

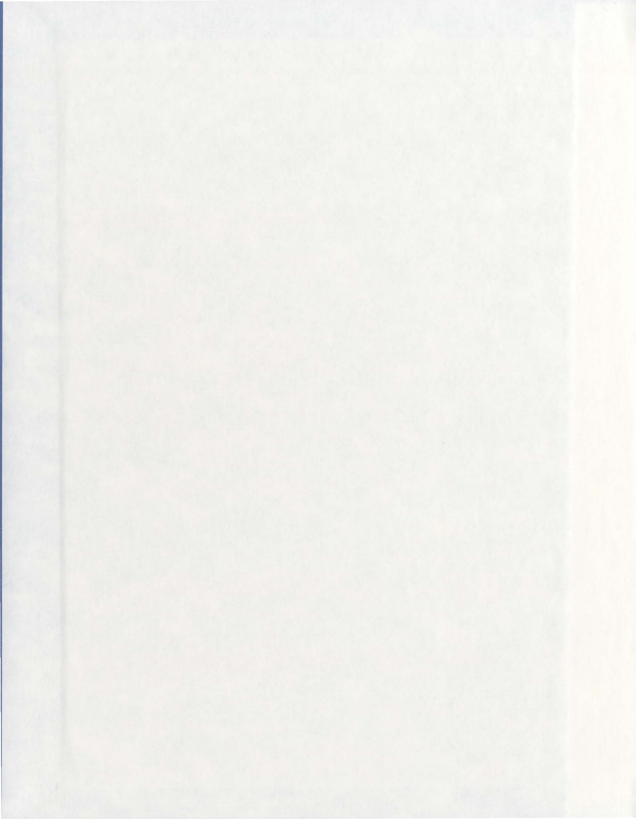
"PIECING WOMANHOODS":
A NEXUS OF GENDERED AND MIDDLE-CLASS
PRACTICES BY WOMEN WHO QUILT IN
ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

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JAIME GRIFFIS



**"PIECING WOMANHOODS": A NEXUS OF GENDERED AND MIDDLE-
CLASS PRACTICES BY WOMEN WHO QUILT IN ST. JOHN'S,
NEWFOUNDLAND**

by

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School of Graduate Studies
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Abstract

This thesis investigates how women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland construct and negotiate gendered and middle-class practices. I explore the ways quilters frame complex 'selves' and ideals of womanhood by analyzing their dialogues, performances and interactions. This analysis focuses on themes that emerged from my ethnographic fieldwork such as 'personhoods', 'femininity', 'community', 'middle-classness', 'power', 'agency' and 'social action'. I analyze how some quilters 'piece' narratives of communication within their creations for the purpose of expressing personal agency. I also include an investigation of the contexts where quilters choose to mobilize personal agency into social action through quilting. This thesis is grounded in the historical context of quilt creators in twentieth century Newfoundland and Labrador where the practice of quilting has developed into an ambiguous act. This ambiguity provides quilters a negotiable site to reveal, through narrative and 'performance', values and ideals that construct their individual and collective womanhoods.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank all of the women who shared their stories, experiences, lives, families and time for this project. I would also like to extend a huge thank you to the members of the Cabot Quilters' Guild for allowing me to come and speak at your September monthly meeting and attend the fall retreat. There would be no thesis without you. Also, I thank the individuals of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Anna Templeton Centre who gave me vital contact information in order to get this project off the ground.

This next paragraph is devoted to acknowledging the faculty of the Department of Anthropology who have helped make this thesis materialize. Dr. Wayne Fife, thank you for your honest constructive criticism of my ideas and writing and for pushing me beyond what I considered to be my limits in terms of finishing this project. Thank you for 'staying the course' and for seeing this thesis through all of its versions, manuscripts and manifestations to the end. I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Mark Tate's time, effort and ideas as my second advisor the first year of this project. I'll never forget your attention to detail when going over endless versions of presentations, grant proposals and my post-fieldwork seminar. Thank you Dr. Sharon Roseman and Dr. John Kennedy for your inspiration and guidance during first year courses. Thank you Dr. Louis Chiaramonte, Ms. Hannah Drown and Dr. Tom Nemec for allowing me to explore teaching on every level in your classes. You have made me the teacher I am today. And finally thank you Professor Rex Clark for letting me discover in your course that power is not a thing but rather manifests through relationships and for showing me that in Newfoundland, it is people who make a place and not the other way around. I would like to acknowledge the Department of Anthropology and the School of Graduate Studies for their generous fellowships for this project. I would also like to thank the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada for the generous research grant which made this project happen.

The word 'thank you' is not big enough to express my feelings toward the following friends and family who were always either by my side physically, on the

telephone, over the internet and on the other side of the Atlantic. Thanks Mom and Dad for driving me to and from Newfoundland, for your love and encouragement and for all of your extra funding of my project. I love you very much and hope you enjoy reading this particular fruit of your labour. Thanks Abby the Yellow Labrador for your hairy hugs and wet kisses. I must also acknowledge my brother Matt who was always asking "they paid you to write about WHAT?" and thus clarifying the value of social science research. Keep spinning those Judy Garland records! Thanks goes to Auntie Marg, Anna, Evan, Lindsay and Bagel the Beagle for being fellow members of the island of sanity. Groovy Girls anyone?

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List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BOSH	Battered Offenders' Self Help Group
CCNL	Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador
ERCNL	Economic Recovery Commission of Newfoundland and Labrador
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KCIW	Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women
NLCDA	Newfoundland and Labrador Crafts Development Association
NONIA	Newfoundland Outport Nurses Industrial Association
PWA	Person With Aids

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Appendix A

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List of Main Participants

Shelley Bauer was born in British Columbia but has lived all over Canada. She is a nurse practitioner who is also pursuing a Masters degree in nursing.

Karen Colbourne Martin was born and raised in Newfoundland. She was an elementary teacher and now creates quilts and quilted objects for sale at craft shows and at the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador shop.

Donna Howell was born and raised in Newfoundland. She is a nurse practitioner and quilts for family and friends.

Ethel Isenor was born in Nova Scotia but her grandparents are from Newfoundland. She has an undergraduate degree in Home Economics and volunteers on the Cabot Quilters' Guild Social Committee.

Jodi McDavid-Brodie was born and raised in New Brunswick. She is currently completing her Ph.D. in Folklore and co-heads a quilting group in the Folklore Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland. She is one of two participants who do not belong to the Cabot Quilters' Guild.

Katie Parnham was born and raised in Newfoundland. She has an M.A. in Textile Studies, is an instructor at the Anna Templeton Centre and teaches the processes needed to create a variety of textile mediums.

Rachel Ryan was born and raised in Newfoundland. She is a graduate of the Textile Studies Programme at the Anna Templeton Centre. Rachel creates quilted objects for sale at craft shows and for the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador shop. She is the second participant who is not a member of the Cabot Quilters' Guild.

Lori Shortall was born and raised in Newfoundland. She has an M.A. in Music, is a music teacher and was the president of the Cabot Quilters' Guild (2003-2004).

Vicky Taylor-Hood was born and raised in Newfoundland. She has an M.A. in Medieval Studies and creates quilted objects for sale at craft shows and for the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador shop.

*These nine women are the main participants of this thesis. All the above names are real and not pseudonyms. Each participant had the right to choose whether or not to use their real name at any time during the course of this project. I interviewed a total of 24 women and have utilized their narratives to confirm similarities and contradictions in my analysis.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Most people, everywhere, think about the future. They think about growing up, or old; about their children, present, past, and to come; about their parents; about personal and public events, occasions, festivals, and holidays, coming and past; about issues that we abstractly call 'economic trends' and 'political processes'; about the condition of their material possessions in conjunction with their needs and wants; about their relations to and with other people, and what is happening in these relations. And they watch and listen to their kith, kin, and others grapple with the same topics-sometimes talking to each other about such issues directly, sometimes commenting on it all indirectly. In sum, people-even in so called tradition-bound societies-conduct their day-to-day lives in ways that construct and invoke knowledge, probably quite finely tuned and constantly adjusted, of the intimate, multiple interconnections of past, present, and future. And this knowledge grows out of and becomes somewhat distanced from, and yet is situated within, the concrete and specific material and social realities of daily life (Sider 1986:3).

I want to know how to inhabit histories and stories rather than deny them. I want to know how critically to live both inherited and novel kinships, in a spirit neither of condemnation nor celebration. I want to know how to help build ongoing stories rather than histories that end. In that sense, my kinships are about keeping the lineages going, even while defamiliarizing their members and turning lines into webs, trees into esplanades, and pedigrees into affinity groups (Haraway 2004:1).

1.1 Beginnings

A thick membrane of python skin catches the eye. Scribed, cursive words and sentences from a personal diary or letter are stained into cloth by technology. An aged photograph, transferred by the same leading-edge computer technology, shows a woman in a sundress straining under the weight of holding the dead body of an enormous snake. When seen stitched together, do these quilted pieces weave narratives, meanings and values of the individual who created it? A curiosity about the origins of this quilt and its creator is ignited within me.

On Saturday, June 21, 2003, I attended the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador Studio Guide Launch. In order to encourage the public to come and pick up a

guide, the Craft Council had also organized an open studio weekend where one would go and talk to artisans and craftspeople featured in the guide. I headed down to Devon House and had the opportunity to speak with Susan Furneaux, a fibre artist, and a woman who makes Teddy Bears. As I came down the staircase from the third floor, I curiously peered into the second floor gallery space. I then realized I just had to walk into the white-walled, sparse room on the last day of a quilter's exhibition. Valerie Hearder is a quilter and her biography, printed and laid out in a small binder before entering the gallery, read that she was born in Durban, South Africa and that she has lived in Japan, the Arctic, Nova Scotia, Europe, Labrador and Newfoundland. All of her quilts ranged in small 8X10 pieces to larger sizes hung on the walls at eye level. I was fascinated by their design. I had never seen quilts that included large pieces of python skin or transferred sepia-toned photographs as well as personal letters of the past on fabric. Her own explanation of the pieces she created was as follows:

Perhaps the landscape changes the person to the same degree that the person changes the landscape - it is an integral relationship. We absorb the atmosphere and energy of a place we live in and when we leave, the imprint of that place is carried with us.

The descriptions of the pieces indicated that the quilts came from Valerie's inner landscapes that were, in turn, made and formed by the places and landscapes that she lived in. It was the metaphor of inner landscapes along with the layered house forms and innovative materials that inspired me to pursue an anthropological approach to quilting.

The research for this project was conducted with women who produce quilts, either for selling and/or as gifts in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. There were also women who identified themselves as fibre artists who use quilting techniques in their art.

In total, I interviewed twenty-four women whose ages ranged from the late twenties to the mid-sixties. The women whom I interviewed were born and raised in Newfoundland, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Alberta and/or British Columbia. While only a few of the women mentioned the existence of male quilters in the St. John's area, none of them had ever met or had any contacts for me to pursue. While these women shared a common passion for the production of quilts and quilted objects, there existed a great diversity among them in terms of their life ways. They identified their occupations as elementary, secondary and post-secondary teachers (either working or retired), fibre artists, craft educators, crafts people, seamstresses, interior designers, music instructors, nurses, ballroom dancers, women who worked inside their home, graduate students, volunteers for charity, Girl Guide leaders, wives, mothers, daughters, grandmothers. It is also important to note that fifteen of the women completed an undergraduate education while eight of those women continued on to complete graduate degrees in a variety of areas such as Education, Psychology, Home Economics and Music. The degree of education and financial independence suggested early on that the majority of the women were middle-class in terms of lifestyle and financial resources.¹ As well, the majority of the women whom I interviewed were members of the Cabot Quilters' Guild in St. John's.

Why quilting? Why are women inspired and motivated to pursue quilting? How do quilter's assign value and embed meaning in quilts? Is the practice of quilting a gendered activity? How does quilting, if a gendered activity, contribute to the construction of gendered selves in the women whom I interviewed? How do the women

¹ I will explore this concept of "middle-classness" in the following chapter which is the theoretical overview of the thesis.

who quilt in St. John's construct gender? How do they create and negotiate their multifaceted selves while participating in a larger community context? Does class practice influence the construction and negotiation of gender for these women? When and how do gendered practices and middle-class practices of these women converge in this specific ethnographic context? Do women utilize the practice of creating quilted objects for personal agency? Does this personal agency always transform into a larger arena of social action? These questions will guide my arguments and ethnographic analysis in this thesis.

In this introductory chapter, I review a selective history of craft and quilt creators in twentieth century Newfoundland and Labrador in order to provide an adequate historical context from which to understand the origins of contemporary quilting in St. John's, Newfoundland. Next, I consider the scope of contemporary research that has focused on quilts and those who use the quilting technique in their lives. This chapter continues with an account of the research setting and methodology. I will end with an introduction to the thesis and chapters.

1.2: A Selective History of Craft and Quilt Creators in Twentieth Century

Newfoundland and Labrador

1.2.1: The Grenfell Mission

In the early twentieth-century, material objects that became ‘crafts’² like quilts were already being manufactured by outport men and women as utilitarian objects, as vernacular art and as gifts (Pocius 1979). Deanne Fitzpatrick, a rug hooker originally from Newfoundland and author of Hook Me A Story: The History and Method of Rug Hooking in Atlantic Canada, asserts that many “of the changes that developed over the years were a result of the influence of people ‘from away’” (1999:3). One of the first of these public figureheads was Sir Wilfred Grenfell of England. Grenfell arrived in St. Anthony’s and North West River, Labrador in 1892 as a doctor, missionary, justice of the peace and investor (Horwood 1969:50). Horwood states that “most public buildings [were] the property of the Grenfell Mission for Sir Wilfred not only built a general hospital but started industrial shops, handicraft industries, a dry dock, dairy and pig farms and founded schools and orphanages” (1969:48). Here, one can see that Grenfell not only held a position of power but also had a virtual monopoly on St. Anthony’s businesses.

Grenfell’s work on the Northwest peninsula and Southeastern coast of Labrador had many impacts on the local population such as access to education, a higher level of medical care and the founding of many communities like Mary’s Harbour and Roddickton (Kennedy 1988: 205). While the Grenfell Mission worked to improve social,

² In Chapter 2, I will consider the differences that women negotiated between the meaning and value behind terms such as ‘craft’ and ‘art’ in reference to their quilts. For now, I will use the term ‘craft’ as it is utilized most often in the academic literature on historical material culture like quilts and hooked rugs in Newfoundland.

living and economic conditions of many outport people, it was Grenfell's discovery and recruitment of a young American occupational nurse named Jesse Luther that altered the style and industry of textile craft production like mat hooking in Newfoundland and Labrador. Wilfred Grenfell first saw Jesse Luther when lecturing in the New England area; he was searching for an individual who could possibly teach weaving at the mission in St. Anthony (O'Brien 1992:55). Luther voluntarily came to St. Anthony in the summers of 1906, 1907, 1909-1914 in order to teach various crafts (O'Brien 1992:55). Grenfell's promotion of the productions and sale of Newfoundland crafts was dominated by the idea of improving local conditions and that women should be the exclusive participants. With Grenfell's funding and Luther's knowledge of the production of textiles, outport textiles began to be reconstituted in value. The main reason for this transformation was *economic development*. Crafts to Grenfell were commodities that could be produced by the women of outport communities and were valuable, for the crafts could be sold to the prominent elite in England and down the New England coast (Reif 1994; O'Brien 1992:55). Crafts were also important to Grenfell because their production and consumption supposedly aided in improving the standard of living in outport communities (Reif 1994:43). Ultimately, Grenfell's presence in Newfoundland initiated an ongoing process where household utilitarian objects were now marketable commodities for the purpose of sale and collection.

1.2.2: NONIA and The Jubilee Guilds

The creation of NONIA³ (Newfoundland Outport Nurses Industrial Association) and The Jubilee Guilds altered textile production and living standards for outport communities in rural Newfoundland as well as in the city of St. John's (House 1990:6; Leitch and Lent 1948:1). NONIA, as a crafting federation, was founded by the Lady Elsie Allardyce, spouse of Governor Sir William Allardyce, on April 3, 1924 (House 1990:9). NONIA existed in order to provide better health care by way of bringing nurses to outports and crafting education for outport women in order that they might produce "marketable garments of excellent quality" and "increase the earning power of each of the NONIA communities" (House 1990:8, 28). Through this effort, textile production was encouraged and taught in order that outport women would eventually, by selling their crafts through NONIA, contribute a much needed second income to the household. Here there is an assumption and practice that craft production is the work of women. While the nursing aspect of NONIA was taken over by the Government in 1934 (House 1990:19), NONIA still operates a store on Water Street today and functions as an organization/guild

³ A critique of NONIA and other 'self-help solutions to health care' is provided in James Overton's 1994 article "Self-Help, Charity and Individual Responsibility: The Political Economy of Social Policy in Newfoundland in the 1920s". Overton's article primarily focuses on the development of social policy in Newfoundland as it developed in particular historical and political contexts. Overton considers the role of charity organization in promoting economic development in outport and urban communities beginning in the 1920s. Here, "where self-help and family responsibility failed, voluntary effort might be necessary to provide for the welfare of the individual" but "the aim of charity [according to the mandates of various charity organizations] must be the reinforcement and restoration of self-help" where organizations "would assess the moral character of those who applied for assistance and separate the deserving from the undeserving" (Overton 1994:96). Thus, charity organizations like NONIA stood for "the 'natural community' against 'government' as an 'artificial institution', for 'individualism' against 'collectivism', for 'charity' rather than the 'right' to relief, and for 'voluntarism' against [the] state provision of services" (Overton 1994:97). While Edgar House paints an ambitious, commemorative account of the purpose of NONIA, it is Overton who suggests that there were underlying motivations in getting outport women to produce crafts in order to attempt to pay for health care when the reality was that outport communities were in the most need of no cost health care because of their continued indebtedness in participating within the merchant capital system (Sider 1977).

textile creators all over Newfoundland and Labrador and regularly exhibits in its store windows handmade quilts for sale.

In their 1948 article for the *Family Herald and Evening Star* entitled "Newfoundland Women Work for Progress", Leitch and Lent note that the Jubilee Guilds were "born in the Jubilee month of King George V, May 1933" and organized crafting guilds in outport communities in order to encourage "a better level of living" (Leitch and Lent 1948:1). A Jubilee Guild was "a voluntary organization in community service, a school of citizenship, non-political, non-sectarian, formed of all creeds and classes and with an avowed aim of improving and developing conditions of outport life (Leitch and Lent 1948:3). These guilds were founded primarily by women and men of the urban middle and upper classes in Newfoundland (Cullum 1992: i).

The difference between NONIA and the Jubilee Guilds existed in the philosophy of their mandates: the primary purpose of NONIA was to provide outport nursing facilities and then raise "the standard of living by increasing the earning power of each of the" outport communities involved with NONIA (House 1990:20, 27). In contrast, the Jubilee Guilds were "primarily designed to provide a wider outlook through skills and education" in craft production (House 1990:65). The products of the guilds were similar to Nonia in terms of crafts but the Jubilee Guilds also encouraged the development of cooking skills, home health care, social and child welfare (Leitch and Lent 1948:1). Again, there is a connection between the production of textile crafts, a better economy, and a better way of life. There is also a clear division in terms of the class⁴ of affluent women organizing the Jubilee Guilds and the outport women. The Jubilee Guilds also

⁴ I will clarify my definition of "class" in the upcoming theoretical overview of the introduction.

attempted to accomplish the formation of a 'model citizen' through craft production in these guilds. In order to earn more social capital, the guilds were also forming identities and communicating a specific system of values based on how one could be financially self-supportive. Ultimately, a "middle-class model of the home, family and women's domestic [work] was produced and reproduced" (Cullum 1992:i).

1.2.3: The Mid-Century Decline in Craft Production

During the 1950s and 1960s in Newfoundland, the production of certain crafts like rug hooking, wool carding, spinning and textile dying were disappearing from outport communities as the first generation of NONIA and Jubilee Guild members aged⁵. As well, with the advent and increased availability of machine produced textiles, the need for crafting on a utilitarian level declined. One academic who focused much of his research on craft production and social organization from the 1960's was Gerald Pocius. In his 1979 monograph for the National Museum of Man Mercury series entitled Textile Traditions of Eastern Newfoundland, Pocius argues that many "textile traditions are no longer followed, and it was only possible, in many cases to obtain verbal description of processes, rather than to observe the construction of a particular artifact" where often "these traditions exist only in the memories of Newfoundlanders born and raised before

⁵ However, one influential member of the Jubilee Guilds who continued in spite of this decline was Anna Templeton who still acted as the organizing secretary in St. John's in 1962 and was influential in writing how-to texts for textile creations like weaving (Bruns 1962). Anna Templeton's contribution to craft education was acknowledged when Cabot Community College opened the Anna Templeton Centre in 1994 (Brenton 1996:3). Located on Duckworth Street in St. John's, it is a site for textile education where individuals can "end up becoming self-employed" as well as gaining access to "downtown art galleries and fabric stores and the support...from the local art community" (Brenton 1996:3). The Anna Templeton Centre currently runs classes on a monthly rotation with instruction on textile production and became an important field site for initial contacts with quilters for this research.

Confederation (1949)" (1979:1). In terms of a decline in quilting activity, Pocius states that local "women [could] remember a number of patterns that were sometimes used for quilts, yet most of [those] patterns [were] rarely seen" in the 1960s (1979:28). Quilts had largely been utilitarian pieces made up of "four or five large pieces of material...sewn together" to make the top where "little attention was paid to pattern or colour", the middle layer being an old wool blanket and the bottom of the quilt was usually "made from old white shirts...or flour bags"(Pocius 1979:28). However, there is evidence in Pocius' account that women attributed different value to different materials. Pocius goes on to indicate that "it was not uncommon that a woman would buy material to use for a quilt" and that "bought material was usually felt to be a necessity for a 'good' quilt"(1979:28). I argue that it is Pocius' contradiction which signals a transition of value for the quilt in a Newfoundland context. Quilts, like other textile creations, were largely utilitarian before the arrival of Grenfell at the turn of the century. Now Pocius' research in the late 1960s demonstrates that women themselves were renegotiating the value of quilts. This is not to say that they did not value their quilts for their warmth and utilitarian use. However, there was a gradual transition occurring in that women were indicating to Pocius that there is a difference in aesthetic value. Quilts that were made of store bought material were more valuable to women in that this material would only be used for 'good' quilts.

1.2.4: The Craft Revival and The Cabot Quilters' Guild

However, in the late 1970s, a 'revival', 'rebirth' and 'renaissance' of craft production began in Newfoundland that has continued to the present day. This craft revival occurred alongside a much larger flourishing of the arts and was "a strong

Newfoundland social movement that [had] its roots in the 1960s and has branches in art, music drama, education and many other spheres” (House in Overton 1996:47). In this era, government funding for the Newfoundland and Labrador Crafts Development Association⁶ encouraged the development of craft producers in Newfoundland. However, the economic climate in the early 1980s of the craft development industry was threatened by cuts in federal government funding that fueled the Newfoundland and Labrador Crafts Development Association (NLCDA) (Whelan 1983:14). Crafters who were associated with the NLCDA throughout the province faced the prospect of “unemployment or joining the welfare queues” (1983:14). Some of the dominant barriers to success that had to be overcome in the early 1990s were the “severely limited amount of funding [to craft production], the concentration of facilities in the major population centers, and the inherent difficulties and expense of touring both within the province and nationally” (ERCNL 1992:50). As well, “the province’s remoteness also [resulted] in the works of Newfoundland and Labrador artists being under-represented in the major Canadian markets” (ERCNL 1992:50). The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador recently announced a new development strategy and the “new funding of one million dollars over two years for its implementation” (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2002:1). This funding, however, is only intended for individuals who sell their creations. What about textile creators like quilters who do not create with the intent to sell? Where is their place in this selective history?

⁶ Now the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (CCNL).

1.2.5: The Creation of Quilts in Contemporary St. John's, Newfoundland

Craft production in Newfoundland is driven today largely by the effort of community organizations and guilds like the The Cabot Quilters' Guild. During the course of a conversation together, Wendy Batten (one of the original founders of the Cabot Quilters' Guild) shared with me that the guild was created in 1984 and had a starting membership of twelve women and these women would meet in each other's homes to discuss anything that had to do with quilting but also to ask questions and learn new techniques from the more knowledgeable members. Many women recounted that since 1984, the guild has grown substantially, especially in the past five to seven years. In September of 2003, the membership totaled more than 150 active members! However, some women in their interviews also indicated that there were many others who quilted in the privacy of their own homes and did not participate in a guild.

The preceding overview has focused on the social, political and economic aspects of textile creation in Newfoundland during the twentieth century. I observed that the majority of historical sources (Jesse Luther's diary, newspaper articles and history monographs) focus solely on tracing the economic development of women who sell their crafts in order to produce more capital for their respective households. The elite class behind the implementation of these economic policies exercised a specific view on how to improve the standard of living as well as reduce a supposed continual dependency on a welfare state. With the decline in overall textile production, including the creation of quilts in the 1950s and 1960s, the value of quilts began to be renegotiated by the quilters themselves and there was a difference in materials used to create quilts. During the craft

revival of the 1970s and early 1980s, the Cabot Quilters' Guild was formed by women who quilted with material purchased at a store and intended for personal use or as gifts.

1.3: Contemporary Social Research on Quilters, Quilts and the Quiltmaking Process

In the past two decades, social research in the areas of anthropology⁷, sociology and history have yielded a high volume of information on quilters, quilts and the quiltmaking process. This research, from both Canada and the United States, speaks to a large variety of focuses: quilts and economic development (Medicine 2001); quiltmaking surveys and demographics (Kucko 2003); quilts as social protest (Williams 1990, Clark 2000); quilting as a paradigm for marginalized women (Elsley 1990); the social relations of production and the performance of the quilting bee (Ice 1984, Stevens 1989, Przybysz 1995, Wilker 2000); the quilt as a visual art medium and communicative cultural vehicle (Cerny 1987, Donnell 1990, Solomon 1998, DeVaul 1998); quiltmaking and the sociology of leisure (King 1997); quilted clothing and gender identity (Cerny 1992); memorialization and the NAMES AIDS Memorial Quilt (Krouse 1993, Mayo 1995, Ellenhorn 1997, Shaw 1998, Myers 1999, Hinkley 2003); African American 'Quilt Culture' and quiltmakers (Beaudoin 1999, Hood 2000, Benberry 2001, Fry 2001); the quilt revival as a 'popular cultural phenomenon' (Wiedlich 1986, Tanchyk 1991, Woods 1993) and lastly twentieth century historical overviews of traditional quilts and quiltmaking (Forest and Blincoe 1995, Crossman 2000, Rake 2000). This thesis offers an

⁷ There has also been extensive anthropological research on the social lives of craft producers of other varieties of mediums (see Cohen 2001, Deitch 1989, Lathrap 1976, Maskiell 1999, McLauchlin and Young 1996, Mead 1976, Ryan and Crotts 1997, Sandelowsky 1976, Yetman and M'Closkey 2001).

in depth analysis in an alternative focus: how quilters or quiltmakers in St. John's, Newfoundland socially construct, reproduce and reaffirm specific gender roles.

The specific social research on quilting and quilters that I will draw upon in my analysis are the following. Elizabeth L. Beattie's and Mary Angela Shaughnessy's Sisters in Pain: Battered Women Fight Back (2000) is an excellent ethnographic example of how women use quilts as vehicles of personal agency and social action. In this powerful book, the reader is carried through the story of how a group of women convicted of crimes against a violent offender come together for therapy and work together through quilting to challenge their abusive pasts and simultaneously challenge the state law on parole. In "The Person With AIDS: The Body, the Feminine and the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt" (1998), Flavia Rando scrutinizes the process of memorialization through the construction of a quilt. Rando also considers how the quilt project initialized social agency and how the American public and medical establishment conceptualizes a person with AIDS or "PWA" (Rando 1998). Lastly, Linda Pershing's "Peace Work out of Piecework: Feminist Needlework Metaphors and The Ribbon around the Pentagon" (1993) considers the story of Justine Merritt and the fruition of her vision of The Ribbon, a nationwide sewing and needlework project of social resistance against the global race for nuclear arms arsenals. Pershing's written piece is an excellent example of how a community of women chose to activate personal agency and engage in social action through the act of quilting itself. They utilize their skills and the production of quilted panels to mobilize social action against nuclear warfare. These three ethnographic accounts are strikingly similar to my fieldwork experiences not only with documenting women's personal agency but also the choice to use quilts as vehicles for social action in

“The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Eastern Tour Exhibition 2003”⁸. In the following section, I introduce to the reader my research setting and the methodologies used in conducting this social research.

1.4: Research Setting and Methodology

1.4.1: Research Setting

The research for this project was conducted with women who produce quilts, either for selling and/or as gifts as well as women who identify themselves as fibre artists who, in turn, use the quilting technique in their art. These women reside in the community of St. John's with the exception of one living in Paradise and four living in Mount Pearl. Mount Pearl is located on the outskirts of the city of St. John's. The city of St. John's is located on the eastern coast of the province of Newfoundland and is the largest urban center of the province; the metro area has a population of 172, 918 people (Statistics Canada 2001a). St. John's also has a vibrant arts community with artistic public venues of art/craft galleries, fairs, exhibitions, museums, educational centers and festivals which also make St. John's an important location for my research.

My fieldwork was conducted from late June to the beginning of November 2003 throughout the St. John's area as well as at the United Church Burry Heights Camp on Salmonier Line, Avalon Peninsula. The advantage of living at my place of residence in central St. John's made the field site(s) readily accessible through walking, public transportation and car rentals. The majority of my research took place in the residences of my participants, at their places of employment, my own apartment, the anthropology

⁸ This argument will be discussed in Chapter six of the thesis.

resource room at Memorial University of Newfoundland, my cubicle in the Queen Elizabeth II library as well as coffee shops and at Burry Heights Camp. The interviews were conducted at places and times that were the most convenient for the participant: in the morning or afternoon over tea or coffee and sweets, during lunch hours, after work shifts and some interviews occurred in the early evening at my place of residence before women headed home to Mount Pearl or Paradise at the end of the day.

1.4.2: Methodology

For this project, the social research methodologies used were qualitative in nature. The method I utilized was to meet initial contacts in the craft/art community as well as network new contacts through these individuals. In the beginning stage of my research, I focused my attention on fibre artists. Through two contacts at the Anna Templeton Centre for Design and Craft Education, I began to introduce myself by phone to the current instructors at the center and used a reference from the center's director. After speaking with individuals who hooked rugs, embroidered, wove, knitted and/or dyed fabric, I began to realize that with the exception of quilters there existed a limited amount of people in these areas who resided and created in and around St. John's. This realization was the reason for my choice to focus on individuals who quilt in St. John's. Another main source of contacts was a quilting instructor at the Anna Templeton Centre who also happened to be a member of the Cabot Quilter's Guild. In the weeks ahead, I attended the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador's Studio Guide Launch, Valerie Header's quilt exhibition as well as the Craft Council's Annual Member's Exhibition, and also "The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project" exhibition at the Lay-

Z-Boy Furniture Gallery in St. John's. These events provided with me exposure and public registers of individuals who quilt in order to sell their objects, as well as women who quilt and/or volunteer for charity purposes.

Once I established initial contacts, I informally met with my first consultant. I first learned of the existence of the guild from this consultant. I had first contacted The Anna Templeton Centre and received a list of phone numbers for instructors of textile arts. Marilyn MacDonald taught introductory quilting courses occasionally at the center itself. After introducing myself and my research over the phone, she agreed to meet for coffee to discuss the possibility of a focus on quilt producers. Marilyn and I met at the Tim Horton's on Duckworth Street on July 9, 2003. Marilyn not only spoke about her experiences in quilting but also made the suggestion that I contact her quilting guild. She also suggested that instead of just showing up at the first meeting in September, I should work through the guild's executive and suggest to them that I give a short presentation of my project. I obtained contact information for Lori Shortall, the Guild's president and sent an official letter to the Guild's mailbox. After speaking with Lori in early August, the presentation was set and I could not wait until I met the members of the guild in mid-September.

I met and interacted with women who belonged to the Cabot Quilter's Guild. The Cabot Quilter's Guild was formed in 1984 and has held monthly meetings from September to June. From the response to my presentation and initial interactions, I proceeded over the months of September and October of 2004 to conduct twenty-four unstructured interviews. In meeting with my initial contacts, I was conducting "informal interviewing" where it is "characterized by a total lack of structure or control" (Bernard

1994:209). Unstructured interviewing occurs when “you sit down with an informant and hold an interview” where both “of you know what you are doing, and there is no shared feeling that you’re just engaged in pleasant chit-chat” (*Ibid.*:209). Throughout these interviews, I kept “a clear plan” but also had “a minimum of control over the informant’s responses” (*Ibid.*:209). This insured that my questions and the narratives and answers which came from my participants were not preplanned by myself. While there were a few questions that seemed to be important to ask (i.e. Why did you start quilting? How did you learn? etc.) and were repeated at several interviews, I did not have a formal list with me at the interviews. These interviews ranged from twenty minutes to an hour and a half in length. The majority of women stated that they only had an hour to spare for the interview. With this information, I made the decision that I could only conduct unstructured interviews and not continue into semi-structured or structured interviews at a later date. However, I left every participant with an information sheet detailing my research, contact numbers for my advisors and the ethics committee at Memorial University as well as my personal contact information should they have any unresolved questions or any additional information they wished to share in addition to their personal interviews.

I also conducted participant observation at many public and private guild events. Participant observation has important elements that occur in a ‘field’ situation. The first element is when “the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it” where the ethnographer “participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995:1). The second element of participant observation is

that “the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others” (Ibid.:1). While I did not participate in the daily lives of the women whom I interviewed, I participated in many public and Guild organized events. In September 2003, I attended the Guild’s Annual First Meeting and with the permission of the executive committee, I presented an introductory speech about my research in the role of guest speaker and observed the many activities of Guild meetings. This event yielded a positive outcome in my fieldwork for nineteen women volunteered their time for interviews. As well, I was also invited by the Guild’s president to come and participate for a day and night as a guest of the Guild at the Cabot Quilter’s Guild Fall Retreat in October. I will go into further detail about the retreat in an upcoming chapter. I also attended many public events that my participants attended, displayed or sold products in such as “The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project” Eastern Tour Exhibition, the Craft Council’s Annual Christmas Craft Fair and The Cabot Quilter’s Guild Annual Christmas Auction in mid-November. My fieldwork officially ended on November 17, 2003.

1.5: Introduction to Thesis and Chapters

Women who quilt in St. John’s, Newfoundland negotiate and construct a nexus of gendered and middle-class practices. In turn, these are influenced by the women’s specific economic and social contexts. Through its ambiguousness, the practice of quilting provides women who quilt in St. John’s, Newfoundland an avenue for specific ‘culturally available pathways’ in which to construct and negotiate gendered, middle-

class practices. It is this ambiguous context of the artistic value and definition of the act and material outcome of quilting that creates a negotiable site for many women to discursively reveal values and ideals that construct their individual and collective womanhoods. Chapter Two of this thesis provides the reader with a theoretical overview of the strengths and weaknesses of specific theoretical perspectives relevant to my thesis arguments: the concept of 'selves', theorizing gendered practices, contextualizing the concept of middle-class practice, the concepts of community, liminality and license in ritual as well as a consideration of specific theories of power and agency. In Chapter Three I problematize the concept of the bounded unchanging self and focus on my participants' narratives in terms of the motivations and inspirations to quilt, the art vs. craft dichotomy, the work vs. leisure dichotomy, the presence of a gendered market in St. John's as well as many dialogues on the women's ideals of womanhood as expressed in narratives on their practice of quilting. Chapter Four focuses on the concept of community practice and how women who quilt in St. John's demonstrate and reaffirm community practices in their participation within a quilting guild and a quilting guild retreat. In Chapter Five I consider how individual women who quilt 'piece' narratives within quilts and attempt to communicate aspects of their selves (and what they value of their selves) by investigating the phenomenon of voices of motivation, spirituality and of Newfoundland identities in specific quilted objects themselves. In Chapter Six I consider how individual women can use quilting in order to engage in personal agency. Lastly, I provide the reader with a summary of my conclusions and arguments to the thesis in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The following chapter provides the reader with a theoretical overview of key concepts and arguments that are relevant to my discussions of women who quilt in St. John's Newfoundland. I will take a critical look at the material in order to identify weaknesses and point out theoretical strengths that inform and guide my analysis. I first consider the concept of the 'self' with specific reference to a conceptualization of self in Dorinne Kondo's 'crafted selves'. My critical analysis of how quilters frame their selves is directly influenced by Kondo's theoretical approach in Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace (1990). Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and its application to this research will also be critically analyzed. Then follows an examination of how gender is socially constructed and negotiated with reference to Sherry Ortner's theoretical stance where one is "making gender". Henrietta Moore also indicates the importance of including individual agency within the negotiation of gendered ideals. I follow this discussion with an in-depth consideration of Mark Liechty's notion of the construction of middle-class practices. These discussions converge as an overall exploration on how the concepts of gender, middle-class and community might be articulated as 'practices' and not as products. Within the idea that community is practiced, Victor Turner's notion of 'liminality' and Max Gluckman's work on the 'license in ritual' will also be discussed. Lastly, I will investigate various theories of power and their interrelationship(s) with both personal and collective agency.

2.1: The Concept of 'Self'

The focus of this thesis is to consider how the women whom I interviewed view and discuss the activity of quilting. It is also important to consider how they create and negotiate their selves in reference to quilting and other areas of their lives. The cultural categories of 'self' and 'gender' as they pertain to 'identity' are often theoretically grouped together in critical analysis. Are these concepts too bounded to illustrate the way in which women negotiate and locate their experiences *as women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland?* This question speaks to the problem of how anthropologists today critically approach how people see and define themselves with reference to their personhoods and in reference to the wider spheres of social engagement around them. Where does a 'self' end and a wider collectivity or 'community' begin? How can one draw and denote boundaries of the 'self' when people negotiate, create and re-evaluate their roles and expectations daily?

The problem of 'self' has been present within Western Anthropological discourse in the form of many dichotomies. In classic ethnographies such as Bronislaw Malinowski's Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea (1922) and E.E. Evans-Pritchard's The Nuer (1940), one encounters within written discourse the dichotomy of not only individual/culture but also of anthropologist/other. More contemporary critiques offer alternatives to the anthropologist/other dichotomy in the concept of the "partial insider" (Abu-Lughod 1988). There also exists the questioning of the idea of a "native anthropologist" (Narayan 1997). These "dualisms escape philosophical confinement or

religious ritual to find themselves built into weapons, states, economies, taxonomies, national parks, museum displays, intimate bodily practices, and much else" (Haraway 2004:2). These dichotomies illustrate the difficulty of identifying and locating boundaries of sameness and difference in many types of 'selves' and 'identities'.

There exists an expansive literature on theories and ethnographies of 'self' (Cohen 1994; Daniel 1984; Kondo 1990; Mageo 1995, 1998; Mageo and Knauff 2002; Mauss 1985 [1938]; Rosaldo 1980b, 1984; White and Kirkpatrick 1985). However, there exists one theoretical idea of the constitution of 'self' on which I focus my analysis. This conceptualization of self is that of Dorinne Kondo's 'crafted selves'. Kondo's ethnography centers upon exploring the problem of how to reconceptualize the idea of the 'self' by looking at the diversity of experiences of male and female labourers in the Sato confectionary, Tokyo, Japan (Kondo 1990:4). Kondo's notion of 'selves' is complex for she attempts to "emphasize, through shifting, multiple voices and the invocation of the 'I', the shifting, complex individual identities of the people with whom [she] lived and worked" (*Ibid.*:8-9). These individual identities of Japanese factory workers existed in a "nexus of power and meaning" where "power can create identities on the individual level, as it provides disciplines, punishments and culturally available pathways for fulfillment" (*Ibid.*:10). Here, persons or selves "seemed to be constituted in and through social relations and obligations to others" where "[s]elves and society did not seem to be separate entities; rather, the boundaries were blurred" (*Ibid.*:22). Identities and selves can "be rewritten" (*Ibid.*:22). Her "experience, and the specificity of [her] experience-a particular human being who encounters particular others at a particular historical moment and has particular stakes in that interaction" allows Kondo to utilize the concept of a

boundless self that interacts with a larger community while contextualizing the experiences (Ibid.:24).

In her ethnography, Kondo works towards “displacing the binary” for the “inner/outer, subject/world dichotomies [that] have been foundational in anthropological studies since Mauss himself” (Ibid.:33). She strategizes to write against the notion that an individual self does not exist bounded, pure, unchanging and isolated; ‘selves’ are expressed within social relationships and experiences of everyday life (Ibid.:34). Kondo’s ‘boundless’, changing and integrated concept of ‘selves’ speaks to Bourdieu’s theory of practice in her focus on the relational aspects of subjectivity.

In the Outline of A Theory of Practice, Pierre Bourdieu critically examines the theoretical and practical faults of objectivism in social science research and proposes an alternate vision of conceptualizing social exchanges and happenings between selves (1977). Bourdieu argues that it is vital to recognize the bias and predispositions that the anthropologist has towards those whom the anthropologist studies. From the objective standpoint, the anthropologist’s “situation” is “that of the ‘impartial spectator’” where “all practice [is] as a spectacle” (1977:1). Social exchanges should not be viewed as a product, “a repertoire of rules”, roles, “object[s] of observation” and/or “representations” but rather as a “dialectic of strategies” that is put into experience by the agents themselves (Ibid.:3-5). Not even the perfect individual or “virtuoso with a perfect command of his ‘art of living’ can play on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and uncertainties of behaviour and situation in order to produce the actions appropriate to each case”(Ibid.:8).

When experience becomes a “project” rather than a “product”, one “substitute[s] *strategy for the rule*” or role (*Ibid.*:9; author’s emphasis). This exchange is not pre-constructed but rather is operated by the agents themselves who use “self-regulating choices” (*Ibid.*:10). These agents “continuously [carry] out the checks and corrections intended to ensure the adjustment of practices and expressions to the reactions and expectations of other agents” (*Ibid.*:10). This important point cannot be stressed enough. Objectivity in the form of the observation and decoding of pre-set rules cannot compete with the idea that practices exist in action and in making the choice of the delivery of that action.

Another important notion that Bourdieu contributes is the idea of the habitus¹ or ‘disposition’. This disposition is “inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interests” (*Ibid.*:15). Here, Bourdieu explains both the origin of agents’ choices and also the nature of these choices; they were induced early on in childhood and remembered because of that inductive process. He also does not forget to include that “even the most strictly ritualized exchanges, in which all the moments of the action, and their unfolding, are rigorously foreseen, have room for strategies: the agents remain in command of the *interval* between the obligatory moments and can therefore act on their opponents by playing with the *tempo* [or speed] of the exchange” (*Ibid.*:15). It is in the

¹ Bourdieu clearly defines ‘habitus’ as “a system of schemes of perception and thought which cannot give what it does give to be thought and perceived without ipso facto producing an unthinkable and an unnameable” (1977:18).

possibility to “generate an infinity of practices” or strategies where the advantage of this theory of practice lies (Ibid.:16).

Another logic that Bourdieu provides is the reasoning that practices cannot solely be determined by rules for there is “the advantage that lies in abiding by the rules, which is the principle of the second-order strategies through which the agent seeks to *put himself in the right*” (Ibid.:22). Again, an agent has the ability to choose to follow or not follow dispositions that were inculcated by similar individuals or the collectivity. There also exists the “power of innovation” and the “power of adaptation” with respect to dispositions and the inculcation of a habitus. The existence of the advantage to following the law or rule (here, being placed ‘in the right’ with others) removes the possibility that rules solely control the agent. Lastly, practices are not “symbolic facts, finished products, to be deciphered by reference to a code” (Ibid.:23). Bourdieu’s idea of subjectivity and self being constituted and negotiated within practices allows one an opportunity to conceptualize the theoretical ideas of gender, class and community as practices with respect to women who quilt in St. John’s, Newfoundland.

2.2: Theorizing Gendered Practices

Many participants indicated that there are men who create quilted objects in St. John’s, Newfoundland. However, all of the participants whom I interviewed identified themselves, either directly or indirectly, as ‘women’. Here lies the main point of departure for this thesis in that I will focus on how gendered practices and dispositions are created and negotiated in terms of what quilters value in their daily lives and what is meaningful to them. With respect to the theoretical notion of gender, the influences of

feminist anthropology have been substantial. It is therefore necessary to address the problems that the concept of 'gender' can create.

The problem of 'self' and 'identity' is further enhanced when one considers the nature of the concept of 'gender'. It is feminist anthropology that initially offered an alternative arena in which to explore and discuss the politics of gender/s and identity/ies. According to Alan Barnard, feminism "has its main roots in substantive, as opposed to grand theoretical, issues of sex roles and gender symbolism" where it "has moved from a concern centrally with women and women's subordination *per se* to a more general commentary on power relations, symbolic associations, and other facets of society at large" (2000:139). Here, feminist anthropology "grew from 'the anthropology of women'" where one could critically consider the oppression and dominance of male bias (Ibid.:145). According to Ravina Aggarwal, Kamala Visweswaran has identified three major historical phases or "waves" that dominate the often contested relationship between feminism and anthropology in North America with a focus on the United States (2000). The first wave occurred around 1880 to 1920 where "sex and gender collapsed into a single empirical category, and biology was thought to determine social roles" (Visweswaran in Aggarwal 2000: 17). From 1920 to 1960, the second phase of feminist anthropology came with the important work of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead where there was a "separation...between biological sex and socially constructed gender roles" (Ibid.). With this second wave, the theoretical notion of gender became a "foundational lens of feminist analysis" where there was a "notion of universal sisterhood [that] prevailed whereby it was assumed that women all over the world shared similar experiences" (Ibid.). This vision of a shared womanhood has met with growing criticism

in more years. The third 'wave' of feminism and feminist anthropology began in 1980 and is "demarcated by critiques against assumptions of universal sisterhood" where feminist post-structuralists (Kondo 1990, Butler 1990, 1997; 2004) and "[f]eminists of color and of different sexual orientations have argued that sex, and not just gender, is a social construct" (Kondo 1990:18, Rosaldo 1980a). This notion of a diversity of gender experiences applies when discussing women who quilt in St. John's in that one cannot assume that all women have the same experience as *women* and/or as *quilters*.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of theorizing 'gender'? What are the central debates and underlying assumptions that social anthropologists have perpetuated with respect to the construction of gender? There exists the assumption that gender is always associated with biological and physiological realities. This assumption is at its core Western-centric and ethnocentric. There exists many examples of instances where gender is socially and not biologically constructed². It was in 1972 that Ann Oakley posed the important question: Does biology or culture determine gender? (1972: 15). For Oakley, "'gender' is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and feminine'" (Ibid.:16). While Oakley focuses on the social aspects of gender, there also exists here a privileging of a didactic model of gender categories and classifications.

For the past thirty years, various social science scholars have debated on rethinking 'gender'. One must assess the various assumptions about the construction of

² For contemporary examples of ethnographic fieldwork that challenges the notion that gendered ideologies are only biologically constructed, please see Serena Nanda's Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India (1999) and Don Kulick's Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes (1998).

gender before proposing applicable ideology(ies) intended for critical analysis. One assumption is inherent in Sherry Ortner's work "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" from the ground breaking anthology Woman, Culture, and Society (1974). The idea that women will predominantly be associated with the natural realm while men are almost always associated with the cultural realm is problematic. This suggests that since "culture seeks to control and transcend nature, then it is 'natural' that women, by virtue of their close association with 'nature', should also be controlled and contained" (Moore 1988:14). This assumption rests on the reasoning that women's reproductive functions in terms of producing offspring "make her appear closer to nature" whereas men seek an identity rooted in culture as they do not participate directly in the physiology of birth (Ibid.:15). On a social level, Ortner's argument also rests on the reasoning that women's "social roles are seen as closer to nature because their involvement in reproduction has tended to limit them to certain social functions which are also seen as closer to nature" (Ibid.:15). Here, Ortner does not account for the possibility that not all 'women' give birth but many still consider themselves as women in their own construction of gender. Also, some cultures recognize more than two genders. What about women who do not give birth? Are these women not fully considered 'women'? What gender are they considered to be associated with? As well, if women are relegated to a bounded and polarized view of gender, should they globally be associated with always possessing less power because of this naturalized association with reproduction?

Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo points to the asymmetrical nature of "cultural evaluations of the sexes" and that the physiological and thus natural "endowments of men and women are hardly...natural or universal" (1974:18). Both Nicole-Claude Mathieu's

“Man-Culture and Woman-Nature” (1978) and Marilyn Strathern’s “No Nature, No Culture: the Hagen Case” (1980) argue against this biological determinism of gender by suggesting that there are many factors influencing the construction of gender including the gender of the anthropologist who observes the practices of gender construction as well as the symbolic ideologies that are socially perpetuated in collectivities. The nature/culture/woman/man debate also puts forward the idea that even the terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ “are not value-free, unmediated categories” (Moore 1988:19) but rather specifically and contextually constructed notions.

Along with the assumption that women are inherently associated with nature comes the reasoning that women “are seen as ‘closer to nature’” because “they are associated with the domestic rather than the ‘public’ domain of social life” (Moore 1988:21) and that this domestic sphere is less powerful than that of the ‘public’ or cultural sphere. Here, women are immediately defined by a biological function where “it presupposes a defined mother-child unit which seems ‘naturally’ universal” (*Ibid.*:23). Here there is the assumption that the ‘domestic’ realm is distinct and separate from the ‘public’ realm where, like the category of nature before it, the terms ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ are culturally constructed (Harris in Moore 1988:25). Secondly, there also exists the assumption that women will always be relegated to a domestic realm and are thus not able to participate or influence public arenas. For many women who quilt in St. John’s, Newfoundland, I will illustrate by considering the diversity of their definitions of what constitutes “work” that the realm of ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ are fluid domains. Domesticity is not necessarily constricting while the public realm is not necessarily larger socially. Also, when associated with ‘culture’ rather than nature/domesticity, men are

assumed to always be dominant in terms of power relations. While this "distinction between power and culturally legitimated authority, between the ability to gain compliance and the recognition that it is right, is crucial" (Rosaldo 1974:21) to a study of what it means to be a 'woman', one cannot reduce the domestic versus public debate to an androcentric myth of male dominance.

Some anthropologists have pointed out that many specific gendered constructions of what it means to be a 'woman' also involve the negotiation of power relationships that are not necessarily subordinate to a male dominance (Kelley 1999; Rogers 1975; Roseman 1999). Marilyn Strathern also cautions against the very use of the idea of the "denigration of women" in a domestic sphere for one "should be cautious about transferring our categories and relationships in the interpretation of other systems of thought" (1984:17). In her ethnographic example of the Hagen peoples in New Guinea, "women's identity as persons does not have to rest on proof that they are powerful [or weak] in some domain created by themselves, nor in an ability to break free from domestic confines constructed by men" (*Ibid.*:18). Gender ideologies as well as the social relationships in which they are constituted are not natural or universally biological in nature. Gender ideologies and practices are thus socially constructed.

The "rethinking" of gendered roles and practices as socially constructed occupies the central focus of many research endeavours (Delphy 2002; Jackson 1998; Mascia-Lees and Black 2000). Sherry Ortner has developed her theoretical stance from the Nature/Woman/Culture/Man position to one of "making gender" where the "question [becomes] how actors 'enact', or 'negotiate' the world as given, and in so doing 'make the world'" (1996:1). This making may turn out to produce the same old social and

cultural thing - 'reproduction.' Or it may turn out to produce something new, although not necessarily what the actors intended" (*Ibid.*). Here, Ortner alludes to the idea that gender is not natural or universally associated at the symbolic level of ideological construction but is rather created and negotiated socially. Gender is thus influenced by ideology but not divorced from it.

In terms of my research with women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland, it is Henrietta Moore's *Feminism and Anthropology* (1988) which provides this research project with a specific theoretical perspective in considering the inculcation of gendered selves and practices. Social scientists usually approach the study of gender in two "different, but not mutually exclusive, perspectives" where gender "may be seen either as a symbolic construction or as a social relationship" (Moore 1988:13). While Moore writes against Bourdieu by analyzing gendered '*roles*' rather than '*strategies*', she consistently reiterates the notion that "the...associations given to the categories 'man' and 'woman' can be understood as the result of cultural ideologies rather than of inherent [universal] qualities or physiology" (*Ibid.*:16).

Here, the "value of analyzing 'man' and 'woman'" (*Ibid.*) within the spectrum of symbolic category and social relations lies in the identification of the expectations and values individual cultures associate with being male or female. Such analysis provides some indication of the ideal behaviours of men and women in the different social roles" (*Ibid.*:18). I contend that it is by identifying what women who quilt value and expect in terms of social behaviour that one may identify specific gendered practices. It is through

the expression and violation of ideal gendered behaviours that one may consider how gender is socially constructed.

Moore also indicates the importance of including individual agency within the negotiation of gendered ideals. She argues that cultural “ideas about gender do not directly reflect the social and economic positions of women and men, although it is true that they originate within the context of those conditions. This is because gender stereotypes are developed and used in the strategies which individuals of both sexes employ to advance their interests in various social contexts” (*Ibid.*:37). One must consider what women do and how they think and negotiate their ideals of gender simultaneously. I agree with Moore that merely looking at gender as an exclusive social relationship is too constrained in scope. Gender is constructed and mediated within dispositions and through practices. Here, “gender is everywhere experienced through the specific mediations of history, class, race, colonialism and neo-imperialism” (*Ibid.*:189). While time and space do not warrant a complete consideration of the above list in reference to their influence on the construction of gender,;

...feminist anthropology...suggests that forms of difference in human social life - gender, class, race, culture, history, etc. - are always experienced, constructed and mediated in interrelation with each other. If we establish the *a priori* dominance or significance of one particular form of difference in our theoretical frameworks, then we automatically run the risk of ignoring others (*Ibid.*:196).

Taking a theoretical cue from Moore, this thesis focuses not only on gendered practices but also on how women who quilt in St. John’s experience and communicate specific class and gender practices simultaneously and divergently. To conclude, I argue along with Moore that gendered practices and dispositions are socially constructed but also

carry the capacity to communicate stereotypic ideals/ideologies. In this thesis, I will attempt to demonstrate that the diverse gendered practices demonstrated by many of the participants were mediated and reflected specific values that also demonstrated a variety of middle-class practices.

2.3: Contextualizing the Concept of 'Middle-Class Practice'

The theoretical concept of "class" is not new to anthropological discourse. While my thesis focuses on the social construction of gender, the concepts and processes and values of what has been called 'middle-class' reappear simultaneously with gendered practices. I first ask the question: What is meant by the term "class"? Karl Marx wrote about his concept of class along with Friedrich Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1888). Class was "a manifold of social rank" where "society as a whole" was "splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat" (Marx 1995:22). Along with the rise of manufacturing came the rise of the industrial middle class who were then pushed toward the proletariat position by "industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois" (Ibid.:22). The concept of class therefore rests on the notion that there exists class struggle. For Marx, these classes are in existence in relation to who controls the means of production (for Marx, the bourgeoisie) and who creates and "augments" capital (Ibid.:27). It is interesting to note that Marx rarely discusses the concept of 'middle-classness' where "the lower strata of the middle class-the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsman and peasants-all...sink

gradually into the proletariat" (*Ibid.*:25). However, unlike the proletariat, the middle-class is "conservative" for they "fight against the bourgeoisie...to save from extinction their existence" and therefore are not "revolutionary" (*Ibid.*:26).

Weber's idea of class is focused on its simultaneous economic and social constitution. Classes are "not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for social action" (Weber 1995:31). He continues:

We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interest in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets. This is 'class situation' (*Ibid.*:32).

Class for Weber is not so bounded as Marx's concept in terms of the struggle over the control of the means of production and capital. It is rather a causal economic situation or "class situation" fueled by similar interests in accumulating goods and income. In contrast, historian E.P. Thompson does "not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships" (1995:131). There does not exist "two distinct classes, each with an independent being" where one "bring[s] them into relationship with each other" (*Ibid.*:131). Class thus "happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (*Ibid.*:131). Class is not an object or "thing" but rather exists within human relationships (*Ibid.*:132).

In Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A Newfoundland Illustration,

Gerald Sider's notion of class also reflects the idea of its dynamic existence (1986). Class for Sider is "relational, processual, and specific" where "any particular social class can only be defined and understood in relations to other social classes, to the material forces of production, and to the property relations through which surpluses are formed, transferred and transformed" (1986:5). Here, there is a processual and dynamic core to class (*Ibid.*:5). Sider's problem with Marx's vision of class is that proletarians, capitalists and bourgeoisies "cannot form any neat system" because "alliances and oppositions must shift, and break and shift again each time re-forming in a new way" (*Ibid.*:8). There is thus not only inter-class struggle and shifts but rather intra-class struggle where "the shifting and transient alliances and oppositions in a system of classes implies that the composition and internal structure of any particular class are fluid and dynamic" (*Ibid.*:9). While Sider's attempt to give the concept of class a dynamism and fluidity, this idea of class is still an inadequate concept for my analysis.

My approach to the concept of "middle-class" is directly influenced by Mark Liechty's research on what he terms 'middle-class³ cultural practice'. In Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class in a New Consumer Society, Liechty admits that his ethnography "contributes to the specific task of conceptualizing middle-class cultural practice" (2003:10). The strength of Liechty's argument for framing class as cultural practice lies in his influences. He states that an "anthropology of middle-class cultural

³ My analysis cannot possibly include every contemporary work in anthropology on middle-class experiences. For a consideration of: friendship among "middle and upper middle class American women", please see Gouldner and Strong (1987); home decoration and the construction of genders and classes in Norway, please see Gullestad (1993); the rise of the middle-class in England, please see Gunn and Bell (2002) and for the cultural dynamics of the contemporary middle-class in Japan, please see Kelly (1986).

practice needs to unite a Weberian sensitivity to the powerful role of culture in social life with a Marxian commitment to locate different forms of cultural practice in the context of unequal distributions of power and resources in society" (*Ibid.*:12). For Liechty, the importance of Marx lies in that Marx saw a link between ideology and status where "class privilege produced a privileged (and privileging) ideology" but did not "appreciate how important a role the very *cultures of social privilege* played in actually producing and reproducing the material reality of economic power" (*Ibid.*:12; author's emphasis).

Weber's departure from Marx lies in the idea that "the middle class relates to economic or productive processes not primarily as sellers of labor (workers) or owners of capital (the capitalist elite) but as *consumers of goods* in the market place" (*Ibid.*:16; author's emphasis). These consumers thus negotiate their identities on their "accomplishments and refinements, moral discourses that it pursues largely through its privileged access to goods and services (from education to fashions) in the 'free' market" (*Ibid.*:17).

With this theoretical platform in mind, Liechty points out that the "middle-class is a constantly renegotiated cultural space - a space of ideas, values, goods, practices, and embodied behaviours - in which the terms of inclusion and exclusion are endlessly tested, negotiated, and affirmed. From this point of view, it is the process, not the product, that constitutes class" (*Ibid.*:15-16). One of the key elements of middle-class cultural practice is the process by which these spaces, behaviours and economic privileges are naturalized through both narratives and performances (*Ibid.*:19). I agree with Liechty that a notion of middle-class can be seen as dynamic and fluid, negotiated and constructed; as practices.

Lastly, I repeat Liechty's fundamental question: What *does* class as cultural practice do? (2003:265). His idea that middle-classness can be seen as cultural process is directly influenced by Bourdieu's theory of practice in that middle-classness is perpetuated within practices. Liechty argues that if "the experience of class is bound up in ways of doing and being, practice and performance, then the outcome of that doing and being - the product of class-cultural performance - is cultural space" where class "as cultural practice is about locating one's self and one's class 'others' in social space" (Ibid.:255). Class "is real, but its reality is something that never exists outside of its continuous production and reproduction in cultural practice" (Ibid.:255). What is important to note in his ideas of middle-classness is that the "production of class-cultural space is accomplished through two conceptually distinct forms of cultural practice: discursive, narrative or linguistic practice on the one hand and embodied, physical, or material practice (including the use of goods) on the other" (Ibid.:256). He concludes:

Through a complex set of cultural processes - from the most conceptual to the most physical and material - middle-class practice is about carving out a cultural space in which people can speak and act themselves into cultural existence...[C]lass practice locates people (either inside or outside the collectivity) and creates locations, conceptual and material spaces of, for and by class" (Ibid.:265).

Like Liechty above, I will locate the diverse practices of women who quilt in St. John's in what they say as well as what they create in the quilting process. I will attempt to demonstrate that many of the women whom I interviewed both 'speak' and 'act' their selves into 'cultural existence'. Using Liechty's idea of where class practice locates people and how class practice then creates 'conceptual' and material spaces, I will ultimately consider how gendered practices and middle-class practices converge and

diverge and why quilting as a specific creative endeavour contributes to these contexts. While taking into consideration how quilters construct and mediate their multi-faceted selves in terms of gendered and middle-class practices, I will also consider how they do or do not speak and act a sense of community into cultural existence.

2.4: Community, Liminality and 'License in Ritual'

Within recent anthropological inquiry into the concept of 'community', there exists many recent theoretical constructions of community: a nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), community as 'region' in the regionalization of ethnographic accounts (Fardon 1990), 'cultural sites' in a deterritorialized world (Fog Olwig 1997), 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 1991), community and the presumption of ethnicity (Amit and Rapport 2002) and the cultural dialectic of the local and the global (Kearney 1985; Tsing 2000). One specific theory of community I wish to engage in is Anthony Cohen's notion of the symbolic construction of community. Anthony Cohen's main argument in The Symbolic Construction of Community (1985) happens to be his last sentence:

Our argument has been, that, whether or not its structural boundaries remain intact, the reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning and a referent of their identity (1985:118).

Here, community can exist in its members' perceptions as well as act as 'symbolic', a 'repository' and a 'resource' for the identities of people. It is important to note that the symbolic quality of community is not an all pervading single meaning but rather a capacity for people to "impute meaning to it" (*Ibid.*:71). Cohen's idea of community

does take into consideration that the individuals who create a community are embedded in a context. Unlike Durkheim's rigid dictum that a community's structure determines behaviour, community (for Cohen) is an 'affiliation' rather than a 'philosophy' where community is internally complex; it consists of the "idiosyncrasies" of the "experiences and personalities" of individuals (*Ibid.*:74). His notion of community is flexible for it takes into account that there might exist multiple interpretations of meanings as well as the existence of a dialectic between individual and collective shared meanings. There is thus a "shared vocabulary of value...[which] therefore enables the integrity of the community's self image and its sense of distinctive self, to be maintained" (*Ibid.*:114). Therefore community "condenses symbolically, and adeptly, its bearers' social theories of similarity and difference" where it "becomes an eloquent and collective emblem of their social selves" (*Ibid.*:114). While Cohen's idea of 'community' is flexible, it still advocates a bounded entity in that community has *a* self-image and *a* sense of distinctive self.

However, Cohen notion's of the symbolic construction of community is not without its criticism⁴. John Knight's 1994 article "Questioning Local Boundaries: A Critique of the 'Anthropology of Locality'" critiques Cohen's idea of community. Knight argues that a "close reading of Cohen's theoretical and ethnographic writings shows that the 'anthropology of locality', while claiming to be a critique of national homogenization, in fact replicates at a lower level of scale features of the national units" (1994:213). By arguing against a cultural unit at the national level, Knight states that localities are

⁴ For more general critiques of the theoretical concept of community, please see Vered Amit (2002) and Gusfield (1975).

“themselves relativized as a specific cultural set; the view of the world as a sort of cultural mosaic can itself be seen as a cultural artifact” (*Ibid.*:215). Cohen, in an effort to counteract a sense of a unified national community, essentializes community in its locality (*Ibid.*:215). As discussed above, I contend that Cohen’s strength is the flexibility of *inter-community* meanings. However, Knight’s criticism rests on Cohen’s failure to reconcile with the *intra-community* exchanges and processes. Cohen’s “approach to locality is unable to come to terms with the national dimension of such localities and as a consequence condemns itself to exaggerate local difference through the idiom of culture” (*Ibid.*:219).

In order to support his claim, Knight puts forth three processes of local and national integration as evidence of Cohen’s failure: participation in the economic market, migration in and out of local communities and the presence of state institutions on the local level. The fact remains that the localities that Cohen uses as case examples (like Whalsay, a Shetland island and community) are “firmly integrated with and dependent on, the wider nation” in terms of market relations (*Ibid.*:219). Fishing families on Whalsay sell their products to national and international markets and in return, depend on mainland agricultural produce to sustain them (*Ibid.*:220). Whalsay and Scotland have an economic relationship that blurs the symbolic boundary that supposedly exists to separate Whalsay as a community. Also, Cohen neglects to consider the fact that people migrate to and from communities, especially in the form of migrant labour (*Ibid.*:220). Here, Knight suggests that a “life-course focus on local people would show how local and extra-local social ties are biographically combined” whereas “the everyday focus adopted by Cohen, by contrast, allows migrants to disappear out of social sight and be in effect

subtracted from social analysis” (Ibid.:221). By subtracting the migrant experience, Cohen essentializes community as a symbolic locality. Lastly, Knight points out that there exists within localities national institutions like state sponsored schools that contribute extra-local meanings to local individuals (Ibid.:222). This contributes to a state-locality separation and an ignorance of the presence of extra-local influences on local meanings (Ibid.:222). The concept of community, whether bounded or unbounded, still brings anthropologists back to analyzing social “differences” and “sameness”.

In reference to this thesis, I chose to consider another defining characteristic of the notion of community: community as ‘practice’ rather than ‘product’. In Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood, Rhoda Halperin utilizes this concept of community as practice and/or “practiced community” when analyzing the class identities of a Cincinnati collective known as “The East End” (1998). For Halperin, “practicing community” is:

...an intentionally active phrase meant to convey the arduous, often grueling, long-term, persistent efforts of East Enders to preserve and revitalize the community...[where] practicing community must be experienced and analyzed as a dynamic, changing, and, at times, tumultuous and dangerous process...Community is not just a place, although place is very important, but a series of day-to-day, ongoing, often invisible practices. These practices are connected to but not confined to place (1998:5).

Community is practiced in the sense that it can be associated with space and place but also exists and is negotiated in everyday relationships. Like Cohen’s notion of community as shared meanings, community as active exchange is negotiable and flexible. One must also remember that community “is the source of dreams, the source of a sense of the future” and of “possibility” and of “security” where it’s meaning, whether practiced or

symbolic meaning, is continually in flux (Ibid.:16). Community and communities are not cultural products but continuing processes.

One disadvantage to Halperin's analysis is her use of the term 'class culture'. While the idea of community as practice opens a working, flexible and negotiable definition, the idea of 'class culture' does not afford my analysis with the same freedoms. Even though 'class culture' is deemed "a constantly changing structure" where "it changes from one generation to the next and from one segment of the neighborhood to the next" (Ibid.:6), the notion of class culture still communicates a structural sense of identity that is solely privileging class as its defining criteria. Even if Halperin affirms that there is no homogeneity in class as well as giving license to consider the "subtleties" and "nuances" that exist within class cultures while taking into consideration the "internal tensions" and "the potential for conflict...[with] great variability and stratification", there is still the sense that class is unified under the specific criteria of shared place and economic living arrangements (Ibid.:41). I will merge Halperin's notion of community with Leichty's concept of middle-class practice. Community and middle-class practices for the majority of women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland are constituted in relation to gendered practices and vice versa.

Experiences of self and community are performed socially at group events. These collective events can also be purposely situated in liminal spaces. The state of 'liminality' was first introduced into the anthropological cannon by Arnold Van Gennep in The Rites of Passage (1960). Van Gennep discussed how there existed "ceremonies, acts of a special kind, derived from a particular feeling and a particular frame of mind" (1960:1). An individual's lifeway comprises of "a series of passages from one age to another and

from one occupation to another” where the “progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts” (Ibid.:2-3). While I am not directly concerned with deconstructing the quilters’ retreat that I attended by categorizing it as sympathetic/contagious, animistic/dynamistic, direct/indirect or positive/negative rites, I am concerned with the liminal period of transition within Van Gennep’s rites of passage theory. These rites of passage are “a special category” where they “may be subdivided into *rites of separation, transition rites* and *rites of incorporation*” and are “recurring” (Ibid.:11,13, author’s emphasis).

In “The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,” Turner (1969) elaborates on Van Gennep’s transitional stage by exploring the characteristics of liminality. Within this “liminal period”, “the characteristics of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) are ambiguous” where the individual “passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 1969:94). The individuals within the liminal state are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” where liminality is “likened...to the wilderness” (Ibid.:95). Individuals within the liminal or transitional space “tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism” where secular distinctions of rank and status disappear” (Ibid.:95). Lastly, when individuals are participating in such a state, there is a “‘moment in and out of time” and the “recognitions...of a generalized social bond” (Ibid.:96). For women who quilted and participated at the retreat, I will show how Van Gennep’s and Turner’s ideas on liminality do and do not apply. The women who attended the retreat did not indicate in either their dialogues or in their actions that the quilter’s fall retreat was religious in nature or a

process/rite of initiation for new members. The positioning of the retreat activities that occurred during its gathering points to the important power of liminal space in how the quilters themselves reaffirm their participation, commitment and social values of their guild and gendered middle class cultural practices.

Within this concept of liminality, I also wish to consider Max Gluckman's concept of 'licence in ritual'. In his 1959 work Custom and Conflict in Africa, Gluckman specifies a phenomenon which he terms the 'license in ritual'. Gluckman is referring specifically to "rites of reversal" where there is "protest against the established order" and their protests "are intended to preserve and even to strengthen the established order" (1959:109). This protest "is licensed and even encouraged" where "the ritual is socially valuable" (Ibid.:110). In his work with Zulu and other South African tribes, Gluckman "found in them items of...lewd and other protests by women against the established order" where these "obscene and domineering acts by the women were encouraged" (Ibid.:111). These rituals, "by allowing people to behave in normally prohibited ways, gave expression, in a reversed form, to the normal rightness of a particular kind of social order" (Ibid.:116). While the quilters' fall retreat was not a mystical rite, it was a specific experience of a social gathering of quilters within a separated, liminal space. However, Gluckman's licence in ritual can only manifest and be effective "so long as there is no querying of the order within which the ritual of protest is set and the group itself will endure" (Ibid.:130).

One problem with Gluckman's theory of a license in ritual is that there is the assumption that it only occurs within formal ritual space. I contend that the reversal of roles, which demonstrate and reaffirm in their performance common values of a

constantly shifting and negotiated community, can be seen in events that are *not* considered specifically rites but events of play. Gluckman's theory of a license in ritual does apply in certain ways to my observations of some of the quilters at the retreat with reference to lewd comments and rebellious practices exhibited by many women throughout the Talent Show component of the weekend. Now that I have considered the advantages and disadvantages of the concepts of practice, self, community, I will now consider the theoretical concepts of power and agency.

2.5: On Power and Agency

In order to demonstrate the existence of personal agency for women who quilt, one must first situate the theoretical concepts of both *power* and *agency*. Eric Wolf in Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis outlines the concept of power in four modalities (1999). Power "works differently in interpersonal relations, in institutional arenas and on the level of whole societies" where it is "useful to distinguish among four modalities in how power is thus woven into social relations" (Wolf 1999:5). The first modality is "the power of potency or capability that is seen to inhere in an individual" and the second modality of power is "manifested in interactions and transactions among people and refers to the ability of an *ego* to impose its will in social action upon an *alter*" (Ibid.:5; author's emphasis). The third and fourth modalities of power are as follows:

...A third modality is power that controls the contexts in which people exhibit their capabilities and interact with others...But there is still a fourth modality of power, which I want to focus on in the present inquiry: structural power. By this I mean the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings

and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the direction and distribution of energy flows (Ibid.:5).

While Wolf does include the individual in his notion of power, its emphasis on structure is problematic. The power manifest in relationships not only 'directs' and 'distributes' energy flows but also 'directs' information. In the first two modalities of power, Wolf is careful to include that there exists the capability for an individual to have power in oneself and that this power can be mobilized by that individual 'in social action' upon another individual, institution, etc. However, I argue that the third modality of power gives agency to the power itself. This frames 'power' as an independent entity that is manifest on its own which then controls the contexts 'which people exhibit their capabilities and interactions with others'. In Wolf's fourth modality, power is again given agency on its own in that it 'organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves'.

Michel Foucault provides a more *dialogic* and *relational* concept of power. This proves more useful in considering how women who quilt demonstrate active agency through the production of their quilts. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault utilizes the example of the production of 'docile bodies' in soldiers in order to illustrate his notion of relational power (1977). Power over a body changes historically from a classical notion of an "analyzable body" to a "body [that] is docile [and] that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1977:136). During the eighteenth century, power over the body becomes "a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes and rapidity" (Ibid.:137). This subjection of power "imposed upon [the bodies] a relation of docility-utility" (Ibid.:137). Power is not an all encompassing entity but rather is 'coercive' and is

manifest in 'a relation of docility-utility'. Power is an element within the relationship that exists between individuals who are in control of the soldier's bodies and the soldier's themselves. The fact that power over the bodies of the soldiers must be made *subtle* points to the existence of individual agency. The employment of direct power carries the possibility of the choice of direct resistance by the individual soldier. This resistance is the manifestation of personal agency.

Foucault also suggests that within discourses, individuals are constituted within multifaceted relationships of power which are dependant on that individual's very subjectivity in order to be recreated (1980). It is not for one to question "who has power?" but rather "what is [power's] intention in practice?" (Foucault 1980:97). He continues:

Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. In other words, rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thought etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects (*Ibid.*:97).

Here, Foucault is not concerned in locating power but rather investigating the negotiation of power relationships and how these relationships, in turn, constitute subjectivities.

Therefore, when considering the personal agency of quilters, this agency exists because the quilters themselves are embedded in relations of power in their daily lives. In using ethnographic evidence, I will illustrate that women quilters work inside and outside of the home, pay taxes and purchase goods in order to produce their expressive creations.

However, like Foucault's eighteenth century soldiers, women also have the capacity for active agency in their daily lives.

In order to contextualize *agency*, I would like to turn to Gerald Sider's notion of 'experience' in "Cleansing History: Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Strike for Four Loaves of Bread and No Roses and the Anthropology of Working-class Consciousness" (1996). Here, Sider considers the cultural politics of memory: remembering and forgetting histories. Sider observes that:

...there is the...view that 'experience' under-lies agency, and that agency is inherently-rather than only potentially-progressive, rather than also potentially self-destructive or, like a trip to Disneyland, just diverting. If we understand that 'agency' has the potential to be self-destructive as well as liberating then we can see that the 'repressive mechanisms which destroy historical memory', could equally as likely be a significant aspect of how we come to terms with our experience, or the ends to which experience is put, or how specific experiences are put behind the person who had them (1996:59).

Sider goes further than this notion of experience in that there is a reconceptualization of agency. Agency becomes at the same time both 'self-destructive' and 'liberating'. Forgetting historical memory or repressing it can be the key to understanding how experience operates within our daily lives in how we interact with it, how we utilize it or how we move on from our experiences. Experience now is the arena where people negotiate the encounters of their everyday lives, both publicly and privately. Therefore, personal agencies expressed by women quilters have the capacity to be both constructive and destructive. It is their *experiences* that will dictate when this agency is 'liberating'. Gendered and middle-class practices are socially constructed and mediated through the ongoing exchange between personhoods and communities. Both my group of participants and their collective(s) participated in practices of power and agency. Many of the women who quilt were, in turn, informed by them. In the next chapter, I will consider the

expressions of gendered practices and the complexities of the selves of the women whom participated in this research project.

CHAPTER 3: THE COMPLEXITY OF 'SELVES'

Power can create identities on the individual level, as it provides disciplines, punishments, and culturally available pathways for fulfillment; nowhere were these forces more evident to me than in my relationships with the Japanese people I knew. At stake in my narrative of emerging order are the constantly contested and shifting boundaries of my identity and the identities of my Japanese relatives, friends, and acquaintances. We participated in each other's lives and sought to make sense of one another. In that attempt to understand, power inevitably came into play as we tried to force each other into appropriately comprehensible categories. This nexus of power and meaning was also creative, the crucible within which we forged our relationship. In turn, our negotiated understandings of one another enabled me to shape the particular problematic that now animates my research (Kondo 1990:10).

Jaime: If you would describe it¹, is it craft or is it art?

Rachel: Uh, I guess both. I don't know why now people make the distinction between craft and art because DaVinci was not seen as an artist, he described himself as a craftsperson as much as he described himself as an artist and his painting was his craft and his pursuit was, to perfect his craft so you know, somewhere, we've gotten away from it. I don't really know why this big distinction is always made...(Rachel Ryan, Craftsperson)

3.1: Motivations and Inspirations

One of the initial questions I posed during each interview focused on what brought women who quilt to this creative activity: What inspired or motivated you to learn how to quilt? I was interested in listening to how my participants began their quilting experience and perhaps the construction of a quilting 'self'. The most evocative response I received came from Shelley Bauer. As we sat talking in her basement home office, Shelley began her conversation with me with a sad story of her grandmother:

¹ In using the word 'it', I was referring to Rachel's textile creations in this question.

Jaime: How did you get started in quilting? Tell me the story.

Shelley: Ah, when I was...the year I graduated high school. In January, my grandparents had a *house fire*, the house was pretty much totaled and my grandmother was, well both my grandmother and grandfather were burned and they were hospitalized and my grandmother died thirteen days later. And my grandfather was hospitalized for three or four months with skin grafts on his *hands* and skin grafts on his back. Anyways, the ah (pause)...very few things were saved from the fire because there were looters that went through the fire almost immediately after the firemen left. It was a farm, rural area and the neighbours didn't realize there were looters over there until the, they finally realized and set up a neighbourhood watch to protect the house [**Jaime:** Yeah] but the looters were coming out of the back and climbing over the hills, through the woods to get to the house. So there were very few things saved from the fire but one of the things that was *saved* was a quilt top. And the quilt top was apparently going to be my graduation present. And it wasn't finished, it was about halfway complete. It's a flower pot, there are flowers coming out of it and the bottom of the quilt was all empty, I don't know what Nana intended to put in that area. I didn't even know it was mine but the quilters from her guild said that it was supposed to be mine for graduation. It was something unlike what Nana had made in quilts for our family at least. The quilts she made for our family were from the suit samples and the wool, they are good serviceable quilts that keep you warm and they're colourful but they're not anything really fancy and this was completely different. This was appliqué. So the first two years the quilt top stayed with her guild with the idea that they were going to finish it for me. And they never finished it so I finally approached my mum and said, 'Mum, I want to have my hands on it 'cause I [**Jaime:** It's a tangible thing] yeah, it's a tangible thing. My mum got it back from the guild and I kept looking at it and looking at it and realizing more and more that the only way it was going to get finished was if *I finished it*. So I had to learn.

Later on in our conversation, Shelley brought the actual quilt top out and pointed to the areas on the quilt where she had to wash the smell and stains from the ash in the farmhouse that had concealed the quilt's location from the looters. Shelley's inspirational story for quilting expresses a personal conviction for her to learn how to quilt in order to continue the creative process that had been started by her grandmother. Her narrative evokes a sense of duty to her grandmother and a sense of personal responsibility to learn how to quilt in order to complete something that has already begun. The quilt top

becomes a tangible, material and historical connection to her grandmother. In this connection, one can also see how Shelley values the presence of family in her life. While her grandmother had passed away, there is a new relationship that literally 'sews' both women together. Her Nana's quilt is still a work in progress and while Shelley herself could not save her grandparents from the horror of the house fire, she saved the quilt from the guild and is still 'saving' it today by insuring a constant editing of quilt top components. The importance of Shelley's memory above is further accentuated in that she was never interested in sewing when young:

I had *never* been interested in sewing before this, NEVER. My sisters, well, my older sister is a seamstress, she made her own wedding gown, she makes gorgeous clothes and all this kind of stuff. I was never interested and even now I don't sew clothes, I sew quilts.

Shelley's emphasis on the word 'never' clearly demonstrates that before the life altering experience of the house fire and the death of her grandmother, sewing did not hold any motivation. The process of quilting holds value for Shelley as it intimately connects her to an individual who has passed away. Shelley's quilting experience is as unique as her personhood.

When writing the thesis proposal for this project, I was advised to choose between researching a specific product or a group of producers. My decision to focus my analysis on a specific group of women who create objects in a specific medium arises from a personal curiosity in drawing out what makes individuals do what they do and how the process of what they do, in turn, influences their multifaceted 'selves'. As Kondo so aptly illustrates, "power can create identities on the individual level, as it provides disciplines, punishments and culturally available pathways for fulfillment" (1990:10). The act of

quilting provides an avenue for specific 'culturally available pathways'. I contend that these pathways of gendered ideals, and social values are created, negotiated and made available to those practicing specific middle-class practices. In this chapter, I will analyze how the women whom I interviewed framed and described their expressions of specific identities. This discussion will be anchored in problematizing the actual concept of the 'self' and identifying how the majority of women evoked central themes, values and choices.

At the beginning of this research project, I assumed that there would be many women who found the desire to quilt at a specific point in their lives and then actively pursued quilting. In return, I received many diverse responses when these women shared their initial inspirations to engage in the activity of quilting. Katie, an established Textile Studies instructor at the Anna Templeton Centre, narrated that she "chose the creative area by chance only, her mother suggested a nine month course in textile studies at Cabot College..." Katie continued, "You fall into a path, there are no real choices, I enjoy the creation process and personal satisfaction." The choice to pursue quilting and other fibre arts occurred when she chose to explore a broader interest of artistic processes and techniques. As well, Katie did not come to this 'path' on her own for it was suggested by her mother. It is interesting to consider the last aspect of Katie's comment in that her choice to pursue her creativity was "by chance only" but that "there are no real choices". Within Katie's narrative, this contradiction highlights how the beginning of her experience with quilting and textiles existed on a path where the opportunity to explore quilting was presented to her.

In contrast, Karen Colbourne Martin, a woman who creates quilted objects and landscapes, “sewed as a child, was into crafts [and] art classes” and her father was “an architect and painted”, her “mom sewed clothing”, and she “remembers having home economics in grade 3”. She continues:

I guess it was always there in terms of an art background. I started in 1986, I took a course on quilting at YMCA but it was not good, we had something to do every week and I had young children but I also took a sampler course from a friend and it was a great way to learn, one lesson and one square to do a month. I always loved geometry, hated math, loved angles, it was the design of the quilts that I loved, quilting grabbed me all of a sudden, I could incorporate the art, design, loved playing with colour, fascinated by quilts in magazines. They looked like an abstract paintings, the idea that someone could take fabric and piece it back together like that.

Karen associates her inspiration to quilt with an artistic inheritance but also shares that her love of visual math (geometry, angles, etc) motivated her to take a sampler course. However, the opportunity to ‘incorporate the art’, ‘the design’ and ‘playing with colour’ comes not from a naturalized and essential ‘artistic inheritance’ but rather a middle class position of privilege. Karen had access to education and could afford to take courses on quilting as well as pursue her love of quilts by purchasing fabric, magazines, etc. In Karen’s words, quilting allowed her to unite her love of line, shape, form, colour, art and design in one technological yet artistic skill.

Vicky Taylor-Hood, a self identified “quilter” and “textile artist”, references a similar notion of artistic inheritance like that of Karen above. She states:

My grandmother was an artist, she specialized in watercolours, she actually studied at Nova Scotia College of art and design, years and years ago and as I grew up, I actually did watercolours, was taught by her. She was also interested in batiks, and all sorts of interesting things of that nature. She was actually very much a creative and ingenuitive person. But I have always done something with my hands or something creative or artistic, one was photography, one was watercolours, I went through a clay phase, you know, if you are a creative person,

you go through this development. When I was an undergraduate, uh, how old was I? Um, eighteen, I met a girl named Melodie Kelly who was an anthropology student and she had said that she had been taught by her aunt to quilt. Now, Melodie is from Ontario, she was sort of, quilting is actually not a Newfoundland tradition per se, um so she had been taught by her aunt to quilt. So Melodie and I used to hang out together and one day she showed me how to put together a quilt. Kept me busy in undergrad and when I did my Masters, they were my sanity projects, to keep me from going insane. When I decided not to do a PhD, I had time on my hands, I was not interested in the daily brunt kind of job and housework, there is only so much you can do. I was putting things back together in my life and with quilting.”

Vicky’s grandmother influenced her quest to ‘always’ have ‘something to do’ with her hands. Quilting then ‘kept her busy’ in her post-secondary education and was a valuable stress-reducing strategy in graduate school. The act of creating quilts kept her ‘from going insane’ and they became known as ‘sanity projects’. Vicky’s narrative also reveals what she desires to experience in her life by telling me what she is not interested in: a ‘daily brunt kind of job’. Quilting then synonymously joins aspects of Vicky’s life together just as she herself joins pieces of fabric together to create her quilts. However, like Karen before her, Vicky has the ability to pursue quilting because of many advantages which suggest specific middle-class practices. Her grandmother had access to education and the financial support in order to purchase supplies. Vicky also had access to higher education and quilting became a strategy by which one can put one’s ‘life back together again’. The act of quilting was a pursuit outside of school. Reconstructing a new life is bound with the act of discovering and pursuing quilting.

The occupations and educational backgrounds of these women² clearly indicate that the majority of quilters whom I interviewed participated in middle-class practices. Their choices in occupations and education express a contextual middle-classness. With these points in mind, I now wish to consider the diversity of ways the women whom I interviewed framed their 'selves' and their quilting experiences as well as how they consistently express conservative, middle-class values and practices.

3.2: Art or Craft?: A Problematic Dichotomy

Many women with whom I interacted had great difficulty in describing how they themselves defined their shared activity. Jodi McDavid-Brodie and I met for the first time through a mutual friend in the Folklore Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Through casual conversation I learned that Jodi was a quilter and an active organizer in the Folklore Department's own quilting guild. She is also a Ph.D. candidate in the field of Folklore and was willing to spend some time talking to me about her memories and thoughts on quilting in her life. The seminar room where we engaged in open conversation had the familiar wobbly tables and mismatched chairs. There hung a slanted large portrait of someone I assumed was a famous folklorist behind Jodi, along with smaller black and white photos of past students and professors. I asked Jodi how she defined the action of quilting:

² The occupations and educational backgrounds, mostly post-secondary achievements, were overviewed in the introduction to this thesis.

Jaime: When you do quilting, do you consider it an art? A craft? Or both? Or maybe nothing like that?

Jodi: That's a hard question. I don't think I think of it as a craft because, because I have issues with both those words, I mean, nothing against you [**Jaime:** oh no no no, so what are your issues?] My issues are that I know a lot of people who do basically crafts and who consider themselves artists and I think that's very, um, I think its an interesting problem, I mean when I was growing up, this is releasing a lot of issues (Jodi smiles and we both giggle) my mom would always say that she was an artist or that I was an artist and I think I felt a little uncomfortable with that term because I don't think I really knew what it meant at that point. I mean I don't think it has to be something that is hanging in an art gallery to be art. I've been down in the States before and we went through the Pennsylvania Dutch country and got to see all their quilts and they are *so* beautiful, they just amaze me, I just wanted to bankrupt myself to just buy all these quilts, so I definitely think that there is an artistic value there... and then craft has that diminutive aspect, you know, people are like 'it's a crafts fair' and you go and there's pompoms glued together with eyes on them or something, like that's the craft.

Jodi's academic pursuits filtrate this narrative in that she finds the terms 'art' and 'craft' intensely problematic. It is an interesting problem when there are "people who do crafts and who consider themselves as artists". Jodi does not elaborate on this problem directly but continues her narrative with a personal anecdote. Here, there exists juxtaposition between Jodi's amazement with quilts made in Pennsylvania Dutch Country and a more generalized craft at a craft fair described as "pompoms glued together with eyes". Quilts have an "artistic value" but Jodi points directly to the idea that quilts are not a craft in that the label 'craft' has a "diminutive aspect" to it. While Jodi has a problem with both terms, quilting to Jodi is clearly not a craft but not necessarily 'art'. In Jodi's definition of what she does, one sees a negotiation of how she perceives herself in *what* she does. Jodi does not create crafts and therefore does not identify herself as a craft creator. However, there also exists an ambiguousness to Jodi's definition of quilting in that her mother saw herself as an artist and this created a level of discomfort in Jodi at the time.

After seeing the Pennsylvania Dutch country quilts, the act of quilting had the capacity to be artistic in nature. Ultimately, as a graduate student who has access to financial resources that support her education and her quilting, Jodi has the opportunity to contest the stereotype of 'craft'.

Rachel Ryan also expressed that the terms 'art' and 'craft' present problems in terms of how she sees her textile objects. In the narrative that follows, Rachel verbally contemplates what the difference (if any) between art and craft is by expressing what her objects are not:

Rachel: I think it's an art/craft dichotomy that's there. You know, it's like there's still this very *subtle* kind of *split* between what's art with a capital 'A' and what's craft. So, um, just thinking about it makes my head hurt so I don't even care any more.

Jaime: That's was what I was going to ask you, what do you then call yourself?

Rachel: You know, if someone asks me when I'm at the dentist's office and making conversation, 'What do you do for a living?', I'll say I'm a craftsperson because to say that I'm an artist sounds really pretentious for one thing and it puts this distance between persons, you know like WHOA, so when you say, 'I'm a craftsperson' they're like, 'Oh, O.K. What do you do?' and it's just like, it's just, for me it's just seems a lot friendlier and a lot more comfortable and textiles for me, that's what it's about. Like I've done some different things and I've been in painting classes and to me it's such bullshit some of the stuff that they talk about, the way that they [Jaime: What's bullshit about it?] THE JARGON, the art speak, they're trying to sound smarter than the person next to you and the fact that you can make this whole painting with you know, all black and one red dot and write this huge uh manifesto on *why* this is very important and what it means and I think if you have to explain what something means then it loses something in the process.

Jaime: Or feel the necessity to do that. There is a lot of abstract art out there but at the same time they aren't doing that huge thing, it's like whatever you see in it, or something like that...

Rachel: I think that a lot of people work really hard at alienating themselves from other people and, personally, um I've found that the way to communicate is by my creative expression so I don't want people to look at something I've made and

say, "What the hell does that mean?" and feel like when they go into a gallery with my work in it, that they have to whisper and that they are not allowed to talk out loud and not allowed to discuss this and that they can't feel calm and good when they go in there. Its just, I don't like the feeling when you go into an art gallery and 'don't touch anything' and I can't even read through that [**Jaime:** sometimes it's like you are almost in a museum] yeah exactly, well, I think too many artists act like they're work is a holy fucking shrine and it's not you know? You are a human being and you are making something, its communication for me. Why would I want to communicate that, 'I'm smarter than you' and 'You have to work really hard to figure out what it is I'm trying to say here' ...I've been in situation like that where you just feel really uncomfortable. Well, some people argue and some friends of mine say, 'Well, I feel that's my job, to make people uncomfortable, to make people reflect' [**Jaime:** engage] Fine, whatever, that's fine but I think its, for me, that is a mask, it's a way of hiding themselves behind what they are doing and they don't want to actually say anything about themselves. They want to look slick and sophisticated and my work is a lot *homier* than that a lot of people would say. But that's fine, they can say that.

Jaime: Why would they say that it's homier?

Rachel: Uh, well textile art is traditionally feminine, very domestic and uh, very friendly and approachable, you know sometimes it has dog hair on it (we both laugh) and that kind of thing so I definitely think it's homier. I think its uh traditional quilts are um, expressions of hearth and home and the log cabin is a very basic quilt design so it traditionally starts with one red square in the center which symbolizes the home fires you know? The hearth....I just don't want to be that kind of artists where people have to feel stunned or something. I just don't like feeling that way personally so, for me it's having a conversation with other people.

Rachel identifies herself as a "craftsperson" to people she interacts with in public such as dentists and dental assistants as the term "artist sounds really pretentious" to her.

Labeling oneself as an 'artist' creates "distance" between individuals like the creator and observer of the art as well as with individuals one interacts with on a daily basis. Art with these associations is accompanied by "jargon" or "art speak" where the artist attempts to be seen, through the description of the meaning of their art, as superior in intelligence.

Rachel sees this type of art, art that requires a "manifesto" and explanation, as diminished in meaning and value as it "loses something". Artists thus "alienate" themselves not only

in their pieces but also in the sterile, formalized gallery settings. For Rachel, her fabric creations using quilting techniques are about “communication”.

Lastly, Rachel identifies textile art as “feminine and domestic” and “friendly and approachable”. She also expresses that “traditional quilts are expressions of hearth and home”. I contend that by looking at how Rachel describes her textile projects, one can see aspects of her thoughts on her own personhood. Rachel is concerned that people in public see her as a craftsperson which communicates that she sees herself as approachable in that she is ‘friendly’ and ‘comfortable’ like her pieces themselves. Rachel’s quilted objects are considered gendered objects. However, when one considers her opening quote of this chapter, Rachel’s definition of what she creates is continually negotiated. In her dialogue on the dichotomy of art vs. craft, Rachel frames herself as a specific type of woman in terms of gendered practices. To be friendly, comforting, non-arrogant, non-pretentious, non-alienating and where one is capable of clear communication speaks to her personal definition of some of the ideal values of her self. These qualities speak to a definition of ‘feminine’ in their associations with domesticity, personal character and concepts of home (i.e. ‘comfort’). Her association with DaVinci’s own categories of self-description seeks to blur the line between art and craft. Ultimately, it is not the definition of what one makes that is of the most importance. It is how you see your ‘self’ as seen by others.

Lori Shortall, the President of the Cabot Quilters’ Guild for 2003-2004, problematizes the labels of ‘craft’ and ‘art’ in the following narrative:

Jaime: Do you see what you do as art or craft or both? Maybe describe how you see what you do.

Lori: I don’t necessarily see it as (pause) *craft* and I don’t mean that being crafty is insulting but when I think of crafty, I think of popsicle sticks and glue. And I

think it's a kid thing because you have craft corner in school and there was a craft store called...um...there's Lewiscraft and there's all these craft stores and a lot of them, they don't sell any fabric. They sell glue and popsicle sticks. I mean I don't mean that in an insulting way [**Jaime:** Well, like dried flowers] yeah, dried flowers. Um, they may sell paint by numbers [**Jaime:** They sell yarn] They sell yarn but they don't sell fabric so its not that I think that quilting has an elevated status, it certainly *does not*. But, um, I don't necessarily think it as a craft and maybe because a lot of the times, it's such a big product and crafts tend to be something that you can always put in the palm of your hand, ornaments, that kind of thing?

Jaime: Well, what you said at the beginning about Brownies. I mean, in Guides or Pathfinders, we would have, we'd do a little craft so I see what you mean.

Lori: Glue and popsicle sticks, macaroni, and sparkles and gold paint [**Jaime:** And lots of feathers] you know what I mean? And like I said, I'm not trying to be insulting to 'craft' but I am just trying to give my own personal connotation to the word, from childhood so it doesn't have elevated status or anything so I don't necessarily think its craft and I think quilting *can* be an art. I don't think mine is quite of that status to call it *ART* the way we think of art like the way I was thinking about crafts. You know, something you have that's framed and you hang on your wall and would buy. Someone like Ed Roach, Louise Andrews, people know your name and people hang you on their wall, that's art. Um, I think it's a bit of a fallacy, that's a little bit on a pedestal too. So I think that my stuff comes somewhere in between, it's not quite craft but I don't think its art. Maybe this Cape Spear thing (landscape fabric painting for her friend in Malta) could be because it is more of a painting.

Lori's response to my question is similar to Jodi's in that she too finds difficulty in placing the act of quilting within either category³. Lori associates 'craft' and being 'crafty' with things that are drastically smaller than a quilt such as "popsicle sticks" and

³ Another interesting response that I received was from Katie. Upon asking her "how do you see what you do?", she responded that she does not "put anything in categories" where it "is just what it is". She continued:

Like, if you have art, painting, whatever, fine art, you know there is still skill all connected to that. And if you have an object on a table which is craft, there is still skill connected to that so hopefully fine work, there's people who don't do fine construction in things but the idea is to make things last, if that's important to you to make things last. I think the voice is the most important, not the category.

Katie does not subscribe to either category of 'art' or 'craft' but still expresses a difference by delineating 'fine art' and 'an object on a table which is craft'. Both share the qualification of 'skill' and 'fine construction' to be valued. It is "the voice" of the creator that is the most important, not the defining of what the nature of the creation is and thus, not the defining of the nature of the creator as well.

“glue” as well as “craft corner at school”. She is quick to clarify that she does not mean to insult people who make craft but rather to communicate her “own personal connotation to the word”. However, quilting does not appear directly opposite ‘craft’ as it “certainly does not have an elevated status”. Quilting is “not necessarily a craft” but holds the *capacity* to be an art. Lori situates her own quilt in this ambiguous position in that her quilts are not ‘art’ in the sense of something “that’s framed” and that “you hang on your wall” and purchase. For her quilts to be art, they would have to be ‘art’ like creations by Ed Roche and Louise Andrews where “people have to know your own name”. This type of art is also a bit of a “fallacy” being placed on a “pedestal” similar to Rachel’s description of the pretentiousness of art.

What do these observations tell us about Lori’s own vision of personhood in reference to her quilting activities? Lori does not see herself as an artist in that she criticizes art’s façade or ‘fallacy’. Lori clearly does not see herself as a crafter but interprets her activity of quilting to be dissimilar to individuals who create art. This speaks to the conclusion that Lori has the capacity to become an artist as her quilting has the capacity to become art. Within this parameter, there exists an appropriation of a utilitarian practice of creating quilted objects by some middle-class women in St. John’s. Lori’s description of the value of her objects is ambiguous as well: they are neither art nor craft. The ambiguous context of the artistic value and definition of quilting creates a negotiable site for many women to discursively reveal values that construct gender and middle class practices. This characteristic of ambiguity repeats itself in how women who quilt in St. John’s, Newfoundland define the act of quilting in their daily lives.

3.3: Quilting as Creation: Work or Leisure?

The concept of “women’s work” is difficult to define in many ways. What specifically constitutes “work”? How are these characteristics associated with the specific gender construction of what it means to be a “woman”? When discussing the concepts of ‘work’ and ‘gender’, it is easy to engage in an analysis that centers on a dichotomy of ‘work’ versus ‘leisure’ activities. One may assume that women and women’s activities are always relegated to the categories of ‘domesticity’ and ‘home’. There can also exist the assumption that the concept of work should be subdivided into paid and unpaid work. Some of the social research that focuses on women’s work privileges this very economic segregation as well as a sexual division of labour (Armstrong and Armstrong 2001, 2002; Bradley 1989; Clark and Harvey 1976; Connelly and MacDonald 1983; Cullum 2000; Myrdal and Klein 1968; Kahn-Hut, Daniels and Colvard 1982; Kealey 1986; Porter 1993; Safa and Leacock 1986). The Statistics Canada 2001 Census differentiates between paid and unpaid work for women where unpaid work is specifically identified as consisting of the categories of “childcare”, “senior care” and “unpaid house work” (Statistics Canada 2001c).

In terms of a Newfoundland (and Labrador) context, there have been many studies pertaining to the social aspects of women’s work and craft/artisanal creation. In Threads of Gold: Newfoundland and Labrador Jubilee Guilds Women’s Institutes (1989), Agnes Richard presents a twentieth century historical perspective on women’s work and the economic effect of the Jubilee Guilds on women’s production of crafts industry in rural outposts. Richard frames this history in a commemorative publication intended to

promote the history of the various Jubilee Guilds. In contrast, Linda Cullum's Under Construction: Women, The Jubilee Guilds and Commission Government in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1935-1941 (1992) illustrates the underlying gender and class relations between the Commission Government and the Jubilee Guilds. Cullum specifically focuses on the political and social aspects of the affect of women's institutions on the Commission Government in the late nineteen thirties.

In a Labrador Context, Rita Kindl considers the social conditions of women's employment and involvement in community development in Change and Continuity: Three Generations of Women's Work in North West River, Labrador (1999). Lynda Stalker's Wool and Needles In My Casket: Knitting as Habit Among Rural Newfoundland Women (2000) considers the "motives and meanings behind the actions of female knitters in rural Newfoundland" with specific reference to knitters who sell their creations through the Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association (2000). While these studies are significant in their own approaches to women's work, there still exists a privileging of the concept of women's work as paid employment and domestic work as unpaid work. The dialogues that were shared with me from many women who quilt in St. John's ultimately reveal that there is a diversity of opinions of how to conceptualize quilting as "work" or "leisure" or neither of the above. It is this very ambiguousness in the naming and categorizing of the quilting process that allows many gendered and class practices to converge and be revealed.

How do women who quilt and/or use quilting techniques in their fibre art categorize their production? Do they consider it work? Or is it seen as a hobby? Let us first turn to Vicky, Karen and Rachel's interviews to see how these women who sell their

quilted objects on the St. John's, Newfoundland and wider national craft markets describe how *they* see the nature of their creation process. Rachel told me that she went through many phases in her life where she was unsure of what "to do". She took both a course at Memorial University and completed courses at Cabot College in garment construction. However, Rachel still asks herself, "How can I support myself with this? It is frivolous to be an artist" and "ambiguous". Rachel repeats the question to me again in that "how are you going to make a living is the question". Her textile creations work cannot be frivolous and must then contribute to the financial support of her as an individual. Rachel continued into the Textile Studies Program (now at the Anna Templeton Centre) and volunteered at the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador. Finally, she was offered to participate alongside another craft producer in a gallery show at Devon House. The show was a "success" with "positive feedback" but it was not "a selling show". Rachel was concerned as "people weren't buying" her creations. Some of her contemporaries argued that "you shouldn't make art into a product" but Rachel disagreed in that she wanted "to make a living from it" where "it's a means to an end". Rachel states, "I want to do this all the time. I don't want anything else to take away from what I want to do". In response to the poor financial outcome of her show, Rachel started to create what she calls her "bread and butter" pieces while also working to produce larger gallery pieces to sell. This fulfills a two fold purpose in Rachel's eyes: (1) she can support herself by selling larger quantities of smaller pieces in the Craft Council shop while still expressing herself in creating larger pieces for sale in the Craft Council Gallery and (2) it is important to Rachel to "have things that are financially accessible as well as emotionally accessible" to people who purchase her work. Here, there is a decision making process

present in that Rachel produces her quilted objects with a strategy to sell smaller items in order to support herself financially but this also provides Rachel with financial support in order to express herself on a larger scale at the gallery. She is also supported and supports, in turn, her partner who lives with her in a rented apartment.

Rachel also describes herself as “a small business person to some degree” where she is not “into the business side” but her smaller pieces are sold under the name of “VibrantSea”. Rachel is clear to state that her smaller pieces are not production work in that all are unique but production work in the sense that “they are many in order to sell” while “stuff in the gallery is under my own name”. Is Rachel’s action work or leisure? In the end, Rachel states that “it’s a means to an end, money to live”. What Rachel expresses is a type of work that is pleasurable but practical. It is also a concept of work that embraces practicality and accessibility while simultaneously is financially supportive.

Vicky’s ideas associated with the act of creating quilted objects are also ambiguous in terms of framing quilting as either work or leisure. Vicky had started to quilt in the fall of 1995. She states that after completing her Master’s degree, she had “time on [her] hands” and was “not interested in a daily brunt kind of job”. There is “only so much housework you can do” and she was trying to regroup, “putting things back together in my life with quilting”. Vicky also produces for annual gallery member shows and pieces to sell out of the craft shop at Devon House. Vicky likes “doing labour intensive quilts so finding faster, cheaper things to do is a nuisance. I don’t enjoy that at all.” She continues in that she “can’t make cheap” where it “exhausts” her. She feels “gypped” and “it becomes work” where she is clear that she “is not good at mass production”. Vicky ends this narrative by stating, “I like getting up, I like my job.”

Clearly, Vicky sees creating her quilted objects as an activity and an occupation in a way that it is a 'job' but not a regimented one that would be a "daily brunt kind of job". She also has trouble reconciling recreating smaller pieces and enjoying the process at the same time in order to increase her earnings. Her preference for 'labour intensive quilts' is interesting in that it is the cheapness of the smaller pieces that "exhausts her". This is the point at which what she does (creating quilted objects for sale) becomes 'work' and that she herself is not good at participating in "mass production". It is also important to note that Vicky indicated to me that she was financially supported by her husband when she made the decision to pursue her now fulltime textile vocation. However, it should also be noted that Vicky financially supported her husband during his years at a Faculty of Law. Vicky's example illustrates the ambiguity between the categories of 'work' and 'leisure' and how women who quilt themselves are negotiating these meanings in what they do.

Karen Colbourne Martin has sold many of her pieces in not only the Craft Council Gallery but has also completed commissions for outside entities like the Waterford Chapel. Karen does "not like quick crafts" and "loves the process" of hand quilting. She explains that she is "not in it for the money" even though "money is wonderful too". Karen, on top of producing large pieces like a traditional white quilt which took four and a half years to make, also makes little Christmas ornaments while sitting in front of the TV where "that's fine". Karen's preference for larger pieces and her love of the slow process of making hand quilted quilts speaks to the inculcation of middle class cultural practices among many women who quilt in St. John's. However, Karen still creates smaller pieces to be sold in the Craft Council shop but does not like quick crafts. It perhaps could be said that Karen's vocation is neither work nor leisure but rather an

occupation in that she does create to sell but also creates by commission on her own time and resources. Karen also indicated in our conversation that she is financially supported by her husband but she also raised their children and maintained the home for the family as a whole. This presence of financial support creates the conditions in which to pursue quilting. This financial support and previous post-secondary education are identities and privileged choices which reveal middle class practices.

In contrast, one woman in particular illustrates an exception to her previous categories of values. It is Rachel's intimate understanding of her goals that reveals the values of anti-ambition and anti-materialism in terms of a person's life purpose and work in creating quilted objects:

Rachel: This is what I'm gonna do, until I get sick of it, this is what I'm gonna do and I haven't gotten sick of it yet. It just keeps getting better and better. Because nobody is telling me what I have to do here. Like, nobody is telling me "you have to do these things to go in the shop and soon as I start feeling that the magic is not there, people *know* this, people *know* it. People aren't stupid, they know, you know? You know, "There's something missing in this, I don't know what it is but there is something missing in this, you know? And as soon as I'm feeling that way all the time about this stuff, I mean, why I'm doing this? I don't want to, I guess it's a search for meaning, to be really cosmic about it, not to be too 'peace, love and eternal grooviness' but you know it's the search for meaning *what* you do for a living. I don't want to be someone who works in an office. Some people can divorce themselves from what they do for a living and it's a job and they go home and they have this whole other life that has nothing to do with their job. And it's just, they're perfectly content for it to stay that way. That's great, that's fine that works for them but for me I don't care about having a lot of money, I don't care that I don't have a house in the suburbs, I'll never care about having a brand new SUV. I want my life to have meaning. If I die tomorrow, this might be a morbid concept, but if I die tomorrow, I want to know that I lived my life the way that I *wanted* to live it./ I'm not going to wait until I retire to live my life...I'll probably never be able to retire!...I've had some experiences where people who have been really close to me died at a young age and its just, you know, life has to mean something to me. Right now, I can't wait until I'm sixty-five. *I just love it so much!* I love everything I'm doing! Going out to Cape Spear with the dogs for a walk and coming home and sewing for the afternoon, I wouldn't want it any other way, I'm really happy with what I'm doing... Things happen, the Fates, the Gods,

whoever, they say “oh, I don’t think so, hahahahaha” and puts you off right in another direction and if you’re not prepared for that, mentally prepared, life is an accident. You know, that that egg, that was a bit of an accident and the fact that we are actually here right now *should be astounding!* It’s like it couldn’t have been another egg the next month, and I could be a totally different person and I’m here right now and I don’t know what lies afterwards but you know, I want to have fun, I want to enjoy what I’m doing and for life to have meaning.

Jaime: And to learn, for me, to learn what you are supposed to learn, whatever you believe, there are certain things you have to learn and if you don’t, you are kind of, to me you’re zapped right back! (both laugh)

Rachel: You have to work really hard at not having ambition, because ambition can be really deadly to people I think, it can drive them in ways that they shouldn’t be you know? Ambition, what does that mean? Why are you driving yourself? Why is your goal to have this SUV? What are you trying to fill up here? What is ambition really? If my ambition is to be happy and content, then that’s one thing but to have ambition like I want to be CEO, I want this, I want this, I want a house with six bedrooms and a giant screen TV, so unproductive. I read something the other day, I can’t remember where I read it, but it said: “consumerism is the opiate of the people”.

Rachel Ryan’s passionate embracing of anti-ambition and anti-materialism differs from the other women I interviewed. She is making the choice to create textile art in that “nobody is telling me what I have to do here”. However, Rachel also enjoys the freedom of financial support from her partner in order to make and enact the statement above. Her concept of work does not coincide with a strive for ambition and therefore ambition is not valued but rejected as ‘unproductive’. Ambition is unproductive in terms of not being aimed at a search for meaning and purpose in life. The freedom to create textile art using quilting techniques is what is considered to give life meaning for Rachel. She contradicts certain middle-class practices (consumption of material goods, the presence of financial support) while she engages in her work and continually renegotiates her values. While the middle-class practices of many women who quilt in St. John’s were revealed in values, they were also revealed in accounts of a gendered craft market.

3.4: Women Who Sell Quilted Objects: The Presence of a Gendered Market

Only three women of the twenty-four participants I interviewed sold their quilted objects to the public: Vicky, Karen and Rachel. They also shared a common location from which to sell their quilted creations in the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador's (CCNL) Craft Shop. They also sold their quilted objects in the CCNL gallery. When asked to describe the market that they participate in, it was clear that Vicky, Rachel and Karen participated in what they defined as a *gendered market*. Rachel first spoke of who bought her textile projects:

People who buy my work generally speaking are women, like I would say that 90% of the people who buy my work are women and usually, when the men are buying it, it is usually for women. So it's a very female, feminine you know *feminine*, I think it speaks more to women than men I guess because it traditionally been a feminine field and um, I don't know, that women just look at it and they have an emotional reaction and it's a very emotional process for me and I want people to look at that and have an emotional response. A positive emotional response preferably, I think that there is a lot of negativity in the world right now...It's a female market. Women feel more affinity for craft than men. There is a growing market in interior decorating, making houses livable, people are into their houses.

Rachel describes her work as "female" and "feminine" where "it speaks more to women than men" for the process of creating textile projects has been "traditionally...a feminine field". The craft market in which Rachel sells her creations is clearly gendered where women seem to be the ones to have a reaction to it. The concept and ideal of what is considered feminine is also specific in that creating with textile mediums has been a 'traditional' female role. Rachel is also expressing the idea that creating 'home' is a female activity.

Karen re-affirmed this central assumption that women who quilt were paid less for their quilts than male quilters in the market:

Karen: And people walk by my pieces and think that they are pictures painted. I have had in the last show, did you seen the one at Devon House? [**Jaime:** Yes] People walk by and think it's just a painting and they have to go back, and some of them will stop. *Men*, men in particular are taken with it. I mean, men go through a quilt show and they are bored, I mean not all men but they go through and they're going because their wife wants to go through but it's the *men* that stop because they'll say "oh you know, this is" and women too but men particularly stop I think because they can relate to it.

Jaime: Have you ever met any male quilters?

Karen: No I haven't. [**Jaime:** Do you think its just..] No, no there are male quilters out there, big names and I'll tell ya, lots of the men are big because they're men. It's on another level. There's Michael James, his quilts sell for twenty thousand dollars and there's nothing to say that they should be twenty thousand dollars. If it was Mrs. James, it wouldn't sell the same I don't think because it's a man, right? I think women are partly to blame because they underestimate themselves.

Jaime: Or they don't *demand* a certain price or say this is worth that [**Karen:** That's right] and maybe *compete*.

Karen: Well, they look at it a lot of times as 'well, that's what women do', I can't charge that. I probably say that myself, I mean my husband and male friends are always saying, 'Karen, you've got to get your prices up' and you know, I'm comfortable. My prices are not cheap and just think 'oh' you know? But when you say it takes you two months to make something and you charge two thousand dollars, that's not a lot of money for two months work.

Unlike Rachel, Karen notices that men as well as women appreciate her landscape pieces for they are more like a "painting" rather than a traditional bed quilt. Karen also makes a fascinating observations that male quilters charge substantially more for their quilts and that the women are partially to blame for this inequality. The women who sell "underestimate themselves" and see what they do in terms of "well, that's what women do". The activity of quilting itself carries the burden of a specific gendered practice: the

practice of underestimating the material and aesthetic value of their creations. Karen herself points out that women are partially to blame in creating this subordination of their opportunity. Even as the value and meaning of a quilt transformed from a utilitarian object to an object to be admired in Newfoundland, some women who create and sell quilted objects in St. John's do not demand larger prices for they were objects that were utilized and required for daily life. Even Karen admits that while her "prices are not cheap", her husband and male friends think that she should sell them for more. Karen also sees herself as partially responsible for not selling at a higher price. The question then becomes: is Karen guilty of underestimating the worth of her pieces and the worth of her actions? For Karen, the gender of the quilter can dictate the material value of the quilt but the women who participate and negotiate this value laden relationship are also partially responsible for the devaluation of their work. The women whom I interviewed are thus not isolated, autonomous subjects but rather enact and create culturally specific gendered categories and associations in their lives.

Vicky confirms the existence of gendered practices in valuing the work of quilters on the basis of gender in that it "is traditional everywhere...that women's work is not worth as much as men's work" where "if you put something in a frame, you can charge more for it". Vicky goes on:

You know, the same thing with knitting, I think you would probably find the same thing if you asked knitters how knitting was valued here because people think they can do it themselves, they think that you shouldn't charge that much for it....Once you do art, people don't think they can do it themselves.

Like Karen before her, Vicky also communicates the idea that it is the gender of the person who creates the quilt that results in how much the quilt is worth in terms of

monetary value. Vicky also communicates the notion that quilting and other textile art forms are things that “people think they can do it themselves”. According to Vicky, some people think that one should not charge as much for a quilt unless they “don’t think they can do it themselves”. Quilting, associated with women’s work, is not as valued as art in that its original connotation is repeatedly evoked: many women quilted out of necessity and that there this is a skill that anyone can learn how to do.

It is Lori’s narrative that departs slightly from that of her fellow participants. It is not only the gender of the quilter which dictates the value of the quilt but that gender regulates the type of design that a quilt can have:

Jaime: I’m just asking people that I am interviewing, I have heard, I have heard from one gal who actually mentioned that there are male quilters in St. John’s. Do you know of any?

Lori: I don’t know them personally. I know that there are male quilters out there, I don’t know any. I wish I did. I think that would be *really absolutely incredibly* fascinating to get their perspective on it [**Jaime:** Exactly, exactly] Cause men and women are different...and 99% of life and I wonder ‘how do they approach it?’ and ‘what are they thinking?’ Why do they pick the colours that they do? Why do they pick the patterns that they do? And *why* in the hell are they quilting? You know, that’s just the first question. Why aren’t you (inaudible on tape) car somewhere?

Jaime: I don’t know, I had never heard of that before.

Lori: The few things I’ve seen on male quilters besides being quilters, they are more designers. Like the male quilters I know of, the big wigs, you know, the top five in Canada or the United States or whatever. The big wigs who are making a living from this, they are artists absolutely! Their design elements are incredible. They’re very *forward*, they’re very *modern*, you know? Very *contemporary* artists whereas a lot of women, who are still doing *design* but still rely on a lot of traditional things.

Jaime: Now that is interesting. What is contemporary and modern to you?

Lori: Um, it has a lot to do with colour and shape, just *design*. Um, men just don’t do stuff with flowers and little square blocks, you know? Like little rectangles and

flying geese blocks, what I've seen anyway. It's more of like a picture of modern art [Jaime: You mean like circles and] Like circles and bold colours and something that has a *hard* edge. Almost like an art deco. That kind of thing. That's what I find men are more in to. I mean, I don't know a lot, these are things that I've seen on TV or in a magazine. You can always kind of go 'that's by a guy' because it just has a different *look* about it. I just think it's the male perspective.

Lori is clear to point out that men and women are different on an essential level. The large, overlapping associations Lori is making such as female/traditional/quilt and male/contemporary/design point to a didactic model of gendered practices with respect to quilt creation and in perceptions of gender. This imbalance of power is embedded in the assumptions of not only potential purchasers but in some of the female quilters themselves. Not only are gendered practices in terms of value socially ascribed and negotiated, many women who quilt thus express certain assumptions about the *capacity* for individuals to perform the action of quilting. Lori asks the key question of: Why are men quilting in the first place? There is the expectation that women are the primary and 'natural' gender to quilt because it is in the nature of the qualities of quilting to be 'female'. Women who quilt, in turn, negotiate these expectations and assumptions in gendered practices and the gendered activity that is quilting.

3.5: Dialogues on Women's Ideals of Womanhood

With reference to the past discussion on quilting as a gendered activity and the presence of a gendered market in St. John's, some guiding questions that I must confront are: what is the interconnection between gender, personhood and community? Are these theoretical concepts too bounded to represent or describe the way in which women who create quilted objects express their 'selves'? How does this shared activity of quilting

contribute (or not) to their multifaceted identities? These questions speak to the problem of how anthropologists today go about taking a critical look at the way people see and define themselves with reference to their personal identities and in reference to the wider spheres of social engagement around them. My critical analysis of how my participants frame their 'selves' by looking at how they frame 'what they do' and how what they do informs their multiple 'roles' in life is influenced by Dorinne Kondo's theoretical approach in her groundbreaking ethnography Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace (1990). The ethnography centers upon exploring the problem of how to reconceptualize the idea of the 'self' as well as 'community' in looking at the diversity of experiences of male and female labourers in the Sato confectionary, Tokyo, Japan (Kondo 1990:4). Kondo's critique of notions of identity and of "how *selfhood* is constructed" (authors emphasis) centers on problematizing the dichotomy of self/community:

My 'personal' account of the emergence of the problematic of selfhood is thus the product of a complex negotiation, taking place within specific, but shifting, contexts, where power and meaning, 'personal' and 'political,' are inseparable. Identity is not a fixed 'thing,' it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations (Kondo 1990:24).

Here, identities and personhoods do not exist in isolation but are embedded in larger cultural, historical and political contexts. Kondo also works towards "displacing the binary" for the "inner/outer, subject/world dichotomies have been foundational in anthropological studies since Mauss himself" and thus strategizes to write against the notion that an individual self does *not* exist as a bounded, pure, unchanging and isolated identity; 'selves' are expressed within social relationships and experiences of everyday

life (1990:33, 34). If identities and personhoods are in constant flux, how can anthropologists reconcile writing about selves and identities at all? If identities are diverse and contextual, how can we represent the similarities and shared nuances of our participants?

When considering the various viewpoints of the existence of a gendered market and quilting as a gendered activity, Kondo's argument directly applies to the individual cases of my participants in that " 'power and meaning', 'personal' and 'political,' are inseparable" where "[i]dentity is not a fixed 'thing'" (1990:24). Quilting to many of my participants is a gendered activity in that it is simultaneously the creation of a gendered object as well as a gendered process. Karen, Vicky, Rachel and Lori's commentaries on the difference between male and female quilters, observers and sellers demonstrate that gender has the capacity to inform relations of power in the 'craft' market of St. John's. Their narratives also demonstrate how the women see the value of their work and, in turn, how they construct aspects of their personhoods in relation to quilting.

There does not exist an unchanging 'self' for many women who quilt in St. John's. And the assumption that there exists a 'quilting self' is too simplistic a notion. What I did discover during my interviews is that women who participated in my project talked a lot about quilting. They also linked this important activity to many other areas of their lives. In this next segment, I will attempt to show how talking about the act of quilting also reveals thoughts and opinions on other important facets of my participant's lives.

One of my participants reflected candidly on how she positioned herself personally and politically as a young woman in graduate school. There also exists a

tension between her first ideas of what quilting means to her and the expectations of other individuals in the quilt making process. Jodi grew up in rural New Brunswick and learned how to sew and quilt from her mother during her high school years. She remembers her “grandmother always had a quilt on the bed” that she slept in when visiting. Jodi was “drawn to that” and wanted to make a quilt for her own bed. Jodi and her mother worked on the same quilt top for many years as Jodi lived at home and then started working at university. After she had finished her Bachelor of Arts degree, Jodi packed her bags and moved to Toronto and met Ian, whom she married. Jodi continued to quilt while completing her Master’s degree. Quilting then became a “me thing” that she could do “on her own”. It is at this point in Jodi’s story that I include the following narrative:

Jodi: The expectations, ah, I think, I look back my childhood was very, very, um, I grew up on a farm. It was just like, you learn how to bake, you learn how to cook and and even though I don’t necessarily, uh, I think I consider myself a feminist but the thing is is that I was brought up very much in a traditional, homemaking sort of way [**Jaime:** That’s, that’s really interesting] I spent a lot of time in my life trying to (pause) rectify the two things and I think that even with the quilting that’s why that’s been good for me in a way *because* the thing is is that it can be used positively for me as, as some kind of expression. And for instance, like baking, I have only recently started baking ‘cause I so often looked at it as something that people just expected and you would have to kind of produce it [**Jaime:** Ahhh] So I didn’t have the same, and the quilts don’t necessarily have the same, I don’t ascribe the same value to it in that way, public you know? It’s more of a personal thing that you have more control over. It’s not like a task, you know?”

Jaime: I have been finding that if you have family who might not appreciate the amount of work that goes into a quilt, that they will pick like the hardest pattern and you’re just like ‘What do I do?’

Jodi: This is the thing...anytime I have tried to make a quilt for someone, she (Jodi’s mother) has kind of said, ‘Are you sure you want to do that because that is so much work and they won’t appreciate it’ So you know, every time I am thinking of making a quilt for someone, she kind of you know, she has done so

much artistic stuff, she knows what its like where you get trapped in a situation where your demand is higher than your supply...and you feel bad cause your kind of disappointing people or something. Like I think a lot of times things are considered to be a feminine ideal, creating a craft, creating a really nice craft or baking is considered to be this feminine ideal and if you can't produce something for the demand, it's a little bit different than not giving someone a book that they asked for. There is more to be read into it I think. I think I take it more personally. Like if I burn a batch of cookies, for some reason I'm upset even though you would think that I wouldn't care, you know on many levels if you asked me if I cared I would say 'no I don't but somehow I feel very responsible for, I feel like I've kind of neglected something there. I don't like to be in a situation where I have promised someone a quilt...

One must remember that Jodi had difficulty defining and positioning quilting under the terms 'craft' and 'art'. Her story begins with how she conceptualizes how she grew up: in a "traditional, homemaking sort of way". All her life, she has "spent a lot of time...to rectify" both being a self-proclaimed "feminist" and what she perceives to be a traditional upbringing. This "traditional" upbringing on her rural farm included learning how to bake, learning how to cook and learning how to sew. These two conflicting viewpoints influence the choices she makes today in terms of what kind of activities she wishes to pursue. Jodi shares that she just recently started to bake again as she always looked at it as "something that people just expected" that would be produced. Quilting is then used to rectify her traditional past and her feminist position in that it is a "personal thing" that is not expected and that "you have more control over". Quilting to Jodi is therefore not a task to be completed for others.

However, Jodi's ideas fluctuate and create tension with this last point as she continues about her mother's experiences quilting for other family members. Jodi remembers that sometimes "you get trapped in a situation where your demand is higher than your supply...and you feel bad cause you're kind of disappointing people or

something". In her next sentence, Jodi points to what she thinks others consider as feminine ideals such as "creating a craft, creating a really nice craft or baking" where "if you can't produce something for the demand, it's a little bit different than not giving someone a book that they asked for". In two sentences, Jodi associates quilting with other 'feminine ideals' like baking and making a craft whereas before, quilting had the connotation of uniting conflicting ideals of womanhood: being a feminist and dealing with one's traditional domestic upbringing. Quilting, creating a craft and baking have many things in common in that they are all activities where the final product is made from scratch but one needs special skills in order to complete the task. There exists a personal element which filters through all of these activities. Jodi begins to feel a *responsibility* to produce for others as well as guilt should she not be able to meet the demand for quilts or when she "burn[s] a batch of cookies". Jodi's definition of what it means to be a woman is both constructed by her family (namely her memories of her mother) at home and is at the same time contested by her own opinions on the feminist positioning of women. Here, the act of quilting is a site where one can rectify a traditional past and present feminist positions because quilting as an activity is ambiguous in its value. This point speaks to the underlying distinction of the craft/art dichotomy where quilters themselves have a difficult time in situating the nature of the activity in terms of material and social value.

Vicky's interview also presented some ideas on how talking about the act of quilting reveals a person's ideals of womanhood and approach to domesticity. Vicky, like Jodi, has completed her undergraduate degree as well as her Master's degree in Religious Studies at Memorial University. She is currently married to her husband John and they have an almost year-old child called Catherine. Vicky produces quilts but also

creates many products intended for sale at the CCNL gallery as well as the craft shop.

One of these products is quilted landscapes. During the interview, John and Catherine would come in and out of the room. Vicky was demonstrating how she creates a certain effect for an iceberg in a quilted landscape. The topic of Catherine and of having children were revealed as well:

Vicky: Hey Catherine, you having fun?

Jaime: She's so cute.

Vicky: She's a good kid. If she nurses in the morning, she goes down, like it's quarter after eleven now so I get to work usually during the mornings, it works out wonderfully.

Jaime: Do you think you might have another?

Vicky: No. (said without hesitation). We are quite happy with the one that we have. We did really well with this one, we want to quit while we are ahead. And if we do have another one, we've talked about it, it won't be until after I have my own show, I want to have my own show. I want to get that part of my life one step further ahead. It's a trade off right?

Jaime: You put things on hold.

Vicky: And we had her and I thought gee, I want to have my first kid before I am thirty, you know, the risk of Down Syndrome and all these other things and they tell you that you are high risk even if you're not...I didn't want to be forty running after a toddler [**Jaime:** You don't have the same stamina] and you reach a point in your life that you actually realize that you want a child. You reach a point where you think, gosh, there is something missing, you know, you actually have to borrow children to do things with them.

Jaime: That should be a sign...

Vicky: Honestly, the funny thing is that people keep telling you how children change your life, how you will never be the same again, and you'll never sleep again and that's all bullshit. It doesn't change your life that much, we still go hiking, we still go blueberry picking, we still do projects. We made those bookcases last weekend. These are things we still do. I still do this (motions to her landscape quilt on wall). In fact, I think I get more done now than before she was born because you are more possessive of your time. I have a day-planner now, I

didn't have a day-planner before...[Talking about when Catherine was born and brought home] She had created a schedule for herself, she had a routine. I actually at that point was *itching* to do something else besides take care of Catherine. I thought I would have been perfectly happy for the first year taking care of Catherine and putting the rest of my life on hold. And actually I was pretty smart in that I planned that because then it gave me the sudden relief of 'oh, I *can* get more done' whereas if I thought that nothing was going to change, and that I was going to get oodles of stuff done, I might have been slightly disappointed. As it turned out, she is a gem of a child that will play on the floor and you know, sleeps when she is supposed to sleep and goes down for a two-hour nap in the morning and afternoon and um, I'm really lucky. But when she was about four to six weeks old, I started to go a little stir crazy and that's when I actually realized I had to develop the coping mechanisms to get back to what I was doing. And I think that post-partum depression partially stems from not being able to, not allowing yourself to do what you need to do for yourself because you've got to be yourself.

Jaime: Exactly, you have a new dimension but you are still yourself.

There are many aspects of life that are integrated for Vicky. This narrative includes important dialogue on lifecourses in terms of both *choice* and *change*. Creating quilted objects is not only associated with being compatible in having a child but also has improved Vicky's textile process and became part of finding "coping mechanisms" to get back to creating quilted objects while caring for a new baby. At the beginning of this narrative, Vicky talked about the choice to delay having another child so that she could pursue her career as "a trade off". However, the 'trade-off' is not all-encompassing in that she sees the continuation of the creative process as necessary in her life. Vicky refuses to sacrifice this part of her 'self'. Creating in textiles with quilting techniques is thus "one way of expressing everything" that is in her life. Vicky's choices regarding the balancing act of having children and pursuing her passion of quilting represents a strong stance for women to have the capacity to make informed choices about their lives. However, this choice is a privileged one. The choice to strategize when to have children and when to quilt is a middle class practice and privileged choice for Vicky who is supported by her

husband financially. The privilege to use quilting as a stress-reducing technique and therapy for post-partum depression is made possible by the context of Vicky's middle class practices. The ambiguous nature of quilting creates a space where women like Vicky can participate in gendered middle class practices and reinforce the requirement of this status.

When I talked to Karen about how quilting integrated her life, her answer highlights some of her most important decisions about many aspects of her 'self':

Jaime: Just drawing to a close, I think getting back to my most biggest question is what, I guess, what position in your life does quilting take? How much of your life is a part of quilting and how much isn't, or can you make that distinction?

Karen: Quilting is a lot of my life, it really has become a lot of my family's life. My husband is really supportive. *All* of my three children...They're *always* supportive, my husband is wonderful. He can't see beyond my work, he just loves it, he'll promote me. But backing, you know? I do it between nine to five but I do it in between other things. I've thought about getting a studio of my own. But I couldn't produce, I wouldn't want to be at it steady, if you had that you'd be constantly, I'll go down and put in a load of laundry and I'll get on the computer and I'll work, I usually work steady for a certain number of hours and I'll come up and bake muffins for my mother in the nursing home...Perhaps I would go further if I had my own studio, perhaps I would feel more professional, I don't know. But I gave up teaching when my first child was born and I've always been home and I like to be able to have dinner ready when Dave comes home and my family, it's important to me. It's important that I have something to bring in baked to my mother in the nursing home and spend time with her and I don't want to *have* to. Now, if I had to make a living out of it, it would be different. I mean, the money certainly goes to pay the bills but it's ah not something, ah. Let's say if I were a single woman, I would have to be at it, pushing it a bit more. It's a business but it's also a hobby and it's also self-satisfaction.

The first element that appears in Karen's narrative is familial support. Karen accentuates the importance of support in that all of her children and her husband "love" and "promote" her work. However, this type of "backing" does not leave out feelings that she could be more professional. It should be noted here that Karen's quilts and fabric

landscapes have appeared at the Craft Council Gallery in the council's Annual Member's Exhibitions. Karen follows this with a dialogue that concerns her choice to build a home for her husband and children. Home in this sense is Karen giving up teaching to concentrate on raising her children, the physical care of the home as well as providing meals for her loved ones. Karen's opinions of the site of where she quilts informs and shapes her idea of what it means to be a woman. Karen creates her objects inside her home in order to sell at a gallery but also performs other tasks that speak directly to a concept of domesticity: laundry, baking muffins, etc. Home is thus a semi-professional space but to Karen, creating within a studio space would be authentically 'professional'. While this exposes a tension in Karen's gendered self, it also expresses a freedom offered by her middle class position to create within a hybrid context: she can create to sell to the public but also function within a domestic space. At the end of her narrative, Karen reveals how the context of her quilting experience is unique to her in that if she were not married, "it would be different" and that she would have to be "pushing it a bit more". This quote is most revealing in that Karen has made choices in how she wants to live her life and that these choices created the opportunity for her to create freely in her own time. But she herself admits that if the context or her choices had been different, her experience and approach to creating quilted objects would be different as well.

3.7: Conclusions

The most difficult challenge that confronts anthropologists when they try to represent shared meanings and experiences in text is showing *change* and shifting contexts of meaning. It is the solid, concrete and permanent quality of text that presents

this challenge to writers of anthropological research. In this chapter, I analyzed how the women whom I interviewed framed and described their expressions of specific identities as well as how they negotiated their gendered ideals and practices as 'women' in their conversations with me about quilting in their lives. This discussion was anchored in problematizing the actual concept of the 'self'. The primary question to answer is: What is the nature of the idea of 'woman' for the diversity of women who quilt in St. John's? What is the nature of the diverse and shared gendered practices of women who quilt? For many women, the act of quilting was a connection to past family members through the medium of textiles. Shelley's narrative about how her grandmother's last quilt, surviving a horrible fire, gave her not only a material but also an emotional connection to the past. The unfinished quilt inspired a sense of conviction and responsibility in Shelley as a person.

Many women also could not clearly identify whether quilting was an artistic or craft activity. Therefore, quilts to the majority of the women whom I interviewed were ambiguous in terms of material value. This ambiguity, in turn, allows the act of quilting to become a flexible site for women to express, reaffirm and negotiate their status and identities as predominantly middle class.

As well, there existed tensions within the narratives of women in that they shared their experiences in activities usually stereotyped as 'domestic' such as laundry and baking. However, these women also expressed the importance of certain themes in their lives: family, duty and responsibility to finish what was started, friendliness, comfort, home, hearth. These themes were valued by many women who, in turn, also valued other aspects of femininity. These aspects are revealing of middle class practices: the

availability of the choice over when to have children, the valuing of post-secondary education and the choice of when to pursue their creative work, the choice over working inside or outside the home and access to both financial and post-secondary educational resources. This is not to say that those who do not participate in middle-class practices are exempt from such valuing. However, it is true that most women whom I interviewed not only valued higher education, but also had access to financial resources and conditions (financially supported by a partner) which allowed them, in turn, to pursue quilting as creative work.

Lastly, Lori asked the key question: Why are men quilting in the first place? There is the expectation that women are the primary and 'natural' gender to quilt because it is in the nature of the qualities of quilting to be 'female'. Women who quilt, in turn, negotiate these expectations and assumptions in the gendered practice that is quilting.

The idea that gender is socially constructed, whether one is talking about humans and/or objects, can be seen in how the women who quilt situated themselves. For Jodi, it is in her continual negotiation of the difference of whether her action of quilting is an art or craft where one sees a negotiation of how she perceives aspects of her self in *what* she does. Also, some women who sell their objects on the St. John's craft market(s) see quilting as a gendered activity and quilts as gendered objects. In turn, these expectations and assumptions highlight what is ideal to many women who quilt in St. John's, namely that it is a woman's activity. Rachel values the ability to communicate through her creations that she is approachable, friendly and comfortable. This aspect of her personhood is connected to her quilted creations. Rachel's and Jodi's practices and values, like many women in the research, speak to specific gendered ideals of what it

means to be feminine: associations with domesticity, caring and personal characteristics like taking on responsibility in caring for others. In negotiating the debates of art vs craft or work vs leisure in reference to the action of quilting, it is not the definition of what one makes that is of the most importance for these women. It is how one sees one's self as seen by others. The activity of quilting for many women in St. John's carries the connotation of a specific gendered practice: the practice of underestimating the material and aesthetic value of their creations.

While gender is only one site where selves are negotiated, "[i]dentity is not a fixed 'thing,'" and is "open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations" (Kondo 1990:24). For many of the women I interviewed, their gendered practices in life became 'power-laden enactments' which contributed to the appropriation of a working class activity for a contemporary and conservative collection of middle class women. In the following chapter, I will critically analyze the gendered and middle-class practices of my participants as they were communicated within a specific quilting guild, within community.

CHAPTER 4: THE CABOT QUILTERS' GUILD: 'COMMUNITY', A RETREAT

AND 'LICENSE IN RITUAL'

In the previous chapter, I explored the theoretical concept of the 'self' and how the expression and enacting of specific gendered practices can communicate gendered values. For the majority of the women I interviewed, their status of middle class was revealed in their dialogues and in the values and meanings that were important to them. Now that the concept of the 'self' has been considered, I wish to turn the attention of the reader to the problems and strengths of the theoretical concept of 'community'. By utilizing my direct experience with the Cabot Quilters' Guild, one common social denominator¹ among the women whom I interviewed, I will analyze the purpose and function of the community arena they create, participate and negotiate by looking at what the women consider as advantages and challenges of the present Guild. Lastly, I will present a major ethnographic example of how some of the women I interviewed performed elements of what Max Gluckman entitled "license"² in ritual" at a fall quilting retreat. The fall quilting retreat, in turn, also expressed elements of liminality which functioned to form the performative and discursive space in which to enact their license in ritual. The embellished performances at the Cabot Quilters' Guild retreat do not work against the accepted social order but rather work to reinforce gendered middle-class practices and values. These actions and experiences are evidence that the concept of an

¹ Out of the twenty-four women I interviewed, only two women were not currently members of the Cabot Quilters' Guild. At the time of our interview, one of these two women had been a member of other quilting guilds but was considering becoming a member of the Cabot Quilters' Guild.

² Gluckman repeatedly uses this spelling of the word "license" in his ethnographic work.

unchanging and isolated 'self' and a bounded, whole 'community' are not adequate theoretical concepts from which to view the life experiences of women who quilt.

When looking critically at the theoretical concept of 'community', one faces the difficulties of a bounded and inflexible concept. How then does one write against the bounded concept of community when many of my consultants have indicated that they themselves *are* indeed a community? Anthony Cohen's main argument in *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) is that the "reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture" where people "construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning and a referent of their identity" (1985:118). Cohen's notion of community is flexible for it takes into account that there might exist multiple interpretations of meanings, as well as the existence of a dialectic between individual and collective shared meanings. Cohen's strength is the flexibility of *inter-community* meanings. The concept of community, whether bounded or unbounded, still brings anthropologists back to analyzing social "differences" and "sameness". In the following section, I provide ethnographic examples that speak to this problem. The women involved with the Cabot Quilters' Guild do share many experiences but do these shared experiences constitute 'community'?

4.1: The Cabot Quilters' Guild: Shared Experiences and Tensions in A Community

When talking about her role as a member of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador's Gallery Committee, Rachel tells me that she was "seeking community" and that "everyone seeks community". With this phrase in mind, the 'community' I wish to discuss is the Cabot Quilters' Guild that regularly meets in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Of my twenty-four participants, twenty-one of the women were active members of the guild and one of the remaining three attended her first meeting the same night that I was officially introduced to the guild. I first learned of the existence of the guild from one of my initial contacts in this project. I had first contacted The Anna Templeton Centre and received a list of phone numbers for instructors of textile arts. Marilyn MacDonald taught introductory courses occasionally in quilting at the center itself. After introducing myself and my research over the phone, she agreed to meet for coffee to discuss the possibility of a focus on quilt producers.

During the course of our conversation together, Wendy Batten (one of the original founders of the Cabot Quilters' Guild) shared with me the information that the guild was created in 1984 and had a starting membership of twelve women. The Cabot Quilters' Guild's Revised Constitution, adopted April 15, 2003, states that the purpose of the guild is as follows:

The Cabot Quilters' Guild, (The Guild), is a non-profit organization which aims to preserve the heritage of quilting, to be a source of information and inspiration, to encourage a high standard of excellence in quilting and related arts, and to provide a forum for fellowship and sharing (Cabot Quilters' Guild 2003:1).

This article points to a collective and official idea of what the 'community' of the guild should accomplish and encourage: "information", "inspiration" and a "forum for fellowship and sharing". It also states that it exists to "encourage a high standard of excellence in quilting". I will explore the conflict and politics of this statement later in the following section.

Almost twenty years after the guild was founded, I stood outside the entrance to St. Theresa's Parish Hall on Mundy Pond Road, September 16, 2003. I was early as the

parking lot only held five cars. Nervous for my presentation but excited and hopeful to meet new faces, I entered the hall through its large heavy doors. As I turned to my left, I entered a medium sized hall/gymnasium where two long folding tables flanked each side of the entrance. There were approximately 80-90 plastic stacking chairs arranged in rows in front of a head table which had a standing wood podium to its left facing the audience. The audience sitting area itself was split down the middle by a center aisle. The interior walls of the hall were of dark brick and its windows, located high on the wall near the peaked roof line, were tinted a deep yellow and reminded me of the windows of some dimly-lit Italian restaurants. Behind the head table at the front of the audience stood a half-assembled wedding archway complete with fake ivy growing up its sides. A lone paper bell hung from the center of the hall's ceiling indicating that this acted as a temporary and shared space for the guild. The tables at the entrance were occupied by women who sold draw tickets for prizes that evening: quilted bags and needle carriers. There was also a table showcasing a plethora of coloured photographs taken of a traveling quilt show (The Quilt 2003: A Breast Cancer Support Project Eastern Tour Exhibition) that had come to St. John's in early August. There was also a table where new members could pay their fee of \$20 and receive information sheets on the guild's newsletter and upcoming events such as the guild's annual fall retreat at Burry Heights Camp in October. I heard Lori's name being called and saw a slightly frazzled but energetic woman run past me to the front of the hall. While patiently waiting for a moment with Lori, whom I did not want to disturb while she problem-solved the intricacies and mechanics of the near approaching guild meeting, I gazed at the photographs. While looking at the photographs, I took notice that three separate women approached me and asked if I was a new member

and if I knew anyone at the guild. After confirming my appearance in the order of the guild meeting with Lori, I took a place near the front of the audience and made pleasant conversation with a mother and daughter who were both members and waited for my turn to speak.

Throughout many interviews with women who were active members of the guild, it became apparent that there were many social products and benefits that were a result of their interaction within this negotiated community. One of these benefits is access to information and education. Lori Shortall describes what the guild offered to her as a new member:

Jaime: Now why join? What do you get out of the guild?

Lori: Well, I was joining with the hopes that I would learn to quilt and you do informally but there's no, the guild doesn't teach you how to quilt, it offers you teaching opportunities, learning opportunities. We do a program where sometimes you'll learn techniques, sometimes you'll see a quilt show or like a slide show kind of thing. Um, sometimes we just have a guest speaker and that's certainly educational there kind of thing. Plus they offer opportunities, like guild members will offer workshops and workdays, that kind of thing. You branch out and its not guild run as such. It's a venue for learning. The guild doesn't teach specifically, it offers you the opportunity to see [**Jaime:** Or to meet these people that will be hosting it] I learned that you could take this and take that and that's what I did, I just signed up for stuff, that's how I learned. I've only been, I joined I guess in '97.

Lori's narrative reveals that the guild acts as a nexus of individual networks of women who quilt. The guild therefore is a site of contact where one receives opportunities to extend their skills through taking "workshops" and "workdays" offered by guild members. The way that Lori furthered her interest and augment her skill (base) in the guild was to take advantage of these offers and started to "just sign up for stuff". Donna Howell also suggested this type of benefit in that one "has access to information" as well

as “people to call” for advice. Ethel Isenor joined in order to participate in a common activity with her friends:

I had friends in guilds in many places that I have lived. I try to surround myself with people who enjoy sewing crafts. Some sewed but not quilted. Here, few sewed so ‘I will have to learn and do more quilting’. I said to myself if I wanted to continue in good company, those who enjoyed working with needle and thread.

For Ethel, women involved in guilds share many characteristics where they not only enjoy either “sewing crafts” or quilting but also share values in that they are considered by Ethel to be “good company”.

The social benefits of belonging in the guild are sometimes seen as an outcome of being willing to participate in a system of ‘sharing’. It is Marcel Mauss who illustrated in The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (1968 [1954]) that “contracts are fulfilled and exchanges of goods are made by means of gifts” where in “theory such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation” (1969:1). Therefore, one must consider the possibility that when women in the guild participate in their specific system of sharing, what are the dynamics of the interaction? Is there a presence of obligation and what non-material value is accrued by the giver? For example, Ethel participates in the guild experience for one gets a sense of “camaraderie” but also a “sharing of ideas”. She states that if you were always on your own, then you may “cut yourself into a corner” versus being in the presence of women who have similar goals where they may offer assistance like “I have a piece of fabric that might match”. This idea of sharing extends not only to advice and help on projects but also to the sharing of supplies. Ethel especially considers her bag of fabric and supplies “public property” when attending a retreat or workshop event where “you anticipate to share”.

This notion of sharing regulates behaviour in that it is expected that you share; one must be aware and plan ahead for sharing as well as supplies at the event itself.

This important aspect of 'sharing' develops further into creating a sense of selflessness in the guild members and the sense of an obligation to share. For example, Shelley Bauer shared with me that she has an abundance of material set aside for many projects. In one instance, she told many guild members and her mother that her current "pattern would look good in hand dyed fabric". No sooner does she casually mention this fact but her mother then sends in the mail a fat quarter³ of material. On her trip to Ottawa, a fellow guild member bought Shelley some more hand dyed fabric as well. Shelley received even more fabric from another guild member. When speaking to Shelley, I had the sense that this exchange of gifts was ambiguous in that she was giving me this example to illustrate the workings of the guild and to show that this type of exchange was expected. However, if one were giving material to another in a selfless act, then the exchange would have to be unexpected. Now that three separate women have given her 'gifts' of material, Shelley's participation in the exchange relationship has shifted from 'giver' to 'receiver' and thus she is now active in a system of exchange, obligation and rounds of generalized reciprocity. This specific system of exchange is both an interaction and a "creative process":

...exchange is just as productive, as creative of values, as is so-called production. In both cases it is a matter of securing goods at the cost of others which one gives up, and in such a manner that the end result yields a surplus of satisfactions over what [was] obtained before the action (Simmel 1971:47)

³ A "fat quarter" is a piece of fabric that had been cut into a perfect square instead of along the length of a bolt of fabric.

The women who participate and share gifts in the form of advice, knowledge and material, gifts of fabric and supplies, enter into an exchange that 'yields a surplus of satisfactions' for the giver and a sense of obligation for the receiver of the gifts. This system of exchange ultimately perpetuates the important theme and element of the guild itself: active and continual participation.

Through participant observation, I also learned first-hand from fellow members that the most important aspect in the guild was the element of *participation*. For some members, participation is an 'all or nothing' event:

Lori: ...I've been on the executive for four years. I'm the type that if I'm in it, *I'm in*.

Jaime: That's interesting 'cause I was going to ask how much do you participate?

Lori: I just think it's my personality. If I'm in, I'm in, I'm in *deep*, I'm in full, but if I'm not in, I'm not in. There's a couple of things other than quilting that I'm trying to stay away from because I know if I put my toe in it, I'll put my whole body in it. For example, I used to be on the music committee but I had to get off it this year because I have the guild. I can't do everything and I can't do half 'n half because I'm not satisfied with that, that seems to be my choice. I am the president of the guild this year and that seems to be my choice.

Lori's description of her participation demonstrates the degree in which quilting and the guild have permeated her lifeways. Her sense of participation also has the recurring element of choice discussed at length in Chapter 3. To participate completely is a personal choice that is derived from her personality. But Lori's narrative also reveals the theme of obligation in that once she begins, Lori concludes that she will 'put her whole body in it'. There is a compulsion to participate and a tension in the definition of Lori's participation. It is a choice but also a compulsion at the same time. The system of exchange, the sense of obligation and the specific notion of complete participation for

many members of the guild perpetuates both the exchange of materials and this contextual middle class practice of 'giving'.

The current executive and fellow committee members of the guild also perpetuate certain activities in order to encourage a high level of participation among guild members. During the first annual meeting of the guild, I observed two events that members referred to as "Show and Tell" and the "Summer Challenge". In the meeting that I attended, the Summer Challenge occurred within the Show and Tell event. During the summer months of July and August, the guild does not hold any meetings. At the last meeting of the guild's year in June, instructions and materials for the Summer Challenge are offered to the guild's members. The products of the Summer Challenge share certain elements but also offer the quilter a chance to be creative and express their individuality. In June 2003, the Summer Challenge consisted of a piece of printed fabric (same print for all members) and the theme of "china". Members then took the fabric and theme and were expected to create a quilted object with the fabric that was inspired by the theme. When the time for Show and Tell came along, 12-15 women proceeded up to the front with their creations. One woman created a wall hanging where she quilted and embroidered a detailed map of China. Other women interpreted the theme as that of ceramic material where scenes of teapots and cups were popular. One unique creation was a three dimensional quilted teacup and saucer. It was explained that the theme of china came from the fact that the guild itself was celebrating in 2004 its twentieth anniversary which is described as the 'china' anniversary.

There are also similar events that focus on individual creations such as "The Mystery Quilt". One can sign up for the event and receive monthly installments of fabric

and instructions on how to complete the project. The difference between the Mystery Quilt and the Summer Challenge is not only the time of year the task is accomplished but participants in the Mystery Quilt must keep their own creations secret until the end of the project itself. I contend that activities such as the Summer Challenge and the Mystery Quilt serve to reinforce dedication and participation in the guild itself while celebrating the creativity of individuals at the same time.

A guild member might also choose to belong to a number of the guild's many committees: the Social Committee, the Executive, the Program Committee or volunteer with the guild's own library resources. However, the process of joining a committee may be voluntary *and* pressured simultaneously. I asked Ethel how she became involved in the Social Committee⁴. While sitting in the meeting's audience last year, sign-up lists for each of the committees were being passed around. Ethel had already signed for other committees but two of her friends were sitting in front of her. One of them "turns around and says '*You will sign*'" and Ethel saw that while there were six spaces, only her two friends had signed up. One of Ethel's friends had been her daughter's grade one teacher and Ethel said she "had helped her in the past" and "when a teacher tells you to do something, you just do it". In the end, Ethel "saw only two people" on the list and "felt bad" and decided "ok, I'll do it". While Ethel had openly volunteered for other committees in the guild, there is an element of peer pressure. It was Ethel's own decision

⁴ The Social Committee is primarily responsible for organizing the refreshments that are served during the "Social" part of the general meeting. This includes establishing who will set up the serving area itself as well as who is bringing what refreshment (eg. Cakes, cookies, squares, etc.) and that there will be enough for those who are present at the meeting.

to join but she also felt guilty at the sight of a lack of participation of other members in the guild.

While the majority of the guild's members are "encouraging" and "motivational", it is in the very acts of 'participation' and 'sharing' which are expected from guild members that cause tensions and areas of conflict in the guild. These tensions and conflicts reveal that the guild's experience of 'community' is not an isolated, bounded and unchanging idea but rather exists in contested social relationships and negotiated practices. When I asked my participants about were the disadvantages of being a member of the guild, one woman responded that she would not use the word "disadvantage" but rather thought of the question in reference to "challenges" that the guild faces. The first challenge that the guild faces according to some members is the number of members itself. I have already stated that the guild started with twelve active members and has now grown to encompass more than 150 members. Some women were concerned about how to "accommodate" such "high numbers" in terms of the program. According to Ethel, the membership had never declined and yet she feels that a challenge to the guild is to "keep it going" and to provide "continuity". She also thinks the guild should "encourage others to do more" in that "how do we keep them staying and doing?".

Another question Ethel asks points to a tension that exists within the guild itself: "With so many, why [do] only two people sign up on the Social Committee?". This idea that there are members not contributing their 'participation' and 'sharing of ideas' is repeated again in Shelley's narrative on challenges for the guild:

Another drawback happens when you get into a group of people who are grumpy about things no matter what. They don't involve themselves. What you get out of it is what you give. For example, joining the Social Committee or ok, I can't do much but I can do that. Some people are not willing to put one foot forward. Like simple things, like getting through the reading (on internet websites). I don't have time but they don't have any suggestions, they don't stick up their hands. One or two words, just say something!

Again, there is a tension between those members who participate to the best of their time and ability and those members who "don't involve themselves", "are not willing to put one foot forward" and "don't stick up their hands!". By attending the meeting itself and enjoying the work of others, these members who do not participate by choice are, in my view, 'getting something out of the guild' *without* putting anything in'. They are essentially not participating in an expected code of conduct that is a community practice.

Another challenge to the guild that can create conflict and tension between members is the issue of criticism on one's quilted projects. As mentioned before, many women join the guild for access to information and learning techniques. This entails (of) help with problem areas and skills as well as suggestions for colour and pattern choice. The incidence of negative criticism very rarely exists but does appear from time to time. Lori describes that some members are affectionately termed "the quilt police":

Jaime: Now that is interesting, the 'quilt police', is it indirect or direct or a kind of feeling?

Lori: It's both, quite frankly. There are people who are really particular and they have a right to be particular I feel with their own work. Um, when it comes to critiquing other people's work, there's a difference in *constructive* criticism (pause) um, not being nasty, that's kind of a juvenile word, you know if you want to offer someone some critique because you think that they maybe don't *know* something or you can help improve something, that's fine. But to just kind of deface someone's art because their points aren't perfect, their seams aren't straight, their lines aren't completely flat. Again, we're not perfect. And if it's the

best that you can do, then that's great. But some people are real picky about that and like I said, they have one hundred percent right to be with their own work.

Jaime: Oh definitely.

Lori: It's *very* discouraging for some people to have comments put forth in a not so constructive light. And not everybody does *so please don't think that* [Jaime: No] it's just sometimes you'll hear the odd remark and go (to oneself) "Oh, that wasn't very considerate". [Jaime: Stung] There's a little ouch behind that. Like a criticism, and it's not constructive, just a criticism of someone's work (pause). You know, if you don't *like* the pattern or you don't like the design, that's fine. It doesn't mean that you can't appreciate it, that there's no *validity* to it just because a point doesn't match or your seam doesn't match. I don't understand that, so I find that really disconcerting when I hear people say things like that. And I know a lot of people won't bring things to the guild because they are afraid of that and they do the best work that they can do but they really truly believe and they are right in some respect that some people will not appreciate it and will criticize it therefore they're not opening themselves to that, that's not why they go to the guild. They go there to get help, assistance, a social thing. And they don't want the criticism that might come with that so they don't bring their products.

Jaime: And as a president, how do you work around that?

Lori: It's difficult cause you don't want to pressure people. But I keep trying to tell people, I have a friend in particular whose name I will not mention, I'm trying to get to bring one particular piece that she has done that is fabulous, *fabulous*. She won't bring it. And she keeps saying "I won't subject it to that" and that's her right, I totally respect that and that's what frustrates me. Not that she won't subject herself to that because nobody shouldn't but the fact that it's even there, that it's even an issue that you can't bring something because somebody might criticize it. There's 99% of people who won't and will tell you how fabulous it is...like, that's what's mostly in the guild, really a lot of positive people who give excellent feedback and who want to help if you need help.

Here, the possibility of negative criticism influences some women not to bring in their creations. As president of the guild, Lori finds herself in a bind. It is difficult to try to get members participating and bringing in their creations but "you don't want to pressure people" and it is considered their right to choose not to subject their work to that type of criticism. I observed the audience during the Show and Tell segment of the guild meeting where there were encouraging comments from the audience to every woman showing a

piece. While I did not witness any negative criticism during my fieldwork, Lori's narrative is evidence that not only she has witnessed its presence but so has her friend. This tension that exists between some guild members points to my original argument that it is the presence of tensions that reinforces the sense of a flexible, unbounded and negotiated community. Community in this sense is created and expressed within social relationships and shared practices.

4.2: A Fall Retreat: Liminality and License in Ritual

"You know those anthropologists, they weave in and out of society."

-Carol Ann Hennebury, quilter at the retreat

"We're like a cult...Eat, Drink, Quilt!"

-Jennifer Gill, quilter at the retreat

4.2.1: Part One: Social Interactions

It was during the guild's first meeting that Lori Shortall extended an invitation for me to attend the Cabot Quilters' Guild 2nd Annual Fall Retreat. The annual meeting's formal conference atmosphere had ended and the social time of the evening had begun with coffee, tea, refreshments and baked goods being served. The quilters who attended the meeting had left their seats to congregate at the right side of St. Theresa's Hall to talk and listen in small groups of women. As I devoured yet another delicious brownie, Lori handed me a one-page information sheet about the retreat itself. I thanked her and tentatively 'booked' the Saturday to observe and participate for a day at the retreat. The retreat itself would be spread over three nights and four days from Thursday, October 2, 2003 to Sunday, October 5, 2003. The information sheet itself intrigued me in terms of a central question I had been asking during the meeting: What do quilters *do* at a quilting

retreat? The sheet stated that one could choose a roommate at this September meeting and one would have to indicate which meals you wanted provided over the weekend itself (offered at a cost to be covered by the attendee). Other stipulations that were included instantly reminded me of my old Girl Guide camping list: "favorite pillow, towels, toiletries, raincoat". Other items included were "extension cords, small ironing board and a lamp". The information sheet also outlined some events that were to take place over the course of the weekend. I was told by many women at the retreat that the central focus of the weekend was to get some sewing/quilting done. Nonetheless, the sheet before me promised the 1st Annual CQG Retreat Talent Show on Saturday evening. One could put together solo or group acts, skits, songs and other talents and "keep it a secret until the big night!". I left the meeting excited with anticipation.

The drizzling rainy Saturday morning of October 4th greeted the anthropology graduate student who drove nervously out of St. John's on the Trans Canada Highway. The quilter's retreat was being held at Burry Heights United Church Camp which is located on Salmonier Line, a fifty minute drive west of St. John's on the Avalon peninsula. Through the twists and turns of the asphalt road, I realized that I was heading into rural Newfoundland. Huge boulders resembling standing stones stood at sporadic intervals. The highway coiled to the rocky horizon. After leaving the highway, I drove up a long, dirt road to arrive at the camp itself in mid-morning. Not knowing exactly where the women were, I saw people moving in a large, white boarded central building to my right. This building was a large lodge joined by a front entranceway and then a smaller building attached to the end which sported on its corner a faded Canada flag and a black cross above the door. Inside, I could see women bending over tables in the shadows of the

reflection of the outside light. I gathered up my courage and stepped through the front door.

The front entranceway divided the large lodge into two rooms. The entranceway itself displayed a large portrait of the founder of Burry Heights. The inscription under Dr. Stella Burry's portrait read, "In Whose Honour Burry Heights is named, A Strong Leader-A Humble Follower". Her smile extended across her aged lined face and she wore a black suit coat. After locating Lori to tell her of my arrival, I took notice of how the quilters themselves were physically organized in the space of the lodge. The workspace of the first room functioned with the majority of quilters individualized within a personal space. Yet these quilters were gathered in a group as centers of action that were situated within the room itself. As I entered, there three tables joined to form a square and there sat one sewer to my left. She sat at her machine piecing together a square for her quilt: a purple star with a background of a night sky material. Continuing on that outer wall was a sort of coffee/tea/snack station where a coffee maker and white ceramic mugs, tea bags and hot water were offered to the quilters. I also observed that the quilters had not only brought their own snacks but their contributions were grouped together so that anyone could help themselves to crackers, chips, bags of Cheesies, corn chips and salsa, water crackers, melba toast, Crispers, a vegetable dip plate as well as peaches and apples in a garden basket. A center of pop drinks in bottles and jugs (Pepsi, Canada Dry) followed. The room also bordered the camp's kitchen area where there was a huge hole in the wall so smells and action alike were seen by all in the room. The wall opposite the snack station featured ceiling to floor-like windows that provided natural light. Long tables were butted together in a horseshoe fashion where each quilter on these borderlands was

facing inside the formation. In the center there were two rows of tables that faced each other again so that the quilters on each side were facing each other. The observation I noted was that no quilter was solitary. Even quilters located on the sides of the room were sitting side by side and facing the center of the room, where other quilters worked throughout the hours. The individual spaces were similar to each other in that some women were concentrating under the desk lamps on their work while others were walking around looking and discussing ideas of quilts that other women were doing at their station. Others still were sitting in the windows of the back of the room with large quilts placed on plastic frame racks and hand quilting their quilts. This first room gave me the impression of constant action and interaction in the group while their personal desk space was occupied with projects of their own.

The second smaller room housed fewer quilters but displayed a different dynamic altogether. This room was a little larger than the first room and much brighter in terms of ceiling lighting. On the opposite wall of the central entrance stood a huge stone and brick fireplace. This room had two centers of action. Two women had positioned their tables facing each other under a side window, while another threesome created a square of four desks; one operating as an ironing station. This second room evoked a different dynamic in that I recognized one of the women in the second group as Carol Ann. I noticed that her sister Paulette and her sister's childhood best friend Sarah⁵ worked side by side with her throughout the retreat. The first pair of women were Marilyn MacDonald and Jennifer Gill, both of whom I had spoken with before. Later on in the evening, Carol Ann and

⁵ I have substituted pseudonyms for women whom I observed during the retreat but did not have the chance to formally interview. These women were informed from the beginning of the retreat of the nature of my visitation and the nature of my research and of their individual rights to decline to participate.

Paulette's mother joined this group so there was a familial connection throughout the second room. The sleeping quarters of the camp were located off of this second room through a ramp-like corridor. These rooms in particular highlighted the camp-like atmosphere of the retreat and this spatial element contributed to the construction of a liminal space for the women on the retreat. Each sleeping room housed two bunk beds with plain blue mattresses. The linens were provided for the women over the weekend for a small fee of five dollars. At the end of the room stood a small desk and to the left of the desk was a sink to serve the occupants of the room. Therefore the women on the retreat could return to their rooms for personal space during the day but even shared communal sleeping space. This communal sleeping space contributed to both constructing liminal space as well as the feeling of community among the women at the retreat.

What do quilters *do* at a quilting retreat? What kind of social interactions occur in this liminal space? At the retreat, I observed many unique social interactions that transpired between quilters. The first interaction was a type of 'visiting' action of which I directly participated in. My first action after coming to the retreat and making my presence known to the organizers was to start circulating and talking to the women who were quilting in the first room described above. I first came across Rosalie, an older woman who was busily constructing an anniversary gift for her daughter and son-in-law. The wall hanging was gradually becoming a picture of a gathered bunch of white lilies. Rosalie stood with her hands clenched and rested on her hips and her eyes surveyed a green piece of the hanging itself. After enquiring as to what she was doing, she told me of her frustration over a mistake. She had done some of the green leaves out of sequence and this put her "back two hours". Another woman sat at what she described as a quilt rack

which had plastic sections of a square holder that stretched the quilt taut enough to quilt the three layers together. Lori Shortall sat at her workspace in the center of the horseshoe table formation and paper pieced a quilt top in assembly-like fashion. When I entered the second room, Jennifer Gill, one of my key participants and a retired school teacher, saw me taking notes of the movement of the quilters and directly instructed me to record the observation, "We are nomadic". Jennifer would repeatedly tell me to "write this down" throughout the retreat itself so the women of room two were used to my having a small pad of paper and a pen at hand. Quilters at the retreat are indeed 'nomadic' in many ways. Their freedom of movement is the method by which they negotiate their labour and social space throughout the retreat. Paulette and Carol Ann's mother moved her entire workspace (table, desk lamp, chair, sewing machine, quilt blocks, quilt patterns, sewing kit and fabric supplies, etc.) from room one to room two as she felt the presence of the kitchen contributed the odor of food to the room and that the room itself was crowded and noisy. She placed her sewing center, with the help of two other women, to bank the tables of Jennifer and Marilyn under a side window.

Another 'nomadic' action was that quilters often stopped for a rest from the whirl of their sewing machines to periodically travel around the two rooms. When this occurs, quilters get to "see what others are doing". It is also a time to socialize but also ask questions of those who have specialized knowledge. Some quilters shared that there are women in the guild who "just know" how to pick colours for a quilt square and others who are "keen on borders". I accompanied Lori on one of these visits when we both were admiring Katherine's unique quilt top that she was beginning to assemble. Many quilts at the retreat are built by joining individual squares together to form a quilt top. Katherine's

quilt, in contrast, was made out of long strips of fabric where each strip was constructed out of one, two or three joined pieces. When Lori admired the interplay between the light and medium blues, Katherine stopped her machine and proceeded to show us a picture of what the finished product would look like. A small glossy page showed a quilt top that was marine inspired; we were looking at a complete underwater scene where the pieced background emphasized a vertical effect. Katherine later would ask Lori and two other women their opinions on the placement of other elements in the piece such as wave patterns and actual fish. She was unsure of whether to place all of these elements horizontally, but in the end two of the three women suggested that she not sacrifice the wonderful vertical effect of the blue water columns.

I also observed another woman placing her completed blue and white center panel upon two large tables and standing on a chair to observe it. While looking at one's quilt top to see if the strips or squares are flat and straight is no irregular occurrence, Marjorie was staring for a long time and did not pull or tug the fabric at all. As I watched her place her hand pensively under her chin, Carol Ann and Paulette approached and began to place two to three bunches of folded fabric beside the quilt top itself. This fabric was hidden on the seat of a chair under the table. Carol Ann liked a border made of a small band of blue saddled by a large band of white and ending with a dark band of blue on the end. Paulette stood quietly while Jennifer left her table under the window and looked at the suggested border. At least seven women were surrounding Marjorie's quilt top when one woman said that the large white band would take away from the center patterns. Marjorie paused and then announced, "I've decided" and many praised the top as 'gorgeous'. Later, I asked Paulette if this interaction happens a lot. Paulette shared with me that Marjorie was

“auditioning” fabric for a border. I remembered that in many interviews, some women who quilt pointed out that a border “makes or breaks a quilt”. It is important to have an effective border to frame the center and that in the end, it was “entirely Marjorie’s decision” whether she would take into account the opinions shared at the auditioning. Here, Marjorie is not only auditioning fabric combinations, but also auditioning opinions and input from others. The social implication of this is if she chose to display her finished piece at a future show and tell, the women who were at the auditioning will know whose suggestion Marjorie adopted and thus evaluated who she would consult on ‘border knowledge’.

As the afternoon shadows lengthened on the linoleum flooring of the camp rooms, I wondered when I should depart. My pen and notes had been flying as had my embroidery needle. I had thought ahead of time that I did not want to just sit or continually take notes and segregate myself so I brought one of my own projects: an embroidered crest intended for my Halloween costume. It was in my mind to be Hermione Granger from the very popular Harry Potter series and I needed to complete a “Gryffindor” crest for my magical cape. The crest was a fruitful strategy, for as women left their stations for breaks and to talk to others about their projects, they would come to view what I was making. When one woman said she wanted to see the back, I asked her why as I handed it over and she said that the back of a quilt is just as important as the front. When looking at my crest’s back, she smiled and said “this is a good back, lots of hard work”. This was when I began to reluctantly pack up my things but Lori popped into the room and said with a kind expression of disbelief, “You’re not going to drive home now are you? Come spend the night!”. I accepted the invitation without hesitation as the

Talent Show would be starting later in the evening. Carol Ann and Sarah invited me to stay in their room as there was a free bunk.

The beginning of dinner was signaled when Carol Ann began to clear off her large basted quilt from one of the tables. Knowing that the women had paid for their meals, I brought my own food which consisted of two pieces of buttered bread and a sad, limp orange. Lori again showed her kindness and said that she had already arranged for me to have dinner and breakfast courtesy of the guild. For the dinner, I decided to sit at a table where I did not know any of the women in order to meet some new faces. Everyone ate quietly and feeling my presence might be slightly awkward, I asked everyone about the upcoming winter. Was it true that the amount of dogberries would signal a hard winter? One woman whom I will call Mary commented to the entire table without looking at me that there were many years when the dogberries were thick and the winters were mild and others the other way around. Another woman began a conversation about her Girl Guide group and whether or not Guides still complete an All Round Cord. Mary reminisced on how she had been a Girl Guide leader when her daughters were in that age group. Without being too intrusive, I made a quiet comment that I had been a Girl Guide but as a Pathfinder, had earned my Canada Cord. Mary looked at me, smiled and said, "You were a Girl Guide?". These were the first words Mary had spoken to me; she had been quite silent towards me during the afternoon when I was wandering. I felt that in sharing my experience in Guiding, I found common ground with Mary and many other women at the retreat. I was soon to know that the majority of the twenty-five attendees had been either Guides or Brownies and leaders themselves. However, they would revisit these childhood roles in a different context at the end of the Talent Show.

4.2.2: Part Two: Gendered Practices, Performances and Commentaries on Womanhood

Of course the anthropologist should participate with their fellow friends at cultural events. After dinner, many bottles of red and white wine were opened and cheese and crackers were served. A mild panic set in though when after dinner Lori informed me that she expected me to perform in that evening's talent show. While staring at my crest, desperately trying to think of a talent I could do without making a fool of myself, Sarah (to my right) was talking about how she had just been through a divorce and how, in trying to do new things, took up belly dancing at the local YMCA. This was a stroke of luck as I had just begun taking belly dancing lessons from my good friend Andrea Kitta in the Folklore Department. I quickly shared this knowledge with the group of women around me. Sarah turned and said, "It would be wild. I'm game". I, not knowing the extent of what I was getting myself into, responded vigorously, "Let's do it." Carol Ann then jumped up and began to take large pieces of fabric from her "stash". All three of us ran to the back bunk room where Carol Ann fitted us with costumes:

"You need something red, here's a red sash."

"Does this fit? I hope it doesn't fall off."

"Oh my god, I can't believe we are doing this."

"We need to jingle."

"Pin your keys to your hip."

"You're going to be wild women."

The talent show itself highlighted everyone's uniqueness from flute solos to drama skits and quilt tips from many women. When Sarah and I were up for our

performance, Lori had kept our 'talent' a secret. As the music (from Sarah's car repertoire) began, Sarah led the way into the open, into the center of the audience. Before I knew it, she told everybody to get up and follow her moves in a circle. It was quite a rush to see 24 women try to belly dance in a circle. Some just moved to the beat while others had their hands in the air and were adamantly trying to copy Sarah. As I was a novice, I relegated myself to a 'sidekick' position while Sarah yelled out, "Love your bodies", "Let your belly hang out" and "We're women, love your curves". After the dancing was done, Sarah and I quickly retreated back to the bunk room and dismantled our costumes. Carol Ann pulled me aside and told me that she had this pattern for a wall hanging called "Wild Women". Now that Sarah and I had worn the bright red fabric pieces as sashes, she was going to use it in the wall hanging itself. Our performance had given the fabric a personal meaning for Carol Ann and our collective experience as 'wild women' would be captured in a quilted piece.

The last 'act' of the show proved to be the most revealing in terms of looking at how the women at the retreat negotiated opinions and ideas of morality. After all the acts had performed, Jennifer Gill was responsible for ending the show. We were all instructed to place our chairs in a circle. Jennifer then handed out individual squares of brown or blue to each woman which we pinned to our clothes. Then she placed a mock campfire made of loose logs and red fabric in the middle of our seated circle and told us that we were now Brownies and Guides and that we were going to have a campfire evening. This campfire setting was to mimic campfire settings that one experiences at Girl Guide campouts. Memories of songs and stories came flooding back to me. I also remembered actions of resistance that I had done when at camp around the campfire such as

strategically flying a leader's hat on the camp flagpole so she could not find it or hiding everyone's sleeping bags ten feet into the forest which ensured a short panic. I was fascinated that my girlhood nature of camp 'acts of resistance' would be recalled at this Guild campfire. Throughout the next half hour, the brownies and guides took turns standing around the center fire and either singing familiar songs from the Guiding musical canon or performing "Simon Says", "Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes". I quickly made note to remember that many women would act a character and perform these actions like young girls, perhaps the way they did at campfires of their girlhood youth. One twirled like a top on the spot and then speedily ran around the circle until someone shouted, "Hey, that's the ADHD kid". Others would purposely place swearing in the songs, repetitively signaled the leader's instructions with their middle finger if they were told to do something and utilized sexual innuendos. Instead of calling Jennifer her proper leader name of Horn Owl⁶, they would call her Horny Owl and repetitively asked her throughout the campfire: "Are you horny, Horny owl?". The campfire closed with much laughter and while some turned in for the night, others continued to quilt until 2am. I was exhausted but happy.

4.3: Conclusions: Retreat Reflections

The conversations I conducted with Jennifer, Sarah and Carol Ann the following morning illustrate some interesting perspectives on how they categorized their actions and identities and communicated certain gendered middle-class practices. After handing

⁶ Brownie and Girl Guide leaders often have leader names that are inspired by nature. The head Brownie leader is most commonly known as 'Brown Owl'.

Jennifer a cup of coffee from the refreshment tables, she looked up from her machine with her eyes lightly squeezed shut, "Are we like a cult?". Knowing Jennifer's taste for the sarcastic, I laughed and surprised at the question, I responded, "Who accused you of being a cult?". Jennifer continued with wide eyes open, "Our children. Think about it. We're in the middle of nowhere, frightened to death, making things all day long and giving them up. We're followers like sheep, embedded with quilters. EAT, DRINK, QUILT!". Then she, like so many times before, instructed me to write this down. After dutifully taking some notes off to the side, Carol Ann commented to Jennifer, "You know, those anthropologists, they weave in and out of society." My conversation with the women in room two continued:

Jennifer: So, taking all those notes, what is your *analysis*? Of us?

Jaime: Right now, it looks like everyone gets to know each other better when coming to a retreat. You can get help on your projects.

Jennifer: Anything *deeper*? (pause) We support each other as women. We understand each other. Things or issues are reaffirmed. Problems with husbands, like our roles at home are different [**Maxilene:** There's no judgment]. The retreat is an escape.

Sarah: It's a community. You get the whole spectrum. Women are intuitive. You know, the quilt fabric didn't talk to me, I put it away. Or picking out borders, it's part of women's intuition.

Both Jennifer and Sarah discuss an idea of shared womanhood that is understood.

Opinions and ideas on problems with their husbands or children are "reaffirmed" at the retreat among fellow quilters. Sarah also stated that being a quilter, a member of the guild and a participant of the retreat is "a community" where "women are intuitive".

Maxilene's comment that "there is no judgment" points to the connotation that there is no moral judgment on how her fellow friends deal with their families and family problems.

The community is responsible “to support” one another but consists of “the whole spectrum”. The women in room two framed themselves as a supportive community but that this community is based on their shared experiences of being female and enacting women’s intuition.

Lastly, Carol Ann continued that quilters “should reinvent themselves” and “revamp their image” by “going on the road” and “dyeing their hair”. Carol Ann wanted to do this in order to “show [that] we aren’t boring”. This comment points to the fact that Carol Ann is perhaps self-conscious of certain stereotypes of women who quilt: that they are boring. It also points to the notion that Carol Ann thinks others see her as a responsible individual in that her change of image suggestions consist of the exact opposite: one of pushing image boundaries by acting rebellious; by “dyeing their hair” and promoting a more exciting look. However, this idea was never enacted by any of the women and would have been a safe rebellion in that there would be no violence, no political or social consequences and the women would not be seen by their families, friends and peers not involved with the guild.

Can a community of people who share meanings exhibit and perpetuate social change and a consideration of larger contexts while still illustrating local, culture-specific meanings? In Chapter 3, I analyzed how the women whom I interviewed framed and described their expressions of specific selves in relation to quilting in their lives. In this chapter, I considered the other extreme of the spectrum by investigating the purpose and function of the Cabot Quilters’ Guild, a common affiliation among the women whom I interviewed; a community they create, participate and negotiate. The Cabot Quilters’ Guild expressed many shared experiences and tensions within their community practices.

The Guild was described as a venue for learning and teaching while offering opportunities to share one's expert knowledge with others. It also provided an arena where women who quilt could access information. The Guild also provided many social benefits in membership: a system of sharing and exchange of gifts that creates a sense of selflessness in members that in turn, perpetuates relationships. This system of exchange also perpetuates the important theme of the guild: active and continual participation.

Tensions also exist within community practices. Some women revealed that there was a pressure, either from peers or a personal sense of obligation, to join and be a part of guild committees. There also existed the issue of non-constructive criticism in the mentioning of the "quilt police". While extremely rare in occurrence, some women expressed that they felt intimidated in showing their work for fear of negative criticism. It is the presence of these tensions that reinforce the sense of flexible, unbounded and negotiated community in their actual practice. Community in this sense is found and expressed not so much on a symbolic level but rather within social relationships and shared practices.

Lastly, I presented a major ethnographic example of how some of the women I interviewed communicated and reaffirmed their membership in the community that is the Cabot Quilters' Guild. However, the women at the retreat with whom I interacted also demonstrated diverse ideas of what it means to be a woman who quilts in the guild in their performances and comments at the retreat's first talent show. The retreat, in the middle of "nowhere", provided a liminal space where many women of the guild felt a safe space in which to quilt, socialize and role-play extensions of their 'selves' and their

'community'. Experiences of self and community are performed socially at group events. These collective events can also be purposely situated in liminal spaces.

Van Gennep discussed how there existed "ceremonies, acts of a special kind, derived from a particular feeling and a particular frame of mind" (1960:1). An individual's lifeway comprises of "a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" where the "progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts" (*Ibid.*:2-3). These rites of passage are "a special category" where they "may be subdivided into *rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation*" and are "recurring" (*Ibid.*:11,13, author's emphasis). Victor Turner in "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure" (1969) elaborated on Van Gennep's transitional stage by exploring the characteristics of liminality. Within this "liminal period", "the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous" where the individual "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1969:94). The individuals within the liminal state are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" where liminality is "likened...to the wilderness" (*Ibid.*:95). For the members of the Guild on the retreat, the isolated space of the camp in the middle of the Avalon peninsula, rural Newfoundland worked to separate the women from their usual living spaces and urban surroundings. The women became egalitarian in the sense that they shared communal work, eating and sleeping space. Individuals within the liminal or transitional space "tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism" where secular distinctions of rank and status disappear" (*Ibid.*:95). Lastly, when individuals are participating in such a state, there is a "moment

in and out of time” and the “recognitions...of a generalized social bond” (*Ibid.*:96). My ethnographic example departs from Turner’s state of liminality in that there were women who did have a special rank in that they had specialized knowledge (i.e. “just know how to pick out colours”, “keen on borders”, etc.) This retreat was not religious in nature but rather a community event held annually. The women who attended the retreat did not indicate in either their dialogues or in their actions that the quilter’s fall retreat was religious in nature or a process/rite of initiation for new members. The positioning of the retreat activities that occurred during its gathering points to the important power of liminal space in how the quilters themselves reaffirm their participation, commitment and social values of their guild and gendered middle class cultural practices.

I argue that there was also an expression of ‘license’ in ritual at the retreat. The 25 women at the retreat were not rebelling against the social order of the community but, through their loud and often shocking performances, reaffirm the gendered and middle-class practices of the community itself. In his 1959 work Custom and Conflict in Africa, Gluckman specifies a phenomenon which he terms the ‘license in ritual’. Gluckman is referring specifically to “rites of reversal” where there is “protest against the established order” and their protests “are intended to preserve and even to strengthen the established order” (1959:109). This protest “is licensed and even encouraged” where “the ritual is socially valuable” (*Ibid.*:110). In his work with Zulu and other South African tribes, Gluckman “found in them items of...lewd and other protests by women against the established order” where these “obscene and domineering acts by the women were encouraged” (*Ibid.*:111). These rituals, “by allowing people to behave in normally prohibited ways, gave expression, in a reversed form, to the normal rightness of a

particular kind of social order" (*Ibid.*:116). While the quilters' fall retreat was not a mystical rite, it was a specific experience of a social gathering of quilters within a separated, liminal space. When Sarah and I and the entire group of Guild members were "wild women" and belly danced in a circle during the Talent Show, we were all acting against the usual order: sitting at one's work desk and quilting or casually visiting others during a break. By doing so, the practice that was reinforced was that all were participating. Also, the various comments, suggestive hand gestures and sexual innuendos, while against the usual discussions of borders, happenings of home and partners, speaks to the women's shared experiences in Guiding. In Guiding, one is ultimately building the values of citizenship, respect for others and women who will "do" for others. These actions, the quilters' own license in the ritual of the campfire and talent show space, reaffirmed their community middle class values and practices. The social order continued the next day as it had before the Talent Show space.

One problem with Gluckman's theory of a license in ritual is that there is the assumption that it only occurs within formal ritual space. I contend that the reversal of roles, which demonstrate and reaffirm in their performance common values of a constantly shifting and negotiated community, can be seen in events that are not considered specifically rites but events of play. This is not a necessary condition of a license in ritual as evidenced by the quilters' actions at the non-religious retreat. The protests against the social order during the Talent Show were safe in that no outside family, children, peers or friends saw their action. The next morning after the Talent Show, it was both Jennifer and Sarah who confirmed the idea that community exists in practice: "Things or issues are reaffirmed" and "It's a community".

In this chapter I have provided narrative and ethnographic evidence to illustrate that in this specific context, the concept of an unchanging and isolated 'self' and a bounded, whole 'community' are not adequate theoretical concepts from which to view the life experiences of women who quilt. In the following chapter, I investigate in greater depth how many women who quilt in St. John's choose to communicate what is valueable in their quilted objects in terms of their gendered personhoods. By considering how these women frame their specific pieces, one can see their engagement within and negotiation of gendered and middle-class practices.

CHAPTER 5: 'PIECING' NARRATIVES WITHIN QUILTS

The women whom I interviewed repetitively expressed in their narratives how they communicated and embedded meaning in the quilts they produced. They also expressed the idea that a quilt can have an 'essence' of its own. This 'essence' of a quilt resonates with another powerful metaphor in quilter's narratives: the importance of the expression of the 'voice' of a quilter and the 'voice' of the piece itself. In this chapter, I will explore in detail this phenomenon of 'voice' by considering how and what women who quilt are communicating through their pieced creations. The narratives that are embedded within quilts fall into three topical themes that are attached to the *purpose* of the quilt: motivation and encouragement to family members, the expression of a chosen spirituality and the communication of a specific Newfoundland identity or 'essence'. I will argue that these three topics of communication demonstrate the presence of an active personal agency in quilters.

In the initial stages of this research project, I was presented with a difficult dilemma. In order to make the project feasible, I was required to decide between focusing on the producer or the product. This choice was difficult as both producer and product are intimately connected. While my decision rested with the producer (or quilter in this case), the relationship that exists between a quilter and their fiber creations is a complex one. If one were to only consider the product, then the search for the product's embodied meaning would be deductive and thus subject to the observer. My analysis on how quilters demonstrate active agency through their quilts must then take into consideration the meanings that are constructed by the producers themselves. During our interview, Rachel revealed that fiber art is "all deconstruction and reconstruction". Therefore, I

contend that quilters are making the immaterial material. By producing and thus communicating through quilts, women who quilt corporealize human experience into fabric with the intent of communicating motivational, religious and personal identity messages. Quilts thus become evidence of a material locus of agency. It is in this dynamic relationship between creator and creation that one can see active agency.

5.1: Situating Power and Agency

In order to demonstrate the existence of personal agency for women who quilt, one must first situate the theoretical concepts of both *power* and *agency*. Eric Wolf in Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis outlines the concept of power in four modalities (1999). Power “works differently in interpersonal relations, in institutional arenas and on the level of whole societies” where it is “useful to distinguish among four modalities in how power is thus woven into social relations” (Wolf 1999:5). The first modality is “the power of potency or capability that is seen to inhere in an individual” and the second modality of power is “manifested in interactions and transactions among people and refers to the ability of an *ego* to impose its will in social action upon an *alter*” (Wolf’s emphasis, Wolf 1999:5). The third and fourth modality of power are as follows:

...A third modality is power that controls the contexts in which people exhibit their capabilities and interact with others...But there is still a fourth modality of power, which I want to focus on in the present inquiry: structural power. By this I mean the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the direction and distribution of energy [and information] flows (Wolf 1999:5).

Wolf's emphasis on structure is problematic. In the first two modalities of power, Wolf is careful to include that there is the capability for an individual to have power in oneself. This power can be mobilized by that individual 'in social action' upon another individual, institution, etc. However, I argue that the third modality of power gives agency to the power itself. This frames 'power' as an independent entity that is manifest on its own which then controls the contexts 'which people exhibit their capabilities and interactions with others'. Wolf's fourth modality, the structures that we as humans create, in turn, create power in that it 'organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves'. I contend that power is created and exchanged through individuals and groups of individuals (institutions) and is not an autonomous entity.

It is Michel Foucault who provides a more *dialogic* and *relational* concept of power which proves more useful in considering how women who quilt demonstrate active agency through the production of their quilts. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault utilizes the example of the production of 'docile bodies' in soldiers in order to illustrate his notion of relational power (1977). Power over a body changes historically from a classical notion of an "analyzable body" to a "body [that] is docile [and] that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1977:136). During the eighteenth century, power over the body becomes "a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself-movements, gestures, attitudes and rapidity" (Foucault 1977:137). This subjection of power "imposed upon [the bodies] a relation of docility-utility" (Foucault 1977:137). Here, power is not an all encompassing entity but rather is 'coercive' and is manifest in 'a relation of docility-utility'. It is an element in the relationship between individuals in control of the soldier's bodies and the

soldier's themselves. The fact that power over the bodies of the soldiers must be made *subtle* points to the existence of individual agency. The employment of direct power carries the possibility of the choice of direct resistance by the individual soldier. This resistance would be a manifestation of personal agency. When considering the personal agency of quilters, this agency exists because the quilters themselves are embedded in relations of power in their daily lives. Women quilters work inside and outside of the home, pay taxes and purchase goods in order to create their expressive objects. But like Foucault's eighteenth century soldiers, women also have the capacity for active agency.

In order to contextualize *agency*, I would like to turn to Gerald Sider's notion of 'experience' in "Cleansing History: Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Strike for Four Loaves of Bread and No Roses and the Anthropology of Working-class Consciousness" (1996). Here, Sider considers the cultural politics of memory: remembering and forgetting histories. Sider observes that:

...there is [a] view that 'experience' under-lies agency, and that agency is inherently-rather than only potentially-progressive, rather than also potentially self-destructive or, like a trip to Disneyland, just diverting. If we understand that 'agency' has the potential to be self-destructive as well as liberating then we can see that the 'repressive mechanisms which destroy historical memory', could equally as likely be a significant aspect of how we come to terms with our experience, or the ends to which experience is put, or how specific experiences are put behind the person who had them (1996:59).

Sider goes further than this construct of experience in that there is a reconceptualization of agency. Agency becomes at the same time both 'self-destructive' and 'liberating'.

Forgetting historical memory or repressing it can be the key to understanding how experience operates within our daily lives in how we interact with it, how we utilize it or how we move on from our experiences. Experience now is the arena where people

negotiate the encounters of their everyday lives, both publicly and privately. Therefore, the personal agency expressed by women quilters has the capacity to be constructive. It is their 'experiences' that will dictate when this agency is 'liberating'. In the following section, I will demonstrate how quilters utilize quilts as vehicles of communication in expressing motivation, religiosity and Newfoundland identities. Ultimately, the women quilters with whom I worked in St. John's expressed an agency that is progressive and liberating.

5.2: Part I: Voices Within: Quilts as Vehicles of Communication

5.2.1: Voices of Motivation

It was a bright and sunny fall day when the Metrobus dropped me off in what seemed to be the middle of nowhere. Deep in the suburbs of Mount Pearl, stately four bedroom two-storey houses stood firm in their foundations of stone while the yellowing autumnal faded grass lawns showed no movement. I made note that nothing seemed to move. There were no humans, no birds, no animals of any kind outside of the buildings that paraded in organized rows as far as the eye could see. After a short walk, I approached Ethel's address and rang the doorbell. The front door opened and I was greeted not only by Ethel with a smile but also by the mad barking of Gismo, the small but feisty family dog. I entered the front hallway where a large staircase led upstairs and large clear plastic bags of root vegetables lined the walls. After taking off my heavy backpack and shoes, Ethel led me first to a formal front parlour that sported pink walls and dark forest green rugs. Ethel left to attend to Gismo's excitement and I had a chance to look around. While sitting on a low couch, I noticed that throughout the rooms I could

see (the parlour, dining room, kitchen), there was a sewing machine and sewing inspired objects everywhere. Quilted cushions or “quillows” adorned the couch and chairs while an old Singer sewing machine on an antique stand stood guard in the corner of the dining room. Ethel and I adjourned to the dining room where I promptly set up my recording equipment and she served tea. I noticed during the interview that even the teapot was in the shape of a sewing machine. After approximately fifteen minutes of calmly talking to Gismo as he barked (at my presence) and he then was finally relegated to the other side of the house behind closed doors, Ethel and I sat down to little caramel coffee cakes and tea and began our interview. Ethel is very passionate about everything that has to do with quilts and she shared many evocative narratives. The following narrative refers to a quilt that she made for her second daughter. What I find compelling about the narrative itself is how Ethel describes how she wanted the quilt to be *motivational* for her daughter.

Jaime: Do you take people who say “I want you to make a quilt” or have expressed interest that you, that they want you to make... [Ethel: I don’t usually sew for the general public] Oh, no, or even your family members, as you were saying that they like this fabric, are they there with you at the store or do they just kind of...

Ethel: No, there is like a cross or a skull on all fabric stores, my children don’t go in them anymore (Ethel laughs)... ‘If you don’t behave, we’re going to go to the fabric store’...

Jaime: And you will have to carry *everything*...

Ethel: Since they were in a stroller, since they could breathe, we have to go with mum to the fabric store, and that was playtime when they were younger. But now, no, they don’t as a general rule go to fabric stores though I’ll use big swatches. Many of the things I do are surprise quilts that they don’t know what I’m working on or what I’m doing but they expressed an interest in a colour perhaps. [Jaime: ok, ok.] Or I’ll, say for example, my second daughter, she loved stars...everything has stars, she signs her name and it has a star crossing the ‘i’. So I had seen an accumulation of fabric that was all coordinated by a particular fabric company so I thought ‘Katie loves stars’, I will make for her a quilt, a *motivational* quilt for

Katie, 'Reach for the Stars'. [Jaime: Neat!] E: She was struggling in the academic world, in school, until recently and that was, for me, that was the motivation and I don't know if *she* got the gist of it, that mother is now subliminally or very directly saying 'Reach for the Stars' but that was the motivation for this quilt. It started as a wall hanging. By then she decided (Ethel lowers her voice) 'Its' too small, I want a quilt for the bed' (both of us laugh at Ethel's rendition of her daughter's voice). So mother ripped everything, besides the bottom part and started adding but it was the joy of quilting though. It's not like making a short dress and then deciding, ugh, 'excuse me, I wanted a gown'..Quilting..you just add more blocks.

Jaime: Editing...

Ethel: Yeah, delete. Edit.

When talking about creating quilts, Ethel first indicates that there can be an element of surprise where the individual for whom the quilt is being created may not know of the creation itself. Ethel's children no longer accompany to the fabric store, therefore heightening the element of surprise. It is thus Ethel who is in control of what she will communicate through her quilt. The recipient, in this case her second daughter, may play some part in the creation by giving their opinion on "big swatches" of coloured fabric.

Secondly, Ethel's narrative reveals the complexity of purpose that comes with the creation of a quilt in that it is intended to communicate a message. The purpose of this particular quilt was "a *motivational* quilt for Katie". Here, the quilter pairs the purpose of the quilt with the intent on what meaning is to be conveyed. The theme of the quilt 'Reach for the Stars' is both a motivation for Ethel to make the quilt as well as Ethel wanting to communicate, through the fabric design, the emotional element of motivation and encouragement to her daughter who is struggling academically. Also, there is direct oral evidence for the quilter's intent of communicating a meaning. Ethel admits in her story that she doesn't know "if *she* [Ethel's daughter] got the gist of it, that mother is now

subliminally or very directly saying 'Reach for the Stars' but that was the motivation for this quilt". The quilter is framed as either "subliminally" or "very directly" saying something through her quilts. Ethel is ultimately demonstrating to her daughter through the actual production of the quilt, her motherly love and support for Katie. Ethel is even willing to alter the quilt in order to please Katie in that "mother ripped everything, besides the bottom part and started adding" to the quilt in order to make it bed-size. Ethel's production of Katie's quilt demonstrates active individual agency because it is Ethel herself that admits to mobilizing the purpose and function of the quilt: to communicate and activate emotional motivation.

Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed that women who quilt were utilizing the quilt as a medium of communication that was motivational but also commemorative and acknowledged certain events that were framed as a trial or a period of struggle. One example of this was Karen's son's graduation quilt intended to commemorate his undergraduate degree. Not only was the quilt a commemorative piece to celebrate his accomplishment, but the quilt itself communicated an important message from mother to son. This message was an acknowledgement of how the son had successfully, in Karen's eyes, negotiated a difficult situation and survived.

The light from the front windows in Karen's living room faded in and out throughout our interview that August morning. The bright room, accented in yellow flowered drapes, had its walls covered in art of all shapes and designs, forms and mediums. Her father's painting of the fiords of Gros Mourné was reminiscent of the style of Tom Thompson and hung over our heads with great presence. My cup of tea rested on a green frosted etched Celtic Cross coaster with a plate of store bought gingersnaps to

assuage my hunger. With our interview completed, Karen began to show me her finished quilts that she either kept for her family or was waiting to give them to their new owners. After granting me permission to take some photographs, I was intrigued at the stories that surrounded certain quilts. Many quilters will argue that one should not place black in one's quilt. When Karen draped her son's graduation quilt over the large sofa in the living room, my eye was drawn not only to the dark but vibrant colours but also to the asymmetry of the piece. Karen looked at me and then asked what I saw. After a few moments of deliberation, I responded that I saw a school of brightly coloured fish that were framed with blocks of deep marine blue and a border of black and sea green. Karen smiled and asked if I could see something that was different in the quilt. I admitted defeat after a few more minutes and this is when Karen began her story of why she made the quilt in this particular design.

Karen explained that she made a quilt for each child when they graduated from their undergraduate education at university. The idea for this particular quilt came from a difficult situation her son encountered. Jonathan was completing an undergraduate degree in marine science and had to complete a certain course that had a professor with a reputation for being an extremely difficult marker. On the first day of classes, the professor announced that he 'didn't give out A's' no matter how hard one worked for it. Karen continued that Jonathan, in her opinion, put 110% into everything for that course and at the end of it, he officially achieved a high B+. Karen's quilt carries the marine theme because of the research focus of her son in his undergraduate career. She also showed me that the school of fish was representative of the undergraduates who were finally graduating and leaving school. However, there was one fish in the school that

faced the opposite direction of the flow of action within the quilt. Karen shared that this lone fish was her son as he was poised to re-enter the university for graduate school and was thus swimming out of the graduating school of fish. The title of the quilt appeared on the back label: "A is for Ichthyology"¹. Karen finished her description by saying that she wanted to show Jonathan that, in her opinion, he got the A in that course.

Karen's quilt "A is for Ichthyology" is an excellent example of how a quilter communicates through the medium of quilting and in so doing, employs active agency in the form of acknowledgement and parental encouragement. While Karen admitted that she had seen a similar pattern of a school of fish, it was her choice "for originality" to flip one fish in the opposite direction. This decision in design created an interaction between me (the observer) and the quilt. The material expression of the outcome of the story (i.e. that Jonathan would pass the professor's evaluation and continue on to graduate school) sparked the sharing of the narrative itself. The quilt "A is for Ichthyology", while an object of material culture, sponsors an activeness and sense of participation from the admirer. Humans endow material culture with meaning socially.

However, Karen's quilt should be viewed as a *personal* communication. Here, the use of 'personal' denotes that the meaning and full context of the purpose and message of the quilt remains within the social sphere of the family unit or until its meaning is directly conveyed to an outsider. Someone who would just observe the quilt, even in looking at the label, could not comprehend its entire meaning and story of inspiration without Karen's evocative narrative. Karen's communication of support and congratulations to

¹ Karen explained as I was copying down the spelling that ichthyology is the study of fish hence the topic of the quilt and Jonathan's academic research focus.

her son is 'pieced' and embedded in the quilt but also demands one have insider knowledge of the quilt which includes the content of the label. While similar in its communicative purpose, Ethel's motivational quilt for Katie is more direct in its communication where the theme of 'stars' in the fabric and the label on the quilt stating 'Reach for the Stars' present the possibility of coming together in subjective interpretations but exists without a larger narrative context like Karen conveyed to me. It was Karen's active decision to design, create and illustrate her message of encouragement to her son Jonathan and to communicate her opinion that he did earn that 'A'. For Karen, the creation and distribution of this gift is evidence of personal positive agency in her life. However, this agency is also limited structurally in that Karen may emotionally effect and influence her son but the final grade of B+ will still be present on his report card.

5.2.2: Voices of Spirituality

Karen and Ethel's inspirational quilts to their children illustrate that a quilter can utilize an artistic medium for communicating meaning. They are thus enacting agency in their lives and in the lives of others. Both familial quilts were agents of personal communication. In the next two narratives, I will demonstrate that women who quilt in St. John's also communicate personal messages in quilts intended for a public context along with the intent to sell. These personal messages are specifically expressions of the quilter's ideas on their own spiritualities.

Rachel and "The Guardians"

Rachel greeted me at the door of her apartment with a warning. She said, "I just wanted you to know that Bouncer (her black Labrador) has gone to get his headless teddy bear to show you." Sure enough, Bouncer literally bounced back with a large, black fuzzy and quite headless teddy bear in his jaws. The speed at which his tail was wagging told me, a veteran dog owner myself, that Bouncer was very proud to show me his bear. I, in turn, was honoured at this special gesture and proceeded to follow Rachel into the living room. Rachel is in her thirties and has created in the fiber arts ever since she graduated from high school. A popular question which elicited interesting exchanges was: describe how you were inspired to begin selling your product? The majority of my participants admitted that they did not produce for the general public but for their families and friends. In contrast, Rachel does in fact produce for the public and sells her works at the Craft Council Gallery and Craft Shop located in Devon House. The following narrative was particularly evocative as it brought to the forefront the expression of Rachel's spirituality.

Jaime: How did you get involved in selling your stuff? Was it just through volunteering and then you thought 'hey, maybe I can make a living out of it?'

Rachel: Well, um, like I was saying, about the first show I had, it wasn't that successful in terms of selling. I had a show a couple years later again, a joint venture with another person and had their work there as well. And I started doing these little, well, I said rather than have everything on a larger, larger scale, why don't I do a few little ones and to kind of compliment the larger ones and that happened to be um, I did a larger piece that happened to be called 'Sea Cathedral' after a poem written by EJ Pratt and it was an iceberg and but it was a larger piece. Two hundred and fifty dollars or whatever it was and so I did a few little ones to go along with it. Just little icebergs, they're called 'Bergie Bits' which is a

traditional term, I guess, used for pieces of icebergs, they're called 'Bergie' and that was just for fun. And also to have a few lower price things in there, a. oh, I also did a larger piece which I called 'The Guardians' which had a tree right in the center and a number of trees around the outside part and then women in cloaks. [Jaime: Oh] behind the trees and so I kind of, the statement I guess that I was making about it was that these people were guardians of knowledge and um, you know, during the witch burnings, and stuff like that in Europe, a lot of the just very practical knowledge of childbirth and [Jaime: the woods] healing, herbs and stuff like that was squelched you know and uh, and it was dangerous to know these things but here are people who despite the burnings that there were people who retained the knowledge. And again, like I said, very practical stuff and uh, so it was a piece like that and the tree was supposed to be a symbol of the knowledge. So I did a number of little trees on smaller pieces and I called them 'Brilliant Trees' and as it turned out, I sold everything.

Rachel's narrative begins with the account of a strategy that did not work out in terms of the selling aspect of creating fiber art. When Rachel only produced larger pieces for a show, they were admired but not purchased. The narrative continues and illustrates a design strategy that did work for her: Rachel produced one or two large pieces along with smaller pieces which were lower in price. Rachel titled one piece "Sea Cathedral" and it was accompanied by smaller pieces affectionally titled "Bergie Bits". According to Rachel, the term 'Bergie Bits' is a "traditional term".

This theme of 'traditional' carries the narrative on to her description of another larger piece for the show called "The Guardians". It is in Rachel's description and explanation of "The Guardians" where one sees an expression of spirituality. This piece is a representation of a gendered view of history. It is about the role of women in societies in late Medieval and early Renaissance Europe at the time of the great witch burnings. The history conveyed is that the women were "guardians of knowledge" which was "very practical knowledge of childbirth, healing [and] herbs". This knowledge is "dangerous" and the burnings were attempts to "squelch" it. To Rachel, this knowledge

was “retained” and in her piece, is represented in symbolic form. She states, “The tree was supposed to be a symbol of the knowledge” with the cloaked women surrounding it in the forest. This piece is a representation of Rachel’s idea that it is important to show that a) women were and still are the guardians of practical knowledge and b) that this knowledge of a particular phenomenon in history is still known. Rachel carries this theme of embodied ‘knowledge’ in her smaller pieces with a play on words. Her smaller “Brilliant Trees” are brilliant because of their vibrant colours but also in the idea of being brilliant is the same of being knowledgeable.

Throughout the narrative, there are many themes that intersect. The theme of practicality is demonstrated in the practicality of her new design strategy and the practicality of the knowledge of the guardian women. There is also the theme of tradition in that “Bergie Bits” is a traditional term for small pieces of iceberg and the idea that the guardian women protect a knowledge base that is traditional in nature. The questions that I now ask are: is “The Guardians” specifically a communicative expression of Rachel’s personal thoughts on spirituality? Does the element of selling influence how Rachel represents these thoughts?

On re-reading the transcript notes of Rachel’s interview, I found a passage that provides potential solutions to the above questions. Earlier in the interview, Rachel shared with me that she feels her work specifically speaks to women:

Rachel: It just speaks to women more than men, I guess because it’s a traditionally feminine field. I don’t know, women just look at it and they have an emotional reaction to it. And ah, it’s a very emotional process for me. I want people to look at that and have an emotional reaction to it, a response, a positive emotional response preferably. I think there’s enough negativity in the world. Now I’m not Pollyanna about it you know. (Rachel increases the tone of her voice) ‘Everyone has to feel good’. [**Jaime:** or lets make an apple pie..] but I think

there's enough negativity in the world, what I talk about in my work I guess is my own spiritual connection to my natural surroundings and I feel very much so that nature and the earth should be protected and not trashed so what I guess I'm speaking about mostly is how I feel when I'm out there, next to the ocean or next to a bonfire with my friends and family or in the forest where everything is quiet and you can see the full moon and all that stuff. To me, it's almost religious.

I argue that Rachel wants people to have “an emotional reaction” to her work and that this element has the capacity to influence her decision on what to create in her pieces. Now the fiber artist has a creative intent. Not only is Rachel trying to communicate through her piece but she wants to communicate something specific in order to elicit a reaction. In the narrative above, Rachel clearly indicates her spiritual beliefs in that “I talk about in my work I guess is my own spiritual connection to my natural surroundings and I feel very much so that nature and the earth should be protected and not trashed”. She goes on to share her direct experiences in nature that “out there, next to the ocean or next to a bonfire with my friends and family or in the forest” are “almost religious” experiences. Rachel clearly indicated to me that she aligns her spirituality with her experiences in nature and that nature is to be protected like the knowledge of the women in “The Guardians”. While I find no evidence to answer the second question that I posed, the element of selling these very personal and expressive pieces must somehow come into consideration within the decision making process in terms of theme and content. Rachel's show is a selling show so one can assume that there is a market for her spiritual expressions. In the end, Rachel's decision to express and communicate her deep spiritual beliefs through her work illustrates the use of active agency in her life.

Vicky and "The Magi"

In a similar example to Rachel's piece "The Guardians", I would like to discuss Vicky's expression of spiritual beliefs in her selling work "The Magi". Vicky is a woman in her early thirties who has a family that consists of a husband Charles and an almost year-old daughter named Catherine. For the interview, all were present in the room for most of the time we discovered quilting. The living room itself had an entire wall dedicated to books as well as Vicky's sewing and cutting table and the couch which I sat upon. Above my head hung a stunning black, red and blue Amish quilt; Catherine and one of the family dogs (who was named after an Ewok in Star Wars) played on the floor in front of me. Vicky, who has completed a graduate degree in religious studies, shared with me her experience of creating "The Magi". In retrospect, it was I, the anthropologist, who introduced the piece into the conversation for I had viewed it at Devon House a week before the interview.

Jaime: Do you always do scenes from Newfoundland?

Vicky: I typically do.

Jaime: I saw one of your pieces and I think it is called 'The Magi', the standing stones?

Vicky: Yeah, that one. [**Jaime:** I looked at it and thought whoa! Stone Circles.] Yeah I thought that myself. I was tidying, um John's parents had just come back from Scotland about a year ago and I had been fascinated by old architecture. I was studying old monasteries, you know, it was sort of a hangover, hangover? Coldover. (We both think of the double entendre here) [**Jaime:** a little slip there..] Hangover from a Master's degree. I have always been fascinated by stone circles, I mean, who isn't? [**Jaime:** My tattoo is a standing stone circle] I mean, who's not? I was experimenting with rocks at one point, I was doing pieces with rocks. I went to a guild meeting and we were supposed to do a Halloween piece right, and they were all putting little cats, moon and tombstones and, um, (Vicky's eyes

twinkle at me, I release a hearty laugh at the anticipation of what is to come) I don't do that. I do these..(Vicky takes out a fabric landscapes of rock-like standing stones bathed in moonlight) and people were looking at the Guild meeting 'what the hell are you doing?' [Jaime: Ah, 'I'm being unique'] I did this and it sorta looked like a graveyard, and that was sort of the approach I was going for.

Jaime and Vicky: Or it could be standing stones (this we said together in unison).

Vicky: And I looked at that and this was in October for Hallowe'en and Sharon wanted something for the Comfort and Joy show she has every Christmas and I thought, I don't want to do a stupid Christmas thing (Vicky laughs)..I don't do cut and dry, cozy woozy, cutesie Christmas stuff. I'm not that kind of a person. Um but I thought I'm still working with these stones and I was making bigger one at that point and they became the ones in 'The Magi'. And I had these three stones done and I had this marvelous sky and I thought, if I just laid them on there, actually, just accidentally laid them down there one day. I was working on two separate pieces. Stones were on and the sky and land were another one and I just laid them *so* Sharon was looking for something for the Christmas show and I had a tree skirt done up, with buildings of St. John's on it, sort of stained glass style um, but I thought I want to do something different, I want to do a landscape quilt but its hard to do a landscape quilt for Christmas right? So I did some research and I found out what the constellations would have been like at Avebury um, 3 BCE, which is the estimated date of the birth of Christ. Um, and I found out which direction of the sky I was looking. Did the research and the constellations in that piece are the ones that would have been in the sky at the time that the Magi would have been following and found out all about what the star could have been that they were following... You know, I'm not actually Christian myself, for me, putting some sort of Christmas theme, it had to take on sort of a neopagan attitude [Jaime: Yeah, something in nature] Exactly, it has to be a juxtaposition of two cultures because I wanted to show that these stones were there and even then they were old, even so at that time. So I took just three of them and they looked like they were leaning towards the moon and to the sky and it was very eerie, and I looked and said 'gee, they're old, those are wise in their own way. So they became Magi. So there is a lot of research that goes on behind these sort of things, um, if I'm trying to portray something, I will research the star constellations, the meaning of them for instance um, the star constellations in the sky at that time actually had significance for wise people or astronomers of the time. The reason why the Magi specifically went to the east was because they saw two constellations of stars that preordained the coming of a king. And these people were not even the same religious or cultural background. You have *three* cultures²

² Here, Vicky's historical references to the identity of 'cultures' that existed around the birth of Christ are confusing. There can not be a Christian culture before or at the birth of Christ in terms of the sequence of historical events: Christ is born and then Christianity follows. As well, the Islamic faith was introduced after 600 A.D. with the writings of Mohammad who was born around 570 C.E. (Ahmed 1992:43). Lila

there. You have Judeo Christian because of the Jesus thing (Vicky laughs at her own phrase) I'm sorry. You have Mideastern probably Islamic, at that time or pseudo Islamic (clock chimes in the background) and then you have England's pre-existing, Great Britain's preexisting cultures at that time. So it was a combination of the three that I was looking for.

Vicky's expression and communication of her spirituality in "The Magi" is multi-faceted. Her narrative gradually reveals her spiritual beliefs but also reveals much of her other interests. At first, Vicky states that she was "fascinated by old architecture" at the time as she was studying monasteries after the completion of her Master's degree. She became fascinated by "stone circles" of the British Isles. Vicky reveals her perception of her uniqueness as an individual when describing the facial reactions of her fellow guild members at the October meeting of that year. The other members of the guild who had created pieces with Halloween themes were utilizing popular images of Halloween subjects: little cats, moons and tombstones. Vicky is clear that "I don't do that" and proceeds to show me her piece that she created for the meeting. The landscape piece has a dark and eerie quality to it as it is done in dark blues and blacks signifying night fall and shadowed greys for the standing rocks. When Vicky reveals her creation, the members of the guild in Vicky's eyes perceive a difference in her work. I argue that Vicky uses this example to demonstrate to me that not only does she see her work as unique, but that she actively chooses to produce unique and different objects than other guild members.

Ahmed explains that the first "urban centers of the Middle East arose in Mesopotamia- in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the southern half of modern Iraq-between 3500 and 3000 B.C.E." (1992:12). Assyrian Law came into effect around 1200 B.C.E. (*Ibid.*:13). Mazdakism "was a religious movement that flourished in the late fifth and early sixth centuries C.E." (*Ibid.*:21) Around the birth of Christ, Ahmed indicates that there were various religions which were active in the Middle East including Zoroastrian, Persian and Sasanian spiritualities and societies (*Ibid.*:18-20). Thus there can not be Islamic or pseudo-Islamic religion in this area at the birth of Christ. I believe that when Vicky states that there also exists 'Great Britain's preexisting cultures', she is referencing that these cultures existed on the British Isles and not in the Middle East.

This expression of uniqueness occurs again when Vicky talks about how her Halloween piece becomes inspiration for “The Magi”. Sharon, the individual who runs and organizes the Craft Council Gallery at Devon House, asked Vicky for a piece to place in the ‘Comfort and Joy’ show that Christmas season. Vicky remarked “I don’t want to do stupid Christmas things” and “I don’t do cut and dry, cozy woozy, cutesie Christmas stuff” and “I’m not that kind of person”. Here, Vicky is identifying who she is as a person in reference to what she does not produce: standard, iconic Christmas symbols. But this identification of the self becomes more complex as Vicky continues her narrative about “The Magi”. She had previously worked on stone like pieces and united by accident two different pieces together to form her Christmas landscape piece.

The issue that captures my attention is the amount of detail and purposeful planning of meaning evoked by “The Magi”. It is in Vicky’s description of her design that one senses her notions of spirituality. Vicky researched the patterns of the constellations *she* believed might have been in the sky at the birth of Christ. The detail does not end here as she also researched specifically about the star that the Magi could have followed at the time. It is at this point in the narrative that Vicky reveals that she is “not actually Christian”. In doing a piece for a Christmas show, it is important to Vicky that the piece “had to take on sort of a neo-pagan attitude” where there was a “juxtaposition of two cultures” and that “these stones were there and even then they were old”. Continuing with the earth-centred spirituality theme of the piece, the stones themselves become “The Magi” as they are “old” and are “wise in their own way”. Here, Vicky provides evidence that the landscape quilt not only has a purpose but that the decisions behind its design and the communication of its central meaning (that pre-Christian spirituality is just as

significant as Christian spirituality) are *themselves* purposeful. Again, Vicky ends her narrative about “The Magi” in that she clearly indicates to me what she interprets to be the existence of three ‘cultures’ represented. In the end, what is important to note is that Vicky is actively communicating through “The Magi” her own spiritual beliefs and the importance that they be adequately represented along with spiritualities that are considered major world religions. Vicky’s spirituality has pagan overtones but she also ultimately reveals her own perception of the uniqueness of her self through the uniqueness of her creations like “The Magi”.

5.2.3: Voices of the Past and Identity: The Problem of a Newfoundland ‘Essence’

The inspiration which brought me to conduct research in Newfoundland was my curiosity in the expressions of a Newfoundland identity. Is there such a thing as ‘a’ Newfoundland identity? Commercial advertising in many national magazines, newspapers and on Canadian television stations such as the CBC flash images of Vikings at L’Anse aux Meadows, natural phenomena such as inland fiords in Gros Morne National Park, icebergs and whales. People who live throughout Newfoundland have also been heavily stereotyped in ‘Newfie’ jokes as well as the dominating image of ‘the fisherman’ and simplistic outpost community life.

One of the recurring themes that I was interested in pursuing was the relationship between quilters and the negotiation of identities of the ‘self’ and how these identities are connected to the production of their quilts themselves (Yetman and M’Closkey 2001, Maskiell 1999, Dawson 1998, Hides 1997, Ribeiro 1987). By looking at the quilts themselves and the narratives that surround them, I want to consider how women who

quilt mould their personhoods and sense of self and express specific Newfoundland identities in their quilts.

There exists a complex relationship between politics, economics and issues of style when considering narratives of women who quilt which focus on discussing either 'Newfoundland symbolism' or a 'Newfoundland influence' in their work and in their lives. A larger, uniting issue that binds economic and political motivations is discussed in Stuart Ewen's (1988) All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture. For those who quilt and those who purchase or view quilts are "engaged in a relationship with style" where "the media of style offer[s] to lift the viewer out of his or her life and place him or her in a utopian netherworld where there are no conflicts, no needs unmet; where the ordinary is-by its very nature-extraordinary" (Ewen 1988:14). However, style is an "intimate component of subjectivity, intertwined with people's aspirations and anxieties" and style is a "decisive component of politics: political issues and politicians are regularly subjected to the cosmetic sorcery of image managers, providing the public with a telegenic commodity" (Ewen 1988:22). Style is constructed *individually* as well as *collectively*. Do women who quilt in St. John's communicate a specific Newfoundland 'style'? What kind of Newfoundland is corporealized in quilts?

James Overton (1996) considers the issue of a Newfoundland style and the commodification of stereotyped Newfoundland 'culture' in Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland. Overton defines what he sees others define as the 'Real' Newfoundland style:

“The ‘Real’ Newfoundland” is said to be those parts of the province which are remote from towns and highways of major importance. To find “the ‘Real’ Newfoundland visitors are urged to ‘go down the side roads’ and ‘poke into the bays’, to ‘turn to the ocean and test the breeze; smell the salt, the wave torn kelp, the spray washed air, the saturated, aged sand’. “The ‘Real’ Newfoundland” is the outports and ‘the people’, ‘the fishermen knitting their nets, caulking their boats or building a wiggly garden rod fence’. In short, it is a vision of rural Newfoundland, but only a certain kind of rural Newfoundland, one which is idealized and romanticized...[The] images which are stressed are those which emphasize such characteristics of the people as strength, pride, independence, fortitude, individualism, respect for the past, love for the environment, freshness, vitality, hospitality, simplicity, generosity, kindness, openness. The ‘people’ are ‘happy’, they have ‘great community spirit’, they enjoy the good life and above all they have real culture (1996:106).

In this view, Newfoundland is a place with no conflict, disease, violence or poverty. It is also portrayed as a place that is frozen in time and does not exhibit change. While reading Overton’s account, one almost sees the frosty edges around the pictures as they are constructed in the mind; an idealized past (and present?) intended for tourists and other ‘outsiders’. However, the majority of the women with whom I interacted did not produce to sell their quilts. Is there a nostalgia that is evoked in their quilts regardless of the intended audience?

The promotion of an idealized or nostalgic past also raises the issue of heritage. The ‘Real’ Newfoundland that Overton describes is an “invented” Newfoundland, not unlike Hobsbawm’s idea of an “invented tradition”³. I had began my fieldwork with the assumption that the images that comprise this vision of Newfoundland are a part of an agenda by the tourist industry in order to promote “a heritage message”, a packaged

³ Hobsbawm defines the term “invented tradition” as meaning ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” or “a suitable historical past” (1983:1). For a critique of Hobsbawm’s “The Invention of Tradition”, please see Charles L. Briggs’ (1996) “The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the ‘Invention of Tradition’”.

culture from the past where because "it has no intrinsic 'meaning', heritage has no existence either" where "it is there as bits of stone and mud, metal and wood; but it only becomes 'heritage' when we, and we alone, give it a value-laden significance" (Boniface and Fowler 1993:157-158). However, the images of outport culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Newfoundland are given value by the quilter's themselves in that it is their active *choice* to reproduce a certain image of Newfoundland in their quilts. Is it within this choice that one may find personal agency?

Overton's main argument is that the communication and distribution of the 'Real' Newfoundland outport culture, without disease, conflict or despair, are also politically motivated images (1996:104). There is a paradox here, for if "underdevelopment in Newfoundland provides the context for attempts to use tourism as an economic development strategy, it also provides the 'raw material' for a certain kind of tourist development" (1996:105). Overton is quick to point out that the Newfoundland portrayed above is a façade to another Newfoundland: "a place of massive unemployment", "of poverty of many people" in both rural and urban contexts, "of dependence on government transfer payments", "of out-migration and rural decay", "of mining, forestry and power production" and a Newfoundland "in which the merchant system locked 'peasant producers into the world market, a Newfoundland characterized by exploitation and oppression" (1996:106). Are women who quilt in St. John's using romanticized images for a specific purpose or expression? One must keep in mind that Newfoundland as a province is culturally diverse. Yet Overton's last warning serves as a reminder that the image of the 'Real' Newfoundland "depoliticizes and mythologized" the "extremes of poverty and wealth" in Newfoundland where it "purifies them, makes them innocent"

(1996:123). Quilters then do not live in a cultural vacuum but rather are integrated in a complex nexus of political, economic and historical contexts and become embedded in these contexts.

With these thoughts in mind, I wish to orientate the reader toward what Newfoundland female quilters are choosing to represent in their quilted pieces. What are the cultural politics that surround these choices? What kind of Newfoundland is being expressed and what is being silenced in the process? The narratives that follow from Katie, Karen and Lori are from women who were born and raised in St. John's, Newfoundland and they continually expressed pride in this fact.

Katie and I sit down for our interview at an old, long boardroom like table on the top floor of the Anna Templeton Centre. Katie is a textile studies instructor at the Centre, and has taught quilting, embroidery and fabric dyeing. A middle aged woman who was born and raised in Newfoundland, she had the opportunity to visit the entire island in her twenties as a fieldworker for Anna Templeton herself. Katie would instruct outport women's groups and communities on the design aspect of producing handmade objects such as sweaters and embroidery. She herself has quilted but admits that because of the lack of time for her own projects, her role is to instruct those who wish to learn the process of design and production. My initial question for many of my informants was to ask whether they themselves had any questions about the research project. After explaining to Katie that my general focus was to investigate the influences and motivations for women to quilt and how these influenced the creation of personhoods, I asked her where she was from. Katie responded that she was born and raised in

Newfoundland and had a strong sense of what Newfoundland is all about. Here is the conversation that followed:

Jaime: Have you been born and raised in Newfoundland?

Katie: Yes.

Jaime: And what made you want to stay?

Katie: Um...family...and a strong sense of what Newfoundland is all about. I like Newfoundland, I would live nowhere else. I like to visit other places.

Jaime: What is Newfoundland all about to you?

Katie: (Pause) I think, I like the people, I like the community. I really love the artistic community in Newfoundland. I really like the way it falls together and it's interesting how it falls apart too. And I really like...the climate even though a lot of people hate it, um, when people come from away. I really like the strength of the, the dynamic qualities of the climate and the land and the whole rawness. My parents came from England and they immigrated here in the early 50's so I'm, ah, I don't have the big long heritage that some people have [**Jaime:** family] of Newfoundland family. Um, but I wouldn't, I really like Newfoundland, probably for the same reasons they decided to stay in Newfoundland...

While Katie does not specifically talk about a certain artistic piece, I wanted to introduce the reader in this section to ideas of how 'Newfoundland' is perceived by the quilters themselves. Katie associates 'community' and 'people' with Newfoundland and specifically with the "artistic community". She elaborates on how she finds it interesting "the way it falls together" and "how it falls apart too". Within this narrative there is also the introduction of the importance of nature. The climate is "dynamic" as well as the land; there exists a "whole rawness". I argue that this vision of Newfoundland displays an unpredictability but also a simpleness to its conception. This is a Newfoundland of the elements, the land and 'the people'.

Later in the interview, I returned to this idea of 'rawness' as I wanted Katie to clarify exactly what she meant. She addressed the idea of 'rawness' as it pertained to her vision of "what Newfoundland is all about":

.....
Jaime: Drawing the interview to a close, I think there are two things that you've already said or mentioned. When you're talking about when you love Newfoundland, you said "rawness". Could you explain what that means?

Katie: Well, just the rawness of everything. The rawness of the wind, the rawness of the...like when you're in England, every single, that's, that's the home, my mother always said "home was England, I'm going home" and you know, every single spot has a brick wall or a rock wall or a fence. There is few wild flowers. Everything is all controlled and the thing about Newfoundland is that nothing is controlled. People try to control it and its just so spectacular. I am able to go for a lovely walk everyday and it brings me to the top of Conception Bay, a gentle walk to the tops of a mountain and you see all of Conception Bay. One day you could be walking up and you see twenty or thirty big crows sort of plummeting off of the top of...sort of the unexpected, it could be windy, it could be rainy...it could be dead calm. That's what I like about Newfoundland is the unexpected, the ocean, the way it pounds in, and the people are for the most part, all really um, honest (pause). There's not a lot of (pause)

Jaime: Pretense?

Katie: Pretense, yeah.

For Katie, there is a "rawness" to everything. Her reflection on her mother's notion of home delineates what is Newfoundland and what is not Newfoundland. England is home to her mother but to Katie, England is "controlled" where every "single spot" is occupied by either fence or wall. In contrast, Newfoundland is raw in that it is not controlled; it is wild versus a "developed" England. There is also the element of the "unexpected" in her recount of a walk to the top of a mountain in order to see Conception Bay. Her example of twenty or thirty crows plummeting contextualized Newfoundland outdoors as dynamic. The weather also is dynamic in Katie's analysis of rawness where "it could be windy, it

could be rainy...it could be dead calm". Lastly, the people are "for the most part, honest". I argue that the elements of 'rawness', 'unexpected', 'uncontrolled', 'dynamic' and 'honesty' frames Newfoundland as an experience of wilderness and of innocence.

Like Katie, Lori Shortall's life is filled with personal and professional responsibilities. As the Guild's current president, I am excited that she can spend an hour or two talking about quilting in her life. We sit inside a research room that I have booked for the semester at the Queen Elizabeth II library. The room itself is very plain with only a wooden desk, chair and wall shelving system to entertain the eye. Lori, on the other hand, is never as dull as this room. The only word I can use to describe her is "energetic". It seems to emanate from the very tips of her straight, bright red hair and as we begin our conversation together, her body language of expressive hand gestures and the biggest smile I have ever seen reads excitement. Lori is also a music teacher and at once pleaded her sympathy in writing a Master's Thesis. I appreciated the warning of "blood, sweat and tears" and "when you're done, it feels like giving birth" and found a sympathetic companion. As we spoke in that little cell on the fourth floor, I noted that Lori spoke with one of the many Newfoundland accents that exist today. My curiosity got the better of me and I was eager to ask her about expressing 'Newfoundland' or a 'Newfoundland identity' in her work.

Jaime: Now it's interesting that, cause you were talking about it really depends on what's around you when you choose colour and when you choose your pattern, um, what's your opinion, I don't know, I've been asking people who are born and raised in Newfoundland, is there such a thing as a Newfoundland style?...

Lori: Yeah, I'm actually working on a piece now. A friend of mine is from St. John's but she now lives in Malta. Yeah, she's married to a Maltese man and um, she plays, she's a flute player too and why plays for the Maltese orchestra. He

works for the Maltese Government, he's like a finance money guy and um, they have their house filled with art. The most interesting home, its just stone, their walls are two feet thick with big pieces of stone, no insulation, no nothing. Just stone and really kind of cool. So she wanted, they have some David Blackwood, they have some Ed Roach, they have a lot of Newfoundland stuff. He finds Newfoundland interesting too because its *different* for him as he now lives in Malta, he is Maltese and for her, it's the *same*, its *home* you know? I think that's why they always like it. Something different for him, something the same for her. They asked me to do a piece they wanted a picture of Cape Spear and what I usually quilt is like, what you think of 'quilts' but they want a photograph done. So I went up to Cape Spear and took some photos and that's what I'm working on now along with this other flowery one, its literally going to be a picture of Cape Spear. The water, and the ocean, rocks, stuff you know?

Jaime: Now is this a landscape or a quilt?

Lori: It's both. It's a landscape quilt. That's exactly what you call it: a landscape quilt. Whenever you technically quilt a picture of a landscape exterior kind of thing, usually it's called a landscape quilt.

Jaime: And that's interesting that Cape Spear is something, also, there is the individual level, that she wanted this and that you're going to do that for her. So, do you think there *is* a Newfoundland style?

Lori: I don't know if there is a Newfoundland style but this has nothing to do with quilting. This is almost a political thing. If you ask most Newfoundlanders: 'where ya from?', they say Newfoundland. If you ask, I think now, I'm making a statement here, anywhere else in Canada 'where ya from?', they say Canada.

Jaime: Or their town...like "I'm from Peterborough, Ontario."

Lori: Exactly, right. Newfoundlanders will answer you: 'Newfoundland'. And if you ask them where their allegiance lies, they'll gonna say Newfoundland, not Canada. They get to pick, they did pick.

Jaime: Or its Newfoundland first, Canada second.

Lori: But I think they think of themselves as Newfoundlanders first, and I think *that colours* everything you do in life, that you're a Newfoundlander. I think Canadian does too but *Newfoundlanders* are very different than the rest of Canada you know? (pause)

Jaime: And do you learn that at school? From your parents?

Lori: It's just *cultural*. It's just *cultural*. I mean, there's this girl that I met recently, maybe about a month ago or so. She's a really nice girl actually and uh, I remember one of my friends saying to me "Is such and such from here?" and I went "No", "So where's she from?" "I don't know but she's not a Newfoundlander" and we went out for supper on Friday night and we asked her if she was a Newfoundlander and she said no, she's from Nova Scotia and that is where we had guessed...but she's *not* a Newfoundlander.

Jaime: Ahhhhhhhhhh

Lori: And it had to do with the way she talks, the way she dresses. (pause) *Everything*. And I just knew.

Jaime: What do you mean the way that she dresses? I'm just interested because....

Lori: Newfoundlanders are *not* big dress up people. We're very comfortable in our own skin. There's no pretense or whatever. *Every* time I see her, she's dressed extremely well {not that that is a bad thing} (whispers)

Jaime: No, no, no...

Lori: I don't find that there is a comfort level with her...Newfoundlanders are very comfortable in their own skin, it's not that they don't feel the need to dress up for people, you know, dress up professionally for work.

Jaime: And for special occasions like anybody else would.

Lori: Yeah, you know, when its down time, like on the Friday night we went out for supper, very casual, that kind of thing, jeans, not sweatpants but jeans, that kind of thing. She had on an office suit. So I think it carries over to the quilting world, I think it carries over into everything you do. I think being a Newfoundlanders colours every aspect of your life.

Jaime: How does it carry over into the quilting world?

Lori: I think we do quilt a lot of landscapes. If they landscape quilt, they landscape quilt Newfoundland scenes, not anywhere else. The pitcher plant is a very popular item that if you are making a bag, a lot of us have our guild bags that we keep all our paraphernalia. I bet you there's fifteen of them that one side is a pitcher plant... You find a lot of Newfoundland tartan in things, which I hate (both of us laugh)

Jaime: Is it one of the ugly ones?

Lori: I just don't like it...you find it in a lot of *homemade, handmade* objects, the Newfoundland tartan. So I don't know if there's necessarily a Newfoundland 'style' but I think that there is an (pause) influence, something there that sometimes will tell you it's a Newfoundland quilt. Sometimes you pick something because you like it.

Jaime: Or take something from your natural environment.

The beginning of the conversation about whether there exists a Newfoundland style focuses on Lori's description of how her friend requested an iconic quilted creation. After describing who she is talking about (her friend from Newfoundland and the friend's Maltese husband), Lori focuses on first describing their house itself in Malta. The house is completely built of stone but it is what is stored inside that has value. There is a lot of "Newfoundland stuff" and it is "just filled with art". The couple have works from noted professional Newfoundland artists such as David Blackwood and Ed Roach. Each partner member of the couple enjoys this Newfoundland art from different perspectives: for the husband, the appreciation comes from a point of *difference* whereas Lori's friend takes pleasure from its *sameness* and from its sense of home. It is interesting to note that the couple proceeds to request a landscape quilt of Cape Spear, a noted Newfoundland historical site. Also to be included by Lori are "the water", "the ocean" and "rocks". The landscape quilt that Lori is creating is on the surface communicating a specific Newfoundland scene. It is of a location (most easterly point in North America), it is of natural surroundings (water, ocean, rocks) and it is of a place (Cape Spear). Here, the meaning of place differs from that of location in that I take location as representing a geographic reference point. A place denotes a location (as described above) that has *contextual cultural meaning* assigned to it. Cape Spear is understood to be the most

easterly point in Newfoundland, in Canada and in North America. The meaning that Cape Spear evokes to Lori's friend is one of 'home' even though she has never lived in that location. The categories of 'home', 'Newfoundland', 'place' and 'sameness' converge and are communicated through the quilt itself.

After discussing Lori's landscape quilt, I wanted to unpack and clarify whether Lori indeed thought there existed a Newfoundland style. Her response to my first use of the question was to talk about her Cape Spear commission for her friend but Lori still had not responded 'yes' or 'no'. On the second attempt of the question, the landscape quilt discussion became a conversational platform from which to ground my inquiry. In the narrative that followed, Lori slowly deconstructs the idea of 'Newfoundlandness' herself. Cultural alliance, as it pertains to identity, is "a political thing" and "has nothing to do with quilting". To Lori, Newfoundlanders are different from the rest of Canada as they would respond to the question "where ya from?" with "Newfoundland" instead of "Canada". If one were to ask "where their alliangence lies", they will answer "Newfoundland". Newfoundlanders therefore *"get to pick"* this aspect of self and thus a cultural, political alliance (author's emphasis).

Lori also expressed that being a Newfoundlander "colours everything you do in life". It is interesting to note the metaphor of colour in that throughout the interview itself, Lori was clear to point out the importance of choosing colour and utilizing effective colour combinations in quilts. Here, the idea of colour is active in tone where the part of the self that is considered "Newfoundlander" weaves and paints one's perspectives and approaches in life. The example that Lori gives is the introduction of a new peer in her life. Lori is asked where this peer is from, an echo from the earlier "where ya from?". It is

Lori who states definitively that “she’s not a Newfoundlander”. From this point in the conversation, I wanted to know how Lori knew this. Lori replied that she knew “from the way she talks, the way she dresses”, it was “*everything*” and she “just knew”. Lori continues that Newfoundlanders are “very comfortable in our own skin” and we are “not big dress up people”. Lori continues that the rest of her companions were “very casual” whereas the non-Newfoundlander had on “an office suit”. Lori is quick to point out that Newfoundlanders do indeed dress up for events like work. Then Lori seems to contradict a statement she had made at the beginning of our conversation: being a Newfoundlander “carries over to the quilting world”. This identity is carried into the quilting world through the production of landscape quilts where the majority of quilters in Newfoundland create “Newfoundland scenes” and “not anywhere else”. Lori goes on to identify certain icons that may also be included in quilted items like carry bags: the pitcher plant (official provincial flower) and the Newfoundland tartan. The Newfoundland tartan occurs specifically in “*homemade, handmade*” objects. Like the landscape quilt of Cape Spear, the idea of Newfoundland is embedded in quilted objects in the themes of nature and of home. While there is not necessarily a Newfoundland style, there is an “influence”. For Lori, being a Newfoundlander is thus an identity that is juxtaposed between choice and non-choice. One can choose their political alliance but the actual act of communicating that one is a Newfoundlander (through dress and behaviour) is “just cultural”.

Karen was one of the few quilters who actually deconstructed the meaning of her quilts directly to me during our interview. It is Karen’s Newfoundland inspired quilt

which I present as an example that clearly illustrates the corporealization of *chosen* Newfoundland symbols in a wall-hung quilt as well as the communication of a *chosen* Newfoundland self.

Karen: But it's landscapes...Now I have made some quilts for my family and I have made just the traditional one. There's this one here (Karen looks over to the quilt hung on the wall behind to her left). It's just a pine tree quilt. Now I did design the center blocks there which [**Jaime:** Its almost leaves...] Well, that was for a show at Devon House and it was called 'Threads That Bind' and they wanted a Newfoundlandia theme so I called (points to the quilt on the wall again) 'When Sun Rays Crown...Pine-Clad Hills' kind of thing, you know, 'Ode to Newfoundland', right? That, that's the winter branches in the center as with the snow on them. And then I sort of have the waves around the edge. I bound it in red. I mean, yes, there is symbolism in that...I used certain colours: the red I sort of symbolized for the blood of the Newfoundland people and the binding of the red around. And then the pine trees I started off mainly because my husband love two colour quilts, white and another colour but um you know when that show was coming up, I decided to make that and I started in, well, you can't really tell but I used metallic threads coming through for the rays of the sun that you can't really see but they go through some of the trees, usually when you use metallic threads, you almost have to make the stitches really large. But anyway, that was sort of the symbolism of the quilt...

Here, Karen clearly communicates the specific Newfoundland symbols she employs in her quilt "When Sun Rays Crown..Pine-Clad Hills". The title itself comes from the first line in the "Ode to Newfoundland" poem. The quilt was begun with the idea of a Newfoundland theme. Karen reveals that it was intended for a show at Devon House entitled "Threads That Bind". One can see that in the title of the show itself, there is the metaphor of 'binding' meaning not only to bind or weave in thread but also to be bound together in identity. Karen continues to point out the significance of the symbols she chose to use in the quilt. The hand-quilted winter branch patterns in the white sections of the quilt are stylized to look like they have snow on them while the dark green geometric pine tree segments that alternate are symbolic of the 'Pine-Clad Hills' of Newfoundland.

Around the border of the quilt, there occurs a wave pattern that counter-acts the formalized pine trees. To finish the symbolic piece, Karen states that she bound the entire quilt's edge with red binding to "symbolize the blood of the Newfoundland people". In keeping with the idea of 'binding' I discussed before, there are many ways 'the Newfoundland people' are bound together in the quilt itself. Karen is communicating that 'the Newfoundland people' are bound in blood or birthright and that they are bound in a shared wilderness/nature (e.g. pine-clad hills, snow in winter on branches, waves of the ocean). The metallic threads that Karen used to denote the sunrays permeate the entire quilt. It is my interpretation that these rays shine down to encompass this specific, bounded "Newfoundland".

Karen also reveals her ideas of what denotes 'Newfoundland' and what her responsibility as a Newfoundlander is toward these ideas. In the narrative that follows, Karen specifically takes her inspiration for creating fabric landscapes out of a need to explore, capture and preserve the past:

Karen: I'm never had anyone turn down a piece. But one person in particular was going to get me to do something and then he realized that I better let you do it on your own, because not everything that someone comes up with will make a picture. I don't like doing just what I call 'a pretty picture'. I like to have..in my landscapes there has to be something in them that evokes Newfoundland, a sense, a feeling and whatever. The piece I did last year for Devon house was an old house. I go out on the island with my husband once a year and we take pictures of the outports. We take a certain by or area. We're trying to do the whole island and this old house was down on Fogo Island and it was a run down house, the clapboard was completely grey and fading and the front yard. It was on a bluff of a hill looking out to sea and it had the rocks and it had fishing twine and between it all, wildflowers were growing, but to me it was like, there's a life. Imagine this house in its hay day when [Jaime: people were in it] there was a family, there was fish and all that's gone and yet every year the wild flowers all come back. That's why I called it 'Wild Flowers Filled In'. My titles of my pieces are really important to me. Because a lot of them say exactly what I'm feeling here. A lot of

me is heart, you know? I mean, my father painted, traveled around the island, took pictures. As a young child, we were privy to slide shows when we came back. You would see us in some little outport...It's part of my love for Newfoundland, my landscapes...

Jaime: I was going to ask when you said 'a piece of Newfoundland, what is Newfoundland to you?

Karen: I mean, I grew up in St. John's but my father did travel a lot alone and as he aged and retired and mom and he would take a lot of pictures and I use a lot of Dad's slides in my work. He's got pictures in the 1960's and 70's when the fishing stages and flakes and all that were still out there and *I'm* trying to go now because every year, there another one collapses into the sea, with the fishery gone and you have and you've got old (Karen's voice is inaudible for a second) homes or you've got homes bigger than half of St. John's in these outports and all the older homes are gone, the way of life is just dying out. So I'm trying to capture that as much as I can, so I've got thousands of slides that *I* use for my pieces and um...so that's where my work has come.

There is a nostalgic element to Karen's inspiration. The Newfoundland that Karen 'preserves' is a very specific Newfoundland. Karen was born and raised in St. John's but it is not a St. John's landscape that she creates but rather a decaying outport. It is not only a decaying outport house that is represented but a certain way of life that is now "dying out". It is vitally important to Karen that her pictures are not just "a pretty picture". She continues to state that in her landscapes, there "has to be something that evokes Newfoundland" where this something is a "sense" or a "feeling". Her narrative in explaining a specific landscape piece intended for sale at Devon House is accompanied with another personal significant activity: photographing outport communities in order to capture stills of island life. It is my impression that Karen strongly feels like outport life is slipping away. Her landscape depicts what she saw but also her reaction to what she saw on Fogo Island. The roughness of the natural world comes across in Karen's words in

that the house is described as being overrun by wildflowers and standing on a bluff overlooking the sea.

The meaning that Karen expresses through her piece is not only of preservation but also how she herself is vitally connected to the Newfoundland landscape. The title of the piece "Wild Flowers Filled In" is important to Karen as it also expresses "exactly what I'm feeling here" and "a lot of me is heart". In this way, Karen creates the assurance that the piece is not just a pretty piece to look at but one should get an emotional reaction to it. Karen was not only trying to represent a still of outport life but also her own conviction of the fate of outport life: the family in the house is gone as are the fish, nature is reclaiming its place in another form of life. Karen's landscape is a specific image of outport Newfoundland where one does not see portrayals of human hardships such as disease and starvation. However, one can look at the situation at another angle: there is also a drive in Karen to create in response to the destruction around her. Karen feels a responsibility as a Newfoundlander to capture the remnants of outport life for she is trying to document the island every year, like her father before her, because "another [house] collapses into the sea". This vision of outport life is also being destroyed through construction in that there are now "homes bigger than half of St. John's". These homes clearly interfere with Karen's vision of outport culture.

Karen, by preserving the past within her landscape quilts, also preserves a piece of her 'self'. She communicates a desire to create a "legacy" of her self:

In a way, I'm driven to have stuff left behind when I'm no longer here, its something I've always, you know. Like my husband was saying the other day, we have a friend who sailed around the world and 'you know, I don't have a dream'. Well, I said, 'My dream really, that I have a dream that I want to produce something to be left behind, a legacy to me. But I'll just know that something's

left on this earth when I'm gone. It's a quirk of mine but I don't care what it is I'm doing, I always gotta be producing something nice, that's pretty. I don't care if it's a small thing, or what it is who gets its...someone's enjoying them.

As mentioned before, Karen has a drive to preserve a specific vision of Newfoundland outpost life. The narrative above illustrates that Karen also has a drive to preserve her self for future generations. In communicating 'preservation of the past' in her pieces, she preserves her self at the same time in that her dream is that she wants "to produce something to be left behind, a legacy". Karen ends with what can be interpreted as a contradiction to previous opinions in that she "always gotta be producing something nice, that's pretty". What is important is that, for Karen, "someone's enjoying" her creations and perhaps enjoying an experience of part of herself at the same time. Karen demonstrates personal agency in her choice of representing and preserving a specific vision of rural Newfoundland.

5.3: Conclusions

In this chapter, I attempted to first theoretically situate the concepts of power and agency in order to clarify their specific definition for the reader. Power exists in dialogic relationships and is negotiated by individuals and collections of individuals. Agency therefore has the capacity to be expressed within the spectrum of self destructive and liberating. Women who quilt in St. John's demonstrated a progressive agency by using quilts as vehicles of communication in expressing voices of motivation, spirituality and specific notions of Newfoundland identities. By producing and thus communicating through quilts, many women who quilt corporealize human experience into fabric. Quilts

thus become evidence of a material locus of agency. It is in this dynamic relationship between creator and creation that one sees agency manifested through material creations.

When considering the personal agency of women who quilt in St. John's, this agency exists because the quilters themselves are embedded in relations of power in their daily lives. Women who quilt work inside and outside of the home, pay taxes and /or purchase goods in order to make their expressive creations. But like Foucault's eighteenth century soldiers, women also have the capacity for active agency. Karen engages in personal agency by communicating a voice of motivation and a voice of commemoration in terms of creating a quilt for her son's graduation. However, this agency is limited structurally in that she may emotionally effect her son but the final grade of B+ will still be present on his report card. Her expression of agency is thus relegated to the realm of the personal.

Some women who quilt in St. John's also communicated personal messages in quilts intended for public context. Rachel, in her creation of "The Guardians", communicated that she values the concept of gendered embodied knowledge. The embodied knowledge within her specific quilted creation is gendered and to Rachel, speaks more to a specific observer: women. Rachel's decision to express and communicate her deep spiritual beliefs through her work illustrates the use of active personal agency. In terms of communicating voices of the past and identity, some quilters expressed voices of past and present images of Newfoundland and Newfoundland identities. There also exists here the processes of simplification and homogenization where the poverty and realities of living in Newfoundland are not shown; they are silenced or rendered invisible. According to Lori and Katie, being a Newfoundlander can

“carry over to the quilting world” with visual representations of place, location and a “rawness”.

In the next chapter, I will argue that the narratives that surround quilts are dominated by how quilters use the quilts themselves for personal agency and/or social action. By considering the guild’s creative responses to a fellow member’s cancer and “The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project” eastern tour exhibition, I will demonstrate how quilts become *strategic vehicles* in order to promote active personal agency and community responses to illness.

CHAPTER 6: FROM PERSONAL AGENCY TO SOCIAL ACTION

The imagery is startling and compelling. Think of it-a ribbon around the Pentagon-lengths of colorful fabric stitched by women and ceremonially wrapped around an impenetrable, stone building that symbolizes the nation's military might. My attention has focused on discerning what these women hoped to accomplish with such a project and understanding why it was done in just this way (Pershing 1993:329).

But no matter what we say/ About how ritual and talk
Promise comfort, promise cure,/ Survival is the hardest art.
Through each garish square is testimony/ To mend the tatters of terror and shame,
These emblems of abuse only sheathe/ The teased cotton batting,
The unraveling thread./ As each pierce of the needle
Stitches the fragments whole,/ Believe, O believe, this fabric bleeds
(Taylor *in* Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000:1).

6.1: Piecework, Peace Work and Pain: Quilters' Personal Agency

Linda Pershing's 'Peace Work out of Piecework: Feminist Needlework Metaphors and The Ribbon around the Pentagon' (1993) considers the story of Justine Merritt and the fruition of her vision of The Ribbon, a nationwide sewing and needlework project of social resistance against the global race for nuclear arms arsenals. L. Elizabeth Beattie and Mary Angela Shaughnessy's *Sisters in Pain: Battered Women Fight Back* (2000) also present an account of an in-prison Kentucky women's therapy group, who self-titled their group 'Sisters in Pain', and their quest for personal strength and healing through creating a quilt together. These women were also on a quest to challenge the existing laws and statutes pertaining to "gain[ing] clemency for incarcerated women who [had] been battered" and who had been sentenced to long prison terms for either killing or assaulting their attacker (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000:5). In this chapter, I first intend to take a critical look at how both groups of women utilize their quilted creations for not only

personal agency but also social action. I then discuss the Cabot Quilter's Guild's response to the illness of a friend of creating a memory quilt. The final section of this chapter will consider the process of memorialization and how women have the capacity to use the production of quilts as vehicles of social agency in the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt for those who have died of AIDS and in my direct experience in participating in The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Eastern Tour Exhibition 2003.

I found the inspiration for writing this chapter in Linda Pershing's quote above. What did the women from the Cabot Quilter's Guild 'hope to accomplish' in creating a memory quilt for their fellow quilter who was going through cancer treatments at the time? What was special about the quilt itself and 'why was it done in just this way'? How does "The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project" exhibition compare to "The Ribbon" in terms of supporting social action?

Art, politics and social action are deeply entwined in a nexus of communication, mobilization and social agency. In 1982, Justine Merritt first brainstormed the idea of The Ribbon to her family and friends, when it was an idea of "making an immense ribbon of decorated fabric to tie around the Pentagon as a ceremonial plea for peace"(Pershing 1993:328). Merritt chose the Pentagon itself as a symbol for "my nation's violence"(Pershing 1993:328). After networking through fliers, "word of mouth" and her Christmas card list, soon people around the country were "sewing panels to contribute to the project-using embroidery, quilting, appliqué, knitting, batik and many other fabric arts"(Pershing 1993:328). The idea was to join all the fabric panels in order to create one long ribbon, hence the title of the project The Ribbon, and "encircle the Pentagon on August 4, 1985, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki” as an act of social protest (Pershing 1993:328). On that August 4, “there were fifteen miles of ribbons and over twenty thousand people present-enough so that they wove around not only the Pentagon, but also the Capitol building and the Lincoln and Washington Memorials”(Pershing 1993:328). Pershing is careful to include that over 90 percent of the panels were created by women (1993:329). Pershing concludes that for the women who created The Ribbon, “the making of the Ribbon panels became an affirmation of life and an act of self-actualization and empowerment, choosing to create a thing of beauty and value in the face of despair over the possibility of future annihilation”(1993:329).

Here is an excellent example of how a community of women chose personal agency and engage in social action through the act of quilting itself. They utilize their skills and the production of quilted panels to mobilize social action against nuclear warfare. This is where the fabric panels themselves become vehicles of their social action. The women who participated in The Ribbon, whether quilting and/or being present at the ceremony, are utilizing their material products as vehicles of social protest against the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust. The campaign of The Ribbon as a social protest carries defined core characteristics that are as unique as each panel that constructs it. Firstly, The Ribbon is akin to human life itself: it is temporary, perishable and its composition of material is malleable and flexible. There is a vulnerability to fabric whereas The Pentagon is a more permanent stone edifice and at the same time represents a more solid and imposing façade of power and of domination. Pershing also provides evidence of a contrast between an entity (a national government) and individuals (the needle workers) (1993:332). She includes the voice of a panel creator:

...I think the impact of The Ribbon is more on individuals, and individuals touching individuals, rather than on powers, on the people who have the power. But I do think that if enough individuals are touched, eventually 'the powers that be' could be challenged by that (Pershing 1993:332).

The participant clearly states that the impact of The Ribbon is on the individual but also reveals that she really does not think The Ribbon itself has the power to persuade the Government of the United States or rather 'the powers that be' to end the possibility of nuclear warfare. Pershing also includes how another participant named Anne Long from Austin, Texas "described her decision to participate as a matter of conscience" and how the project "combined making a political statement and doing needlework" (1993:332). While there is the presence of doubt of the power of The Ribbon in the first participant, Anne Long ultimately illustrates that she herself sees her participation as social action within the needlework creation project.

Another excellent example of how women who quilt use quilts as vehicles of social action is Beattie and Shaughnessy's Sisters in Pain: Battered Women Fight Back (2000). In this powerful book, the reader is carried through the story of how a group of women convicted of crimes against a violent offender come together for therapy and work together through quilting to confront their abusive pasts and simultaneously challenge the state law on parole. In 1994, two inmates at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women (KCIW) asked Chandra McElroy (an offender rehabilitation specialist) to "create a therapy group for battered women" which then became the "Battered Offenders' Self-Help Group (BOSH)" (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000:4). Each Monday, the group of "eight to twelve women" came together "to discuss their experiences" where "they gained strength from the camaraderie, which they'd all missed

as women who were kept isolated by their abusers” (*Ibid.*:5). Two other political figures would emerge as prominent supporters of the therapy group. Marsha Weinstein was a “Louisville activist for women’s issues” and was “appointed by Governor Jones as the executive director of the Kentucky Commission of Women” where she “had determined, in accepting that role, to do what she could to gain clemency for incarcerated women who’d been battered”(*Ibid.*:5). The other woman involved in this journey was Helen Howard-Hughes who was “recently appointed chairperson of the Commonwealth of Kentucky Parole Board” (*Ibid.*:6). Both women collaborated in order to make a difference in the lives of the women involved in BOSH and to challenge the state laws over convicted women who killed their abusers.

They also came together to encourage the Sisters in Pain to evoke personal agency in facing their abusive pasts through quilting. One woman in the group stated that “[n]o one cares about us and we have no voice” which then “triggered Weinstein’s memory of having read that, in recent years, women without a political voice had expressed themselves through their handiwork”(*Ibid.*:9). This is how the women involved in BOSH began a quilt that communicated “the battering they’d survived”(*Ibid.*:9).

Beattie and Shaughnessy include an abundance of photographs of the actual quilt squares themselves. The creation of the quilt squares became a journey of confronting the abuse the women in BOSH had encountered. It was difficult for me to look at the photographs at first as they depict graphic scenes of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the pasts of the women who stitched them. However, it is the graphic visual stimulation of the completed quilt that catalyzed their personal and group agency. One of Sherry Pollard’s squares depicts a scene of emotional abuse she suffered from her partner.

A seated, slumped female figure with her face in her hands faces an angry man who stands over her, pointing and saying, "You have NEVER been any good and you will NEVER amount to ANYTHING! You will NEVER be good enough for ANYONE! You are LUCKY to have 'me'!!" (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000:12). Her next square depicts the same man walking through a doorway saying, "Where do you think you're going!? You will do and go where 'I' say! I will NEVER let you leave this house to go ANYWHERE!" (*Ibid.*). These squares depict the gradual isolation of Sherry by her partner's words. The physical domination of the exchange can be seen in the directness of his statement in that he will never let her leave. Other squares like that of Karen Stout are self-portraits of the physical abuse received. Karen's self-portraiture depicts a face of a woman, but the needlework of the square blackens her left eye and weaves to show drops of blood dripping from her mouth along with a bloody nose (*Ibid.*:13). This is a square that a viewer observer cannot avoid. There were also squares of plain text that offered messages of hope and protest. For example, one square by Karen Stout states that "If you're in the dark, Light your Candle From MINE" (*Ibid.*:12) and a Sherry Pollard square demands "Don't just write the laws to protect us, ENFORCE THEM!" (*Ibid.*:14). The creation of the squares thus offered women, whose voices were oppressed by abuse and violence, a therapeutic outlet to confront their experiences and a forum for their new voices.

It is this graphic visual stimulation of the completed quilt that became a strategic vehicle for the women of BOSH to mobilize personal and group agency. It was May 1995 when the members of BOSH finished their fifty-two squares and McElroy's project had received increasing news coverage from the press (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000:18). In

August, the quilt traveled for the first time to the state fair in Louisville where fairgoers “rated the Sisters in Pain Quilt, which would later be dubbed the Prison Quilt, the single most popular piece of stitchery displayed at the fair to date”(Ibid.). Weinstein led Governor Jones to the quilt itself in order to “heighten... the governor’s awareness of the abuses that its makers had survived” and upon viewing the quilt, the Governor himself began to cry (Ibid.). He responded that “[w]e have got to see about getting these women out of prison before I leave office” and in later interviews, stated, “[w]ithout the quilt, in honesty, I doubt (the women’s parole) would have happened...Many things in our society-if they’re visual and right there in front of you-you grab them”(Ibid.:19). Nine of the thirteen women in BOSH gained commutations and that “the next step was for those women to have their cases heard by the parole board” and following those reviews, twelve of the thirteen women were granted parole (Ibid:21-22). What is important to remember Governor Jones’ observation that it was the stark visual nature of the quilt that directly influenced his decision to take action in the convicted women’s lives. By quilting their stories and displaying them for all the world to see, the Sisters in Pain finally had a chance to heal their pasts and raise their voices in social protest by enacting agency through the production of a quilt.

6.2: Two Surprises For Donna

In the following section, I would like to illustrate how the narratives and actions that surround quilts are dominated by the way women use the quilts themselves as strategic vehicles in order to promote personal agency and responses to illness. However, this personal agency is limited to the realm of the personal and does not extend into social

action. The first example I would like to consider is Donna's narrative on her experience in facing cancer and enacting personal agency through the practice of quilting. The second example where individuals enact personal agency in response to illness is the creation of Donna Howell's memory quilt. I then follow with a deconstruction of "The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Exhibition" where women (and men) locally and nationally use the act of quilting strategically to move from personal agency to a larger arena of social action. I argue that the exhibition itself becomes a temporary memorial to those who have passed on from cancer as well as show how both the volunteers and contributors to the auction are utilizing quilts in order to mobilize action against illness.

I can remember quite vividly the first time I saw Donna Howell. While all of my participants exhibited their own uniqueness, Donna's experience within the guild was quite different from anyone else on another level. It was Saturday morning during the October Guild Retreat weekend and the women themselves had already been quilting for two nights and three days when I arrived at the Burry Heights United Church Camp. The majority of the quilters were located in the front room which was filled with the constant buzz of talk, laughter and the whirring of the sewing machines all around us. The tables themselves were arranged around the room facing inward. There were also two rows of sewing tables in the middle of the room as well. Each quilter had their own long table and some even brought desk lamps to temporarily give them much needed light as the days grew shorter. As I toured around the perimeter tables, I met with women who were either taking a break and/or chatting with their neighbour. Rosalie happened to be piecing a difficult wall hanging that was intended to be a gift for her daughter's upcoming wedding anniversary. The wall hanging was a lily and Rosalie shared with me that she was

including pieces of her daughter's wedding dress in as the white sections of the quilt. However, Rosalie had taken a piece of the wrong green colour for the leaves and this unfortunately set her back two to three hours of labour. I continued on and another woman in the corner was machine stitching a bear face to the side of what would become a pillow. She pointed out that using fusible interfacing allowed her to zigzag stitch around the difficult and complex edges more readily as it kept the material from moving.

Fascinated by all the different creations that surrounded me and excited for the fieldwork that would come, I made my way over to a couple of tables where I had spotted the beginning of a beautiful Christmas scene. On a cream coloured backing, a Christmas tree, fireplace, intricate presents, Santa's feet coming out of the chimney, a window with three dimensional ruffled curtains and the beginning of a cozy chair adorned this tribute to "A Night Before Christmas". I looked up to see who was crafting this piece and saw Donna for the first time. Here sat a woman who, very calmly, was painstakingly cutting out the smallest of fabric pieces for her Christmas scene. She smiled and when I introduced myself, she responded that she remembered my presentation on my research at the first annual Guild meeting only three weeks ago. I also noticed that there were bottles of hand lotion not far from her work and that her hands were dry and deep cracks covered the fingers that guided the fabric through her machine. I found it very hard not to stare at her large, bright pink turban wrap that encircled her head. My suspicions were confirmed later that day by a Guild member who told me that Donna was going through a second trial of cancer.

Carol-Ann, sister to Paulette and daughter to Maxilene (quilters who were also present at the retreat), had just finished wrestling with her sewing machine and a quilt that

was being sewn together. She and her fellow creators dubbed this quilt the “The Fucking Apache Trail”¹. I then accidentally stabbed myself with my embroidery needle. Not knowing whether to scream or laugh, I looked up. Movement over in Carol-Ann’s direction had halted. She had left the quilt in mid sewing when I saw her and Sarah and Paulette conversing in a close circle nearby. Paulette held a plastic Ziploc bag which held coins, and several five dollar bills in it. Carol-Ann and Sarah proceeded to give Paulette sums of money while Paulette’s eyes darted back and forth as if to see who was entering the second room. Paulette left our area in order to continue on to other groupings of women. When Paulette returned, I approached her and asked what the bag and the money was for. I had assumed that it would be a collection of some sort and, always thinking in terms of ‘exchange’, I also wanted to contribute too. Paulette confessed, “It’s a surprise for Donna. She has to leave early tonight because she’s gonna be in the Breast Cancer Walk tomorrow. We thought it would be a good idea to collect something for her, to sponsor her.” I asked if I might contribute and then sat down to continue embroidering my Halloween crest. After a few minutes, I overheard Lori and Paulette discussing whether to give Donna the money at the beginning of dinner or whether to wait until she had finished eating. Lori suggested that they wait until after dinner as Donna “usually gets really emotional over a gesture like this”. She reminded Paulette about how Donna had cried when the guild had surprised her with a memory quilt. Lori continued that this had happened before dinner and that she remembered that Donna could not eat as she was

¹ Carol-Ann, Paulette and Debby were creating a quilt to sell for the first time together. The pattern of the quilt itself is called “The Apache Trail” and consists of wide curved bands of pieced blocks together. Carol-Ann was having difficulty as the top, filling and back of the quilt had already been basted together and she was in the process of redoing some of the machine quilting that either Paulette or Debby had done before. They told me that in their emails about the quilt and its numerous problems, they began to call the quilt “The Fucking Apache Trail” because of the problems it created.

so emotional. After dinner, the guild members surprised Donna again on a weekend retreat with more than seventy dollars in sponsorship money. This is how I learned of Donna's memory quilt.

I would first like to consider Donna's narrative of her quilting and cancer experience before I analyze her fellow guild members' responses to her illness in the form of a memory quilt. It is October 7th and I find myself standing in Donna's front foyer drenched to the bone. The pouring rain soaks me here in Mount Pearl even though I am wearing my trusty rain jacket and slush pants. When I moved to Newfoundland the summer before, I realized on the third day of searching in vain for an umbrella that umbrellas are rare on the island and thus invested in some rain gear from the local Canadian Tire store. However, I learn that on this smoky October day, autumnal rain has a tendency to fall sideways even in Mount Pearl. Donna tells me to come on in and dry myself and she generously hangs my pants and jacket on the front door knob and rail so as to ensure efficient drying. Her house is warm to my skin and I am relieved to be inside. Donna's house is a split level and I go up stairs to the kitchen instead of down into the cozy rec room where her mother in law is sitting. We enter the kitchen where the cupboards continue to emanate the warmth that I always feel from wooden things. There is a large window on the opposite wall that overlooks out to the back yard where small nearly leafless trees stand. While getting us something to drink for the interview, Donna and I talk about "Random Passage" and how the set for the mini series filmed in Newfoundland was built with trees as small as the ones growing in her backyard. I notice there are bottles of hand lotion alongside the condiments on the kitchen table. After

pouring two large glasses of water, Donna sits opposite me at the kitchen table with the tape recorder between us and we begin our conversation.

In terms of sewing and quilting, Donna likes to do “a bit of everything”. This means experimenting and trying new “challenges” like drapes and pillows as well as quilting by hand. Donna is originally from St. John’s, Newfoundland and estimates that she started to quilt five or six years ago. It was the finished quilted pieces shown in the ‘show and tell’ segment of a Cabot Quilter’s Guild meeting that sparked her amazement at what the quilters were creating. She then signed up for a beginners quilting course with Paulette where once a week each student would work on a sample block which featured a new technique. What strikes me even today in reading over my interview notes is that Donna attaches great importance to the notions of *practicality* and of *doing*. Quilting gives Donna access to the act of doing. Quilting by hand is more efficient for her as one can “sit together with family” instead of piecing alone in a separate room and one can also “piece while waiting for the kids at the pool”. Quilting by hand to Donna exhibits practicality in terms of maintaining close social relationships with her family. Quilting is also practical to Donna because of its portability. Donna also likes to see material in her life to be used and useful. She recounts that at the retreat, Donna suggested to Rosalie to place a bit of her own wedding dress along with that of her daughters in the paper pieced wall-hanging Rosalie was constructing for her daughter’s wedding anniversary. Donna goes on to relate that her wedding dress “is too big” for her daughters to wear so she is planning to take it apart and “make Christening dresses out of them”. The wedding dress then takes on this useful quality. According to Donna herself, it “becomes an heirloom” and “something to pass on forever”. Here, practicality and

usefulness are embedded in the processes of creating familial heritage as well as preserving specific life moment memories for future generations.

While we talked at her kitchen table, I made the decision during the interview that I would not press her to speak in detail about her experience with cancer as I had promised the interview was going to be focused on her experiences with quilting. I felt that in this context, direct questions may have given the first impression of ‘snooping’ or perhaps an ‘exposé’ and carried the possibility of making me and my participant uncomfortable. While Donna does not go into any detail, her thoughts and feelings about her condition appear throughout the interview itself. Donna’s personality shines in that she claims her experience with quilting and with cancer as her own. For example, she is “not a perfectionist” and insists that “this is not my job, this is what I enjoy”. She continues, “why am I going to stress myself out?”. In reference to making time for Guild meetings once a month, Donna emphatically states that “this is my outing, nothing interferes with this outing except sickness and this is *my* sickness, I’m [the one] having it”. In one sentence, Donna combines her claim on experiencing quilting and cancer. This emphasis on claiming individual experience occurs again when we talk about how I can only concentrate on a single task at a time. Donna spoke encouragingly:

Why would you change it if it works for you? Just because somebody multitasks doesn’t mean they are any more productive than you are. You are completing things.

The idea of working to complete objects carries into how quilting as a leisure activity helps Donna cope with cancer. It is important to know that Donna Howell was a quilter even before her battle with cancer began. I conclude that quilting can be seen as

therapeutic but not specifically as art therapy² in this case. At the end of our conversation together that Donna shares with me how quilting has helped her cope during the past year:

Jaime: What's ahead in quilting for you?

Donna: Right now, completing what I got done. I would like to do a scrap quilt. I also read "The Quilter's Apprentice", it's a four part book series, fiction. In the book, a woman taught someone to quilt and they turned it into something that was positive for them, functional. They used it to save a heritage home, hand piecing a quilt. I haven't done a piece completely hand piecing...It (quilting) helped this year too, made a big difference too, always having something that you could be doing, kept you from sittin' down and dwelling on stuff too. It keeps you going. I never want to pursue, I didn't want to be doing nothing anyway but you know [pause and continues in almost a whisper] I do find that keeping busy really made a difference again through all this illness.

Jaime: And also focused. And positive too, like going to the retreat.

Working on quilted objects and projects helped Donna tremendously during a difficult time in her life. The activity of doing "made a big difference" which kept her from "sittin' down and dwelling on stuff". In the end, quilting "keeps you going". It is this idea of doing, of enacting personal agency, that appeals to Donna and reflects her ideal of practicality. Her last sentence in the narrative above reveals the importance of quilting for Donna in that "keeping busy really made a difference through all this illness". Donna clearly claims her experience with cancer as her own but also expresses her desire to take action through quilting instead of a non-active response. However, this example of using quilting as a vehicle for personal agency demonstrates that in this instance personal agency is personal and does not continue into a larger arena of social action.

² There exists an entire realm of academic literature on art therapy. After some initial reading, I came to the conclusion that Donna was not participating in art therapy as a prescribed activity by a medical professional but rather found for herself that quilting helped her cope with her cancer therapeutically.

6.2.1: Another Response to Cancer: Friends in the Guild

After interviewing Donna, I had the opportunity to photograph the memory quilt mentioned previously by Lori at the retreat. Each square was completed by individual quilters at the fall retreat two years before and pieced and quilted at the retreat when Donna was present. The label on the back of the quilt had a phototransferred miniature map of the quilt squares. A transferred photograph of each woman who had contributed to the quilt itself was positioned above or below that person's square on the map. I was told that Donna had no clue as to what was occurring around her and was completely taken aback with the gesture. Lori and I talked about this kind gesture on behalf of the guild. In the narrative that follows, I would like to consider how the quilt itself becomes a specific metaphor for comfort.

Jaime: In terms of time, I only have one last question. I thought it was really neat to see that you participated on the memory quilt for Donna, for Donna Howell [**Lori:** Yeah, she's so sweet]. I was wondering if you could talk to me about that experience, just as a closing. Well, who started the idea that you should do that?

Lori: Oh, I don't know, I can't remember....Well...anyways, it was probably Kathleen Martin her friend, that would be my guess. She said we were just going to do it and I thought (pause) what a nice idea. I just thought it was such a nice gesture (pause) you know? It could've been a quilt, it could have been a basket of muffins, it could've been mowing the lawn, it wasn't that it was a quilt. The point was that it was for Donna. 'Cause Donna was just having a crappy time. [**Jaime:** Yeah] Health is in danger, your life is in danger [**Jaime:** Lots of issues to deal with] yeah. I think with the quilt, I mean that's Donna's forte. Donna's a wonderful quilter, um so the appreciation level would be there and quilting to us has a certain comfort zone. Well, you know a lot of people go home, watch TV and throw a quilt over themselves and yes, its comfortable but that's not your comfort zone. There's a big difference. And I think having a quilt made by all your friends...my mom died of cancer too so I know about the chemo, oh my god...

Jaime: So you could relate.

Lori: Oh totally. I know what its like to have to hold your mother's head above the toilet while she's throwing up for ten hours. I just felt that, you know, when you're, you've finished throwing up for ten hours in the toilet and you are flaked out on the couch and you don't have one ounce of energy left to do so much as *blink*...to lie down on the couch with a quilt over you that that's your comfort zone because its what you like to do. And it was made by all of your friends so you have that comfort zone available to you. I just thought that was a great idea.

Jaime: It was beautiful and it was interesting that everybody did an individual square and it worked out [**Lori:** It worked out wonderful] It looks fabulous. Now tell me about your square. How did you choose what to do?

Lori: I made a butterfly. I also love butterflies, I just think that they re the most fascinating animals in the world. I think its just the cocoon thing and the chance for change you know? And life has a new start man [**Jaime:** That's right] and I think that's what made me want to do a butterfly. It's kind of like Don. When this is all said and done, you'll be the same person but man, the road is still there. You can have a fresh start kind of thing (pause) and just put it behind you and not forget, cause you'll never forget but it's a new start. Just take the first step and go ahead you know? That's why I did a butterfly and it was bright colours, fuchsia background and it was blue or teal, yellow. It was just bright, it's a new day.

Lori's narrative concerning Donna's memory quilt is evocative in many ways. She is very specific as to her perception of the quilt's purpose. It is the idea of the "gesture" of making a quilt where it could "have been a quilt" or making a "basket of muffins" or even "mowing the lawn". For Lori, the point "was that it was for Donna". What is important here is that the guild members who participated chose to do a quilt instead of baking muffins or mowing the lawn because of how it would be meaningful to Donna.

Lori goes on to explain in detail how the idea of 'comfort' has a deeper meaning when it comes to quilters and especially in this circumstance. Quilts can be comfortable after a long day and useful when used as a wrap while watching TV. Lori is quick to point out that this example of a quilt as a wrap is not what a 'comfort zone' entails. She talks vividly about her mother's constant exhaustive sickness and eventual death from cancer

and gives me an example of what discomfort is considered to be. Only then can I understand what a 'comfort zone' to a quilter entails. The quilt then not only gives Donna utilitarian warmth but it is the knowledge that the quilt was made for you by your friends that communicates and that gives Donna a 'comfort zone'. Quilting is what Donna "likes to do" and that it is the responsibility of her friends to make sure that "that comfort zone [is] available to you".

Lori's individual square also has the capacity to contribute to the 'comfort zone' in its hidden personal meaning from Lori herself. Lori indicates that she chose a butterfly not only because she loves them, but also for the symbolic act of breaking out of a cocoon. I argue that Lori wanted to communicate to Donna a comfort that there was hope for Donna to become that butterfly; "to just put it behind you and not forget" but that "it's a new start". Lastly, the colours Lori chose were bright and vivid thus evoking positivity. In the narrative, this 'brightness' contrasts sharply with Lori's previous account of her mother's sickness. For Lori, brightness becomes an essential quality to the quilt. The making of the quilt itself, in turn, gives Donna's friends a chance to provide 'comfort' as well as to foster hope in her battle with cancer. The construction and gift of the quilt becomes a strategic vehicle for Donna's friends to engage in personal agency and respond to Donna in her time of need. Again, this personal agency through the act of quilting is limited to the realm of the personal and does not extend to a larger arena of social action.

6.3: From Personal Agency to Social Action: “The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project”

In early July 2003, I was at Devon House taking notes on all things having to do with crafts and when I came across a pamphlet that I had not noticed before on previous visits. The purple on the cover had caught my eye and I picked it up hurriedly only to look at it when I got home. It provided an introduction to “The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project”. I noticed and made note that the Eastern Tour of the show was scheduled in St. John’s from August 1-9, 2003 and made a point to attend and document this event. The Eastern tour of the exhibition was to be displayed in the St. John’s La-Z-Y Boy furniture gallery. The furniture gallery was located in Wedgewood Park, a sprawling and large commercial and industrial park set “in the middle of nowhere” near the city limits and consists of large department and home improvement stores such as a large Walmart, Kent’s Home Improvement, Zellers and Cosco to name a few. The La-Z-Boy Furniture Gallery was located by itself and while riding in the bus, I noticed the same purple colour out of the corner of my eye. Posters for the quilt show were posted on the four glass doors of the entrance to the gallery and I could hardly wait to attend.

The eastern tour exhibition of donated quilts I attended on August 5, 2003 was only one event in a series of social activities that comprise “The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project”. The project currently is the brainchild of Carol Miller, a quilter from Ontario. It was 1997 when Carol was “diagnosed with breast cancer” and “her thoughts turned to quilting, a craft that had shaped her life”(The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Show Guide 2003:1). Carol thought of “the companionship of the quilting bee”, “the laughter”, “the sharing” and “the support that women gave each other as they pieced

together a story from treasured remnants" (The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Show Guide 2003:1). Carol's ideas on how to deal with her experience with cancer echo that of Donna Howell in that "she knew that when hands were busy, the mind was freed" and that "this was exactly the sort of thing that women with breast cancer needed to survive" (The Quilt 2003:1). It is from these personal observations that Carol conceived the notion for a quilting exhibit and auction to benefit the Canadian Cancer Society as well as survivors of breast cancer (The Quilt 2003:1). The project's online internet web site states the current statistics in terms of how many quilts have been donated in the past and the total amount of money that was raised per annum (and per auction)³. In 2001, there were 641 quilts donated with an auction total of \$328,000 while the next year brought 941 quilts with an auction total of over half a million dollars raised for breast cancer research (www.thequilt.com 2004). The 2003 exhibition and auction began in Stratford, Ontario on May 16 with a display of 230 quilts in Festival Square and also had two separate exhibitions in eastern and western Canada, each displaying 85 quilts (The Quilt 2003:2). The show guide indicated that the traveling exhibition would return to Casa Loma in Toronto at the beginning of September. The culmination of social events of the project was a Gala Auction Evening held on Saturday November 15 at the Avon Theatre in Stratford that was emceed by Stratford Festival actress Lucy Peacock and Luba Goy of the Royal Canadian Air Farce television series. These social events clearly indicate an arena for social action.

³ On the first page of the program show guide, the organizers of the exhibition and auction are very clear to state that a total of 100% of the money earned from the auction "goes directly to the Canadian Cancer Society office nearest the donor of the quilt" (The Quilt 2003:1).

My approach to this traveling exhibition and auction is to consider the eastern tour event as that of performance and memorialization. I would first like to contextualize the exhibition in terms of space and display. I will then investigate and analyze how the individual quilts on display become vehicles for agency by their creators. As mentioned before, the La-z-Boy furniture gallery is situated in Wedgewood Park on the outskirts of St. John's, Newfoundland. There is only one city bus route (Route 10) available to the public that travels its route only once an hour. The site is also accessible by taxi service as well as by car. From this observation, I contend that the geographical location of the gallery creates the possibility that access could be restricted to the exhibition for people who can not afford cars or the time to travel on a city bus. However, the exhibition itself is sponsored by Lay-Z-Boy and therefore is at the mercy of wherever the galleries are situated. The furniture gallery building is new. Inside the lobby of the first set of doors with the four posters stands a large metal easel that proclaims the exhibition where 'Lay-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries are proud to host the Quilt Eastern Tour'. I also observed that there was what I first thought of as a plain side table. Upon further inspection, the price tag of more than a thousand dollars indicates to me that the furniture gallery services a certain type of customer: one who is willing to pay significant sums of money for a piece of furniture.

The "performance" that is the exhibition begins after one walks through the second set of glass doors into the vending space itself. Upon entering, my eyes make a panoramic sweep of the entire open and well-lit store where one can now choose between two forks in the path of the short major aisle. Three women sit located at the head of the split in limonite flooring. One is taller than me, perhaps 5'7 and has slight wrinkles

around her eyes with blonde short straight hair that does not touch her shoulder and thin teal framed glasses. Another woman with dark short gray hair is formally clothed for she wears a smart blueish gray knitted pantsuit and a pearl necklace around her décolletage. The last woman's face is not riddled with wrinkles and lines of time but is rather young in appearance, yet she sports layered short gray hair with specs of white streaks throughout. She also wears wire-rimmed glasses and is dressed in a light yellow-green suit. I would meet this woman again at the Cabot Quilter's Guild Annual meeting and would discover that she is Ethel Isenor, couture quilter extraordinaire. I approach the table and notice that there are copies of the pamphlet I picked up at Devon House, larger copies of the program guide and a fabric collaged box with a slit in the side that sits in the center of the table. A \$10.00 donation to the project will give you one copy of the program as well as three draw tickets for a quilt.

These observations from my fieldnotes are striking in that the exhibition mirrors that of a museum and/or a theatre performance. The first activity an observer encounters is the purchase of a ticket and a program. In this case, the tickets are for a prize draw for one of the donated quilts. It is the program show guide itself that becomes the central nexus of the exhibition itself. While its purchase seems to be voluntary, its contents work to engage the observer with the magnitude of the project. There also may exist both a moral and peer pressure to contribute to the cause through this purchase from the presence of the sellers. The program includes detailed directions on a) how to use the book to place a bid in the auctions in person, on-line, by phone or by fax; b) the explanation of quilting technique terms such as appliqué, embroidered, pieced, whole cloth and printed fabric; c) shipping charges and d) colour photographs of each quilt that

accompany the title of the quilt, the name and geographical origin of the donor, the size of the quilt, the name of the pattern, the quilt's appraised value and a short paragraph which the donor has written. Instantly, the reader of the program can approach a quilt on display and research all of the details of its creation and purpose. In so doing, the visitor is connected to both the quilt and the quilt's creator through the guide itself. In terms of physically interacting with the quilts on site, I was instructed by Ethel that one was not supposed to touch the quilt itself as the oils and dirt on hands would slowly soil the quilt and therefore lead to the damaging of the quilt's fibres. If one wanted to turn the chosen quilt over, Ethel or another representative would wear white cotton gloves and perform that function. If there was more than one visitor occupied with looking at the back of a quilt, Ethel would distribute white gloves to the observers themselves. In order to enforce this courtesy, many quilts had an additional sign pinned onto their borders that reads: "Please *do not* touch or handle the quilts. Please ask for assistance. Thank you" (emphasis on sign).

When gathering ethnographic data, one can gain knowledge through the accumulation and analysis of visual data. An important aspect of an exhibition is its visual nature. A key issue to consider is how the objects themselves communicate value, context and meaning in how they are arranged and presented. While the La-z-Boy furniture gallery was a public space, I asked both the representatives of the quilt show as well as the manager of the store if I might take photographs of the quilts in the exhibition. Documenting the exhibition via photographs was crucial in analyzing how the quilts communicated value and meaning for one can observe how they are positioned throughout the store itself. After documenting the position of the quilts in the exhibition,

I observed many interesting characteristics. The quilts in the exhibition ranged in size from small wall hangings to large king size bed quilts. However, no quilt appeared to be displayed on a horizontal surface such as a bed. All of the quilts were hung. There were three types of visual arrangement. Some quilts were suspended from the ceiling and seemed to float in mid air. These same quilts were hung in between 'sets' of furniture. These quilts served to divide physical space on their own and were either queen or king size but also the highest appraised quilts in terms of monetary value. It was in this context of display where the exhibition was most abstract in terms of presentation. For example, in photograph A⁴ one sees quilt #127 entitled "Hawaiian Gold" suspended with invisible string on a wooden dowel in space. The quilt itself does not touch any furniture or walls and is also hung on an acute angle from the outside wall behind it. Hawaiian Gold, while hanging behind a furniture diorama, stands by itself in the exhibition and therefore can be constituted as abstract in nature. Another similar example is the positioning of quilt #284 entitled "Sampler". The design itself is unique in that the squares of samplers are usually seen and presented as straight squares. All of the sample squares in quilt #284 are positioned on an angle that not only attracts the eye of the observer but also sets this quilt as a unique sampler. One does not expect a sampler's squares to be arranged in this manner and it is this unexpected quality that constitutes this quilt as exhibiting abstractness. Like the previously discussed "Hawaiian Gold", this "Sampler" is suspended in mid air as well.

The second type of visual arrangement occurred when quilts are hung from pre-existing interior structures such as dividing walls. These quilts can be associated in

⁴ Please see Appendix A for photographs A to G.

context with the surrounding furniture or exist as a separate background. In photograph C, “Flowers for Friends”, “Shining Stars of Hope”, “Scrappy Hearts for Scrappy Survivors”, “Healing Flower Baskets” and “Garden of Hope” (from left to right) are displayed on a pre-existing dividing wall which originally separated the central “Design Center” from the “Recliner Gallery”. With the exception of “Scrappy Hearts for Scrappy Survivors” which anchors the middle of the display, the symmetrical design and pattern of the quilts mirror and imitate the symmetrical rows of recliners before them. Even the sampler “Flowers for Friends” exhibits a row-like symmetry in that the sampler blocks themselves are organized in three rows of three squares. This second type of visual arrangement also communicates a message of value to the observer as well. When I ventured to the back of the store, I was fascinated with how the quilts had been arranged. In the foreground of photographs D and E, one can see another view of the “Recliner Gallery”. The name of “Recliner Gallery” itself communicates a message of value in that ‘gallery’ can be interpreted by the observer as like an art or museum gallery. The higher value of art or museum pieces, objects of material culture that are ‘special’, now translates to the quilts which are suspended in a gallery of their own. The quilts in the background are displayed in the same zig zag formation as the recliners and therefore add movement to the display for the eye. My first jottings of this gallery of quilts stated that the first image that came to me after seeing this display was that of the sale of expensive ‘Oriental’ carpets.

A second example of quilts demonstrating opulent value occurs in photograph F. This photograph consists of another view of the extensive recliner gallery but was placed on an exterior wall of the store. Here, I argue that the positioning of the quilts communicate value in terms of how they are framed themselves. Quilt #222 entitled

"Birds of a Feather" and quilt #374 entitled "Show Love the Whole Year Through" are positioned beside a central window that consists of a large background photograph of an autumn tree landscape. The two quilts that flank this central window become by association metaphorical windows themselves. Are they windows into the creator of the quilts? Or perhaps are they windows to a cure for breast cancer? The two quilts "Birds of a Feather" and "Show Love the Whole Year Through" are framed by a protruding archway at their top and two Grecian inspired columns to the left and right. The framing action of the archway and the columns adds the connotation of value to these specific quilts. They received a specific place as well as framing constructs. All eight quilts in the back wall gallery as well as the two quilts on the outside wall, communicate a similar material value as that of a painting in an art gallery or a precious object in museum by their own physical arrangement.

The third type of visual arrangement communicates a central meaning most often attributed to quilts: that of creating and establishing a sense of 'home'. Quilts were integrated into the existing furniture dioramas. After taking the left 'fork' in front of the welcome desk, I passed two sofa displays to my left. It was after these displays that I encountered what looked like a museum diorama. In the store's upper left corner of its expansive space, I stood on the brink of an upper middle-class living room. In photograph G, one can see that this living room was well equipped with valuable objects. A wooden mantelpiece framed the fireplace while a central framed clock kept time for the invisible family. A total of five different sized lamps, one a wrought metal floor lamp, illuminated the space and palm leaf plants and ivy gave a living presence to the living room as well. Two opulent chocolate brown leather sofas were situated on the borders of the room.

These sofas also sport tapestry inspired throw pillows. A hardwood sofa table ended the space at the border of the aisle I was standing on. The only 'fakeness' of the room are the books. The room contained four visible posters of tremps l'oeill bookshelves which gave the room another potential use: a library. In my fieldnotes, I observed that it was interesting to note how all three quilts in this diorama seem to belong to the room itself.

The small quilt "Christmas Tree" by Janet Rice-Bredin in Sudbury, Ontario is placed symmetrically in the center above the fireplace mantle and gives a festive holiday and festival feel to the room. The quilt directly to the right of "Christmas Tree" is entitled "Spring Flowers" just as spring follows winter. This quilt covers the imitation bookshelf like a framed painting might in a turn of the century antiquarian's library. The last quilt called "Heart to Heart" by the Cotillion Ladies Club and Savanna Creations from Spirit River, Alberta is the most fascinating to consider in this discussion of context and of building home. The themes of 'heart', 'hearth' and 'home' repeat themselves for within the pattern in "Heart to Heart" is the famous log cabin pattern. I was told that traditionally, the center square of the log cabin quilt square was and is always red to symbolize the hearth which was also described as being the center of the home. The dark shaded quilt squares are arranged in the shape of a heart by the women of Savanna Creations. It is in this sense of constructing the context of 'home' that I wish to speak to. Within the quilt itself, the symbol of a home's 'hearth' in the pattern, while not represented as a red square, would be known to fellow quilters and thus there would be the association of the quilt's pattern with the rest of the diorama.

Individuals come to the La-z-Boy furniture gallery with the intention to purchase furniture in order to create a 'home' back in their living space. The quilt "Heart to

Heart's" square pattern and larger shadow pattern unite and communicate in one fabric creation the themes of heart, home and hearth. The furniture diorama also communicates these themes within the presence of the fireplace and in the presence of comfortable furniture. However, I argue that the purpose of integrating the quilts into the diorama, the organizers of the exhibition are purposely sending the observer a message that quilts are the heart of the home; they are the objects that enhance what a material home is. At the same time, there is 'heart' in the fact that the eventual auction of these quilts will contribute to finding a cure for breast cancer so those afflicted will not have to leave their 'homes', their 'hearts' and the fires of life because of the illness. My observations were confirmed in a later interview with Ethel. Without any inquisitive prompting, Ethel shared with me that the importance of displaying a quilt is the tone and theme of the piece itself. She recounted that an example of this occurred at the La-z-Boy exhibition where some quilts were "placed in an environment" and "looked as though they belonged". Here, Ethel's observations on important aspects of display re-enforce my earlier arguments on the construction of context by the positioning of the individual quilts themselves. In the final section of this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that women who quilt not only can communicate personal agency and social action through the quilts themselves but also utilize the quilts as material vehicles for their social action against breast cancer.

6.4: Narratives Indicating Quilts As Vehicles for Social Action

I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again (The Quilt 2003:72).

We have all been affected, in some way, by this terrible disease. I donate this quilt to The Quilt Project with the hope that it will, in some small way, help to find a cure. The quilt is a tribute to my family and friends who have been afflicted with cancer – those who have won their battles, those who continue to fight, and those who have climbed the Stairway to Heaven. If love could build a staircase and fond memories a lane, we'd climb the Stairway to Heaven and bring them home again (The Quilt 2003:76).

The program show guide, which includes descriptions of all the quilts in the auction regardless of the location of the traveling exhibitions, also works to engage the observer with the individual stories and purposes of the donated quilts themselves. It is both the program guide and the presence of the quilts themselves that unites the national macro-level context of quilting and cancer with the micro-level pasts, presences and futures of the charitable quilters themselves. My approach in investigating how quilters utilize quilts as vehicles for agency involves considering how social action and personal agency can be seen in the creation of temporary memorials to the deceased and the communication of the rhetoric of survivors.

In "The Person With AIDS: The Body, the Feminine and the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt" (1998), Flavia Rando takes a closer look at both the process of memorialization through the construction of a quilt. Rando also considers how the quilt project initialized social agency in how the American public and medical establishment

conceptualizes a person with AIDS or “PWA”(Rando 1998). At the beginning of the article, Rando provides a historical context of how a PWA has come to be viewed. First, a PWA and the AIDS population “[have] been perceived as marked by profound differences of sexuality, race, and class from [an] imagined ‘general population’”(Rando 1998:192). The myth of the ‘general population’ consists of “heterosexual, middle class, white” people who have a “lifestyle defined by monogamy and nuclear family” which echoes the “sadly outdated ideal of what Simon Watney describes as ‘the ever anxious neo-conservative imagination in which the family...hero and heroine and 2.8 children snuggle down chastely after prayers, in pajamas under *granny’s patch work quilt*’”(Rando 1998:192, Rando’s emphasis).

However the PWA and the mythic ‘general population’ without AIDS is configured in the dominant representations from the American bio-medical establishment, Rando makes the important observation that “the female body, the trope through which discourses of both the diseased body and desire have been developed in modern Western medicine and art, is relatively absent” in representations of PWA’s and the AIDS crisis (1998:193). The NAMES project memorial quilt brings to the forefront “The debate concerning ‘artists’ response’ to the AIDS crisis [that] has been marked by activist protest, leading to a blurring of the distinction between artist and activist and the reconceptualization of art forms”(Rando 1998:194). How does this particular memorial quilt exhibit the social agency of its creators? How does the quilt itself symbolically reconceptualize the figure of a PWA?

San Francisco’s gay activist community first began the Names Project Memorial Quilt in 1985 “as a gesture of mourning” where people in the community marched in a

commemorating memorial carrying "placards bearing the names of people who had died of AIDS"(Rando 1998:194). The project is a "national effort to create a hand sewn tribute to the tens of thousands of Americans struck down by AIDS" where " 'the whole purpose of quilting is to have a sense of community'"(Ruskin in Rando 1998:195). The quilt itself becomes a material memorial to those American who have dies of AIDS but also works to create 'community'. Rando's main argument is that quilting is "an art form without an artist" and that the NAMES Quilt specifically is "layered with the history" of this " 'specific cultural form'" (1998:196). Quilting as a "traditional woman's art form" can evoke a "nostalgia for an imagined better past in which family and community were known and comprehensible institutions"(Rando 1998:196), hence the further construction of a normalized, general population. In essence, the NAMES Quilt "has allowed even those in the 'general population' to finally approach (their) negative ideologies of difference, to realize that 'real people' have died, and to mourn"(Rando 1998:196). The creators of this quilt simultaneously reconceptualize the definition of 'family', 'community' and those who are victims of AIDS by employing an art form once seen as traditional and creating a 'non-traditional' memorial. The quilt becomes a response to those images perpetuated by Western science:

The NAMES quilt allows for the possibility that this dangerously feminized and eroticized male PWA can be transformed: under the cover of the quilt, the sexual can become comfort and a familiar heterosexual paradigm-mother and son-re/appears. The body of the mother and the male PWA, both marked by the feminine, both traced by absence, converge in the Quilt...In the crisis of representation that accompanies AIDS, women who are PWA's are caught between 'the archaic maternal power...and the test-tube[s] of bio-medical science'...Deflecting the scene of death away from the discourse of bio-science, away from the body inscribed by bio-technology, back onto the natural realm (and body) of the mother, the NAMES Quilt reassures the living. It shifts our focus: a

politicized bio-technology in crisis can now share its responsibility for the dead and dying (Rando 1998:199).

What Rando is attempting to argue is that the art form of the quilt itself allows the action of creating a memorial that, in turn, reconstitutes and shifts society's definitions of what a person with AIDS is in terms of sexuality, gender, etc. It is the inscription of individual names and dates of birth and death from all over America that give a personal quality to death: a person with AIDS can no longer be grouped in a stereotyped community of 'others' or people who do not conform to the nuclear ideal but rather a multi-faceted community of victims and mourners of those lost. In essence, "the Quilt becomes a metaphor for the body/politic as re/constructed by the AIDS crisis" (Rando 1998:200).

My approach to deconstructing The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project 2003 exhibition relates to that of Rando's account of the NAMES Quilt in that I am interested in how quilts can become vehicles for social action and agency. How can the quilts that were donated to The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project 2003 be considered as memorials to the dead? In reading the narrative that accompany the photographs of the quilts in the show guide, I began to realize how the process of creating and donating a quilt for charity was the expression of deeper meaningful experiences. One of these experiences is the process of memorialization of someone or a group of women who passed away because of breast cancer. One repeated motif in the narratives is the clear communication that the creator of the donated quilt was personally connected with the person who died; it was important for some creators to indicate that they were personally 'touched' by cancer either in the death of a friend or family member. The narrative of the quilt "Pinwheels and Hearts" reads that this "quilt is dedicated to the memories of Linda

Thorne and Roberta Moore, two dear friends and active members of the Cariboo Calico Quilters of 100 Mile House, BC. This is a quilt of HOPE” (The Quilt 2003: 64). Here, there is a direct dedication to the memories of two women who interacted in the life of the quilter herself. There is an indication that they are associated with the quilter in that they are “friends” but also that they themselves were quilters.

Lastly, the quilter’s narrative expresses the notion of “hope” indicating perhaps a hope that the donation of her quilt, an action of personal agency, will contribute to finding a cure. Other women who donated quilts write about the interconnectedness of quilting and cancer while creating a temporary memorial to their friends. For example, Barb Kennedy from Calgary Alberta writes under her quilt “Birds of Paradise”:

This quilt is dedicated to the memory of my friend Audree, a warm, generous, unpredictable, fun-loving woman. She loved colour, and would have approved of the batiks I used in this quilt. During her final illness, when she felt like company, we spent many hours pouring over quilting books and fabric samples, planning projects that we both knew would never be started. I knew this wonderful lady for only a few short years. I miss her very much (The Quilt 2003:66).

Here, the quilt becomes a memorial in that Barb both dedicates it to the memory of her friend and at the same time, eulogizes her friend in the narrative above. Barb describes the positive characteristics of her friend such as “unpredictable” and “generous” while also narrating to the reader an important life event, her “final illness”. It is clear that Barb, her friend who died of cancer, and quilting are combined within the process of quilting. In Audree’s final hours, the topic of conversation was quilting as well as planning quilting projects for a future that was to be cut short because of the absence of a cure for breast cancer. My last example of a quilt constructed as a temporary memorial is one that exhibits an accompanying narrative that speaks to the spiritual aspect of

memorials. Katherine Grimsdale of Red Deer, Alberta shares with the reader of the guide her inspiration for the pattern of "Paws 'N' Logs":

This quilt is a combination of log cabin and bear's paw blocks. The log cabins blocks represent the security of home and family. It can be as comforting as a cabin in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. The bear's paw represents the cancer which may be knocking on that cabin door threatening to destroy that peace and tranquility. I dedicate this quilt to all survivors, and to the families of those who have been taken by cancer, for it is the spirit of their loved one which survives through them. My wish for you is that will recapture the peace of that log cabin in the Rockies (The Quilt 2003:66).

This quilt is clearly intended to convey symbolic messages to its observer. However, I argue the depth of the symbolic memorial to "all survivors and to the families of those who have been taken by cancer" would be lost without the accompanying narrative in the program guide. Here, cancer is represented by the figure of a "bear" who is "threatening to destroy [the] peace and tranquility" of people's lives and homes. By quilting and donating "Paws 'N' Logs", Katherine is taking action against the bear-like force of cancer. This memorial is temporary in the fact that the quilt will be eventually bought at one of the final auctions and perhaps the story of its symbolism and inception will be forgotten if the guide book does not accompany the quilt itself.

The program show guide's first page not only give the story of the exhibition and auction's conception but also states quite clearly that this support project is a "celebration of survivors". After reading this initial statement, I was curious as to how the quilts themselves can be considered both as memorials to the dead and a celebration of the living. It was in the dedication narratives published in the program guide that one begins to see the rhetoric of survivors. The first indicator of the presence of a rhetoric of survivors was the presence of the language of war. Within the narratives themselves

there is the expression that 'we' as human beings are all in a "fight against cancer" and this fight is expressed in battle imagery within the narratives themselves. For the Threadbearers, a Quilting Guild in the Yukon Territories, their quilt entitled "Poultry in Motion" was created because they wanted to "support our friend and group member Joan who continues to battle breast cancer".(The Quilt 2003:65). Joan is described as being involved in a direct altercation or "battle" against breast cancer itself. Breast cancer, in turn, is therefore given personhood; it is a formidable opponent in this war. There is also an emphasis on how one can be a "survivor" of this battle.

In "Loving Celebration's" narrative, Nancy Basserman writes about how her mother has had other "health challenges since her breast cancer" and "has overcome each and every one of them indicating her strong sense of survival" (The Quilt 2003:67). At the end of the narrative, Nancy "salutes" her mother in her efforts against breast cancer. Nancy's mother is clearly in a battle with cancer and not only has a "sense of survival" as one might need survival knowledge to outlast a battle but she also warrants a "salute" from her daughter and family (The Quilt 2003:67). The presence of battle rhetoric and imagery was also expressed by Ethel when she described her time as a volunteer for the exhibition itself. She was completing what she described as a "tour of duty" for her "mother is a breast cancer survivor" so she tried to "get involved" and tried to "contribute". Lou Punko's "Hand Me My Shield" is quite direct in its intention. Punko expresses that:

Hand me my shield is basically about two things. Firstly protecting ourselves as we go into personal battle with disease and secondly, finding a safe, womb-like place to go mentally and emotionally in order to look after ourselves during a stressful time (The Quilt 2003:55).

Here, Punko's quilt is sewn in the shape of an oval shield where the quilt evokes a shield like effect. The quilt also resembles that of a woman's genitalia and Punko directly indicates this "womb-like" representation. Ethel's contribution is expressed in the language of war where she is fighting breast cancer by completing a 'tour of duty'; Ethel casts herself in the role of a dutiful soldier. By taking up this fight and this battle, Ethel is taking action and invoking personal agency against an almost invisible force and expresses it in the language of war.

The rhetoric of survivors extends to dedications of quilts to survivors as well as that of the deceased. The rhetoric of survivors also includes the expression of symbolic resurrection of the self out of cancer. In the eastern tour segment of the exhibition, I am fascinated by the repeated butterfly motif first expressed to me by Lori Shortall in her inspiration for a square in Donna Howell's memory quilt. As I indicated before, Lori shared with me that she used the image of a butterfly to denote the emergence of hope and a new person from cancer. This same butterfly motif repeats itself in many quilts donated to the breast cancer support project. For example, the quilt "On Butterfly Wings" includes many squares decorated with butterfly shapes. The narrative of the quilts talks about how " 'On Butterfly Wings' expresses cheerfulness and hope" (The Quilt 2003:69). Again, the butterfly has become a symbol of 'cheerfulness and hope' just like Lori has expressed earlier in this chapter. This notion of renewal and resurrection in hope is expressed yet again in the quilt "Renouveau". This quilt was created by the Friends and Needles Quilt Guild in Calgary, Alberta where the quilt was named 'Renouveau' after "a French word meaning renewal or a beginning of new life and hope" where the "butterflies incorporated in the design symbolize new life, new beginnings and hope" (The Quilt

2003:57). Here, butterflies occur within the material design of the quilt and are chosen with the purpose to symbolically express the condition of survivors. The condition of survivors is one of renewal and newness; a feeling of resurrection and hope. Through creating and donating quilts for this support project, women are invoking personal agency against breast cancer and further engaging in social action in the quest for a cure.

6.5: Conclusions

The key arguments of this chapter have focused around Linda Pershing's 'Peace Work out of Piecework: Feminist Needlework Metaphors and The Ribbon around the Pentagon' (1993) as well as L. Elizabeth Beattie and Mary Angela Shaughnessy's Sisters in Pain: Battered Women Fight Back (2000) who present an account of an in-prison Kentucky women's therapy group and their quest for personal strength and healing through creating a quilt together. I intended to take a critical look at how both groups of women utilized their quilted creations for not only personal agency but also social action.

I also focused on my argument that women can evoke personal agency by utilizing quilts as vehicles of that agency in discussing the Cabot Quilter's Guild response to the illness of a friend by creating a memory quilt. The memory quilt created for Donna was an example of where personal agency is enacted but not followed through to a larger arena of social action. The agency demonstrated here is also limited to the personal. The women who contributed to this quilt could also have received personal advantages such as self-satisfaction and a sense of productive selflessness as well as a sense that they have once again *participated* in a Guild inspired event. Donna, in her narrative, attempted to

display individual agency in the face of her cancer. However, there is no evidence that she ties this to any larger social arenas, agendas or philosophies. This is another example where a woman who quilts uses her creative practice for personal agency but this agency is limited to the individual and does not extend to a larger arena of social action.

The final section of this chapter considered the process of memorialization and how women have the capacity to use the production of quilts as vehicles of personal agency and social action in the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt for those who have died of AIDS and my direct experience in participating in The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project Eastern Tour Exhibition 2003. This exhibition is an example of women (and men) using quilting in order to express personal agency but also move into social action. Women who quilt locally in Newfoundland and nationally not only shared narratives of the personal agency enacted by the action of their quilting. These women pursued this action further into the public arena of social action against breast cancer. This example is similar to the ethnographic examples discussed at the beginning of this chapter: the imprisoned Kentucky women's therapy groups and the women and men who quilted for The Ribbon. By donating their creations and narratives to The Quilt, the women participating are *practicing* and engaging in personal agency and social action. I contend that my evidence demonstrates that individual agency for many quilters will often not lead to social action. This agency will instead remain at the level of individual expressions of emotion and personal agency. In the final chapter of this thesis, I hope to present conclusions to my arguments.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

něx'us, n. Bond, link, connexion, (fig.);...[L (*nectere nex-* bind)].
(Fowler and Fowler 1964:812)

This thesis is an investigation of the experiences and narratives of a group of women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland. It demonstrates that women who quilt in St. John's negotiate and construct a nexus of gendered and middle-class practices. While these twenty four women share a common passion for the creation of quilts and quilted objects, there exists both similarities and differences among them in terms of their life journeys. At the beginning of this analysis, my guiding questions focused on exploring what these specific women valued and what they considered meaningful. At first, this exploration yields these central questions: How do these women construct gender, negotiate their femininity, and communicate their womanhoods in what they say and what they do? How does the gendered activity of quilting contribute to the construction of gendered selves in the participants? How do these gendered selves participate in personal and community practices? How do middle-class practices influence these constructions? Lastly, how do gendered practices and middle-class practices converge in this specific ethnographic context?

With these key questions in mind, it was also necessary to note how quilting as an activity had changed in function and purpose over the course of the twentieth-century in Newfoundland. Quilting, as well as the creation of other material objects, moved from being a utilitarian action in early twentieth-century Newfoundland to becoming a way for women in outport and urban Newfoundland to earn an income for their family. There was a mid-century decline in the production of quilts and crafts when factory produced

textiles came to the island. However, a craft revival occurred in the late 1970s which coincided with a larger flourishing of the arts in Newfoundland. Today, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador still funds new development strategies through the CCNL for people who create crafts intended for sale. However, many women clearly choose to quilt for other purposes. Thus quilting for my participants is ambiguous in nature.

In order to begin answering key questions listed above, I investigated how these women who quilt in St. John's situated themselves and their participation in the wider Guild community. By concentrating on an analysis of the women's narratives, it became clear that the following theoretical topics had to be addressed: the concept of 'selves', theorizing gendered practices, contextualizing the concept of 'middle-class' practices, community and liminality and the concepts of power and agency. In listening to the women talk, there arose many themes of the women's selves. What followed was an analysis of how these specific women framed and described their expressions of specific identities as well as how they negotiated their gendered ideals and practices as 'women' in their conversations with me about quilting in their lives. I ask: What is the nature of the idea of 'woman' for the diversity of women who quilt in St. John's? For some women, the act of quilting is a connection to past family members. It also inspires in others a sense of personal conviction and responsibility to finish projects in process. There are also women who do not clearly identify whether quilting is an artistic or craft activity. Therefore, quilts - to the majority of the women - are ambiguous in terms of material value. In turn, this ambiguity allows the act of quilting to become a flexible site for these women to express, reaffirm and negotiate their status and identities as predominantly middle-class.

There exist tensions within the narratives of women in that they shared their experiences in activities usually stereotyped as 'domestic'. However, a majority of my participants also expressed the importance of certain themes in their lives: family, a duty and responsibility to finish what was started, friendliness, comfort, home and hearth. Many participants also value other aspects of femininity which reveal middle-class practices: the availability of the choice over when to have children, the valuing of post-secondary education and the choice of when to pursue their creative work, the choice over working inside or outside the home and access to both financial and post-secondary educational resources. Many women value higher education and also have access to financial resources and conditions (financially supported by a partner). These circumstances allow them to pursue quilting as creative work.

Whether one is talking about humans, the idea that gender is socially constructed can be seen when one considers how the women who quilt situate themselves. For Jodi, it is in her continual negotiation of whether her activity of quilting is an art or craft where one sees a negotiation of how she perceives aspects of her self in *what* she does. Also, some women who sell their objects on the St. John's craft market(s) see quilting as a gendered activity and quilts as gendered objects. In turn, these expectations and assumptions highlight what is ideal, namely that it is a woman's activity. Rachel's and Jodi's practices speak to specific gendered ideals of what it means to be feminine: associations with domesticity, caring and personal characteristics like taking on responsibility in caring for others. In negotiating art vs. craft or work vs. leisure, it is not the definition of what one *makes* that is of the most importance for these women. I contended that it is how *one sees one's self as seen by others*. The activity of quilting

carries the connotation of a specific gendered practice: the practice of underestimating the material and aesthetic value of their creations. The middle-class practices and values of the majority of the women whom I interviewed were interwoven in their gendered practice of quilting and in their constructions of what it means to be feminine.

I also investigated how these 'selves' participated in a quilting guild in order to illustrate how "community" is practiced for women who quilt in St. John's. I explored their participation in The Cabot Quilters' Guild, the expression of shared experiences and the tensions present in a community setting. The Guild is frequently described as a venue for learning and teaching while offering opportunities to share one's expert knowledge with others. It also provides an arena where women who quilt could access information and further their education in quilting techniques. The Guild also provides many social benefits in membership: a system of sharing and exchanging of gifts that creates a sense of selflessness in members that in turn, perpetuates itself. This system of exchange also perpetuates the important theme of the guild: active and continual participation.

I have also discovered that there exist tensions within community practices. Some women reveal that there exists a pressure, either from peers or a personal sense of obligation, to join and be a part of guild committees. There also exists the issue of non-constructive criticism in the mentioning of the "quilt police". While extremely rare in occurrence, some women express how they feel intimidated in showing their work for fear of negative criticism. It is the presence of these tensions that reinforce the sense of flexible, unbounded and negotiated community in their actual practices. Community is thus found and expressed not solely on a symbolic level but rather also within social relationships and shared practices.

The women at the fall guild retreat demonstrated diverse ideas of what it means to be a woman who quilts in the guild in their performances and comments at the retreat's first talent show. The retreat, in the "middle of nowhere", provided a liminal space where many women of the guild felt a safe space in which to quilt, socialize and role-play extensions of their 'selves' and their 'community'. Experiences of self and community are performed socially at group events. These collective events could also be purposely situated in liminal spaces. The positioning of the retreat activities points to the important power of liminal space in how the quilters themselves reaffirm their participation, commitment and social values of their guild and gendered middle-class cultural practices. The 25 women at the retreat were not rebelling against the social order of the community during a license in ritual but, through their loud and often shocking performances, reaffirmed the gendered and middle-class practices of the community itself. Gendered and middle-class practices are interconnected when these women come together in their common practice of creating quilts. Gendered and middle-class practices as well as diverse notions of selves and community interconnect when these women come together in their common practice of creating quilts.

In conclusion, I have discovered that it is not enough to simply outline the gendered and middle-class practices of my participants or illustrate how they overlap, interweave, and converge together. An important second question is: what do gendered and middle-class practices *do* for women who quilt in St. John's? In Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class in a New Consumer Society, Liechty admits that his ethnography "contributes to the specific task of conceptualizing middle-class cultural practice" (2003:10). Liechty states that the "middle-class is a constantly renegotiated cultural

space - a space of ideas, values, goods, practices, and embodied behaviours - in which the terms of inclusion and exclusion are endlessly tested, negotiated, and affirmed. From this point of view, it is the process, not the product, that constitutes class" (*Ibid.*:15-16). My important question takes inspiration from Liechty's fundamental question: what *does* class as cultural practice do? (2003:265). The result of practicing class "is cultural space" where class "as cultural practice is about locating one's self and one's class 'others' in social space" (*Ibid.*:255). What is important to note in his ideas of middle-classness is that the "production of class-cultural space is accomplished through two conceptually distinct forms of cultural practice: discursive, narrative or linguistic practice on the one hand and embodied, physical, or material practice (including the use of goods) on the other" (*Ibid.*:256).

There were many examples of how my participants create, perpetuate and occupy cultural space in terms of their middle-class and gendered practices. Quilts themselves have become cultural space where individual women communicate voices of motivation, voices of spirituality, voices of the past and Newfoundland identities in their creations. Their shared middle-class practices (access to education, access to financial support and resources to purchase material goods) create cultural spaces. In these spaces, they can create quilts and the cultural material space of the quilts themselves. The creation of cultural spaces by middle-class and gendered practices also produces an arena for power relationships and opportunities for agency. Quilts become evidence of a material locus of agency. It is through this dynamic relationship between creator and creation that one sees active agency. When considering the personal agency of women who quilt in St. John's,

this agency exists because the quilters themselves are embedded in relations of power in their daily lives.

Agency has the capacity to be expressed on a continuum between being self-destructive and liberating. I argue that the narratives that surround quilts are dominated by how quilters use the quilts themselves for personal agency and/or social action. By considering the guild's creative responses to a fellow member's cancer and "The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project" eastern tour exhibition, one can see how quilts can become *strategic vehicles* to promote active personal agency and community responses to illness. The Guild meetings, retreat and the quilt exhibition are all cultural spaces that are produced by the gendered and middle-class practices of my participants. Many women in the Guild evoke personal agency by utilizing quilts as vehicles in response to the illness of a friend by creating a memory quilt. The memory quilt created for Donna is an example of where personal agency is enacted but not followed through to a larger arena of social action. The agency demonstrated here is also limited to the personal. The women who contributed to this quilt could also have received personal advantages such as self-satisfaction and a sense of productive selflessness as well as a sense that they have once again *participated* in a Guild inspired event. Donna, in her narrative, has attempted to display individual agency in the face of her cancer.

Why did the women who created Donna's memory quilt not move their personal agency to social agency? There are many possibilities. First, I did not interview every woman who contributed to the memory quilt. There is a possibility that some of the non-interviewed women *do* move their agency into social action. However, let us consider the ethnographic evidence that does exist. Donna, who has cancer, moved her personal

agency into social agency when she left the fall retreat early in order to participate in a charity walk for cancer. However, I did not see evidence that Donna moves her personal agency into social agency in terms of using quilts as strategic vehicles.. There is also the possibility that the women who created Donna's quilt could make the jump from personal agency to social action with their quilts in specific circumstances: when cancer touches them personally. Of course, the events in one's life that are deemed 'personal' have much to do with how the individual defines 'personal'. After reviewing my interview and observational data, I observed that the women's practice of 'personal' had to do with their organization of time and cultural spaces in their lives. All of the women whom I interviewed lead full lives, many have children, work and guild responsibilities. The women who created Donna's quilt made it during a past retreat: time that was devoted to participation in the guild. The retreat is a specific cultural space and event of the guild. Participation in the act of quilting and in the guild is therefore limited. Also, there is the possibility that the women may mobilize their personal agency into social action when cancer materializes in their lives directly: in themselves or in their immediate families (husband, children, parents, etc). No longer would their limited quilting time be devoted to the guild or for quilting for a friend in the guild who has cancer. Lastly, one must observe that the women have a choice in whether or not their personal agency mobilizes into social action and whether or not this will take place within their quilting practices. Another example from the women I interviewed comes from Ethel's narratives who told me that, while she was volunteering at the quilt exhibition to do "her part" for the guild, she also volunteered because two close relatives died of cancer in her family thus Ethel

makes the leap from personal to social agency. However, this is not accomplished through physical space of her quilts but rather at the cultural space of a quilting event.

With reference to personal and social agency, middle-class practices create cultural space where women use the production of quilts as vehicles of personal agency and social action when discussing the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt for those who have died of AIDS and in participating in "The Quilt: A Breast Cancer Support Project" eastern tour exhibition. This exhibition is not only an example of how women (and men) use quilting in order to express personal agency but also move into social action. Women who quilt locally in Newfoundland and nationally not only share narratives of the personal agency enacted by the action of their quilting. My evidence demonstrates that individual agency for many quilters will often not lead to social action. This agency will instead remain at the level of individual expressions of emotion and personal agency.

In closing, this thesis demonstrates that women who quilt in St. John's negotiate and construct a nexus of gendered and middle-class practices. In turn, these gendered and middle-class practices are influenced by the women's specific economic and social contexts. By considering how these women situate and communicate multifaceted selves and practices of community, I argue that through its ambiguousness, the practice of quilting provides women who quilt in St. John's, Newfoundland an avenue for specific 'culturally available pathways' and spaces in which to construct and negotiate gendered, middle-class practices. It is this ambiguous context of the artistic value and definition of the act and material outcome of quilting that creates a negotiable site for many women to discursively reveal values and ideals that construct their individual and collective womanhoods. The women who gave me their time, energy and narratives, create and

negotiate spaces, behaviours and economic privileges which are “naturalized through both narratives and performances” (Liechty 2003:19). These women speak and act “themselves into cultural existence” (Ibid.:265) and hopefully will continue to do so with their quilting activities, passions, pursuits, friendships, families, obligations and rewards for many years to come.

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APPENDIX A



Photograph A: "Hawaiian Gold" By: Wednesday Group Ottawa Valley Guild,
The Quilt: 2003. Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph B: "Sampler" By: Mallory Slingerland, The Quilt: 2003. Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph C: "Recliner Gallery". Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph D: "Recliner and Quilt Gallery". Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph E: "Recliner and Quilt Gallery". Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph F: "Windows and Temples". Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



Photograph G: "Living Hearth, Heart and Home". Photo taken by: Jaime Griffis, August 5, 2003.



