The Vocation of the Artist examines the historical role of the artist and presents a particular perspective, grounded in the author's experience as a practicing artist and scholar, on the contemporary function of the artist as prophetic critic and visionary. Using specific interpretations of the words "vocation," "prophetic," and "visionary," Deborah Haynes draws attention to the need for artists to assess critically the relationship of the past and present to the future. Bringing together a wide range of historical and theoretical sources in cultural history, art history and theory, and religion, this book is addressed to those interested in the complex interdisciplinary dialogue of the visual arts, religion, and ethics.

The Vocation of the Artist

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This book is dedicated to those living artists whose work has inspired me.

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Preface

At the outset of this book, I invoke two mythological figures: the Hindu goddess Durga and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim angel Gabriel. Their stories relate to the polemical core of *The Vocation of the Artist;* their images provide powerful metaphoric points of reference. Durga conquers destruction and makes possible a future. Gabriel announces new beginnings; Gabriel's story comes at the end of the book.

In India, Durga is a complex goddess. In ancient times she was related to crops and fertility. The earliest Hindu texts tend to speak of discrete goddesses, such as Parvati, Sita, and others, but in the medieval period, the tendency to think of all the goddesses as related to one another developed. The earliest example of this trend is the *Devi-mahatmya,* which dates from the sixth century. In this text Durga is identified with the Devi, or primal goddess, and many stories are told about her. Perhaps the most famous story and most popular epithet is of her incarnation as Mahisa-mardini, the slayer of Mahisa (Figure 1).

In the story the cosmos is embroiled in a crisis. A battle between the gods and demons for control of the world has been underway for one hundred years, and it appears to have been won by Mahisa, chief of the Asuras. Indra, leader of the beleaguered gods, gathers over thirty other deities to tell Visnu and Siva of their trouble. In order to conquer Mahisa, they decide to concentrate their energies and to produce a goddess. Durga is created. Each male god gives her a weapon: Siva – his trident, Yama – a staff, Visnu – a discus, Indra – a thunderbolt and a bell, Agni – a spear, the wind – a bow and arrows, and so forth. She rides off with their cries urging victory in the background. The army of demons fights hard, but she is able to move through them like fire in a forest. Durga destroys demons until blood runs in rivers. However, she must also confront Mahisa himself, who has terrorized the troops that have joined the goddess. At last Durga becomes so enraged that from her fury she creates the black goddess Kali. When Kali throws her noose, Mahisa changes shape and becomes a lion. As she cuts off his

head, he becomes a man. She cuts the man down, but he becomes a huge elephant that drags the goddess's lion from under her. When she cuts off the elephant's trunk with her sword, Mahisa becomes a buffalo. Guzzling her liquor, the goddess gathers her strength and flies at him. Finally, she pierces him with her spear, cuts off his head, and stands on him. All the other creatures – human, divine, and animal – praise her victory. The world is saved from destruction; there will be a future.

This story, and the many manuscript paintings and sculptures that depict it, engages my already-developed apocalyptic imagination. Indeed, one could say that an apocalyptic sensibility informs *The Vocation of the Artist*. I think regularly about death. Born in the post–World War II years, I have experienced, like others of my generation, enormous changes. How can one characterize these changes? In terms of war and countries torn asunder by strife on every continent? Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Haiti. The list is seemingly endless, and it changes with each year. Ecological destruction on a scale previously inconceivable is underway, with Love Canal, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, and the *Exxon Valdez* disaster among the most publicized examples. A sad legacy for me, having been born in the state of Washington (the "Evergreen State"), is the disappearance of once-majestic fir and pine forests in the Cascade Mountains. Farther away, in Russia, Lake Baikal is rapidly dying from industrial waste and pollution; and the oceans themselves are now full of dead zones where nothing discernible lives. During my lifetime we are witnessing the "end of nature," as the title of Bill McKibben's book put it.

But an even more potent image and devastating reality is The Bomb. It is, in fact, the major cultural icon that has shaped my thinking and experience. I grew up in its shadow, and, like all schoolchildren of my generation, hid under my desk during air-raid drills. From early adolescence my consciousness was formed by a keen sense of the proximity and possibility of death. I knew that personal death could be chosen – my mother's suicide attempt was a constant reminder that death always offered a ready escape from the vicissitudes of life. But I also understood, as much as anyone can, the finality of the nuclear solution. As a member of my high school debate team, I had researched nuclear proliferation. I knew the statistics about how many warheads each nuclear power had in its stockpile, and I knew what nuclear conflagration would mean. Long before cultural artifacts such as the New Zealand film *The Quiet Earth,* or the made-for-TV drama "The Day After," I could describe the consequences of detonating a single megaton bomb.

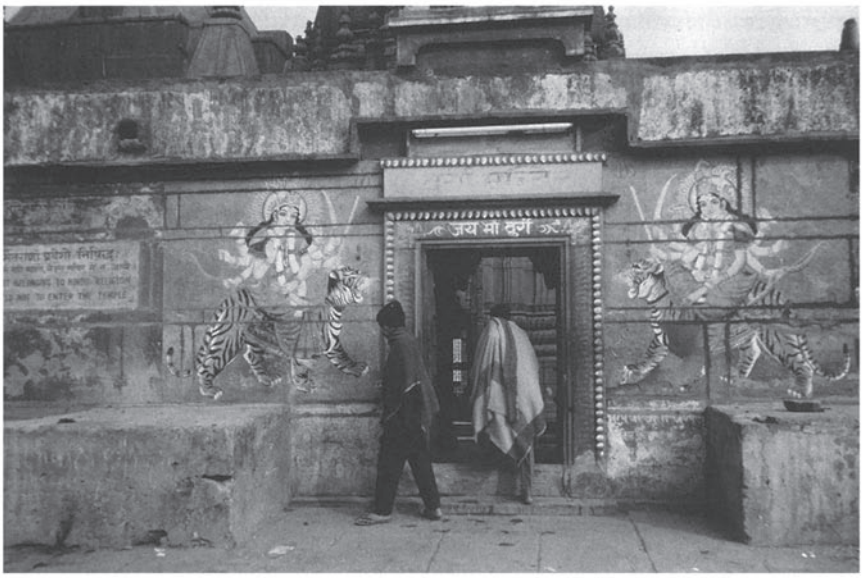

Figure 1. Entrance to the Durga Temple, Varanasi, India, 1992

Luckily, life, as well as the polymorphous imagination that helps to shape one's experience and perception, is a process, never fixed and finalized, until death. Even then, the interpretive possibilities for those who view a person's life are endless – unfinalizable, as Mikhail Bakhtin would say. My process, my story, provides the logic for the ideas contained in this book.

Very often at the beginning of a book one finds a biographical note, which sets a broad personal context for what will follow. With this Preface I too frame my agenda in a personal manner. It is by now almost commonplace to acknowledge that one's particularity and situatedness define one's hermeneutics, or interpretive standpoint. But even beyond issues of interpretation, the very questions I ask can be linked to my personal story.

In reflecting about my work as an artist and a scholar and about the vocation of the artist more generally, I have been aided by recent feminist theoretical writing on autobiography.[1] A number of questions have insinuated themselves into the process; I am not the first to think about them. Who is writing? What is the role of personal memory and my own past life in a project like this? Is there an "appropriate" limit to personal reflection? How does my present feminist consciousness shape my memory of the past and my imagination of the future? And how does the act of writing inform who I am becoming? I cannot answer these questions simply. I could say that I experience the self who writes

the present, the self who was, and the self who also continues to grow and age as one creates into the future.[2] But this way of describing the process is ideologically and axiologically neutral, and it belies the fact that writing, and the memory and imagination on which writing relies, is thoroughly value laden. It is never ideologically or axiologically neutral. My values – social, political, religious, and moral – pervade these pages.

Beyond these general questions and concerns related to writing, there is yet another consideration: I am determined to challenge some of the conventions of art historical and theoretical forms in order to make the act of reading more active. For instance, Liz Stanley has identified several innovations of feminist auto/biography (her neologism to name the breakdown of the traditional categories of autobiography and biography) that encourage such active reading. The self-conscious traversing of boundaries between different genres of writing, such as fiction and nonfiction, prose and poetry; the articulation of a social focus, with a "contingent and engaged authorial voice"; and a conscious focus on textual practice and the vicissitudes of the act of writing itself all encourage and even demand active reading.[3] That the book is presented in a format of relatively short chapters should make it accessible, even if the ideas are challenging. But this book is not simply my quirky response to personal desire or to theory construction for its own sake.

If all writing is in some sense autobiography, then *The Vocation of the Artist* is about my own struggles to define my vocation as an artist and a theorist in the world. I feel a personal calling to write this book, a sense of calling that has grown over at least the last fifteen years. The commitment that informs my point of view is neither trendy nor driven by market-based enthusiasm, but it is born of a lived life, full of experience and reflection about that experience.

At age six I wanted to be a teacher or a nurse, ideas that were shaped by cultural and gender stereotypes. I read vociferously and continued to develop my grandfather's and father's stamp collection. I wanted to be a veterinarian; later, I was drawn to psychiatry. I played the flute from age ten, and thought I could be a musician. I loved drawing architectural diagrams on the kitchen table. Still later, my desire to be a Russian translator or to do international work conflicted with a new aspiration to become an artist.

Few of my many jobs have had anything to do with those early aspirations: clerk in a cleaning plant, sales in all departments of a large store, conveyor belt worker in a cannery, waitress, bartender, typist,

elementary school teacher, go-go dancer. But in the past twenty years my work has centered in education.

My search for my own vocation has everything to do with the teachers I have sought: artists such as David Stannard, Bob James, George Kokis, and M. C. Richards; yogis such as B. K. S. Iyengar and Angela Farmer; theologians such as Gordon Kaufman and Margaret Miles. My acknowledgments really begin with these teachers; here, I want to say more about David Stannard and M. C. Richards in particular.

In this book I am seeking the most appropriate vehicle for the expression of certain ideas. This notion, that every idea has its most elegant and appropriate form, was one of the key lessons I learned from David Stannard, my first ceramics teacher. Stannard's teaching was governed by his love of clay, stone, and ceramic processes, by his unflagging curiosity (how our universe was formed, how the microcosm reflects the macrocosm), and by his conviction that each person has ideas unique to her or his position in the world that must be explored and developed. As far as I know, Stannard was not a poststructuralist or new historicist; these terms were not in wide circulation in the late 1960s. My earliest art training was modeled on learning *to wonder,* to ask what, why, and how things came to be, and what could be done, rather than on issues concerning historical tradition or contemporary style. We did not learn enough history or art history, but I developed a commitment to finding out what I think.

Educators and activists such as Paolo Friere advocate learning to question as a pedagogical tool for developing linguistic, social, and political consciousness. Ivan Illich has written that schools teach students the need to be taught, which prepares them for the alienation and institutionalization of life that awaits once schooling has been completed. Students are "schooled" to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, fluency with the ability to say something. By inculcating the idea that there is only one main authority and one right answer (the teacher's), schools thus destroy the desire to learn. This is a devastating critique of public school education, and although Stannard did not articulate it in this way, he practiced another pedagogy. Long before I knew Friere's or Illich's ideas, I had already learned that following the meandering way of questioning led me not necessarily on the quickest route from here to there, but on an authentic quest. I learned from Stannard that every question is valid and that every content carries its own most elegant form and material.

PREFACE

Once a small group of us traveled with him to visit an observatory in the central Oregon desert. We stayed up all night looking through the large telescope at the Crab Nebula and the moons of Jupiter, and watching the campfire – that mysterious and magical element with which we danced at home. I have always loved fire. As a child, I was transfixed by the sight of a neighbor's house in flames. As a ceramics student, I savored every opportunity to light the burners of the Alpine kiln, adjust the air, and create just the right admixture of air and fuel for optimum combustion. Ceramic processes were indeed tied to the *Music of the Spheres,* as the title of Guy Murchie's book suggested. Our teachers were committed to providing an environment that would allow us to engage with those materials. Clay and the other earth elements, fire, water, and air: Suddenly the cosmos seemed alive. In a 1970 journal entry, I wrote that Stannard seemed to me about "twenty years ahead of himself." Perhaps he was one of the first people I knew that I might now call visionary.

In this context, where the emphasis was on our direct experience with the materials, a few texts were also called to our attention. David Green's *Understanding Pottery Glazes* and Daniel Rhodes's *Clay and Glazes for the Potter* were consulted on technical questions. D'arcy Thompson's *Growth and Form,* Christopher Alexander's *Synthesis of Form,* Gaston Bachelard's *Psychoanalysis of Fire,* and Guy Murchie's books were consulted for aesthetic and philosophical guidance.

But, in the winter of 1971, another book was urged on us: *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person,* by Mary Caroline Richards. Originally published in 1964, the first paperback edition appeared in 1969. Our teachers read it with excitement and invited us to read it too. Here, in a book written by a poet and potter, a woman whose first book was a translation of Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of the Absurd,* was a philosophy of creativity and a philosophy of life. If books such as those by Green and Rhodes might be said to provide the body of ceramics, and by Bachelard and Murchie the intellect, then *Centering* was an attempt to articulate its soul.

In her book, Richards talked in a poetic language about the connections between our work as potters who center clay – who create pots that must withstand the ordeal by fire – and the hard work of bringing into being – through our speech, our gestures, our acts – a self capable of responding, in life as well as in art, to other persons. Here, for the first time, I encountered a vision and articulation of the moral dimension of artistic work. "How do we do it," she wrote, "how do we center in the moral sphere? How do we love our enemies? How do we perform

the CRAFT of life, *kraft, potentia?*"[4] "*Kraft*" means power or strength; and we must use that power to form not just the pot, but ourselves. Art, Richards insisted, is a "Moral Eye" that opens and closes, helping us to see truly and to live ourselves into the questions. At the center of her vision there was no product to sell, no "specific object" such as artist Donald Judd touted in the 1960s, but instead a process of becoming, of evolution.

Richards's writing appealed to me because it was vivid, personal. This was no disembodied abstract philosophy, but writing that stimulated the senses. Richards told jokes, describing how we tear and swat and push and pinch and squeeze and caress and scratch and model and beat the clay. She related philosophical ideas to her life as a poet, a potter, a teacher, an "odd bird" in both academic and craft worlds. She talked of the paradox of human longing for union and for separation and of the pain, suffering, and joy that accompany our attempts to live and love. And at the center of all our yearning and urgent activity was mystery and paradox. Richards came to my university art department for just one week, and my friendship with M. C. began then.

Following my completion of a bachelor of fine arts degree in ceramics and of a master of fine arts degree that involved experiments in mixed-media writing and drawing, I began to create installations and performances around the Pacific Northwest. All of my work between 1977 and 1984 dealt with themes of initiation, environmental destruction, death, and regeneration as aspects of both inner and outer life.

In my *Gaia* installation of 1979, for example, I sought to express my pain about the destruction of the earth. Extinction of species; depletion of nonrenewable resources; pollution of the environment – the rivers, lakes, streams, the oceans, the land, the air – through individual and industrial carelessness; nuclear proliferation and problems of nuclear waste disposal; global warming (what I then called "thermal pollution"); decreasing genetic diversity of plants; overpopulation; changes in the structure of the earth's crust due to removal of oil, gas, and other deposits: all of these seemed urgent then. They seem even more urgent now.

In Greek myth, Gaia is one of the names given to the goddess of the earth. It was once believed that she was the creator of all the deities, earth mother and bestower of abundance. Details in the myths of earth goddesses differ in various cultures, but they share the idea that the earth is not a dead body. Rather, the earth is inhabited by a spirit that gives it life and soul. All agree that the earth spirit is female and will give nourishment to those who shelter in her womb.

As with the theorists of the Gaia Hypothesis,[5] I used the name Gaia not to propose a female deity, but to suggest that the entire living pelt of our planet, its thin green rind of life, is actually a single life-form with its own senses, intelligence, and power to act. But just as the body is mortal, so also may the earth be. Confronting the literal destruction of life on the planet, I wanted to create an environment that evoked a counterimage, affirming life and reestablishing a connection with and reverence for the earth. In addition, *Gaia* was my first full-scale attempt to create a work of art that sidestepped the habitual production-consumption cycle, that resisted the commodity market, that neither polluted nor used nonrenewable natural resources.

In 1980, some time after this installation and nearly a decade after our first meeting, I went to visit M. C. in Portland, Oregon. We retired early that night. When we awoke before seven, we lay talking from twin beds on opposite sides of the room. As I complained about the state of the arts, M. C. said that perhaps my task was to teach artists. Their consciousness is no higher than that of "corporate workers," I said. "Few artists seem to embody 'higher' values like community or ecological awareness. Much work seems, sadly, to follow in some kind of artistic tradition, but cut off from the era in which we live." I hear now the youthful judgment of that statement, but I still hold the sentiment. M. C. spoke of her recent experience teaching at an institute where the students seemed especially frivolous and irresponsible in their use of precious materials and nonrenewable resources. "But," I said, "what should artists be doing if they are capable of a visionary potential? What does the culture require?" We mulled this over before getting up. A very specific sense of my vocation as an artist and a theorist was born in this formative conversation.

I was, at the time I visited M. C. in Portland, already scheduled to create an installation at a gallery in LaGrande, Oregon. I chose then, as I still choose, to live mostly in the Pacific Northwest, already a marginalized location vis-à-vis the art world. Expanding on comments by Martha Rosler in "Place, Position, Power, Politics," I observe that in the 1960s and 1970s not only did many artists seek to liberate themselves from consumerist and materialist values by developing art forms such as mail art, installation, and performance, but they also chose to live outside of New York.[6] Moreover, alternative artists' spaces were developed to counteract the power of galleries and museums in the art world. Unfortunately, these strategies for both the production and exhibition of art were not successful in changing dominant art-world val-

ues. It is now rare that major art magazines devote any space to art or artists or even theorists not well anchored in the gallery-museum-magazine network of the country's major cultural centers. But such marginalization, "life in the provinces," as the printmaker LaVerne Krause insisted, does not preclude conversation with others located more centrally in the art world. In addition to the plan I had developed for the LaGrande installation, I decided to solicit contributions from various artists in the United States and Europe concerning the following propositions and questions.

Proposition A: Much contemporary artwork seems to lack spirit and soul. Proposition B: Artists tend to ignore the survival problems facing our species: nuclear proliferation, overpopulation and famine, air, food, water and land pollution by toxins, depletion of natural resources, and so forth. Proposition C: Artists tend to follow an artistic "tradition" and produce objects. This activity fits into cycles of production/consumption responsible for the destruction of life on this planet. Therefore, Question 1: If artists are the cultural visionaries (and I think that the best artists have been), what should they be doing? Question 2: What values need to be either implicit or explicit in the work (aesthetic, spiritual, intellectual values, etc.)? I put the letters and visual responses from artists such as Richard Long, Carolee Schneemann, David Stannard, and Nancy Pobanz on one wall of the gallery during the *Temenos I* exhibition.

The museum, from the Greek *mouseion* (home of the Muses), was once a place for the sacred band of scholars to work and to share their work in tangible communicable form. In two *Temenos* installations, I tried to create such a *mouseion,* a temple for contemplation. For, I thought, in the temple the world is resanctified. Like *Gaia, Temenos* was based on a particular understanding of the title. The word *temenos* meant, literally, the share of land apportioned to the deity. This sacred precinct was the center of worship and the only indispensable cult structure. As both the physical and metaphoric center, its function was to create a space in which problems could be met and the personality protected during change. In Celtic and Druidic worship, the word *nemeton* meant a sacred grove with a spring. In the *Temenos* installations, I sought to reestablish a sense of connection with the body/earth and to rediscover the holy.

During the opening of *Temenos II* in Boise, Idaho, I made my first short performance piece: a ritual of initiation for those who were present at the opening. Between 1982 and 1984 I created four other per-

formance pieces: *Faer/Fear* (1982), *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Goddess* (1983), *Gloomy Monday* (1983), and *The Twelve Stations* (1984).

In 1984, having recently completed a tour of *Initiation* and having returned from a sojourn in India, I decided that I wanted to learn more about how European-American culture had gotten into its (our) current ecological and spiritual predicaments. Among the most pressing of the problems, I thought, were environmental destruction, fundamentalism, nihilism, cynicism, and apathy. How could one understand the broad cultural problems that we face on both individual and institutional levels? Further, my will-to-understand my own creative activity led me to ask questions such as the following: Are there moral imperatives to which art must attend? What is the relationship of human creativity to divine creativity? How can the insights of art historical and theological study be appropriated and used as vehicles for change?

With that ambition to know, I set out across the continent on an intellectual quest that lasted seven years and brought me back to the Northwest in 1991. To acknowledge the time and space traversed is easy; it is harder to describe the expansion of my knowledge and consciousness through those years. This book reflects the evolution of my ideas during the course of my journey.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge those people who have contributed to the development of my perspective and who have directly supported this project. There are, of course, others besides David Stannard and M. C. Richards who were formative along the way. I have already mentioned others of my teachers: Bob James, George Kokis, B. K. S. Iyengar, Angela Farmer, Gordon Kaufman, and Margaret R. Miles. C. A. Bowers was the first to propose some of the questions about education that have become so central to my thinking.

My colleagues at Washington State University expressed genuine interest and support, especially Christopher Watts, Rita Robillard, Jack Dollhausen, Ross Coates, Sandra Deutchman, Carol Ivory, Ann Christenson, Mike Mandel, Shelli Fowler, Noël Sturgeon, T. V. Reed, Val Jenness, Birgitta Ingemanson, Bonnie Frederick, Don Bushaw, Paul Lee, Francis Ho, Patrick Siler, Patricia Watkinson, and Margaret Sherve, who provided outstanding research assistance. I especially thank Interim Provost Geoffrey Gamble, who, upon hearing a talk that I gave as I was working out the shape of the book, suggested the phrase "reclamation of the future." Washington State University also provided a Completion Grant that covered the costs of obtaining reproductions and permissions.

Although the sources of the ideas that (in)form this book go back many years, my students at Washington State, both undergraduates and graduate artists, gave me the opportunity to test ideas. The first such opportunity was with a group of undergraduates in the fall 1992, when we read Edmund Feldman's book *The Artist*. The students insisted that they needed a more complex account of the evolution of ideas about the artist. I doubt that many would have found the present text easy, but it certainly moves in the direction of complexity! Then, during the fall 1995, a group of graduate artists read the manuscript with me and queried many of its premises and arguments. This latter process was especially useful, as it provided a gauge of the level and persuasiveness of the book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the period I was preparing to write, I met a number of Russian artists and curators in Vladivostok, Russia. Among these, Alexander Doluda, Andrei Kamalov, Alexander Pyrkov, Ryurik Tushkin, Victor Serov, Nataliia Yanchenko, Victor Fedorov, Margarita Snitko, and Marina Kulikova expressed enthusiasm as well as disagreement about my ideas on *prizvanie khudozhnika,* "the vocation of the artist." I hope to make the ideas here available in translation for them at some point.

After years of preparation, I began actually writing the book during the Coolidge Colloquium in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in June 1994. Individuals from that diverse group of scholars in several disciplines – especially John Downey, Laurence L. Edwards, Mary Phil Korsak, Suzanne Stewart, Emilie Townes, and Carol White – asked many hard questions that helped to shape what I subsequently wrote. The support of a Senior Fellowship at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, provided me with an intellectually stimulating context in which to spend my 1994–95 year on leave and complete the book. I thank Director Lawrence Sullivan and my fellow Fellows, especially Bathula Sree Padma, Emily Lyle, Katharine Tehranian, Immanuel Etkes, and Kimmerer LeMothe, for many vivid conversations. I also thank Duncan Williams and Barbara Ambros, Zen priests with whom I practiced *zazen* during the year. A number of friends and colleagues read chapters and versions of the book and offered constructive criticism. To thank Lynn Randolph, Virginia Abblitt, David Thorndike, Robert Littlewood, Edward Robinson, Rita Robillard, Margot Thompson, Michelle Ross, Laurence L. Edwards, David Michael Levin, Bonnie Frederick, X Bonnie Woods, and Frank Burch Brown for reading various chapters while the text was evolving is not enough, but it is a start. Lynn Randolph, in particular, argued vehemently with me about some of the book's major premises. To her I owe the idea of works of art as chapter epigraphs, or *epi-eikons*. I am especially grateful for our letters and conversations.

Writing, while a solitary task, is never the result of a monologic voice. I learned (again) that work is sustained by intimacy. Friends such as Virginia Abblitt, Louise Dunlap, Rosemary Gordon, Dorrie King, Betty Sawyer, and Zoya Slive have been especially significant. At Cambridge University Press, the enthusiasm, criticism, and support of Beatrice Rehl, Margot Lovejoy, Camilla T. K. Palmer, and Susan Greenberg have helped to make this a better book. For all of the dialogues, personal and professional, I thank my friends, colleagues, and students.