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**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL METAPHORS:
THE INTERACTION OF TEXT AND IMAGE
IN THE WORKS OF GREG CURNOE**

By

Katie Cholette, B.A. (Honours), Carleton University

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Canadian Art History.

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

July 18, 2001

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**The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis**

**Autobiographical Metaphors: The
Interaction of Text and Image in the Works of Greg Curnoe**

**Submitted by Katie Cholette, B.A. Honours (Carleton)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.**

Michael Bell, Thesis Supervisor

Alan Gillmor, Acting Director: SSAC

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 2001

ABSTRACT

The Canadian artist Greg Curnoe (1936-1992) believed that the only valid source of inspiration for his art was his lived experiences. As a result, his works are universally acknowledged to be autobiographical, although they are generally perceived as non-metaphorical. This thesis examines a selected number of Curnoe's works that, for the most part, feature the view from his studio window in both word and image, and demonstrates that despite their quotidian content and plain language, they are much more complex than they initially appear. Far from being spontaneous, objective depictions of what he saw and experienced, they are highly subjective fragments that he has used to advance a particular public view of himself. By examining the works through theories of autobiography and metaphor it is evident that they function as metaphors of Curnoe's life-long search for self-identity: "My life is art."

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Art Gallery of Ontario	AGO
Carleton University Art Gallery	CUAG
London Public Library	LPL
London Regional Art and Historical Museums	LRAHM
National Archives of Canada	NAC
National Gallery of Canada	NGC
University of Western Ontario, London	UWO

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INTRODUCTION

I'm afraid of art because it might kill me.

—Greg Curnoe, Contemporary Canadian Painting

I make no distinction between art and life so that what I have said applies equally to my art or whatever else I do.

—Greg Curnoe, Contemporary Canadian Painting

The Canadian artist Gregory Richard Curnoe (1936-1992) had a life-long fascination with the integration of text and image in his art works. His textual works have been interpreted as verifiable recreations of specific moments in time that document actual events in his life. In a posthumous exhibition catalogue (1995), Christopher Dewdney claimed that Greg Curnoe's "paintings and drawings achieve their ingenious simplicity by avoiding any metaphorical content. They are based on specific, personal perceptions harnessed to his overriding descriptive project, a project realized in the everyday, sometimes incidental nature of his subjects."¹ Upon initial examination, the places and events that Curnoe describes *are* factual; his works appear to be objective transcriptions of the everyday events in his life. They may be viewed, however, in a different manner. The works that we perceive as spontaneous, true depictions of real events are in fact constructions that Curnoe used to create fragments of his own autobiography. Greg Curnoe's word paintings function as narratives that often tell a quite different story about Curnoe than that which he intends. They are complex, often obscure, and highly subjective pieces of a larger autobiographical project that depends upon the invocation of memories. Through the employment of elements of metaphorical and

autobiographical theory it is possible to demonstrate how Curnoe's multi-layered works become "metaphors of self."²

Although Greg Curnoe's work is almost universally perceived as lacking in metaphor, I intend to show that this is not the case. Many of his works, in particular the paintings that feature various descriptions of the view from his studio window (see below), show his lifelong search for a valid form of self expression through the integration of text and image in his art. Curnoe intertwines personal memories, private opinions, historical facts, factual descriptions, and fantasy, to create works that are complex while appearing deceptively simple. When viewed individually and collectively his works are deeply personal and can be interpreted as metaphors of himself (or autobiographical metaphors). In addition to being highly entertaining and visually pleasing, they demonstrate what kind of life Curnoe believed was worth living, one that ultimately was inextricably tied to his precise (metaphysical) place in the universe, and more specifically to his actual place in London, Ontario.

This thesis is not a biographical survey of Curnoe's life, nor does it presume to discuss his entire oeuvre (which was prodigious and diverse). In order to demonstrate my argument most effectively, I have deliberately limited my discussion to a select number of Curnoe's works which (for the most part) illustrate his preoccupation with establishing his self identity by using the view from his various studio windows—a technique that allowed him to reflect his world back to himself. The selected works, *24 Hourly Notes* (1966) (AGO), *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* (1967) (CUAG), *Cityscape, Right Windows* (1967) (AGO), *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* (1968-1969) (NGC), *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (1969-1971) (NGC), *View From the Window*

(1971) (Curnoe Family, formerly Art Bank of Canada Council), *Blue Book 8* (1988-89), and *Deeds #2* (1990) (AGO), show Curnoe's lifelong concern with engaging his immediate surroundings in his art. An exception to this is *Blue Book 8*, an artist's book published by Art Metropole in 1989, in which Curnoe attempts to definitively state who he is by exhaustively listing who he is not (see chapter 3). I have chosen to include this book because its production coincided with a slump in Curnoe's career in the 1980s, and can be seen as an attempt by Curnoe to reassert who he was (or wanted to be).

Throughout the course of my research I repeatedly encountered references to Curnoe's dislike of art historical theory (and presumably its application to his own work).³ Because it was generally understood that Curnoe denied the presence of metaphor in his work, his friends, supporters, and art critics in general, respected this opinion and subscribed to the same belief. The willingness of these people to accept and perpetuate Curnoe's own views has resulted in a body of literature that is repetitive and superficial, and that does not acknowledge the complex nature of his works.⁴ Curnoe's lack of intentionality does not preclude the application of theory to his works; rather I believe that a discussion of Curnoe's work from a fresh perspective enriches its meaning.

In this introduction I review the plethora of literature about and by Greg Curnoe, and discuss its usefulness in supporting my thesis. I also discuss why the theories that I have chosen to use are particularly relevant to his work. Finally I briefly summarize what will be covered in the subsequent chapters.

There is a large amount of written and other relevant material dealing with Curnoe. It has been divided into five subsections which will be discussed separately. The first group is primary material—the *Greg Curnoe Fonds* at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

The second group consists of catalogues of exhibitions of Curnoe's work. As his work was exhibited so frequently during his life and since his death, I will confine my discussion primarily to solo exhibition catalogues.⁵ The third important body of literature on Curnoe comprises numerous newspaper articles and reviews, and periodical articles. The fourth group contains miscellaneous books on Curnoe—several memoirs, an M.A. thesis, and films about and by Curnoe. The fifth section covers Canadian art history surveys. Because of the sheer volume of written material on, about, and by Curnoe I have chosen to discuss only those exemplary items in each section that were of particular use to my thesis.

During his lifetime Greg Curnoe wrote and collected a huge amount of material related to his art practice (and taking into account the fact that he considered everything in his life material for his art this could apply to pretty well anything he ever wrote). In the years following his death in 1992 the Art Gallery of Ontario acquired the majority of his personal papers and miscellaneous items along with a large number of his works.⁶ The extensive archive is now housed in the E.P. Taylor Library at the gallery.⁷ The material in the Curnoe archive at the Art Gallery of Ontario was especially useful because it provided evidence to support my ideas. Being able to see such a large amount of material written by Curnoe gathered together in one place also provided me with a better idea of how he worked. By viewing it as a whole, I was able to recognize patterns and an overall consistency within his working method(s). I was also able to discern that although many of his works gave the initial impression of being spontaneous, they were often carefully planned and revised before being executed in their final form. As one would

expect there was limited evidence in the archive of any dissenting opinions about Curnoe's work.

The nature of exhibition catalogues is such that they generally present a positive picture of the artist(s) featured, something that needs to be recognized when using exhibition catalogues for research purposes. Additionally, a large number of the solo and group exhibitions that featured Curnoe's art were curated by friends and supporters. Not surprisingly, there is a general consensus of opinion regarding the meaning of his work amongst the catalogues. The exhibitions and catalogues also served to increase the public's awareness of Curnoe's art and elevate his status to one of Canada's best-known contemporary artists. Curnoe's rise to fame occurred during an important decade in Canada's history.

1967 was a very special year; in addition to marking Canada's centennial, it was the year that the international exposition, *Expo 67*, was held in Montreal. *Expo 67* boosted the patriotic pride of Canadians and attracted international attention to Canada and its culture.⁸ The following year, in the wake of the success of *Expo 67*, the Edinburgh Festival Society invited Canada to exhibit art at its annual festival. The exhibition was titled *Canada 101*, a double entendre on the fact that it was the one hundred and first year after Confederation and it also served as an introduction to contemporary Canadian art.⁹ David Silcox (of The Canada Council) acknowledged that the number of artists was limited, but justified their selection by saying that those chosen caught "the spirit that informs most of the significant work being done here [in Canada] today."¹⁰ Comments like this helped situate Curnoe at the cutting edge of contemporary Canadian art.¹¹

Some of the publications that accompanied exhibitions of Curnoe's work allowed him to supply his own artist's statement. In late 1967, Curnoe participated in a group exhibition entitled *18 Canadian Artists*, at the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina.¹² The artist's statement in the catalogue that accompanied the show featured an autobiographical essay by Curnoe in which he cites popular culture (music, children's books, radio shows and cartoons) as a source of his art. He also discusses his art education, and the influence that various people had on his career. He includes a long paragraph listing a widely disparate number of things that he is interested in or involved with at the time of the exhibition. There is a reproduction of the work featured in the exhibition, one of Curnoe's lettered works, *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967).¹³ Exhibition catalogues like this one provided Curnoe with the opportunity to shape his own public persona.

In 1968 the National Gallery of Canada publicly acknowledged the growing importance of the regional art scene in London, Ontario with a traveling exhibition entitled *The Heart of London*. The catalogue that accompanied this exhibition also gave the readers the impression that they were hearing Curnoe's own (sincere) voice by including quotes from him in addition to a very short biographical paragraph.¹⁴ While acknowledging Curnoe's growing importance in the Canadian art world, this exhibition still situated him within the context of the region of London.

The following year Greg Curnoe was placed at the forefront of contemporary Canadian art when he was one of three artists chosen to exhibit at the São Paulo X Bienal in Brazil.¹⁵ Dennis Reid (a friend and supporter of Curnoe) curated Curnoe's work in the exhibition and wrote the accompanying catalogue—*Greg Curnoe: Canada*¹⁶ (although he

credits Curnoe with having equal input in the format and content of the catalogue¹⁷).

Dennis Reid's catalogue for the São Paulo X Bienal stresses the connection between all aspects of Curnoe's life and art. Short explanatory paragraphs accompany the numerous photographs that include shots of Curnoe's family, friends, studio, and local environment. Following these photographs are a series of "questions" posed by Curnoe,¹⁸ an interview from *Region* magazine with a local eccentric, and an annotated list of people who played an important role in Curnoe's life. The very last item in the book is the catalogue of the individual works in the exhibition, although there is no interpretive text to accompany it. Despite the fact that the catalogue fails to enlighten the reader about the nature of the actual works shown, Reid tries to portray what he considers the essence of the artist.¹⁹ (The contents of the catalogue, *Greg Curnoe: Canada* will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.)

Perhaps because his direct and unembellished writing style was his own best promotional tool, exhibition catalogues that featured Curnoe's writings continued to reassert his personal version of his life and work throughout the years. In 1975 he was the subject of an exhibition at the London Art Gallery, *Greg Curnoe: Some Lettered Works, 1961-1969*.²⁰ The short essay that Curnoe wrote is interesting because of its almost complete concern with the technicalities involved in making his paintings, instead of addressing their content. It is almost as if Curnoe defies his viewer to read anything into the works.

In 1976 Curnoe was chosen to represent Canada again at an international art exhibition, the prestigious XXXVII Biennale di Venezia. This time another friend and supporter of Curnoe's, Pierre Théberge, curated the exhibition and wrote the

accompanying catalogue, *Canada: Greg Curnoe* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976).²¹ The catalogue contains a brief biographical introduction, followed by a catalogue of the works shown. There is a detailed analysis of the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* that stresses the objectivity and “directness” of the work. This publication was particularly useful because it presented the officially sanctioned view of Curnoe’s work, a view that was generally accepted and sustained by other art critics and writers.

Five years after the Venice Biennale, Greg Curnoe was featured in a traveling exhibition organized by Pierre Théberge for the National Gallery of Canada entitled *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*. The exhibition was accompanied by a lengthy catalogue that featured an extensive three-chapter essay by Théberge which dealt with “The Studio,” “Ideology,” and “The Critics.” The essay was followed by a chronology and catalogue of works (many of which had explanatory text) and black and white illustrations of all of the works in the exhibition. This was followed by a list of Curnoe’s exhibitions and writings until 1981 and a bibliography. Although the catalogue was useful from a research point-of-view, it was not particularly helpful as an interpretive tool. Théberge’s opinions on Curnoe’s art were very similar to the artist’s own, and the catalogue reads as a huge promotional piece for Curnoe. The bibliography was helpful, as it was one of the few available until the publication of the exhibition catalogue that accompanied a show in 1999 at the Art Gallery of Windsor curated by Robert McKaskell called *Making It New! (The Big Sixties Show)*.²²

There were several exhibition catalogues published in the 1990s that were helpful in situating my thesis. In 1991 Walter Klepac curated *Reading: Public Signs, Private*

Acts, a group exhibition at the Art Gallery of York University that featured some of Greg Curnoe's works.²³ In the exhibition pamphlet Klepac discusses the complex role of language and the act of reading in artworks. The essay shows that there may have been a move towards a more theoretical reading of Curnoe's art on the eve of his death.²⁴

Deeds/Abstracts: Greg Curnoe, one of Curnoe's last solo exhibitions before his death, featured a catalogue co-written by Greg Curnoe and Frank Davey.²⁵ This exhibition of verbal self-portraits and lettered works combined Curnoe's interest in his self identity and his growing interest in the history of the land he lived on.²⁶ This interest in past inhabitants, especially the native Indians who had lived in London indicates that Curnoe's work may have been moving in a more universally inclusive direction, and away from the previously closed focus of his immediate experience.

The Heart of London Revisited was a group exhibition curated by James Patten and Michael C. Hannay the year after Curnoe's death,²⁷ and featured an essay looking back at Curnoe and the history of London's artistic community. While the artistic past of London was revisited, so too were the stereotypes and preconceptions about Curnoe's life and art. This was not unusual, as other curators continued to show nostalgia for Curnoe's simplicity.

Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe 1936-1992, was curated by Christopher Dewdney and Diana Nemiroff in 1995, and is remarkable for Dewdney's tenacious insistence that Curnoe's work lacks metaphor.²⁸ As with *The Heart of London Revisited* the exhibition pamphlet faithfully repeated the views voiced in previous catalogues as Dewdney continued to promote the impression of Curnoe that had been developed throughout his life.

In the spring of 2001, the Art Gallery of Ontario mounted a retrospective exhibition, *Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff*,²⁹ which was accompanied by a large publication. The book, also entitled *Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff*, is not an exhibition catalogue in the traditional sense—there is no list of works in the exhibition, although there are reproductions of many of the works in the show. Instead of acting as an explanatory text of the works in the exhibition, the book functions in a complementary fashion. There are two essays in the book, one by Sarah Milroy entitled “Greg Curnoe: Time Machines,” and one by Dennis Reid entitled “Some Things I Learned from Greg Curnoe.” In addition to the essays there are an extensive chronology and bibliography by Judith Rodger. The entire catalogue is interspersed with illustrations of Curnoe’s works (many of them in colour), and photographs from his life. Although the book tries to take a different approach to traditional exhibition catalogues, both the essays fall back on a relatively similar chronological account of Curnoe’s life (with considerable overlap between the two). The chronology and bibliography functioned very well as a research tool, while the essays provided some good background information and context, but very little new interpretation of Curnoe’s work. Consistent with the rest of the exhibition catalogues that featured Curnoe as a solo artist or as one of a group, this catalogue perpetuated many of the previous stereotypical opinions on his art and life. As was mentioned before, the nature of exhibition catalogues then seems to preclude a critical interpretation. For this kind of information it was necessary to turn to another source—newspaper and periodical articles.

The third major body of written material dealing with Greg Curnoe consists of newspaper and periodical articles, and exhibition reviews. The National Gallery of

Canada's extensive clipping files on Curnoe (and to a lesser extent the artist's files in the London Regional Art and Historical Museum, and the London Public Library) provided me with a comprehensive overview of the ups and downs of Curnoe's career through the eyes of the popular press and art periodicals.

The National Gallery of Canada has an extensive (and fairly complete) clipping file on Curnoe, dating from the early sixties until the present. Reading through the newspaper accounts of his rise to fame, his diminished popularity in the 1980s, and the resurgence of his career in the early 1990s, was illuminating. I was able to see the important role that journalists like Leonore Crawford (from the *London Free Press*), and Barry Hale (*The Telegram* [Toronto]), played in promoting and publicizing Curnoe's work. I was also able to see how many of the "facts" regarding Curnoe's life and work were established very early on in his career, and remained unchallenged throughout his lifetime. It is largely through the unexamined repetition of strategic pieces of information about Curnoe that his artistic persona was created and sustained. Although the National Gallery of Canada clipping files were extensive, there were a number of newspaper articles that they did not have in their files—especially those from newspapers and local magazines in London, Ontario (for example: *Scene*, a local London entertainment weekly often featured Curnoe).

The London Regional Art and Historical Museum's artist's file provided me with several relevant articles and small exhibition catalogues that were not available at the NGC. There were also some interesting one-of-a-kind materials in the file such as photographs of the interior of his first studio in the basement of his parents' home on Langarth Street in London.³⁰

The London Public Library takes a proud interest in local celebrities. They have recently acquired several previously hard-to-access films by and about Greg Curnoe such as Curnoe's early films *Souwesto* (1969) and *Connexions* (1970),³¹ a local historical film on London entitled *Vagabonds and Visionaries: The London Story* (1998),³² and *Greg Curnoe* (a 1981 biographical film on the artist by the London company, Lockwood Films).³³ In addition to their general reference department, the main branch of the London Public Library has a room devoted to local history—the London Room.³⁴ The London Room has a number of items that pertain to Curnoe such as copies of *Region* magazine and *Provincial Essays* (to be discussed later).

There are several audio and videotapes that were useful in the collections of both the National Gallery of Canada and the National Archives of Canada. Items such as Jack Chambers' movie *R 34*, a 30-minute film that featured Curnoe were of particular interest in my research. The National Gallery also has several audiotapes of Curnoe being interviewed and interviewing people himself that helped me to understand more about his manner of gathering information. Because Curnoe is dead, it was interesting to hear how he spoke and presented himself on film. The films provided valuable insight into how he saw himself and others saw him. They also provided a snapshot of London's past, documenting how the city appeared at the time he was creating his works.³⁵

Over the years there have been a number of works about Curnoe that do not fall into any of the other categories mentioned, but that provided valuable contextual or supplementary information for my thesis. In 1987 Barbara K. Stevenson wrote an M.A. thesis entitled "The political and social subject matter in the work of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe."³⁶ Although the material that she studied was not directly relevant to my

thesis (she uses Marxist theory to analyze a number of Wieland and Curnoe's works), she appended an interview with Curnoe that provided me with a first-hand account of his feelings about the reception of his art.

In 1990 Wayne Johnston published a book entitled *At the York*, an oral history of the infamous London night-spot, the York Hotel (which has since closed).³⁷ The collage of opinions and dialogue regarding the role that the hotel played in the lives of the artistic and intellectual community in London provided some useful contextualization. Curnoe, a longtime regular of the establishment, was one of the contributors to the book.³⁸

After Curnoe's death in 1992 there were several memoirs published about him. In 1993, his friend, the Canadian poet and writer George Bowering, published a book of reminiscences about Curnoe—*The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe*.³⁹ Structured after a book by Harry Mathews,⁴⁰ Bowering's book consists of short, fond anecdotes and reminiscences about Curnoe. Arranged in an informal, non-linear manner, it evoked some of Curnoe's paintings, both in style and content. It also continues to perpetuate the myth of Curnoe that had formed during his lifetime.

A more useful source of basic information was Lynda Curnoe's *My Brother Greg: a Memoir*, published in 2001.⁴¹ The rather rambling account of Curnoe's family (from his grandparents to his children) helped situate many of the events and people mentioned in his art, and showed how a non-artist, family member viewed Curnoe the successful artist.

While they were not substantively useful, *At the York*, *The Moustache*, and *My Brother Greg*, each helped to reinforce Curnoe's now familiar self-image. They present a consistent and complementary view of his character and the regional ambience within which he created his art.

The most general type of information about Greg Curnoe was found in survey text books. Geared towards the broadest audience, and with a large focus, the books present a consistent portrait of him. As Greg Curnoe became well-known, his work began to be featured in comprehensive studies of contemporary art and art historical survey texts from the early 1970s onwards. Although none of the following books deal with Curnoe in any great depth they were helpful at the outset of my research in situating my thesis. Several re-readings of the passages on Curnoe were necessary; it was necessary to refer back to them periodically during research to see what stereotypes of Curnoe and his art they reinforced. It was also very interesting to see which of Curnoe's artworks were chosen to represent him and to be reproduced in the various books. Although most of the books purported to be surveys of Canadian art (in particular painting), these books were by no means universally inclusive of all the artists in Canada (nor were they impartial regarding qualitative distinctions between artists). It is noteworthy that Curnoe appears in every Canadian art history survey book that deals with art from the early 1960s onwards.

In 1972 (three years after Curnoe's work was exhibited at the São X Bienal) William Withrow, the Director of the Art Gallery of Toronto, featured him as one of only twenty-four artists singled out to represent Canadian painting in his survey book *Contemporary Canadian Painting* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972). The book features an introductory essay, artists' statements, and individual short biographical and interpretive essays. Withrow categorized contemporary artists as those who were "active in the period since 1945" and who worked in the medium of painting (which he defined as the "application of colour to a flat surface"⁴²). Twenty-four painters is by no means a comprehensive study of contemporary Canadian artists; Withrow admits that the artists

and artworks chosen were done so selectively, and lists the criteria for their inclusion as: “(a) quality (b) a persistent and unique visual image or (c) a catalytic function.”⁴³ In the introduction, Withrow discusses major movements and artistic groups in Canada from 1945, and mentions Curnoe’s importance in the London, Ontario art scene.⁴⁴ Ascribing the cohesion of the artistic community of London to a reaction against the hostility of the general population of London to artists in the 1960s, Withrow highlights the interdisciplinary nature of London’s artistic community: “this creative group grew to include poets, photographers and filmmakers, so that an unself-conscious cross-pollination stimulated the imagination of all.”⁴⁵

Withrow’s book validates Curnoe’s opinions regarding art, particularly his belief that art had to be relevant to life. Echoing Curnoe’s sentiments that what he made was not necessarily art, Withrow states: “Greg Curnoe’s work doesn’t lend itself easily to explanation or criticism, dealing as it does with activities which operate outside the normal and traditional boundaries of ‘art.’”⁴⁶ Withrow does not, however, treat the featured artists as participants in artistic movements or styles; rather he treats them as selected, talented individuals.

By placing Curnoe with other exemplary artists, Withrow helps to establish him as a scion of Canadian art. While providing a relatively good general survey of the pivotal events and influences in Curnoe’s life to the time of its publication, the book’s overall accuracy comes into question when it states that he graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1960⁴⁷; in fact, Curnoe failed to complete his diploma. It was precisely this kind of biographical inconsistency that recurred throughout my research, alerting me to the dangers of unconditionally accepting everything that was printed. Withrow also

firmly labels Curnoe as a Pop artist in the biographical section accompanying the artist's works⁴⁸—a label that Curnoe consistently denied. Although not the most accurate account of Curnoe's life, it was useful in that it showed that by 1972 Curnoe had become firmly accepted by the art establishment. Subsequent art historical survey books (and other broadly inclusive subject-specific books) that included Curnoe, did not significantly differ from the opinions put forward in Withrow's book.

Following his success at the São Paulo X Bienal, Curnoe rapidly became a sufficiently well-known artist that his works were used to illustrate various "niche" publications such as Jerrold Morris's *The Nude in Canadian Painting* (Toronto: New Press, 1972). In a small book which "celebrates" the nude in Canadian art, Morris included Curnoe's large scale oil and mixed media work *Spring on the Ridgeway* (1965).⁴⁹ This type of publication is not interested in Curnoe's motivation or context, but is only concerned with a specific kind of image.⁵⁰

In 1973 Curnoe's friend and long-time supporter Dennis Reid published a comprehensive survey text—*A Concise History of Canadian Painting*.⁵¹ In 1988 an expanded and revised second edition of the book was published (Toronto: Oxford University Press). The first edition was not particularly useful as Reid discussed painting only up until 1965, at which point Curnoe was still struggling for recognition.⁵² Most of the works that I examine in this thesis date from 1966 until the 1990s. The first edition situated Curnoe within the creative community of London, alongside fellow artists Jack Chambers and Tony Urquhart.

Reid discusses Curnoe's work and life in more depth than previous survey books had, understandable perhaps when considered that Reid wrote the exhibition catalogue

that accompanied Curnoe's works at the São Paulo Bienal. As in the first edition, Curnoe's work and life are situated with respect to the regional artistic scene of London, Ontario, but Reid elaborates on Curnoe's varied artistic interests and influences as well as his social and political interests (the influence of Dada, Canada's first "happening"—*Celebration*, his involvement with the Canadian Artists' Representation group [to be discussed in chapter 1], film making, the Nihilist Spasm Band, teaching at the University of Western Ontario and so on). Reid discusses several of the works that I feature in my thesis—*24 Hourly Notes*, the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* and *Second Series*, albeit briefly. This helped me to get a good basic idea of what kind of writing had been done about these works as Reid's opinions on Curnoe's life and art have, on the whole, gone unchallenged. Reid includes something that the other survey books did not contain—a section describing the influence that Curnoe had on other Canadian artists such as John Boyle and Ron Martin.⁵³ While helpful from a general point of view, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* is frustrating because of its lack of a bibliography or index.⁵⁴

In 1974 Barry Lord published *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press), examining Curnoe's work in relation to artistic movements, and discussing his political activities. Lord's book, although it did not provide any new material on Curnoe, did provide some insight into his personality and its effect on his work.

Curnoe's life and art receive a thoughtful (if less vivid) treatment in David Burnett and Marilyn Schiff's *Contemporary Canadian Art*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., and the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983).⁵⁵ In a chapter entitled "A Broadening Scene:

Toronto and London,” Burnett and Schiff deal with the political and social aspects of Curnoe’s art, and situate him “at the center of the artistic community in London from the beginning of the sixties.”⁵⁶ They link Curnoe’s work with others in his region, and discuss the main issues that influenced his art (popular culture, everyday experience, Dadaism, Curnoe’s relationship to Pop Art, and so on). Chosen to represent Curnoe are the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*, the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, and *Homage to van Dongen (Sheila) No. 1* (1978-79), the work that was featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue for Curnoe’s 1981 retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada. Published two years after this retrospective, *Contemporary Canadian Art* presents a picture of Curnoe that was consistent with both the popular opinion of him and with his own view of himself.

Less helpful from an interpretive point of view, but a good source of basic information were books like the National Gallery of Canada’s *Canadian Art: Catalogue of the National Gallery of Canada*, (Volume One/A-F, General Editors: Charles C. Hill/Pierre B. Landry, 1988). This book functions as its title suggests—as a catalogue, not a history—and presents brief, official biographies of artists in the National Gallery’s collection along with a complete list of all their works in the collection (including size, medium, provenance and acquisition number). Some, but not all of the 42 works by Curnoe in the National Gallery’s collection are illustrated in thumbnail-sized black and white photos.⁵⁷ This type of publication had a limited use for the purpose of this thesis.⁵⁸

More recent art history survey books tend to focus on only a few aspects of Curnoe’s life and work—regionalism, his political involvement, and the importance of everyday life in his art. Joan Murray in her book *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*

(Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999) acknowledges the important role that Greg Curnoe played in several areas of twentieth-century art.⁵⁹ In Chapter Five—"Post-Painterly Abstraction, Minimal Art, and Post-Minimal Art"—Murray discusses Curnoe briefly in a section on the development of artist-run galleries and "alternate" spaces.⁶⁰ She discusses Curnoe in slightly more depth in Chapter Seven—"Developments in Representation; Post-Modernism; New Image Painting"—when she notes his involvement with the Canadian Artists' Representation group. Murray situates Curnoe as a regionalist when she discusses him in the context of a group of "idiosyncratic" artists from London.⁶¹ Because of the format of the book, Murray is only able to devote a page and a half of space to Curnoe, and confines her discussion of Curnoe's artworks to those that demonstrate his main interests—text, colour, and bicycling.

For much of the general public, Curnoe's identity (if they are aware of who he was at all) has become synonymous with his bicycle paintings. This impression is supported by books like Anne Newland's recently published survey book *Canadian Art: From its Beginning to 2000* (Willowdale: Firefly Books, 2000), in which Curnoe's artistic output is represented by a single work—*Zeus 10-Speed* (1972). A minimal amount of text accompanies the illustration, and presents a standard account of his life and career.⁶²

Although the nature of art historical survey texts precludes an in-depth study of the work of a single artist, most of the aforementioned books deal with Curnoe in a cursory fashion. While some of them (Reid, Lord, Burnett and Schiff, and Murray in particular) mention the important link between Curnoe's life and his art (especially with regard to issues like regionalism and his political activism), they do not delve into his

specific works in any particular depth. The publications function as good contextual tools, however, and it was useful to refer back to them at various stages of research. As with Curnoe's lifelong interest in the "connexions"⁶³ between people and events that appeared relatively meaningless at first they would later prove much more interesting.

The theories that I have chosen to use in this thesis are not ones which were developed for art history, but rather they stem from studies in literature—more specifically studies in metaphor and autobiography. They are applicable to Curnoe's work for a number of reasons: firstly, he incorporated text into a large number of his works (and as a result they may be considered as a form of literature); secondly, in addition to creating visual artworks Curnoe wrote compulsively in diaries, articles (newspaper and periodicals), working ideas for art works, and personal correspondence; and lastly, but most importantly, because Curnoe claimed to make no distinction between any of the art forms that he engaged in. All of these factors created a resonance between Curnoe's works and the autobiographical and metaphorical theory. As these theories were not developed in an art historical context in order to apply them to Curnoe's work it is necessary to provide a concise, and simplified, outline of their basic principles.

Because I demonstrate that Curnoe's works function as "autobiographical metaphors," or "metaphors of self"⁶⁴ it was necessary to use different, although complementary, branches of theory—autobiographical and metaphorical studies. The political philosopher Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* are the two main theoretical texts that I use. Because Curnoe's work focused so heavily on the everyday, ordinary moments of his life which were considered non-metaphorical, Lakoff and

Johnson's theory that metaphor need not be a literary or poetic device, but rather can include concepts that we structure our lives around, was particularly appropriate. Charles Taylor's discussion of the importance of ordinary life in articulating a self-identity helped to give substance to my arguments that Curnoe's work is indeed metaphorical. As a bridge between these two theories I have used sections of James Olney's *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, and aspects of other theorists such as Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz (*Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*), Felicity Nussbaum ("Toward Conceptualizing Diary"), Mark Freeman ("Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span"), Jill Ker Conway (*When Memory Speaks*), W.J.T. Mitchell (*Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, and "Word and Image"), and Monique Yaari ("Who/What is the Subject? Representations of Self in Late Twentieth-Century French Art").

I decided that rather than discuss a large number of works (Curnoe was after all a prolific artist), I would limit my focus to a select number of pieces that deal with recurrent themes. By limiting the number of works, I was able to analyze them in greater depth, to come to more substantial conclusions than if I had treated a larger number more generally. The works that I have chosen, while they do not represent Curnoe's entire oeuvre, do represent an overview of his life and work. In the three chapters of this thesis I demonstrate how his life and work were connected.

In chapter 1, "(Auto)Biography," I discuss who and what Greg Curnoe was. The creation of either a biography or an autobiography is a selective process on the part of the author. Through an examination of some of the aspects of these selective processes, I show how Greg Curnoe's artistic persona was formed and reinforced, and what the

important influences and events were that shaped his life. The strong links between Curnoe's life and his art are undeniable, a fact that was highlighted by writers and critics as well as Curnoe himself. By searching for ways to articulate his sense of self, while incorporating material from his life into his art, Curnoe lived his life according to the metaphor "My life is art."

In chapter 2, "Search for the Self," I present the theoretical framework through which I examine Curnoe's works, and link it with the biography/autobiography discussion of chapter 1. Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, forms the basis for the first part of my argument—that Curnoe was searching for a valid form of self expression when he made his art. The form and content of this art in turn reveals something about the artist's identity; indeed it becomes a metaphor of the maker. I use the theories of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By*), to show how even the most everyday concepts (and by extension Curnoe's life and work) can be metaphorical.

Chapter 3, "How Evident are These Truths?", integrates the theories discussed in the previous chapter with a number of Curnoe's works that, for the most part, deal with the view from his various studio windows. By demonstrating the intricate connections between his life and art I show that Curnoe's works, far from being simple recreations of actual moments and events, are in fact, complex autobiographical metaphors.

This thesis adopts a thematic, rather than strictly chronological approach to Curnoe's life. In order to clarify and situate events within a conventional time frame, a chronology of significant dates and events in his life has been appended following chapter 3 (Appendix A).

ENDNOTES

¹ Christopher Dewdney, *Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe 1936-1992* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995), unpaginated.

² James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).

³ Curnoe was vocally opposed to the application of theory to his works; he dismissed art theory as "a performance that art writers put on for each other." Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge, *Informal Discussion after Panel Discussion*. Hart House Summer Program, National Archives of Canada, Canada Council Collection. No date available. NFTSA #V6 8601-30. Accession number 1985-177. Part of Curnoe's resistance to the applicability of theory to his own works may have had something to do with his own mythmaking desires. If Curnoe wanted to be seen as an "ordinary guy," not even an artist, it would have been inconsistent (or at any rate pretentious) to admit that his work had a subtext that could be "read" by anyone. I believe that his lack of intentionality does not preclude the application of theory to his work, as I demonstrate in this thesis.

⁴ There were occasional exceptions to this, notably Diana Nemiroff's article "This is Great Art Because it Wasn't Made by an American," *Vanguard* 10, no. 8, (October 1981): 24-31, and Walter Klepac's exhibition pamphlet, *Reading: Public Signs, Private Act* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1991).

⁵ Although I am mainly concerned with Curnoe's solo exhibitions, I will mention several group exhibitions that featured Curnoe's work.

⁶ The 2001 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto)—*Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff*—was mounted to celebrate this donation.

⁷ The *Greg Curnoe Fonds* consists of 14 boxes of material. Box 1: Notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks; Box 2: Writings 1956-1984; Box 3: Writings 1985-1992; Box 4: Correspondence 1956-1979; Box 5: National Gallery of Canada Retrospective Exhibition 1981; Box 6: Business and professional activities; Box 7: Canada Council applications and publications; Box 8: Newspaper clippings, printed material; Box 9: Organizations/photographs; Box 10: Early sketch books; Box 11: 84 audiotapes; Box 12: Stamp books; Box 13: Oversized assorted material; Box 14: Printed material related to Curnoe exhibitions. Some of the items (such as the material on organizations) were organized by Curnoe during his lifetime, other boxes were organized after his death.

At the time of my initial research trip to the E.P. Taylor Library at the Art Gallery of Ontario in February 2000 the *Greg Curnoe Fonds* was not accessible to the general public. I had to receive permission from Sheila Curnoe, Curnoe's widow, to access and use the material for a graduate term paper (which was the genesis of this thesis). Although a preliminary finding aid for the fonds was available, and the material had been sorted into general categories (for example: diaries, correspondence, and so on), the material was stored in a number of large cardboard boxes (see above for general contents of the boxes). Judith Rodger, who sorted the majority of the material (and was preparing the chronology for the 2001 Greg Curnoe exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario) was present during my stay in Toronto, and proved invaluable in helping me find relevant material for my purposes.

⁸ Curnoe exhibited a painted construction, *For Ben Bella* (1967) in the exhibition *Painting in Canada*, at the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67. Judith Rodger, "Chronology," eds. Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, published in conjunction with the exhibition *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, organized and circulated by the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 155.

⁹ Peter Diamand, *Canada 101. Edinburgh International Festival. 18 August/7 September 1968* (Ottawa: Canada Council, 1968), unpaginated.

In universities, 100 numbers are used to signify introductory courses to discipline studies.

¹⁰ David P. Silcox (The Canada Council), "Introduction." *Canada 101*. unpaginated.

¹¹ The other artists chosen were: Marcel Barbeau, Claude Breeze, Jack Bush, Brian Fisher, Charles Gagnon, Yves Gaucher, Reg Holmes, Jacques Hurtubise, Roy Kiyooka, Gary Lee-Nova, Les Levine, Kenneth Lochhead, John Meredith, Guido Molinari, Michael Morris, Bodo Pfeifer, Michael Snow, N.E. Thing Co. (Ian Baxter, President), Claude Tousignant, Harold Town, and Joyce Wieland. Silcox points out that at age 59, Jack Bush was the eldest artist in the exhibition by fifteen years. Silcox, *Canada 101*, unpaginated.

¹² The exhibition catalogue was called *Statements: 18 Canadian Artists*. The show ran from November 16 to December 17, 1967.

¹³ The work is identified in *18 Canadian Artists as Cityscape—Right Centre Windows—Apr. 20, 1967*, but it is now known as *Cityscape: Right Windows*.

¹⁴ Although the catalogue uses quotes from Curnoe, it is not clear whether Curnoe himself chose the texts that accompany the illustrations or not. In acknowledgement to Curnoe's wide-ranging influences the format of the page on Curnoe mimicked one of the mainstays of popular culture, the comic book. The page is divided into frames, some with text and others with artificially coloured photographs. Curnoe speaks in a voice bubble in one frame, "...I don't understand the term 'form'; I never could understand it..." Greg Curnoe, *The Heart of London* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968) unpaginated.

¹⁵ The other artists were Robert Murray (organized by Brydon Smith) and Iain and Ingrid Baxter (N.E. Thing Co.) (organized by Pierre Théberge). Dennis Reid, "Some Things I Learned From Greg Curnoe," *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 115-116.

¹⁶ *Greg Curnoe: Canada*. Exhibition Catalogue for the X Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, September 1969 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969).

¹⁷ Reid and Teitelbaum, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 119-120. Reid acknowledges that although he and Curnoe were friends for many years, their relationship was essentially a professional one. Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 123.

¹⁸ Curnoe posed six questions addressing issues such as the influence of the (dominant) American culture on Canadians, the negative effects of urban renewal, and why Jack Chambers rented a certain studio space. The questions probe "the way identity relates to culture, culture to a sense of place." Reid, "Some Things I Learned," *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 119.

¹⁹ Reid, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 121.

²⁰ Paddy O'Brien, curator. Greg Curnoe essay, *Greg Curnoe: Some Lettered Works, 1961-1969* (London, Ontario: London Art Gallery, September 5-28, 1975).

²¹ The catalogue was a small-scale (4" x 7") 168 page trilingual publication (English, French, and Italian). It included black and white reproductions of the eight exhibited works, a selected bibliography (including writings by Greg Curnoe), and a list of Curnoe's previous exhibitions. There was also a panoramic photograph of Curnoe seated in his Weston Street studio.

²² Robert McKaskell, curator, *Making It New! (The Big Sixties Show)* (Windsor, Ontario: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1999).

²³ Walter Klepac, *Reading: Public Signs, Private Acts* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1991). Exhibition pamphlet.

²⁴ There was a small exhibition at the London Regional Art and Historical Museum in May 2001 entitled *Greg Curnoe-Serge Lemoyne: Two Nationalisms? Deux nationalisms?* Curated by Carl Johnson. This show compares the work of the two artists, and uses a semiotic and visual analysis of their works, indicating that re-examination of Curnoe's work can yield new interpretations.

²⁵ Greg Curnoe and Frank Davey, *Deeds/Abstracts* (London: Forest City Gallery, 1992).

²⁶ Doug Bale, "Artist's verbal self-portraits let language paint character." *The London Free Press*, 6 March 1992.

²⁷ James Patten and Michael C. Hannay, *The Heart of London Revisited* (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museum, 1993).

²⁸ Christopher Dewdney and Diana Nemiroff, *Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe 1936-1992*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995).

²⁹ On May 12th the Art Gallery of Ontario in association with the Ontario College of Art & Design hosted a one-day symposium on Greg Curnoe. The symposium, *We Are Not Greg Curnoe*, was organized by Robert Fones and Andy Patton and featured a number of different speakers who discussed Curnoe's life and work in three sessions. The first session, "Life & Art," consisted of the following panel participants: Jamelie Hassan (moderator), Murray Favro, Oliver Girling, Greg Hill, John Bentley Mays, and Michel Sanouillet. Preceding the panel discussion Lynda Curnoe and Terence Dick each discussed one of Curnoe's works. The second session, "Language," consisted of the following panel participants: John O'Brian (moderator), George Bowering, Victor Coleman, Janice Gurney, and Michael Snow. Preceding the panel discussion Walter Klepac and Sally McKay each discussed a work. The third session, "Regionalism & Internationalism," featured panel participants: Richard Hill (moderator), John Boyle, Gail Lord, Philip Monk, and Dot Tuer. Preceding the panel discussion Ron Benner and Luis Jacob discussed a work.

For the most part, the speakers and participants at the symposium presented material on Curnoe that conformed closely to established opinions on his art and life. Although there was a general consensus that there was more to his art than mere documentation, the word "metaphor" was studiously ignored. Interestingly, two of the speakers who presented during the "Language" session, George Bowering and Victor Coleman, chose to read (their own) poetry as a tribute to Curnoe (which can be considered a metaphorical representation of Curnoe).

³⁰ Lynda Curnoe, *My Brother Greg: A Memoir* (London: Ergo Productions, 2001), 113-115. When Curnoe's mother died in the autumn of 2000, the studio was dismantled and is now in boxes in the LRAHM basement. During a visit to London in May 2001, I talked with the present owner of 75 Langarth Street who told me that he was going to throw out the very old (and water-damaged) wood paneling from the room, but was stopped at the last minute by the intervention of the LRAHM.

³¹ The LRAHM has had *Souwesto* and *Connexions* transferred onto video tape from its original 16 mm format, and the videos are available to the general public.

³² Roger's Community TV, *Vagabonds and Visionaries: The London Story*. 1998.

³³ In a newspaper article in 1981, Noel Gallagher wrote: "Artist Greg Curnoe contends that art is life, life is art and no distinction should be made between the two." Noel Gallagher, "Londoners filming Curnoe documentary." *The London Free Press*, 14 January, 1981.

³⁴ Until his retirement earlier this year Curnoe's younger brother, Glen, was the librarian in charge of the London Room.

³⁵ The Internet also provided an interesting, if indiscriminate, amount of information on Curnoe. The search engine *Google* yielded 126 hits on Curnoe, ranging from information on the Nihilist Spasm Band to his

First Nations research (*Deeds/Abstracts & Deeds/Nations*), to the recent Art Gallery of Ontario exhibition). 15 March 2001.

³⁶ Barbara K. Stevenson, *The political and social subject matter in the work of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe*. M.A. Thesis (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1987).

³⁷ The Nihilist Spasm Band (of which Curnoe was the drummer) had a weekly gig at the York Hotel for many years.

³⁸ Wayne A. Johnston, *At the York* (London: Ergo Productions, 1990).

³⁹ George Bowering, *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (London: Coach House Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Bowering cites Harry Matthews, *The Orchard* (Flint, MI: Bamberger Books, 1998) as his model for *The Moustache*.

⁴¹ See note 30.

⁴² Withrow, *Canadian Painting*, 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁴ Withrow gives Curnoe's close friend and fellow artist Jack Chambers equal prominence in the development of London's artistic scene. *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁹ *Spring on the Ridgeway* is a work that features a large painted panel depicting the naked backview of his wife Sheila looking through a painted window at a replica of the view from her home in the Ridgeway. There is a small panel perpendicular to the main panel, which acts as a vague mirror to the torso of the figure. Both panels feature a thin border of text around their outer edge which chronicles random thoughts and words. The work also incorporated a real cloth sheer curtain (Barry Fair, the registrar at the London Regional Art and Historical Museums, speculated that this work was originally installed with a fan, although I could not find any other information to substantiate this claim.) *Spring on the Ridgeway* is in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario and was installed at the 2001 exhibition *Greg Curnoe, Life & Stuff* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in the section devoted to his friends and family. The 1982 catalogue that accompanied the National Gallery of Canada's retrospective of Curnoe, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*, provides a comprehensive description of this work on page 83.

⁵⁰ There is no mention at all of Curnoe in the other major Canadian art history survey text of the seventies, J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition. (Toronto: University Press, 1977). This is not because Curnoe was not a significant figure in Canadian art by this time, but because Harper's account of Canadian painting only extends as far as the 1950s, which precedes Curnoe's main period of artistic production. (The first edition of this book was published in 1966.)

⁵¹ Curnoe produced an unusual review of Dennis Reid's survey in *The Canadian Forum* magazine, using his distinctive Bulletin typewriter to create pages that looked like those that accompanied his work *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (to be discussed in chapter 3). Curnoe, Greg, "The Dilemma of Provincialism: A History of Canadian Painting," *The Canadian Forum* 54, no. 648 (February 1975): 30-32.

⁵² Reid acknowledges that the artists featured up to 1965 did not cease to create art after this date. He notes that at the date of publication (1973) Curnoe is still one of "the finest creative spirits working in the world today," and goes on to say that Curnoe (along with Michael Snow, Guido Molinari, Joyce Wieland, and Jack Bush), "deserve[s] our closest attention." Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), 305.

⁵³ Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 326-338.

⁵⁴ Despite being a good overall survey of Canadian painting, Reid's book includes neither footnotes nor a bibliography, omissions of sources which would have been helpful in my research.

⁵⁵ David Burnett and Marilyn Schiff, *Contemporary Canadian Art*. (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd. in cooperation with The Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983). Burnett and Schiff's book deals with sculpture and painting from 1940 to 1983, a period of just over forty years. In their introduction they state that they "have given emphasis, in the main, to the leading radical developments and to the artists who have brought these about" (page 7). They divide the book up into geographic regions and the artistic production that occurred in each separate part of the country. This approach allows them to deal with Curnoe as a "regionalist" artist.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁷ When the catalogue was published in 1988 the National Gallery of Canada owned 42 works by Curnoe. Some of them were large-scale projects like the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*, others were small sketches. The majority of the works were bought from the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto from the mid-sixties to the late seventies, a period when the National Gallery changed their policy of collecting single works by many artists, to many works by fewer artists. Boggs, Jean Sutherland, *The National Gallery of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971), 62. A search of the National Gallery of Canada catalogue on 3 July 2001 showed 58 items for Curnoe (some of them working drawings).

⁵⁸ In 1997 the National Gallery of Canada produced a CD Rom, *The Canadian Collection of the National Gallery*. The CD Rom featured "[t]hree centuries of art by over 2,000 artists," which consisted of sketchy biographical details, reproductions of most of the works in the collection, and basic identification information (date, size, medium, acquisition number). Curnoe is represented by reproductions of most of the works in the collection, although some works were not given copyright clearance. Besides showing some of the works in colour, the CD Rom did not provide any more information than the 1988 catalogue had.

⁵⁹ Joan Murray, *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999). *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century* is a survey of major artists and movements in the twentieth century. Unlike earlier art historical survey books like Barry Lord's *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art*, Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History*, or Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, Murray's book is not confined to the single medium of painting, but features sculpture and alternative artistic practices as well.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁶² Anne Newlands, *Canadian Art: From its Beginning to 2000* (Willowdale: Firefly Books, 2000). In her book Newlands attempts to provide a comprehensive survey of all aspects of Canadian art by featuring works in various media by 300 artists including First Nations and Inuit artists as well as artists of European descent. In the preface, Newlands states that she "was interested in capturing highlights of artistic production by our finest artists, from the past and the present and across our hugely varied geography." (page 13). Newlands presents the artists in alphabetical order (she says that she chose this format to avoid

hierarchies), and the resulting book functions as an illustrated dictionary of Canadian art rather than a chronological or thematic history. Most of the artists are represented by a single work, as is Curnoe (*Zeus 10-Speed* [1972] [AGO]).

⁶³ In 1970 Curnoe made a film entitled "Connexions" in which he filmed places and events in London, Ontario. A voice-over supplied the complex links between all the things depicted, and showed that in Curnoe's world, everything was connected. Greg Curnoe, *Connexions*.

⁶⁴ Olney, *Metaphors of Self*.

CHAPTER ONE

(Auto)Biography

...it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone...

—Marlow speaking in Joseph Conrad's, *Heart of Darkness*

I am the only embodiment of myself.

—Greg Curnoe, *Hart House Summer Programme*

The compilation of a biography is a selective process on the part of the author. It is impossible to chronicle every minute of an individual's life, and the facts that are selected for re-telling are usually incidents or occurrences that are felt to be significant in the development of the person's life. These selected highlights are neither necessarily impartial nor accurate; the telling of a life-story may be subtly altered depending on the person relating the history, and their purpose for writing the biography. Facts may be manipulated, enlarged, omitted, or falsified in order to substantiate the story being told, something that must be considered when reading a biography.

Choosing how to tell one's own life story is also highly selective. Autobiography is a process that undergoes constant revision as the self changes over time.¹ William Howarth refers to the autobiographical process as "the poetic act of continuing self-study."² In autobiography the author exerts significant control over how events are perceived, as it relies heavily upon memory, a faculty that is hard to corroborate. Memory plays an important role in the creation of identity; it has been called the "primary

foundation for the construction of self.”³ Memories are very selective however; they are fragmentary and non-linear recreations of past moments in the present, and they change as an individual’s life and circumstances progress.⁴

The boundary between biography and autobiography is not always clearly defined; it may become blurred when the subject plays an active role in the construction and retelling of his own story, as Greg Curnoe did. At first glance, Curnoe’s autobiographical works come as close as possible to the actual moment of occurrence of the incidents that he selected to represent his life, and are thus perceived as true. These incidents and episodes are not objective though; Curnoe selected incidents carefully to portray himself in a very particular way. Certain aspects of his life, such as important influences and precedents were highlighted, while other aspects such as the deliberate planning behind many of his works was hidden.⁵

In retrospect we look back upon a life and select those facts that support our arguments. We search for reasons and explanations when considering an artist’s work; precedents and influences must be found to prove that there was some kind of a linear development, or progression, throughout their career. The desire to find logical explanations for things leads us to fix upon similarities and patterns which we can then use to prove our point. If something is repeated many times it is not a random occurrence, and can be said to be part of a habit or style. It can then be used as a standard from which other things can be seen as either a progression or a regression. We are constantly evaluating things (for example the degree of success that Curnoe experienced during the 1960s), by comparison with other things (the downswing in his popularity in the late

1980s). The way that we evaluate success varies depending on our societal values; in a capitalist society money and critical acclaim become the determining factors of success.

By its very nature autobiography remains an incomplete chronicle—one that does not encompass the death of the subject. A biography, on the other hand, can, and often is, written after the death of the subject (indeed, the subject's demise often frees the biographer from considerable constraints). Facts and opinions that may have been refuted by the subject now manage to stand undisputed. It is therefore necessary that the reader be aware that this is not a definitive version of Greg Curnoe's biography, but rather one compiled from a variety of sources, to suit the purpose of this thesis.

Biographical information on Curnoe was culled from a variety of sources; material from his archives, journal and periodical articles, exhibition catalogues, and extensive newspaper coverage of his life, were examined in order to form an idea of how his story was both lived and created. Some of the facts presented, such as the details surrounding his birth and schooling are indisputable and verifiable, but other biographical elements are much more subjective. Certain aspects of Curnoe's life were brought to the attention of others by Curnoe, other aspects were repeated by critics and writers and became representative of Curnoe's persona. For the most part, the persona of Curnoe was established relatively early in his career; by the late 1960s a particular picture of him was commonly presented in the media. This persona would remain quite constant, although in the subsequent thirty years certain aspects would be highlighted depending on the direction that his work was taking, or what was happening in his life (for example: after Curnoe's death in a cycling accident in 1992, his bicycling works, and Curnoe's involvement with cycling became more significant to writers and critics). In order to

understand how this mythologizing process developed it is necessary to examine a number of established biographical facts. The following biographical material is divided into thematic categories, rather than following a strict chronology. To facilitate the placement of key events in Curnoe's life, a conventional chronology has been appended to this thesis following the conclusion (see page 130).

Gregory Richard Curnoe was born to Nellie Porter and Gordon Curnoe on November 19, 1936 in the Victoria Hospital in London, Ontario. He attended London South Collegiate from 1950 to 1954, and Beal Technical and Commercial School from 1954 to 1956.⁶ At Beal Tech, Curnoe studied art under Herb Ariss, John Henly, and Mackie Cryderman, who introduced him to the works of the Cubists, the Dada Movement, and the Surrealists.⁷ His interest in art was nurtured during his years at Beal Tech, leading Curnoe to establish his first studio in the basement of his parents' home at 75 Langarth Street.⁸ Although Curnoe would ultimately pursue a full-time career as a "fine" artist, he briefly worked in commercial art, gaining practical experience at the silkscreen company Stewart Bender Screen Printing Company in 1956.⁹

In 1956 Curnoe left London to pursue a formal art education, attending the Doon School of Art where he studied with Carl Schaeffer and Alex Miller, and met A.Y. Jackson.¹⁰ From 1957 until June 1960 Curnoe attended the Ontario College of Art, studying under Jock Macdonald, John Alfsen, and Fred Hagan.¹¹ Curnoe did not graduate from the Ontario College of Art (a fact that became celebrated by Curnoe, writers and critics). Nor did he retain any fond memories of the institution—indeed, field sketching with Larry Russell seems to be Curnoe's sole favourable recollection of his years at the college.¹² Of his experiences at Doon and the Ontario College of Art, Curnoe said: "In

both cases this was my first extended exposure to Fine Art in its narrowest sense, people who believed in a culture that had no connection with popular culture. I did not get along at these schools.”¹³

During his years in Toronto, Curnoe became friends with the artist Graham Coughtry,¹⁴ and Michel Sanouillet, a French literature teacher at the University of Toronto and an important expert on the Dada movement.¹⁵ Generally dissatisfied with his exposure to the Toronto art world, Curnoe returned to London after less than three years. He lived in London for the rest of his life, although he often visited friends in Toronto and regularly exhibited at the Isaacs Gallery.¹⁶

Curnoe sustained a lifelong interest in the written and printed word. From childhood he was fascinated by comic books, and the way that they relied equally on words and images to communicate. He began incorporating both into his art from an early age, something that was noticed and consistently remarked upon by writers and critics. Ross Woodman, in an exhibition pamphlet for the *Greg Curnoe* exhibition at the 20/20 Gallery in London, Ontario (February 14-March 5, 1967), gave considerable prominence to the influence that cartooning and comics had on Curnoe’s art.¹⁷ His childhood interest in comics was also highlighted by Curnoe himself;¹⁸ in a 1975 exhibition catalogue Curnoe stated “my whole background in drawing comes out of comic books and children’s books with captions under the pictures. To draw or paint an object or place without words was too much of a handicap.”¹⁹ Although the link between Curnoe’s work and comic books was one that was commonly acknowledged by art writers, some occasionally looked beyond this banal media for deeper meaning (while

denying that this deeper meaning was a metaphorical one). In an article, "Pop Goes the Easel," in the December 1964 *Saturday Night* magazine, Harry Malcolmson stated:

There is something strikingly literary about Curnoe's work. It's frequently witty, not in a painterly way, but in a cartoon manner. He puts words in and around his work, not just for their looks but for their sound. There is frequently a sense of story, something of a snapshot quality about his images. In common with other Pop artists, he uses the comic strip balloon in order to signify what his characters are saying, but unlike other Pop artists, his characters seem to be talking to one another and the scene is almost continuous.²⁰

Curnoe actively promoted links between other childhood interests and his mature art. In a 1990 article, *Lettered Works and Equipment from 1946*, Curnoe traced his strategy of rubber-stamping text back to 1946 when he was given a rubber stamp set for Christmas by his parents. He noted that the same year he and his young cousin Gary Bryant experimented with a "stamped metal, hand cranked, drum printing press."²¹ Dennis Reid, in an exhibition catalogue from 1969 also traced Curnoe's use of stamping back to his childhood when he wrote that Curnoe's rubber stamped works "have a directness which he has been aware of ever since, as a child, he and his cousin published a newspaper made with their toy rubber stamp set."²² Over the years Curnoe accumulated many more sets of rubber stamps, some he bought himself, others were gifts from friends, still others he made himself.²³ In an interview with the *London Weekly* in July 1968, Curnoe was asked about his use of stamped words in his art. He said "I've been using texts in my paintings for years, for six or seven years. It was an idea I thought I would use. I'm doing that now but it won't be part of my painting permanently."²⁴ History would prove him wrong; stamped works, whether he intended them to or not, came to

define a large portion of Greg Curnoe's art. As an adult Curnoe continued to make little distinction between writing and other forms of art.

As well as incorporating the written word in his art, Curnoe was interested in writing for literary publications, and was extremely committed to exploring and promoting poetry and writing in a local context. In 1961 he co-founded and edited *Region* magazine, a local periodical that was published until 1967.²⁵ From 1966 to 1970 he contributed articles to *20 Cents Magazine*,²⁶ and during the 1960s he also wrote articles for journals such as *Regional Essays*, and the literary and poetry magazine *Alphabet* (founded and published by his close friend and playwright James Reaney).

The Greg Curnoe archive has been housed since his death in the E.P. Taylor Library at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.²⁷ Through the examination of this archive, and by studying other sources of information such as film footage of and by Curnoe, audio tapes featuring him, and the large number of periodical articles and newspaper items that chronicled his life and artistic development, it is possible to form a picture of Curnoe that enlarges upon that presented in existing biographies and autobiographical fragments. By examining Curnoe's biography and autobiography through the framework of several theorists, it is possible to see how his persona was created.

Curnoe's public identity was constructed by himself, and by those who knew him and wrote about him. In his book *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor discusses the development of the modern sense of identity,²⁸ and points out how our notion of dignity is intertwined with self-fulfillment, which is, to a large extent, conditional upon our need for respect. Taylor asserts that "there is a peculiarly modern sense of what respect

involves, which gives a salient place to freedom and self-control, places a high priority on avoiding suffering, and sees productive activity and family life as central to our well-being."²⁹ The modern world views artistic production as an "eminently worthwhile"³⁰ way to spend a life and self-fulfillment is realized through an individual's ability to engage in various forms of artistic articulation or expression. The path to happiness also lies in following one's true purpose in life, a purpose that is often traced back to childhood desires and interests.³¹ Curnoe presented himself, and was presented, as an artist who showed an early, innate talent, and who achieved personal fulfillment by following his true path as an artist. It was also through remaining true to his nature, that he gained the respect of his peers.

Curnoe believed in the validity of all forms of artistic production. This commitment to "democratic" art was traced back to his childhood interest in media that were not traditionally considered "high art"—things like comic book art and graphic arts. Charles Taylor contends that one of the most pronounced developments of the modern world was a growing interest in universal equality and the common good, which manifested itself in a move towards democracy (a democracy that increasingly came to include many aspects of human existence beyond the physical). Curnoe was certainly influenced by ideas such as this—his commitment to (and acceptance of) varied art forms, and his generous support of his fellow artists, reflect his desire to be a participant in a co-operative, somewhat idealistic, new art movement.³²

Combined with the move towards "universal benevolence"³³ in the modern period was the development of a second moral concept that Taylor calls "the significance of ordinary life."³⁴ Curnoe, while he probably was not aware of Taylor's work,

wholeheartedly agreed with the value of ordinary life—indeed, he felt that he could only make a worthwhile contribution if he used quotidian experience as the sole basis for his art.³⁵

Charles Taylor discusses another idea that developed during the modern era—the concept of “the free, self-determining subject,”³⁶ who was able to make autonomous choices regarding his or her life and work. In order for society to maintain its integrity it was necessary that all individuals be allowed the freedom “to express and develop their own opinions, to define their own life conceptions, to draw up their own life-plans.”³⁷ Curnoe’s success in combining these concepts in his life and work—a commitment to his fellow artists, a strong belief in the democratization of art, and a desire to follow his true path—made him a truly modern man. His ideas and beliefs came to define him as strongly as his art did: Curnoe became known and admired for his outspoken opinions.

A large portion of the biographical information on Greg Curnoe is anecdotal. Seemingly trivial incidents from his life gained unprecedented importance, while other, perhaps more conventional facts were consigned to obscurity. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz in *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, discuss the use of anecdote to present personalities. They state that “[a]necdotes have ... been repeatedly used as sources in the writing of history.” Anecdotes are important because they “occasionally convey something significant about their hero, and very often provide a deeper insight into his personality than other sources.”³⁸ Curnoe himself had an appreciation for anecdote and a fascination with the minutiae of his everyday life, something that is evident in the contents of his archive.³⁹

The sheer volume of written material generated (and kept) by Curnoe is impressive. He was a man who listed things, and a man who collected huge amounts of written material in what, at first glance, appeared to be an indiscriminate manner. It is possible, however, to view the seemingly chaotic compilation of facts as a sign of Curnoe's desire to control and understand his own life. Curnoe obsessively compiled lists of the names of his friends, of artists whose work he admired, of his favourite musicians and their recordings, of his soft drink bottle collection, of the colours of his various tubes of paint, and on and on. These lists were scribbled on whatever was handy—napkins, scraps of paper, old school notebooks were all pressed into use for his lists. Curnoe was also a chronicler of the minute details of his personal life. An avid amateur cyclist and member of the London Centennial Wheelers bicycle club, for many years Curnoe kept journals of his cycling progress, complete with details of wind speed, temperature, precipitation and his physical condition (he even documented the state of his bowels).⁴⁰ Holidays and business journeys were also recorded in journal-type jottings which Curnoe often documented at their moment of occurrence.⁴¹

Curnoe used various diaristic strategies to explore and expand artistic boundaries, both through the journal-writing process, and by according the actual journal pages the status of art works. Over the course of several years Curnoe kept a radio journal, which consisted of observations that he made while listening to the radio. In 1969 he began typing these journal entries into a teleprinter linked to a mainframe computer at the University of Western Ontario. The entries were subsequently processed and he received printouts from them,⁴² a project which became known as the "Computer Journal."⁴³ Some of the data from his lists and journal entries was integrated into his art constructions and

paintings (for example: *List of Names of Boys I Grew Up With* (Art Edwards) [1962]), but other journal pages, essentially unaltered, were exhibited in galleries, becoming works of art in their own right.

Felicity A. Nussbaum, in an article entitled "Toward Conceptualizing Diary," discusses the nature of diary keeping, ascribing it mostly to "women and dissenters"⁴⁴ who kept diaries as a self-reflexive means of private expression rather than a chronicle of their everyday, public lives.⁴⁵ Journal-keeping came naturally to Curnoe, who portrayed himself as a dissenter, a type of artist-outsider in a conformist world.⁴⁶ Nussbaum describes a diary as "a daily record of remembered days (that) may offer proof of the discontinuous self."⁴⁷ She goes on to state: "The diary may also subversively suggest that these moments of tedium and monotony, of repetition and the mundane, signify only themselves."⁴⁸ Curnoe felt very strongly that the mundane occurrences in his life were worthy of re-presentation, as a method of self-expression, and as an artistic statement. There may be another reason for Curnoe's decision to incorporate his journals into his art. Nussbaum comments on the incontrovertible nature of diaries, saying "[w]e can have no reviews of diaries, no forcing them through the dominant ideologies; perhaps they are the site of tensions between historical truth which must, for public consumption, be fitted into poetic truths."⁴⁹ Perhaps Curnoe also used journals as the basis for a large part of his art as a means of circumventing traditional art criticism.⁵⁰

Most journals are seen as private accounts of an individual's life that only become public after the death of the writer. Interestingly, Curnoe chose to "publish" his private writings by incorporating portions of it into his art. The meaning of this is unclear; was Curnoe uninhibited about airing his most personal thoughts and feelings, or was he self-

consciously using the journal trope to try to control how he was viewed while he was still alive?

The material that Greg Curnoe listed and wrote about in his journals derives from his personal life experiences and is presented from a first-hand point-of-view. The resulting works are assumed to present the “truth” about his life. Because enough of the information seems probable and verifiable, we are more likely to believe that it is *all* true. The truthful appearance obscures the possibility that the content might, in fact, be a construction like his art.

Curnoe’s interests were not limited to the arts—he was also interested in parodying politics and culture (something that is highlighted by writers and critics).⁵¹ His typical 1960s desire to “reject much of established culture”⁵² may have been one of the factors that led him to co-found the Nihilist Party of London, a party with no single leader, that consisted mostly of annual picnics of Curnoe’s friends and their families.⁵³ Curnoe was the drummer for the Nihilist Spasm Band, a group of friends who played unstructured music on homemade instruments.⁵⁴ The band had a weekly Monday night gig at the York Hotel,⁵⁵ a local London beer-hall, where they became a local legend.⁵⁶

Curnoe was also active in local grass-roots artists’ groups. He was a co-founder of several artists’ co-ops: The Garrett Gallery, Toronto (1957-59), Region Gallery, London (1961-63), the 20/20 Gallery, London (1966-70), and the still operational Forest City Art Gallery, London (founded December 1973).⁵⁷ An active campaigner for the rights of artists, Curnoe gained attention in the press as early as 1965 for his belief that artists should be paid an exhibition fee when their works were included in public exhibitions,⁵⁸ and in 1967 Curnoe was involved in the formation of the important Canadian Artists’

Representation Group (CAR) with Jack Chambers and Tony Urquhart.⁵⁹ Curnoe was an active member of CAR, and in 1977 he was awarded a CAROT award for his services to the art world.⁶⁰

Despite his political activism, Curnoe prided himself on being an “ordinary guy”; in a 1968 interview with *The London Weekly* he listed lacrosse, racing cars, hockey, and golf as some other areas of interest.⁶¹ The interviewer asked Curnoe if these interests made him “the same as every average Canadian male.”⁶² Curnoe agreed, adding though that these interests were not mere leisure pursuits, indeed he said he had no leisure time—everything that he did was part of his work.⁶³ (Comments like these helped let the public know that Curnoe was living his life *as art*, which I will discuss in chapter 2). Curnoe’s varied interests were often remarked upon in reviews of his work, perhaps in order to make his work appear accessible to a wider range of viewers. One fact that was universally agreed upon was the importance of Curnoe’s immediate environment to his art practice.

Charles Taylor discusses the significance of spatial orientation in the creation of identity. He states: “To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.”⁶⁴ Taylor believes that in order for a person to truly know their identity they must understand what he calls their “fundamental orientation,”⁶⁵ from which they form commitments (for example a regionalist and a nihilist) and identifications (a Canadian and a Londoner).⁶⁶ In Greg Curnoe’s case his fundamental orientation, and hence a large part of his identity, was centred upon his geographic location. (This will be discussed in more depth in the next

chapter.)

Greg Curnoe was a vocal advocate of regionalism, the promotion of which he considered essential in preserving Canadian cultural diversity. He believed that all the inspiration and subject matter that one needed could be found in one's immediate surroundings. Part of this ideology may be seen in the context of the cultural climate of the late sixties. There was an anti-American backlash against the New York art scene, the dominance of which had soured many Canadian artists.⁶⁷ The influx of international art journals into Canada made it seem as if the entire world could easily become homogenized, something that greatly disturbed Curnoe.⁶⁸ In reaction to these perceived threats, Curnoe became rampantly anti-American,⁶⁹ publishing the *Continental Refusal/Refus Continental* with John Boyle in 1970.⁷⁰ Throughout Curnoe's life, America and its culture remained one of the things against which he defined himself and his art.⁷¹

As a self-declared regionalist who was anxious to preserve his local culture, Curnoe devoted a large amount of time to the recovery of what he considered to be threatened, or lost, aspects of regional culture in Southern Ontario. In 1972, in the small town of St-Eleuthère Kamouraska, Quebec, Curnoe and Pierre Théberge co-founded the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada. Curnoe and Théberge wrote:

...The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada aims at documenting what we feel to be the innate sensibility of people in Canada and spreading knowledge about it. The Association is not interested in integrating these manifestations of innate sensibility into any kind of system of "higher" cultural values. We only want to point out the importance of these manifestations for all people in Canada and thus blur the artificial border between the "fine" arts and culture.⁷²

Curnoe (and to a lesser extent Théberge) traveled throughout Canada making audio tapes of interviews and informal gatherings with artists, craftspeople, and others that they felt were making or contributing something worthwhile to local (and by assumption, genuine Canadian) culture, but whose work was unacknowledged or endangered. Curnoe and Théberge also created a visual archive that consisted of videotapes and slides of the work of many of these artists.⁷³ From December 6th 1974 to January 2nd, 1975 Curnoe, Théberge, and fellow co-president, psychologist Peter Denny, organized an exhibition at the Art Gallery of the London Public Library showcasing a "collection of slides and explanatory videotapes documenting Canadian objects and activities of genuine cultural significance."⁷⁴

This gathering of odd facts and personalities was exactly the sort of undertaking that Curnoe liked. His insatiable curiosity gave him limitless patience with projects that may have struck others as fruitless. For example: in August 1968, Curnoe, Jean-Paul Morisset, Ron Martin and Royden Rabinovich visited the house of a St. Thomas, Ontario man named Dan Patterson who had recently passed away.⁷⁵ Patterson had been an eccentric inventor and artist who made large constructions with found objects, in particular, perpetual motion machines.⁷⁶ Curnoe recorded the group's attempts to measure and document an enormous work that Patterson had made from hoarded Carnation milk cans. Curnoe was fascinated when Dan Patterson's niece said that it took him three days to finish a can of milk. Impressed by Patterson's persistence, Curnoe mused on the length of time and dedication that it must have taken to amass the raw materials for a sculptural creation that measured 90' by 126'.⁷⁷

The preservation of memories became increasingly important to Curnoe as he aged; there are a number of audio tapes and writings among his archives that show his desire to commit facts about the people and institutions of his region to audio tape and paper so that they would become known and remembered.⁷⁸

Inspired by the diversity of artistic production that he saw in and around London, Greg Curnoe participated in many different artistic practices: he was a poet, an artist, a filmmaker, a writer, a builder of constructions, an inventor, and a musician (albeit a drummer in a band that featured home-made instruments). Throughout his career Curnoe remained firmly committed to the idea of generalization. A member of a large group of creative individuals, Curnoe prided himself on being open-minded to many experiences. In a taped discussion with Gerry Gilbert in 1969, Curnoe talked about his feelings regarding elitism, saying: "If you're a specialist, an elitist, you only have a few peers."⁷⁹ By participating in many different artistic practices, Curnoe's sphere of contemporaries was broad. His multidisciplinary approach to art also stood in opposition to Modernist ideas of a pure art form. In the exhibition catalogue for the National Gallery of Canada exhibition *The Heart of London*, (1968), Curnoe claimed: "...I don't understand the term 'form'; I never could understand it..."⁸⁰ Vocally opposed to the concept of "high art," Curnoe often claimed that what he made was not art at all. This rather ambiguous claim seems to have been broadly interpreted, and led to his work being described interchangeably as "anti-art" or "non-art" by writers and critics.⁸¹

Greg Curnoe nevertheless actively pursued and had achieved considerable success, and not a little notoriety as an "artist," over the years. In 1961 (relatively early in his career) Curnoe organized an event at the London Art Gallery called "Celebration," an

event that subsequently became known as Canada's first 'happening'.⁸² The same year Curnoe received an honourable mention at the Winnipeg Annual Show, and in 1965 was selected for the Canadian Biennial exhibition.⁸³

At the same time that Curnoe was protesting that his work was not art, he was entering into negotiations with the National Gallery of Canada to sell them one of his works for their collection.⁸⁴ It was this request that led to a journey by Pierre Théberge to London, Ontario in 1966, a journey that Théberge described as a 'pilgrimage'.⁸⁵ Two years later, in 1968 Curnoe was one of the medallists in the *Canadian Artists 68* exhibition in Toronto where he met the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton who was on the jury.⁸⁶ For many years the two men maintained a correspondence that references their shared artistic influences.⁸⁷ The fortuitous meeting, and subsequent friendship, with an internationally renowned artist added to Curnoe's own status in the art world.

Some of Curnoe's works became notorious for their content, and this notoriety enhanced his fame. In 1967 Curnoe was the centre of controversy when he was commissioned to create a mural for Dorval Airport—*Hommage to the R100*. The work was briefly installed at the airport but rapidly removed when it was discovered that Curnoe had included anti-American references in the work that were interpreted as criticism of the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War.⁸⁸ Critics of the work did not find fault with Curnoe's art, rather in its textual content. Emile D'Aoust, the director of the Department of Transport's architecture and construction department, felt that the "[W]ording of the objectionable panels was in bad taste and not favourable to international relations (he said). There was no objection to [the] quality of the art, just its theme."⁸⁹ Curnoe refused to alter the work, and in newspaper interviews declined to

elaborate on its meaning, saying that the work was too “complex” to be simplified by any explanation that he could give it.⁹⁰ The subsequent newspaper coverage that continued for several months raised public awareness of Curnoe’s art, and he gained a reputation as one of Canada’s up and coming young artists. In 1968, *24 Hourly Notes*, was excluded from the *Canada 101* exhibition in Edinburgh, Scotland due to Curnoe’s inclusion of four-letter words in several of the panels.⁹¹ Again, there were a number of newspaper articles that reported on the controversy.⁹²

During the sixties Curnoe’s work also began to be collected by public art galleries. In 1963 the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina bought the painting *Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street* (1961).⁹³ In 1964, the Vancouver Art Gallery bought a work entitled *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat* (1963).⁹⁴ Two years later, in the fall of 1966, the National Gallery of Canada bought *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, and the London Public Library and Art Museum bought *Feeding Percy* (1965). Curnoe expressed bitterness over the fact that the London museum waited to buy his work until another public gallery had done so. In an article in the *London Free Press* he was quoted:

It’s very nice the London gallery is taking one of my paintings. It would have been nicer, though, if it hadn’t waited until the National Gallery bought one and thought it was ‘safe’ to get one. It would have been a real help three years ago. I really needed it then. It was the Regina gallery—and Regina isn’t any bigger than London—that was willing to take a chance on me, not the gallery in my own home town.⁹⁵

Despite his growing fame, Curnoe chose to remain in London which became a vibrant centre for the arts in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁶ Curnoe was part of what Joan Murray describes as a “talented group of idiosyncratic artists,”⁹⁷ a group that included Jack

Chambers, John Boyle, Paterson Ewen, Murray Favro, Tony Urquhart, the Rabinovich brothers and others. Inspired by the mutual support of his friends, and free from the constraints of Toronto's more commodified art scene, Curnoe was able to develop freely in London. After his return from Toronto he set up his second studio at 432 Richmond Street in July 1960, followed by a third at 202 King Street in the spring of 1963.⁹⁸ His studios rapidly became the focal point for informal gatherings of London's artistic community.⁹⁹

Two of the most important personal influences on Curnoe were his close friends Jack Chambers, a visual artist and filmmaker, and James Reaney, a professor at the University of Western Ontario and a noted playwright. Both Chambers and Reaney were committed to exploring art through their local setting, a commitment that they shared with Greg Curnoe.

Jack Chambers, who had lived and studied in Spain for a number of years, returned to London in the early 1960s and began exploring themes of "everyday life and death"¹⁰⁰ within a local context. Chambers' preoccupation with the local accorded with Curnoe's commitment to regionalism; both artists shared a pride in the artistic achievements of their city. Chambers, initially a painter, became more and more interested in film making as his career progressed. Some of his paintings show cinematic concerns and feature an interest in a "simultaneous presentation of a sequence of actions."¹⁰¹ Curnoe, through the influence of Chambers, also became interested in film making—the technique of conflating fragmentary moments into a single work¹⁰² may be seen in Curnoe's painting *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (to be discussed in chapter 3).

Jack Chambers was an intellectual artist who was extremely interested in exploring philosophical theory—in particular theories that dealt with perception. In October 1969 he published his “personal manifesto and description of his artistic credo” entitled “Perceptual Realism” in *artscanada* (1969 was also the year that Chambers was diagnosed with leukemia).¹⁰³ Although Curnoe’s works do not show an obvious theoretical influence, and he denied their theoretical content, he was an avid reader who was undoubtedly aware of Chambers’ theoretical interests and writings.

A second important influence on Curnoe was the multidisciplinary playwright, English literature teacher, and filmmaker James Reaney, who moved to London, Ontario in 1960 to teach at the University of Western Ontario. Shortly after his move Reaney founded the literary magazine *Alphabet*, which he edited for its ten-year life span. Like Curnoe, Reaney was extremely interested in the exploration of regional culture; among his many projects he taught a course in Ontario literature and culture at the University of Western Ontario.¹⁰⁴ He felt very strongly that a regional art scene should be able to hold its own against larger artistic centers. In an interview with Wayne Johnston, Reaney stated: “Why should London always kowtow to Toronto or New York or Paris?”¹⁰⁵

Reaney, like Curnoe, was a compiler of lists; in his biography, his son James S. Reaney states that his father was able to create a distinctively Canadian theatre through “collecting a list of Canadian *things*.”¹⁰⁶ James S. Reaney believed that it was through the interaction of listing, theatre, and games engaged in by people like his father and Greg Curnoe that London’s “local regional culture achieve[d] an unprecedented importance.”¹⁰⁷

Greg Curnoe formed close personal relationships with both Jack Chambers and James Reaney—the three men were regular patrons of the York Hotel in the sixties.¹⁰⁸ The men also worked together occasionally; Curnoe and Chambers collaborated on film projects,¹⁰⁹ and James Reaney wrote about Curnoe's art as well as working with him in theatrical projects.¹¹⁰ In 1963 Greg Curnoe made marionettes and sets for Reaney's production of *Little Red Riding Hood*, a production that Jack Chambers documented on film.¹¹¹ In 1964, Reaney published Curnoe's *The Coke Book in Alphabet*, an entertaining, on-the-job account of his employment as a Coca-Cola delivery man.¹¹²

Curnoe's commitment to regionalism was nurtured in his local environment and validated by the example of his friends and colleagues. Dennis Reid, in *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, states that, "Curnoe [...] like [his good friend Jack] Chambers, was convinced that art had to be firmly grounded in life experience."¹¹³ In his familiar setting Curnoe incorporated a wide variety of different influences into his art, but his subject matter became quite individual.

Pierre Théberge understood and highlighted the personal nature of Greg Curnoe's work. In the exhibition catalogue for the 1976 Venice Biennale Exhibition he wrote:

All of Greg Curnoe's work is autobiographical. He has deliberately chosen to limit his field of activity to his region—London, Ontario—and his themes are generally drawn from this source. For Greg Curnoe, the only possible culture is regional, and the only genuine form of art springs from daily experience. His painting is spontaneous, without a system, and presents whatever holds his passing attention for one reason or another. Greg Curnoe considers himself an artisan, a *bricoleur*, a completely subjective observer of reality. Only one principle motivates him: the pleasure he finds in doing what he does. Greg Curnoe wants his art to be an integral part of his life, and to reflect as much as possible all that interests him.¹¹⁴

Curnoe's family and region provided much of the inspiration for his art. In 1965 he married Sheila Thompson with whom he had three children (Owen, Galen, and Zöe). In 1968 they bought an old factory building at 38 Weston Street in the south end of London (with money earned from his ill-fated *Dorval Mural*).¹¹⁵ He and Sheila converted the front part of the building (which faced onto Weston Street) into living quarters, and the back (which faced out over the Thames River to the Victoria Hospital) into his studio. The hospital had a very personal connection to Curnoe; he and his brother, all three of his children, and Jack Chambers were all born there. (It was also the hospital where Chambers died from leukemia in 1978 and Curnoe's father died in 1985.) In a way, the hospital's constant presence was a physical embodiment of the things that were important to Curnoe—it became indexical of who and what he was. It also became the subject of a number of his works, functioning as a focus around which Curnoe assembled memories to form a visual and written narrative of his life.¹¹⁶

Curnoe was an artist who strove to articulate his identity through visual forms of expression that celebrated his ordinary life. This articulation was not confined to art alone, Curnoe felt that his entire life was lived as an artistic statement. The overall meaning that his life exceeded the sum of its individual components—in effect it became a type of *gestalt*. Seen in this manner his search for identity through his art may be viewed as metaphorical. In the following chapters I will discuss metaphor and identity, and how Curnoe's life may be viewed as a series of metaphors that are arranged under a broadly encompassing one: "My life is art."

ENDNOTES

¹ William Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 105.

² Ibid.

³ Mark Freeman, "Self as Narrative," *The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 20. Quoting William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950).

⁴ Freeman, "Self as Narrative," 21.

⁵ For further discussion of hiding and highlighting, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 10-13.

⁶ Pierre Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe XXXVII Biennale di Venezia 1976* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 57.

⁷ Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*. 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 312-313.

⁸ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 57.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. Judith Rodger, "Chronology." In *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, eds. Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 141.

¹¹ Greg Curnoe, Artist's statement. In *Statements: 18 Canadian Artists* (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1967), 40-41.

¹² Ross Woodman, *Greg Curnoe*. Essay for *Greg Curnoe's Series* Exhibition (London, Ont.: 20/20 Gallery, February 1967), 1.

¹³ Greg Curnoe. Quoted in Dennis Reid, *Greg Curnoe: Canada. X Bienal São Paulo* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), 65.

¹⁴ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 58.

¹⁵ In December 1961, Curnoe participated in the "Neo-Dada" exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery, where he exhibited a work entitled *Drawer Full of Stuff* (Autumn 1961), an actual wooden drawer filled with 32 seemingly random objects that he ordered and labeled. Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 314. Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 66-67.

Michel Sanouillet presented a short tribute to Greg Curnoe at the Art Gallery of Ontario/Ontario College of Art symposium on Curnoe (May 12, 2001). Sanouillet discussed the affinities between Curnoe and the famous Dada artist Marcel Duchamp, both of whom Sanouillet knew. Sanouillet made an interesting comment regarding Curnoe's works, calling them a "transubstantiation of reality." Michel Sanouillet, untitled transcript of presentation. *We Are Not Greg Curnoe*. Symposium held at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto) in association with the Ontario College of Art and Design. Organized by Robert Fones and Andy Patton in conjunction with the exhibition *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*. 12 May, 2001.

¹⁶ The Isaacs Gallery represented Curnoe from February 1966 until December 1978 when Curnoe ended the association because of his dissatisfaction "with the dealer system in general." Greg Curnoe letter to Avrom Isaacs. Undated. Greg Curnoe Fonds. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. (To be referred to as the Greg Curnoe Fonds [AGO].) Quoted in Rodger, "Chronology," 174.

¹⁷ Woodman, *Curnoe*, 1-3. The important influence that cartooning and comics had on Curnoe's art is one of the aspects that is universally acknowledged by writers and critics.

¹⁸ A desire to seek precedents for Curnoe's art in his childhood is a constant theme with his biographers. Kris and Kurz discuss the motif of the child prodigy as part of the heroization process of the artist. "The Heroization of the Artist in Biography." *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 13-38.

¹⁹ Greg Curnoe, *Some Lettered Works by Greg Curnoe 1961-1969* (London: London Art Gallery, September 1975), 1.

²⁰ Harry Malcolmson, "Pop Goes the Easel," *Saturday Night* (December 1964), 44.

²¹ Greg Curnoe, *Lettered Works and Equipment from 1946*. Unpublished manuscript. (1990 Writings, Greg Curnoe Fonds, AGO), 1.

²² Reid, *Greg Curnoe*, 11.

²³ Curnoe, *Lettered Works*, 1-6.

²⁴ "The Weekly Interview: Greg Curnoe, Part II," *London Weekly*, July 23, 1968, 2.

²⁵ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 58.

The archives of the London Room at the London Public Library has a complete set of *Region* magazine. It was devoted to poetry, short essays, and other written material, and was published sporadically between 1961 and 1967. Early indications of Curnoe's interest in listing the mundane moments of his life can be found in select issues of the magazine. *Region* 1 (Spring 1961) features a poem that details smells, sounds, and thoughts. *Region* 8 (Spring 1967) had a list of items in his studio entitled "Notes on the North Wall."

²⁶ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 127.

²⁷ The archive and its contents were referred to in the literature review in the introduction. As was noted, the retrospective exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (March-June 2001) celebrated the finalization of the donation of the Greg Curnoe archive along with a large number of his works to the gallery.

²⁸ Charles Taylor defines the modern world as the period following the Enlightenment to the present. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² One of Curnoe's affiliations was with the Canadian Artists' Representation Group (CAR), to be discussed later (see notes 58-60).

³³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 394-395.

³⁴ Ibid..

³⁵ In the Jack Chambers' film *R 34* Curnoe made the following claims regarding his art: "I deal to quite an extent with actual things...What communicates with me is experience." Jack Chambers, *R 34* (16 mm) (1967).

³⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 394-395.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Kris and Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic*, 11.

³⁹ Refer to note 6, introduction.

⁴⁰ Greg Curnoe Fonds (AGO). Box 1: Notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks.

⁴¹ In one of his journals from a holiday in 1969 Curnoe wrote: "I am beside a small vegetable garden—with rows of peas, beans etc. The onions are going to seed. It is about 15' x 20' and surrounded by a [?] fence and chicken wire. Hydro pole number 7348 yellow plastic numbers. A sparrow, a robin, and a cow pissing." This sort of random documentation was typical of a portion of his journal keeping process. The bicycle journals on the other hand, are much more factual—documenting only those things relevant to his sport. Greg Curnoe Fonds (AGO).

⁴² Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982), 99.

⁴³ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 60.

⁴⁴ Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Toward Conceptualizing Diary." In *Studies in Autobiography*, edited by James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Perhaps in an attempt at exoticism Curnoe referred to himself in letters to friends from the late 1950s as "Gregor" rather than Gregory or Greg Curnoe. It may also signal a desire to be associated with left wing worker politics (by adopting the Russian version of his name).

⁴⁷ Nussbaum, "Conceptualizing Diary," 134.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁰ Diana Nemiroff mentions the rise in popularity of diaries in the 18th century. Diana Nemiroff, "This is Great Art Because it Wasn't Made by an American," *Vanguard* 10, no. 8 (October 1981): 29.

⁵¹ Barbara K. Stevenson's master's thesis, "The political and social subject matter in the work of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (Carleton University, 1987), provides a comprehensive account of the political (especially Nihilistic) content in Curnoe's work.

⁵² Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 314.

⁵³ Curnoe founded the Nihilist Party of London, Ont. in September 1963. Rodger. "Chronology," 149.

⁵⁴ The other members of the band were: John Boyle, William Exley, Murray Favro, Archie Leitch, Hugh McIntyre and Art Pratten. Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 131. The instruments that they played ranged from a conventional drum-kit to home-made kazoo instruments to a saucepan and marbles. The band continues to play and has achieved a level of success in esoteric music circles. They are especially popular in Japan. Robert Fulford, "All for Nothing: Documentary Looks at the Long Rise to Nowhere of the Nihilist Spasm Band." *National Post* (Toronto), 12 September 2000.

⁵⁵ Leonore Crawford, "Music in the Air: The Spasms. Unpredictability Hallmark of London's Nihilist Group on Homemade Instruments." *The London Free Press*, Saturday, February 3, 1968, 35.

⁵⁶ Pierre Théberge, "London Recaptured: For Greg Curnoe (1936-1992)." *Canadian Literature*, no. 152/153 (Spring/Summer 1997), 160.

⁵⁷ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 127/128.

⁵⁸ Leonore Crawford, "Young Contemporaries' Jury Discusses Exhibit's Future." *The London Free Press*, 9 January 1965.

⁵⁹ Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 320. Curnoe became one of the first members of CAR in the fall of 1967. Rodgers, "Chronology," 156.

⁶⁰ "CAROT award to Greenwood and Curnoe," *CAROT* 3, no. 1, (February 1977).

⁶¹ "The Weekly Interview: Greg Curnoe." *London Weekly*, 23 July 1968, 2.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁷ Barry Lord discusses the influence that the Emma Lake summer painting workshops organized by the University of Saskatchewan in Regina had on Canadian artists. The annual workshops featured such well-known American artists as Barnett Newman. The critic Clement Greenberg was invited and wrote an article on the school. Lord writes that "[t]he Emma Lake Artists' Workshop became a cultural branch plant for New York Art. Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art*. (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), 209." For a comprehensive historical account of the Emma Lake workshops see John O'Brian, ed. *The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops* (Saskatoon, Mendel Art Gallery, 1989).

⁶⁸ For a discussion of Canadian economic conditions in the 1960s see Walter Gordon. *Troubled Canada: the Need for New Domestic Policies* (Toronto: McClelland, 1961) and Walter Gordon. *Choice for Canada: Independence or Colonial Status* (Toronto: McClelland, 1966).

⁶⁹ In 1967 Curnoe received a major public commission to paint a mural for the Dorval Airport in Montreal. The mural was briefly installed and quickly removed because it was believed to contain anti-American references. See discussion on pages 45-46.

⁷⁰ Barry Lord called the *Continental Refusal/Refus Continental* "a pointed (though still anarchistic) attack on continentalism" which was based on Paul-Emile Borduas' *Refus Global* of August 1948. Lord, "Painting in Canada," 239.

John Boyle wrote and presented the *Continental Refusal/Refus Continental* at Queen's University, Kingston on 11 March 1970. Curnoe read *Amendments to Continental Refusal/Refus Continental* nos. 1 through 10 in Kingston on 11 March 1970 and nos. 1 through 37 were read in Windsor on 19 March 1970. Transcriptions of both, along with a review by local Kingston artist Irene McKim ("Curnoe and Boyle Speak in Kingston") appeared in *20 Cents Magazine* 4, no. 4 (April 1970).

⁷¹ It is necessary to have an "other" in order to form an identity. Curnoe's tendency to define himself through what he was not can be seen in *Blue Book 8*, a mimeographed copy of one of his journals. The book consists of 167 pages of stamped text, each page beginning with the words "I am not..." and filled with a seemingly endless list of possibilities (for example: "...a woman, Innuit, Métis, Mohawk, Muncey..." [page 1]). It is only by deduction that one can discern what Curnoe is. Greg Curnoe. *Blue Book 8: December 7, 1988-October 2, 1989*. (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989). The use that Curnoe makes of this format to defend himself against criticism will be discussed in more depth in Chapter three.

⁷² Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge. "The St. Éleuthère Manifesto." *The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada* 1, no. 1 (December 1974).

⁷³ These items are part of the Greg Curnoe Archive at the AGO.

⁷⁴ Greg Curnoe, Pierre Théberge, and Peter Denny. Promotional flyer for an untitled exhibition at the Art Gallery of London Public Library, 6 December 1974-2 January 1975 (London, Ont.: The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada, 1974).

⁷⁵ Dan Patterson was born on 8 May 1884 in St. Thomas, Ontario. He died in St. Thomas on 7 August 1968.

⁷⁶ Ron Martin, "Telling Stories: Homage to Greg Curnoe." C. Dec. 31, 1992 Unedited draft #1. Written for *Artworld* (Winter 1993). February deadline. Greg Curnoe Artist's Files, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

⁷⁷ Greg Curnoe, Audio taped interlude with Greg Curnoe, Ron Martin, Clark McDougal, Jean-Paul Morisset and Dan Patterson's niece. August 14, 1968. National Gallery of Canada Archives. Patterson's work *Carnation Milk Can Assemblage* (1947-1963) is in the National Gallery of Canada collection. It was "[a]warded an honourable mention at the Second Triennial of Naïve Art, 1969, in Bratislava." *The Canadian Collection of the National Gallery of Canada*. CD Rom (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1997). Disk 3.

⁷⁸ Box 11 of the Greg Curnoe Fonds (AGO) consists of 84 audiotapes of "talks and interviews taped by Greg Curnoe," dating from March 1968 to 1983 (some of the tapes are not dated). Some of the tapes have detailed descriptions of who is on the tape and when it was recorded (for example: Tape #17. "April 8/69. 4 p.m. John Boyle and East London [both sides]"), others are less formal (for example: Tape 15. "March 29/69. Lunch").

⁷⁹ Greg Curnoe. "Audio taped interview with Gerry Gilbert." March 16, 1969, National Gallery of Canada Archives.

⁸⁰ Greg Curnoe, *The Heart of London* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968).

⁸¹ Paul Mandell contested these labels in a review entitled "Not Fine Art; Not Anti-Art." *Montreal Gazette*, 17 February 1967.

⁸² Sarah Milroy, "Greg Curnoe: Time Machines." In *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 35. Rodger, "Chronology," 145, 147.

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- ⁸³ Greg Curnoe. *National Gallery of Canada Information Form*. National Gallery of Canada Artist's file.
- ⁸⁴ Undated letter to Jean-René Ostiguy at the NGC, sometime in the Fall of 1966 asking them to buy *Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*. Judith Rodger, "Chronology," 152.
- ⁸⁵ Théberge. "London Recaptured," 161.
- ⁸⁶ Diana Nemiroff concedes that although there are Pop art qualities in Curnoe's work, (for example his use of colour, and shading), but asserts that an important difference was that "Pop art was about images, popular images of American culture," and Curnoe's work was "not about images, but about real life." Nemiroff, "This is Great Art," 28.
- ⁸⁷ Greg Curnoe Fonds (AGO).
- ⁸⁸ Helen Wallace, "Remove 'objectionable' Curnoe airport art." *London Evening Free Press*, Thursday, March 28, 1968.
- ⁸⁹ Helen Wallace, "Curnoe art depicts anti-war writing, blood-spattered Johnson." *London Evening Free Press*, March 29, 1968.
- ⁹⁰ Wallace, "Curnoe art." March 29, 1968.
- ⁹¹ "Art Festival Officials Remove 3 Sections of Greg Curnoe Work." *The London Free Press*, 20 August 1968.
- ⁹² For comprehensive press coverage of this controversy see the Greg Curnoe artist's file at the National Gallery of Canada.
- ⁹³ Rodger, "Chronology," 147.
- ⁹⁴ Rodger, "Chronology," 150.
- ⁹⁵ Leonore Crawford, "Looking at Art: Artist Curnoe More 'Involved' Than Ever." *The London Free Press* (December 1966).
- ⁹⁶ Barry Lord, "What London, Ontario, Has That Everywhere Else Needs." *Art in America* 57, no. 5 (September-October 1969): 103-105.
- ⁹⁷ Joan Murray, *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1999), 185.
- ⁹⁸ Rodger, "Chronology," 143, 148.
- ⁹⁹ Pierre Théberge, in the catalogue essay for the 1982 Greg Curnoe retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada, likened Curnoe's studios to European cafés, which had played a central role in 19th century French artistic development. Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*, 6.
- ¹⁰⁰ Lord, *History of Painting in Canada*, 229.
- ¹⁰¹ Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 318.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, 319.
- ¹⁰⁴ Wayne A. Johnston, *At The York*, (London: Ergo Productions, 1990), 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰⁶ James Stewart Reaney, *James Reaney* (Profiles in Canadian Drama). Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1977), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The York Hotel was across the road from the offices of *Alphabet* magazine. Johnston, *At The York*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ In 1964 Chambers made a film about Curnoe entitled *R 34*. Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 318. The movie *R 34* features Curnoe's life and work in a series of collaged moments that complement the style and content of Curnoe's own work.

¹¹⁰ James Reaney discusses Curnoe's use of text and image in "The Role of the Inscription in Painting," *Canadian Art* 23, no. 4 (October 1966): 41-45.

¹¹¹ Reaney, *James Reaney*, 2.

¹¹² Lord, *History of Painting in Canada*, 227.

¹¹³ Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 320.

¹¹⁴ Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, 128/129.

¹¹⁵ Dennis Reid, in both the 1969 exhibition catalogue for the São Paulo X Bienal, and *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, describes the building as a former lithography shop. Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 2nd ed., 322. In his exhibition catalogue for the 1976 Venice Biennale, however, Pierre Théberge states that the building was a former furniture-construction shop. Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe*. Lynda Curnoe, Curnoe's sister writes that it was an old printing shop. Lynda Curnoe, *My Brother Greg: A Memoir* (London: Ergo Productions, 2001), 134. Judith Rodger simply calls it "an industrial building." Rodger, "Chronology," 157. When I visited the studio on May 13, 2001, Owen Curnoe (Curnoe's oldest son) told me that it had been a lithography factory, and that the owners of the business (the A.E. Knowles family) had lived in the large house situated on the eastern side of the factory. During my research at the London Regional Art and Historical Museums I encountered a number of newspaper clippings about the designation of 38 Weston Street as a heritage building. In one of the articles it clarified that it had indeed belonged to the Knowles family and had functioned as a lithography factory. "Artist's Home Designated," *Scene* 5, no. 15 (London) (7-20 October, 1993). "History of 38 Weston Street: Home of Fine Art and Artist Greg Curnoe." *Old South Advocate* (October 1993). "Our Architectural Heritage." *The London Free Press*, 6 November 1993.

¹¹⁶ Curnoe was always conscious of the presence of the hospital, and he featured it at the end of his 1969 film *Souwesto*. Curnoe also included the hospital in his 1970 film *Connexions* where he showed footage of it and discussed its role in his painting *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (which he was working on during some of the time that he filmed *Connexions*).

CHAPTER TWO

Search for the Self

Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not.

—Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*

*...metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language
but in thought and action.*

—Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*

Greg Curnoe claimed to make no distinction between art-making as a conscious process and every other aspect of his life.¹ This well-publicized claim helped influence the perception of his work as highly autobiographical. The central focus around which Curnoe's biography and autobiography revolve is the creation and expression of his "self" or identity through art. Repeatedly drawing upon his personal experiences, Curnoe strove to understand, define, and articulate his life by using various modes of expression. Curnoe's desire to articulate his self not only through art, but also through how he lived and told his life story, may be interpreted metaphorically. Although Curnoe (and art critics and writers in general) denied the metaphorical content in his work, I intend to show that despite its deceptive facticity, Curnoe's work incorporates and manifests metaphors that help to define his identity. Through an examination of aspects of the theories of Charles Taylor, Mark Freeman, James Olney, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, I will discuss the development of Curnoe's identity or self, and show how his life can be understood as an autobiographical narrative that relies heavily upon a central metaphor. I will demonstrate that it is possible to view Curnoe's life under the

overarching rubric of the metaphor, “My life is art”—a surprisingly complex metaphor that I will interpret in a number of different ways. “My life is art” was not the only metaphor that structured Curnoe’s life, but it was the main one that determined how he lived his life. It is necessary to understand how Greg Curnoe shaped his identity in order to understand how this metaphor functioned.

Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, attempts to define what constitutes our modern notion of self or identity. Throughout his book he contends that the notion of selfhood is “inextricably intertwined” with something called “the good,” or modern morality,² with which we seek to align ourselves to give our lives meaning in the ultimate hope of achieving personal fulfillment. Although the concept of fulfillment varies greatly from one individual to the next, one of its fundamental components is a universal desire to alleviate meaninglessness³ through thoughts and actions that are significant to us in some way. The phrasing that Taylor uses in his argument is important—we do not attempt to seek meaning in our lives, rather we strive to *alleviate meaninglessness*.

Taylor argues that we live our lives according to what kind of person we are (what is acceptable to our selves), rather than the other way around (where the life lived determines the self). Each type of life therefore becomes quite unique. He states:

There are questions about how I am going to live my life which touch on the issue of what kind of a life is worth living, or what kind of life would fulfill the promise implicit in my particular talents, or the demands incumbent on someone with my endowment, or of what constitutes a rich, meaningful life—as against one concerned with secondary matters of trivia.⁴

The path to true happiness lies in being true to ourselves. Through a series of qualitative decisions based on our abilities and limitations we formulate and live a life

that satisfies an inner need: "One form of life may be seen as fuller, another way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life as more admirable, a given demand as making an absolute claim against other merely relative ones, and so on."⁵ Although the concept of living a life that is true to one's self is a modern idea, its evolution may be traced back to much earlier ideas.

Charles Taylor discusses early (pre-modern) frameworks that people used to structure what kind of life they felt was worthwhile. The earliest that he cites (at least in Western civilization) is one called "the honour ethic," where supremacy was given to warriors, citizens, or citizen-soldiers. Under this ethic "fame and glory" were the ultimate goals. In order to achieve fame, it was necessary to be willing to risk everything.⁶ Opposed to the risky honour ethic was one of reason, based on the ideals of Plato. Under the reason ethic, one strove for a life of "purity, order, limit, the unchanging" over one of "excess, insatiability, fickleness, conflict."⁷ Rationality was seen as the key to the good life and Stoicism was achieved by a complete "mastery of self which consists of the dominance of reason over desire."⁸ Taylor states that Stoicism led to the phenomenon of something he calls "the disengaged self," which was "capable of objectifying not only the surrounding world but also his own emotions and inclinations, fears and compulsions, and achieving thereby a kind of distance and self-possession which allows him to act 'rationally.'"⁹ As an observer of the everyday, and an accepted chronicler of the truth, was Curnoe striving to become a disengaged self?

The dichotomy between an honour ethic and one of reason are apparent in Greg Curnoe's work and life. On one hand he strove to make works that had the appearance of complete objectivity (a Stoic rationality), while his choice of subject matter was often

completely subjective (and had an heroically spontaneous aura). It is precisely this dichotomy that characterizes Greg Curnoe's identity (Lakoff and Johnson's theory of experientialism will be discussed below). We are not overly disturbed by this tension though; rather we admire the individual who attempts to live their life this way. Taylor states that "We sympathize with both the hero and the anti-hero; and we dream of a world in which one could be in the same act both."¹⁰ Perhaps Curnoe too, dreamed of such a world.

Taylor describes the ways that we seek to define ourselves in the modern world as being bound within "inescapable frameworks" that structure our patterns of thought and behaviour. He categorizes these frameworks into three broad categories: rationalism, the importance of ordinary life, and artistic expression.¹¹ While he describes these three categories independently, I posit that Greg Curnoe's life and work inhabited territory in all three areas at various times, and to varying degrees. Concerned with an outward appearance of rationality, order, and control, Curnoe took ordinary life as his subject matter to create art that expressed and came to define his personality and identity.

An emphasis on everyday life was one of the most important features of Greg Curnoe's work, and he repeatedly incorporated "immediate" moments into his art.¹² Charles Taylor contends that our sense of dignity is "woven into (a) modern notion of the importance of ordinary life."¹³ What constitutes the ordinary, though, and is the choice of an ordinary life based on unconscious decisions? In his discussion of the ordinary life, Taylor discusses how the things that we consider ordinary are defined. He proposes that "the affirmation of ordinary life, while necessarily denouncing certain distinctions, itself amounts to one; else it has no meaning at all. The notion that there is a certain dignity and

worth in this life requires a contrast..."¹⁴ What is chosen as a contrast is highly personal; consequently how a person chooses to articulate their life is unique.

In order to determine what kind of life is worth living, we have to know who we are first—we have to find our self. Taylor contends that the self is not an object that can be studied absolutely or objectively.¹⁵ The self is difficult to describe or articulate precisely, and as a result we must find ways to define and understand it in relation to how we see ourselves with regard to the world around us. Taylor points out that the resulting descriptions of the self often tend to be presented as spatial metaphors,¹⁶ although, for Taylor, this space is not an actual physical one, but a moral one. He states: "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary."¹⁷ The fundamental moral space that we each occupy varies from individual to individual, and is complex and "multi-tiered" rather than simple and one-dimensional.¹⁸ Because (for Charles Taylor) it is not an actual space, it has to be described metaphorically with reference to the physical world.¹⁹ Taylor raises an interesting point regarding this moral space. He asks: "Why do we think of fundamental orientation in terms of the question, Who?"²⁰ For example, Greg Curnoe was constantly asking, "Who am I?," not "What am I?," or "How, or why do I exist?" Similarly, critics and writers (myself included), continue to ask the question: "Who was Greg Curnoe?" In the *Blue Book Number 8*, an artists' book published by Art Metropole in 1989, Curnoe filled page after page with stamped text defining his identity through a process of elimination. He chose to define himself as "Who I am not," rather than "Who I am." As a result, Curnoe never states categorically who he is. We are forced to draw our

own conclusions through a careful reading of the text. The things that Curnoe has chosen to represent who he is (or is not), are, in some cases, unalterable facts (for example: "I am not a woman,"²¹ is the first entry in the book). In other cases Curnoe alludes to who he has chosen to be (for example: "I am not a ... suprematist, neo-expressionist..."²²). The different facets of Curnoe's identity are factors that condition his fundamental orientations.²³ (This will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.)

Our fundamental orientations are framed by what Taylor calls commitments and identifications, factors that are specific to an individual and comprise social and cultural elements.²⁴ A commitment is a conscious allegiance made on the part of the individual—in Greg Curnoe's case he was committed to being a regionalist, a nihilist, a supporter of the rights of artists, and an anti-American and therefore a nationalist. Factors that help to establish identity on the other hand, can be something not of the person's choosing. Curnoe was a Canadian of European descent, a white male who grew up during the 1950s and 1960s, and more specifically, a South-Londoner. While such factors were things that lay beyond Curnoe's control, they were nevertheless important determinants that influenced his sense of identity (for example if Curnoe had been born a woman, his entire identity would have been fundamentally different). The identifications and commitments from which Curnoe formed an autonomous identity provided him with a framework that gave his life meaning—they were the means for him to find his self.²⁵

Charles Taylor writes "to speak of orientation is to presuppose a space-analogue within which one finds one's way."²⁶ He goes on to state that this space must be "mapped by strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions."²⁷ These qualitative distinctions affect how we live our lives (returning to a point made earlier about what kind of a life is worth

living). Because we make choices and decisions, we are responsible for a portion of the development of our selves. An identity is not a fixed or given entity; it will change and evolve, and with its development comes a certain moral responsibility. Taylor asserts that "an identity is something that one ought to be true to, can fail to uphold, can surrender when one ought to."²⁸ The development of self-identity is a process that demands a degree of self-awareness: a person must make decisions, and form opinions that reflect how they see the world and its challenges. Taylor claims: "to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what one wants to answer."²⁹ He goes on to emphasize that "this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity."³⁰ Self orientation is only possible through self-reflection.

What we choose to reflect upon is both highly personal and revelatory. It is partially through the things that we find significant that we are able to articulate ourselves;³¹ the people we befriend, the activities we participate in, the objects we collect, and the information that we find interesting all contribute to our individuality. In Curnoe's case, the obsessive attention that he paid to detailing the minutiae of his life, and the things that he considered important, rather than being insignificant time-wasting practices, were all ways through which he attempted to articulate his identity.³²

Identifications and commitments cannot provide a complete picture of a person's identity; according to Taylor the self is something that is too complex to be fully articulated.³³ Although we strive to express our identity through various forms of articulation, no matter how hard we try, explanation and clarification cannot describe the self completely. Taylor acknowledges this when he says "articulation can by its very nature never be completed. We clarify one language with another, which in turn can be

further unpacked, and so on.”³⁴ Greg Curnoe would agree with this. In a discussion group at one of the Hart House Summer Program lectures he stated that it was impossible to know everything about an artist through their work; he maintained that it was physically impossible to do something that expressed all of you.³⁵ This did not stop him, however, from repeatedly seeking new ways of expressing himself through his art, as we shall see in chapter 3.

As the most outstanding defining characteristic of Curnoe’s life remains his artistic creations, an understanding of the important role that his life played in his art (and vice versa) is necessary. His commitment to an artistic life may be understood, to some extent, by the value that our culture gives to the importance of artistic expression. Charles Taylor states that:

Alongside ethics of fame, of rational mastery and control, of the transformation of the will, there has grown in the last two centuries a distinction based on vision and expressive power. There is a set of ideas and intuitions, still inadequately understood, which makes us admire the artist and the creator more than any other civilization ever has; which convinces us that a life spent in artistic creation or performance is eminently worthwhile.³⁶

We believe that artists possess special visionary powers that enable them to see more clearly than ordinary people, and to transmit this special knowledge through their art. We accord them the status of seers, a role that depends upon our willingness to believe that the meaning of their lives is connected with invention and expression.³⁷ Greg Curnoe questioned the supremacy of the artist as he constantly strove to homogenize the boundaries between artist and everyman, choosing the mundane as his subject matter, and engaging in aspects of the ordinary life, while at the same time dedicating his life to art. Taylor states that there exists a tension “between the affirmation of ordinary life...and

some of our most important moral distinctions”—moral distinctions that are formed within a larger context.

How we seek to define ourselves through what is important to us is, to a large extent, culturally specific. The things that were significant to Curnoe would have not necessarily been significant to someone outside his specific “regionalist” and cultural location (indeed he claimed to be unconcerned with audience reception of his work³⁸). In a 1969 interview with Gerry Gilbert, Curnoe noted that a lot of his work was not “translatable” outside the city of London. To understand his work Curnoe said that you had to “start from the particular, that’s for sure.”³⁹ Charles Taylor contends that our fundamental values are usually shared (at a fairly general level), throughout a culture. The desire to share these values is “one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value.”⁴⁰ Therefore the things that we find important—the importance of artistic expression, the need for respect from one’s peers, and the acceptance of the value of everyday life—are also values that are important to those around us. (Lakoff and Johnson propose that this is cultural coherence [see below].)

This is what Charles Taylor means when he says that the self does not develop in isolation but in the context of a defining community. In a variation on the trope “no man is an island” Taylor alleges that “one cannot be a self on one’s own.”⁴¹ Although it has its limitations, language plays a central role in Taylor’s theory of the development of the self existing in a moral space interconnected with other people. The dialogues that we engage in with others form “webs of interlocution”⁴²; as we converse with others throughout our lifetime our self-understanding becomes established and defined.⁴³

Within the security of a defining community (London's artistic and academic circle⁴⁴), and through his close links to his family and friends, Greg Curnoe liked to believe that he was artistically unique and eccentrically different. In the early years of his career Curnoe was repeatedly described as a "Pop artist"⁴⁵ and his interest in word painting echoed techniques used by American painters. Curnoe (a self-avowed anti-American) vehemently denied any influence from south of the border, stating that he had been an innovator rather than a follower.⁴⁶ Ironically Taylor states that "[t]his kind of individualism, and the illusions which go with it, is particularly powerful in American culture."⁴⁷ In the absence of a larger group of Canadian artists working in a style similar to Curnoe, he became accepted as a unique, "regional" artist,⁴⁸ whose most distinctive characteristic became the autobiographical nature of his art.

Mark Freeman, in an essay entitled "Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span," discusses related issues surrounding self-identity, in particular, how we chronicle the self by the imposition of a narrative structure onto our life stories. Traditionally, there has been an emphasis on the literary (more specifically the written) nature of autobiography, and the application of this type of theory to Greg Curnoe's work is made easier by the inclusion of text in much of his work. Retrospective exhibitions, which focus on the chronology and development of his career have reinforced the narrative aspect of autobiography, although this is to a large extent, a retroactive projection of ideas onto his life. Lives, although they are inextricably bound to the passage of time, seldom unfold in such an orderly fashion. Freeman questions our assumptions regarding the imposition of a narrative structure onto our lives, stating that:

Given the decidedly disorderly process of living one's life—moment to moment, day to day, and year to year—may it not be the case that the self

is little more than an accident waiting to happen? Alongside the attempt to question the orderliness of the process of development, therefore, the very idea of the self—as integrated, consistent, and enduring identity—is rendered suspect.⁴⁹

Mark Freeman shares Charles Taylor's belief that the self is culturally determined—he also acknowledges that the self is a construct when he refers to it as “a cultural product.”⁵⁰ He takes this idea even further when he states that “concepts of self are relative to time and place,”⁵¹ implying that how we study the self depends upon where we are in time in relation to the events. A person's own memory plays only a partial role in the writing of a life history, and much of our stories depend upon anecdote, fantasy, hearsay and other people's memories (for instance memories of our early childhood).⁵² In addition to the importance of culture in shaping the self, Freeman believes very strongly in the central role of language in autobiography, stressing that “the fact that life-history narratives are linguistic, even literary, artifacts simply means that there is no understanding of narratives and the selves who tell them apart from being culturally specific, linguistically mediated modes of understanding.”⁵³

The theoretician James Olney, in his book entitled *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* also links autobiography with a form of written narrative, when he divides autobiography into three essential components: the *autos* or self, the *bios* or life, and the *graphe* or writing (although he concedes that this does not always have to be in the form of literature).⁵⁴ Olney contends that all three of these components need to be present, and work in a cohesive fashion, for a work to be a comprehensive autobiography. Olney affirms that the self does not remain unchanged throughout a lifetime but is affected by all of its life experiences.⁵⁵ The accumulated different

memories of events, people and places become incorporated into works (the *graphe*) to create “metaphors of self.”⁵⁶

Olney defines a metaphor as “something known and of our making, or at least of our choosing, that we put to stand for, and so to help us understand, something unknown and not of our making.”⁵⁷ The author or artist, through a desire to make “the universe take on his own order,”⁵⁸ creates metaphorical works through which we can know him. Rather than being rhetorical devices, there is a practical purpose to metaphor. Taylor points out the psychological aspect of metaphor, saying that its basis is “to grasp the unknown through the known, or to let the known stand for the unknown and thereby fit that into an organized, patterned body of experiential knowledge.”⁵⁹ By applying this theory it is possible to show that Greg Curnoe’s work is a metaphor of his search for self-identity through the documentation of his experiences. Olney’s theory (along with those of Taylor and Freeman) does not provide a complete framework for discussing the metaphorical content in Curnoe’s work, the extent of which has been underrated due to its emphasis on the mundane. In order to approach the “metaphor” in Curnoe’s work, it is necessary to look to the theories of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

Lakoff and Johnson share Charles Taylor’s belief that the search for personal identity is a quest to discover the “meaningfulness of our everyday experience.”⁶⁰ In their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson show how our lives are structured through a variety of important metaphors that help to define and give meaning to our existence (similar in a way to Charles Taylor’s inescapable frameworks that structure our fundamental moral spaces). The important role of metaphor in our lives is emphasized by Lakoff and Johnson who allege that “[p]rimarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we

have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature.”⁶¹ A major premise of *Metaphors We Live By* is that metaphor extends beyond the boundaries of language to pervade our very thought processes and behavioural patterns.⁶²

Lakoff and Johnson challenge the popular assumption that the metaphors we live by are necessarily literary, poetic, or rhetorical devices.⁶³ They contend that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action,”⁶⁴ and that metaphors may be found in the most ordinary details of our lives.⁶⁵ Although Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge the importance of language as a means of clarifying and codifying metaphor, they do not believe that this is the only way to understand metaphor. Because (as Charles Taylor demonstrated) aspects of our lives such as the concept of selfhood are not easily articulated, things like: who we are, how we live, and what we believe in, often have to be described in metaphorical terms.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson describe many different kinds of metaphors in great depth, giving examples that are specific to each type. I intend to demonstrate that it is possible for a single metaphor such as Curnoe’s metaphor “My life is art” to be understood in a variety of different ways, rather than falling into only one category. As Charles Taylor shows our moral spaces are “multi-tiered,” so too are the metaphors we live by.

Lakoff and Johnson explain that we live according to structuring metaphorical concepts depending on how we conceive of them.⁶⁶ One example that they use to illustrate this theory is the concept “time is money,” where we act as if time is something that can have an actual monetary value placed on it (at least in a capitalist society).⁶⁷ As a result, time (an ephemeral and arbitrary concept at best), may be saved, spent, budgeted,

invested, lost, and so on.⁶⁸ Just because there is a tacit agreement that “time is money” does not mean that time actually *is* money; rather one thing is understood in terms of another. This is what makes the idea “time is money” a metaphorical concept. I would like to apply the same strategy to Greg Curnoe’s dominant metaphor “My life is art.”

Although he made no definitive claim that his life was art, Greg Curnoe often stated that he made no distinction between how he lived his life and what he produced—all aspects were capable of influencing the others, and none were more important than any other. Despite this attitude, I believe that Greg Curnoe experienced and understood his life foremost as if it *were* art—something highly individual, personally fulfilling, and socially important. Curnoe lived his life according to how he conceived of it (and this conception was established quite early in his career [as was discussed in chapter 1]). Everything that Curnoe did was seen (primarily by himself) through a particular lens as material for art.⁶⁹ In an article in the November/December 1965 *Canadian Art* magazine, Curnoe looked back on early experiences, claiming them latterly as important influences on his art: “I have found that since my formal schooling, my home life and my activities as a kid in south London have become more and more important in my work.”⁷⁰

This does not mean that all aspects of Curnoe’s life *were* art; indeed it does not necessarily follow that any of his life *was* actually art (which had become an increasingly difficult concept to define by the 1960s). What it does mean though, is that Curnoe and those around him understood the metaphorical concept “My life is art,” to be a valid notion and agreed to view Curnoe’s life and work through its basic structuring principles. Lakoff and Johnson describe this kind of metaphor as a structural metaphor in which one concept is understood in terms of another.⁷¹ While it is possible to categorize “My life is

art” as just a structural metaphor, that would be misleadingly simple. This would depend upon a willingness to believe that it is possible for everyday life to be synonymous with “art,” a concept that we shall see is difficult to prove.

One important point that Lakoff and Johnson raise in *Metaphors We Live By* is the concept of hiding and highlighting as an inescapable part of many metaphors (even structural ones).⁷² Highlighting certain aspects of metaphorical concepts may obscure, or hide, other less-consistent parts of the metaphor. For example, the metaphor “My life is art” implies the superiority of Curnoe’s existence—it suggests that he is able in some way to see things differently (perhaps more clearly) than non-artists around him. (Lakoff and Johnson’s view is similar to Taylor’s discussion on the important role that we accord artists as visionaries based on their expressive power.⁷³) It also implies that his day-to-day existence is more meaningful than that of others. What this metaphor hides, however, is the fact that what one person may consider art may be seen by another as a complete waste of time. Lakoff and Johnson point out that meaning is not always immediately apparent (despite the deceptively simple construction of many metaphors); in some cases it is necessary to be familiar with sufficient contextual information to comprehend specific concepts.⁷⁴

In Curnoe’s case, the circle of artists, curators, writers, and academics who knew his work, and wrote about it, were sufficiently aware of movements in modern art such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Pop Art, and performance art to be able to understand how a concept like “My life is art” could be true. This same audience was also sufficiently versed in Curnoe’s own opinions to understand how the metaphor functioned. In order to

understand this, it is necessary to look beyond structural metaphors for a more satisfactory explanation.

There are other, more complex types of metaphors than merely structural ones. Lakoff and Johnson outline orientational metaphors, a type of metaphor “that does not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another.”⁷⁵ Orientational metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson, have a spatial orientation that is directly linked to how we perceive our bodies function in space (such as “up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral.”⁷⁶) Although Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, describes a moral space that we inhabit, he also acknowledges that we cannot escape our physicality when he writes: “The very way we walk, move, gesture, speak is shaped from the earliest moments by our awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of respect or contempt, of pride or shame.”⁷⁷ Lakoff and Johnson’s orientational metaphors also show that we cannot escape the fact that we inhabit an actual physical space in the world. Curnoe was certainly very aware of his own physical presence, and its relationship to objects around him. A preoccupation with his bodily functions, and the placement of external phenomena in relation to himself comprise a large portion of his journals and printed works.⁷⁸

Curnoe’s personality and artistic style were often described by critics in terms of orientational metaphors (although they were not generally acknowledged as being metaphorical). For example, when discussing Curnoe’s working method he was often described as being “centered” in his studio, where he surveyed the world around him, selecting elements from it as inspiration for his art. Pierre Théberge, in the exhibition

catalogue *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1981), placed Curnoe firmly at the center of his artistic production when he wrote:

I imagined a series of concentric circles with the artist himself at the center, looking out from his studio—as from his inner self—towards an exterior world represented by even larger circles. Each circle represented places, events, ideas, and persons increasingly distant from the center, as the radiating rings that form when a stone breaks the surface of still water.⁷⁹

In addition to being portrayed as centred, Curnoe was described as a “plain-dealing,”⁸⁰ laid-back, down-to-earth type of man, whose work eschewed any pretension toward “high art” status. Some of these adjectives merit a more thorough investigation.

Until movements such as Dadaism raised the challenge, the concept of “high art” was traditionally used to denote the arts of painting on canvas and sculpture. Graphic arts such as cartooning and printmaking (especially prints that incorporated text and aspects of mechanical reproduction), and sculptures made from unorthodox, “found” materials were felt to be inferior, or “low art.” The categorization of one art form as “higher” than another conforms to the orientational metaphor that something higher is better or more elite, and that “mundane reality is down” or commonplace.⁸¹ The concept that something lower is more ordinary, but not necessarily inferior, is a fairly recent idea that is fundamental to understanding Greg Curnoe’s art.⁸² Indeed, with Curnoe’s work the audience is encouraged to believe that because his work (both in content and form) appears to be based on quotidian reality, it should be perceived as truthful. The down-to-earth nature of Curnoe’s personality and work tended to reinforce this perception (a selection of his works will be discussed in depth in chapter 3), as did his reliance on personal experience for his subject matter.

Curnoe felt very strongly that the only valid foundation for his art was personal experience, and most of his work was based on real events, places and people in his immediate sphere.⁸³ Lakoff and Johnson point out that “[s]patialization metaphors...are not randomly assigned,” and that they “serve as a vehicle for understanding a concept only by virtue of its experiential basis.”⁸⁴ They argue very strongly for the importance of experientialism, stating: “In actuality we feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis.”⁸⁵ The experiential basis of metaphors is crucial in understanding Curnoe’s life and work, as the metaphor “My life is art” is understood by how it is experienced, rather than one thing actually being the other. The two main parts, “my life” and “art,” are connected by the word “is,” where “is” forms the experiential basis for the metaphor. Rather than providing a direct equivalent of life “equals” art, it refers to how a life *could be* art. Lakoff and Johnson explain that “the IS should be viewed as a shorthand for some set of experiences on which the metaphor is based and in terms of which we understand it.”⁸⁶

Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of experientialism accords with Charles Taylor’s view that our values and identity are heavily derived from our cultural background. Lakoff and Johnson link metaphor with something that they call “cultural coherence” when they state that “[t]he most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.”⁸⁷ While we as a society tend to hold the same basic values as each other it does not mean that these values apply to all segments of that society. Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge that “[i]n general, which values are given priority is partly a matter of the subculture one lives in and partly a matter of personal values.”⁸⁸ Lakoff and Johnson define a further category of

individuals—“groups whose defining characteristic is that they share certain important values that conflict with those of the mainstream culture.”⁸⁹ Curnoe, while believing in some of the basic values of the larger culture of European-settled, Southern Ontario (values such as marriage and providing for one’s family), also subscribed to the values of the group of artists and intellectuals with whom he consorted. These values placed him at odds with most of his fellow Londoners, who tenaciously held onto their conservative English heritage.⁹⁰

Curnoe was raised during the 1950s and 1960s in the small Southern Ontario city of London⁹¹—a city that believed in working-class and middle-class conservative values such as hard work, moderate behaviour, and life insurance. Even Curnoe’s own father disapproved of his son’s career choice, believing that it was impossible and imprudent to want to make a living as a visual artist.⁹² Many of his fellow citizens were suspicious of artists, let alone one like Curnoe who felt that even the free-jazz cacophony produced by the Nihilist Spasm Band was an art-form. Although there were sympathetic art critics such as Leonore Crawford (who was the arts reporter for many years at the London Free Press⁹³), there were those outside his immediate circle of artists and supporters who reacted to his unorthodox and bohemian behaviour with bemusement. His sister Lynda (who was seven years younger than Curnoe), in her posthumous memoir *My Brother Greg*, recalls her feelings of puzzled alienation when she and her friends attended studio parties and gatherings during the 1960s and early 1970s.⁹⁴

Curnoe’s basic values were not entirely consistent with those of the larger art-world of Toronto either—indeed his reluctance to accept the superiority of traditional art forms ran counter to its dominant value system. Curnoe did however, find a set of

sympathetic allies in London's artistic community; during the period Curnoe was establishing his identity and main metaphor, "My life is art," this subculture was sensitive to his views, and shared his belief in being down-to-earth (a metaphor) rather than pretentious, and artistically elite. Although Curnoe shared many of his sub-culture's values his basic values were not completely at odds with mainstream values. He followed a fairly conventional personal trajectory when he married Sheila Thomson in 1965. When the couple bought a house, and had children, Sheila stayed at home to raise them and keep house (as Curnoe's own mother had).⁹⁵ Undoubtedly influenced by his parents' conservative views, Curnoe had a lifelong concern with being able to make a sufficient living to support his family (a concern exacerbated by periods of financial hardship).⁹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson point out that "(I)ndividuals, like groups, vary in their priorities and in the ways they determine what is good or virtuous to them. In this sense, they are subgroups of one. Relative to what is important for them, their individual value systems are coherent with the major orientational metaphors of the mainstream culture."⁹⁷

Just as structural metaphors are limited, so too are orientational metaphors. In attempting to address these limitations Lakoff and Johnson introduce a more complex set of concepts—ontological metaphors. They state:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and, by this means, reason about them.⁹⁸

If we accept this theory we can see that Curnoe's life and the events within it functioned as a series of ontological metaphors—occurrences that could be grouped, described, listed, and categorized as he wanted. From the largest ontological metaphor—

"My life is art," to the smallest components of his daily existence (things like the state of his asthma on a given day⁹⁹), Curnoe catalogued his experiences with painstaking care. Perhaps Curnoe's compulsive organizing of the mundane moments of his life was a way of trying to justify its worth—if it had enough substance to be organized and catalogued, then it existed. (This is similar to Taylor's earlier discussion of identifications and commitments—what Curnoe believed in and what he chose to represent himself becomes an entity [his self] that can then be quantified.)

Curnoe's attempts to document his physical experiences (things like riding his bicycle or playing in the Spasm Band) were not the only evidence of ontological metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate how we have a tendency to impose artificial boundaries upon things that do not have "real" boundaries, in order to understand and describe them adequately. They cite our own embodiment as a reason for this, stating that, "(H)uman purposes typically require us to impose artificial boundaries that make physical phenomena discrete just as we are: entities bounded by a surface."¹⁰⁰ In the works featuring the Victoria Hospital, Curnoe created careful verbal and visual portraits of the view from his studio window, with precise attention to detail and strictly defined boundaries (eg. "from the left" as if the scene did not exist beyond this point). Although the view from Curnoe's window was, in reality, limitless, when he painted it from the confines of his studio, he included a painted rendition of the window frame—in effect he determines the extent to which we can view the scene by imposing an artificial boundary on the view. (The implications of Curnoe's control and mastery of the view will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.)

Lakoff and Johnson stress the important role that ontological metaphors play in helping us attempt “to deal rationally with our experiences.”¹⁰¹ If we assume that Curnoe’s life was art, which could be seen as an entity, this “allows us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and perhaps even believe that we understand it.”¹⁰² Without some sort of mental parameters to operate within (the willingness to believe that a life could be art), then it would be impossible to understand this metaphor fully.

Both Mark Freeman’s and Charles Taylor’s theories posit that there is a connection between the search for self and our quest for immortality. Freeman states that autobiography is a metaphor for death (the self is perpetually dying but in autobiography some part of us lives on¹⁰³), and Charles Taylor writes that “the modern aspiration for meaning and substance in one’s life has obvious affinities with longer-standing aspirations to higher being, to immortality.”¹⁰⁴ How we choose to live our life, therefore, has a direct bearing on how we will be seen after death.

In their discussion of metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson state that we use ontological metaphors to “comprehend events, actions, activities, and states.”¹⁰⁵ They say that “(E)vents and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, activities as substances, states as containers.”¹⁰⁶ This raises an important question: how did Greg Curnoe see his life, and how was this shown in his works? Did he see his life as an event and an action, an activity, or a state, and are these things necessarily independent? I will show that Curnoe viewed his life as all of these things, to varying degrees, at different times—and give specific examples from his work.

Despite the fact that Curnoe believed strongly in experientialism (or at least in

the validity of all of his experiences) his work oscillates between a rational objectivism (the appearance of its content) and a complete subjectivism (what he chose to depict). They are not necessarily “evident truths.”¹⁰⁷ His work relies heavily on the audience’s acceptance that what he depicts is a reality—a notion that has remarkable longevity. I intend to show that Curnoe’s deceptively simple works are careful constructs that, through a careful analysis, can be read as complex metaphors of his life.

ENDNOTES

¹ In Jack Chambers' movie *R 34* Curnoe stated that he wanted his painting to be integrated with everything else he did. His only criteria for choosing to do something was that it be something "...where I feel genuine about it." Jack Chambers. *R 34* (16 mm, colour, sound, 30 minutes) 1967. National Archives of Canada. NFTSA #8504-197, 198.

Although Greg Curnoe consistently declined to declare that what he made was art in an isolated sense, he was equally reluctant to define exactly what he did. In an interview with Bruce Kidd in *The Canadian Forum*, Greg Curnoe evaded Kidd's question: "(w)hat is the relationship between what you do and the recording of what you do, which seems to be important to your art?", by changing the subject to focus on specific details of his daily life rather than on the larger issue. Bruce Kidd and Greg Curnoe. "Interviews with Canadian artists: Bruce Kidd Interviews Greg Curnoe." *The Canadian Forum* 53, no. 631 (August 1973): 22.

² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor suggests that this dichotomy creates a confusion within which "naturalism takes root." Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 24.

¹¹ Ibid., 3-24.

¹² In both the film *R-34* by Jack Chambers and an episode of the television show *The Umbrella* featuring London, Ontario, Curnoe discusses the importance of using "immediate things" in his art. Jack Chambers. *R-34*. 1967. "London Group." *The Umbrella (TV's Magazine of the Arts)*. William Ronald (host). (Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1966). ISN #104446.

¹³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁹ Lakoff and Johnson expand on this with their theory of orientational metaphors which will be discussed later. They allude to an actual space that we understand physically. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 14.

²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 29.

²¹ Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book 8: December 7, 1988-October 2, 1989* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989), 1.

²² Curnoe, *Blue Book 8*, 49.

²³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 29.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 30.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 34.

³² As was mentioned previously, what Curnoe believed was essential in his art was its ability to let him express what he felt was genuine, or "immediate" about his life, not its resemblance or pretension to "high art." Projects like the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada would therefore have been considered part of his art, as would performances of the Nihilist Spasm Band, lacrosse games, and socializing at the York Hotel.

³³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 29.

³⁴ Ibid., 34.

³⁵ Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge. *Informal Discussion after Panel Discussion*. Hart House Summer Program, National Archives of Canada, Canada Council Collection. No date available. NFTSA #V6 8601-30. Accession number 1985-177.

³⁶ Taylor states that this idea derives from Platonic ideas. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 22.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In a 1986 interview with Greg Curnoe, Barbara Stevenson asked him if he expected a certain amount of engagement from the audience when viewing his work. Curnoe replied: "I don't expect anything from my audience. I don't even think about that," and implied that the strength of his work would communicate its true meaning. Curnoe then went on to suggest that it was the responsibility of the viewer to realize that what he was depicting was specifically regional (and local) and not a universal experience. He felt that if the viewer was suitably informed about his art, then they would be able to understand its specificity. Barbara K. Stevenson. "Interview with Greg Curnoe," 15 December 1986 (London), appendix to "The Political and the Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe." Master's thesis (Carleton University, 1987), 181-211.

³⁹ Greg Curnoe, "Gerry Gilbert by Greg Curnoe." Audio recording. (March 16, 1969). National Gallery of Canada Archives.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Throughout his lifetime Curnoe accumulated a large circle of sympathetic friends that included fellow artists, writers, poets, musicians, post-graduate students, and professors. Although he expressed distain for the university and college environment (as I discussed in chapter 1), Curnoe availed himself of their facilities when it suited him (for example: the entry of the "Computer Journals"), and became more tolerant of its teaching practices over the years. He was visiting artist at St. Lawrence College in November 1973, and became the first Resident Artist at Western in 1974. Curnoe also began teaching art at the universities during the 1970s; in the summer of 1972 he taught a course at the University of Guelph, and in the fall and winter terms of 1973/74 he taught at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. He would teach and lecture on a fairly regular basis for the rest of his life. Rodger, "Chronology," eds. Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001).

⁴⁵ As early as 1965 Greg Curnoe's work was described in relation to the Pop Art movement. An article in the January/February issue of *Canadian Art* states "his colour and interest in constructions is pure pop." "Western Canada and Western Ontario," *Canadian Art* 22, no. 1, issue no. 95 (January/February 1965): 16.

The connection between Curnoe's use of colour and Pop Art was still being made after Curnoe's death. In a 1993 essay Robert Fones wrote: "Like many artists associated with pop art, Curnoe was attracted to fluorescent paint's eye-popping intensity, its matte finish and its unconventionality within the history of painting. Also like many pop artists, Curnoe had been influenced by the flat colours and stylized forms of comic-strip art, as well as the tradition in comics of combining text and image." Robert Fones, "Local Colour: Colour and Technique in the Work of Joanne Tod, Greg Curnoe and Jaan Poldas." *C Magazine*, issue 38 (Summer 1993): 26-39.

⁴⁶ Curnoe was quite adamant that he was not slavishly following the American Pop artists. In an article from *The London Free Press* from 1964 Curnoe called the Pop art label "nonsense." Lenore Crawford, "Galleries Like Works of Londoner." *The London Free Press* 30 September 1964. In a 1986 interview with Barbara Stevenson, Curnoe explained that his style developed "in tandem" with American Pop art, rather than following an existing trend. Stevenson, "The Politician and Social Subject Matter," 183-184.

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 39.

⁴⁸ There has been some confusion surrounding the term "regional" with regard to both Greg Curnoe's work and to the larger Canadian art scene. Curnoe felt that regionalism was often used in a derogatory sense to denote a "provincial" or amateurish product, whereas for Curnoe regionalism was a celebration of those things that were unique and interesting in a small culture. Curnoe stated that provincialism was "what people do when they live, as they think, 'out in the sticks', and they try to imitate what they think is hip in the big centers. Regionalism is simply what people do when they are integrated people, when they are at ease with themselves in their own environment and are at ease with other people from other environments." Kidd, "Interviews with Canadian artists," 28.

The association of the artists of London, Ontario with a regional school can be traced back several years earlier when Ross Woodman, in an article in *The Globe & Mail* in 1969 entitled "London: regional liberation front" discusses what he calls the London regional school of artists (although they never referred to themselves as this). For Woodman, the school's style was typified by the work of Jack Chambers and

Greg Curnoe. Ross Woodman, "London: Regional Liberation Front." *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 13 December 1969.

⁴⁹ Mark Freeman, "Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span." In *The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues*, edited by Thomas M. Brinthaupt and Richard P. Lipka (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 16.

⁵⁰ Freeman, "Self as Narrative," 22.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 18.

⁵³ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴ Robyn Jeffrey, "Intersections: The Drawings of John Scott, The Semiotics of Charles Peirce, and The Autobiographical Theory of James Olney." Master's thesis. (Carleton University, 1999), 38-39. Paraphrasing James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment." In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-27.

⁵⁵ Olney, *Autobiography*, 24.

⁵⁶ Olney quoted in Jeffrey, *John Scott*, 39.

⁵⁷ Olney, *Metaphors Of Self*, 30.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, x.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Perhaps to claim that every aspect of one's life is of equal importance worked as a way of circumventing criticism by those less sympathetic to Curnoe's unorthodox working habits.

⁷⁰ Greg Curnoe, "The Education of 12 Practicing Artists." *Canadian Art* 99 (November/December 1965): 28.

⁷¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 14.

⁷² Ibid., 10.

⁷³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 22.

⁷⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 15.

⁷⁸ Curnoe's cycling journals in particular show a concern with his health and bodily condition. He notes the severity of his asthma, bowel function and general physical well-being in them. Greg Curnoe Fonds. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. (To be referred to as the Greg Curnoe Fonds [AGO].) Box 1: Notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks. In one of his early stamped works, 25 *Hourly Notes*, 14-15 December 1966 (to be discussed in depth in chapter 3), Curnoe documents his bowel movements, sore eyes, and headache throughout the course of a day.

⁷⁹ Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1981), 1.

⁸⁰ John Bentley Mays, in an exhibition review of *Greg Curnoe: Recent Work* at the Wynick Tuck Gallery in Toronto referred to the works as "an expressive display of Curnoe's plain-dealing art at its best." John Bentley Mays, "A Certain Quality of Meditation." *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 25 April 1991.

⁸¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 19.

⁸² The aversion to applying qualitative distinctions to art was something that both Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge focused on when they wrote the manifesto for the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada (see chapter 1, pages 42-43).

⁸³ As was discussed previously, Curnoe was very vocal about his belief that the only valid material for his art was personal experience—incidents that were "genuine" and "immediate." See note 1.

⁸⁴ Lakoff and Johnson put forward their theory of experientialism as a middle-ground between objectivism (which Charles Taylor called "Stoic rationalism") and subjectivism. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 18.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

⁹⁰ A significant portion of the wealth in the city of London, Ontario comes from the insurance industry, which together with the University of Western Ontario, employs a large portion of the population of the city. In 1969, Ross Woodman, an English professor at the University of Western Ontario, described London as an "ultra-conservative" enclave of English culture from which the artistic community was struggling to break free. He wrote "London is essentially waspish in character and is largely defined by the

insurance and trust companies that find it a thoroughly comfortable place to rest. The garrison mentality is preserved by an Establishment that finds the atmosphere of a walled fortress quite congenial." Ross Woodman. "London: Regional Liberation Front." *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 13 December 1969.

⁹¹ One of the lists in the Curnoe archive was entitled "Cities Under 300,000" (the population of London, Ontario), indicating Curnoe's belief that this was the ideal size for a city. Curnoe held a theory about city size and individual development. In his interview with Gerry Gilbert (Mar. 16, 1969) he said that a change occurred in American towns when they grew to be larger than 5000 people. At this point their inhabitants changed from being "rural folk to urban sophisticate," who would have less individual concern for others. (This opinion is very similar to that of the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel who wrote about the effects of increased urbanization in his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life." [1903]. Whether or not Curnoe was familiar with Simmel is unclear.) Curnoe said that the sophisticating effect of urbanization did not hold true in Canada, and that "the folk thing" happened all the time in London still.

In 1970 Curnoe wrote an article in *The London Free Press* on the negative effect of urban renewal and growth in London in which he quoted the French writer, Simondon's opinions on the evolution of machines and the subsequent effect on nature (showing his awareness of literature surrounding the issue of urbanization). Greg Curnoe, "Curnoe on London," *London Free Press*, 17 October 1970. In 1969 (a year after emigrating to Canada) the urban philosopher Jane Jacobs wrote *Economy of Cities* which Curnoe may have been familiar with.

In 1961 the city of London annexed a large number of suburbs, and its population increased to over 160,000 inhabitants. Lynda Curnoe. "My Brother Greg: A Memoir." (London: Ergo Productions, 2001), 10.

⁹² Greg's younger sister Lynda Curnoe discusses their father's opposition to Curnoe's choice of career in her biographical memoir *My Brother Greg*, 102-103.

Curnoe recalled his parents' attitude to his career choice in a letter to his son, Galen, in 1990. He wrote: "My mother worried quietly and would pass on my dad's concerns about me, which were also hers to some extent. She objected to a lot of my attitudes and work. My father put me down a lot. He was a really good athlete and I was a wimp (really) and he knew it. He told me I liked the equipment more than I liked the sport and he was probably right. He insisted that I should get a job in commercial art. He thought I was crazy to go to art college. He told me that I would last three weeks in my studio downtown (this was when I was twenty-four years old) because I wouldn't be able to pay the rent, etc., etc." Greg Curnoe, undated letter to his son Galen, 1990. Quoted in Rodger. "Chronology," 144.

⁹³ Lenore Crawford was an early supporter of Curnoe's work, covering his first solo exhibition, *An Exhibition of Things*, at the Richard E. Crouch Branch Library in London (November 3-December 1, 1961). Although she felt that not all of the works were worth exhibiting, some of them showed "evidence of competent craftsman and a sensitive artist." Lenore Crawford, "Spoofs Reveal Artist: Odd Objects Startle Art Lovers." *The London Free Press*, 4 November 1961, quoted in Judith Rodger, "Chronology," *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, 144.

⁹⁴ L. Curnoe, *My Brother Greg*, 125.

⁹⁵ Sheila's occupation is listed as housewife in the exhibition catalogue for the Sao Paulo Bienal. Dennis Reid, *Greg Curnoe: Canada. X Bienal São Paulo* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968), unpaginated.

⁹⁶ Curnoe's studio was not accessible through the living quarters of 38 Weston Street, but by a door on the studio's east side. Rather than knock a connecting door through the wall, he preferred to physically leave his living area, walk several metres outside, and then enter the studio space, a process that symbolically allowed him to feel like he was "going to work." After his death in 1992, Sheila had a connecting doorway inserted between the studio and living area. L. Curnoe, *My Brother Greg*, 135.

⁹⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 24.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 25. -

⁹⁹ Greg Curnoe Fonds (AGO). Box 1: Notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Freeman, "Self as Narrative," 18.

¹⁰⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Dewdney and Diana Nemiroff, *Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe 1936-1992* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995), unpaginated.

CHAPTER THREE

How Evident are These Truths?

His paintings and drawings achieve their ingenious simplicity by avoiding any metaphorical content. They are based on specific personal perceptions harnessed to his overriding descriptive project, a project realized in the everyday, sometimes incidental nature of his subjects.

—Christopher Dewdney, *Evident Truths, Greg Curnoe 1936-1992*

Throughout the course of his life Greg Curnoe constantly tried to understand and communicate who he was. The manner in which he lived his life, and the art that he created, became indistinguishable from one other. His attempts to articulate his identity through how he lived his life may be viewed as an all-encompassing metaphor: “My life is art.” The development and critical reinforcement of this metaphor can be seen by examining a selection of his works that incorporate text, and focus on the importance Curnoe placed on daily life. It was precisely his preoccupation with the mundane facts of his daily existence that made critics and writers think that his works were simply truthful transcriptions of facts, which lacked any kind of metaphorical content. Additionally, the physical appearance of the works, and the linguistic strategies used within them, reinforced the “truthful” appearance and reception of his art.¹ Christopher Dewdney paraphrased popular opinion when he titled his posthumous essay on Curnoe *Evident Truths*.² I intend to show that far from being simple truths, Curnoe’s works were in fact metaphors of himself.

Curnoe’s life can be seen as a recurrent and protracted search for self-identity. He repeatedly strove to find ways to articulate who he was and to define his particular place

in the world. Through his works he tried to establish what kind of life he felt was worth living, and it became increasingly clear that this kind of life relied upon the capacity to express himself artistically—he found and justified his worth through artistic production. Curnoe was supported in his artistic endeavours by the art establishment and critics, whose acceptance that the everyday details of his life constituted the content of his art, reinforced his own belief that his life was, in fact, art.

If Curnoe's works were an attempt to articulate his self, then how was it best achieved? I will demonstrate that a pattern of increasing preoccupation with his location in the world develops in his works through his career. While his early works tend to be less expressive (lacking in focus) than his later ones, they are important indicators of his search for self identity. His self-articulation reaches an expressive peak with the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971), a work that allowed Curnoe to mirror his life and its important events back to himself. This multi-layered work becomes a metaphor of his entire life until that date, although it was critically interpreted as non-metaphorical. Curnoe did not abandon his search for identity after the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*; rather he showed a consistent concern with his place in the universe throughout his entire oeuvre. After the success of the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* Curnoe revisited a number of earlier themes, but by the time of his death in 1992, his work was moving away from a rigid preoccupation with an actual location to an interest in a more general and universal space.

Curnoe's early works that featured text were often constructions or collages made with objects that held personal significance for him (for example: *In Memory of the Toronto Scene* [14 October 1964] [AGO], and *Bowering Westmount #5* [27 September

1967] [AGO]). These were not works that contained words that were actually “created” by Curnoe, rather the works contained pre-existing text appropriated because of their significance to him. Curnoe would move away from collages to create text with rubber stamps in a large number of his works.³

The expressive power of words was always very important to Curnoe; relatively early in his career he began to use rubber stamps to create works that were predominantly textual (in some cases completely textual).⁴ Curnoe’s textual works focused on aspects of his daily life that appeared to be mundane and trivial, and were considered to be devoid of metaphorical content.⁵ They were nevertheless, deceptively complex works that become metaphors of Curnoe’s life and self. As Charles Taylor discussed in *Sources of the Self*, we strive to alleviate meaninglessness in our lives by searching for ways to understand and articulate our self. Three main “inescapable frameworks” govern our search for self: rationalism, the importance of daily life, and artistic expression.⁶ Although Charles Taylor claims that these frameworks operate independently from each other, in Curnoe’s case they often worked simultaneously.

While trying to chronicle the minutiae of his life in meticulous detail some of Curnoe’s early works appear highly structured. *24 Hourly Notes* (Figures 1-3) consists of twenty-four painted galvanized iron panels of identical size, each bearing text that referred to some event or thought that occurred to Curnoe during a twenty-four hour period from the 14th to the 15th of December 1966. *24 Hourly Notes* gives the impression of being a systematic and rational work, in which facts are clinically observed and transcribed without apparent mediation. This impression is quickly dispelled however, as the viewer begins to read the content of the work.

The first panel of *24 Hourly Notes* establishes the starting date and time of the project. Stamped in the upper left hand corner are the words—"DEC. 14, 1966, 12 A.M." Each subsequent panel starts with the next hour throughout the twenty-four hour period.⁷ This is the only systematic and consistent element of the work though, as the rest of the content of the panels is quite random. While each panel seems complete within itself, the work as a whole is a rather confused and disorganized mixture of facts, feelings, and thoughts. In addition to the erratic leaps Curnoe makes between factual observations, expressions of emotion, and a persistent concern with his bodily functions, the individual nature of the panels remains quite separate. Upon close examination the work takes on a surreal, fragmentary nature that is disorienting to the viewer, partly due to its content, but also because of its physical properties.

Not only are the thoughts and events on the separate panels unrelated, but the size of the individual panels and the rubber stamp sizes used determined how much text could be included on each panel. As Curnoe reached the end of a panel, his sentences and words are abruptly truncated as he runs out of space, and each panel remains unresolved. While the construction of the work denies a complete narrative account of twenty-four hours of Curnoe's life, the work enables the viewer to have a deeper understanding of who he was, or who he wanted to be seen as—a spontaneous, controversial, contemporary artist.⁸

Although the panels were executed within Curnoe's studio, there is no textual evidence of a spatial metaphor in the sense that Lakoff and Johnson describe (Curnoe is not mentioning himself in direct reference to his place in the world around him, but rather with regard to it [metaphorically]). I believe that this work can be read as a metaphor of Curnoe's view of himself centered within the community of London. This is not achieved

through linguistic devices. Rather it is inferred from the content of the work which focuses around Curnoe's daily experience of his environment. As Curnoe is the subject of the work, it serves to position him within his world, and in this respect can be seen as a spatial metaphor (albeit one with a fairly loose focus).

Not all of Curnoe's works were as broadly encompassing as *24 Hourly Notes*; in 1967 he created two works in which he narrowed his focus considerably. In the two following works, *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* (1967), and *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967), Curnoe separated feelings from facts to create two quite different impressions of his world and his response to it.

Curnoe's continued search for a legitimate form of self-expression through the textual articulation of his personal experience can be seen very clearly in works such as *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* (1967)⁹ (Figure 4). A completely textual work of words stamped in marking ink over enamel on canvas, Curnoe uses the piece to muse about his ongoing preoccupation with what is "real," and to express dissatisfaction over the miserable state of his finances (Appendix B). Executed in a stream-of-consciousness, run-on commentary, the main gist of the work is that conversations can turn into word games that, in turn, can lead to misunderstandings. Curnoe cites Royden (Rabinovitch) as an example of an adversary and says that these verbal misunderstandings caused them both to feel threatened. (This verbal interchange can be seen as an example of what Charles Taylor calls "webs of interlocution"—the personal insight that evolves as a result of our ongoing conversations with others throughout our lifetime.¹⁰) Curnoe goes on to confess that he has been feeling like a loser recently. Inserted into this pessimistic soul-searching is an act of personal significance to Curnoe—his son, Owen's first steps are described as

he walks towards Sheila to grab a pen she is holding. The inclusion of this action gives part of the work an immediacy that the rest lacks; it is an example of the value that Curnoe placed on personal experience and the importance of ordinary life in his art. It is the action of Owen walking, and Curnoe's need for money that becomes real, not word games. The insertion of this act creates an oscillation between the foreground and the background of the work. The background is Curnoe's premeditated thoughts on his life, the foreground are the actions that have an immediate impact on him.

The oscillation between thought and action is not the only disjunctive aspect of this work. The format that Curnoe chose for this work conformed with high art conventions, although the content and style were not conventional. A large-scale piece measuring 127 x 104 cm, the support is canvas covered in enamel. Curnoe has superimposed rubber stamped words in printing ink over the enamel, but the work is extremely difficult to read. Rather than flushing the copy to the left margin (as it would have been if it were a book), or justifying it by adjusting the space between the words, Curnoe breaks the words arbitrarily as they reach the right hand side of the canvas. By making the words deliberately hard to read, Curnoe calls attention to the fact that it is not a literary work, but rather a self-consciously constructed work of visual art. Arbitrary word breaks are an artistic device that Curnoe reuses in other textual works to interrupt the viewer's apprehension of the text and question what constitutes "art."

Because the subject matter of *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* is highly personal, it is necessary to understand the specific context from which Curnoe was working to comprehend this work fully. The person named in the title needs explanation, as do the characters mentioned within the text. Without knowing that Urquhart and Royden

referred to Curnoe's friends and fellow London artists Tony Urquhart and Royden Rabinovitch, and that Sheila and Owen are Curnoe's wife and son, the work lacks resonance. Curnoe's hometown of London, Ontario and his circle of friends and family formed what Charles Taylor refers to as his defining community.¹¹ When the viewer understands Curnoe's strong attachment to his locale and the people he references, the work gains much more significance.¹²

Although Curnoe refers to people and events that are important to him he does not yet situate himself specifically within his studio as he will do in works like *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967), and the Victoria Hospital works (1968-71) (to be discussed later). As with *24 Hourly Notes* he is implicitly located within his studio. *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* is not an objective listing of events though; in this work subjective selection of feelings and actions take precedence over description.

In the same year that he made *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* Curnoe created several works based on the view from his King Street studio window, including *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967) (Figure 5).¹³ Despite the fact that it used a similar format to *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* (words stamped in marking ink over a painted canvas support) *Cityscape: Right Windows* had a different focus. Instead of chronicling feelings and pivotal events in Curnoe's life, it appears to be a factual description of the view from his window (Appendix C). In contrast to the highly subjective confessional content of *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart*, the obsessively detached detail that Curnoe uses to describe what he sees from his studio gives the work a scientific, almost clinical empiricism.¹⁴

In contrast to *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart*, *Cityscape: Right Windows* is a

much more static work in which Curnoe chooses to describe the physical appearance of his view, rather than focus on feelings and events. The only mention of anything transitory or ephemeral comes at the end of the work in a sentence which reads, "The sky is overcast." While this reference to the weather briefly forces the viewer into Curnoe's present moment, the overall effect of the work is timeless and stable.

This does not mean that the scene described is mundane or meaningless. Instead it can be seen as an example of the belief that a visionary power the artist possesses allows him to see things more clearly or deeply than non-artists. Previously unimportant, or overlooked aspects of life (and this may be metaphorical of Curnoe's perception of his own undervalued talent) are brought to the viewer's attention through the deeper insight of the artist as seer. It is through the detailed use of listing that Curnoe transmits the importance of what he is seeing (it is *his* view that becomes important, not just *the* view). As has been previously discussed in chapter 1, lists were a recurrent feature in Curnoe's work.¹⁵ Diana Nemiroff, in an article "This Is Great Art Because It Wasn't Made By An American," traces Curnoe's "urge to collect and inventorize the various parts of his world"¹⁶ back to his childhood.

Although they appear highly objective, the mundane details that Curnoe chooses to include are based on his personal experience (even if this experience only involves one of the senses—sight). He describes the buildings he can see from his studio window and the ornament that appears on them (company identification lettering, fancy brickwork, number of windows, etc.). While Curnoe describes the view from the window, his description appears to be somewhat random. There is not yet a left to right, or top to bottom systematized scanning of the view; rather he seems to have decided to describe

things in the order that they caught his eye. Recurrent throughout the work is Curnoe's description of the colours within his viewing field—an orange border, white frames, red brick, grey concrete are described through words. Although the fact that the work is not stamped in brightly coloured ink, he attempts to enliven our mental image of the scene through textual description. It is apparent that colour was an important factor in Curnoe's choice of what he found important to describe (as were shapes, use of text, and building materials).¹⁷ Curnoe's preoccupation with colour may be read as a metaphor for how he saw himself. Always dressed in brightly coloured clothes, and often incorporating bright colours into his artworks, Curnoe became established as a colourful personality within the conservative city of London.¹⁸

Despite these somewhat limited, subjective choices the apparent objectivity of *Cityscape: Right Window* is its most striking characteristic. It is this apparent objectivity that encourages the viewer to believe that what s/he is seeing is a truthful recreation of reality, and that the work is therefore lacking in metaphorical content (objectivity and metaphoricity being usually seen as mutually exclusive properties). This detached impartiality was exactly what Curnoe was hoping to show in his art. Dennis Reid describes Curnoe's ongoing preoccupation with the "real" in his essay "Some Things I Learned From Greg Curnoe." Reid writes: "He insisted constantly on the need to make connections, to chronicle events, establish facts, striving always for objectivity and trying not to rest on judgements."¹⁹

Lakoff and Johnson point out that a metaphor is perceived as an "out-of-the-ordinary imaginative or poetic linguistic expression" which is assumed to be incapable of depicting a truth.²⁰ They state that popular opinion believes that the truth is something

that can only be described through a “non-metaphorical ‘literal’ paraphrase.”²¹ Following this reasoning then—if a metaphor is not capable of describing the truth, then the truth (or at least what resembles the truth) cannot be a metaphor. This commonly held belief is responsible for the widespread view that Curnoe’s work was not metaphorical, an opinion that is itself open to challenge.

Lakoff and Johnson propose that as there is no such thing as an absolute truth this reasoning is unsound. They contend that the reason that we are anxious to believe that there is an absolute truth, is that “(W)e base our actions, both physical and social, on what we take to be true,” actions which help us function on a daily level.²² (If we relate this theory to Charles Taylor’s search for self, we can say that these (fictional) absolute truths become part of the inescapable frameworks which govern our lives.) Because the illusion of an absolute truth is so important to us there are various strategies that we use to reinforce its existence. Some of these devices are things like definition, description and categorization that rely on our understanding of prototypes and family resemblances in order to function adequately.²³

The role of categorization in establishing truth is an important part of Lakoff and Johnson’s argument. They state: “In order to understand the world and function in it, we have to categorize, in ways that make sense to us, the things and experiences that we encounter.”²⁴ Curnoe’s repeated use of categorization can be seen to function in precisely this manner. Description and definition also played important roles in establishing the truthful appearance of Curnoe’s work, especially the way in which he used them. Most of Curnoe’s work had a very simple appearance—short sentences, simple grammar, and an unpretentious vocabulary reinforced the viewer’s belief that what they were seeing was

the same reality that Curnoe saw or experienced. It is precisely this impression that obscured the metaphorical content of the works.

Curnoe's overwhelming preoccupation with his physical location in the world is important and can be interpreted metaphorically. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, we tend to view external phenomena around us with regard to our physical orientation within the world (what is in front of us, above and below us, etc.), and that we then use these orientational (or spatialization) metaphors to describe our lives (for example: "I am up," or "I am feeling down," and so on). By placing himself concretely within his studio (indeed the text of Curnoe's work indicates that he is directly opposite 197 Richmond Street), Curnoe indicates the increasingly narrow framework from which he is operating. This is different from *24 Hourly Notes* where he implicitly indicates that he is in his studio, and *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* which was generally located in London through contextual knowledge (by referencing people who he knew that were known to live in London). *Cityscape: Right Windows* is sharply situated through the use of specific, verifiable markers. The content of the work becomes a spatial metaphor of Curnoe himself.

Curnoe always maintained that he was a regionalist who drew his inspiration from what was happening in his immediate vicinity (his defining community²⁵ was the region of London, Ontario [more specifically his studio], although at times it was expanded to encompass a larger portion of Southern Ontario [for example Port Stanley where he vacationed]). The importance of place cannot be overstated with regard to Curnoe's work; indeed, the statement "I am *where* I am," describes Curnoe better than "I am *what* I am." Where he was in many of his works became narrowed down to the inside of his various

studios, and in the end, the works that feature the view from his studio become metaphors of Curnoe himself. If his life is art, and his studio is where he creates this art, then the studio can metaphorically and metonymically stand for him.²⁶

While Curnoe's work was not considered metaphorical, there was a general recognition of the importance of daily life in Curnoe's work. This was acknowledged when *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart, Cityscape: Right Windows*, and *24 Hourly Notes* were shown at the 1968 Edinburgh International Festival as part of an exhibition entitled *Canada 101*.²⁷ The catalogue entry that accompanied the exhibition treated Curnoe metaphorically when it recognized the amorphous boundary between his life and his work, stating: "'Happening' may well be the most suitable term to describe Curnoe's activities. For his art is not confined to painting or sculpture, or to any medium. It is, indeed, his very life style, and has grown to impregnate the London art scene."²⁸ This statement, in addition to functioning as an ontological metaphor (Curnoe's entire life is seen as art), may also be read as a conduit metaphor (where something becomes a container that can be filled with other things).²⁹ Curnoe's lifestyle becomes the thing that infiltrates, and impregnates the region of London, Ontario.

In addition to perpetuating a view of Curnoe as someone whose entire life is art, the author of the catalogue essay also subscribes to the idea of the artist as someone with special, visionary powers. Curnoe is depicted as a sort of psychic anthropologist who gathers meaning from the mundane in a manner denied to non-artists. The author writes: "The objects which he exhibits are the debris left behind as this energetic mystic passes through time."³⁰ The allusion to a passage through time is relevant to many of Curnoe's works, which reference specific times and dates to pinpoint the moment at which they

were created (or that he wants us to revisit).

While works like *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* and *Cityscape: Right Windows* are intended to recreate moments in Curnoe's life or document his experiences, they do not function as narratives in the way that his later works featuring the Victoria Hospital do. His earlier works provide snapshot-like random fragments of his life rather than forming systematic narratives. It is through the use of various narrative devices that Curnoe manages to influence the viewer's perception of himself, effectively creating himself through his work.

In order for a story to function as a narrative, there must be a centre, or subject around which the action revolves (James Olney's "I" or Charles Taylor's "self"). When the narrator is also the subject of his own works, they naturally become autobiographical. In the case of Curnoe's works, the artist himself, or something of personal importance to him (the "bios," or "life") often functions as the centre or subject of the works (the "graphy" or "writing"). As the works reveal aspects of the artist to us, we come to "know" him through his work—they become metaphors of himself. The works are not directly readable as truths though. By examining several of Curnoe's works that were factually based on the view from his Weston Street studio window, we can see that what he is describing literally is not necessarily the real story; they allude to a much more complex web of influences and memories. They function metaphorically as they form something concrete that Curnoe uses to reflect his life back at himself. The deceptively simple way in which the works are constructed also presents a particular picture of Curnoe—one that is consistent with his creation of his own myth as the average Canadian male.

In 1969 Curnoe was chosen along with Robert Murray and Iain Baxter to represent Canada at the São Paulo X Bienal in Brazil.³¹ Among the works exhibited was the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* (1968-1969) (Figures 6 and 7), a work that consisted of six large-scale canvases covered in monochromatic text and exhibited side by side. The text was applied in marking ink with huge rubber stamps, a physically demanding process that took Curnoe five months to complete.³² As with *Cityscape: Right Windows*, the subject matter of the work is descriptive; Curnoe looked out of his Weston Street studio windows and described what he saw (Appendix D). The textual strategy and content of the work gives the canvases the appearance of being a narrative or story (although, as was seen before, the sheer scale of some of Curnoe's lettered works ensures that they remain undeniably visual.) The verbal structure of the piece also makes it read with more narrative movement than *Cityscape: Right Windows* did.

As Mark Freeman discusses in his essay "Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span" there is a tendency among autobiographers to try to impose a narrative structure onto their life stories in order to clarify and understand the "disorderly process of living one's life."³³ Although our lives are undeniably lived in a chronological fashion, our memories are not bound by such structures—we may choose to include what we please, in any order that we find useful, and as a result, our stories become fragmented assemblages of our own construction. A good deal of Curnoe's work attempts to order his life and define himself through the imposition of narrative structure onto his past.

Implicit in the definition of narrative is the notion of sequence and progression; one event supersedes another in a logical flow. The passage of time and events leads from

a beginning to an end, and forms a coherent story that we recognize as a life. In the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*, Curnoe gives the impression of having created a narrative of sorts, albeit one that tells a fairly uneventful story. He creates a panoramic impression of what he sees and gives the illusion of recreating the act of visually scanning the view from his window. It is possible, upon a close reading of the (visual) text, to determine a sequence of movement and some sort of passage of time. The work begins with the words "from the left" and the objects are consistently described "to the right." At one point the sun strikes an object, later on the sun (presumably setting) strikes the tops of some trees. Streetlights are repeatedly mentioned, giving the impression that they have come on in the dusk. The passage of time that the work describes does not bear any direct relationship however, to the actual five months that it took to complete the work. Rather, it reads as one continuous event, the pace of which may vary, and gives the reader or viewer the impression that they are experiencing the same thing that Curnoe was as he looked from his studio out over the view below. In a manner similar to a camera panning slowly across a scene, Curnoe's canvases recreate a viewing path.³⁴ Was this simple description really the story that Curnoe meant to tell?

There is a strong hidden subtext of control and mastery in this work. In addition to its rigidly-controlled method and narrow focus of subject matter, this work raises issues about Curnoe's desire to "possess" the view.³⁵ This was not the first time that Curnoe had made artworks based on the view from his studio window, nor would it be the last. As was previously discussed Curnoe described the view from his Richmond Street studio in *Cityscape: Right Windows*, and he would reuse the view from the Weston Street studio in the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*.³⁶ Seated in the safety of his studio, Curnoe

surveyed the surrounding territory as if from a Foucauldian panopticon. By transcribing the view, (miniaturizing it if you will) he was asserting his own personal “eye of power” over it.³⁷ What reasons could be behind Curnoe’s obsessive desire to control his environment?

Beside the fact that it is the supreme example of Curnoe working with material “from his own backyard” so to speak (the ultimate in practicing what he preached), he may have been trying to explore his own self-identity and maintain control over his own life. Jill Ker Conway, in her book *When Memory Speaks*, discusses how we seek to influence our future by asserting control over our past (through how we [re-]tell it). She postulates that we envision our future much as we see our past; a person who remembers a happy childhood generally assumes that their future will be the same way. Likewise, someone who experienced a chaotic past will likely view their future as uncertain.³⁸ From all accounts Curnoe’s past was happy. The product of a stable, close-knit family,³⁹ Curnoe was himself devoted to the idea of family life. In order to ensure that his life remained happy and normal, Curnoe may have hoped that by presenting an ordinary, eternally unchanging view of the world, his own would remain so.

The important central role of the Victoria Hospital cannot be overstated. As was mentioned before, this hospital had enormous personal significance for Curnoe. In the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*, the surface narrative of the view of the hospital provides the framework from which Curnoe can incorporate personal memories.⁴⁰ It becomes indexical proof of Curnoe’s existence. From within the safe envisioning of the hospital Curnoe feels free to reveal aspects of who he is. Some of these aspects appear in the form of ironic interjections.

The ironic interjections that Curnoe has inserted in the text are very important because they represent aspects of his ideology.⁴¹ The first interjection, “this is truly great art” may be Curnoe’s ironic comment on the nature of Modernist art which privileged painting in a gallery or museum space over alternative modes of artistic production. Curnoe’s work is on canvas, and is made to hang in a gallery space, yet it does not show a realistic representation of a landscape, but instead a textual or graphic description of the scene that he saw. We read (or see) his mental image instead. In the second interjection Curnoe asks, “are you reading or just looking?” Deliberately constructed to make the work hard to read, Curnoe questions how we look at art. Are we reading this image of his vision like a book (and if so are we experiencing frustrations because of the difficulties his format has imposed on us), or are we viewing it as a painting? Do we value it less because it contains words and not a pictorial image? This raises questions about the “value” of words over visual images, an issue that will be addressed shortly. The third interjection, “this is truly great art because it was not made by an American” references Curnoe’s rampant anti-Americanism. The fourth comment, “Gordon Jeffrey, meet Geoffrey Gordon” alludes to Curnoe’s fascination with the odd coincidences in life, and in his interest in regional personalities.⁴² The final interjection, “we are really Riel” indicates Curnoe’s interest in Canadian history, and its colourful personalities, and his perpetual associative word games. Far from being merely ironic anti-art statements, these interjections tell us quite a lot about Curnoe’s “nationalist” ideology.

Curnoe’s use of listing to order and control his life appears consistently throughout his entire career. From early works like *List of Names of Boys I Grew Up With* (Art Edwards) (1962), through his works like *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967), to later

works like *Blue Book 8* (Dec. 7, 1988-Oct. 2, 1989), and *Deeds #2* (1991) (the latter two will be discussed later), Curnoe incorporates lists of events and details to clarify his place in the world. The use of these seemingly objective lists serves another purpose—it makes the viewer believe that what Curnoe is detailing is verifiable and truthful, and therefore without metaphorical content. There is a curious relationship between what we perceive as the truth (a re-creation of reality), and what we understand as metaphor (something that stands for something else).⁴³ Part of our acknowledgement of something as the truth depends on the invocation of different types of images. The most distinctive feature in *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* is its evocation of multiple types of imagery to replicate reality.

Widely known for his writings on the battle for primacy among the “sister arts” of word and image, W.J.T. Mitchell, in his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, tries to define exactly what constitutes an image. He broadly defines an image as a likeness, resemblance, or similitude,⁴⁴ but points out that this definition is by no means adequate to distinguish between the many different kinds of images that can exist. He breaks the overall category of image down into the more specialized categories of Graphic, Optical, Mental, Verbal, and Perceptual images. Graphic images include things like pictures, statues, and designs—which he says belong in the realm of the art historian. Optical images include things like mirror images and projections that are part of the science of physics. Mental images encompass dreams, memories, ideas and something called *fantasmata* (which he defines as “revived versions of those impressions called up by the imagination in the absence of the objects that originally stimulated them”⁴⁵). These mental images fall within the realm of psychological and epistemological studies. Verbal

images include metaphors and descriptions—devices used in literature studies. Perceptual images however, are things like “sense data,” “species,” and “appearances,” and represent (for Mitchell at any rate), a point of convergence between all the other kinds of imagery.⁴⁶

Mitchell discusses how we privilege certain forms of imagery over others, based on our desire to know what the “truest” image is. We tend to favour graphic images over all others mainly because we can see them (and therefore assume they must be true).⁴⁷ Verbal imagery, such as metaphor and description, is imprecise (even when taken to the extremes of Curnoe’s work); it can conjure up different mental images to different people, and is therefore unreliable as a method of establishing verifiable truth. Mental imagery is equally suspect; with the recounting of mental imagery, we have only the other person’s word that they are telling the truth, and no real way of knowing if our mental image of their mental image is the same thing at all. We are also highly suspicious of optical imagery. What Mitchell intends to show with his theory of multiple types of imagery is that it is in fact the perceptual image (the point of convergence of all the other types of images), that gives us the truest picture of what something or someone is like. The perceptual image is not one that belongs to a single discipline; rather it results from a “deterritorialization”⁴⁸ of theoretical disciplines.

W.J.T. Mitchell’s theory is relevant to Curnoe’s work. Curnoe attempts to give concrete, graphic form to his thoughts, feelings and visual experiences by setting the words down on canvas in a manner designed to control the viewer’s perception of the sensation that he had experienced.⁴⁹ He wants his audience to experience his world in the same way that he did. By combining mental imagery with verbal and graphic imagery, he

has created works that we can “perceive.” In this way his works become metaphorical—they tell us something about Curnoe. With *Cityscape: Right Windows* and the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*, he was not completely successful in recreating a reality, partly because his imagery is limited by the use of text alone. (The same would have been true however, if he had simply painted a picture of what he saw, in which case we would not have been able to understand how he *thought* about the world.)

The limitation of text alone was a problem also perceived by Dennis Reid, the curator of Curnoe’s participation at the São Paulo Bienal. Reid was responsible for the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, a catalogue that provides the “proof” of Curnoe’s experience (Figures 8 and 9). It is in this catalogue that the photographic evidence of Curnoe’s story is presented—including is documentation of his family, friends, studio, region, and achievements. The catalogue provides a comprehensive account of many of the things that contributed to Curnoe’s artwork, but that might have gone unnoticed had not Reid brought them to the public’s attention (after all, how would anyone not familiar with Curnoe make any connection between his work and life?). The catalogue is remarkable for something else as well—there are no standard reproductions of Curnoe’s works. In an essay entitled “The Past of Our Practice: A Note on the 1960s,” Scott Watson comments that “[T]he catalogue declares the primacy of the visual over the textual while at the same time almost completely usurping the works of art, which in turn are available only as described in the text.”⁵⁰ (The same could be said about Curnoe’s work, in which the view is only available through his verbal description of it.)

In the recent book *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, Dennis Reid emphasizes the cooperative aspects behind the creation of the São Paulo catalogue. Rather than

presenting a traditional exhibition catalogue (one that closely re-presented the works), Reid recalls that Curnoe was anxious that the accompanying catalogue show the “outcome of a process.”⁵¹ They decided to “construct it as a simple pictorial narrative with plain, direct text that would convey as much information as possible about his environment with a minimum of interpretation.”⁵² Reid proposes that “by closely examining the artist’s surroundings, the context of his production, the essence of the work would emerge.”⁵³

By not including reproductions of the works in the exhibition in the catalogue, Reid is reiterating the importance of the actual experience, a concept that was fundamental to Curnoe’s artistic practice. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the works, the viewer needed to attend the show, view the works in person, and take away a visual memory of it. The experience would then have been complemented and reinforced, but not repeated, by the catalogue.

The catalogue also serves to reinforce further the myth that Greg Curnoe favoured—the one that portrayed him as a regular, humble, Canadian guy, who never really wanted to be an artist, but who succeeded nevertheless (a version of the Canadian dream). By providing the additional visual proof that things were roughly in the same place as where Curnoe described them, the viewer is encouraged to believe that the facts that appear in Curnoe’s works are true, and that he is only recording events as they happened. The viewer is not encouraged to look for any deeper meaning in the work.

Curnoe’s use of very simple language, short sentences and plain words were also devices that influence the viewer’s perception of the work as germane. We tend to view inaccessible language and grammar as more likely to obscure the true meaning of a

situation or event, than something that appears guileless and without subtext. After all, “plain-speaking” is used as a metaphor to describe someone who “tells it like it is.”

Metaphors like “up-front,” are used to denote that the person speaking has no hidden agenda (spatial concepts like down and behind being considered less trustworthy than up and front). Text alone could go only so far in reinforcing Curnoe’s picture of reality—the inclusion of visual images in the catalogue vastly enhanced the experience of participating in his life.

Curnoe may have recognized the didactic value of the visual aids in the São Paulo catalogue, and this would explain why he made the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (1969-1971) so soon after the first (he began it a month after finishing the first). In the *Second Series* a large painted panel loosely replicated the view from his window, showing a schematized landscape rendered in Pop Art colours and dotted with circular, numbered shapes (Figure 10). Accompanying the painting were eight typewritten journal-like pages that recorded incidents that happened and observations that he made over a two-year period which corresponded to the numbered dots (Figures 11-18). By including a painted version that replicated (and “proved”) the view out of the window, Curnoe could then use the text to focus on the events that happened as he viewed his territory, something that had been lacking from the first series. Through the synthesis of objective facts (what the Hospital looked like, and where it was as proved by his painting) and subjective events that happened in Curnoe’s life (which he could select at random), the work becomes a perfect example of experientialism.⁵⁴

In the *Second Series*, Curnoe included observations on a wide range of banal subjects including lights that he could see, climatic phenomena, and insects and birds, but

assigns each observation a precise date and time. Interspersed with these seemingly unimportant observations were references to people and events. Number 7 shows the room where Jack Chambers was on approximately July 15th. Number 18 shows the observation room from which Curnoe's father waved to him (sometime in April 1970). Phone calls from friends are noted, as are conversations with them regarding his work. On October 8th Sheila points out the room where she had their son Galen (number 53), although Galen was born on June 22, 1968. One of the most interesting things about the events retold is that while they give the appearance of adhering to a chronological pattern (by the dates and times that they are assigned in the numerical list), they do not in fact reproduce a biological temporal model. They function instead in a historical temporal manner as "signals" or markers of events that Curnoe has chosen to represent himself.⁵⁵

Nor is the work confined to the view reproduced before us. Not all of the events mentioned in the work are represented by numbers on the painted scene; Numbers 104 where Galen broke his front tooth, and number 105 where Curnoe slipped on some ice and fell while carrying Galen (who hit his head on the ground) are missing from the painting.⁵⁶ Number 24 is a complete fabrication: there was no American jet shot down by Canadian small arms fire on June 18 or on any other day—perhaps this was wishful thinking on Curnoe (the nationalist's) part. By the clever insertion of numbers in the painted view, Curnoe creates what Mieke Bal refers to as a hermeneutic code; he makes the work into a mystery which we then want to solve.⁵⁷ It is only by constantly referring back and forth between the painting and the text that we can understand what was happening and where it happened (and in a curious way it becomes important for us to find these things out). Interior studio and exterior view blend as Curnoe calls attention to

things that happen outside and inside the studio. We experience both domains as if we were Curnoe.⁵⁸

The image and text are further complemented by the inclusion of a tape recording of several segments of time (recorded during July and August of 1969) that are played through speakers mounted near the top of the painting. Pierre Thberge, in the catalogue that accompanied the Canadian contribution to the Venice Biennale, commented that the viewer was able to: "recreate, through the spontaneous perception of the visual, textual, and acoustic elements, not only the scene in its details, but also the disorder of the events which occurred during the production of the work by Curnoe."⁵⁹ This work is an index of Curnoe's desire for complete control over his environment which, if achieved, would make order out of disorder. What he chooses to communicate is interesting—why these things, and what determined his choices?

In his earlier, solely textual work, *24 Hourly Notes* (1965), Curnoe used a formula to determine how to choose material—once a day he would note down something that happened. With the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, there was no time constraint or restriction. The work began without a pre-determined end-date, something that allowed Curnoe relative freedom of choice regarding subject matter. As a result, his whole lifetime became potential material, and the incidents that he chose to include can be seen to be more personally significant. It is likely that this work is more consciously a construction of self than the others (although at first it would appear to be more spontaneous). Curnoe was able to exert more control over his life story in this work than if he had been bound by a more rigid temporal system.

In a broad sense, all narratives are subjective, mentally determined processes.

Choices are always made in selecting what elements are included in the retelling of a story. Events are included, excluded, highlighted or hidden according to the particular ideology of the individual telling the story. Although they may be highly personal, the choices made may also be seen to reflect the historical period, and artistic and social milieu within which the artist is working, factors that must be considered when viewing Curnoe's work. As was discussed in chapter 1, Curnoe was part of a large and stimulating circle of artists, writers, musicians, and academics by the late 1960s. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of artistic change in Canada—artists were searching for new, more “concrete” ways to express themselves, and Curnoe's art can be seen as a reflection of this.

Curnoe created a perfect dependence between word and image in the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*. Long considered rivals, Curnoe used word and image as equally important and complementary methods of communication. He has bridged the gap between what Michel Foucault terms “the seeable and the sayable.”⁶⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell expands on this perceived chasm between word and image when he states it is traditionally acknowledged that “literature is an art of time, painting an art of space,”⁶¹ and that word and image are seen as mutually incompatible. Mitchell contends that the two are not, in fact, incompatible. It is quite possible to achieve a crossover; literature can describe space, and painting can show time; it is just a bit more difficult (and as a result less often attempted).⁶² With Curnoe's work we have seen how the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* described both a passage of time and a physical space by words alone. By incorporating a numeric (and recognizably sequential) code into the painting, Curnoe is using text and image in a co-dependent way in the *Second Series*. As a result

the impression of a concrete experience is made much more “real.”⁶³

The *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* is a work that epitomizes Greg Curnoe’s life and interests. Incorporating aspects from both his past and present through the use of various types of imagery, the work functions as a form of self-portraiture. Although Curnoe would create a number of traditional painted self-portraits of himself (for example: *What’s good for the goose is good for the gander* [1983] [NGC] [Figure 19], and *Self-portrait No. 15, Aug. 5/8, 1992* [1992] [National Gallery of Canada] [Figure 20]⁶⁴), *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* is not a conventional self-portrait. It is instead, a work that relies on visual, textual, and other types of imagery to form an impression of the artist.

In an article entitled “Who/what is the subject? Representations of self in late twentieth-century French art,” Monique Yaari introduces the term “autoportrait” to characterize self-portraiture that spans the boundaries between visual art and literature.⁶⁵ As has been demonstrated, Curnoe’s *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* also transgresses the traditional boundaries between the arts; indeed he goes further to incorporate an aural dimension into the work. Yaari’s theory is particularly applicable to this work, especially when considering the fragmentary nature of its content. Yaari discusses the difference between classical autobiography and autoportraiture:

In broad terms, classical autobiography is understood to be retrospective, chronologically ordered, and narrative. In contrast the alternative version, the autoportrait is construed as a ‘thematic’ assemblage or bricolage whose project is at times anthropological in nature, and which exhibits radically different features of composition and style—analogical, metaphorical, poetic, structural.⁶⁶

If we accept this definition, then the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* is a

work that is most decidedly autoportraiture rather than merely self-portraiture. Yaari claims that autoportraiture goes farther than “telling” who someone is to “showing” who they are, and as a result it “thematizes the artistic process and refrains from totalizing representations.”⁶⁷ Curnoe felt that it was impossible to tell everything about a person through a work.⁶⁸ It is possible, however, to get a sense of who Curnoe was by examining a number of his works that show a similar preoccupation with his self (i.e., that become metaphorical of himself).

Throughout his career Curnoe’s works move from being relatively simple orientational metaphors to more complex ontological ones that reveal his identity.⁶⁹ As was introduced in chapter 2, Lakoff and Johnson discuss ontological metaphors and say that they can be used to describe a life in a number of ways; it can be seen as an event, an activity, or a state.⁷⁰ I believe that Curnoe viewed his life as a combination of all three; at various stages of his life some aspects became more important than others, but there was a constant movement back and forth between them. How he saw his life at a particular period can be seen in the art that he created at that time (similarly how he remembered his past depended upon where he was in the present).

In 1971 he painted a work entitled *View From the Window*, (Figure 21) (Curnoe Family), which, at first glance, was very similar to his earlier work *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967). *View From the Window* was also an obsessively detailed account of what he saw from his studio window, although here he focused on the atmospheric conditions rather than a description of the buildings he saw (Appendix E). While the work has a pseudo-scientific appearance (the specific date and time are included at the bottom of the work), it is, in fact, an attempt to document an ephemeral moment and its

effect on Curnoe's senses. Temperature, sound, visual appearance, and a sense of foreboding (in the form of changing atmospheric conditions) are phenomena which he documented. Colour is mentioned in this work as it had been in *Cityscape: Right Windows*, although here it is only the colour grey that Curnoe mentions (five times). The focus of this work has narrowed considerably from the scanning approach of *Cityscape: Right Windows*, a fact that is indicated by a word in the first line of the work. The first line indicates to the viewer where Curnoe's focus was as he printed "ZENITH!"⁷¹

Curnoe's work that followed in the wake of the success of the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* was not received with as much enthusiasm by the art world. He underwent a period where he revisited earlier themes, a practice that was seen as retrogressive and repetitive. Dennis Reid, in his essay "Some Things I Learned from Greg Curnoe," discusses this period of Curnoe's life. "He felt ignored by the younger generation of artists, and that his earlier contributions as an artist had been forgotten, that he was being left behind."⁷² In an exhibition review of one of Curnoe's shows at the Isaacs Gallery in 1978, Gary Michael Dault pronounced Curnoe's art "a bore," and called the show "a hodge-podge of what might be referred to as 'Curnoe-isms.'"⁷³

In addition to revisiting old themes,⁷⁴ Curnoe underwent a period of introspection in his art during the 1980s.⁷⁵ This can be seen as a reaction to the diminished popularity of his works, which had increasingly been perceived as repetitive and boring.⁷⁶ It was during this period that he tried to redefine (or perhaps define) who he was. One of the works that he created in the late 1980s was an artist's book published by Art Metropole—*Blue Book 8* (Dec. 7, 1988 – Oct. 2, 1989) (Figures 22 and 23). A reproduction of an actual rubber-stamped book created by Curnoe, this book provides an exhaustive list of

who Greg Curnoe was not.⁷⁷ In one long, run-on sentence that extends for one hundred and sixty-eight pages, the book provides interesting insights into Curnoe's identity (as told by himself). Tired of efforts by critics and the media to categorize him, Curnoe provides the definitive list of who he is not in an attempt to articulate who he is.⁷⁸ In an ad for the book, Curnoe described the project as "a very Canadian form of self-portrait—me describing myself in terms of what I am not."⁷⁹

Throughout the book is Curnoe's underlying awareness of the reception of his work; his list includes such notable comments as: "I am not a...pop-artist (page 49)...lettrist (page 55)...specialist (page 63)...linguist (page 67)...mystic (page 77)...bricoleur (page 107)...no one (page 135)...nothing (page 135)...one dimensional (page 143)...transient (page 143)...fiction (page 145)...rubber stamp (page 147)...parochial (page 157)...serialist (page 163). Curnoe also used the format of this book to reinforce opinions regarding the reception of his art when he claimed: "I am not a ...metaphor" (page 71). Although there is a playful, humorous feel to much of the book, he also used it to make a bitter comment on the fickle nature of the art world when he wrote: "I am not an ...artist manqué (page 153)...flash-in-the-pan" (page 155). The last entry is perhaps the most telling of all: "I am not...always truthful" (page 167).⁸⁰

The introductory essay to this book includes a section on "Lists," in which Christopher Dewdney calls Curnoe's book a "taxonomic exercise rather than an epistemological one."⁸¹ Dewdney, a proponent of the belief that Curnoe's work is not metaphorical, attempts to reduce the list to a purely documentary exercise on Curnoe's part, claiming: "His concern with catalogues or the compilation of comprehensive lists and descriptions is indicative of an empirical impulse almost scientific in its exhaustive

accumulation of relevant data. With these inventories, lists, catalogues and descriptions Curnoe uses reference as a form of stripped-down high-realism.”⁸² Dewdney alludes to the presence of metaphor within the book when he writes: “Ultimately his overriding intention is the location of self, the individual equivalent of national identity as defined by Spender in the epigraph.” but goes on to state that Curnoe’s “unmetaphorical language...is honed down to pure reference.”⁸³

In the early 1990s Curnoe’s bitterness seemed to abate, and his later works show a greater degree of personal awareness and self-examination than *Blue Book 8* did.⁸⁴ His work began to move towards an almost transcendental awareness of his position in the universe. His idea of what kind of a life was worth living (his constant search) was inextricably bound up with his physical position in the world, a link that can be seen very clearly in one of his last works—*Deeds #2* (1990) (Figure 24). This work has a broader context than before though; here Curnoe’s subject matter expands beyond his immediate self to include a much larger realm of memories and people as he traces the previous owners of the land he inhabits. Although Curnoe is always the centre of his own works, he attempts to acknowledge that in this instance at least, there are others who merit mentioning. In *Deeds #2* Curnoe abandons the “truthful” textual strategies he employed with the *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* and *Second Series*—perhaps he no longer cared if his audience experienced his life as he did. He did, however, continue his ongoing preoccupation with finding and defining his place in the world through listing and categorizing in his art, aspects which allow the work to be read as a metaphor of Curnoe himself.⁸⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ Diana Nemiroff reinforces the perception of Curnoe's art as truthful in an article entitled "This is Great Art Because it Wasn't Made By an American," *Vanguard* 10, no. 8, (October 1981): pp. 24-32.

² Christopher Dewdney, *Evident Truths. Greg Curnoe, 1936-1992*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995).

³ I am not suggesting that Curnoe did not make works in which he created text from the outset of his artistic career (for example his early comic-strip artworks and works like *Going Home, Coming Back* [1961] [AGO]), but rather, I suggest that he moved away from collage works that appropriated 'ready-made' text to works in which he was wholly responsible for the textual content.

⁴ As the works that I am dealing with are predominantly textual the designation "viewer" will also be assumed to refer to a "reader."

⁵ See opening quote to this chapter.

⁶ Charles Taylor, "Inescapable Frameworks." In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. (Cambridge, 1999), 3-24.

⁷ This work contains two different temporal systems—historical and biological time are melded to (re-)present what we perceive as reality. Refer to note 39.

⁸ This work became the subject of controversy when it was exhibited in Edinburgh at the *Canada 101* exhibition because it included 'obscene' text. For comprehensive newspaper coverage of this event see the National Gallery of Canada's artist's files on Greg Curnoe.

⁹ The work is so titled because Curnoe reused an old canvas given to him by his friend Tony Urquhart. Pierre Thberge, *Greg Curnoe: Rtrospective/Retrospective* (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1981), 94.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² Dennis Reid, in his essay "Some Things I Learned From Greg Curnoe" discusses the importance of connections in Curnoe's work. While discussing Curnoe's belief that observation was a valid subject matter, Reid writes: "even the most mundane observation was integral to a great web of experience, stretching out in all directions from the sensate body at the center, familiarly ensconced at home or in the adjacent studio. This web, centrally dense and strong, more open at its outer reaches stretches back through time as well. The work, then, the evidence of this interconnectedness, was a living, growing, increasingly rich history of a man, of a family, of a community, a city, a region, country, civilization, of the human condition." Dennis Reid. "Some Things I Learned From Greg Curnoe", *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, eds. Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 119.

¹³ Curnoe also made other works in this series entitled *Cityscapes: Middle Windows* (1967) (which focused on the makes and colours of cars he could see from his King Street studio), and *Front Left Centre Windows* (April 1967).

¹⁴ This was not the first time that Curnoe chronicled the view from his studio window in an artwork. In 1961 he created a textual work entitled *Cityscape*, which documented the view from his Richmond Street studio

window.

¹⁵ Curnoe's use of lists extended into all areas of his life and was a lifelong occupation for him. In his archive there is list after list of things like objects he owned, people he knew or admired, cities with populations under 30,000 and so on.

¹⁶ Nemiroff. "This is Great Art." *Vanguard*, 27.

¹⁷ Curnoe shows a good deal of interest in the formal properties of what he sees in this work. This is in ironic contrast to a statement that he made in the catalogue for the National Gallery of Canada's 1968 exhibition *The Heart of London*, where he pictures himself saying in a cartoon balloon: "...I don't understand the term 'form'; I never could understand it..." Greg Curnoe, *The Heart of London* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968) unpaginated.

¹⁸ James Reaney describes meeting Curnoe: "I used to see Greg on the streets in his orange pants..." Elizabeth Dingman. "The Art World Beats a Path to London, Ont., Mousetrap." *The Telegram* (Toronto), 28 November 1970.

The vividness of Curnoe's taste in clothing has attained a near-mythic status over the years. Curnoe's startling appearance at the National Gallery of Canada's 1967 group exhibition, *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art*, is commented on by Sarah Milroy in the catalogue that accompanied the 2001 Greg Curnoe retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She writes: "Not surprisingly, he celebrated in style, attending the opening in a yellow suit, blue tie, and chartreuse shirt..." Sarah Milroy, "Greg Curnoe: Time Machines" *Life & Stuff*, 60. Dennis Reid, in the same catalogue also comments on this outfit, noting that Curnoe was "resplendent in new yellow suit, chartreuse shirt, and sky blue tie." Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 111. George Bowering made frequent mention of Curnoe's colourful clothing in his posthumous tribute to him. One segment begins: "I remember Greg Curnoe and his rainbow clothes." George Bowering, *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (London: Coach House Press, 1993), 31.

¹⁹ Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 121.

²⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 159.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 160.

²³ Ibid., 164.

²⁴ Ibid., 162.

²⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36.

²⁶ For Pierre Théberge's discussion of the importance of Curnoe's studio see chapter 1, note 99.

John Boyle wrote about Curnoe's first studio at 432 Richmond Street: "His studio became a center of intellectual activity where ideas were discussed and plots were hatched." John Boyle, "Reflections on Greg Curnoe: He Is Us." *Carnet* 1, no. 2 (Spring/Printemps 1993): 20-26.

²⁷ The show was entitled *Canada 101* because it was the hundred and first anniversary of Canada's confederation. The impetus for the show was the remarkable impact that Expo '67 had in bringing the world's attention to Canadian art and culture. Peter Diamand in *Canada 101*. Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh College of Art. [Ottawa]: The Canada Council, 1968, unpaginated.

²⁸ *Canada 101*, unpaginated.

²⁹ Lakoff and Johnson describe conduit metaphors in *Metaphors We Live By*, 10-13.

Pierre Théberge, in an article entitled "London Recaptured" also used a conduit metaphor when he described Curnoe's "unshakable faith in the reality of what is represented." He writes that "Curnoe's entire output is impregnated with this strength of conviction." Pierre Théberge, "London Recaptured: For Greg Curnoe (1936-1992)." *Canadian Literature*, no. 152/153 (Spring Summer 1997): 164.

³⁰ Canada Council, *Canada 101*, unpaginated.

³¹ E-mail correspondence with Judith Rodger, Sunday, 25 March 2001.

Although Curnoe was chosen to exhibit at São Paulo, neither he nor Dennis Reid traveled to Brazil for the exhibition. Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 120.

³² In a catalogue from a 1975 exhibition *Some Lettered Works, 1961-69*, the reason that Greg Curnoe gave for the lengthy creation of this piece was that it was harder to stamp on pliable canvas than on a hard surface. I believe that this statement became commonly accepted because the audience and critics wanted to continue to believe that Curnoe's work was a spontaneous piece, not something that he had to plan for months. While the idea behind it may have been spontaneous (and even this is debatable given the amount of preliminary material in his archive), it is unrealistic to believe that the only reason it took so long to make was physical. Greg Curnoe, *Some Lettered Works, 1961-69*. (London, Ont.: London Art Gallery, 1975), 4.

³³ Mark Freeman, "Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span." In *The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues*, eds. Thomas M. Brinthaupt and Richard P. Lipka, (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1992), 16.

³⁴ The effect of scanning the view may be seen to reflect the cinematic influences of Jack Chambers. Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 318.

³⁵ For more on the theory of possessive individualism see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

³⁶ The works are all quite different though—*Cityscape* merely described the view. The insertion of alternative text did not appear until the *First Series*, and the *Second Series* incorporated a painted view with textual references to events.

³⁷ M. Foucault quoted in Neil Leach, "Panopticism." In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 356-367.

³⁸ Jill Ker Conway, "Word and Image." In *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 177.

³⁹ Although Curnoe and his father came into conflict over his career choice as an adult, Curnoe's sister Lynda describes their childhood as relatively happy in her biographical memoir *My Brother Greg: a Memoir* (London: Ergo Productions, 2001).

⁴⁰ See chapter 2, page 61, for a discussion of Charles Taylor and "inescapable frameworks."

⁴¹ As with *Ruminations on an old Urquhart* (1967) the interjections also interrupt the narrative flow, and result in an oscillation between the foreground (the view) and background (an awareness of the creator) of the work.

⁴² Judith Rodger told me that Sheila Curnoe said that although Curnoe had never met Gordon Jeffrey (a well-known London, Ontario musician) he was fascinated by the large organ that the man had built. Apparently "Gordon's organ" became a bit of a family joke. Rodger (25 March 2001).

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- ⁴³ See earlier note 20 in this chapter regarding Lakoff and Johnson and "truth".
- ⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 10.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.
- ⁴⁸ Lara Lipinski, "'When the trees of language are shaken by rhizomes' in Rene Magritte's 'Les mots et les images'." *Word & Image* 11, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1995): 220.
- ⁴⁹ See chapter 2, page 75, for a discussion Lakoff and Johnson's theory of experientialism.
- ⁵⁰ Scott Watson, "The Past of Our Practice: A Note on the 1960s." In *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, ed. by Peter White (Banff, Alberta: Walter Phillips Gallery Editions, Banff Centre Press, 1996), 6.
- ⁵¹ Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 116.
- ⁵² Ibid., 119.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 121.
- ⁵⁴ See note 49.
- ⁵⁵ George Kubler discusses the difference between biological time (chronological time experienced as we experience the passage of time at this very moment) and historical time (our conflation of historical events into a more concise, and unified past) in a discussion of the history of things. He says that biological time is not the best way to study the past. A historical model, which uses important events (or objects) as "signals" of points of time in the past is more useful. George Kubler, "The History of Things." In *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 1-30.
- ⁵⁶ Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Canada*, 139.
- ⁵⁷ Meike Bal, "Seeing Signs: The Use of Semiotics for the Understanding of Visual Art." In *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Anne Holly, and Keith Moxey. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78.
- ⁵⁸ The conflation of events that occurred over a two-year period onto a single canvas may also be due to the influence of cinematic techniques learned through Jack Chambers. Reid, *Canadian Painting*, 318.
- ⁵⁹ Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Canada*, 135.
- ⁶⁰ M. Foucault quoted in W.J.T. Mitchell, "Word and Image." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by R. Nelson and R. Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 47.
- ⁶¹ Mitchell, *Iconology*, 95.
- ⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Not everyone liked the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*. Kay Kritzweiser, the art critic for *The Globe and Mail* wrote: "Enough, enough, the whimper is heard. Is there no end to the Curnoe colloquy with windowpanes, easterly, northerly, southerly, all giving on to Victoria Hospital in London, Ontario? Presumably not, because this week Curnoe removed the huge plate glass window of Isaacs Gallery ('Once more,' Av Isaacs groaned) to ease in his latest painted journal, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*. The painting continues Curnoe's record of minutiae from his studio windows framing the building which has become the root noun in this painter's vocabulary." Kay Kritzweiser, "Curnoe's Continuing Window Chronicle." *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 20 March 1971.

⁶⁴ Both *What's good for the goose is good for the gander* (1983), and *Self-portrait No. 15, Aug. 5/8, 1992* (1992), were exhibited at the 1995 National Gallery of Canada's posthumous exhibition, *Greg Curnoe, 1936-1992*. The *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* was also shown at the exhibition, along with several working drawings and sketches for it.

⁶⁵ Although Yaari's article deals with postmodern art during the 1970s and 1980s (slightly later than the period of the work I am discussing), there are many aspects of her theory that are applicable to Curnoe's work. I intend to focus on several of them here. Monique Yaari, "Who/what is the subject? Representations of self in late twentieth-century French art." *Word & Image* 16, no. 4 (October-December 2000): 363.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge, *Informal Discussion after Panel Discussion*. Hart House Summer Program, National Archives of Canada, Canada Council Collection. No date available.

⁶⁹ Lakoff and Johnson defined ontological metaphors as metaphors which allowed us to "identify our experiences as entities or substances, [so that] we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them." Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 25.

⁷⁰ See chapter 2, page 79.

⁷¹ Zenith refers to the "point of heavens directly above observer." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 1253.

⁷² Dennis Reid discusses Curnoe's attempts to reinvigorate his career during this period. Reid, "Some Things I Learned," 126-127.

⁷³ In a scathing review of the exhibition, Dault attacked Curnoe's regionalism, nationalism, use of the ordinary moments of life in his art, and the "theatrical, almost aggressive parading of his hobbies as the content of his work." He wrote that Curnoe's autobiographical works were "self-indulgent", and that they were "[I]nsufferably, languishingly, narcissistically boring." Gary Michael Dault, "No matter his reputation this Curnoe's art's a bore." *The Toronto Star*, 27 February 1978.

⁷⁴ Curnoe continued to experiment with stamped works throughout his career, searching for new ways to make the format fresh. In *Difficult Spring Landscape* (1986), he stamped impersonal observations on the weather, but played with the textual structure. Reversing the text so that it reads from bottom to top (although it is still left to right). I think that this shows that he was trying to find new ways to express himself with text, but could not yet break free of the formula that he had become best known for. Perhaps the title is metaphorical of the frustrations he was experiencing.

⁷⁵ As early as 1976 critics were indicating that Curnoe's career was experiencing a downturn. In a review of an exhibition at the Forest City Gallery in 1976 Judy Malone wrote: "Curnoe's concept of living art is interesting to a point, but would his documentation of chapters from his life be more properly placed in a

journal? His work seems to suffer the dilemma of all un-edited thought—at times, so confusing and so incoherent it paralyzes communication.” Judy Malone, “Exhibition of New Works by Curnoe Shows Artist in Period of Transition,” *The London Free Press*, 13 November 1976.

⁷⁶ Eight years earlier, in the 1981 movie *Greg Curnoe*, Curnoe acknowledged his declining popularity, saying that the public had a short memory and was influenced by what was fashionable in art. He went on to say that the age 40-45 was a difficult time in an artist’s life, where you had to remain “interesting.” Greg Curnoe, *Greg Curnoe* (London, Ont.: Lockwood Films, 1981).

See note 71.

In 1983 David MacWilliams wrote a negative review of Curnoe’s exhibition at the Equinox Gallery saying that Curnoe was “too sure, too smug. He needs to get away from 38 Weston Street and London, Ontario.” David MacWilliams, “Greg Curnoe: Equinox Gallery.” *Vanguard* 12, nos. 29/30 (February 1983): 29-30, quoted in Rodger, “Chronology,” 178.

Sarah Milroy, in her biographical essay on Curnoe discusses the slump in his career. Milroy, “Greg Curnoe: Time Machines,” 87-94.

⁷⁷ *Blue Book 8* was one in a series of stamped *Blue Books* that Curnoe made over the years.

⁷⁸ Sarah Milroy refers to the *Blue Book 8* as a “silhouette portrait” of Curnoe. Milroy, “Greg Curnoe: Time Machines,” 104.

⁷⁹ Greg Curnoe. Advertisement flyer for *Blue Book 8*. Art Metropole, 1989.

⁸⁰ At the symposium at the AGO in May, 2001, portions of the lists from the *Blue Book 8* were cited by various speakers who picked out items from the list to support whatever point they were making (something like I have done in the text).

⁸¹ Christopher Dewdney, “Reference and Self: The Limits of Subjectivity.” In Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book 8: December 7, 1988-October 2, 1989* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989). 176.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 178.

⁸⁴ In 1990 Curnoe made a stamped work called *Stamp Story*, the text of which reads: “Hand-cut, rudely assembled, inked, and stamped! – January 15, 1990.” This short, pithy, and ironic statement reflects Curnoe’s awareness of the fickle nature of the art world which had at one time embraced this very type of work. However, I believe that by acknowledging this in a humorous (and entirely typical) fashion, Curnoe indicates that he does not care to adjust his style to suit current fashion.

⁸⁵ In the entertainment newspaper *Eye*, Oliver Girling reviewed the exhibition *Deeds Abstracts* where this work was shown. Along with a series of other works in the *Deeds* series, Curnoe exhibited textual works where he tried to articulate himself through various different languages (for example: “I am” in Ojibway, “me” in English, and so on). Girling concedes that the subject matter of the verbal self portraits is the *self*, but he does not acknowledge the metaphorical content of the *Deeds* works, saying that their subject matter “is the land he and his family occupies.” Oliver Girling, “Coming home and what it means.” *Eye* (Toronto), 2 June 1994.

CONCLUSION

More often than not the intention should be whether it was fun or not.

—Greg Curnoe, *Greg Curnoe Interviews Gerry Gilbert*

Although Greg Curnoe's life was cut short when he was killed in a bicycling accident on November 14th 1992, interest in his work has continued to intensify throughout the past decade. Spurred on by the ongoing efforts of friends and fans, and the donation of his archive and a large number of works to the Art Gallery of Ontario, the retrospective exhibition *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* and accompanying symposium *We Are Not Greg Curnoe*, were organized in 2001. While his stature as an artist continues to grow to legendary proportions, his personal life is also celebrated in posthumous publications as friends and family pay tribute to Curnoe, the man (George Bowering's *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* [1993] and Lynda Curnoe's *My Brother Greg: A Memoir* [2001]). In keeping with previous exhibitions and publications, the retrospective exhibition, symposium, and memoirs all deal with similar concerns as they attempt to investigate and understand the complex links between Curnoe's life and his art while steadfastly ignoring the latter's metaphoricity. While it is universally accepted that Curnoe's work is autobiographical, its underlying complex meaning is often ignored. By strictly adhering to the belief that Curnoe was merely documenting reality, critics, curators, and writers perpetuate many of the remarkably persistent myths that formed during his lifetime.

Both biographical and autobiographical writing played very important roles in the development of Curnoe's public identity and the reception of his art. While writers and

curators such as Leonore Crawford, Dennis Reid and Pierre Théberge were important in promoting and validating Curnoe's work, Curnoe himself assumed an equally active role in the creation of his artistic persona, and in the interpretation of his work. As is demonstrated in this thesis, biographical facts were manipulated to form a public identity for Curnoe that, although it was factually based, was, in effect, a construct. By the dissemination of strategic pieces of information about Curnoe, the way in which he lived his life became synonymous with his artistic creations—neither aspect was more important than the other, and events that occurred in one sphere (for example his daily activities) were often manifested in another (his paintings). His identity became structured and understood under the metaphor: "My life is art."

Curnoe's lifelong interest in incorporating text into his artworks can, and generally has, been traced back to his childhood pastimes such as reading comics and playing with rubber stamps. While the validity of these precedents is undeniable, these facts were highlighted because they helped to formulate a particular picture of Curnoe as a humble, populist artist who took not only his inspiration, but his style and technique, from his lived life. Overlooked in this picture is the fact that there were many other artists working with text in art at the same time.¹ By providing information that substantiated Curnoe's early claim to the use of text in his art, both he and critics and writers were able to set him apart from a general trend, and portray him as an innovator.

Heavily influenced by Curnoe's own writings, his commentators consistently denied (and continue to deny) the metaphorical content in his work. The selective, fragmentary nature of memory combined with factual description and plain language resulted in works that were universally perceived as free from metaphor (which is

commonly understood as a poetic or rhetorical device).² As we have seen in the preceding chapters, this was not the case. By applying the theories of Charles Taylor, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (with additional reference to theoretical writings by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, Felicity A. Nussbaum, Mark Freeman, James Olney, Jill Ker Conway, W.J. T. Mitchell and Monique Yaari) to a select number of Curnoe's works it becomes obvious that his overriding project was not merely descriptive, but a life-long search for personal understanding through artistic expression. It was only through the repeated articulation of what was important to him that Curnoe was able to determine what kind of life he felt was worth living and subsequently achieve personal fulfillment. The expression of self-identity through his art was not an isolated phenomenon that was limited to a specific stage in his career, but rather each work forms part of a continuing, life-long process. The works that I examine in this thesis can be seen as evidence of this ongoing search for self-identity, and they function as autobiographical metaphors.

By examining a selection of works that incorporate text and feature the view from Curnoe's studio window, along with selected complementary works, it is possible to see how he experimented with a number of different formulae to express his experience of life. These strategies range from the adoption of the rigid conventions of telling time by the twenty-four hour clock in *24 Hourly Notes*, to the more open-ended format of *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (which, although it gave the impression of being limitless, was nevertheless almost entirely constrained by the range of Curnoe's view from his window), to the documentary strategy of *Deeds #2*. The content of the works varies considerably: *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* shows Curnoe's preoccupation with personal feelings; *Cityscape: Right Windows* assumes a detached impartiality; and,

Deeds #2 indicates an awareness of the thick historical context within which Curnoe lived. What all these works have in common (besides the previously stated surface subject matter) is that they are all based on Curnoe's personal experience, whether it be his son's first steps, transitory weather effects, or his temporary ownership of a piece of land.

An analysis of the validity of personal experience as the basis for art-making reveals that Curnoe's works can function as metaphors despite their mundane appearance. Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, discusses the importance of ordinary life as one of the frameworks that are necessary for personal fulfillment (together with rationalism and artistic expression).³ Lakoff and Johnson's theory elaborates on this idea as they demonstrate how the everyday, mundane occurrences that we take for granted are in fact, concepts that are structured around fundamental metaphors. They discuss the importance of "experientialism" as the basis for understanding these metaphorical concepts that determine how we live our lives.⁴ For Lakoff and Johnson our most complex metaphorical concepts are ontological metaphors, whereby something becomes an entity that can be referred to, categorized, grouped, quantified, and reasoned about.⁵ I have demonstrated that Curnoe's works (in particular the *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*) function as ontological metaphors of his life—they provided information about Curnoe that could be analyzed to facilitate a greater understanding of the artist's self-identity: "My life is art."

The theoretical framework that I have used is not the only one that could be applied to his work, and there are other directions of inquiry that I refer to but do not examine in depth. Some of these other directions offer promise, but are beyond the scope

of a single master's thesis. A more detailed analysis of Curnoe's use of listing in his journals, jottings, paintings, and poetry could make a separate thesis, as could an examination of the supporting body of writings by Curnoe (and collected by him) in his archive. I chose to limit my discussion of Curnoe's works to a select few that showed his use of text to describe his feelings and environment (both physical and metaphysical), in order to maintain a very specific focus. There are numerous other works that could have supported my thesis, although less directly than the ones I chose. It would be possible to formulate many different arguments around other combinations and categories of Curnoe's work. While these areas were tantalizing, the aim of this thesis was to demonstrate that Curnoe's work is indeed metaphorical, and to challenge previously accepted opinions and facts by reinterpreting them through an interdisciplinary approach.

This thesis forms part of a continuing narrative of Curnoe's life. If as both Mark Freeman and Charles Taylor suggested there is a connection between the search for self and our quest for immortality,⁶ then I believe that Curnoe has achieved a form of immortality through his work. As Curnoe's life and work continue to be examined through exhibitions, books, essays, symposia, and theses like this one, new avenues of interpretation will appear, enriching and enlarging the reading of his life and work.

ENDNOTES

¹ By 1968 there was a profusion of art that featured words, with or without images. In response to this seemingly chaotic abundance Robert White and Gary Michael Dault wrote an article in which they proposed eight categories for examining artworks that incorporated words. White, Robert, and Gary Michael Dault. "Word Art and Art Word." *artscanada* 25, no 2, issue 118/119 (June 1968): 17-20.

² See chapter 3, pages 96-97.

³ See chapter 2, page 61.

⁴ See chapter 2, page 75.

⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 14.

⁶ See chapter 2, page 79.

APPENDIX A

Chronology

The events featured in this chronology do not represent all aspects of Curnoe's life, rather they are intended to situate the main events and works discussed in this thesis. The works discussed in depth in this thesis are identified in bold face type. I am indebted to Judith Rodger whose extensive chapter, "Chronology," in the exhibition publication *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, provided a comprehensive overview of Curnoe's life.

- 1936 Nov. 19. Gregory Richard Curnoe born at Victoria Hospital, London.
- 1946 Curnoe is given a rubber stamp set for Christmas by his parents.
- 1954-56 Attends H.B. Beal Technical School in the Special Art Program.
- 1956 Spring. Builds his first studio in the basement of his parent's house at 75 Langarth Street E.
- 1956 Jun.-Oct. Attends Doon School of Fine Arts, Doon, Ontario.

Nov.-Apr. 1957. Works as a commercial artist at Stewart Bender Screen Printing Company, London.
- 1957 Begins studies at Ontario College of Art (OCA) in Toronto.

Dec. 6. Exhibits in first group exhibition, *Nine Young Painters*, at the Garret Art Gallery, Toronto.

Meets Michel Sanouillet, French Literature professor at the University of Toronto and Dada expert. Also meets artists Michael Snow and Graham Coughtry in Toronto.
- 1960 May 10. Fails final year at OCA and returns to London.

Jul. Rents studio at 432 Richmond Street, London.
- 1961 Nov. 3-Dec. 1. First solo exhibition, *An Exhibition of Things*, Richard E. Crouch Branch Library, London.

Dec. 21-Jan. 10, 1962. Participates in un-named neo-Dada exhibition, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. Exhibits *Drawer Full of Stuff* (Autumn 1961).
- 1962 Creates stamped work, *List of Names of Boys I Grew Up with* (Art Edwards).

Feb. 3. Co-organizes *The Celebration*, Canada's first "happening" at the London Public Library and Art Museum.

May. *Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street* (1961) is purchased by the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina.

Nov. 3. Region Gallery opens in London (closes December 1963).
- 1963 Spring. Curnoe moves into studio at 202 King Street, London.

- Sept. Founds Nihilist Party of London, Ontario.
- 1964 Spring. *Sunday Lacrosse at Talbot School* (1963) is purchased by Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
- Aug. Curnoe begins first rubber stamped journal (*Blue Book #1*).
- Sept. *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat* (1963) is purchased by the Vancouver Art Gallery.
- Nov. John H. (Jake) Moore (an important patron of Curnoe's for over 30 years) buys his first painting by Curnoe.
- 1965 July 3. Curnoe marries Sheila Thompson in London.
- Aug. 1. First Nihilist Picnic held in Port Stanley.
- Oct. Nihilist Spasm Band formed.
- Dec. 15. *Spring on the Ridgeway* (1964) is purchased by the Art Gallery of Toronto.
- 1966 Feb. 2. Avrom Isaacs (Toronto) becomes Curnoe's art dealer (remains Curnoe's dealer until Dec. 1979).
- Apr. 30. First son, Owen, is born at Victoria Hospital.
- Summer. *20 Cents Magazine* begins publication.
- Fall. Curnoe petitions National Gallery of Canada ((NGC) to purchase his work for their collection.
- Pierre Thberge travels to London to visit Curnoe's studio. *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels* is purchased by the NGC.
- Feeding Percy* (1965) is purchased by the London Public Library and Art Museum.
- Nov.16-Dec 5. Curnoe's first solo exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery, *Greg Curnoe: New Work from Souwesto*.
- Dec. 14-15. Curnoe paints *24 Hourly Notes*.
- 1967 Paints *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart*.
- Paints *Cityscape: Right Windows*.
- Oct. 10. Signs contract for Dorval Airport mural. The mural is installed and subsequently removed in March, 1968. The work becomes part of the collection of the NGC in 1998.
- Fall. Curnoe becomes one of first members of Canadian Artists' Representation (CAR), founded by John (Jack) Chambers. Chambers makes *R-34* (film about Curnoe).
- Dec. 9. Curnoe buys 38 Weston Street (with financial assistance from Jake Moore and money from the Dorval Airport mural commission). The Curnoes move in on May 15, 1968.
- 1968 Feb. First screening of Curnoe's film *Souwesto*.

- Apr. Paints *Front Left Centre Windows*.
- June 22. Second son, Galen, is born at Victoria Hospital.
- Aug. 18-Sept. 7. *Canada 101* exhibition held in Edinburgh, Scotland. Curnoe's work, *24 Hourly Notes*, is censored.
- Aug.-Jan. 1969. Paints *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*.
- Sept. Curnoe meets British artist Richard Hamilton in London, Ontario (Hamilton awards Curnoe a prize at the *Canadian Artist's '68* exhibition that is held from Nov 29-Dec. 29, 1968).
- 1969 Curnoe makes 16 mm film on London, Ontario, *Souwesto 1947-69*.
- Feb 10. Begins *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (work is completed Mar. 10, 1971).
- Apr. Begins entering journals into the computers at the University of Western Ontario (London).
- Sept.-Jan. *Greg Curnoe, Canada: X Bienial, São Paulo (Brazil)*. Exhibits *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series*.
- 1970 Curnoe makes 16 mm film documenting people and places in London, *Connexions*.
- Mar. Curnoe and John Boyle present the *Continental Refusal* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University, Kingston.
- Nov. Curnoe types his computer journals into a terminal installed in his studio at 38 Weston Street.
- Late Fall. First meeting of the London branch of CAR.
- 1971 Paints *View From the Window*.
- Spring. Curnoe begins competitive bicycling.
- August. Sells *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (1969-1971) to the NGC.
- November 17. Daughter Zoë born at Victoria Hospital.
- 1972 Summer. Teaches an art course at the University of Guelph.
- 1973 Sept.-Dec. Teaches an art course at the OCA. (Curnoe teaches and lectures regularly at various institutions from this point).
- Dec. Co-founds the Forest City Gallery (an artists' co-op) in London.
- 1974 Dec. 6-Jan 2, 1975. *Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture* exhibited at the London Public Library and Art Museum.
- 1975 July. Begins a one-year term as Resident Artist at Western.
- Sept. 5-29. *Greg Curnoe: Some Lettered Works, 1961-69* is exhibited at the London

Public Library and Art Museum.

- 1976 Jul. 14-Oct. 10. Represents Canada at the XXXVII Biennale di Venezia. *Canada: Greg Curnoe*. Exhibits *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* among other works.
- 1977 Feb. Awarded a Carot Award by CAR.
- 1978 Apr. 13. Jack Chambers dies at Victoria Hospital.
May 14-Jun. 2. Teaches course on regionalism at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD).
Dec. Ends relationship with the Isaacs Gallery.
- 1981 Lockwood Films (London) produces *Greg Curnoe*, a documentary film about his life and work.
June 27-May 2, 1982. *Greg Curnoe: Retrospective*, is organized by the National Gallery of Canada and curated by Pierre Théberge. Exhibition travels to Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary, London, Fredericton, and Toronto.
- 1985 Jan. 1. Gordon Curnoe (Greg's father) dies.
- 1986 Paints *Difficult Spring Landscape*.
- 1988 Dec. 7. Begins *Blue Book 8*. (Book is finished Oct. 2, 1989.)
- 1989 Nov. *Blue Book 8* published by Art Metropole, Toronto.
- 1990 Paints *Stamp Story*.
- 1991 Paints *Deeds #2*.
- 1992 Mar. 6-28. *Deeds Abstracts* exhibition at the Forest City Gallery, London.
Nov. 14. Curnoe dies at Strathroy General Hospital as the result of a cycling accident.
- 1996 Dec. 7-Jan. 14, 1996. NGC organizes a traveling exhibition *Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe, 1936-1992*. Exhibited at Laurentian University Museum and Art Centre (Sudbury), the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Halifax), and the Winnipeg Art Gallery.
- 1997 AGO acquires 151 works by Curnoe.
Nov. 6. Curnoe's mother, Nellie, dies.
- 2001 Mar. 9-Jul. 15. *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* exhibited at the AGO.
May 12. Symposium *We Are Not Greg Curnoe* held at the AGO.

APPENDIX B***Ruminations on an Old Urquhart—Transcription of text.***

In order to facilitate reading of the work it has been transformed into a more legible reading format. The first letters of sentences and of proper nouns have been capitalized and the un-hyphenated line breaks have been eliminated.

But there are some things that are real. I have thought about that too much & gotten myself into too many conversations. A couple have become word games where I lost, particularly with Royden when it became vicious, probably because he felt threatened, as I did. Always the feeling lately of being a loser & then Owen starts to walk, he is very busy, Sheila holds up the black pen & he staggers about 3 steps & grabs it. We have no money. What a pissy way to live.

APPENDIX C

Cityscape: Right Windows—Transcription of text.

In order to facilitate reading of the work it has been transformed into a more legible reading format. The first letters of sentences and of proper nouns have been capitalized and the un-hyphenated line breaks have been eliminated. Occasional unnecessary periods have been removed. The strike throughs appear on the artwork.

An orange border, below that "RVIC L MP." White lettering. Bodoni. Followed by a white diamond. ~~Below that~~ on dark blue. Below that. Smaller lettering. Same style, dark blue "Co. Limited," on white. Under that is a thin orange line. The sign is lit from above by 4 lamps with green shades. Above it 5 windows. 2½ pairs, with white frames. An orange flag flaps over 2 of them. Above the right hand pair are grey sills & above them a circular depression in the red brick with grey concrete blocks set in the circle at 12.3.6 & 9 o'clock. To the right is a grey diamond & above --- the ornate roof line, painted white. To the right the left wall of guild home equipment recedes.←! The sky is overcast. Below the sign, 197 on the glass above the double doors.

APPENDIX D

View of Victoria Hospital, First Series, Nos. 1-6 – Transcription of text.

In order to facilitate reading of the work it has been transformed into a more legible reading format. The first letters of sentences and of proper nouns have been capitalized and the un-hyphenated line breaks have been eliminated. The interjections that Curnoe has inserted that function outside the main narrative are highlighted in bold face. The text remains separated into the six individual panels.

From the left – putty smudges on the glass, a dark green frame house with white trim, its left side is also visible through several small trees, a group of large trees obscure the houses to the right of it, the east (**this is truly great art**) wall of a one story brick cottage, its east window with an awning, in front of it a dead elm tree, across the street part of the front of a white frame house, above it part of the Jack-Tar building and

a bit of the Huron & Erie 8ts flag pole – the flag is a moving spot, a tall, cool green tree, a 1-story house with a grey upper part & a white frame first story – the upper window is visible with a blind half drawn – (**are you reading or just looking?**) – to the right a tall, warm green tree with the sun shining through it, making the outer leaves translucent. A group of bushy trees in front of it. To the right, on the horizon, a corner of a tall

building. Two tall chimneys side by side – the right one has two rings at the top. It is a yellow brick tube. The left one is older. I can count II. Equally spaced rings on it & two more at the top, west of them, two rows of trees – their tops lit by the sun, east of them, a tree & then the left end of a tall white building – eleven top floor windows are visible – above it the top of the red brick C.I.A. building, below it an old red brick building. with

an aluminum vent on the peak of the roof. A tree. The face of an older brick bui (**this is truly great art because it was not made by an American!**) lding, it has two buttresses on each side of & a big half circular window above the front door, in front of it, the back of an old yellow brick building with a slate roof – over it, a dead elm tree – just in front of it another slate roofed brick building, trees in front of all of them a light green tree, a h

ouse, a tree above it, a chimney above it. Lots of trees (“**Gordon Jeffrey, meet Geoffrey Gordon.**”) in front & below – many lighter, yellower trees. Part of the nurses’ residence. Victoria Hospital*! The knot in the white string covers the mullion which covers part of the east wing. Cars in the parking lots & curved street lights on Colborne St. Trees & the last house on the east side of Colborne – above it a red maple – part of a building. A cre

am gable & a brick one with white trim, part of Blackwood Lodge – a yellow tree – the foreground covers it. The public parking lot. The back of a house & its garage. The back of another house. A forked light standard. A modern apartment – yellow brick, an elm tree (we are really Riel). In the foreground – a tall, emerald green tree. The dark green brown sash. Earthquake.

APPENDIX E***View from the Window—Transcription of text.***

In order to facilitate reading of the work it has been transformed into a more legible reading format. The first letters of sentences and of proper nouns have been capitalized and the un-hyphenated line breaks have been eliminated.

Grey or gray?? Zenith! A breeze has come up, the sky is overcast—light grey with faint lines of lighter grey. Its [sic] about 70 degrees out. All the leaves in the trees are moving. I can hear them though the door under the window is shut.

The wind is getting stronger, there is a heavy sense of relief in the sky. The darker grey clouds are moving east very quickly below the lighter grey overcast.

5 to 12 A.M.—September 15—1971.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Greg Curnoe, *24 Hourly Notes* (14-15 December 1966). Stamp pad ink and acrylic on galvanized iron.

6.A.M.conf:FLACCID A
 FTER IT. IT'S DANCE M
 USIC! JOHN ARRIVES
 JOHN & SHIRLEY CAM
 E UP AT 5:30, CHRIST
 DO I EVER FEEL GREA
 T, THE CHIMLEY IS DA
 RKEH THAN THE SKY,
 HE IS WRITING! THE S
 PASM BAND IS INTO IT

Figure 2. Greg Curnoe. Detail of *24 Hourly Notes* (14-15 December 1966). Stamp pad ink and acrylic on galvanized iron.

Figure 3. Greg Curnoe. Detail of *24 Hourly Notes* (14-15 December 1966). Stamp pad ink and acrylic on galvanized iron.

BUT THERE ARE SOME THINGS
 THAT ARE REAL. I HAVE THOUGHT
 ABOUT THAT TOO MUCH & GOT
 TEN MYSELF INTO TOO MANY C
 ONVERSATIONS. A COUPLE HAVE
 BECOME WORD GAMES WHEN
 I'VE LOST, PARTICULARLY WITH
 ROYDEN WHEN IT BECAME VICI
 OUS PROBABLY BECAUSE HE FE
 LT THREATENED. AS I DID. ALWA
 YS THE FEELING LATELY OF BEIN
 G A LOSER & THEN EVEN START
 TO WALK. HE IS VERY BUSY, SHI
 LA HOLDS UP THE BLACK PEN &
 HE STAGGERS ABOUT 2 STEPS &
 GRABS IT. WE HAVE NO MONEY.
 WHAT A DISCOURAGING SCENE

Figure 4. Greg Curnoe. *Ruminations on an Old Urquhart* (1967). Stamp pad ink and enamel on canvas.

AN ORANGE BORDER, BELOW THAT "PVT
 CE L MP" WHITE LETTERING, BOLD, F
 OLLOWED BY A WHITE DIAMOND, BEKO
 THAT ON DARK BLUE. BELOW THAT, SMA
 LLER LETTERING, SAME STYLE, DARK BL
 UE "CO. LIMITED", ON WHITE. UNDER THAT
 IT IS A THIN ORANGE LINE. THE SIGN IS
 LIT FROM ABOVE BY 4 LAMPS WITH GR
 EEN SHADES. ABOVE IT, 5 WINDOWS, 2
 PAIRS, WITH WHITE FRAMES. AN ORAN
 GE FLAG FLAPS OVER 2 OF THEM. ABOVE
 THE RIGHT HAND PAIR ARE GREY SIL
 LS & ABOVE THEM A CIRCULAR DEPRIS
 SION IN THE RED BRICK WITH GREY CO
 NCRETE BLOCKS SET IN THE CIRCLE AT
 12, 3, 6 & 9 O'CLOCK. TO THE RIGHT IS A
 GREY DIAMOND & ABOVE---THE ORNATE
 ROOF LINE, PAINTED WHITE. TO RIGHT
 THE LEFT WALL OF GUILD HOME EO
 UIPMENT RECEDES. THE SKY IS OVER
 CAST. BELOW THE SIGN, 197 ON THE GL
 ASS ABOVE THE DOUBLE DOORS.

Figure 5. Greg Curnoe. *Cityscape: Right Windows* (1967). Marking ink on canvas.

Figure 6. Greg Cumoe. *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* (August 1968-January 1969). Rubber stamp and ink over latex on canvas.

Figure 7. Greg Cumoe. Detail of *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series* (August 1968-January 1969). Panel number 1.

Greg Curnoe looking out of the western-most window of the north wall of the studio.

Directly across the flats is Greg Curnoe's home and studio, his fourth in London. It is ideal for his purposes, with a large work-area which was once a lithography shop, and a comfortable apartment at the front for himself and his family. Looking out of the back windows of the studio, he can see the Victoria Hospital, where he was born, and many of the landmarks of the city in which he was raised.

Figure 8. Greg Curnoe. Page from *Greg Curnoe: Canada*. Exhibition catalogue for the X Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, September 1969.

Looking out the northern-most window of the east wall of the studio. General Steel Wares and the shed of the L. & P. S. Railway (where Greg Curnoe's grandfather Richard Curnoe painted coaches) visible in the distance.

The studio has windows on all four sides, and from these Greg can see his neighbours, the continuing panorama of the London skyline, the trees and bushes which lie around his home.

Figure 9. Greg Curnoe. Page from *Greg Curnoe: Canada*. Exhibition catalogue for the X Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, September 1969.

Figure 10. Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Oil, rubber stamp and ink, graphite, and wallpaper on plywood, under plexiglas, with audiotape, tape player, and eight-page text (photocopied from a typed notebook).

- 1.
0. SHADOW OCCURS AT 4.30 OR SO E.S.T.
1. FLASH OF A WINDSHIELD FEB.27-1969.5.P.M.
2. HEADLIGHTS GO PAST HOSPITAL MAR.20-12.P.M.
3. OWEN MARKS THE PANEL HERE WITH A BLACK FELT MARKING PEN & I GET MAD MAR.25-11.45.A.M.
4. A GROUP OF PEOPLE WALKING IN FRONT OF BLACKWOOD LODGE MAR.25-5 TO 2.P.M.
5. A DROP OF WATER RUNNING DOWN THE OUTSIDE OF THE CENTREPRIGHT WINDOW PANE MAR.24-12.45.P.M.
6. A MURK HUGES PUFF OF SMOKE MAY 15.-9.P.M.
7. JACK LAD HERE JULY 15-APPROX.
8. DUMP TRUCK ON ROAD MOVING EAST AT LEFT CHIMNEY 1 NOV.28-10 TO 2.P.M.
9. WINDOW CHINY FEB.22-1970.3.P.M.
10. TWO SUN REFLECTIONS-CONSTANT MAR.19-AFTERNOON.
11. WHIP OF BLACK SMOKE MOVING WEST MAR.19-AFTERNOON.
12. LIGHT AT WEST END OF BLACKWOOD LODGE MAR.20-7.30 P.M.
13. LIGHT BELOW & LEFT OF LARGE MIDDLE UPPER WINDOW MAR.20-10.1.P.M.
14. DOT OF LIGHT MAR.23-NOON.
15. A LOT OF BLACK SMOKE FROM CITIES HEATING MAR.25-3.55.P.M.

Figure 11. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 1 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

2.

16. A FLASH APR. 7-NO TIME.
17. A CAR GOES OUT OF HOSPITAL PARKING LOT FROM EAST
-TURNS ONTO COLBORNE STREET-GOES NORTH APR. 9-11.
15.P.M.
18. DAD IN OBSERVATION ROOM WAVING-SOMETIME IN APR.
19. FLUTTERING WINGS MAY 5-5 AFTER 10.A.M.
20. TWO VERY BRIGHT BLUISH LIGHTS-ONE ABOVE THE OTHER
MAY 8-5 TO 9.P.M.
21. THE RAIN HIT THE OLD POST OFFICE & FLAG BEFORE HERE
NO DATE OR TIME-AFTERNOON.
22. BIRDS ON FIELD JUNE 10-A QUARTER AFTER 2.P.M.
23. NOTICED WHERE PAINT WAS CHIPPED OFF CEILING JUNE
12-2.50.P.M.
24. AMERICAN B58A HURTLER SHOT DOWN BY CANADIAN SPAL
L. ARMS FIRE JUNE 18.-12.30.P.M.
25. SMALL ICH DARK CLOUD DIRECTLY OVER THE TWO CHIMNEYS
& SMOKE GOING STRAIGHT UP OUT OF CHIMNEY ON
THE RIGHT JULY 30-7.30.P.M.
26. FIRST RECORDING MADE WITH MICROPHONE ON BLUE PICKET
FENCE-FRAISED JULY
27. SECOND RECORDING MADE WITH MICROPHONE ON TREE STUMP-
FRAISED AUG. 4.
28. THIRD RECORDING MADE WITH MICROPHONE ON BLUE PICKET
FENCE-WITH JIMMY & GLEN AUG. 9-8.P.M. TO 9.P.M.
29. FOURTH RECORDING MADE WITH MICROPHONE ON BLUE PICKET
FENCE AUG. 16-10.25. TO 11.25.P.M.

Figure 12. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 2 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

3.

30. CAR TRACKS IN THE GRASS MADE BY OUR AUSTIN 1100
AUG. 20--AFTERNOON

31. FIFTH RECORDING MADE WITH MICROPHONE ON WEST SIDE
OF SECOND FLOOR WEST HALL NORTH WINDOW AUG. 23--
5.30 TO 5.35 A.M.

32. LOTS OF BLACK SMOKE-A FIRE AUG. 24--20 AFTER 11 P.
M.

XX
XXX

33. THREE BIRDS WITH WHITE BREASTS AUG. 26--10.30 A.M.

34. THREE BUTTERFLIES AUG. 26--10 AFTER 2 P.M.

35. LARGE BUG FLEW PAST WINDOW SEPT. 2--20 TO 4 P.M.

36. I NOTICE THAT THE WHITE PAINT DRIP IS RIGHT ON THE
HOSPITAL & THE SIDE OF EVERGREENS SEPT. 20--NO
TIME.

37. LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW AT HOME AFTER ARCHIE'S PHO
NE CALL SEPT. --25 AFTER 5 P.M.

38. TOLD THAT C.B. WAS HERE SEPT. --NO SPECIFIC DATE O
R TIME.

39. 2 RED LIGHTS SEPT. 9--12.20 A.M.

40. " " " " " " " "

41. LIGHT JUST ABOVE THE EAST END OF THE APARTMENT B
UILDING--IN THE TREES SEPT. 9--12.22 A.M.

42. LIGHT ABOVE RED BUILDING ON TOWER SEPT. 9--12.23.
A.M.

Figure 13. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 3 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

4.

43. LOWER FLOOR LIT UP SEPT. 9--12.25.A.M.
44. LIGHT RINKING SEPT. 9--12.45.A.M.
45. TWO TRACTORS & A VOLKSWAGEN PARKED ON THE SHADE
SEPT. 10--QUARTER TO 12.A.M.
46. GRASS MOVED BEFORE NOON SEPT. 10--NO SPECIFIC TIME.
47. BLACK SMOKE SEPT. 11--25 AFTER 12.P.M.
48. WHITE CLOUD BEHIND HANGING SPOND BOTTLE SEPT. 11--
20 TO 4.P.M.
49. NOTICED INSECTS IN THE BROWN BOTTLE SEPT. 11--20
TO 4.P.M.
50. TWO BUTTERFLIES FLY PAST SEPT. 11--QUARTER TO 4.P.
M.
51. NOTICED SEARCHLIGHTS--THOUGHT OF HAL-FAIRGROUNDS
SEPT. 11--9.30.P.M.
52. BLUE JAY FLEW TO TREE BELOW POLE OCT. 1--10 TO 1
2.A.M.
53. SHEILA POINTS OUT THE ROOM WHERE SHE HAD GALEN O
CT. 8--10.30.P.M.
54. FLASHING LIGHT--A SIREN OCT. 8--10 TO 12.P.M.
55. THIS TREE HAS TURNED BRIGHT YELLOW--ORANGE OCT. 9--
5 TO 11.4.P.M.
56. BRANCHES WAVING OCT. 9--1.30.P.M.
57. DARK "C" SHAPED CLOUD OCT. 8--20 TO 6.P.M.

Figure 14. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 4 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

- 5.
- 58. PATH OF A FALLING DROP OF WATER OCT. 12--3.P.M.
 - 59. GREY AMERICAN CAR PARKED ON ROAD OCT. 13--10 TO 1
2.A.M.
 - 60. LARGE CRANE MOVING TO THE RIGHT OCT. 20--10.30.A.
 - 61. LIGHT BLUE AMERICAN CAR GOING WEST ON ROAD SLOW.
(Y OCT. 20--25 TO 11.A.M.
 - 62. CRANE OCT. 23--11.15.A.M.
 - 63. CELLYN ON THE PHONE OCT. 26--9.39.P.M.
 - 64. MAPY SIGNALS WITH MICROF OCT. 27--20 TO 11.A.M.
 - XXII
 - 65. RED LIGHT NOV. 4--5.30.P.M.
 - 66. WHISP OF BLACK SMOKE NOV. 4--5.30.P.M.
 - 67. REFLECTION OF JEAN BELIVEAU HOCKEY GAME IN WINDOW
" NOV. 4--5.32.P.M.
 - 68. MOTORCYCLE WITH HEADLIGHT ON GOING EAST ON ROAD
(NOV. 4--5.35.P.M.
 - 69. CAR LIGHTS FLASHING NOV. 4--11.P.M.
 - 70. LIGHT GOES OUT NOV. 4--11.05.P.M.
 - 71. LIGHT GOES OFF NO TIME OF DATE
 - 72. LIGHT FLICKERS NOV. 9--12.30.A.M.
 - 73. BRIGHT BLuish STREET LIGHT NOV. 9--12.35.A.M.

Figure 15. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 5 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

6.

- 74. STEAM SHOVEL DIGGING NOV.9--4.10.P.M.
- 75. LEAF FALLS NOV.10--11.20.P.M.
- 76. MOTORCYCLE PARKED NOV.11--12.20.P.M.
- 77. BLACK SMOKE BLOWN WEST NOV.11--12.05.P.M.
- 78. IRENE SIGNALS WITH FLASHLIGHT & POOM LIGHT FROM
SELYNG ROOM NOV.11--7.P.M.
- 79. PED SIGN NOV.12--10.30.P.M.
- 80. 63 SHOULD BE HERE.
- 81. SHEILA POINTS OUT REFLECTIONS FROM THE SUN ON THE
HOSPITAL WINDOWS NOV.13--5 TO 5.P.M.
- 82. CAR COE, AROUND CORNER & EAST-SEEN THROUGH FALLING
SNOW NOV.14--A QUARTER TO 11.P.M.
- 83. I NOTICE MANHOLE COVER FOR THE FIRST TIME NOV.15
--20 TO 12.A.M.
- 84. STEAM SHOVEL AT SOUTHEAST CORNER OF APARTMENT BUILDING
NOV.23--5 AFTER 10.P.M.
- 85. SNOW IN GROOVE NOV.23--5 AFTER 10.A.M.
- 86. PILES OF DIRTY SNOW NOV.30--2.20.P.M.
- 87. WHITE SPIRE NOV.30--2.25.P.M.
- 88. STEAM RISING FROM RED BRICK BUILDING DEC.10--11.
15.P.M.
- 89. CRANE DEC.10--11.30.A.M.
- 90. BRIGHT LIGHT AT REAR OF APARTMENT DEC.15--4.30.
.M.

Figure 16. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 6 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

7.

91. PILES OF DIRTY SNOW DEC. 15--4.30.P.M.
92. DORFEN TELLS ME SHE WAS HERE DEC. 23--15 TO 12.A.M.
93. SMOKE DEC. 29--2.P.M.
94. SAM IN BACKYARD BX JAN. 2. 1971--2.15.P.M.
95. THREE BIRDS FLY TO HERE JAN. 4--11.30.A.M.
96. " " " " " " " " " "
97. LIGHT BUILD REFLECTED IN WINDOW JAN. 5--3.30.P.M.
98. A LOT OF STEAM JAN. 22--20 TO 10.A.M.
99. ORANGE TRUCK-MOUNTED CRANE PARKED JAN. 23--2.30.P.M.
100. DUMP TRUCK DUMPING SNOW JAN. 23--2.30.P.M.
101. LTC BUS GOING WEST--GONE BEHIND BLACKWOOD LODGE JAN. 23--2.35.P.M.
102. BULLDOZER MOVING SNOW FEB. 12--2.P.M.
103. DIRTY SNOW PILES HIGHER THAN IVE EVER SEEN OUT BACK FEB. 12--2.P.M.
104. GALEN BREAKS OFF HIS FRONT TOOTH FEB. 12--AROUND 4.P.M.
105. I FALL DOWN ON THE ICE AT TECUMSEH CARRYING GALEN & HE HITS HIS HEAD FEB. 13--AROUND 7.30.P.M.
106. STEAM FEB. 14--20 TO 5.P.M.

BX

Figure 17. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 7 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

3.

107. BIRD FLYING NORTH FEB. 14.--10 TO 3.P.M.
 108. ORANGE CRANE PARKED FEB. 14.--10 TO 3.P.M.
 109. WHITE VAN GOES EAST FEB. 17.--9 TO 4.P.M.
 110. SNOW SCRAPED AWAY-EARTH SHOWING THROUGH-10 FROM
 VF FEB. 17.--10 TO 4.P.M.
 111. STEAM HANGING IN THE AIR FEB. 17.--10 TO 4.P.M.
 YXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 112. A GUY SHOVELLING SNOW IN THE GROOVE FEB. 18.--1
 30.P.M.
 113. A HAWK FEB. 18.--1.35.P.M.
 114. SOMEONE WALKING EAST FEB. 18.--1.40.P.M.
 115. ORANGE VAN PARKED FEB. 18.--1.45.P.M.
 116. BARELY VISIBLE DARK SMOKE COMING FROM LEFT CHI
 MNEY FEB. 18.--15 AFTER 4.P.M.
 117. A BIG CRANE PARKED FEB. 25.--5.15.P.M.
 118. LISTENING TO CYRINX TN 2 FEB. 26.--5 TO 3.P.M.
 119. TOP OF NEW BUILDING 10 BED MAR. 6.--15 TO 12.P.
 M.
 120. REDDISH CAST ON BUILDING MAR. 6.--10 TO 12.P.M.
 VIEW OF VICTORIA HOSPITAL-SECOND SERIES-XXXXXXXXXX
 FEB. 10. 1969 TO MAR. 10. 1971 GREG CURNOE LONDON ONT

Figure 18. Greg Curnoe. Notebook page 8 from *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (10 February 1969-10 March 1971). Bulletin typewriter on paper.

Figure 19. Greg Curnoe. *What's good for the goose is good for the gander* (1983). Watercolour, graphite, and ballpoint pen on paper.

Figure 20. Greg Cumoe. *Self Portrait No. 15, August 5-8, 1992* (1992). Watercolour, stamp pad ink, blueprint pencil, and pencil on paper.

A BREEZE HAS COME UP. THE
SKY IS OVERCAST - LIGHT GREY
WITH FAINT LINES OF LIGHTER
GREY. ITS ABOUT 70 DEGREES
OUT. ALL THE LEAVES IN THE
TREES ARE MOVING. I CAN
HEAR THEM THOUGH THE
DOOR UNDER THIS WINDOW IS
SHUT.

THE WIND IS GETTING
STRONGER. THERE IS A HEAVY
SENSE OF RELIEF IN THE SKY.
THE DARKER GREY CLOUDS
ARE MOVING EAST VERY
QUICKLY BELOW THE LIGHTER
GREY OVERCAST.

5 TO 12 A.M. - SEPTEMBER 15, 1971

Figure 21. Greg Curnoe. *View from the Window* (5 to 12 A.M., September 15, 1971). Mixed media.

BLUE BOOK 8

by
GREG CURNOE

Dec. 7, 1988

Oct. 2, 1989

Art Metropole

Toronto

1989

Figure 22. Greg Curnoe. *Blue Book 8* (Dec. 7, 1988-Oct. 2, 1989) Inside front cover.

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**I am not a
Confucianist,
spiritualist,
communist,
capitalist,
atheist,
scientist,
medium,
metaphor,
physician,
fatalist,**

Figure 23. Greg Curnoe. *Blue Book 8* (Dec. 7, 1988-Oct. 2, 1989) Page no. 71.

Figure 24. Greg Curnoe. *Deeds #2* (5-7 Jan. 1991). Stamp pad ink, graphite, blue pencil, pencil crayon, gouache on paper.

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