in Jesus and connection with His church. I mainly used acrylic colour, which I felt confident in dealing with. Also I used collage (photo and cloth) to make my work interesting and expressive.
8. **Ronald Kim (1997, p. 25), 'Illusions of Something Else', Painting.** In my artwork I have tried to capture the alienation and isolation that I was feeling after an unbearable experience. The work has, for this reason, been presented in a cyclical nature in order to show the ongoing torment that engulfed my soul. Further more, the light intensities also differ throughout the series to give the work the sense that time is progressing. However, my existence remains futile. Like Rembrandt, who has played a major role in my artmaking, I have tried to record my emotions by allowing the spectator to visually observe the 'empty gaze'.



## Appendix K

### Montage (M.4.2): Visualising Self, the Self-Portrait



## Montage (M.4.2): Visualising Self, the Self Portrait

**1. Shuang Chen, (2005), 'Myopic', Drawing 5 Pieces.** I have focused on the sense of self. Following the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, I have signed my portraits with a strong symbol of my identity. From the age of seven I have worn glasses for myopia, and at times I have been identified by my glasses. My work involved an in-depth study of my image over time and in different situations, using charcoal as my medium to give the drawings both subtlety and contrasted light and tone.

**2. Chloe Banicevic (2005), 'Make Yourself', sculpture, 9 Pieces.** My work is a visual metaphor for one's journey to create who they are as a person, avoiding the pressures and social standards of society. The hands and body are casts of my own down to the last detail, symbols of my personal experience of creating my own character, choosing my own parts and consequently becoming who I am today ... myself. It is important to examine the gentle nature and young detail in the hands which mould the body. They exemplify the notion of seeking individuality in your youth and forever being yourself.

**3. Jessica Hicks (2002, p. 107), 'Sit Down, Shut Up and Have a Cup of Tea!', Painting, three pieces.** This painting is about whatever you feel when you look at it. For me, it is a continuous exploration of self, with no real conclusions. About what it is to inhabit a body, voyeurism. The bottom line is this is me, you are you, regardless of anyone else.

**4. Sam Wolff-Gillings (2005), 'Subtexts', Documented Form, 13 pieces ( detail)** 'Subtexts' explores the underlying meanings associated with growing up, and the journeys undertaken by teenagers in general. Through this I also attempted to show the moods or feelings leading to freedom, as seen in the final, larger shot of the teenager ready and prepared to face the future, having overcome previous obstacles and disappointments. My inspiration came from the friends and people around me who have achieved their freedom. The artmaking process primarily depended upon the location of the school, finding places that reflect the teenagers' moods. Combining with the texts ensured that neither aspect dominated the work.

**5. Carla Middleton (2003, p. 95), 'Myclonic Epilepsy: Seizing the Mind, Body and Spirit', Painting.** This body of work is a way for me to express the emotional and physical aspects of myclonic epilepsy, a condition I have integrated into my adolescent life. I chose a large format and the contrast of yellow and pink to invade the comfort zone of the audience. I deliberately distorted linear perspective to reflect my feelings of anguish and disorientation. EEG patterns symbolise my abnormal brain waves, the hands reflect the pain in my mind, body and spirit. The PJs represent the uniform of epilepsy which I suffer during sleep.

**6. Kim Goldthorp (2002, p. 20), "Jacob's Wrestle", Painting 5 pieces.** Jacob's Wrestle is influenced by the works of photo-realists and Robert Rauschenberg. My conceptual practice explores the spiritual: a journey, struggle, choice and the freedom to search for enlightenment. In my material practice I employed disparate media, e.g. graphite, acrylic paint, collage and found objects. The ladder was of great significance and was a powerful metaphor.

**7. Kieran White (2003, p. 83), 'Trapped in the Wake of Your Existence', Collection of Works.** Exploring the interactions between myself and my twin- a struggle to be recognised as individuals in a world where we're seen as mirror images of one another. Auerbach, Gittoes and Giacometti's expressive representations were influential. Words became so important to me that my final piece was created purely through layers of text. Although the time I can spend on this series is over, my relationship with Justine continues to evolve and hence this work can never be finished.

**8. Erin Black (2005), 'Narcissus, I, II, III', Painting (detail).** I portray the slippery, unfixed nature of identity, and the desire to hold on to rigid notions of the self, relying on set moments captured in photographs or in cherished possessions that offer a sense of security in times of change. Self-portraiture is an expression of the self – but which self? The leaning stands serve to invade the viewer's space, heightening this sense of anxiety. 'Narcissus' depicts transition from the perception of self to the acceptance of 'selves'; like Narcissus's reflection on the water's surface, such is the ever-variant self.

## Appendix L

### Montage (M.4.3): Visualising Events





## Montage (M.4.3): Visualising Events

**1. Lauren Murphy (2001, p. 74), 'Bondi Tides', Drawings.** My Body of work made up of six pastel images was inspired by concepts to do with the passing of one summer or the span of a day at the beach. The images evoke parallels with the outset of adolescent sexual awakening followed by adult maturity, and finally sexual and physical deterioration through old age.

**2. Stephanie Knight (1991, p. 19), 'My Mother', Painting.** My artwork was inspired and driven by the intimate sensitive works of Marc Chagall...My mother died when I was young and I found the lyrical, dream like creations of Chagall to be the perfect vehicle for representing my romantic intimate warm feelings about my mother's life, as seen through the innocence of my childhood. I used colour as a medium of joy and expression. My main problem was creating a soft image with such intense colour I found that blurring and softening forms created this fantasy-like image. I learned about the transience and fragility of life and the precious qualities of childhood.

**3. Louise Genet (2003, p. 71), 'Flow of Life', Drawing.** I explore the issue of life being a journey of sorts. My fascination with the movement and flow of water lead me to relate this concept back to life. The concept of 'life flowing' naturally led me to a flowing medium, hence ink. I tried to balance out the works by having areas of high detail and areas of plene washes with little or no detail.

**4. Jane Milligan (2004), "shoo Fly Don't Bother Me", Documented Forms 5 Pieces.** Through video, found objects, painting and installation my work explores ideas surrounding 'labelling' and the effect it has on a child. The installation comprises a discarded library catalogue box which symbolically contains the definition of those labels, the reoccurring fly symbol connotes the discarded child, being dismissed by those around her.

**5. Jeremy Entwisle (2005), 'Being and Nothingness', Paintings.** Man is unique in his ability to question his existence. But this gift is also his greatest curse for he soon realises his nothingness.

**6. Shabnam, Naddef-Meli (2003, p.30), 'Imprints of Life's Journey, Drawing 4 Pieces.**

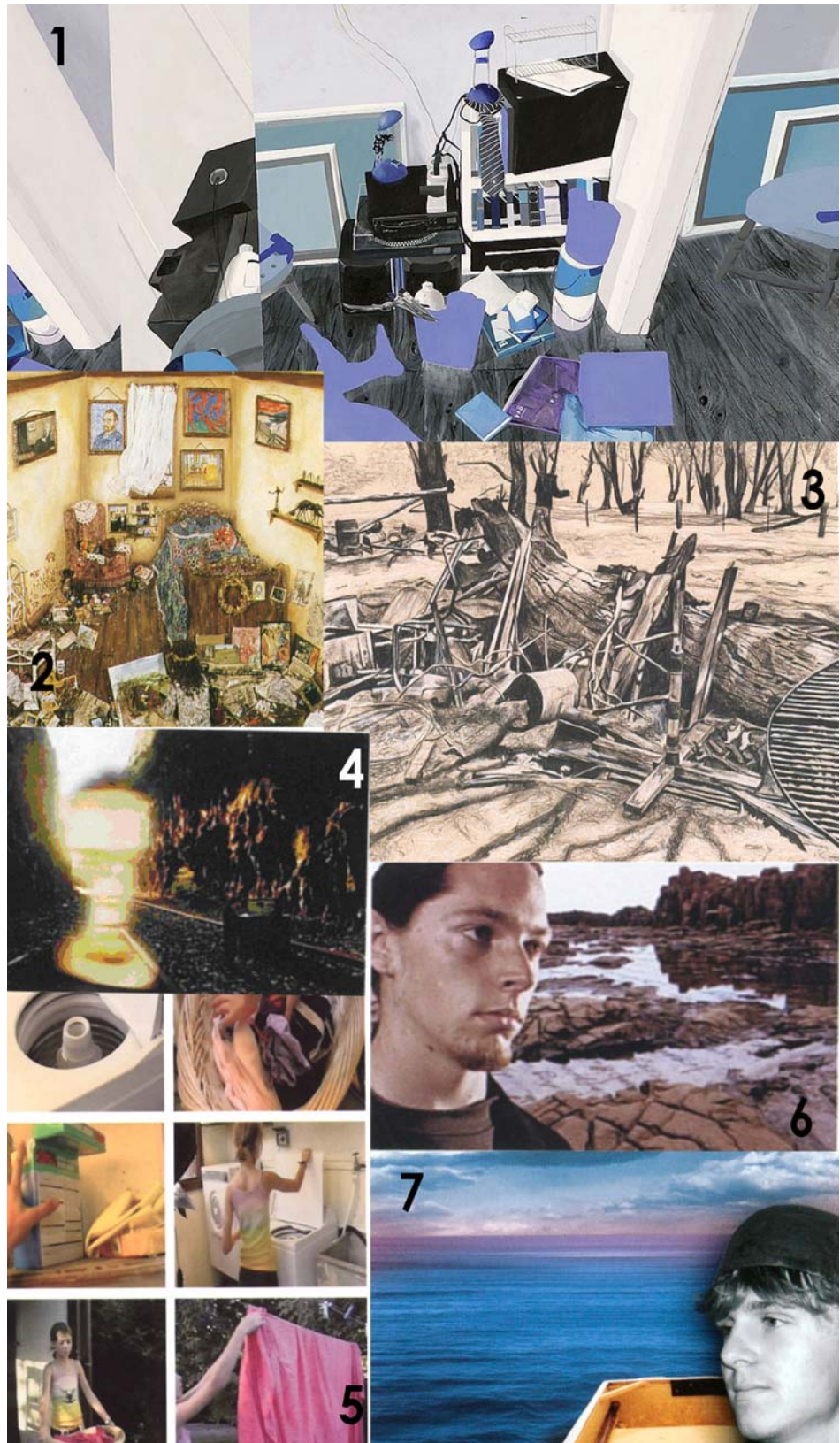
The journey of life is one that every human being takes. This body of work, *Imprints of Life's Journey* explores the concept of the imprints of the journey upon ones physical features with emphasis the hands and eyes, as they are the main features indicating the passage of time.

**7. Laura Garzaniti (2003, p. 71), 'What Lies Within, Printmaking 6 Pieces.** I chose to explore the issues of self-mutilation in my work. I worked with the medium of printmaking as the cutting of the lino block reinforced the idea of cutting oneself. I used objects from within the home to express the emotions felt within a person. I feel a personal connection to the concepts and form of the body of work

**8. Melani Brayshaw (2003, p. 20), 'The Long and Winding Road' Paining 2 Pieces.** My body of work explores 'the long and winding road', the significance relationships have on our existence; the road they take us on from adolescence to adulthood. My works show a man in his youth and as a grown adult, reflecting on a significant relationship in his life. His emotions are literally etched into his face: the contrast of tones, the harsh lines all contribute to how he feels. The two faces tell the story and this is complemented by the lyrics from the selected Beatles songs to break up the background compositionally and to bring the viewer in.

## Appendix M

### Montage (M.4.4): Visualising Events



## Montage (M.4.4): Visualising Events

**1. Stephen Hutchings (2005), 'Still Life', Painting.** This piece is an exploration of the relationship between art making and the immediate frame of reference.

**2. Amanda Henriksen (1991, p. 15), 'The Artists Bedroom', Painting.** It was inspired by the composition of Van Gogh's "The Artist's Bedroom" I decided to include many items which were personal and important to me. I changed the composition until it was derived from my own bedroom and I placed intricate items crafted by myself and scattered throughout the bedroom. I also composed myself in the room painting my other major work. I included work by many artists whose work inspired me such as Giacometti, Dobell, Picasso, Whistler, Morandi, Munch, Van Gogh, Tjapaltjarri, Michelangelo, da Vinci, Wood, Wyeth, Degas, Cezanne and the "Chair" by Unknown.

**3. Donna Cantrill (2003, p. 54), 'Conversations with Bulldog and Smike, Orange, 2003'. Collection of Works, 15 Pieces.** My work is an exploration of the landscape around my Dad's farm in Orange which represents a big part of my childhood. I experimented with different materials, acrylics and watercolours, to express how I saw the landscape during the hot summer months.

'Bulldog' is the nick name for Tom Roberts and "Smike" as Arthur Streeton, prominent Australian landscape artists who wrote letters to each other. In my visual diary I wrote letters to them, telling them about my artwork and having 'conversations' about the landscape.

**4. Brendan Plunkett (2001, p. 28), 'Series of Six Self Portraits, detail, Photography.** My work presents images of my mental states. The combination of landscape, interior, portrait, still life and macro photographs is intended to create a disturbing self-portrait. Art influences include Surrealism and Albert Tucker's *Philosopher* which also shows the artist in his own mental environment. Bringing these photographs together involved digitally cutting and pasting, matching detail and focus, adjusting colours and opacity, aligning perspectives and creating shadows appropriate for the object's new environment.

**5. Emma Davidson (2001, p. 16), 'All day I live my life', Film/video.** My work is about the two levels of life, the day-to-day domestic grind and the internal, the monologue. These two levels could function by themselves, but my video aims to show that the calm, daily domesticity and the sad, lamenting thoughts work together. This video might appear as simply a girl doing the washing, but the normality of these slow, almost mesmerising images, emphasised by the rhythmic editing is important because it reveals that these two levels (the good and the bad) exist at the same time.

**6. Brendan Plunkett (2001, p. 28), 'Series of Six Self Portraits, detail, Photography.** My work presents images of my mental states. The combination of landscape, interior, portrait, still life and macro photographs is intended to create a disturbing self-portrait. Art influences include Surrealism and Albert Tucker's *Philosopher* which also shows the artist in his own mental environment. Bringing these photographs together involved digitally cutting and pasting, matching detail and focus, adjusting colours and opacity, aligning perspectives and creating shadows appropriate for the object's new environment.

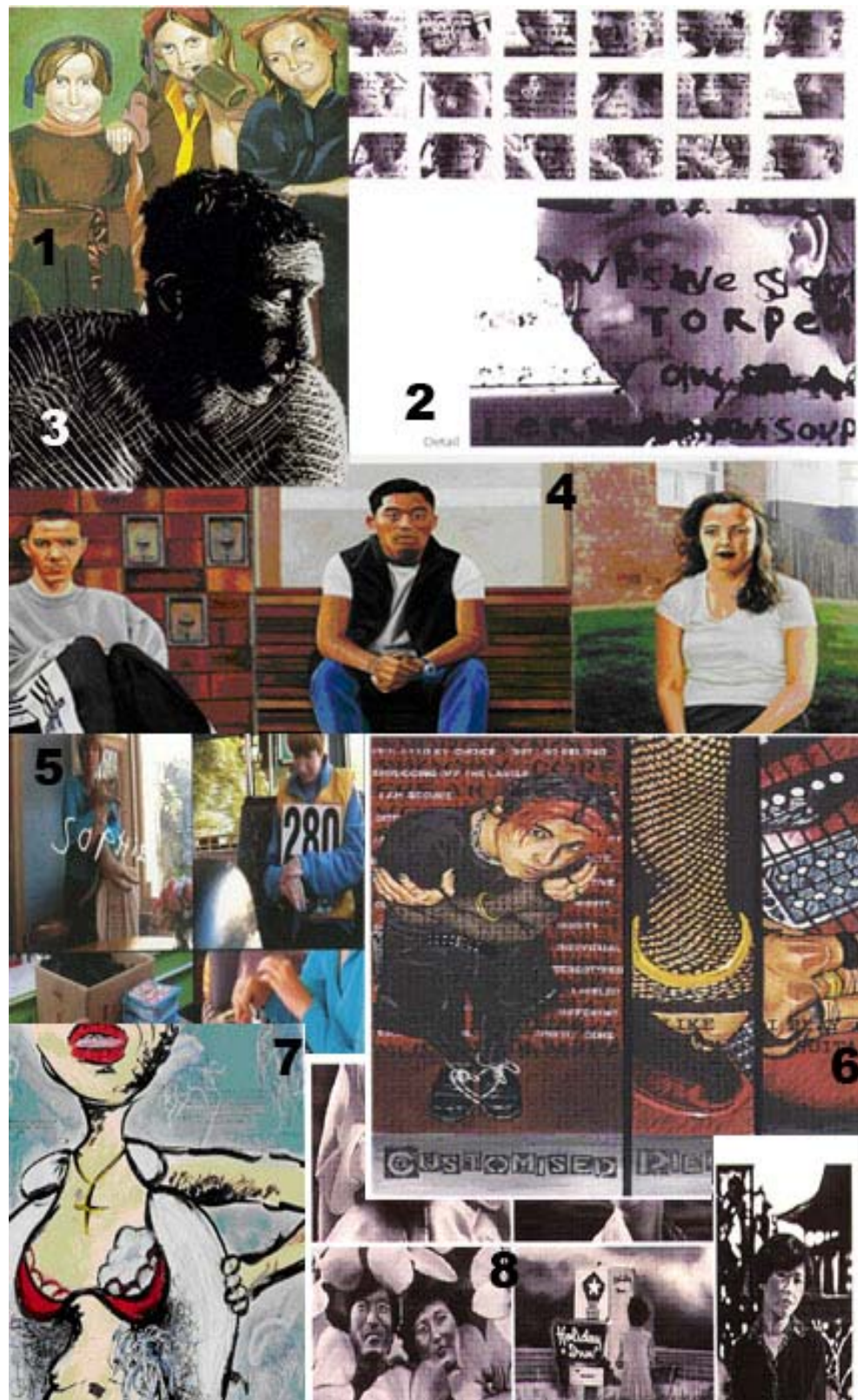
**7. Paul Baka (2003, p. 121), 'My Life My Mind', Interactive.**

*My Life My Mind* explores a shift, which takes place both physically and mentally. It reflects a journey that takes place in my own life as I live in the city but return to visit my childhood home, which is natural beach and bushland. The photographic images capture my visual encounters as I move through the city and wait for the train. The more abstract created images reflect the state of mind these encounters evoke- anticipations, aversion, memories and longing. Approaching my destination a sense of freedom and possibility is conveyed by the open spaces of the ocean and waiting boat.



## Appendix N

### Montage (M.4.5): Tangential Visibility



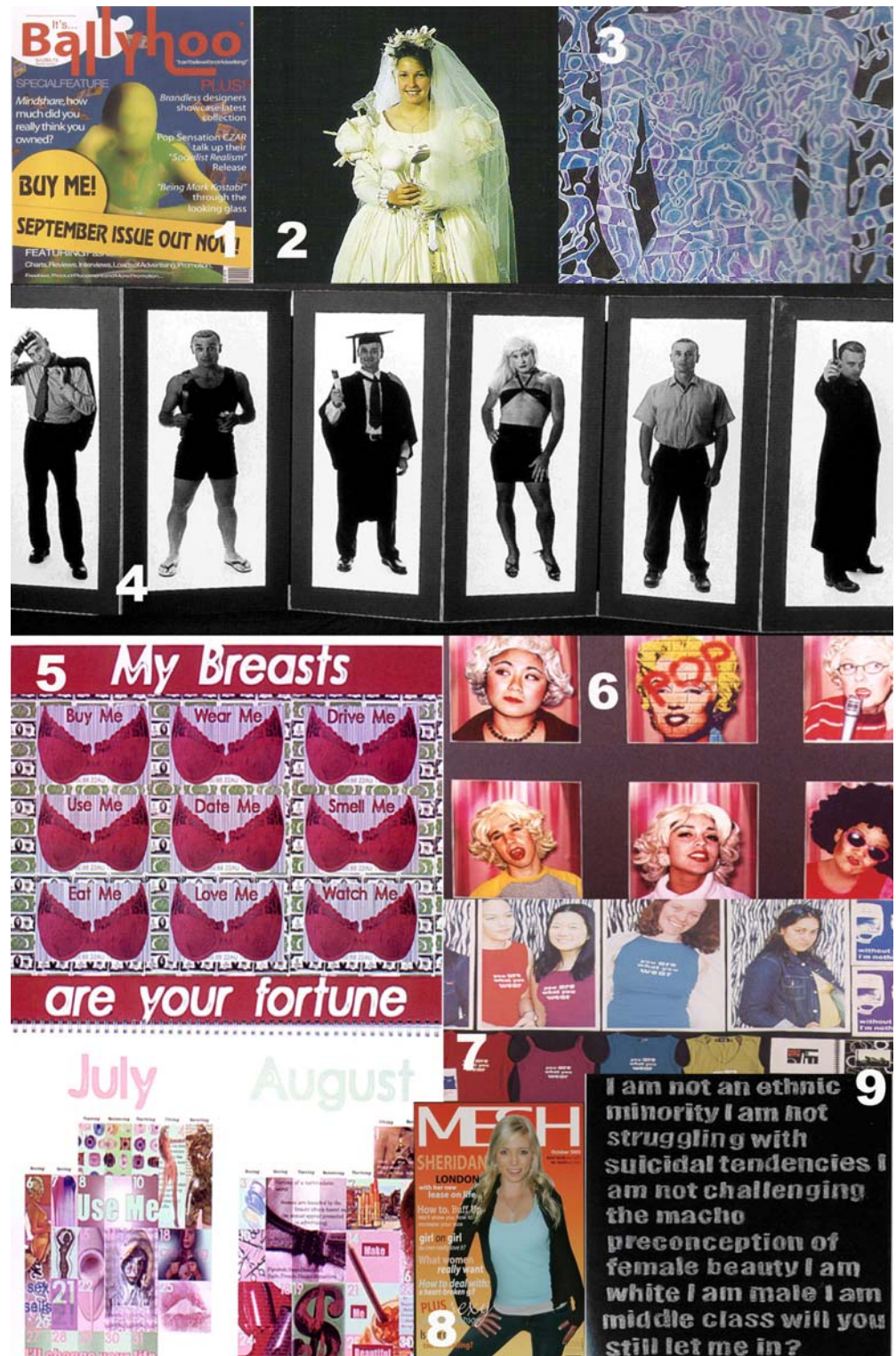
## Montage (M.4.5): Tangential Visibility

- 1. Suzanne Ganey (1991, p. 13). 'Hang Me in a Gallery', Mixed media.** My sole inspiration came from a childhood photo of great character. The frame which I felt must be gold and partially a detailed design, built itself as I worked. I found it was easier to execute the inner edge of the frame using dowel wood to make it look [realistic]. I realised that if my work was to have the vibrancy and life I had envisaged, I would have to re-paint the whole canvas. I completed the work with pastel. In all it was a challenge in capturing shadow, depth and proportion and also a [useful] experiment in using [unfamiliar] materials.
- 2. Jolanda Moyle (2001, p. 25). 'Michael', Collection of Works.** In my body of work I have not tried to imitate a sense of reality but let what I see unfold in its own way. Through film I was able to capture my brother Michael's character, his mental state and his subtle revelation of mental illness. I have used different aspects to present his character as juxtaposed parallels of physicality and psyche. The houseboat represents the past and its place in his current state. The wheel is seen as a force which rolls us on, symbolic of our way of life, and the way to deal with negative experiences. Ultimately, my collection of works intimately delves into the inter-subjective relationship between myself and my brother.
- 3. Minto MacPherson (1997, p. 29). 'Knowledge of Self', Graphics.** These wood engravings were inspired by black-and-white photographs taken of a friend. I tried to achieve a sense of dislocation and self-analysis, which combined to bring about a stronger understanding of individuality. The wood engraving medium helped me to achieve close intimate portraits. A looser, more expressive style was employed to capture emotion and presence of person. I had trouble balancing the composition with the black-and-white but in the end I was happy with my solution.
- 4. Luke Crouch (1997, p. 14). 'Self Portrait with friends', Painting.** For these portraits I chose to paint myself along with a friend and my sister because these two people are both influential in my life, as well as being easily accessible. As the paintings progressed I became more confident in using oil paint and I found myself constantly going over and redoing areas to bring all three paintings to the same standard. The compositions are quite symmetrical and I had to arrange them to allow the three paintings to go together, which meant reversing some backgrounds and linking them together through common colours and objects
- 5. Georgia Carter (2003, p.121). 'Sophie', Film/video.** Repetitive behaviour in a well adjusted and happy intellectually disabled girl was the focus of my body of work. The challenge was to capture various aspects of her repetitive day-to-day life on video and then cut and edit this in a professional and sympathetic manner. My technical use of split scenes and frequent fades allowed me to demonstrate her behaviour and compare it simultaneously with her structured routine. My major work was particularly emotional and satisfying for me as Sophie, the 21-year-old star of my film is my sister.
- 6. Christian Zapf (2002, p. 96). 'My Friend Ben', Painting 3 Pieces.** My body of work *My Friend Ben* is about the perceived nature of subcultures and stereotypes. The work is concerned with individuality and the ways we choose to define ourselves or how others define us. I was also interested in the misconceptions that are easily created when we see or experience something a little out of the ordinary.
- 7. Sarah Batt (1997, p. 10). 'MY mother wears a jellyfish in her bra', Drawing.** I wanted to do this work for a few reasons, but the strongest would have been to pay a tribute to my mother's strength and to celebrate that she is still alive. I also wanted to look at how a disease can affect a person- physically, mentally and emotionally. I also had unresolved emotions I had to work through. Each work is done in a different medium because each conveys a different tone and atmosphere. I had great trouble with the second one and only through continued experimentation did I find something I liked I hope my work conveys a hopeful message – that breast cancer ( or any disease really) should not be immediately associated with death and shame.
- 8. Hannah Park (2001, p. 26). 'My Mother's Story', Drawing.** My Mother's Story displays significant aspects of her life: treasuring her Korean culture; reflecting on the past; aspirations for the future; the displacement; the longing to return. In this story an immigrant faces the inevitability of change. Charcoal gave me the freedom to convey moods through powerful tones of black and white which were subject to vivid emotions and expressive blurs of feeling. This was my mother's story.



## Appendix O

Montage (M.4.6): Visibility as a Cultural & Social Discursive Identity Construct



## Montage (M.4.6): Visibility as a Cultural & Social Discursive Identity Construct

- 1. Martin Hlavacek (2002, p. 107). 'Ballyhoo', Graphic Design.** *Ballyhoo* is defined as a chaotic, noisy situation or blatant advertising. Created as a reaction against the objectivity of popular media and the loss of individual identity through consumerism. *Ballyhoo* is a parody of everything mass media stands for. *Ballyhoo* serves as a wake-up call to the intellectually destitute youth of today.
- 2. Claire Goby (1991, p. 13). 'The Disillusioned Bride', Wearable.** I gained the major inspiration for my work from experiences related to my job at a Bridal Boutique. [I wanted to explore] beyond the bridal look, yet capture and use it to communicate the after-image of marriage. I conducted a survey on various married women to seek their opinions before and after marriage. Results from this survey are portrayed in the various items shown on the dress, while the 'lace look' on the veil incorporates a combination of quotes taken from the survey... In completing my major work I learned to be aware of a mental image – trial an idea, view it, discuss and evaluate with others before taking the next step.
- 3. Kris Bankier (1993, p. 2). 'Engendered Fantasy', Painting.** The theme I worked on for my major work was the notion of body politics represented by the nude human figure. Images of the human figure appear in all aspects of popular culture and form a basis for the stereotypical roles expected from each gender. Through my studies in year 12 I explored the notion of reversal of gender roles represented by the pose and body posture adopted by the figure. Rod Milgate, an Australian artist influenced my major work through his technique of dividing the image into a number of smaller images in his work entitled Descent from the cross. Through experimenting with images and media, I finally produced a larger figure representing my views on the socially defined roles projected by gender bias images in our culture.
- 4. Imran Kamal (1997, p. 52). 'What do you want to be?', Photography.** My work is the expression of irritation I felt when relatives and friends ask: what do you want to be? My answer began with four male stereotypes; the aim was to stimulate awareness of the demands imposed by the question. Ideas changed and developed over time, complicating the work. It became necessary to add panels. The stark images of Chuck Close and Robert Mapplethorpe influenced moods I wanted to create. I chose photography as the medium to formulate the effect. I struggled with how to display the work and aid the viewer interpretation. I hope this work doesn't need interpretation.
- 5. Mina Giang (2002, p. 21). 'Beauty', Graphic Design.** My body of work reflects perceptions of beauty over time in different cultures and in art history. My computer-generated images took the form of a calendar as I enjoy producing design work for which there is a purpose and a need to work within constraints. I used the computer as this allowed me to manipulate and reproduce multiple images, change scale and add text.
- 6. Emma Court (2001, p. 55). 'Marilyn Munroe- A Dime a Dozen', Collection of works.** My attempt to comically portray the consumer-driven ethos of quantity over quality blurs the barriers between race, gender and even species. Using the medium of photography aided by digital enhancement, I attacked the traditional ideas of beauty. I adopted the Warholian guise of 'Marilyn Monroe' to convey and support my ideas of media overkill, Western influence and feminine mystique.
- 7. Madeline Genner (2001, p. 18). 'You are What You Wear', graphic Design**

Every day thousands of fashion advertisements encourage us to believe that our external self is more important than our internal self, and every day thousands of people follow the advertising. From this basic idea, I have created my body of work using the mass media techniques of the fashion industry to explore our desire to use accessories to define ourselves within our consumer-driven society.
- 8. Gordana Gorgiojski (2005). 'Mesh', Graphic Design 4 Pieces.** My artwork explores the world of magazines. 'Mesh' is oriented around issues related to men but, unlike other men's magazines, it considers aspects of life that most men do not normally deal with. In many ways my artwork could be viewed as styled on traditional women's magazines. I created a world of famous people, showing the power of the magazine industry and how easy it is to make an average person look famous. Care was taken to create consistent design and a layout that is unique to 'Mesh'.
- 9. Liam Grealy (2003, p. 43). 'Untitled (Will You Still Let me In?)', Collection of works.** *Untitled* conveys my feelings regarding the establishment of identity as a young white, middle-class male, part of the majority. It relates to societal preconceptions and the willingness to categorise based on ethnicity. Influences included the work of African-American artist Glen Ligon, hip hop culture and previous ARTEXPRESS exhibitions. The title question is directed at both my society and the curators of ARTEXPRESS.



## Appendix P

### Montage (M.4.7): Visibility as a Cultural Discursive Construct – Identity, Ethnicity & Conformity





## Montage (M.4.7): Visibility as a Cultural Discursive Construct – Identity, Ethnicity & Conformity

. **Olga Lazaridis (1991, p. 21). 'Wog Rituals', Mixed media.** Based on five of my most favourite childhood photos, the process was to express personal feelings relating to my ethnic background and its rituals. This is shown mainly in the distortion of facial expressions. Because family and friends were an inspiration for my artwork, and the scenes in the art being so memorable, bright colours were always essential. I coloured on paper with oil pastels and crayons. The black paint was applied and scratched off, leaving a thick outline to distinguish everything more clearly. This was influenced by Matisse and Margaret Preston. After accomplishing the five pieces I discovered they all draw the viewer into the picture.

**2. Tristan Kenyon (2003, p. 123). 'Suburban Reality', Digital Animation.** In my animation I sought to portray a comical insight into the proceedings of everyday life. I wanted to depict real life in a fun way reflecting the style of such films as Toy Story. Having used and been interested in the animation medium for six years, the creation of a fun and aesthetically detailed story in 3D became a new challenge. Producing the animation was time-consuming and consisted of digitally creating every detail in the film from characters to animation. Including working files, rendered frame and post production, the entire project was over 42,500 megabytes in size.

**3. Patrick De Teliga (2001, p. 56). 'The Bloke and His Dog', Drawing.** My body of work is an expressive form of drawing using black ink and paint and coloured oils to complement my concept. There are two basic series- 'Pain' and 'Humour'. 'Pain' has two aspects- 'Cause' and 'Effect'. 'Humour' has three aspects- 'Adam and Eve', 'The Bloke and His Dog', and the 'Baz and Shaz' series. All the drawings are forms of irony and satire.

**4. Ayla Cakal (2003, p. 21). 'I wore a veil from the age of ten', Textiles and Fibre.** An exploration of my grandmother's life, her culture and religious traditions and identity, but during this process I also considered my mother's and my own cultural identity. Stitching reflects the traditional role of the female within the family unit and the use and manipulation of polaroids and text gives my work a contemporary setting.

**5. Julia Salamonsen (2005). '(Matriarchy) My Mother's Daughter', Photography** 20 pieces I explored the notion of cultural identity, looking at the strong influence my mother and her Japanese culture have had on my relationship with her and on my upbringing in a Western culture. I wear a traditional kimono, acknowledging my heritage and exhibiting the customs of subtlety and modesty that are cornerstones of Japanese culture. By contrast, the act of undressing represents the emergence of a new identity within myself as an Australian. The photographs scattered on the ground represent the way that culture transcends time and the inevitability of change.

**6. Rebecca Schembri (2003, p. 47). 'Conformity is a Valid Concern', Collection of Works.** Blindly, we line ourselves up along the dotted lines of formulaic ideals. Our society undermines any sense of individuality. Each so-called individual can be seen as a paper doll, a manufactured toy. Each subjected to the power of the institution. Each to be shaped, cut and moulded, Each to fit neatly into the grids of social expectation and acceptance. These concepts were explored as a means of analysing and challenging society. Conformity is a valid concern. What is the measure of your oblivion?

**7. Danielle Stapleton (2003, p. 46). 'Who Do You Want To Be Today?', Collection of Works.** My artwork aims to portray the role of gender stereotypes in modern Western society and to interrogate the validity of individual perceptions of such structures. I am interested in the way society believes we have blurred the rigid definitions between males and females. However what my artwork intends to show is that total equality between the two sexes is virtually impossible

**8. Joshua Kerr (2003, p. 77). 'Plastic Majority', Drawing.** My work is about consumerism, uniformity, coercion of the masses and the importance of preserving individuality. I wanted to make a statement about my own individuality. I used a smudging technique with a wide variety of graphic pencils in order to create a synthetic artificial effect and rich tonal textures. The mannequins represent consumerism and the empty pursuit of fashion. They are all smiling; the human is the only one with an expressionless face. I stand apart in my self portrait, only revealing to the world a part of my face looking on the Plastic Majority of our society.

**9. Michael Carroll (2004). 'Are You Consumed', Collection of Works.** I have carefully manipulated front pages of well-known newspapers, changing the headlines and images to reinforce the obsession we have with consumption. Stark Barbara Kruger's billboards influenced the slick commercial finish in my own artmaking. My use of text is aimed at making the viewer question the world they live in.

## Appendix Q

### Montage (M.4.8): Visibility on the Social and Ethical Self



## Montage (M.4.8): Visibility on the Social and Ethical Self

1. **Ellen Mackie (1997, p. 29). 'Educated emotional conflict', Drawing.** All students at school are individuals, exploring with different and often conflicting emotions. This is a school photo with a difference. The conformity of the school seen in most school photos as absent and the students are simply being themselves. The positions, emotions and expressions of each student significantly represent the way they view their school life. However, to the disgust of many teachers, their attitudes don't come across as positive. So this school photo is just a representation of educated emotional conflicts that constantly arise in everyday of school life.
2. **Sarah Hipsley (1997, p. 21). 'Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong', Painting.** My series of works were inspired after spending three weeks travelling through Vietnam. My time in Vietnam made me realise that the Vietnam War not only affected soldiers, but the ordinary everyday Vietnamese- the farmers, the villagers. So many of these people were brutally slaughtered. They knew the soldiers were coming but were powerless. They could do nothing. So they got on with things as best they could, whilst the war raged all around them. My artwork is a tribute to the brave and wonderful people of Vietnam. It is about how the war affected the people as well as their culture.
3. **Christina Park (2001, p. 75). 'Oppression, Resistance Asylum', Drawing.** My drawings are about political issues in Korea in the 1950s. News media and the public of the time are depicted through the use of distorted and ripped newspapers, intensive red slashes and detailed self-portraits. They symbolise the struggle for freedom despite all the perils. It was important to evoke a strong powerful atmosphere to convey a sense of the passion of young men fighting for justice.
4. **O'Connor, Vincent (2003, p. 30). 'Fomori: The Dispossessed', Collection of Works.** My artwork explores the universal cycle of invasion and dispossession using the Celtic myth of the Fomori as a metaphor for all cast-out people. Inspiration is drawn from haunting images from my deceased grandmother's photograph album and from tribal masks of the North American Indians, Balinese dance, African tribal totems and the art of Diego Rivera. I am giving new life to the memory of my dispossessed predecessors through tin extracted from sheds hand-built by my grandparents, crafting these masks into an image for the world's dispossessed peoples: the Fomori.
5. **Samantha Collins (1997, p. 94). 'Madonna del simplicity', Painting.** My artwork is an appropriated oil painting of Raphael's Madonna del Graduca. I am seeking to break down any truths or beliefs upheld in the iconic image through a postmodernist perspective and my role as a child. I wanted the work to operate as a painting, which inspired a reverence for this relationship, but also as a reminder of the loss of this sacredness in our contemporary society. The love between a mother and a child cannot be constructed in the way women sew, nor can it be conveyed realistically in a flat two-dimensional painting. The archetypal mother and child cannot be achieved by formula or simple instructions on a dress pattern.
6. **Michael Elder (2001, p. 72). 'Die Krafanlage' Drawing.** 'Die Krafanlage', meaning 'power plant', is a presentation of my thoughts about the amalgamated evolution of humans and technology. I have always been interested in the kinetics of the raw human form and Renaissance artists have influenced me. In the process of creating this work, I have used traditional methods of drawing as well as digital methods involving a graphic tablet.
7. **Yvonne Maxfield (1991, p. 23). 'Against Vivisection', Drawing.** Extensive research with the help of factual articles on animal cruelty contributed to the development of these horrific but aesthetic mediums aiming to induce disturbing emotions. But chiefly I was visually inspired by the indignant, tormented faces of animals which have been exploited through animal experiments discovered through my research. the blank lines which break up the drawings represent the entrapment, these lethal but legal death machines inflict on these animals...A disturbing, unethical, human infliction on defenceless, often bewildered domestic animals.
8. **Christopher Berry (2001, p. 121). 'Future', Interactive.** In the making of my work I wanted to explore the idea of the convergence of man and machine. Through an interactive I was able to express how we are becoming increasingly dependent on machines and technology in our day-to-day lives. I was inspired by the Australian performance artist Stelarc, whose work, *Third Arm*, led me to further investigate ideas of machinery and technology and how it affects our worlds. My work is about consumerism, uniformity, coercion of the masses and the importance of preserving individuality. I wanted to make a statement about my own individuality. I used a smudging technique with a wide variety of graphic pencils in order to create a synthetic artificial effect and rich tonal textures. The mannequins represent consumerism and the empty pursuit of fashion. They are all smiling; the human is the only one with an expressionless face. I stand apart in my self portrait, only revealing to the world a part of my face looking on the Plastic Majority of our society.
9. **Calvin Luk (2002, p. 27). 'M.P.D. Mental Process Diary', Collection of Works.** My work seeks to take the audience behind the scenes into the psychological world of an artist during the process of art creation. The audience immerse themselves in my world as the comic narrative dictates, and in trying to make sense of the world, undergo their own mental Process. Inspiration includes traditional comic conventions and the work of David Mack.
9. **Kristie Lee (2003, p.94). 'World Vision', Sculpture.** In constructing my body of work, I strove to convey the need for equality of all races on Earth. Underneath the exterior we all have similar needs and everyone has derived from the same origin, so why shouldn't we be treated equally?

All student works referenced from:

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