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lindaduvall@hotmail.com**Transparency of Digital
Manipulation or Not****Discussion of Where Were the
Mothers? Video Installation**

This paper will address the significance of the ability of digital media to alter and transform primary experiences in ways that may improve, misrepresent or interfere with the viewer's reception and understanding of the original material. A secondary question is that of ownership and authorship when the translation involves a creative process. These ideas will be considered through a discussion of my video installation *Where were the Mothers?* (2009) in which people who have taken alternative life paths worked with a professional musician to write one song about the participant's mother. This video installation allows viewers to explore both transparent and more invisible shifts from the original material.

This project presents the complicated narratives of people who have had run-ins with the law, lived or worked on the street, dealt with addictions or participated in illegal street gangs. Each of these participants collaborated with a professional musician to produce an original song about their mother. I commissioned professional musicians working within a variety of musical styles to work with the participants on a one-to-one basis. That musician assisted the participant in shaping the composition and in recording it. Condensing a lifetime of stories into three minutes of music both compresses and alters the original narratives.

Once the musician and the participant enter the recording studio, a second translation occurs through the magic of the digital manipulation that occurs within that process. In the resulting video installation I make visible all parts of the process including the evolution from the original voices, stories, and instruments to the finished professionally produced song. A second layer of complication results from the staging of the encounter between two strangers – in this case the participant and the musician. Thorny issues of roles and authorship emerge. Who really shaped each song, and what preconceptions were brought to the interaction by each party?

Where Were the Mothers? is a multimedia exhibit that explores the uneasy fluidity of truth, and reveals the contradictions in trying to assert a singular or absolute narrative. I will present excerpts of this project during my presentation.