

LOCATING LUKE

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ABSTRACT

Locating Luke

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This thesis is an attempt to locate Alexandra Luke within three theoretical paradigms. These include a cultural/historical position within Canadian modernism, gender-directed practices and parameters, and her position within the preponderance of Canadian cultural figures who engaged in spiritual explorations. The work addresses these issues through examining Luke's personal, professional, and private lives, and argues for a logical rather than phenomenal interconnectedness in seemingly disparate actions and ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

Her friends remember Margaret:¹

her very blue eyes, direct, probing and
intelligent--²

You are one of those real people that I like to
see at a time like this . . . I think of you with
love and admiration my dear--you have meant a lot
to me in my work--you are such a generous person
passing on your enthusiasm and knowledge.³

You have found something of your own that [has] a
feminine beauty to it and reflects I think your
inner life.⁴

Alexandra Luke was one of the founding members of
Painters Eleven, the first group of abstract painters in
English Canada. She worked with significant individuals and
institutions for artists in her day, and recorded their
teachings and her own development in copious notes which
offer insights into the psychological and spiritual
underpinnings of modern art.

Within the Oshawa community, Margaret McLaughlin, as
wife of Ewart McLaughlin of the General Motors McLaughlins,
was a significant generator of cultural improvement,
arranging art classes for local painters, bringing major

Canadian artists to local workshops. She was in many ways, a typical "clubwoman" as many women of privilege were during the 1940's and 50's. Art classes, discussion groups, exhibitions, and workshops with well known artists were activities consistent with her artistic disposition, but she was also involved in more popular Oshawa pursuits such as the skating club, the YWCA, the Historical Society.

At home she fulfilled the demands of her position as wife and mother, with tree-trimming parties at Christmas, summer entertaining at the cottage, and garden teas.

But there was another Margaret, one who was continually inquiring and speculating, interested in a wide variety of study that included mysticism, psychology, parapsychology, UFO's, in fact many of the interests and preoccupations of her era. But in particular, and alongside conventional religious practices, Margaret was, from 1958 on, a part of a study and work group which followed the teachings of an Armenian/Greek/Russian mystic named Gurdjieff. The group kept its interests private, according to the precepts of its leader, neither recruiting nor preaching, and is not widely known even today, in spite of an increasing body of writing on the subject. The degree of Margaret's commitment can be ascertained by the fact that she made time in an extremely busy life to travel to Mendham, New Jersey, where members combined manual labour, study, and exercises in

self-awareness in order to carry out "the work". Trips in to the centre in Toronto were frequent, at times several sessions per week, and her friends in the work visited her in Oshawa, especially later when she was dying with cancer.

Alexandra Luke is the focus for an exploration of connections between twentieth century Canadian art and mystical thought, gender issues, and the location of modernism within these areas. The working title "Locating Alexandra," refers to the evaluation of her position in light of the post-modern assertion that creative production include its "location", that is, its point of view, ideological bias, its temporal position. Luke may be located within several theoretical paradigms. Among these are i) the cultural/historical position of Alexandra Luke, ii) a feminist reading of the dualism within which she functioned and her manner of mediating conflicting roles and expectations, and iii) her position within the complex and ambivalent realm of mystical thought which has manifested itself in the works of such notable Canadian artists as J. E. H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, Fred Varley, Emily Carr, Jock Macdonald, and Joyce Wieland. This work is an attempt to locate Alexandra, and in so doing, creates reciprocal reference points, for my study of Luke, and for me.

Methodology

The research work has formed itself into three distinct areas which held their own disciplinary demands, and offered their own insights. These are: Feminist Theory, Modern Art, and Mysticism. The spiritual movements that Luke explored and their positions in the cultural and artistic history of Canada is an area of study which has generally been termed "Theosophy," when in fact Luke's spiritual explorations ranged beyond this assignation, further and wider into the exotic realm of the teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff. Readings in feminist theory have helped to assess the implications of Luke's various "locations". Issues of gender, class, creativity, and societal restriction arise. And most important at an objective level is the recognition of Alexandra Luke as the significant and underrated artist who pioneered abstract painting in English Canada at about the same time as it was developing in French Canada and New York.

Biographical material on Luke, who died in 1967, has been obtained through archival research and interviews with friends, fellow artists, and family. A feminist perspective on interviewing and writing biography, offering non-linear, subjective analysis, is grounded in methodological parameters suggested in the writings of feminist theorists such as Cixous, Showalter, Dupré, Heilbrun, and biographers

Edel and Oakley.

Luke's artistic experience is explored in relation to her position within modernism, her connections with other Canadian art and artists, and her artistic and spiritual influences.

A feminist reading will examine the gender, regional (community), and class related difficulties of integrating public and private, spirit and matter.

But putting theory aside, Margaret Alexandra Luke McLaughlin's life is also a great story that begs to be told!

On Subjectivity

Ultimately I, as the biographer, must paint the portrait and I can paint it only from the angle of vision I have, and from my time and its relation to the time that I seek to recover.⁵

This attempt at "locating" Alexandra is, in its overall structure, a personal and artistic biography of Luke. However it eschews the notion of an objective analysis of Luke in the traditional sense of biography. Heilbrun identifies poet Adrienne Rich and her generation of women poets as responsible for defying T.S.Eliot's "ban upon the personal" in "novels, interviews, and letters."⁶ Heilbrun also posits that "feminist theoreticians like Elaine

Showalter have, since then, defended this female mode, despite efforts to dismiss it by calling it confessional.⁷

Other theoretical discourse also contains critiques of pure objectivity on the grounds that all knowledge is qualified by the subjective. P. D. Ouspensky's Tertium Organum, a text which attracted the interest of many artists during the earlier part of this century, follows the philosopher Immanuel Kant in its call for consideration of the position of the analyst as well as her subject: "every knowledge is conditional. We can never embrace all the meanings of any one thing, because in order to do that we must embrace the whole world with all the variety of its own meanings."⁸ Ouspensky is discussing the deficiency of positivist reasoning which relies upon empirical fact while misunderstanding the limited nature of human perception. More specifically to my study of Alexandra Luke, every knowledge is not only conditional to human perception but also to individual points of view, and within this particular situation, to a feminist referent. This viewpoint emphasizes the subjective nature of not only my interpretation of Luke's location, but also the multiplicity of interpretations of her location from the viewpoints of her daughter, her artistic peers, her friends and neighbours, and her legacy to the region.

In Writing Lives Leon Edel provides would-be

biographers with valuable insights and practical suggestions for working within this art form, reminding readers that "scholars facing new archives often assume that old methods are still viable. And they work out of ancient rigidities."⁹ Although Edel refers specifically to the art of writing, many of his reflections and suggestions are equally appropriate to the visual artist. A great deal of feminist theory is derived from literary experience, but remains relevant to visual art. Nell Tenhaaf explains: "The impact of French feminist thought has extended in the 1980's beyond language and politics to include the visual arts, where it has revitalized a sense of feminist activism."¹⁰ While the artist's biographer's references are more visual than literary, the revelatory nature of visual art is more closely aligned with psychological states. In abstraction in particular, the inner landscape of the artist is often articulated on the canvas or paper in a language of colour and form. Edel's comments on psychology are exquisitely pertinent to Luke's works because of her particular interest in the psyche, and her inquiries into many psychological, and as well, psychic phenomena:

Biography takes three postulates from psychoanalysis: first, the existence of the unconscious in human motivation and behaviour, in dreams, imaginings, thoughts; second, that within

the unconscious there exist certain suppressed feelings and states of being which sometimes emerge in the consciously created forms of literatureThird, by the process of induction, that is, by examining the mental representation in words of things not presented to the senses, we can discover deeper intentions and meanings, valuable both to the biographer and to the critic.¹¹

Much of Luke's work was derived from an "automatic" method of painting which originated with the French surrealists and comprised the methodology for the work of the Quebec "automatists" who were painting a little earlier than the Toronto abstract painters. Although each group developed independently and from separate sources, the unifying concept is that they explored the images and colours which came through revelatory trance-like states whose original methods referred directly to Freud's ideas earlier in the century. Luke was introduced to this manner of working by Jock Macdonald, who learned from psychiatrist Dr. Grace Pailthorpe in Vancouver a method "of using the unconscious so that paintings occurred automatically--without thought."¹²

By taking the name Alexandra Luke, the artist

contributes to a personal mythology. Both Alexandra and Luke are names suggestive of strength, regality, and even piety. Although Alexandra is a female name, the combination, but for a slip of a suffix, sounds like a man's name. Ray Mead thought she was a male artist until her met her.¹³ Edel suggests that "psychological role playing" occurs in certain instances, when "the private myth provides a covert drive and motivating force."¹⁴

The notion of location is integral to any depiction of Luke's life and work, and the ultimate meaning in the exercise is pertinent to current feminist thought because of the consideration of location, rather than in spite of it.

In "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local" Elspeth Probyn illuminates the complexities which exist within feminist/postmodernist discourse upon the concept of location.¹⁵ Both feminist and postmodernist theory acknowledges the necessity of consideration of location in any analytical exercise, but Probyn grapples with the fundamental issue of legitimacy of voice with respect to local, locale, and location. She defines each term:

the concept of "locale" will be used to designate a place that is the setting for a particular event . . . the home being the most obvious example. In distinction, "local" is that directly issuing from

or related to a particular timeFinally, by "location" I refer to the methods by which one comes to locate sites of research.¹⁶

The location of biographer is integral to the discussion. For me, choice of topic, site of discourse and analysis of the local have both shared and divergent aspects in common with the subject.

As a member of the local artistic community, I can identify common experiences and frustrations with my subject. The compelling nature of being a parent, and all the related responsibilities, societal pressures, and competition for time and attention which occur within conventional family life are all aspects of Luke's life with which I can identify, and within which I perceive my "location" as similar to that of my subject. But there are also many aspects of Luke's life and work which distance her in terms of local, locale, and finally location from any position of identification on my part. Luke was attached by marriage to a family which participated in fundamental and far reaching changes which have taken place in the twentieth century. Luke's personal life consisted of activities concomitant with Oshawa society life, interspersed with travel to Bermuda and the American south, and summer on an island in Muskoka. Her philosophical journeys into the esoteric were enabled in part because her daily life did not

include the menial duties which exist within the experience of most women. This is not to denigrate her achievements, but to acknowledge her position of privilege, always qualified by the difficulties which also existed for her within an unhappy marriage, within the restrictions as well as privileges of wealth, and within her Protestant, upright, structured family circle of duty and expectation. It must also be noted that, in spite of her position within a wealthy family, her personal income remained limited, closely supervised by her husband Ewart.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSONAL LIFE

MARGARET'S HERITAGE

La parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles.¹

One's heart is full yet frustrated that one cannot share this golden morning with kindred spirits - 'Tis enough to gather in the good impressions. They'll be transposed in other ways to others somehow, sometime!²

Flaubert's fictional creation echoes against the reality of Margaret McLaughlin (a.k.a. Alexandra Luke)'s life in its reaction to and choice within a bourgeois environment and value system. Like those of the fictional Emma Bovary, Margaret's origins were provincial and limited in choice and expectations. In combination with wit and talent, these factors create an uneasy mixture which resonates throughout the modern era in both fact and fiction. Many overlapping and conflicting layers of meaning in Flaubert's words are relevant to an examination of the life, work and interests of this Oshawa artist. Fiction can

offer valuable insights into the problematics of ordinary life, and sometimes reality offers equal drama to the creative genius of a Flaubert, who based his Emma on a true story. Margaret's story is such a reality in its mythic potential, while the fictional experience of Emma's response to an unsatisfying environment offers illumination to the question of Margaret's exploration of spirit. The difference is also revealing, because Emma's response was romantic, sexual, and material, while Margaret's was intellectual and spiritual.

Although she and her twin sister Isobel were born in Montreal in 1901, Margaret Alexandra Luke was an Oshawa girl, whose family had returned to their home town by 1914. Descent from early settlers positioned her nicely within local society, where the Luke family were known as salt of the earth Methodists. Margaret belongs to the line descended from Richard Luke and Mary Pascoe, who came from St. Blaizey Cornwall in April of 1834. Apparently the journey was arduous, across rough waters where children were occasionally lost over the side, and Samuel, one of the Luke children, was indeed rescued by an oarsman when he was washed overboard from the Durham boat which the family was taking up the St. Lawrence River. They settled on Conlins Road in the Kedron area, in a closely knit community of upright, moral people. When other newcomers such as the

Pedlar family came out from Cornwall they provided whatever support they could, even the loan of their barn until they found living quarters. The Luke home survived until recently when it was taken down to make way for Kedron Dells golf course.³

When viewed in juxtaposition with the chronicles of the Moodies in Roughing It in the Bush⁴ which was written in 1837, the prosperity and stability of families in the Oshawa area is underscored. Excellent farming conditions, skilled labour, and a tightly knit society with common values and origins contributed to the success of Oshawa's first families. The Lukes were tradespeople who quickly became engaged in the industry of the region, while the Moodies were poor upper-middle class, unskilled farmers on poor land, unable to overcome class pretensions and unfitted for life in the bush. The Lukes were not homesteading; although 1834 is relatively early in the settlement of the area, they did purchase their land from a previous owner.

Richard and Mary's son Jessie Pascoe Luke (b.1830) had nine children, the youngest being Jessie Herbert Richard Luke, born in 1870 and the father of Margaret Alexandra and her twin sister Mary Isobel, Elizabeth Ritson (Betty), and Mabel Katherine Emsley Luke. A photograph addressed to the "aunties" from the "Luke quartet" shows the elder twins to be sturdy and tomboyish, while the younger sisters are

ensconced in muslin and lace. Stories from her youth reveal that Margaret was the lively twin, the one that could "act up" to avoid dinner duties, the strong-willed one.⁵ A much earlier photograph, labeled "Mrs. Luke and twin infants" reveals a dark, slim young mother standing with an infant in each arm, for what must have been an interminable session while the exposure was completed.

Photographs reveal the development of a prosperous, middle class family firmly positioned within its time. Strong family-oriented values did not change for Margaret, who remained faithful to family interests and obligations throughout her life.

Although there are no records of other artists in Margaret Alexandra's background, there are manifestations of creativity and artisanship in the industries in which her forebears engaged. The Lukes in Oshawa were furniture makers and in the funeral business, occupations which went hand in hand in early Canada. It was a nursery business in Montreal which attracted Margaret's parents to that city in 1900. There was also a grandfather locally renowned for his singing voice. (Margaret played the piano and the autoharp, and Mary remembers the family singing all the way to Muskoka and back.) The significance of their being of Cornish descent affords them with a cultural heritage of workmanship, strong religious commitment, and no small

amount of superstition.⁶ An emerging picture is one of stability within a huge extended family that is devout and industrious. Yvonne McKague Housser says to Alexandra, "You have pioneer energy and spirit - put into action."⁷

Following high school Margaret and her sister Isobel trained as nurses at Columbia Hospital for Women in Washington D. C. According to Eva Donovan, a cousin, the sisters went to Washington because Canadian hospitals would not accept sisters in nurses' training programs.⁸ After graduation, only Margaret returned to Oshawa society, where she was married to Marcus Everett Smith on April 15, 1925 by Reverend J. H. McBain. The reception took place at her parents' home on Kendall Avenue in Oshawa. Exemplary of Southern Ontario life in the twenties, their social set skated, golfed, partied, and in general enjoyed their prosperity.

However material prosperity and middle class values are not universally considered as advantages. Wilhelm Reich calls the middle class "the class that preserves nothing less than several thousand years of patriarchy and keeps it alive with all its contradictions."⁹ Indicative of an underlying and stultifying provinciality which characterizes so much of the collective WASP experience was Margaret's mother-in-law's disapproval at her early pregnancy, and the narrow range of society within which she was situated.

Life was altered most tragically and dramatically when, after only four months of marriage, her husband died suddenly. While Margaret was celebrating as matron of honour at her twin sister Isobel's wedding, a call came from Simcoe, where Everett was working in the canning business, to tell of his sudden death. The wedding party was then required to hurry away to make funeral arrangements. Within the year she was a widow and a mother, with a mother-in-law who was suddenly thrilled to be having a grandchild.

An old friend of the McLaughlins reminisces:

John Burns is 94 years old (91?) and emphasizes the unreliability of his memories. However, in the random access manner of remembering which both afflicts and entertains the elderly, Mr. Burns offers many delightful recollections about his close friends, Ewart and Marg McLaughlin. He has lived through and past the Luke sisters, their marriages and tragedies, his best friend Ewart's late marriage to Margaret Luke, the young widow in their social set. Little of the material can be applied to the issues around which this study is centred, but most of what he says evokes an almost idyllic time past, when he and Ewart became best friends, when he almost married Ewart's sister Dorothy, and when the "Luke twins" were popular young ladies in Oshawa society. Clearly he values his friendships, and when I ask "Was she religious?" he scowls at me and wants to know exactly what I am writing this for. I do not find out what she read, studied, talked about.

But I find out that he and "Mrs. George" (Ewart's mother) became friends when he was delivering shoes from his father's store and became frightened by the McLaughlins' barking, slavering dog. Mrs. George stopped the dog in its tracks, and pacified the small boy with some cookies.

Later on he and Ewart shared many youthful excursions in an open car, often headed to the cottage in Muskoka.¹⁰ When I question his accounts of two fifteen year olds spending a few unsupervised days at the cottage, he says that they were responsible boys. As adults, they continued their friendship, the closeness of the two families corroborated by the pictures he has displayed in his living room. Along with his own family sits a studio photograph of Margaret, and over the chesterfield hangs one of her abstracts. Another painting looks like one of her earlier landscapes, but is not signed.¹¹

MARGARET AND EWART

In 1928 Margaret Alexandra married Clarence Ewart McLaughlin of the McLaughlin Buick family. Although the new baby was later adopted by Ewart, the family remained close to their Smith grandmother, who lived nearby and continued to be part of their extended family through Sunday dinners and frequent contact.¹²

Ewart's father, George, was one of the sons of Robert McLaughlin of the McLaughlin Carriage Company; the family was General Motors, the wellspring of Oshawa. Although the public is most familiar with the philanthropy of Colonel Sam McLaughlin, his quiet brother George also contributed significantly to the community. Coupled with community

spirit and an obligation toward philanthropy is a Protestant carefulness (frugality, moderation, propriety, ..) which in Ewart was represented by a taciturn teetotaler whose closeness to his money is better remembered than his dry humour, flair for photography, and enthusiasm for boating. Ewart was also known as someone who enjoyed giving rides in his snazzy cars.

The relationship between Margaret Alexandra and her second husband is significant as the essence of legend, rich in event as well as inconclusively and tantalizingly ambivalent. Ewart is described variously as either a high school sweetheart who waited for her, or a rescuing partner in an expedient marriage.

Ewart McLaughlin's obituary in the Oshawa Times states that

Mr. McLaughlin gave generously throughout his life to many civic philanthropic organizations. His most recent gift was the new art gallery which will be located in the new civic square complex. The gallery was donated in tribute to his grandfather, the late Robert McLaughlin.¹³

Other remembrances by friends, staff, and family include remarks such as

Ewart always thought he was an invalid; brought up

to believe it.¹⁴

Although they were wealthy people, Mrs. George McLaughlin did all of her own preserving, providing Ewart with definite ideas about the role of women.

It was hard for Dad, too. He grew up with a mother who coddled him because he wasn't expected to live.¹⁵

He took margarine/she [Margaret] took butter, and they didn't compromise.¹⁶

Ewart had cancer before her. At the opening of the gallery Ewart came in a car. He was so ill he couldn't sit up; he had to recline. He turned the earth with a trowel. Shortly afterwards, he died.¹⁷

Ewart gave his wife an allowance which was the equivalent of the married exemption on the income tax return. He couldn't tolerate her art and couldn't stand to have it around.¹⁸

Ewart was stingy. Luke was very limited financially as he was not exactly generous. He had the old-fashioned male viewpoint.¹⁹

He gave her everything. But they were both frugal.²⁰

As for Ewart being tight-fisted, everyone in his generation was tight-fisted.²¹

Ewart was "a fine, clever person, "not well, but hardly an invalid."²²

Ewart was very intelligent although not prepossessing.²³

Ron Lambert, describing Ewart as a "very friendly gentleman . . . when you got to know him," didn't think that Ewart was trying to control Margaret with his money, rather that "he thought it [her art] was nonsense and he wasn't going to spend any money on it."²⁴

At the cottage he'd stay by himself a lot.²⁵

..reserved and retiring, but he had a good sense of humour.²⁶

Luke's marriage to Ewart McLaughlin has been examined and analysed by friends, relatives, peers, and academics studying the artist's life. But there are only a few

impressions which remain consistently; rather, what comes through is the multiplicity of impressions of her relationship with Ewart McLaughlin, and of Ewart himself.

Certainly it was not a perfect union, but seemed to be firmly located within the persona of Margaret McLaughlin. "The marriage had problems, but you couldn't say they didn't get along."²⁷ Mary remembers "discussions" during the earlier years of the marriage, when discord and disagreement dominated their conversations.²⁸ Margaret made no secret of her less than perfect union with Ewart, a fact which is documented in correspondence as well as in verbal recollections from a wide variety of sources. It is clear that they were two strongly divergent personalities with conflicting interests, inclinations, and ideas. Margaret's life as an artist and explorations of the spirit were at odds with Ewart's conventional rationalism.

However, during the summer of 1964, the battles had nearly all been fought, both Margaret and Ewart had received what their daughter Mary refers to as their "death sentences," and, by the accounts of Bernice Johnston, their nurse/chauffeur for the summer, the couple lived quietly. Margaret slept in her tiny bedroom beside Ewart's in order to get up with him in the night. And although their interests diverged, they spent afternoons talking together about their readings.

Johnston feels that they had the kind of relationship they wanted. She was busy with her art, but she'd go in and sit with him, and didn't like to leave him alone. During her illness, it was Ewart, weak from his own imminent death, who provided funding for the development of an Oshawa art gallery and personally turned the sod for the project. Given that the Robert McLaughlin Gallery is an institution dedicated to the promotion of Canadian art, and in spite of being named after Ewart's grandfather, a Sunday painter, rather than his wife Alexandra Luke, the fact that he muttered that he never saw much in modern art offers a glimpse of his own problematic relationship to his wife's activities, but hints at a kind of sanguine support in the final analysis. It also has been suggested by Michèle Lacombe that

his near death-bed conversion and acceptance of her and her art reveals a Christian pattern or form of personal spiritual narrative: grace? forgiveness? room/time for charity, beauty, leisure, love, only when it's (almost) too late? ... the joint cancer and how each handled it is quite mind-boggling, to me a metaphor for a certain kind of marriage, although to them it was certainly much more than a metaphor.²⁹

Such details as her Sunday dinners with Grandmother

Smith, the maintenance of the McLaughlin homestead in Enniskillen, and her daughter's recollection that they had always had three grandmothers underscore her perseverance in maintaining a sense of family. They also raise questions about the circumstances surrounding her marriage to Ewart. Did his frailness and her nurse's training counterbalance her rather desperate circumstances at the time of her marriage? How important was her parents' approval of her new husband to be? In fact, the Lukes and McLaughlins grew up a few doors away from each other, and both sets of parents were very pleased at the match. Ewart was well into his thirties, and his parents were anxious to see him married. The fact that Margaret had a child, and a boy at that, could only add to their delight, since there were no other male heirs in the McLaughlin family. They were all great friends, a fact corroborated by family pictures of Margaret and her first husband partying with McLaughlins at their summer homes in Muskoka.

Heilbrun's comments may shed some light on this suggestion:

Marriage in short, is a bargain, like buying a house or entering a profession. One chooses it knowing that, by that very decision, one is abnegating other possibilities. In choosing companionship over passion, women like Beatrice

Webb and Virginia Woolf made a bargain; their marriages worked because they did not regret their bargains, or blame their husbands for not being something else - dashing lovers, for example. But in writing biographies, or one's own life, it is both customary and misleading to present such marriages, to oneself or to one's readers, as sad compromises, the best of a bad bargain, or scarcely speak of them at all. Such marriages are not bad bargains, but the best of a good bargain, and we must learn the language to understand and describe them, particularly in writing the lives of accomplished women.³⁰

Heilbrun analyzes the institution of marriage by looking into various well-known relationships. Describing the life of Dorothy L. Sayers, who found herself pregnant and alone "at a time when it was . . . a great sin," Heilbrun sees assurance of "her strange independence"³¹ unlike the biographer James Brabazon, who "suspects that Sayers might have been happier had she been pretty, "normally" married, with lots of children, and had she not been a lonely, only child."³² By contrast, Margaret was good looking and charming ("everyone" was in love with the Luke sisters), "normally" married, with two children and a large extended family.³³

If Brabazon suggests that Sayers' achievements are in some way a default, Heilbrun's alternative is just as unsatisfactory, since she interprets the difficulties of her private life to be the necessary and chosen price which talent and achievement require:

We can sense now that it was essential to Sayers' sense of vocation that she (like George Eliot) put beyond reach the temptation of the conventional woman's life. By becoming pregnant as an unmarried woman at a time when that was (as it was to remain in Sayers' mind always) a great sin, by pouring out her love to a man (not the father of her child) who was incapable of receiving it, Sayers assured herself her strange independence.³⁴

Many issues which pertain to Alexandra Luke are raised in these arguments. Was she a precursor to the so-called superwoman, the high achiever who worked to "have it all" and if so, what was the cost? Her daughter remembers her severe migraines which occurred during or right after a major event.³⁵ Had the artistic talents which she displayed as a youth been channeled sooner, would she have engineered the course of her life in such a way as to avoid "the conventional woman's life"? We can only speculate. Certainly there were problems inherent in her attempts to integrate professional and family life which continue for women today,

but were exacerbated for Margaret because of Ewart's disapproval.

If the circumstances conspired to make it seem like a good idea at the time, the match between Margaret and Ewart soon proved them to be very ill-suited. The fundamental disagreement surrounded her failure to meet Ewart's expectations in terms of what a wife should be. He wanted his socks darned, a wife to look after him, his home, and his children. Margaret was not interested in domesticity in the traditional sense, and also completely disinterested in General Motors, cars, photographs of early Oshawa, politics, or history, all of which were Ewart's enthusiasms. Her painting was acceptable when she was making landscapes in a Group of Seven fashion, but her full-hearted espousal of "modern art," her interests in esoteric thought, and later, her "arty" friends, were, Ewart felt, hostile intrusions into his world. Although the famous story about Ewart removing Luke's paintings from the walls of their home and hanging up his F. A. Verner watercolours when she was away contains comic possibilities, Mary recalls that it was no joke when it happened.³⁶

Heilbrun looks at the marriage of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, defining it as "one in which both partners have work at the centre of their lives and must find a delicate balance that can support both together and each

individually."³⁷ This situation necessitates a stronger nurturing role for the husband. Although marriage at this time "appeared both conventional and mandatory," the Woolfs were able to reinvent the institution for their own purposes. The author refers to writings by Nancy Miller and Colette to substantiate her description of a workable marriage:

But he must believe not only what he can see, what appears to his "male gaze," and the gaze, therefore, of other judging men, but what he sees of her life as a whole, including work, intelligence, talent, doubt, and achievement.³⁸

Sadly, Margaret never received the sympathy and approval which might have created a comfortable relationship in which each partner could work and grow.

MOTHERHOOD

Although it would seem that Margaret McLaughlin had every opportunity to indulge herself wherever her interests lay, the patterns of her life indicate that this was not entirely the case. During the 1930s her artistic explorations, however imperative, were organized to include her children. There are earlier indications of a need/desire to expand her parameters, and suggestions by those who knew her that she was very forceful, very focused toward what she wanted, and that her family (grudgingly) accommodated her needs, rather than the other way around. In 1931 she spent several months with her mother and son in Bermuda in order to alleviate Dick's allergies, and to paint. Mary, born in 1930, was left at home with Ewart and the nurse. Variations of this were repeated several times in the ensuing years, when Mary recalls home tutoring to replace conventional schooling during their sojourns away. Later in the thirties Margaret took both children to Aiken South Carolina, and then on to Arizona for Dick's sinus problem, and to paint. When they stayed in Arizona, the children attended school, leaving early in the morning and returning late in the day by bus.

During this period, Margaret took about ten days to leave the children in Arizona, and attend art lessons in New

Mexico. As it is today, New Mexico was a mecca for artists of all kinds. The Transcendental Painting Group had been founded in 1938 in Santa Fe, with Raymond Jonson, Emil Bisttram, and Lawren Harris, who participated in its formative stages and became a member in 1939. Bisttram had established the Taos School of Fine Arts in 1932, where he taught "dynamic symmetry."³⁹ This would have been an exciting and valuable experience in Margaret's artistic development, but also an incredibly problematic activity in terms of her relationship with her husband and children. But, as their daughter says, she went, and must have had financial support from him to do so.

Her daughter recalls her mother's anger and frustration at years of entering juried shows unsuccessfully, and trying to "break in" to the societies which comprised the Canadian art establishment. Margaret finally broke through in 1945, when she studied in Banff. This milestone in her life as an artist was a lonely and painful time for her daughter Mary, who, at fifteen, was left in charge of their summer home on the island in Muskoka. Mary's capabilities had been proven much earlier, since she had been responsible for dinners on Thursdays, when the servants had their days off, from the time that she was seven years old. Margaret was a talented, but irregular cook. The gender-specific nature of these criticisms and the fact that they would never occur in a

discussion of the development of a male artist is indicative of the expectations placed upon Margaret. Going beyond prescribed patterns of behaviour were partly excused by "artistic temperament," but it is clear that a traditional Mom would have been preferable to the family, and what emerges is a sense of the pressure which is exerted by the needs of children, by the way families do things, and by Margaret's sense of propriety.

The other side to this, of course, is that the children, in their awareness/denial/resentment/pride of Luke did not want to sell their mother's paintings. Through filial affection and also unawareness of the exigencies of the art world and perhaps of the scope of their mother's relationship to Canadian art, declined to promote her work in a commercial venue after her death. This was compounded by the fact that Luke's dealer, Dorothy Cameron, went out of business after her gallery was closed in 1965 in what Barrie Hale refers to as "the obscenity bust," that memorably Torontonians uprising against "indecent" painting.⁴⁰ Since the work was not circulating through the commercial gallery system of dealers and purchasers, Luke's reputation languished; the market value of the work did not appreciate; and the majority of the pieces remained within the family as treasured remembrances of "Mother." Joan Murray notes the prevalence of this phenomenon for women artists, another

side effect of the hagiographic dimension of motherhood.⁴¹

Like many artists, Margaret did not display all of the so-called motherly qualities which our culture demands. Her enthusiasm for society life engendered tears from children who wanted their mother, and disapproval from Ewart who considered it frivolous. Her strong desire to spend time developing her art also infringed upon the time which was supposed to be devoted to family pursuits. Notwithstanding these qualifications regarding Margaret's degree of "motherliness," her experiences which related to having children must be accredited as integral components in her development, given that motherhood is both a biological state and a vocation. There are many aspects of Margaret's life which were structured by it, and which demonstrate her affection and interest in her children and later her grandchildren. In Daybook: The Journal of an Artist sculptor Anne Truitt expresses the reconciliation of conflicting demands from her art and the rest of her life:

The artist could not have come into herself without the mother's experience: She owes her a debt of honor for all the layers and layers of hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly knowledge of what life is. For the artist has grown out of that rich ground as surely as she has grown out of the student, the wife, the nurse, the friend. The

fact that the mother is bothersome, takes up the artist's time with her demands, in no way reduces this fundamental reliance on her wisdom. The artist also is more dependent on the mother than she likes to acknowledge, set as she is on her independence, for just as the mother turns to the artist for comfort so does the artist turn to the mother for nurture when her work gets her down. And the mother never turns her off curtly. Rather, she rushes in with nourishing soup, hot baths, and a tender hushing into night.⁴²

The author creates two personae in order to cope with these conflicts, a creation which reverberates onto Luke's life. Not only does Truitt acknowledge gender-related contributions to the artist in her, but she defines a reciprocal relationship special to her own situation. In Daybook Truitt's descriptions of her orderly and disciplined existence also reveal the consistent and salient fact which can also be ascribed to Luke, and that is the absolute necessity of diligence and hard work which the artist's life demands, and even more so the artist who is also wife and/or mother.

Margaret's relationships within her family offer insights into the inherent conflicts in her personality. Her

two children are Everett Richard (Dick) born in 1925, and Mary, born in 1930. Dick was adopted by Ewart when he reached adolescence.

Margaret's daughter Mary describes her mother as family oriented in a larger sense, making sure that they knew their relatives and heritage, organizing pageants at family get-togethers and singsongs on their trips north. Margaret's diary contains many references to her grandchildren, and her sketch book has children's drawings amidst her own works.

In "Embracing Motherhood: New Feminist Theory," Heather jon Maroney outlines varied and conflicting attitudes toward motherhood within the feminist movement.⁴³ Undeniably, parenting is seen as a complication by as many artists as it is an integral component of life and self expression for others. Of her son, Margaret said "Dick never caused me a moment's anxiety all my life."⁴⁴ However the compliment cannot be returned, since an interview with Dick's wife, Patsy, reveals that Dick used to be unable to sit at the table because of his parents' quarrelling.⁴⁵

Mary recalls her mother taking her downtown to Burns Shoes to buy her ice skates. Since the only suitable pair were figure skates, this was what she got, and since she couldn't skate, it was necessary to hire a skating instructor. These were the beginnings of the Oshawa Skating

Club, and although Mary did not become a champion skater, her brother did. Margaret remained an active member of the club which she founded, later designing a trophy (see figure). Other motherly pursuits included organizing Saturday morning art classes at Centre Street Public School, an activity which probably had more to do with her interest in art, since her children did not take this activity up for long. Her friend Sylva Armstrong describes her as someone who would get an idea and see it through - "push it through."⁴⁶

Undoubtedly Margaret was a complicated woman, with conflicting impulses and motivations, but her concern and affection for her children comes through in the final posthumous words which appear in her will, her motherly admonition that they "share and share alike."

PSEUDONYM

This two-way street of obligation and personal interest couldn't have been easy for her, but she handled it admirably.⁴⁷

In a letter to Margaret, William Ronald asks her for a reference for a Guggenheim application he is making, and inquires, "also if your answer is yes which of your names will I use?"⁴⁸

One of the ways in which Margaret seems to have reconciled her conflicting lives can be seen in her use of two names. In "Double Focus," Sigrid Weigel warns against the **partisanship** of women's literary criticism which rejects female creative work in anticipation of negative male assessment. Weigel asserts that we can learn from the "contradictions, problems, their mistakes, and even their failures." Specifically, new insights may be acquired

about how a woman copes in a literary form with her social position, the expectations attached to her role as woman, her fears, desires and fantasies, and which strategies she developed in order to express herself publicly in spite of the confinement in the personal and the private.⁴⁹

Keeping in mind the fact that conclusions which have been reached with regard to literary production are being transposed into the area of visual art, much of Weigel's

discussion displays distinct pertinence to the life of Alexandra Luke, since her social position and accompanying societal expectations reveal the extremities in terms of restriction and responsibility.

One of the "strategies" which Luke developed was the use of her middle and maiden names. Professionally she was "Alexandra Luke," not Margaret McLaughlin. Although she did not adopt a male name, many instances exist in her correspondence and media reviews where she is addressed as Mr. Luke or referred to as Alexander. This suggests the usefulness of the assumption that she was a male artist or male coordinator of exhibitions. Often assumptions are made which underscore the nature of male dominance. Artists with ambiguously gendered names are automatically male. In Burlington Magazine Anita Brookner says of Lee Krasner, "the man is clearly a romantic," missing the fact that Lee Krasner was one of the few female abstract expressionist painters in New York in the forties.⁵⁰

Within the Painters Eleven, it was perceived that Luke did not receive her due recognition from the art world. Luke quotes Bush as saying, "God the way she has been treated in this town makes us weep blood all over the floor."⁵¹ And quite possibly her successes may have been augmented by wrong assumptions of gender.

The other advantage to the adoption of a professional

name is the protection which is then afforded to the private sphere of existence. Weigel refers to this as "the **formal** possibility of overcoming the contradiction between self-protection and self-expression."⁵² But she sees it as an "illusory solution like the function of the veil in front of a woman's eyes which certainly protects her, but obscures her vision."⁵³ By living one existence as Margaret McLaughlin, wife of automobile scion and mother of Dick and Mary, (not Jane?), and another as Alexandra Luke, painter and intellect, Luke effectively fragmented her existence, acting against patriarchal terms of reference.

The metaphor of the 'mirror' - its reverse side and edges, its splintering and 'doubling' effect - is now commonly used to describe female self-awareness controlled by the male gaze.⁵⁴

This controlling male gaze can account for choice of nomenclature but also for artistic expression. Alexandra Luke embraced the ideas of abstract expressionism from the perspective of spiritual growth, negation of the material world in favour of the spirit, and explorations of a variety of phenomena, movements, and discourses on the subject. But within the abstract expressionist movement there existed a decidedly male vision with an accompanying masculinist approach to life.

The use of a pseudonym offers feminist analysis rich

theoretical possibilities. There are always really good practical reasons why a person chooses to exhibit her creative work under a different name. Luke decided to use another name when she and Isabel McLaughlin were exhibiting their paintings in the same show. Luke chose her maiden surname and her middle name, nothing so esoteric as "Rose Selavy", the female signature which Marcel Duchamp used by collapsing the French phrase: "eros, c'est la vie!" or the flamboyant "Marshall Delaney," Robert Fulford's pseudonym as a movie reviewer. Nevertheless, Margaret McLaughlin (or more often, Marg) remains to the present day the name by which her friends in Oshawa remember her, while Alexandra Luke is her name in gallery files and Canadian art history books.

In Writing a Woman's Life, Heilbrun provides her reasons for writing the Amanda Cross novels under a pseudonym, while acknowledging another level of reasoning:

Certainly I was not without coldly practical reasons when I decided to write detective novels as Amanda Cross. There was no question . . . that had those responsible for my promotion to tenure in the English department of the university where I teach known of the novels, they would have counted them heavily against me; I would have probably been rejected . . . One had one's "real" identity, and if one chose to indulge in

frivolities, however skillful, one did it under another name than that reserved for proper scholarship.

I no longer think that this was the whole explanation. I think that there are layers within layers of significance . . . to a pseudonym.⁵⁵

Heilbrun suggests that one of these layers is the anxiety of authorship, which creates a desire to hide one's identity from prying eyes, "while protecting the quotidian self leading her appropriate life."⁵⁶ Another layer is the need to create a "psychic space" for oneself.⁵⁷ She notes the usual housing arrangements which provide room for all of the family's activities except those of the mother, the idea being that the mother has the whole house. Heilbrun suggests that this contributes to a desire to create an inner, emotional space. Luke devoted considerable effort to the creation of both physical and emotional space. She had a studio in the attic of her Oshawa home "Greenbriar," two studios at their summer place in Muskoka, and struggled on her own to purchase her little cottage overlooking Lake Ontario at Thickson's Point. This was her own place, a retreat where Painters Eleven and also the Gurdjieff group met, and a quiet environment for painting. Her friend Glad Smith called it "her spiritual home."⁵⁸

In addition, Heilbrun notes the need for an alter ego,

another identity "whose destiny offered more possibility than I could comfortably imagine for myself."⁵⁹ She cites the use of a male protagonist by many female writers. Alexandra Luke can be regarded as moving towards a male protagonist-figure in her involvement with abstract painting, a male-oriented and male-dominated movement. Her membership in the Painters Eleven also qualified her "in a man's world" in a manner which differs from her contemporary women artists whose figurative and representational work could more easily be linked with women artists throughout art history. Flowers, children, and landscape painting were the favoured subject matter at the time, and while the entire art field was mined with male domination, those intrepid females who ventured into it tended to stay within their traditionally designated stylistic norms.

In Rachel Blau DuPlessis' discussion of multiplicity of form in the "female aesthetic," the conditioning factors which are described are pertinent to Luke's situation:

For the woman finds she is irreconcilable things: an outsider by her gender position, by her relation to power; may be an insider by her social position, her class. She can be both. Her ontological, her psychic, her class position all cause doubleness. Doubled consciousness. Doubled understandings.⁶⁰

Luke's many faceted existence demonstrates the necessity for two names. But DuPlessis advances her argument into the actual creation of new form:

How then could she neglect to invent a form which produces the incessant, critical, splitting motion. To invent this form. To invent the theory for this form.

Following, the "female aesthetic" will produce artworks that incorporate contradiction and nonlinear movement into the heart of the text.⁶¹

In spite of the fact that Luke embraced an aesthetic which was male created and dominated, her position remains radical within the context of Canadian art, where landscape painting dominated the scene and the movement toward abstraction still required energetic advocacy, work for which a society matron would be suitably trained.⁶² Luke worked tirelessly to further public awareness of abstract art. There was a fervour associated with this which is derived from the notion that abstraction heralded the spiritual growth of humanity and expressed cosmic concepts which were beyond representation in conventional art form. Luke wrote,

The new visual idiom in 20th century painting is a natural outcome of man's conscious evolution Each century produces stepping stones to a higher knowledge of a spiritual essence and the artist

must be creative to provide the important stepping stones for the next century.⁶³

Certainly the transformative nature of creating an alter ego afforded Alexandra Luke immense possibilities which were unavailable to her as Margaret McLaughlin. However the creation of Luke does not imply a negation of Margaret. Heilbrun articulates this positive approach to duality in describing her own creation of Amanda Cross:

When she sought psychic space, it was not from personal frustration, but rather from a wish . . . for more space, less interruption, more possibility of adventure and the companionship of wiser women through these adventures, greater risk and a more fearless affronting of destiny than seemed possible in the 1950's and early 1960's.⁶⁴

In Luke's readings of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, she would most likely have encountered Gurdjieff's discussion of the "repertoire of roles" to which Ouspensky refers:

"You must realize that each man has a definite repertoire of roles which he plays in ordinary circumstances," said G. in this connection. "He has a role for every kind of circumstance in which he ordinarily finds himself in life. . . . The study of the roles a man plays represents a very necessary part of self-knowledge. Each man's

repertoire is very limited. And if a man simply says 'I' and 'Ivan Ivanich,' he will not see the whole of himself because 'Ivan Ivanich' is not one man; a man has at least five or six of them. One or two for his family, one or two at his office (one for his subordinates and another for his superiors), one for friends in a restaurant, and perhaps one who is interested in exalted ideas and likes intellectual conversation.⁶⁵

Luke's daughter Mary Hare agrees that her mother certainly did have two identities, although she emphasizes that this was not meant to imply a schizophrenic sense to the concept. She notes that Jock Macdonald also exhibited this quality, as did many artistic people, and that it was a struggle for her mother to achieve an interrelationships of identities. Even today, many of Luke's former friends and associates are unaware of her involvement in the Gurdjieff organization, or disinterested in her professional life, since they knew her as friend or neighbour, or co-worker in community work.

There are examples of another Margaret besides the artist and the mother. When Heilbrun speaks of her creation Kate Fansler, she says "her clothes she regards as a costume one dons for the role one will play in the public sphere."⁶⁶ In New York for a Hofmann opening, Luke tells her companion Glad Smith: "I'm wearing my mink because they think I'm very

rich and expect it of me."⁶⁷

In "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," Mary G. Mason defines "a set of paradigms for life-writing by women right down to our time" through an examination of "four representative cases" of several early writers including Margery Kempe, who wrote the first full autobiography in English in 1432ca.⁶⁸ One aspect of this work is applicable to a mid-twentieth century Canadian visual artist:

[The] dual sense of vocation: the wife-mother, pilgrim-mystic roles, which were continuous throughout Margery Kempe's life, [and] represent a rather more common pattern of women's perception of themselves as maintaining two equally demanding identities, worldly and otherworldly, both of which, however, are ultimately determined by their relation to the divine.⁶⁹

In the work of Anne Bradstreet, Mason sees "a unifying of a public and a private consciousness."⁷⁰ Mason continues:

One element, however, that seems more or less constant in women's life-writing- and this is not the case in men's life-writing, is the sort of evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity that we have traced in four paradigms: relation to another autonomous being (Margaret

Cavandish), relation to one single, transcendent other (Julian), relation to two others (Margery Kempe), relation to a multiple collectivity, a many-in-one (Anne Bradstreet)- these are four distinct possibilities, and while there are no doubt more, the number of possibilities is certainly not infinite.⁷¹

To this list I would add relation to an alter ego to accommodate two somewhat incompatible identities. Leon Edel's observation on multiplicity of character relates to both biographer and subject in this instance:

When a writer sits down to write, all his past sits behind his pen. . . . And this one self driving the pen is many selves, some of them very contradictory. "A biography is considered complete," observed Virginia Woolf, "if it merely accounts for six or seven selves whereas a person may well have as many thousand."⁷²

LUKE AND FEMINISM

Alexandra Luke's life could not be construed as that of a feminist, although many of her attributes such as her strength of purpose, her sense of community, and her work within the male-dominated field of abstract painting might indicate that were she working in the seventies, her position as an artist might have been within the women's movement. However, just as many of her activities situate her firmly within a patriarchal structure of familial duty and social obligation. But since this 1990's examination of her life and work is, by its location, informed by feminist theory, it is not only possible but necessary to reread Alexandra Luke and discuss the manner in which gender is related to behaviour and creative production. Therefore, the salient point here is the subjectivity of author in the analysis of her female subject. "Assertion of subjectivity, then, becomes the first aesthetic act."⁷³

Luke herself would argue against the viewpoint that her life and work were indeed inextricably and unavoidably structured by gender. "She certainly wasn't a women's libber. She just wasn't even interested in that--thought achievement spoke for itself."⁷⁴ But a feminist reading establishes that gender affected what and when she studied, painted, read, her relationships within her home and family,

and contributed to her particular strengths and weaknesses. However, applying feminist theory to someone who doesn't seem to want it induces a cautionary note.

Carolyn Heilbrun articulates both the necessity and problem of feminist theory:

scholars will get lost in the intellectual ramifications of their disciplines and fail to reach out to the women whose lives must be rewritten with the aid of the new intellectual constructs. I mean no anti-intellectual complaint here. Without intellectual and theoretical underpinnings, no movement can succeed; the failure of feminism to sustain itself in previous incarnations may well be attributable to its lack of underlying theoretical discourse. But we are in danger of refining the theory and scholarship at the expense of the lives of the women who need to experience the fruits of research.⁷⁵

Many of the issues and problems which have contributed to the development of the women's movement centre around the concept of empowerment, not strictly in the public realm so much as in terms of empowerment to facilitate progress toward increased earning power, better education, a stronger voice in issues related to the body, and toward a general feeling of autonomy of self. However, there are usually practicalities around which life tends to construct itself. Many aspects of Luke's life suggest accommodation to family,

society, and social obligation. Joan Murray refers to her as a "prisoner of ordinary life."⁷⁶ Margaret did travel to Banff, Provincetown, and New York to nurture her talent and further her career, but not without the disapprobation of Ewart. Margaret also made one trip to Europe at the urgings of her friends Jock and Barbara Macdonald, but tenuously. Because she was feeling ill, the Macdonalds worried about her pushing herself too hard, and thought the trip would do her good. In January 1955 Jock writes to Margaret,

We aren't happy to know that you are also tired, in fact, feel somewhat worried that you are doing far too much for everybody. Somehow you have to get a rest and a good one, otherwise something is going to happen to you which won't be good.⁷⁷

A letter from Barbara Macdonald reveals another factor: "If Ewart won't give you the cash you must get it from Dick and come over as soon as possible as arranged with Gladys."⁷⁸ And always present was the underlying idea that her husband Ewart just didn't want her to go.

As a committed and prodigious worker, Margaret painted from six to nine every morning in her summer studio over the boathouse, whether there were guests or not, an arrangement which allowed her to spend her afternoons with Ewart, who liked to sleep in. When she could, she made other arrangements. For example, her friend Carry Cardell was

asked to bring Ewart his breakfast tray while she was staying with the McLaughlins in Muskoka. She recalls his querulous concerns about the weather and his health.⁷⁹ When compared with the structure of Picasso's workday at the same time in history, a clear delineation of accommodation can be seen in Luke's work schedule. Picasso slept until mid day, played in the afternoon, and worked through the late day until the early hours of the next morning. The household worked around Picasso, while Luke worked around her household.

Another aspect of Margaret's life which must be considered from a feminist perspective is her membership in the Gurdjieff society. Moore notes that beyond their caretaking role, as spiritual subjects and leaders, "women always held an honourable place among Gurdjieff's pupils and a pre-eminent place in his sacred dances."⁸⁰ It was Mme de Hartmann who handled his finances, Mme. Jeanne de Salzman who became head of the organization upon his death, and Mrs. Welch who is the spiritual leader at present.

However Moore points out that Gurdjieff's All and Everything contains no women whatsoever, and to illustrate Gurdjieff's "strong patriarchy" quotes the guru:

Nature of woman is very different from that of man. Woman is from ground, and only hope for her to arise to another stage of development - to go

to Heaven as you say - is with man. Woman already know everything, but such knowledge is of no use to her, in fact can almost be like poison to her, unless have man with her.⁸¹

Margaret's views about her own marriage may have been affected by this attitude since she fulfilled her perceived commitments to the patriarchy dutifully in spite of clear inclinations toward more mobility and privacy. She created her own space by buying a little cottage at Thickson's Point, and by her insistence upon attaining the instruction she needed in Banff and Provincetown.

The issue of patriarchy presents a considerable dilemma to feminist artists and critics, and most emphatically within the context of an examination of Alexandra Luke's life and work. Theorists grapple with the patriarchal history and bias of visual and written language and its therefore inherently flawed tools for feminist expression. Gisela Breitling addresses the problem:

It would be absurd to think that women should only refer to female predecessors and models, should only develop artistic themes and techniques within a history of women's art because they are 'different' and because the 'universal' art up until now is in reality men's art.⁸²

Breitling's reasons for participation in the male dominated art world are i) that there are so few female predecessors; ii) art develops in "a complex social framework" which has included female collaboration in many forms; iii) regardless of where the dominance has been, the cultural tradition is shared and accessible to female artists today; iv) the ghettoization of female artists. She concludes her argument by saying "We cannot do women's creativity justice so long as we consider it in an exclusively female context."⁸³

Although sometimes described as "feminine" and "spiritual," Luke's work does not display the conscious expressions of "female" iconography, which can be seen in the body-centred images of Joyce Wieland, for example, who was speaking to issues of gender in the early sixties through her "Time Machine Series."⁸⁴ Nor does Luke proselytise for women's art or the status of women, although important texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's Le Deuxième Sexe, translated in 1953, and Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique of 1963 were widely discussed during the last decades of her life. But texts which attempted to confront gender oriented issues in art such as analysis of female iconography, evaluation of previously unknown women artists, and revisionist analysis of female dominated areas of creative expression such as Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Famous Women Artists?," Lucy Lippard's From the

Centre, and Germaine Greer's The Obstacle Race appeared after Luke's death.⁸⁵

A typology of women's art-making by Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis categorize women's art within the following four types:

- i) "glorification of an essential female art power . . . an essentialist position . . . based on a belief in a female essence residing somewhere in the body of women";
- ii) redefinition of crafts and skills previously relegated to "women's work" - the authors see this as an essentialist position because of its valorization of female production, however it seems more applicable to identify this kind of art-making with social structure and invest it with a much greater implication of cultural ghettoization;
- iii) "isolationism," which is the site of "both 'separatist' (artists who do not identify with the artworld) and nonfeminist (women artists who maintain that they are people who just happen to be women) argumentation; and
- iv) the view that "artistic activity [is] . . . a textual practice which exploits the existing social contradiction toward productive ends . . . culture [is] a discourse in which art as a discursive structure and other social practices intersect."⁸⁶

While the fourth category clearly represents the most effective and pertinent methodology for contemporary

feminist artists, the other three approaches described are easily identified, and in fact elaborated upon extensively by American critics Lawrence Alloway and Lucy Lippard.⁸⁷

Luke can be situated within the third category as one of the artists "who happen to be women." The authors decry this attitude, which denies that the work is "embedded in social context . . . or that art-making, like being a woman, is a form of social practice."⁸⁸

While the social context of Luke's art can be defined, any attempts to ascertain a female iconography have to be grounded in the fact that this would not be so-called "feminist" iconography. Breitling responds with acerbity:

One might think that the feminist description of feminine forms of expression would contradict the customary "official" interpretations of "women's art". Surprisingly, the opposite is the case: changing object arrangements, collages of temporary materials, forms of expression involving the body like performances, video and action are not only described as genuinely feminine by the art market, the magazines and the papers' arts pages which set the standards, but are confirmed by feminist interpretations as well. It is even more surprising that the "female counter-culture" has apparently not yet questioned this consensus;

indeed, it doesn't seem to have noticed it. The culture business seems exempt from the suspicion of adopting "token women" - in contrast to other public spheres "Feminist counter-culture" has not merely adopted a given image of femininity and accepted that a considerably limited area has been put aside for women's discourse, it is rather that it has fashioned this image itself and has therefore potentially even aggravated the polarisation of the sexes.

The criteria which determine whether a work of art is feminine - in the feminist sense of the word - describe quite closely the opposite of what language allocates to the "sexually neutral masculine": the "feminine" is subjective, subversive (anti-classical), physical, irrational or "deranged", agitated, fleeting - that is, it is a process, not directed towards permanence, opposed to the norm Such criteria overlook women's capacity for abstraction. On the contrary, they promote the exclusion of women's creativity from the areas of art which **do** transcend gender. And in so doing they conform to an artmarket which has always labelled women's desire to impose form as irrelevant to general trends, as marginal,

subjective and narcissistic, and as far as possible denied women's other artistic endeavours. Such attitudes do not transcend patriarchal dualistic thinking; rather they articulate resistance merely as the negation of the dominant norm which is thereby not only recognized [revealed] to be masculine but also recognized [accepted] as such. This norm represents not only an "incomplete" but also a "false universality". Femininity is not merely "difference", although up until now it has been defined only as those leftovers of human existence which cannot be assimilated into the male consciousness of self. The solution of the problem then is not to discard the notion of a sphere which transcends gender just because it has so far merely endowed the masculine with a "false universality."⁸⁹

Breitling calls for continued aspiration toward an aesthetic which transcends gender, but acceptance of existing formal criteria rather than eschewing them because the form is male dominated. Luke's painting implicitly exhibits this rationale, as does her tireless advocacy for the acceptance of abstract painting in Canada. Although her colleagues in Painters Eleven vehemently objected to the unfair treatment of Luke by the art establishment, feeling that she was

slighted in this regard, her modest replies did not indicate that she felt this was gender-related. Therefore, although Luke the woman did not consciously create a feminist discourse, the fact that her work was within a male dominated sphere creates an exemplary case study for Breitling's argument:

A transcendence of the limitations imposed on the feminine must at first look like a step into the territory of the masculine according to current language usage. The insights of women who have uncovered its false universality offer a starting point for the first draft of a new and true universality in which the feminine will find its rightful place and the masculine its actual dimensions [for in future it cannot be "the measure of all things".]⁹⁰

Breitling's analysis advocates a quest for universality which is situated in opposition to current trends toward multiplicity and celebration of difference. While it is agreed that the masculine needs to find its "actual dimension," there exists the possibility that her argument presents merely a sophisticated rationale for the production of the kind of art which she prefers due to her own internalization of a patriarchal aesthetic.

In assessing Luke's work within this context, a

necessity emerges to locate her within a masculine aesthetic sphere because there is no evidence to suggest otherwise. Her studies were with Hans Hofmann, whose widespread influence was enthusiastically embraced by the male artists and critics which comprised the establishment and "the measure of all things" then, and, sadly, now as well.



Fig. 1. "Mother with the Twins." Emma Russell Luke (née Long) with Margaret and Isobel (c. 1901). Collection of Mary Hare.



Fig. 2. "To Oshawa Aunties from the Luke Quartette."
Clockwise from top: Margaret, Isobel, Kathleen, and
Elizabeth (c. 1912). Collection of Mary Hare.

CHAPTER TWO

ALEXANDRA LUKE: ARTIST

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

At the time of Margaret's nurses' training it was not unusual for women to prepare for a career and then not practice it. Prevailing thought was that this kind of education was excellent preparation for later life, something to "fall back on" if necessary, and useful for motherhood. Patriarchal attitudes about the role of women elevated homemaking to such an extent that women's already limited choices were even more strictured by notions about one's "true calling."

I recall Ewart's outgoing uncle Sam McLaughlin speaking to a young teacher on one of the many occasions when his home "Parkwood" was opened for a charitable fundraising event. Colonel Sam, at this time well into his nineties, was being squired about his gardens in a golf buggy, stopping to speak to visitors now and then. One of these was a first year teacher, to whom he remarked, "My wife was a teacher, you know, but I rescued her from that." It would be easy to demonstrate by this statement the kind of family and attitudes which Margaret would be adopting by marrying a McLaughlin. But these were the prevailing

assumptions, that a career was something which women could dabble in until their real careers came along, that marriage offered rescue and respite for women. As a young teacher myself at the time, I recall no registration of annoyance at Colonel Sam's statement; I thought it was amusing, and shared his perception of marriage to a millionaire as rescue.

But the well documented truism that women could become secretaries, teachers, or nurses would offer sufficient motivation for Margaret's career choice, and her training would have been considered a distinct asset for any young mother, and an even greater asset to Ewart, who had always been rather unwell.

In addition, Margaret's nursing abilities were mythologized in well meaning accounts after her death. Joan Murray relates that "Years later, a starry-eyed journalist described Luke as consumed with passion for nursing; her children report that she found most of the work demeaning."¹ In fact she forbade her daughter Mary to enter nursing. Mary states that "I wanted to be a nurse, I think I'd have been a good one. But she wouldn't have any of this--there was no way I would be allowed to "go and scrub floors."² The irony of this is that Margaret herself went and and scrubbed floors in Mendam New Jersey as part of her work in the Gurdjieff movement.

But she was always interested in art. She took it in high school and must have thought well enough of her

drawings to save her sketchbooks from this time.³ As early as 1928 she had some lessons from Jan Van Empel in an Oshawa workshop arranged by her sister-in-law, Dorothy Henderson.⁴ Her friends included local people with interest and involvement in the arts in some capacity. Her close friend Dorothy Van Luven was an art teacher and an active participant in the local cultural scene. Margaret's sister-in-law, Dorothy Henderson wrote books on spiritual matters, poetry, and local history. Ewart's cousin Isabel McLaughlin, Canadian artist and first woman president of the Canadian Group of Painters, is a friend who recalls her awareness of Margaret as an emerging artist during the thirties.⁵ Margaret and Isabel exhibited together in 1946 at the Oshawa Y.W.C.A. and participated in group shows over the years.⁶

Dorothy Cameron Bloore described Luke as someone who "started late in life but found she had this gift."⁷ When Alexandra Luke's participation in Painters Eleven is discussed, her persona is contrasted to the young bohemian painters who comprised the majority in the group. Significantly, Hortense Gordon, the other female member, is also a woman, and in her seventies. But in fact, and in spite of Luke's age, she was a "young artist" in terms of education and career development. In 1953 at the inception of Painters Eleven she had been a recognized artist for only

eight years, had studied part time and therefore over a longer period, from 1945 in Banff to 1947-52 in Provincetown with Hofmann. So actually she had had about a year of art training in total, two solo exhibitions, and a considerable body of group participation in juried, travelling, and community shows. This is comparable to the experience of the younger male members of the group, excluding the commercial art work which has to some extent been considered a detriment to pure abstraction. But concurrent with this time of study she also performed community service, studied and read widely, functioned at home as mother, wife, daughter, sister, and so on in a huge extended family. She was firmly her own person, and joked about not dressing "more like an artist."⁸

But however late and seemingly incongruent Luke's entry into the professional art world was, her early life consisted of the study and practice of painting and drawing within gender specific confines of Oshawa society. Within five years of her first lesson, she had paintings in the Lyceum Club and Women's Art Association Annual Exhibition and volleyed a spirited defence of abstract art in the Oshawa Daily Times against Sir Wyly Grier, president of the Royal Canadian Academy. During the thirties her organizational skills reflect her interest in art but also reveal intense involvement in many aspects of community.

Preschool activities in her attic, children's art classes at Centre Street School, the Historical Society, the Women's Welfare League, and the Golf Club all benefited from her efforts.⁹

As it is with many artists, the friendships that Margaret had were tremendously and reciprocally important in her development and sustenance. Isabel McLaughlin's career and study may have afforded her with a view into other possibilities. However McLaughlin stresses that she "had nothing to do with" encouraging Margaret to go to Banff to study, nor does she feel that she influenced her art. But "we were good friends" and "going home for weekends, I sometimes dropped in to see her latest work, in latter years oftener." But she acknowledges that Margaret may have met some artists such as Yvonne McKague Housser through her.¹⁰ Isabel's demurring aside, it must have been inspiring to Margaret to have a relative who was prominent in the Canadian cultural milieu.

Isabel credits Margaret's relationships with A.Y. Jackson, Jock Macdonald, Hans Hofmann, and her fellow members of Painters Eleven with tremendous influence on her as a developing painter. These relationships contributed to her professional career as an artist, but since she did not spring "fully formed" in 1945 it is important if less dramatic to position Luke within her locale and see her

moving perhaps inexorably, perhaps circumstantially, toward her place in Canadian art.

It was her summer school experience in Banff that led to her most significant relationships. Both Jackson and Macdonald were instructors that summer, and each became integrally important to Margaret. Her friendship with Jock introduced her to the reading matter with which she was fascinated, and Jackson remained a kindly mentor to Luke during her life.

An argument could be constructed around the idea that "Moonlight--Banff" of 1945 contains the essential elements of Luke's iconography, philosophical ideas on art, and in its representation, the chronological history of Alexandra Luke as an artist. The painting is composed around a series of axes ordering and describing a transcendental vision of nature which reveals heavenly bodies, space, and a sense of the infinite compatible with her readings in psychology, philosophy and her curiosity about extraterrestriality. It also gives a nod to Vincent van Gogh's "The Starry Night" in both its subject matter and its luminous painterly quality. Van Gogh's acknowledged position as the father of the "expressive" arm of modern art is an appropriate model for Luke's pending adventures in abstract expressionism.

Banff is important in her chronology because it was in Banff that she began to focus her talent, and from then on

her attitude toward art was as a professional rather than a hobbyist, her commitment was intense, and her connections were made with important figures Jock Macdonald and Jackson; all of which increased her opportunities.

In 1947 Luke's work was accepted in Canadian Women Artists, an exhibition which took place at the Riverside Museum in New York in the spring of 1947. Of 536 entries, 64 were chosen, and three of these were Oshawa natives Luke, Isabel McLaughlin, and Helen Stevens. The jurors were Jackson, Mrs. R. de Bruno Austin, and Marian Scott. Half of the show was exhibited in Oshawa at the YWCA's Adelaide House, and during the fall of 1947 it was shown at the T. Eaton Gallery in Toronto.

The following year she had a solo show at Trinity College in Toronto. Regular acceptance by juries followed, indicating the gradual recognition of her talents and also of abstraction itself. In 1950 she had Traveller's Palm accepted in the Montreal Museum of Fine Art's 67th Annual Spring Exhibition, and in 1952 at the International Art Exhibition at the Perry Institute in Florida she was one of 100 accepted from 2250 entries in their "Hall of Fame."¹¹

HANS HOFMANN

Hofmann was a popular and influential instructor of modern painting in New York and Provincetown. Referring to his many prominent students, Hofmann declared, "Talent is, in general, common--original talent is rare. A teacher can only accompany a talent over a certain period of time--he can never make one."¹²

During this exhibition period Luke was an enthusiastic and gifted student of Hans Hofmann. In 1947, at the suggestion of Joe Plaskett she enrolled at Hans Hofmann's summer school in Provincetown, and this experience was the one which positioned her within the avant-garde of abstract expressionism. In turn she encouraged other Canadian artists to go, including Jock Macdonald, Isabel McLaughlin, Yvonne McKague Housser, Rody Kenny Courtice and several artists from her region such as Ron Lambert.

Fortunately for posterity, Luke was a prodigious note-taker, and when she wasn't taking her own notes, she copied those of colleagues such as Jock Macdonald. Consequently, much of what was said and done in the classes of Hans Hofmann in Provincetown was recorded, including Hofmann's lectures, his comments to Luke, to the other students in the class, and the comments of some of her fellow students as well.

Luke's notes dated June 16, 1947, are lively, personal, funny evocations of a summer art school environment:

I put my work up first as the others all seemed bashful about it and also I knew if I didn't I wouldn't have the courage later--He liked the fish but said the top half was too heavy . . .

Tuesday: Ron [Lambert] caught 20 Whiting brought a few home, we did still life to-night of two fish on blue platter on the floor--

Friday: too insufferably hot to do anything so we came back and sat in the patio and had a coke (then went up to the Moor's restaurant for dinner--\$2.15.) Ron got the dinner fish he had caught

Incidental experiences which she relates reveal a certain degree of innocence, even unworldliness:

Sunday: Had breakfast about 10:00 went in next door to see Mrs. Alice Wood make monotype print. She entertained us for 2 hours telling about her life in Paris. She knew many prominent professional people, among them, Arnold Bennett, Picasso, Matisse, Gertrude Stein, whom she said was a [sic] lisbien?

and a sense of humour:

tomato story, worshipful German student asking

about why he (Matisse) painted the tomatoes blue .
 . . Matisse, "Well my friend it is like this--When
 I buy the tomatoes they're red, when I eat them
 they're red but when I paint them they're blue."¹³

Her notes also articulate Hofmann's theories on painting
 such as the famous "push and pull," which she quotes,
 "everything you draw must ask for a response somewhere else
 as in another line."¹⁴ This resembles Gurdjieff's
 observation:

everywhere there is affirmation and negation,
 cathode and anode. Man, earth, everything is like
 a magnet. The difference is only in the quantity
 of emanations. Everywhere two forces are at work,
 one attracting, another repelling Always
 there is a push and pull, or pull and push.¹⁵

Luke's colour sense was also most amenable to Hofmann's
 theories. On colour, he said to "drown yourself in the color
 just keeping a little breath for yourself."¹⁶ Clement
 Greenberg observes Hofmann's juxtaposition of "shrill colors
 of the same pitch and warmth," thereby rendering their value
 contrast "jarring and dissonant."¹⁷ More specifically, his
 use of cadmium red and vermilion with ultramarine and violet
 in The Chinese Nightingale employs up front primaries to
 give direction to his "push and pull." These colours have
 the jewel-like quality that is seen in the earlier moderns

such as Chagall and possibly Rouault. Several of Luke's works from the fifties exhibit her assimilation of his ideas. Garden and Interior with Relics are drenched in colours suggestive of Hofmann's technique, but it is later in her career that her use of colour in Yellow Space, Homage to Hofmann, or Chromatic Impact reaches back to Hofmann but transcends her lessons and achieves her own robust, expressive voice. By 1964 Luke is creating pieces which continue to swim in colour, but no longer exhibit the clash and dissonance of the earlier work. For example, her Yellow Space, is a confident paean to the simple enjoyments afforded by one colour, an eggy yellow, played against an inky dusting on a white ground.

In Untitled Luke integrates an overall melange of shapes which exist monochromatically in her Abstract Drawing #2 by using a combination of reds and mauves that demonstrate a wide ranging exploration of the picture plane. When asked, later in her life, what she felt was her particular contribution to the artistic movement within which she worked, she replied that it was her patchwork effect, a full use of the picture plane which is reminiscent of the patchwork quilt.¹⁸ This connects her not only to Hofmann through colour but also to a traditionally female form of expression, the quilt. This compositional device can be seen in Interior with Relics, January '57

Hofmann's advice on composition was to "show a powerful axis from the first line."¹⁹ Many of Luke's works are composed around this powerful axis. Observance to a Morn of May contains painterly configurations of geometric shapes which are assembled and in fact perform a balancing act upon a central fulcrum, the axis of which operates at an angle, thereby creating a sense of motion through space. But this fulcrum can also be seen in her ceramic sculpture titled Bird on a Stump.

Luke's success in Hofmann's classes was undoubtedly an encouragement which enabled her to continue her progress into abstraction:

--Patted my arm, said "very goood"!!! I think I have the idea of the shifting planes moving in space. Hofman (sic) quoted Mondrian "Plasticity is created in the unequal but equivalent in oppositions." 3 students asked me if I had studied with Hofman (sic) before. Sam next to me said he had "never known anyone to get it so quickly."²⁰

These comments are corroborated by Joan Murray, who has observed that Luke understood Hofmann's teaching more fully than some students.²¹ Luke's "instant success" at Hofmann's classes might be attributable to the degree to which she was already sympathetic to his theories. For example, earlier works such as Moonlight, Banff from 1945 and the ceramic

Bird on a Stump of 1946 already reveal her use of a powerful axis/fulcrum dynamic. In a later charcoal drawing titled Structure the form no longer provides the mechanism for infusing energy into representation, but reveals an essential vitality in its abstract simplicity and strength.

Clement Greenberg pronounces on Hofmann's merits:

No one has digested Cubism more thoroughly than Hofmann²²

and

in any case you could have learned more about color from Hofmann, as long as it was just a question of learning, than from Picasso, Miró or Klee. In fact, as it now looks to me, you could learn more about Matisse's color from Hofmann than from Matisse himself.²³

But in Painters Painting, Greenberg also praises Hofmann's art, in fact contradictorily and to the detriment of his teaching:

I think that he was one of the greatest painters, one of the two or three best that we produced in New York in the 1940s and '50s. Now Hofmann wasn't as explicitly intelligent about art as he was supposed to be. He was a much better painter than he was a teacher. I didn't recognize that until the early 50s.²⁴

Greenberg's revised opinion aside, the artist's reputation remains secure in North America as an eminent and influential teacher and artist who contributed significantly to the development of abstract expressionism in the New York school and in Canada as well. In "The New American Painting," Alfred H. Barr, Jr. recalls Hofmann as "a Parisian-trained German of Picasso's generation, [who] taught the young inspiringly and became their doyen colleague."²⁵

LUKE AND PAINTERS ELEVEN

The story of the inception of Painters Eleven is well documented.²⁶ William Ronald was working in the display department in Simpson's department store in Toronto when the interior director requested paintings to coordinate with furniture arrangements. The artists whom Ronald invited were Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, Ray Mead, and Kazuo Nakamura. From this initial group effort came a meeting at Luke's cottage at Thickson's Point, where several other artists were invited. The original seven had expanded to include Harold Town, Walter Yarwood, Hortense Gordon, and Jock Macdonald. Many group exhibitions and favourable reviews followed.

What Harold Town refers to as "simply a mechanism for exhibiting"²⁷ has had significant impact in Ontario because it did gain serious attention for abstract painting at a time when Canadian art, through its institutions and collectors, remained firmly committed to representational landscape paintings. In 1954 Jock Macdonald writes Luke from London, where he showed Painters Eleven slides to M. Gimpel, of Gimpel Fils Gallery, saying "our type of art was everywhere in this place and a lot of it very interesting."²⁸

Through its collective voice, many milestones were achieved, such as their entry into the 1956 Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists. This was the second time that a Canadian group showed in New York, the first being the Group of Seven's 1913 participation in the Armoury Show. In Alexandra Luke: Continued Searching, Murray relates examples of the high esteem in which Luke was held:

Luke's dealer, Dorothy Cameron Bloore, recalls taking on Luke's work as soon as she saw it in the Painters Eleven exhibition at the Park Gallery in 1957. . . . Her peers considered Luke one of the most promising of their group.²⁹

William Ronald describes her as "a very mystical person . . . her paintings are very strange and in many ways ahead of their time."³⁰

An article in Vie des Arts profiles ten of the members of Painters Eleven, excluding Luke while listing her as Alexandra Juke.³¹ Although articles and reviews of the group's exhibitions tend to ignore Luke, her role was not unimportant. Ronald had included her from the beginning, and in fact the first Painters Eleven meeting was held at Luke's studio. Also, she brought in Jock Macdonald, whose association could only benefit the group's prospects. However she is consistently slighted in the critical attention given to the painters. A 1979 review of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery's 25th anniversary of Painters Eleven exhibition by Gary Michael Dault refers to the paintings as boyish and brash, and singles out several of the more prominent male artists, but fails to describe or critique Luke's work, which cannot by any stretch of the imagination be deemed either boyish or brash, and deserves comment on many accounts.³²

A pattern of trivialization or silence is repeated, both during and after her life, allowing the reputation of this important Canadian artist to languish, and reinforcing the theses of feminist theorists such as Nochlin, Lippard, and Greer on the status of women in the visual arts.

Town's accusation that Painters Eleven was nothing more than a show of strength through numbers would have more credence if not for the similarity of artistic activity

which was being played out in New York a few years earlier. There is even a department store exhibition reminiscent of the Simpson's Abstracts at Home of 1953. In January 1942 Samuel Kootz showed works by Avery, Gorky, Gottlieb, John Graham, and others at Macy's Department Store.³³

Luke's connections to New York were integral to her artistic development. Her workshops with Hofmann, her friends in New York such as gallery owners Martha Jackson and Dorothy Parsons, and even her connections through her work in the Gurdjieff movement which is centred in Manhattan provided strong ties which attracted her interest and talent. In "Abstract Art in the United States" Michael Seuphor identifies "the first official recognition of American abstractionist painting" as occurring in a show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in January, 1951, which was followed by a series of talks.³⁴ Luke notes in her copy of Seuphor's book that she and Martha Jackson attended these events. This fact places her in a significant position within Canadian art since it occurs before the first showings of the nascent Painters Eleven and underscores the importance of her work with Hofmann from 1947.

One of the collective efforts of Painters Eleven was their invitation to the highly esteemed critic Clement Greenberg to visit their studios and critique their work. Greenberg's visit to Luke occurred on June 14, 1957. Her

Symposium

notes record that he suggested that she "forget all art school painting - become absolutely free, be yourself . . . most women painters too timid, lack confidence in themselves," and,

one thing he liked about my work which he could not say of the other members of group. it was not squashed in at the sides which is one excellent thing that Hofmann frees you of. Perhaps his greatest contribution is just that.³⁵

By 1959 the group had achieved a voice for abstraction in Canadian art, and members found their places as individual artists. Ronald had resigned earlier and Oscar Cahén was killed in 1956, but at a final meeting at Tom Hodgson's studio Painters Eleven decided to officially disband. Luke continued to exhibit regionally and internationally, as did most of the other members.³⁶

NEW YORK: A PATTERN FOR PAINTERS ELEVEN

In her introduction to Issues in Abstract Expressionism, Ann Eden Gibson's list of American abstract expressionists includes William Baziotas, Arshile Gorky, Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Richard Pousette-Dart, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still.³⁷ Many of these artists would have been giants to Luke and the other painters who studied with Hofmann in Provincetown. Although they did not name themselves as a group, they function as a model for Painters Eleven in terms of exhibition patterns, gender distribution, longevity and significance within their respective artistic communities.

The term "abstract expressionism" was not in general use until 1952 when it is cited by Eden Gibson to have appeared in a series of panel discussions held at the Club.³⁸ In spite of the diversity of the work, "Abstract Expressionism demonstrated a surprisingly cohesive body of repeated themes."³⁹ It is useful to examine these in light of similar denials of any unifying principles by members of Painters Eleven and even their critics. They were:

emphatically large and astonishingly assertive . . .
 . . They urgently confronted the viewer with the
 language of paint: its viscosity; its capacity to

retain a reference - in slashes, ridges, and scrubblings - to the hand that had been moved to stretch the medium's language to these extremes; and its role as a carrier of color (with all of color's inherent psychological and physiological power). This paint was applied with techniques which ranged from the painterly to the linear, from gesture to field. Despite this apparent catholicity of method, however, other more divergent directions in art - such as Realism, certain forms of Geometric Abstraction, and Surrealism - had been eliminated. By the late fifties, "important" American painting was nonnarrative and immediate in its impact.⁴⁰

Painters Eleven had officially disbanded in 1959 because there was no longer a need for such group support, while a chronology reveals that their evolution within the same decade was consistent with what was happening artistically in New York, the acknowledged centre of the art world. What seems on the surface to be a remarkable bit of catching up in fact displays the same earlier explorations in mythology, psychology, and mysticism that fascinated both the New York artists and their European models. However, Canadian abstract expressionism does not overtly display the Cubist roots which Clement Greenberg posits as seminal in the

development of this art form.

Greenberg targets Cubism because of the central position of France in the development of modern art, and specifically the rectilinear and curvilinear forms upon which the form is based.⁴¹ Although this may be true in a stylistic sense, Joan Vastokas, in "The Roots of Abstraction: An Introduction" delineates a broader range of influences which helped to produce abstract painting, the most "lyrical vein of abstract expressionism" derived from an interest in creating "visual music."⁴² The importance of synesthesia cannot be underemphasized with regard to Luke's work, since she not only listened to music while she painted, but also gave paintings titles such as "Symphony," and "Sound Vibrations". In addition, part of the cosmology of the Gurdjieff "system" involved the application of movement and form to pitch and tone in participants' efforts toward spiritual growth.

Vastokas asserts that abstract art is rooted in primitive art, eastern philosophies, folk art, archeology, music, and mathematics.⁴³ Earlier artistic movements which influenced abstraction include Picasso and Braque's Cubism, derivative of their interest in African carvings, and the Surrealists, who explored the psyche in part through the contemplative aspects of Eastern thought and the hallucinogenics employed in some aboriginal religious

practices. Vastokas also notes the connections between Russian folk art and icons and the work of Kandinsky, Larionov, Goncharova, and Gorky among others.⁴⁴ Music is influential within the "romantic, lyrical vein of abstract expressionism" which attempts to express inner emotional states. Vastokas asserts that Kandinsky's paintings between 1910 and 1920 are expressive of this kind of emotional content, whereas his later work from the 1930's reflects the preoccupations of the Bauhaus, and is more mathematically derived.

The essay connects much of the iconography of the New York artists to specific areas of influence, and much of what is identified illuminates the degree and nature of connection to New York of Luke and some of the other members of Painters Eleven. The roots of abstraction which Vastokas outlines that are most pertinent to the interests and artistic expression of Luke are: Eastern thought, the surrealists, music, and mathematics. Hans Hofmann was a direct link between Painters Eleven and the New York school, since Luke as his friend and student encouraged her associates to attend the workshops in Provincetown.

The work of American artists such as Newman and Rothko whose work manifests a spiritual dimension, are particularly integral to Luke's progress into abstraction. Vastokas gives primary importance to Rothko and Newman by concluding her

article with a discussion of the spirituality in their works. She observes that

all the diverse roots find their systematic connection in what is probably the fundamental basis and raison d'être of abstract art in the twentieth century . . . the conception of art as an essentially spiritual activity.⁴⁵

She attributes Werner Haftmann and Robert Rosenblum with tracing this "fundamental dimension of abstraction" back to nineteenth century Romanticism.⁴⁶ Rosenblum describes a lineage within a Northern Romantic tradition of mysticism and transcendentalism which relates Rothko's work to that of Caspar David Friedrich:

in the case of Kandinsky and Mondrian, not to mention such minor pioneers of abstract painting as Ciurlionis and Kupka, a whole new world of esoteric religious iconography culled from such occult sources as Theosophy and spiritualism provided, together with landscape imagery, the matrix for a totally abstract pictorial language that was meant to create what were virtually spiritual icons for new, mystical religions.⁴⁷

Canadian parallels have been drawn between art and mysticism within spiritualism, transcendentalism, and the Canadian Theosophist tradition.⁴⁸

While Newman's expressions of vision relate to a broad spectrum of religious experience, its focus is primarily that of religion. Rothko, however, takes spiritual questions into another abstract realm, that of musical experience. "For him painting aspired to the condition of music and poetry; Mozart was his ideal, the creator who communicated the basic human emotions of tragedy, ecstasy, and doom."⁴⁹

Vastokas also identifies several Canadian artists whose abstract art can be connected to music. These are Bertram Brooker, who painted a visual expression of Dvorák's New World Symphony, and the jazz music of Jack Bush, William Ronald (Painters Eleven), and the next generation of artists who include Graham Coughtry, Gordon Rayner, and Michael Snow.⁵⁰ Luke listened to classical, Romantic, and Baroque music, but was not fond of jazz, and, according to her daughter, would have hated modern rock.

In "Art: Mark Rothko," Dore Ashton corroborates Vastokas' assertions regarding the importance of Rothko:

Of all the temperaments which together make up the American vanguard acknowledged as such abroad, Rothko's is perhaps the most pondered, the most constructively disturbing. Although he obviously shares certain attitudes with other New York painters, Rothko, in a sense, stands alone. He is the transcendentalist of the group.⁵¹

In 1945 Rothko himself says, "art to me is an anecdote of the spirit, and the only means of making concrete the purpose of its varied quickness and stillness."⁵²

An interesting connection occurs in New York between the formal considerations which deal primarily with visual stimulæ, colour theory, and the picture plane, and its psychological, surreal, even metaphysical aspects. Russian emigré John Graham was one of the figures that dominated the abstract art scene in New York in the late thirties, along with Hofmann, Gorky, and de Kooning.⁵³ Referred to as "artist, connoisseur, polemicist, mystic, dandy, and cosmopolite" by Sandler,⁵⁴ he and Hofmann had known each other in Europe and kept in touch in America.⁵⁵ Graham wrote System and Dialectics of Art, which deals with Marx, psychoanalysis, artists' alienation, Jungian notions of a collective unconscious, and the relationships between these concepts and abstraction in art.⁵⁶ In Readings in American Art 1900 - 1975, Barbara Rose describes him as "one of the most successful Cubist painters in America in the thirties" whose 1937 book was a "prophetic but obscure treatise on aesthetics."⁵⁷

Graham speaks of the artist's écriture, a term which is now invested with what Pamela McCallum refers to as a "corporeally based textual aesthetic . . . employed to grasp the oppression of women."⁵⁸ The term is used in feminist

discourse, particularly in reference to the French feminist Hélène Cixous, who called for a feminist writing which used the body, the personal, the subjective in an articulation of gender which could "undermine the closed masculine signifying conventions."⁵⁹ Although subsequent critiques of this essentialist position point out the mediated nature of even a biology-centred world view, Cixous' magnificent

Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself
better than flesh and blood, rising,
insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with
sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively
combination of flying colors⁶⁰

was a battle cry which appropriated écriture as a feminist signifier of location.

Graham's engaged use of the word in the 1930s, while influenced by cultural Marxism rather than by feminism, is not so far from that of Cixous when he describes that "the difficulty in producing a work of art lies in the fact that the artist has to unite at one and the same time three elements: thought, feeling, and automatic "écriture"."⁶¹ At the same time the ideas and language which he employs is suggestive of Gurdjieff's system of centres of thought, feeling, and motion, thereby illustrating the nature of the intellectual climate which nurtured a wide variety of movements. Graham as a modernist painter articulated the

necessity of spiritual and psychological investment in the creation of a work of art. This aspect of modern painting was of singular importance to Luke, as evidenced in her notes, her library, and even some of the titles which she gave to her pieces, names such as From Beginningless Time, Dwellers in the Ageless, or Sway of Silent Forces. One painting Abyss of Time of 1955 was formerly named Prophecy and even earlier, Transfiguration.⁶²

Not to remain an advocate of modern art, Graham renounced it in the forties, but continued to make a significant contribution to American culture through his exploration of native American art. W. Jackson Rushing describes:

During the late 1930's in America, Graham was perhaps the single most credible purveyor of the idea that atavistic myth and primitivism are an avenue to the unconscious mind and primordial past. His System and Dialectics of Art (1937) is replete with ideas and language similar to Jungian psychology. As Graham explained, "The purpose of art in particular is to reestablish a lost contact with the unconscious (actively by producing works of art), with the primordial racial past and to keep and develop this contact in order to bring to the conscious mind the throbbing events of the

unconscious mind."⁶³

The Lawrentian prose and theosophical terminology which Graham uses is alarmingly similar to Nazi doctrine and further illustration of the manner in which ideas circulate, intermingle, and are picked up in a large variety of interpretations.⁶⁴

AUTOMATIC PAINTING

Luke's colourful "automatics" are free-falls into the unconscious which demonstrate her interest in the psychological subtext of modern art and her faith in abstraction as a form of self-expression. Barrie Hale outlines some sources of influence upon this movement:

With the end of World War II and its restrictions, art magazines from Europe and the United States (including Life and Time's less than friendly views of the New York School) became available in Toronto, and ideas entered its hermetic painting world in the personal experience of other places, other teachings. Jock Macdonald--the J. W. G. Macdonald who had, in Vancouver, gone sketching with Varley and been awakened to paintings' possibilities by him, began automatic painting in 1934, had read Kandinsky's Concerning the

Spiritual in Art and Sir Herbert Read's Art Now--arrived in Toronto in 1947 to teach painting and drawing at OCA. Macdonald was to have a profound effect on a number of fledgling modernists at OCA, beginning with William Ronald, who graduated in 1951.⁶⁵

Carrie Cardell, a friend of Macdonald, Luke, and Ronald, recalls their enthusiasm and a kind of "innocence" regarding what were new ideas to them.⁶⁶ Cardell, born in Indonesia, and having studied with a student of Kandinsky in Holland, recognized many of the concepts which attach spiritual activity to everyday life from her own less exotic locale of personal experience and youthful inquiry. But Luke and her contemporaries embraced ideas associated with esoteric thought with a degree of vigour which encourages the notion that the "innocence" which Cardell has identified in Luke is in fact a revealing signifier towards an understanding of a propensity for spiritual dimension in Canadian artistic expression.

Some of the ideas about which they were excited relate to the exploration of the unconscious through "automatic painting," a technique taught by Macdonald, who learned it from a British psychiatrist, Dr. Grace Pailthorpe. Dr. Pailthorpe developed the method as therapy for mentally disturbed criminals. It consisted of clearing one's mind as completely as possible, sitting quietly, and allowing the

hand (with paintbrush) to follow its own course. Macdonald then drew into his automatics, creating fanciful zoomorphic compositions. Luke's results were less objective and more abstract in composition. Both artists executed many "automatics" during one session, and Luke documented hers by date, time, and sometimes position in the series. This method of working is consistent with her interest in the unconscious, and her wide-ranging readings which included both legitimate and questionable (by today's standards) psychology and philosophy. One such text, Rhine's The Reach of the Mind, promises on the dust jacket:

Here is the story of an amazing research into the unknown powers of the human mind and the evidence for its ability to project itself into the future and even to influence physical objects.⁶⁷

Rhine's discussion of the ESP experiments with twins might have been of particular interest to Luke as a fraternal twin herself. Another book from Luke's library is Theodor Reik's Listening with The Third Ear: The Inner Experience of a Psychoanalyst, which deals with the author's experiences with Freud and his subsequent career as a psychoanalyst.⁶⁸

Luke's interests lead logically into automatic painting, which endeavoured to bring forth image and form, not of entities from past worlds, as in the automatic writing of 19C spiritualism, but from one's own submerged

consciousness. It was similar in manner to the methods of the European Surrealist painters and writers of the late twenties such as Miró and Breton, whose work derived from Freudian theory.

But distinctions between Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism exist in the aversion which abstract expressionists have displayed to verbal explanations for their work. Eden Gibson identifies both formal and philosophical reasons for this reluctance.⁶⁹ The first relates to Greenberg's assertion that verbal interpretations are unnecessary when "each medium . . . must establish its excellence through an explanation of its own limits."⁷⁰ The second touches on the propagandistic possibilities inherent in narrative accessibility as seen in the association of realism with the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin. Finally, a "suspicion of the literary basis of French Surrealism as it was conceived by the Surrealist leader André Breton" was due to the abstract expressionists' perceptions that it was lacking in "painterly vigor." Therefore they adopted "the silent, gestural aspect of Surrealism--automatism--ostensibly for its plastic qualities alone."⁷¹

While this explanation provides a historical and methodological rationale, it dilutes the importance of the psychological nature of the Surrealist movement, which assumes primary importance in the work of the Abstract

Expressionists, and in particular that of Alexandra Luke. The automatism of English Canadian artists such as Luke was prescriptive in a personal sense; in origin, a therapy for deviants which allowed artists to free their works from content and formal concerns.

Any discussion of automatic painting demands consideration of *les Automatistes*, a Québécois movement which began in the early 1940s. Dennis Reid credits Paul Emile Borduas with perfecting an "automatic" process "over the winter of 1941-42."⁷² Borduas and several younger artists were les automatistes who produced the 1948 manifesto Refus Global, which comprised an avant-garde movement with more specific political implications than the Toronto painters, and a closer relationship to the European Surrealists. According to Borduas, "The Surrealists showed us the moral importance of non-preconceived acts."⁷³ His invocation:

MAKE WAY FOR MAGIC! MAKE WAY FOR

OBJECTIVE MYSTERIES!

MAKE WAY FOR LOVE!

MAKE WAY FOR INTERNAL DRIVES!⁷⁴

echoes and precurses many liberationist movements of the twentieth century, but "To hell with holy water and the French-Canadian tuque!"⁷⁵ reflects specific regional and immediate concerns which contrast markedly to the activities

of abstract artists in English Canada. Automatics by Luke are dated later in the 1940s, but have origins with Macdonald and Pailthorpe from 1934. Therefore the English Canadian version of automatism can be seen as at least concurrent with les automatistes, similar in psychological derivation, but from a clinical rather than literary and philosophical standpoint, and from England, not France.

LUKE AND MODERNISM

Although Luke was part of the avant-garde in her day because of her engagement with abstract art, her position and that of other modern artists is more closely aligned with the "high modernists" which Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes as follows:

High modernists are the most problematic nonhegemonic group, because they make a conservative, sometimes fascisante criticism of bourgeois culture, with "positive" values ascribed to hierarchical social order, sometimes buttressed by religion, but also, astonishingly, linked to peasant-based agriculture (as opposed, of course, to our urban, industrial morass). These writers constitute themselves as a group-against, whose common bond is opposition to the social basis on

which their world in fact rested. Modernists show the strength of a politicized culture based on a shared revulsion to World War I, on one hand, and to the Russian Revolution on the other. This set of individuals with residual values (Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Lewis, Lawrence) depends on responses to a once-existing, and somewhat mythologized, social basis in peasantry and patriarch. Aristocrat, head, il capo. A revolution from the right.⁷⁶

Furthermore, some of these influences are common to the abstract expressionist school of painting, and are identified and connected to specific iconographies by Joan M. Vastokas, as previously discussed. Luke's notes allude to "the fruitless vortex of materialistic living," while Vastokas describes the modern dilemma in the following terms:

The artist's daily experience of the upheaval of modern urban life is crucially reflected in his art--the problems of accelerating change and its attendant shift away from traditional values, the sense of alienation of individuals from stable patterns of community and society, the feeling of helpless uprootedness in the face of two world wars and bewilderment in the light of a newly developing not yet cohesive reality. Far from

emerging as an unthinking emotional response to the crisis of apparent directionless change, it is clear that the essential significance and subject matter of abstraction is philosophical and spiritual, aligned with metaphysics and religion in its search for meaning.⁷⁷

From its vantage point in the late seventies, Vastokas' framework for the roots of abstraction seems to suggest, in its inclusion of folk art, aboriginal art, and archeology, what DuPlessis refers to as "residual values" dependent "on responses to a once-existing, and somewhat mythologized, social basis in peasantry and patriarch."⁷⁸ The assignation of spiritual dimension to abstract art speaks to both the past and the future, in its references to the patterned abstract designs prevalent in agricultural based pre-industrial cultures, and in its optimistic notions regarding a movement toward enlarged consciousness and spiritual growth for the future. The latter idea holds specific significance for Canadian artistic expression by artists such as Harris, Brooker, Macdonald, and in particular, Luke, as does the concept of hierarchy of consciousness which prevails in both Theosophy and the Gurdjieff movement.

DuPlessis' postmodern interpretation of artistic expression in reaction to modernity also distinguishes early

modern authors by gender, offering another facet to the definition of Alexandra Luke's location:

Literature by women, in its ethical and moral position, has analogues with the equally nonhegemonic modernism in its subversive critique of culture. (Most--Woolf, Lessing, H. D.--are in no way right-wing; . . .) In women's writing, as in modernism, there is a didactic element, related to the project of cultural transformation, of establishing values.⁷⁹

By identifying progressive as well as regressive aspects of modernity and ways in which the era evolved in response to many issues, DuPlessis provides a structure within which a definition of Luke's position emerges. Luke's unarguably conservative attitudes toward her own place within a patriarchal construct, within an industrial world which served her very well, and within her own home (where servants were called by their last names and uniforms worn where required) are consistent with ideas of cultural transformation through metaphysics and religion. It would seem that both Vastokas and DuPlessis have identified similar elements within modernity, but have interpreted their findings according to their respective locations.

It is obvious that considerable overlap exists in the locating of modernism in the twentieth century. But given

Luke's context in terms of the local, her involvement in the Gurdjieff movement, with its connections to White Russia and implications of patriarchy, and her optimism regarding the transformative nature of modernism, her position might be more closely aligned with the early moderns and their conservative stance. However, her espousal of abstraction placed her in an obliquely critical position within her own community, where formal expression within an avant-garde mode would be unsettling to family and friends. "You just didn't understand what she meant."⁸⁰

A panel discussion with Hilton Kramer and Clement Greenberg projects another possibility on Luke's location within abstract expressionism and within the modernist movement. Kramer sees the large gestural works of the New York painters as expressive of something "being drawn to an end." He says, "I see the whole Abstract Expressionist phenomenon, and Pollock in particular, as a kind of last gasp of European modernism." Greenberg defends the significance of the movement and its creators in his contradiction: "I'd place Pollock along with Hofmann and Morris Louis in this country (US) among the very greatest painters of this generation."⁸¹

This kind of lionizing of artistic genius is now widely critiqued in post modernist discussions. In A Theory of Parody Linda Hutcheon refers to Foucault's argument that

"the entire concept of artist or author as an original instigator of meaning is only a privileged moment of individualization in the history of art" and that modernity is actually a departure from the norm.⁸²

In spite of Luke's disinterest in the automobile, General Motors, or the assembly line, her connections to the McLaughlins place her in a singular position within modern art. In Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art, Leo Steinberg finds analogies within modernism to the automobile industry which resonates against Luke's position.

It is probably no chance coincidence that the descriptive terms which have dominated American formalist criticism these past fifty years run parallel to the contemporaneous evolution of the Detroit automobile. Its ever-increasing symbiosis of parts--the ingestion of doors, running boards, wheels, fenders, spare tires, signals, etc., in a one-piece fuselage--suggests, with no need for Kant, a similar drift towards synthesizing its design elements. It is not that the cars look like paintings. What I am saying here relates less to the pictures themselves than to the critical apparatus that deals with them It is the critics' criterion far more than the painters'

works which is ruled by a streamlined efficiency image.

But the reference to industrial ideals can serve to focus on certain distinctions within art itself.⁸³

Luke's work can be viewed within the context of Steinberg's final statement, since her formal choices within a modernist tradition were predominantly from the expressive, sensual and psychological arena of abstract expressionism, rather than the formal concerns derived from geometry and colour theory. At a psychological level her manner of expression displays a polarized relationship to "industrial ideals," but in terms of motion, speed, and space, Luke's work does in fact suggest certain qualities and implications of the automobile. Paintings such as "Journey"(1957) and "Encounter"(c1958) are G-force experiences. There are also more obvious experiments which relate to the nature of abstraction, where streamlining and simplification take place. This twentieth century movement toward these formal qualities takes on a larger field of reference which includes the automobile industry as a major component, but also contains the entire industrialization process of the Western world. Luke's connection to this process can be viewed as incidental to her work, vital to her work, or more than likely, somewhere between these poles. However,

consideration of her paradoxical position is a fundamental component in locating her within modernism. Perhaps this connection, had it been made to Ewart, might have contributed to significant changes in his regard for her work. He would probably have revelled in John Marin's comment "what is my painting worth next to a taxi-cab? A taxi-cab is so much more powerful and beautiful and so much more expressive of the present time. I feel sometimes the same way about machinery when I see it."⁸⁴ Ewart might have enjoyed hearing Buckminster Fuller say "that the greatest artist of the twentieth century is Henry Ford."⁸⁵

But Ewart's reaction to modern art was that of the majority. In Leo Steinberg's discussion of the continuous process of assimilating the avant-garde, and the "plight of its public" or what Robert Hughes calls "The Shock of the New," there is always a progression from rejection toward acceptance:

In the early 1950's, certain spokesmen for what was then the avant-garde tried to argue differently for Abstract Expressionism. They suggested that the raw violence and the immediate action which produced these pictures put them beyond the pale of art appreciation and rendered them inherently unacceptable. And as proof they pointed out, with a satisfied gnashing of teeth,

that very few people bought these pictures. Today we know that this early reluctance to buy was but the normal time lag of ten years or less. By the late 1950's, the market for Abstract Expressionist art was amazingly active. They just looked outrageous for a season, while we of the reluctant public were coming around.⁸⁶

Post modernism exists beyond modernity; its predictable critique of abstraction erupts twice in the same issue of The Toronto Star. In "Angry Art," Christopher Hume announces that

The good old days of splitting conceptual hairs are over. The search for theoretical perfection has ended. Modernism, with all isms, has been swept aside. Art for art's sake sounds like the fustian it is. . . . Ergo, the hopelessly marginalized position in which the abstractionists now find themselves. Those starry-eyed zealots still fighting the war of the picture plane battle on even though its outcome has long since ceased to matter.⁸⁷

Elsewhere in the same edition, Sid Adelman remarks in his discussion of the Thomson Gallery that in "a breathtaking display of Canada's best historical art . . . Canadian abstract expressionists are absent, but not missed."⁸⁸ These

sideswipes reflect not only a contemporary position beyond modernity (but not far enough beyond for objective evaluation), but also a continuing public resistance to abstraction in Canada. Perhaps an underlying fear of being duped has influenced the direction of Canadian art into spiritual dimensions which offer explanation and justification for abstracted form to viewers accustomed to representation.

Vastokas critiques Greenberg's notions of purely formal objectives in abstraction and describes minimalism as reflective of the sterility of modern life. Since abstract expressionism is evocative of feeling and impression, it is therefore in possession of content.⁸⁹ The question of spiritual content in visual art is examined comprehensively in the exhibition catalogue The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985.⁹⁰ Recent texts that offer specifically Canadian references include Ann Davis' The Logic Of Ecstasy and Roald Nasgaard's The Mystic North. Ramsay Cook refers to "the marriage of mysticism and modernism in Canada, and indeed, elsewhere" in "Nothing Less Than a New Theory of Art and Religion": The Birth of a Modernist Culture in Canada."⁹¹ These references underscore Vastokas earlier assertions regarding the primary importance of spiritual content in abstract expressionsim, and therefore a significant component in modernism.

In his introduction to The Spiritual Image in Modern Art , Robert P. Welsh notes the relationships between modern artists and Theosophy and related movements. Not only has there been a preponderance of mystical or occult preoccupations within the realm of abstract art, but also in earlier movements such as Surrealism and Symbolism. While many artists have displayed some of the tenets of theosophy in their work, and espoused a spiritual influence, Welsh identifies Mondrian as the only actual member of The Theosophical Society.⁹² But in Canada there is a distinct history of involvement in Theosophy among major Canadian painters such as Lawren Harris and Yvonne McKague Housser who attended lectures and readings regularly or became active members of the Theosophical Society. Other related movements such as Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy attracted later artists such as Joyce Wieland, while Jock Macdonald and Fred Varley, explored a panoply of Eastern mysticism and esoteric thought.

"The essential idea of Art [as] a quality of human consciousness, rather than professionalism or commercialism" was the guiding principle behind the Art Students' League, an organization based upon its New York counterpart, and for which Luke's friend McKague Housser was a key figure.⁹³ The idea of relating Art to the quality of human consciousness focuses upon an ideal integration of form and content, and

places symbolic use of colour and form in a dominant position. This is an approach which de-emphasizes purely formal explorations that deal with optical effects of colour, line, shape, and space, and an approach evident in the works of those artists whom Welsh refers to as "esoterically inclined."⁹⁴ Luke was of course one of these artists, as was McKague Housser, who was also a loyal member of the Toronto Theosophical Society, an influential instructor at the Ontario College of Art, and a moving force behind the Art Students' League in Canada.

Through McKague Housser, Macdonald, and her own impetus, Luke examined and explored areas of thought that were pertinent to modernity, while the formal aspects of abstraction were given scope for development through such excellent tutors as Hofmann and again, Macdonald. Her position in modern art is therefore within a matrix of both spiritual and formal dimension, and central in any discussion of modernism in Canada.

CHAPTER THREE

IN SEARCH

THE WORK

As it is I say almost nothing and never even talk of the work.

In Rochester in 1958, Margaret's friend Hal Bohaker found a copy of P. D. Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous, which was both a description of the mathematician's years with Gurdjieff and a most cogent explication of his system. Oshawa resident Madeline Rose, who is still committed to Gurdjieff's work, recalls the year spent reading the book,

So we began reading this, sometimes at Margaret's studio. . . . We were searching. And the thing I remember most is, after we finished, and we closed the book, the group just split, in absolute two--half of them just thought it was pure balderdash absolutely, there was no correspondence in them . . . and the other five or six of us, just, it was like on a high, we felt we had found something that contains the possibility . . . I

think it was just an exciting mixture of ideas that touched someplace that you don't normally have touched. And I don't even think that the ideas that one could learn were pertinent at that point. It was just an urgency that we must find a school, that's what it was. It was just that, there wasn't any question yes or no, it was we must. And so Margaret was one of the ones.²

Likely Margaret had heard about Gurdjieff before, through the Theosophical Society or her readings from Gurdjieff's disciple Ouspensky. Her friend, mentor and fellow member of Painters Eleven Jock Macdonald, familiar with Tertium Organum during the 1930s, had drawn from the theories of Ouspensky in his painting and teaching.³ The long and cordial association between Luke and Macdonald affords plausibility to Luke's interest and direction; like many other Canadian artists, she enjoyed lifelong fascination with various strains of esoteric thought as her reading matter ranged from Krishnamurti to flying saucers. Among her books is The Reach of the Mind, begins with the question "What are we human beings, you and I?"⁴ This characterizes the nature of much of the searching quality in Luke, and is indicative of the range of her interests, which also included Edgar Cayce, theories of reincarnation such as are found in the Rosicrucian movement, and even Timothy

Leary and his LSD experiments.⁵ There is also a reference to Wilhelm Reich in one of Luke's letters from Yvonne Houser: "I was amused when reading the Canadian Theosophist to come accross(sic) the word orgone--(page 58). It is evidently an old word used by our pals with their little boxes."⁶ Reich, a disciple of Freud, and author of Character-Analysis, who later became absorbed in the development of what he called "orgone accumulators," fabricated boxes into which people sat in order to receive therapeutic amounts of what he claimed to be a life energy which he named "orgone," in reference to orgasms.⁷

More of Margaret's inclinations are revealed in a diary entry of Jan 10, 1958: "Yvonne Houser here for lunch. We went down to Lakewood and had a wonderful talk, she is so knowledgable regarding occult matters and spiritual evolvments."⁸ But it was the Gurdjieff movement where Margaret and several other diverse and variously motivated Oshawa citizens found a private and profound experience. They met weekly to read, then contacted Lord Pentland, the head of the organization in North America, and joined the Toronto group. Carrie Cardell recalls Margaret's enthusiasm for the material, reading the books every evening before bed.⁹

Today a variety of sects work through the teachings of one or another of Gurdjieff's disciples: Ouspensky, Orage,

and Bennett. There is one in Rochester which operates as a commune, one in Toronto, called the "Society for Traditional Studies," its summer centre north of Halifax, and a Vancouver group. The "mother house" for Toronto and Halifax is the Gurdjieff Foundation in Manhattan on the upper east side, while the Vancouver group is associated with a California based society. Administrative head of the Gurdjieff Foundation of North America is Dr. Welch, while his wife is considered to be the spiritual leader since the death of Mme de Saltzmann in Paris. Oshawa members, including Margaret, worked with Mrs. Welch, who made frequent visits to Toronto, and also at centres in New York, Mendham New Jersey, and Armonk, New York.¹⁰

THE MILIEU AND THE MAN

In order to ascertain the relevance of this involvement to Alexandra Luke's art, and Margaret McLaughlin's life, it is necessary to describe the milieu into which it appeared, in a larger global context as well as at a personal level for Luke.

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (18??-1949) is a twentieth century cult figure, mystic, magician, or "dance instructor", as he called himself in mock humility. During his life he attracted a wide variety of cultured people to his movement, including the mathematician and philosopher P. D. Ouspensky, Alfred Richard Orage (the editor of the New Age), Katherine Mansfield, the conductor Thomas de Hartmann and his wife, Mrs. Enrico Caruso, Olgivanna and Frank Lloyd Wright, and many members of the Russian intelligentsia who fled the revolution.

The unstable political environment in Russia probably contributed to Gurdjieff's appeal because he was seen as offering both a method for spiritual growth and collective safety from immediate dangers. Ouspensky's description of St. Petersburg during the week before the Bolshevik revolution articulates the sense of dread which must have permeated society:

It was quite impossible to stay there any longer.
Something disgusting and clammy was drawing near.

A sickly tension and the expectation of something inevitable could be felt in everything. Rumours were creeping about, each one more absurd and stupid than the other. Nobody understood anything. Nobody could imagine what was coming later on . . . what was taking place in Russia had to a considerable extent got out of hand.¹¹

Gurdjieff said to his group:

You do not realize your own situation. You are in prison. All you wish for, if you are a sensible man, is to escape . . . but one man can do nothing. But let us suppose there are ten or twenty men. . . .¹²

After organizing in Moscow and Petrograd, Gurdjieff summoned his followers to Essentuki, in the Caucasus. "At first thirteen people came from Russia, then forty more."¹³ Some of the members at this time were:

Alexandre de Salzmann, painter, inventor, forest ranger, lighting director, associate of Rilke, Dalcroze and Kandinsky, 'a former dervish, former Benedictine, former professor of jiu'jitsu, healer, stage-designer . . . an incredible man.' With him his wife Jeanne de Salzmann, an accomplished teacher of Dalcroze eurythmics. There was Olgivanna . . . the daughter of the Chief

Justice of Montenegro . . . the stolid
pipe-clenching figure of Pinder, Major Frank
Pinder of British Intelligence, responsible for
the security of the Batum-Baku oil line . . .
Gurdjieff's brother Dmitri.¹⁴

In addition there was Gurdjieff's wife, Madame Ostrowska,
Dr. Leonid Stoernval, Thomas de Hartmann and his wife, and
Ouspensky, who parted from the group at Essentuki when he
"suddenly elected to follow the system but not the man."¹⁵

Aside from his charismatic abilities, some of the
strength of Gurdjieff's leadership probably lay in his
careful choice of members whose skills and talents
complemented each other, and afforded some defence against
the times in which they were living. Members received
security as well as the theories for "harmonious living"
from their master Gurdjieff. However he was an exacting
leader, who berated his pupils and repeatedly demanded
unreasonable action from them. All accounts related by the
principals indicate belief that their interests and needs
were paramount and that Gurdjieff was helping them to
advance with exercises in humiliation such as the toast of
the idiots, where dinner guests were required to define the
category of idiot to which they belonged, or inexplicable
commands such as sending the composer de Hartmann to the
market to hawk goods, or demanding absolute silence, or

abrupt changes in living quarters for several days.¹⁶

The de Hartmanns' account of their adventurous journey, chronicled in Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff, offers a glimpse of the difficulties and the ways in which they were truly "led" to safety. When Essentuki became dangerous, Gurdjieff organized an expedition into the mountains to research dolmens:¹⁷

considering that Gurdjieff's 'scientist citizens of Essentuki' were in fact Tsarist Guards officers, doctors, engineers, musicians and other 'enemies of the people', his dignified letter to the Soviet authorities requesting material assistance in mounting his expedition must surely qualify him for some sort of prize.¹⁸

By the time Katherine Mansfield meets Gurdjieff the group has arrived in Paris and is working on the Prieuré. She describes: "He looks exactly like a desert chief. I kept thinking of Doughty's Arabia."¹⁹

GURDJIEFF'S SYSTEM

Gurdjieff "unfolded an astonishingly clear and cohesive body of data."²⁰

Gurdjieff's system can be regarded as the complete, ideal **Existnezphilosophie**.²¹

"I cannot develop you, I can create conditions in which you can develop yourselves," said Gurdjieff.²²

"There is no System" said Ouspensky near the end of his life.²³

It is difficult to ascertain the validity of Gurdjieff's ideas, since many of his explicators have been apologetic about their own understanding of scientific thought, but no less convinced of its importance. Margaret Anderson says,

If anyone would answer my step-by-step questions about the Gurdjieff charts, I think I could finally understand them; but I have never found such a person, either in or outside the Gurdjieff groups.²⁴

Less generously, The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought

refers to words with "an illusory scientific flourish common to much neo-mysticism".²⁵

According to Maurice Tuchman, most mystical and occult world views include the following common ideas:

the universe is a single, living substance; mind and matter also are one; all things evolve in dialectical opposition, thus the universe comprises paired opposites (male-female, light-dark, vertical-horizontal, positive-negative); everything corresponds in a universal analogy, with things above as they are below; imagination is real; and self-realization can come by illumination, accident, or an induced state: the epiphany is suggested by heat, fire, or light.²⁶

This framework is further refined into "five underlying impulses within the spiritual-abstract nexus--cosmic imagery, vibration, synesthesia, duality, sacred geometry."²⁷

Although it is impossible to set out the doctrine of the "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man" in detail, several concepts can be outlined.²⁸ Gurdjieff theorized that people functioned through "centres," intellectual, emotional, and moving. He later added an instinctual centre and a sex centre. Much of the work dealt

with assessing the individual functions of the centres and relating one's personality to unbalance in them. In a larger sense he addresses the problematic nature of rationalism within modernity, and overlaps Freudian theories which were widely disseminated at the time when he was developing his system.²⁹

People were required to distinguish their chief feature, analyse their weaknesses, and try to raise their levels of spiritual development. A new twist was applied to Transcendental and Theosophist concepts of humanity's evolution toward a higher plane of existence through reincarnation. Gurdjieff said that man does not have a soul, merely the capacity for development of a soul through self observation, will, conscious suffering, and group dynamics, and that only then would reincarnation occur. Luke analyses herself:

Personally my prison is my emotions which have always been strong. If by superhuman strength I can knock down or undermine the emotional wall I would be free.³⁰

Gurdjieff saw people as asleep for most of their existence, and many of his exercises related to awakening. Kenneth Cavander describes this as "one of the most ambitious experiments in raising man by his psychic bootstraps."³¹ Luke applies these concepts to her art in her notes entitled

"Your approach to painting":

We are all asleep you know--for instance how many of us look carefully and enjoy the beauty around us--the shapes of the beautiful spaces between the tree branches We are so blind in the fruitless vortex of materialistic living we don't see anymore.³²

The concept of interconnectedness of all things was expanded into his "law of the octaves" which employed the musical scale as a structure for perceiving the cosmos. For example, there was a law of momentum which plotted a curve based on the space between musical notes, so that while doh, re, mi fah proceeded in full tones, the space from fah to soh created a lapse in momentum which required an extra push of energy to overcome and progress. Otherwise momentum would be lost and the curve would move downward. Music permeated Gurdjieff's system, and much of the work involved composition, dances, and sensitivity to particular note sequences. Besides the cerebral and spiritual realms of existence, much attention was devoted to the physical aspects of life, which included menial labour as well as exercises, movements, and dances. Katherine Mansfield describes the communal atmosphere at the Prieuré:

Nina, a big girl in a black apron--lovely too--pounds things in mortars. The second cook

chops at the table, bangs the saucepans, sings; another runs in and out with plates and pots, a man in the scullery cleans pots--the dog barks and lies on the floor, worrying a hearthbrush. A little girl comes in with a bouquet of leaves for Olga Ivanovna. Mr. Gurdjieff strides in, takes up a handful of shredded cabbage and eats it . . . there are at least 20 pots on the stove. And it's so full of life and humour and ease that one wouldn't be anywhere else.³³

Gurdjieff's teaching often occurred during meals which he helped to prepare. He always appointed his quarters in an Eastern fashion, and a great deal of the Work was accomplished in this exotic environment. Ouspensky describes his teacher's home in In Search of the Miraculous:

His small apartment on the Bolshaia Dmitrovka, all the floors of which were covered in the Eastern style with carpets and the ceiling hung with silk shawls.³⁴

Many stories are told about Gurdjieff's legendary feasts.

RODGERS: Do you know the story of Gurdjieff and Frank Lloyd Wright? It's about Wright being very full of himself, when visiting Gurdjieff, who had made dinner for them.. Wright said "You could be a cook, that was delicious" and Gurdjieff said "I

can make more money fleecing sheep than cooking them" (paraphrased).

ROSE: Armenian dishes were his forté.

RODGERS: He was playing with Wright, and humiliating him in a way, but was he also implying any sort of magican-like work on his part as taking advantage of people?

ROSE: I think he did--he wouldn't term it that way.

RODGERS: So he can be a charismatic figure and have meaning for people, and still have faults?

ROSE: But this would not be a fault, this is what the work is all about. For instance, if you are with someone, and you're capable, and they're just throwing off their good energy, there's nothing wrong with taking it. But there has to be an exchange, that's the thing about Gurdjieff, he gave, I don't think a magician does. He gave while he was taking. In any group that I participated in, we were almost aware that that was happening. If you were losing your temper, somebody else was gaining energy. Or if you "lost it" you would know that. And that's why groups are necessary. You cannot work alone, and another thing, you're not supposed to believe everything you're told, you

have to find out for yourself.³⁵

CHARLATAN

Much of the of the condemnation of Gurdjieff comes from literary quarters, and issues from the death of Katherine Mansfield, who spent her final days under his care, and died at the Prieuré at Fontainebleau. Mansfield was insistent that Gurdjieff accept her in his programme, but since the group had only recently arrived, and adverse public opinion at the obviously imminent death of this famous writer would be detrimental to the progress of "the work," Gurdjieff was hesitant, relenting to a temporary stay, which finally did become permanent. In "The Remains of Katherine Mansfield," Gloria G. Fromm interprets the situation:

During her more than two months under Gurdjieff's absolute rule, she endured as much hardship as he thought she could tolerate, to all of which (unheated rooms, lack of bathing facilities, menial kitchen labors) she meekly submitted as part of what she claimed to believe was her last

chance at health . . . when Gurdjieff put her on a platform above the cowshed, to inhale the rising smell of dung, she thought his diagnosis and prescription were brilliant. All the accounts confirm that she was happier at the Institute than she had been for years.³⁶

Upon her death, Gurdjieff's reputation suffered stingingly articulate attacks from such literary notables as D.H. Lawrence and John Middleton Murry. In Gurdjieff and Mansfield, James Moore disdainfully recounts various "sanctimonious biographers" of Mansfield who describe "the man who did her wrong."³⁷ He quotes Jeffrey Meyers, who refers to Gurdjieff's "violent temper, greed for money, personal lust, Byzantine extravagance and spectacular megalomania, which scarcely reflected the Wisdom of the East."³⁸

In a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, Lawrence denounced, "I have heard enough about that place at Fontainebleau . . . to know it is a rotten, false, self-conscious place of people playing a sickly stunt."³⁹ This sentiment is echoed by Francois Mauriac, who sees Mansfield's attachment to Gurdjieff as a defection from his own Catholicism: "So much suffering could have led her elsewhere, towards another enlightenment. The poor little girl lost her way."⁴⁰ But Fromm's version of Mansfield's sojourn at Fontainebleau is

slightly less damning:

Yet she managed to put an extraordinary finishing touch on her life, which seems to me a story in itself and perhaps the best one she ever 'wrote.' Against Murry's wishes, who she kept saying was not taking care of her anyway, she placed herself in the hands of a peripatetic foreigner named George Gurdjieff. It was a desperate measure on her part that nevertheless, in retrospect, makes perfect sense, bringing together all the elements of an astonishingly chaotic life.⁴¹

According to Fromm, Mansfield's afternoons in the cowshed were in order to "inhale the rising smell of dung."⁴² But

Katherine tells her story in another way:

I'll tell you . . . about that couch Mr. Gurdjieff has had built in the cowhouse. It's simply too lovely. There is a small steep staircase to a little railed-off gallery above the cows. On the little gallery are divans covered with Persian carpets (only two divans). But the white-washed walls and ceiling have been decorated most exquisitely in what looks like a Persian pattern of yellow, red and blue by Mr. Salzmann. Flowers, little birds, butterflies and a spreading tree with animals on the branches, even a hippopotamus.

But . . . all done with the most **real** art--a little masterpiece. And all so gay, so simple, reminding one of summer grass and the little flowers that smell like milk. There I go every day to lie and later I am going to sleep there. It's very warm. One has the most happy feelings listening to the beasts and looking. I know that one day I shall write a long long story about it.⁴³

Moore also adds the information that the cowshed had been Gurdjieff's original quarters at the Prieuré, that Mansfield loved cows and derived great pleasure from the daily visits of Madame Ostrowska, who came to milk "Mrs. Murry's cows"⁴⁴ and argues,

would Katherine Mansfield herself have preferred a hotel or a ward for the terminally ill? If she drew a sort of inner strength from the friendship and the sacred dancing at the Institute, was Gurdjieff to show her the door?⁴⁵

In Moore's view, the death of Katherine Mansfield at the Prieuré does not corroborate accusations of charlatanism on the part of Gurdjieff. This exploration is significant to a discussion of Margaret McLaughlin to the extent that she continued in "the work" during her battle with cancer.⁴⁶

But Gurdjieff's reference to sheering sheep, his

self-related experiences at earning a living, and the nomadic nature of his existence all place him within a paradigm of "medicine men," gypsies, and charlatans. Moore elaborates:

He serviced typewriters and sewing machines; he cured drug-addicts and psychosomatic patients by hypnotism; he dealt shrewdly in carpets, antiques and Chinese cloisonné; he sold pickled herrings and oil wells; he started restaurants, built them up and disposed of them; he remodelled corsets; he even clipped and painted sparrows and off-loaded them as 'American canaries'.⁴⁷

When Moore refers to Gurdjieff's memoirs, Meetings with Remarkable Men as "not exactly history,"⁴⁸ the suggestions are clear that one of Gurdjieff's features was that of an opportunist with charismatic appeal, who to a great extent created his own mythology.

STORYTELLING AND MYTH

Certain distinguishable features augment the mythological flavour of Gurdjieff's origins. George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was born in Alexandropol on the Shiraki Steppe, a disputed territory which was claimed by Armenia, Georgia, the Ottoman sultanate and Tzarist Russia.⁴⁹ The Gurdjieff family were among many refugees who poured into the city of Kars when it was evacuated by Turks fleeing from Tzarist forces. Having lost its herds of cattle, the family was now supported by the father's earnings as a **carpenter**. The child was bright, and therefore taken out of the regular school and educated by the dean of Kars Military Cathedral, reminiscent of the carpenter's son lecturing to elders in the temple. Gurdjieff's memoirs recount several miracles which he experienced, and which motivated him to inquire extensively into scientific thought.⁵⁰

Gurdjieff is an old world character to the extent that he operates within his father's storytelling tradition and embarks upon the exploration of a plethora of traditional spiritual phenomena. Moore lists these as: "shamanists, yogis, holy men, fakirs, staretz, Turkoman Babas; Hesychasm at Mount Athos; remote theocratic societies in Tibet and Abyssinia; 107 orders of dervishes; religious solitaries and brotherhoods."⁵¹ A carpenter's son lecturing to elders in the temple, then travelling to the east in order to explore

mystical thought is a resonant myth within Western culture.

Much of Gurdjieff's early biography is rich in mythological suggestion. Although accounts are available which establish the authenticity of most of the story, a substantial amount of the detail is pregnant with fabrication which calls for acceptance as part of the storyteller's craft.

Gurdjieff senior was also a storyteller, an "ashokh" or bardic poet, and it is through the storytelling talents of Gurdjieff the son which recent studies in oral narrative and the revival of storytelling as a legitimate art form can offer insights into the significance of this curious figure.

In All and Everything Gurdjieff reveals his capacity as storyteller, using an allegorical space odyssey to impart his views on "all and everything".⁵² Moore compares the "dislocated sequences and improbable laminates" to "those of The Thousand and One Nights,"⁵³ a comparison which came to my mind along with The Eugué lionne, an "anti Bible" written as space odyssey by Quebecois feminist Louky Bersianik.⁵⁴

Aside from his writing, Gurdjieff's teaching also displayed characteristics of oral narrative, and indeed the factual particulars of his life exhibit the structure of myth. Professor Marlene Castellano's outline characterizing indigenous knowledge in an oral tradition and contrasting this with knowledge systems within literate cultures offers

insight into content and method in the teachings of Gurdjieff, which display many of the features evident in systems of knowledge within an oral tradition.⁵⁵ In differentiating oral and literate knowledge systems Castellano compares the validity of multiple views with the presumptuous nature of scientism which requires truth and error, less flexible concepts, and a literal interpretation of objective reality. Indigenous knowledge relies upon perceptions rather than imposed concepts, a combination of intuitive/affective/intellectual reading rather than purely intellectual activity. This is consistent with Gurdjieff's system of centres, wherein people are governed by three centres, feeling, moving, and thinking.

Castellano also contrasts the subjectivity of oral knowledge against the so-called intellectual objectivity of literate thought. People within the Gurdjieff movement emphasize its personal and subjective nature, and the fact that one performs tasks particular to one's own context. Madeline Rose emphasizes that her impressions and interpretations are just that, while those of others might be quite different. Since members of the Gurdjieff group were cautioned not to discuss the ideas, even among themselves, a situation was created which relied heavily upon subjectivity.

for a long time it seemed to be a hidden teaching,

again this was because of Gurdjieff that people would have to find their way to it. That hasn't changed, you cannot phone up and say "I'd like to become a member; you're asked questions. . . .

There was a time when I would not even talk to you about this because it was not to be talked about or proselytised. That was an absolute no no, and if you understand the work you can see why, because you have to have made some effort to acquire some understanding on your own, and you can do dreadful things if you try to, which I did. I was so excited every time I came back from meetings I would talk to my husband about them, and I absolutely turned him off, because of my inability to express my inner state, and I spoiled any possibility for him to become interested, but I couldn't stop.⁵⁶

When asked whether Margaret's experience was similar, she replied,

No, I'm sure that she took her energy, I guess it's got to be an energy, and developed her painting. I really do think that, but there again, no one talked to one another, you talked in the situation of a meeting, in the group.⁵⁷

Castellano contrasts this particularity to context to

the generalizable theories which permeate a "marketplace of ideas" in literate society, where general accessibility of all kinds of knowledge is assumed. In contrast to this situation, oral tradition values the power of knowledge. Knowledge is dangerous in that it can be misused, and is only transmittable according to the capability of the apprentice.

Margaret Anderson's interpretation of the concept of exclusivity of knowledge in the Gurdjieff work is in conflict with modern notions of universal accessibility, but is consistent with attitudes within knowledge systems of indigenous people. Anderson elaborates:

But first it would have to be understood that these ideas cannot be made available to everyone. The masses don't want them, and couldn't understand them. Clergyman, priests, evangelists, Billy Grahams, serve the needs of those whose aspirations and capacities are on a different level, and who, in the hierarchy of 'accident', never rise above that level.⁵⁸

But Anderson also expresses eagerness to share the ideas, and presents a dialogue which reveals other facets to the argument for exclusivity:

'Oh, another cult!' they'll say. It's harmful to Gurdjieff to present him like this to a hostile,

ignorant public . . . Gurdjieff's more elusive method was a necessary weeding out. . . . Some people have a nose for these ideas. In others there is nothing that Gurdjieff can touch. But there are a few people in each generation who are alive.⁵⁹

This reticence to entertain casual inquiry extends to the present; the centre in Toronto has an unlisted telephone number, while one of the other local groups inserts a telephone number for the "Toronto Gurdjieff Ouspensky group" inside the binding of related reading material. This kind of intrigue has its counterparts in the Tales of the Arabian Nights and is characteristic of many of Gurdjieff's activities which revealed him as a figure from this tradition.⁶⁰

Gurdjieff veils his ideas with the following story:

There is an Eastern tale which speaks about a very rich magician who had a great many sheep. But at the same time this magician was very mean. He did not want to hire shepherds, nor did he want to erect a fence about the pasture where his sheep were grazing. The sheep consequently often wandered into the forest, fell into ravines, and so on, and above all they ran away, for they knew that the magician wanted their flesh and skins and

this they did not like.

At last the magician found a remedy. He **hypnotized** his sheep and suggested to them first of all that they were immortal and that no harm was being done to them when they were skinned, that, on the contrary, it would be very good for them and even pleasant; secondly he suggested that the magician was a **good master** who loved his flock so much that he was ready to do anything in the world for them; and in the third place he suggested to them that if anything at all were going to happen to them it was not going to happen just then, at any rate not that day, and **therefore** they had no need to think about it. Further the magician suggested to his sheep that they were not sheep at all; to some of them he suggested that they were **lions**, to others that they were **eagles**, to others that they were **men**, and to others that they were **magicians**.⁶¹

"According to the capability of the apprentice" was defined quite specifically by Gurdjieff to mean people possessing what he called a "magnetic centre":

those who have a place in themselves which can receive the substance of great knowledge, those who are susceptible to the influence of 'higher

forces'. He divided such people into two groups--the first composed of those whom 'education' has not atrophied in the tendency of aspiration; the second, of those he called 'simple man'.⁶²

Since many of the members of the early group were white Russians, it is impossible to ignore the political ramifications of this idea and weigh the validity of the "marketplace of ideas" over the exclusivity of esoteric knowledge.

Most appropriate to the nature of oral knowledge is its use of metaphor rather than literal translation of ideas. Castellano notes this quality within indigenous cultures who enjoy an oral tradition. It also appears as a significant component within Gurdjieff's teaching. His monumental All and Everything is an explication of his ideas within a rambling narrative of a space odyssey that is better appreciated when read aloud, and indeed was used for many years in this manner.⁶³ Human beings are appropriately called "three-brained beings from the planet earth."

It is reasonable to assume the resurgence of ways of thinking other than those imposed by the dominance of reason and its historical imperatives, since many of these concepts now exist within post-modernist theory as well as feminist theory.⁶⁴ Pertinent to this discussion is the manner in

which features characterizing indigenous knowledge systems offer a critique of scientific method within such varied fields as aesthetic theory, feminist theory, theoretical approaches to interdisciplinarity, and within this context Canadian Studies. Since oral traditions both pre and coexist with literate culture, their integration into contemporary systems of thought presents a revolutionary change in theoretical approach for society. Those within the Gurdjieff movement experienced the benefits from this way of thinking much earlier in the century.

A CANADIAN TRADITION

Since interests in mysticism and esoteric thought have engaged many Canadian artists and intellectuals throughout our brief cultural history, Alexandra Luke's affiliation with the Gurdjieff movement is a more reasonable response to her environment than might first be assumed. From Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill's experiments in spiritualism⁶⁵ to the writings of Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, examples exist which indicate interest in nineteenth century mystic and occult movements by members of an intellectual community which included artists, writers, physicians and social theorists. In addition, theoretical material by Lacombe, Doyle, Davis, Cook, Zemans, offer a rationale which in some ways redefines assumptions about moderate Canadians.

R. M. Bucke is a Canadian literary figure best known for his relationship with Walt Whitman and his exposition of transcendental ideas. His Cosmic Consciousness gained him an international reputation, and the ideas and terminology were taken up by the Theosophists during the early part of the twentieth century.⁶⁶ Davis notes that

through transcendental theories in general and those of Whitman in particular Harris, Carr, Varley, Brooker and Macdonald found support for their pantheism, their rejection of organized

Christianity, their emphasis on the intuitive individual, and their generally optimistic outlook.⁶⁷

Specifically, these doctrines included: i) a closeness to nature; ii) the dignity of manual labour; iii) intellectual companionships and interests; iv) the essential divinity of man, that is, the idea "that man can intuitively transcend the limits of the senses and of logic and receive directly higher truths and greater knowledge."⁶⁸

Elements of James Doyle's analysis of Bucke's relevance to Canadian culture adds definition to Alexandra Luke's intellectual and philosophical inheritance. Doyle notes Bucke's outward view to both England and America, and lack of interest in Canadian literature as a negative in his tally of Bucke's "Canadianness." However, looking to England and then to the U.S. is actually a time honoured Canadian tradition as a colonized country with a "garrison mentality."⁶⁹ Decades after Bucke's death, Margaret chose Washington D.C. for nurse's training, and later in her life New York became an artistic and a spiritual centre for her as hub of the abstract expressionist movement, and in a smaller sense the Gurdjieff society as well.

Doyle sees Bucke's desire for "a world spreading confederacy" of "English speaking peoples" as "tinged with familiar nineteenth century assumptions about racial

superiority."⁷⁰ Since Gurdjieff adored the English and all things English, thinking that "the English are the most intelligent people"⁷¹ an uncomfortable connection emerges which has also to be acknowledged as a sometime Canadian component. Whether this held any appeal for Luke is indefensible to suggest, but prevalent morés of the time position her within a society which manifests some acceptability to the idea at some level.

Doyle, Davis and Lacombe see an attempt at "philosophical synthesis" in these occult movements which mediates "the widening gap between the materialistic conception of man propagated by the natural sciences and modern technology, and the various humanistic traditions which emphasize the subjective, spiritual, and imaginative dimensions of experience."⁷² Spiritualism, Transcendentalism, Theosophy and related movements such as the Gurdjieff society all assign an evolutionary aspect to man's development. a concept which held great appeal for psychologists, artists, and other philosophical thinkers.

Doyle's final argument which positions Bucke within a "peripheral and idiosyncratic relevance to Canadian literature"⁷³ is unsatisfactory in view of the preponderance of these ideas in our cultural tradition. While Bucke was writing Cosmic Consciousness he described it as "nothing less than a new theory of art and religion and I am sure a

true one.⁷⁴ Doyle notes that Canadians found continued appeal in transcendentalist ideas after Americans had moved on to "abstractionist modes of perception".⁷⁵ But Cook connects mysticism to modernism in Canada, and also links elements of American modernism to Bucke through American painter Marsden Hartley,⁷⁶ finding "an increasing body of evidence that suggests that Bucke's influence on the development of modern art remains underestimated."⁷⁷ This opinion is fundamental to providing a connection between the paintings of Alexandra Luke since her primary sources were both Canadian in Jock Macdonald and American in Hans Hofmann.

It is Lawren Harris who most embodies the unification of mystic thought and abstraction in Canada, since his commitment to abstraction grew out of earlier concerns, influenced by nationalist feelings, esoteric thought, and contemporary abstract art. Harris' belief in the central function of art as an inspiration for elevated spirituality shines through.⁷⁸

While his fellow painters expressed spirituality through landscape and portraiture, they shared a sense of modernity and the impulse to express themselves differently than their predecessors. Macdonald's move into abstraction was influenced by a desire to understand a fourth dimension, a

mathematical concept which Ouspensky defines in Tertium Organum, and also an exploration of the unconscious through automatic painting. This was shown to him by Dr. Grace Pailthorpe, a British psychiatrist who was exploring "automatic painting" as remedial treatment for mentally disturbed criminals.⁷⁹ All of these ideas and influences were available to Alexandra Luke as a developing artist. Her own interest in abstraction is documented from 1933 when she wrote a spirited defence of it in response to criticism by Sir Wyly Grier who opened the Lyceum Club and Women's Art Association Annual Exhibition in Oshawa. This was long before she became friends with Macdonald, but certainly she would have been well aware of some of the atmosphere in Canadian art through her husband's cousin, the artist Isabel McLaughlin.

By all accounts Margaret enjoyed organizing and being part of group activities; she was roundly praised for her generosity, strength, and organizational abilities by many who knew her. Spiritual affiliations and art associations were logical attachments for a person who enjoyed working and playing in a group, an idea consistent with Lacombe's observation that Theosophists were joiners and organizers whose activities and relationships overlapped into various organizations.⁸⁰

Lehmann and Myers ask "what appeal do these movements

have for people?" and find studies which

draw a picture of people who have become attracted to cults because of such lures as love, security, acceptance, and improved personal status. Unstable and rapidly changing social and political situations in contemporary technological countries also provide a rich seedbed for the emergence and blossoming of religious movements.⁸¹

Although the larger societal picture applies to this analysis, Margaret's personal milieu would not be deficient in terms of security, acceptance, and personal status. However the warmth and support of her Gurdjieff group may have provided some consolation to her against her lonely and contentious marriage.

There could also have been appeal in exclusivity.

Georgette Leblanc writes:

I was not astonished that he was little known, that he was not surrounded by thousands of followers. Neither money nor influence could open the doors of the Prieuré--Gurdjieff created all possible obstacles to discourage any idler-spirits who might push their way into a world where they did not belong.⁸²

In Seuphor's Dictionary of Abstract Painting Luke has made considerable notations which reveal her close reading

of the text, and the areas of discussion which she considered noteworthy. One of these consists of a discussion of the necessary qualities in an audience for abstraction, a discussion which she may have outlined because of its closeness to the theories of Gurdjieff which she was reading in 1958. Within contemporary thinking it is also an issue under discussion within the realm of postmodern reception theory.

Seuphor notes that the spectator needs to play a creative part in abstraction, and that "he(!) is expected to have a well-informed mind and to be generous with it, never shrinking from the efforts that are demanded of him." He then quotes a nineteenth century physicist Eugène Chevreul who points out that the effects of abstractions "will be fewer in proportion as the minds to which they are addressed are less civilised or less cultured" Seuphor concludes by stating that "a work of art is worth exactly what the spectator is worth; that is to say as much as the spectator or lover of art are capable of putting into it."⁸³

This sets up an aura of exclusivity which has an appeal not unlike that which is generated within the Gurdjieff work as well as within indigenous systems of knowledge, an expression of approval for a non verbal but nevertheless sophisticated sensitivity to non-literate complexities, and also, from the teachings of Gurdjieff, an acknowledgement of

an evolutionary hierarchy which is connected to notions of man's development, an idea that occurs earlier within the Theosophical Society and the Transcendentalists. But exclusivity also connotes snob appeal, an idea which resonates with ongoing highbrow/lowbrow arguments which position abstract painting in the former camp. This location would not be lost on Margaret McLaughlin, and contributes to an overall rationale of her position within modern art and also within the Gurdjieff society.

It has been suggested by friends that McLaughlin was always seeking because she wanted to open her mind to new ideas and hence she was "always into things like that," and because her artist friends were interested.

I said to Gurdjieff, "I am almost afraid--life rises in me like the sea." He repeated, "It is only a small beginning."⁸⁴

Art is a powerful instrument, a magical key, and a universal language. It should not stop with the already discovered beauty but should continue searching forever. I think the artist should grow spiritually with his work so that each year, through thought and struggle his progress shows evolvment and not mere repetition of his former works.⁸⁵

Margaret's catalogue entry suggests that her interest in the idea of "spiritual evolution" and its relationship to the creative process was present long before 1958 when she became involved in the Gurdjieff group. Since the concept of spiritual evolution through reincarnation exists in Theosophy, its inclusion is consistent with the ideas about art embraced by her friends and mentors such as Macdonald, Housser, and Hofmann.

Specific to Gurdjieff's system is the idea that people contain only the potential for a soul, and have to work at producing one worthy of reincarnation. Hard work and diligence applied to one's efforts is an idea with tremendous appeal to anyone with origins in the Protestant work ethic, and therefore not so unusual for Oshawa society.

Unlike its predecessors the Gurdjieff movement includes acknowledgement of the body as an integral part of the human being. Where previous movements looked to spiritual growth through transcending the material, Gurdjieff included the physical in his program with dances, pageants, communal feasts, and then the other side, deprivation, labour and physical "tests." Students of Gurdjieff worked willingly at trying to know themselves, through physical, mental, and emotional exercises in hopes of developing a soul which would reincarnate. His critique of modern life and the impoverished spirit of modern man included an attainable

solution.

In addition, the exotic furnishings of the man and his environment and his use of ancient techniques from Sufism and other religious orders afforded old-world authenticity (the wisdom of the ancients). Gurdjieff's theories and teaching satisfied participants at many levels, not the least of which is in the mythologizing of his life story. The combination of this background with twentieth century ideas of psychology, physics, and mathematics provides a modern rationale for acceptance of the doctrine. Not to be discounted is the aristocratic appeal of the exclusivity of the movement as well. All of these ideas are at play in modern society, in Oshawa society, and certainly within the family and social circle of Margaret McLaughlin.

Also, there is a note of pessimism in Gurdjieff's teaching which is lacking in earlier movements.

I know that this is true and that there is no other truth. You know that I have long since looked upon all of us without exception as people who have suffered shipwreck and have been cast upon an uninhabited island, but who do not yet know of it. But these people here know it. The others, there, in life, still think that a steamer will come for them tomorrow and that everything will go on in the old way. These already know that

there will be no more of the old way. I am so glad that I can be here.⁸⁶

Katherine Mansfield's words express an ennui which articulates an aspect of modernity that created the necessity for new methods of artistic expression as explored by Luke and her contemporaries, and in a manner which may have spoken to Margaret McLaughlin most profoundly.

LUKE AND GURDJIEFF

The manner in which Luke's work relates to her involvement in the Gurdjieff movement reveals the contradictory nature of human belief and intent. Gurdjieff's pronouncements on art would seem to have been diametrically opposed to Luke's own practice. In response to the question "Can there be no unconscious creative art, coming from feeling?" Gurdjieff replies,

There can be no unconscious creative art, and our feeling is very stupid. It sees only one side, whereas understanding of everything must be of all sides. Studying history we see that there were such accidental results, but it is not a rule.⁸⁷

Michèle Lacombe has pointed out the resemblance of

Gurdjieff's approach to Cubism, happily coinciding with Greenberg's position on Cubism as the main influence on the development of Abstract Expressionism. A rationale for Luke's choices of both art form and philosophy appears at this juncture.

Gurdjieff also taught that without studying the mathematical foundations of art "one can expect only accidental results; repetition cannot be expected."⁸⁸ Notes from Luke's sketchbooks indicate that she did explore mathematical theory, and her careful records of Hofmann's lectures indicate in her a consideration of both the unconscious and technical expertise, which does indeed involve mathematics.

But Gurdjieff's views on art contradict modern notions of pure expression. He follows classical and medieval criteria, where art is an emanation of knowledge and belief for a largely illiterate population.

I studied Western art after studying the ancient art of the East. To tell you the truth, I found nothing in the West to compare with Eastern art. Western art has much that is external, sometimes a great deal of philosophy; but Eastern art is precise, mathematical, without manipulations. It is the form of script. . . . A modern painter may believe in and feel his art, but you see it

subjectively: one person likes it, another dislikes it. It is a case of feeling, of like and dislike.

But ancient art was not for liking. Everyone who read understood. Now, this purpose of art is entirely forgotten.⁸⁹

Gurdjieff is asked, "Is mathematics the basis of all art?" and replies,

"All Eastern ancient art."

"Then could anyone who knew the formula build a perfect form like a cathedral, producing the same emotion?"

"Yes, and get the same reactions too."⁹⁰

The idea of formula is an appealing concept in creative production because of its antithetical position to expressionism. However there are other art movements within modernism which make use of physical and mathematical theory, movements such as Cubism, Constructivism, or De Stijl.

Another aspect of the Gurdjieff work which relates to Luke's painting is the commitment of time and energy which both painting and "the work" demanded. "Institute work is inner work . . . for some it may be necessary to stop outer work, for others not."⁹¹ At its peak, the Oshawa group travelled to meetings in Toronto five times a week. During

this period Luke was also painting prolifically. Not surprisingly, diary entries complain of exhaustion.

Given the dance-oriented dimension of the Gurdjieff work, which assigned movements to specific notes and thought patterns, it is conceivable that she applied this approach during the actual painting process. Sheila Mahlberg, another member of the Gurdjieff work who paints, asks,

Have you investigated the possibility that one of her concerns may have been the application of Gurdjieff's principles during the execution of her art work--such as awareness, three-centred activity, maintaining a sensation of the body? I mention this because these principles are always a concern of mine while painting, whether or not it is possible to apply them.⁹²

It is possible to conjecture that she did employ these principles, blending form, technique, subject, and source in her painting, because of titles such as "Sway of Silent Forces" and configurations which suggest centres and a desire for integration of centres.

Therefore it is clear that Luke borrowed from both ends of the modernist spectrum, on the one hand relying upon the unconscious as the application of certain formal structures derived from her tutors Hans Hofmann and Macdonald, and, on the other hand, applying the insights obtained from her

spiritual tutors within the Gurdjieff movement. In her case, the two seem to have been complementary, a creative mix which led to excellence in artistic expression as well as to personal enlightenment, inspiration, or peace of mind.

CONCLUSION

In "Painting the mystical into the Oshawa Y" Peter White offers a catchy, if inaccurate, summation of Luke's life and work which is revealing in its combination of error and insight. He ascribes her spiritualism to Hofmann's symposiums,

whose own teaching followed the tradition of the pioneers of abstraction--Klee, Kandinsky in part-- . . . establishing a bond between the spiritual side of existence and the non-objective image. Her own quest found a touchstone in the Russian mystic Gurdjieff and his high-flown student OuspenskyAlexandra Luke, a remarkable woman who died in a traffic accident 10 years ago [succeeded in] making compatible such otherwise unlikely bedfellows as Ouspensky and the Oshawa Skating Club.¹

Luke's story is a remembering and reevaluation of a woman artist whose work has been largely forgotten, not in the way that many women artists' work is often forgotten because it did not speak in the dominant language, but perhaps because it did so successfully. Several members of the group for which she campaigned established their niches within Canadian art history, while Luke remains one of the lesser known among Painters Eleven, this in the face of general

acknowledgement that she excelled. Despite her name, and the manner in which she painted, she feminized a male-dominated art form and therefore disqualified herself.

In contrast, a location outside the dominant discourse is offered as a solution to a secondary position within patriarchal constructs. Marie Fraser elaborates:

the very foundations of feminism seek to deconstruct the notion of a master concept and its restrictive domination of discourse.

The impact of feminism is not solely defined in terms of political or social action. Feminism has gone beyond the scope of demands, turning instead to the strategies of the dominant discourses; to what instigates and forms politics. Putting an end to the senseless absence of women in History is no longer considered the end in itself of feminist demands. On the contrary, this reality is now perceived as a symptom. Finding themselves imprisoned in a subjugated position, reduced to an object of pleasure and phantom-image with no existence because they have no voice, women have developed strategies for re-thinking language, politics, and the codes of representation; they have also reflected on the notion of the subject. They have based their reflections on the idea of

rejection and have positioned the respective sites of power and marginality. It is **in** and **on** the margins of the system that they have developed their actions, discourses and practices.²

Since the silences and margins of "what is rejected, excluded, or unsaid exercises a significant relationship to power,"³ it is by looking within the aesthetic theories which were important to the development of abstract art and to Margaret's work that a methodology for "locating Alexandra" within negative space emerges.

In aesthetic theory, a major principal of design is consideration of negative spaces. Learning to paint and draw demands acute perception of space, margin, background surrounding the subject. In abstraction this concept becomes a paramount concern for artists in part because of the primacy of form over subject matter. In biography it becomes crucial. Margaret's views on negative space are expressed in her artist's statement of 1952:

My experience is that more beauty and interest is to be found in the negative space created by the object than in the positive. The painting thus created must have a vital breathing quality and carry with it the mystery of creation. This important quality cannot be so readily sustained

if the painting is dominated by story telling, a figure or an object.⁴

Ouspensky quotes Hinton's The Fourth Dimension on negative space:

But, if we take Kant's statement simply as it is [-not seeing in spacial perception a hindrance to right perception--and say to ourselves that we apprehend by means of space, then it is equally allowable to consider our space-sense] not as a negative condition hindering us from apprehending the world, but as a positive means by which the mind grasps its experience [i.e. by means of which we apprehend the world].⁵

The overlap between Ouspensky's ideas and aesthetic theory is evident, as is its application within feminist discourse, thus unveiling through cross-disciplinary exploration an analytic device of global implications.

An examination of Luke's life, interests, and artistic production has not necessitated reinventing the wheel in terms of stylistic analysis of her work, or detailed repetition of her successes as an artist, since excellent references are available at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in her paintings, archival material, and catalogues on her as well as Painters Eleven. In addition, a chronology is provided as preface to this work.

Then what has the exploration accomplished? Aside from the fact that this woman's life has inherent value as story, this thesis aims for a better understanding of the complex and multiple attitudes and ideas surrounding modernity, Canadian culture, and issues of gender. The optimistic, prescriptive facet of Canadian modernity which Luke and her avant-garde contemporaries embraced is pitted against its self-limiting "blind eye," as elaborated upon by Marilyn Burgess and Janice Andreae:

Modernist humanism does not recognize power relations, thereby denying the diverse and contradictory ways in which people experience the world.⁶

Margaret's character, her environment, her pursuits conspire to create another allusion to Madame Bovary, thus articulating an essential disjuncture between individual need and proscribed societal demands; and between the nature of material reality against creative imperative.

Today's turmoil of ideologies, systems of knowledge, ways of thinking and seeing capture the imaginations of artists located beyond modernism. Looking at the particularities of Luke's explorations helps to illuminate our view into her time and place, and creates speculation regarding the manner in which patterns and themes in the fabric of human intellect merge or emerge.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Margaret McLaughlin's professional name became Alexandra Luke in order to avoid being confused with her husband's cousin, Isabel McLaughlin, who is also an artist. I refer to her as Margaret when the context is personal, and Alexandra when it relates more closely to her professional life.

² Glad Smith, letter to Joan Murray, 2 Aug. 1989, Alexandra Luke File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

³ Yvonne McKague Housser, letter to Luke, 4 Aug. 1964, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁴ Ibid.

Subjectivity

⁵ Leon Edel, Writing Lives: Principia Biographica (New York: Norton, 1984) 201.

⁶ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) 69.

⁷ Heilbrun 68.

⁸ P. D. Ouspensky, Tertium Organum: the third canon of thought: a key to the enigmas of the world, Revised trans., E. Kadloubovsky and author (1920 New York: Vintage, 1982) 126.

⁹ Edel 102.

¹⁰ Nell Tenhaaf, "A History, or a Way of Knowing," instabili: La Question du Sujet/The Question of Subject, Sous la direction de Marie Fraser and Lesley Johnstone (Montreal: La Centrale (Galerie Powerhouse), 1990) 77.

¹¹ Edel 148-49.

¹² Joan Murray, Alexandra Luke: Continued Searching (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1987) 7.

¹³ Joan Murray, note, 3 Jan. 1992.

¹⁴ Edel 173.

¹⁵ Elspeth Probyn, "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local," Feminism/Postmodernism, Ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 176-89.

¹⁶ Probyn 178.

Chapter 1. Personal Life

Margaret's Heritage

¹ Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961) 179.

² Margaret McLaughlin, Black Sketchbook, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

³ Bessie Gannon, meeting with Mary Hare, M. Rodgers, and members of geneological society Bessie Gannon, Mary

Starr to examine and discuss Luke family papers, 7 June 1991.

⁴ Susanna Moodie, Roughing It in the Bush; or Life in Canada, 2nd ed. (London: Bentley, 1852).

⁵ Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

⁶ Bessie Gannon, conversation, 7 June 1991.

⁷ McKague Housser, letter to Luke, n.d., Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁸ Mary Hare, conversation, 25 Nov. 1991.

⁹ Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism 44, qtd. in Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (New York: Pantheon, 1974) 210.

¹⁰ Ewart had the distinction of being Canada's youngest automobile test driver. Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹¹ John Burns, interview, 8 Oct. 1991.

Margaret and Ewart

¹² Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

¹³ Oshawa Times, obituary for Ewart McLaughlin, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

¹⁴ Sylva Armstrong, interview with Joan Murray, 7 Aug. 1987, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

¹⁵ Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

¹⁶ Bernice Johnston Taras, telephone conversation, 5

July 1991. Mary finds the statement to be true as either a metaphor which illuminates character, or perhaps a necessity by medical decree, but recalls his earlier adamant opposition to margarine when it first appeared. Ewart always remained involved with farming, and like many farmers, opposed the use of margarine because it was a threat to the butter industry.

¹⁷ Isabel McLaughlin, interview with Joan Murray, 5 December 1986, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Isabel's account differs from that of Mary, who remembers that her father definitely stood, although very ill.

¹⁸ Sylva Armstrong, interview with Joan Murray, 15 Dec. 1986, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

¹⁹ Isabel McLaughlin, interview with Joan Murray, 5 Dec, 1986, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

²⁰ Johnston.

²¹ Patsy McLaughlin, interview with Joan Murray, 2 Nov. 1987, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

²² Armstrong.

²³ Isabel McLaughlin, interview with Joan Murray, 5 Dec. 1986, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin

Gallery, Oshawa.

24 Ron Lambert, interview with Joan Murray, 12 Jan. 1987, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

25 Lambert.

26 Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

27 Bernice Johnston.

28 Mary Hare, conversation, 25 Nov. 1991.

29 Michèle Lacombe, letter, 25 July 1991.

30 Heilbrun 92-93.

31 Heilbrun 53.

32 Heilbrun 52.

33 Mary Hare, telephone conversation, 11 Nov. 1990.

34 Heilbrun 53.

35 Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

36 Mary Hare, conversation, 22 Nov. 1991.

37 Heilbrun 81.

38 Heilbrun 83.

Motherhood

39 Dennis Reid, Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Works of Lawren S. Harris (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985) 29. "The invention of Canadian-born Jay Hambidge, dynamic symmetry is a theory of ideal composition based upon an understanding of the mathematical relationship of the proportions of the golden section to the logarithmic

spiral."

⁴⁰ Barrie Hale, Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950-1980 (Toronto: Phacops, 1985) vol. 2 of Provincial Essays, ed. Jennifer Oille, 65.

⁴¹ Joan Murray, telephone conversation, 3 Feb. 1992.

⁴² Anne Truitt, Daybook: The Journal of an Artist (New York: Penguin, 1984) 183-84.

⁴³ Sylva Armstrong, interview with Joan Murray, 7 Aug. 1987, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

⁴⁴ Heather jon Maroney, "Embracing Motherhood: New Feminist Theory," Feminism Now: Theory and Practice, eds. Marilouise and Arthur Kroker et al. (Montreal: CultureTexts/New World Perspectives, 1985) 40-64.

⁴⁵ Patsy McLaughlin, interview with Janine Butler, 2 Nov. 1987, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

⁴⁶ Patsy McLaughlin, interview with Janine Butler, 23 March 1989, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa).

Pseudonym

⁴⁷ Glad Smith, letter to Joan Murray, 2 August 1989, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

⁴⁸ William Ronald, letter to Margaret McLaughlin, 28

Sept. 1955, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

49 Sigrid Weigel, "Double Focus: On the History of Women's Writing," Feminist Aesthetics, ed. Gisela Ecker, Trans Harriet Anderson (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1985) 60-61.

50 David and Cecile Shapiro, eds., "The New New York Scene," Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 406.

51 Jack Bush qtd. in Luke's notes on Painters Eleven meeting at Jock Macdonald's 9 May 1957, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

52 Weigel 67.

53 Ibid.

54 Weigel 61.

55 Heilbrun 110.

56 Heilbrun 112.

57 Heilbrun 114.

58 Glad Smith.

59 Heilbrun 114.

60 Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "For the Etruscans." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon 1985) 278.

61 Blau DuPlessis 278.

62 This can be argued from the standpoint of the lifestyles and macho images generated by the young lions of

the art world, by the dominance of phallic imagery within many of the works - so well parodied later by Joyce Wieland - by the very scale and marketability of the pieces: modernist works for corporate lobbies/the right brain speaking to the left, but still only a male dominant discourse.

63 Luke's notes.

64 Heilbrun 120.

65 Ouspensky 239.

66 Heilbrun 123.

67 Glad Smith.

68 Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical ed. James Olney (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980) 210.

69 Mason 211.

70 Ibid.

71 Mason 231.

72 Edel 132.

Luke and Feminism

73 Donna E. Smyth, "Dialogue: Self and Severed Head," Gynocritics/Gynocritiques ed. Barbara Godard (Toronto: ECW, 1987).

74 Dick McLaughlin, interview with Joan Murray, 8 Nov. 1978.

75 Heilbrun 20.

76 Murray 5.

77 Jock Macdonald, letter to Luke from Vence, 10 Jan. 1955, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

78 Barbara Macdonald, letter to Luke from Vence, n.d., Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. "Gladys" refers to Gladys Montgomery.

79 Carrie Cardell, conversation, 10 Dec. 1991.

80 Moore, 188.

81 Fritz Peters, Gurdjieff Remembered (Gollancz, 1964 p.114) qtd. in Moore, 188.

82 Gisela Breitling, "Speech, Silence and the Discourse of Art: On Conventions of Speech and Feminine Consciousness," Feminist Aesthetics ed. Gisela Ecker (London: The Women's Press, 1985) 165.

83 Breitling, 167.

84 Interesting parallels between Luke and Wieland exist in that both artists were producing abstract, painterly works during a similar time period, and within the same milieu. Both artists were also concerned with spiritual matters. Connections can be made between the Painters Eleven and the Isaacs gallery stable of artists which included the next generation of abstract artists in Canada--again dominated by men such as Snow, Rayner, Coughtry, Burton, and the transitional William Ronald.

85 Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race (Great Britain: Secker and Warburg, 1979); Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Art and Sexual Politics; Lucy R. Lippard, From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: Dutton, 1976).

86 Judith Barry and Sandra Flitterman-Lewis, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making," Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology ed. Arlene Raven et al. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988) 87-97.

87 Lawrence Alloway, "Women's Art in the Seventies," Art in America, 3 (1976) and Lippard.

88 Barry and Flitterman-Lewis 94.

89 Breitling 173-74.

90 Breitling 174.

Chapter 2. Alexandra Luke: Artist

Professional Life

1 Joan Murray, Alexandra Luke: Continued Searching (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1987) 1.

2 Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

3 Luke's papers, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

4 Mary Hare, interview with Joan Murray, 2 Dec. 1986,

Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin Gallery,
Oshawa.

⁵ Isabel McLaughlin, response to letter from Margaret
Rodgers, Oct. 1991.

⁶ Murray, Continued Searching 50. An Exhibition of
Paintings by Isabel McLaughlin and Margaret Luke McLaughlin
Y.W.C.A. (Adelaide House), Oshawa, 18-25 Jan. 1946, Robert
McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁷ Dorothy Cameron Bloore, conversation with Joan
Murray, 16 Nov. 1986, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert
McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

⁸ Margaret Bohaker, telephone conversation, 25 Jan.
1991.

⁹ Mary Hare, interview, 2 Dec. 1990.

¹⁰ Isabel McLaughlin, Oct. 1991.

¹¹ Alexandra Luke Papers, Robert McLaughlin Gallery
Archives, Oshawa.

Hans Hofmann

¹² Hofmann qtd. in Readings in American Art: 1900-1975,
ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Holt, 1975) 119-20.

¹³ Luke, 16 June 1947, Robert McLaughlin Gallery
Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁴ Luke, notebook, 1952-55, Robert McLaughlin Gallery
Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁵ G. I. Gurdjieff, Views from the Real World: Early

Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago As Recollected by His Pupils (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1973) 269.

¹⁶ Luke, notebook, 1952-55, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁷ Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 215.

¹⁸ Joan Murray, telephone conversation, 3 Feb. 1992.

¹⁹ Luke, blue notebook, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

²⁰ Luke, 16 June 1947. Box 4(a) Blue notebook

²¹ Murray, "Painters Eleven," Lecture series, Canadian Modernism and Its Discontents: A Perspective from Oshawa, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 29 October 1991.

²² Greenberg 192.

²³ Greenberg 232.

²⁴ Qtd. in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, Painters Painting (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984) 61. The fact that Greenberg says "we produced" is evidence of the power which he wielded in New York. This also underscores the importance of his visit to the individual studios of most of the members of Painters Eleven. Exceptions were Harold Town and Walter Yarwood, who refused to entertain his opinions.

²⁵ Alfred H. Barr, "The New American Painting," Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, eds. David and

Cecile Shapiro (Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 1990) 99.

Luke and Painters Eleven

²⁶ Barrie Hale, Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950 - 1980 Provincial Essays Vol. 2 (Toronto: Phacops, 1985) 29; Joan Murray, Painters Eleven in Retrospect (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1979); Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1973) 221; Jennifer C. Watson, "Painters Eleven: 1953-1960" (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1975).

²⁷ Gary Michael Dault, Sunday Star [Toronto] 4 Nov. 1979: B4.

²⁸ Macdonald, letter to Luke, 24 Sept. 1954.

²⁹ Murray, Continued Searching 6.

³⁰ Murray, Continued Searching 6.

³¹ Rodolphe de Repentigny, "Le Groupe des Onze," Vie des Arts 12 Automne 1958: 27-32.

³² Dault B4.

³³ de Antonio and Tuchman 166.

³⁴ Seuphor, Dictionary of Abstract Painting: With a History of Abstract Painting, trans. Lionel Izod et al., (New York: Paris Book Centre, 1957) 76.

³⁵ Luke, notes, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

³⁶ For detailed exhibition records on Luke, see Murray, Continued Searching 50-54.

³⁷ Eden Gibson, Ann, Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1990) 1. Although these artists worked together from 1946-51 they did not want to name themselves as a group or movement. De Kooning said that to do so would be "disastrous."

New York: A Pattern for Painters Eleven

³⁸ Eden Gibson 1, 59. The Club, first held at Ibram Lassaw's studio and later in a rented loft on East 38th St. was a place where artists could meet.

³⁹ Eden Gibson 1.

⁴⁰ Eden Gibson 1.

⁴¹ Greenberg 211.

⁴² Joan M. Vastokas, "The Roots of Abstraction: An Introduction," Artscanada 36.1 (1978): 23.

⁴³ Vastokas 2+.

⁴⁴ Vastokas 9.

⁴⁵ Vastokas 68.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Vastokas 68.

⁴⁷ Vastokas 68.

⁴⁸ Joyce Zemans, Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape/A Retrospective Exhibition (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981) and Jock Macdonald (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1985); Roald Nasgaard, ed., The Mystic North (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984); and Ann Davis, The Logic of

- Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920 -1940 (London, Ontario: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990).
- 49 Rathbone qtd. in Vastokas 23.
- 50 Vastokas 23.
- 51 Qtd. in Shapiro 402.
- 52 Qtd. in Barbara Rose 137.
- 53 Greenberg 230.
- 54 Sandler 21.
- 55 Sandler 22.
- 56 Karen Wilkin, Adolph Gottlieb: Pictographs (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1977).
- 57 Barbara Rose 98.
- 58 Pamela McCallum, "New Feminist Readings: Woman as Écriture or Woman as Other?" Feminism Now: Theory and Practice, eds. Marilouise Kroker et al. (Montréal: CultureTexts, 1985) 127.
- 59 McCallum, 129.
- 60 Qtd. in Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'Écriture Feminine," Feminist Studies 7.2 (1981): 260.
- 61 Qtd. in Barbara Rose, 99.
- 62 Jennifer C. Watson, Alexandra Luke: A Tribute (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1977) 20.
- 63 W. Jackson Rushing, "Ritual and myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism," The Spiritual

in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985 exhibition catalogue
(Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York:
Abbeville Press, 1986) 274.

⁶⁴ In The Occult Establishment James Webb details a
fascinating fabric of interconnectedness in many
aspects of modern thought.

Automatic Painting

⁶⁵ Hale 29.

⁶⁶ Carrie Cardell, (10 December 1991).

⁶⁷ J. B. Rhine, The Reach of the Mind (New York:
William Sloane Associates, 1947).

⁶⁸ Theodor Reik, Listening with the Third Ear: The
Inner Experience of a Psychoanalyst (New York: Grove Press,
1948).

⁶⁹ Eden Gibson, "Abstract Expressionism and Language,"
Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, eds. David and
Cecile Shapiro (Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 1990) 195-211.

⁷⁰ Greenberg qtd. in Eden Gibson, 197.

⁷¹ Eden Gibson 197. The author cites Irving Sandler,
T. J. Clark, Serge Guilbaut, Fred Orton, and Griselda
Pollock as sources for this idea.

⁷² Reid 221.

⁷³ Paul-Emile Borduas, Refus Global/Total Refusal,
trans. Ray Ellenwood (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1985) 57.

⁷⁴ Borduas 37-38.

75 Borduas 30.

Luke and Modernism

76 Blau DuPlessis 286.

77 Murray, Continued Searching 9 and Vastokas,

Artscanada 3.

78 Blau DuPlessis 286.

79 Blau DuPlessis 286.

80 Patsy McLaughlin (and Dick), interview with Murray,
8 Nov. 1978, Joan Murray, Artist's File, Robert McLaughlin
Gallery, Oshawa.

81 de Antonio and Tuchman 46-47.

82 Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of
Twentieth-Century Art Forms (New York: Methuen, 1985) 4-5.

83 Steinberg 79-80.

84 Qtd. in Steinberg, 61.

85 Steinberg 61.

86 Steinberg 5.

87 Christopher Hume, "Angry Art," The Toronto Star 3
Nov. 1990: J1.

88 Sid Adelman, Toronto Star 3 November 1990.

89 Joan M. Vastokas, Worlds Apart: The Symbolic
Landscapes of Tony Urquhart (Windsor: Art Gallery of
Windsor, 1988) 8 and 72-73.

90 Edward Weisberger, ed., The Spiritual in Art:
Abstract Painting 1890-1985 (New York: Abbeville Press,

1986).

⁹¹ Ramsay Cook, "Nothing Less Than a New Theory of Art and Religion': The Birth of a Modernist Culture in Canada," The Logic of Ecstasy, 14.

⁹² Robert P. Welsh, Introduction, The Spiritual Image in Modern Art, by Kathleen J. Regier (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987) 1-11.

⁹³ Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1973) 177.

⁹⁴ Welsh 5.

Chapter 3. In Search

The Work

¹ Barbara Macdonald, letter to Alexandra Luke, Christchurch New Zealand: Jan. 1964. Macdonald is telling Luke about her sister, a Jehovah's Witness who "has done her best to convert me and I think if it hadn't been for our work I would have hit the roof."

² Madeline Rose, interview, 21 Nov. 1990.

³ P. D. Ouspensky, Tertium Organum, qtd. in Joyce Zemans, Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape (Toronto: AGO, 1981) 51.

⁴ J. B. Rhine, The Reach of the Mind (New York: William Sloane, 1947).

⁵ "Rosicrucian: one of a world-wide secret fraternity

of very ancient origin, given to the study of occult philosophy and science, a branch of which flourished in Europe during the fifteenth--seventeenth centuries [L. rosa, a rose; crux, a cross]." The Webster Universal Dictionary. Luke's interest in Leary was described by Mary Hare, Oshawa 2 Dec. 1990.

⁶ Yvonne McKague Housser, letter to Luke, n.d., Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁷ Wilhelm Reich, Character-Analysis, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe, (New York: Farrar, 1970). Reich became something of a martyr when, hounded by American authorities for distributing his accumulators across state borders, he was imprisoned where he died in 1957.

⁸ Margaret McLaughlin, diary entry, 10 Jan. 1958, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁹ Carrie Cardell, interview, 10 Dec. 1991.

¹⁰ Madeline Rose, Joan Murray, An Index of Possibilities, and Sheila Mahlberg.

The Milieu and the Man

¹¹ P. D. Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching (San Diego: Harcourt, 1949 1977) 369.

¹² Ouspensky, In Search 30.

¹³ James Moore, Gurdjieff and Mansfield (London: Routledge, 1980) 34.

¹⁴ Moore 101. Internal quotation from René Daumal, Mount Analogue (Vincent Stuart 1959) 6].

¹⁵ Moore 95.

¹⁶ Thomas de Hartmann, Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972); Kenneth Cavander, "To awake. To die. To be born" Horizon 14.2 (Spring 1972); Ouspensky, In Search.

¹⁷ Dolmens are megalithic prehistoric sepulchres.

¹⁸ Moore 94.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Moore 144.

Gurdjieff's System

²⁰ Moore 29.

²¹ Colin Wilson, The Outsider (Golancz 1956) qtd in Moore, 129.

²² Qtd. in Anderson 137.

²³ Moore 215.

²⁴ Anderson 12.

²⁵ Alan Bullock et al., eds., The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought 2nd ed. (London: Fontana, 1988) 491.

²⁶ Maurice Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 (Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Abbeville Press, 1985) 19.

²⁷ Tuchman 32.

²⁸ Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous; and Gurdjieff: Views from the Real World, Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago As Recollected by His Pupils (New York: Dutton, 1973); and Madeline Rose, member of the Group.

²⁹ Sisley Huddleston, Paris Salons Cafés, Studios (New York: Lippincott, 1928), 34. In Huddleston's chronicles of Paris life, the author remarks that "from about 1910 Freud began to be understood in France."

³⁰ Alexandra Luke, "Reflections on The Fourth Way by P. D. O.," Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives.

³¹ Cavander 62.

³² Luke qtd. in Murray, Continued Searching 9.

³³ Moore 147.

³⁴ Ouspensky, In Search 31.

³⁵ Madeline Rose, interview, 21 Nov. 1990.

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³⁶ Fromm 79.

³⁷ Moore 3.

³⁸ Jeffrey Meyers qtd. in Moore 3.

³⁹ D. H. Lawrence qtd. in Luhan, Lorenzo in Taos (Secker 1933).

⁴⁰ Margaret Anderson, The Unknowable Gurdjieff (New York: Weiser, 1962) 3-4.

⁴¹ Fromm 82.

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