**The Altered Terrain:
Reconfigurations of the Landscape
by Photo-based Artists in Canada**

Rodney Graham

Sylvie Readman

Lorraine Gilbert

Submitted by

Susan Bernard, B.A. (Concordia), B.F.A. (University of Ottawa)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Research

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in

Canadian Art History

of

Master of Arts

Carleton University

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of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis

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Carol Payne, Thesis Supervisor

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Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

In recent scholarly discourse landscape has become a site of contention as a discursive ideological space. This thesis investigates postmodern interventions into the Canadian landscape tradition as exemplified by photo-based contemporary artists Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert. I will demonstrate how this epistemological critique extends to the visual arts and particularly to the photographic and conceptual practice of these three Canadian artists. In the appropriation and reconfiguration of landscape, particularly as an icon of Canadian nationhood, these artists critique a uniform national narrative and instead reorient the gaze towards a new regard for the signifying practice and reception of landscape representation in Canada.

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This work is dedicated to my parents Mia and Manny Bernard for their unconditional understanding, encouragement and support.

I dedicate this work especially to my son Julian, my best friend, greatest teacher and steadfast shining light, from whom I learn every day the art of living life, with spirit, enthusiasm, strength and courage.

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Introduction

Rendering the Landscape Uncanny

*The idea came by chance, like all things that have any value.*¹

In my final year as a studio art student in 1998 I made a sequence of black and white exposures while travelling through the township of North Gower, Ontario. It was a typical late October morning, a brooding sky permeated by dampness and silence. The rapidly passing view was contoured by traces of a dusting of snow. There was not a soul to be seen. Transfixed by the farms and homesteads appearing intermittently in the open fields I was compelled to hold my camera up to the rattling window of the school bus. The shaking motion made it impossible to look through the viewfinder or even to hold the camera still. Regardless, I released the shutter each time this forsaken landscape evoked a sense of longing.

Back in the darkroom, the processing and printing complete, I was startled by the results. The images that emerged from this outing barely resembled what I had seen; the rural landscape looked hostile, apocalyptic even. Enlarged the exposures became painterly and exquisitely haunting, like film stills. (Figure 1) The homes and fields to which I was initially drawn were rendered formidable and unapproachable. Adding to the undertone of menace were the stark roofs and disparate mounds of oddly glowing snow contrasted against a darkening sky. Unidentifiable objects were caught, suspended in mid-air. The monochrome black and white format only added to the cinematic atmosphere of the bleakness of that day.

¹ Duchamp quoted in Matthew Teitelbaum, "Returning to the Present or Writing a Place in the World: Rodney Graham," *Rodney Graham: Works from 1976-1994* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1994), 31.

Drained of colour, remote aspects of distance, absence and ambiguity accentuated the compelling textures of the print. How peculiar, I remember thinking, that this more closely resembled a moonscape than any familiar terrain.

Usually associated with sentiments of warmth, comfort and refuge, 'home' and land were transformed by these pictures into a site of foreboding. Bewildered by their content I nevertheless took delight in fortuitously rendering the landscape uncanny. The pictures enacted a *mise en scène*: a stilled and muted moment caught by the camera and preserved on film. As objects the photographs were viscerally captivating, both alluring and repellent. As counter-narratives of the landscape genre they denoted a territory of signification 'beyond landscape'. Eventually I would acquire the necessary framework in which to read them, although even to this day they remain enigmatic. I would become aware of the difference between the melancholic landscape of the 'real' township of North Gower as I saw it on that morning and the surreal abstractions of the landscape that had left their mark on my film. More importantly, I would come to apprehend that beyond the fictions conveyed by the camera always lie higher, more perplexing dimensions of candour.

This thesis topic emerged from that encounter of the (in)congruencies of film and subject. The series is tantamount to the alchemy of the working process - the convergence of intention, unconscious, raw material and chance.² Walter Benjamin's prescient insights into photography are noteworthy: "Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than

² Beverley Southgate offers an interesting reading of chance as a convergence of serendipitous circumstances and opportunities seized upon: "The ancient Greek usage of the word 'Tyche', often translated as 'chance' is a concept that related not only to what one was *allotted* (by the gods or one's destiny), but also to what one *attained* for oneself through individual effort. The inherent ambiguity in the Greek word suggests that what befalls human beings is not always or necessarily outside their own power." In Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why? Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 57.

opens to the naked eye if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."³

My inquiry was first directed to refining my understanding of the discourses established by the operations of the photograph, termed by Barthes as "the rhetoric of the image."⁴ I then began searching for common ground in appropriations and distortions of landscape, especially by artists engaged with the genre in Canada. I discovered that at specific times, within a critique of cultural assumptions distinctive to Canada for example, the selection of the landscape motif is both convenient and significant, an obvious and malleable subject. If landscape had become a contested site on a transnational level, the critique of space as applied to Canada was of special interest, since national identity was so closely tied to the depiction and perception of the Canadian land.

As a result of the colonial heritage of this country, landscape, ownership and territorial rights have become contentious issues. The consistent theme for artists in the Mendel Art Gallery exhibition *LandScape'96*, for example, was the incongruity between representation and experience of the land. Landscape is portrayed as "increasingly foreboding" in a perpetual "dichotomy between the traditional iconic and unpeopled image of Canadian landscape and the social and ecological realities that have been obscured by such

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 236-7.

⁴ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," In *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51.

images."⁵ Such counter-narratives take issue with representations of landscape "that efface the complicated social, economic, political, and racial history of the colonization and development of the area we now call Canada."⁶ Landscape has become a primary site for contemporary Canadian artists' articulations of personal and unofficial histories as well as a site for countering official conventional narratives of Canadian identity.

Contemporary artists' strategies of appropriation and mimicry are informed by the discourses of postmodernism and post-colonialism. Motifs from popular culture and the Western canon of art are reconfigured to disturb preconceptions of historical narratives. My readings have led to the conclusion that this inclination emerges from a fundamental philosophical position, motivated perhaps by ethics or politics, but emphatically conceptual. Within this milieu, objects are devised to trigger contemplation and eclipse preconceptions. The world is rendered uncanny by artists in order to dispute the assumptions of the prevailing culture.⁷

The practice of this generation of postmodernists reflects the disillusionment of the era. Artists are confronted by a conundrum of representation, a mistrust of the image and what is referred to as a crisis of meaning.⁸ Further, disenchantment with Enlightenment epistemology and the detachment of Modernist formalism have brought artists to a position

⁵Tim Nowlin, "Imagining Eden: The Contemporary Canadian Landscape," In *LandScape'96: Placing Site/Siting Place* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1996), 22.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Andy Grundberg, "On the Dissection Table: The Unnatural Coupling of Surrealism and Photography," In *Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (N.Y: The New York Press, 1999), 123.

⁸I am referring to Adorno's reverberant "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." This one specific and rhetorical statement, bold as it may be, signifies one of the foremost queries besetting art practice in the years following WWII. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 34.

of skepticism, or what Martin Jay has aptly termed "the denigration of the visual."⁹ The figure of Marcel Duchamp, his concepts of the readymade and fundamental rejection of the 'retinal image' are crucial to much postmodernist practice. The rebuttal of pure aesthetics in favour of conceptual content is therefore a key feature of recent critical practice. Further, an awareness of semiotics has rendered art into a signifying discourse, an object of communication redolent with cultural references and read as text. Informed by the signifying imperative of art, postmodern artists configure imagery to convey concepts that raise issue with the status quo. Photography, photo-manipulation and appropriation, as we shall see, are strategies particularly adept at accomplishing this objective.

In this way, the art object can serve as a marker of resistance. In this milieu, artists resist commodification by producing complex signs that deny the optical pleasure of decorative function and mass-market consumption. Although alluring visual strategies are often used to captivate the viewer¹⁰ the orientation is for the creation of unresolved, disturbing conditions of uncertainty, transgression and abjection. Activated and engaged by the semantics of the culture these strategies are often accompanied by gestures of parody and irony. The appropriation of familiar forms is often marked by play and humour. Intervention and a redressing of the past by means of disorientation and reconfiguration is often their point of departure.

⁹ Martin Jay offers a compelling study of the progression of this concept in demonstrating the evolution of the visual object into a vehicle for discourse on perspective. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, L.A. & London: University of California Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁰ Sometimes contradictions are only heightened by the contrast between the beauty of the photographic print and the unsettling content of the subject matter, as illustrated with the disturbing beauty depicted in the landscapes of environmental erosion by Edward Burtynsky. Artists rely on this strategy to highlight inherent contradictions in subject matter, of course, but also to punctuate the altered function of the art object in contemporary society, as a discourse of abjection positioned to heighten critique of the 'decorative' function of art in the history of reception.

The conventions of landscape representation in the canon of visual arts are noteworthy to the photo-based artist motivated by a postmodernist methodology. Following W.J.T. Mitchell, landscape "is both a representation and a presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and a simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package."¹¹ After Derrida, Jonathan Bordo refers to early twentieth century Canadian wilderness depiction as "an aestheticizing and subliming depiction of a *terra nullius*, a culturally saturated aporia,¹² a space rendered blank upon which the dominant Anglo-British culture took up residence and permanently inscribed itself.

The collusion between landscape and identity has gained currency in many academic disciplines over the past twenty years. Issues of 'space' and 'place' have become central to these emergent discourses. This has not escaped the study of art history, as perceptions regarding the interpretation of art as an articulation of space are being revisited and reconsidered. Therefore a presentation of the contemporary milieu of landscape critique in the academe will be included.

As signifier and cultural construct, landscape presents the ideal material for which to survey ideological aspects of representation that enact self, identity and culture. Such perceptions determine the place of the subject in relation to space. Landscape, like the body, is corporeal. Accessible, malleable and historically determined, perceptions of self and the

¹¹ Mitchell is a foremost voice in recent discourse on landscape representation as signifier of colonial dynamics. W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," In *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7.

¹² Bordo offers an important critical perspective on landscape representation in Canada. Jonathan Bordo, "The Terra Nullius of Wilderness - Colonialist Landscape Art (Canada and Australia) and the So-called Claim to American Exception," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 (Spring 1997), 13.

larger cultural body are inscribed therein. I will be arguing that from the perspective of post-colonial and postmodern evaluations landscape is approached as a lexical system of representation with pointed reference to its position as an historical signifier. These issues, currently at the forefront of critical thought, will be applied to the particular experience of the Canadian landscape.

This thesis will investigate the postmodern treatment of landscape by three contemporary photo-based artists in Canada. Although Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert are by no means the only contemporary artists addressing issues pertaining to the embodied identity in representation of landscape, their work is exemplary of a critique of the concept of national identity accomplished by pointed intervention and reference to landscape representation. It will be established that this Canadian sense of national identity is distinctively and historically aligned with the representation and perception of landscape appearing in the trajectory of the visual and literary arts. These perceptions have been internalized by dissemination, markedly accelerated by the revolution in technology suggested by the advent of the printing press¹³ and validated by the agendas of national collecting institutions.¹⁴

¹³ Joyce Zemans provides valuable insight to the influence of the Group of Seven's pictorial style when advances in printing technology converged with institutional agenda and reproductions were widely distributed to elementary schoolrooms across Canada. One might consider the impact of the present revolution in digital technologies as equivalent to the shifts in perspective and ideology experienced by modern society with the phenomena of the photograph and the printing press. Joyce Zemans, "Establishing the Canon: Nationhood, Identity and the National Gallery's First Reproduction Program of Canadian Art," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 16, no. 2 (1995), 6-35.

¹⁴ Whitelaw's PhD dissertation demonstrates how the display of the Canadian art collection at the National Gallery of Canada services the linear national historical narrative. Ann Whitelaw, *Exhibiting Canada: Articulations of National Identity at the National Gallery of Canada*, PhD Dissertation (Montreal: Concordia University, 1995). This point is also made by Lynda Jessup, "Bushwackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," In *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

Within a Canadian context, images of landscape become the material appropriated and manipulated by artists in order to comment on the iconography aligned with national sentiment and identity. As Johanne Sloan has argued, "in order to re-invent landscape contemporary artists had also to grapple with the legacy of the genre - they had to come to terms with the overly familiar motifs, textures, spatial illusionism, and ideological assumptions of landscape painting."¹⁵ While this topic has been deemed worthy of some scholarly attention in recent literature, writing on landscape and identity in the context of contemporary visual photo-based arts in Canada is limited to date.¹⁶ This has been attributed to the lack of recognition for "the importance of Canadian artists to the development of a new conceptual landscape aesthetics."¹⁷ Concurrent with shifts that occurred in the treatment of landscape in the late 1960's and early '70s in international art practice, contemporary Canadian artists have been forerunners in the new conceptual arena. Concepts of " 'space', 'place', 'environment', 'site', and 'site-specificity', " Sloan contends, "are now utterly commonplace in contemporary art."¹⁸

Attempts to establish a definitive Canadian identity have long eluded cultural theorists. Scholars do agree, however, on the notable degree to which landscape has figured in Canada's history as a marker of identity. The term 'phantom territory' is particularly useful to consider. In 1991 Bruce W. Ferguson wrote, "a country exists for the most part in the imagination, collective and individual. As an object it is an imaginary body, which is to say

¹⁵ Johanne Sloan, "Outside Matters," In *Elusive Paradise: The Millenium Prize* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2001), 45.

¹⁶ From the frequency with which I was referred to Gayle McGregor's *The Wacousta Syndrome* (1985) one might presume it is still considered the seminal inquiry of landscape as a marker upon Canadian identity. Most of my sources, however, do not cite McGregor as a source for their research, an indication perhaps that this text, once the only available book on this topic, has been eclipsed by more recent thought.

¹⁷ Sloan, 46.

¹⁸ Ibid, 45.

that the documents that produce the meaningful discourse called 'country' relentlessly scan and re-scan an imaginary space."¹⁹

Artists who speak to conventions of Canadian landscape render identity problematic and disrupt notions associated with codes of nationalism. This is often accomplished with the appropriation of the very symbols associated with the mythic relationship to landscape that has defined a Canadian national spirit and illuminating them as nostalgic.²⁰ The range of agendas and strategies posited by Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert are the central focus of this investigation. As photo-based artists and photo-conceptualists the perception rendered by the mechanical device is at issue to their critical practice. They approach the photograph with awareness to its historical currency as an inscriptive rendering. Graham, Readman and Gilbert are designated here as photo-based artists rather than photographers to more succinctly locate their conceptual use of the medium. In their work the camera is used reflexively to disclose the role of photography in determining historical forms of representation.

Rodney Graham's work, for example, critiques the predominance of single-point perspective historically associated with the camera obscura. With the seemingly simple gesture of turning an archetypal symbol upside down, Graham transmits the loss of noble human purpose and expresses disillusionment with modernity. Throughout his practice, Graham has consistently used landscape and the concept of mechanical reproduction as markers for addressing issues related to vision and knowledge.

¹⁹ Following Anderson (1994) a singular concept of identity necessarily purports a construction contingent on the selection of imagined and popularized myths of the past. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).

²⁰ Bruce W. Ferguson, "Un-Natural Acts and Tongue Ties," In *Un-Natural Traces: Contemporary Art from Canada* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1991), 11

Sylvie Readman investigates how perceptions of landscape influence the formation of memory and the construction of the subject. Readman uses techniques of layering, juxtaposition and montage to poetically collapse categories of past and present historical moments. Her work highlights the fictive nature of the recording and narration of history. Readman's critiques of epistemological conventions are embodied in her pictures by the paradigm of the explorer figure. In so doing, Readman questions the ideological baggage historically aligned with the photographic image.

Lorraine Gilbert is most often associated with large-scale panoramas documenting the impact of unencumbered logging practice in the pristine British Columbia landscape. However this thesis will introduce earlier interventions in the landscape by Lorraine Gilbert. This work, *North American Landscapes*, represents an astute challenge to the traditional deployment of scopic possession in landscape. The emphasis placed on the subjective response to space may be read in light of recent scholarship as seen, for example, in feminist and geographic discourse. In seductive colour Polaroid exposures, landscape appears reminiscent of Romanticism yet subverts the genre's conventions with the plasticity of medium and unexpected format. Gilbert denies the gaze the comfort zone traditionally offered in landscape treatment. In diverting the expectation for single point perspective typical to the Cartesian Western eye the artist reorients the spectator to a more inclusive reconsideration of space, one that serves to undermine the traditional visual treatment of landscape.

Landscape practice will be considered as a central feature in the careers of these artists within postmodern Canadian art discourse. Although their work has been considered separately and sometimes substantially in journal articles, reviews and exhibition catalogues,

this marks the first occasion in which these three artists will be considered together.

Interpretation of the works is mediated by scholarly sources and from the perspective of a photo-based studio training and practice.

My research is informed by the recent discourses on the significance of space, place and landscape generated by texts such as W.J.T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power* (1994) and Brian Osborne's "The Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art" (1988). Postmodern cross-disciplinary theorists have also been consulted, for example, Irit Rogoff, who in *Terra Infirma* (2000) considers the art object as a feasible ground for inquiry into how territory is represented. I have taken into consideration the current *zeitgeist* of diaspora from which the themes of belonging and displacement have emerged. Similarly, the impact of *unheimlich*, or loss of homeland, is widely articulated in recent art and exhibition practice. Both widespread and un-restricted by borders, these themes have contributed, I believe, to the reconsideration of the position of the subject in the context of the nation. For my discussion of landscape and Canadian identity, the scholarship of Jonathan Bordo, Eva Mackey and Linda Jessup has been invaluable.

While postmodernism by its very nature resists definition, my position is that it marks a pointed departure as a counter-narrative to an historical moment.²¹ Lyotard's rejection of master narratives and the rendering of the unrepresentable in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) is my consistent point of reference for defining a postmodernist art practice. In addition to others, David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) and Linda

²¹ Habermas, for example, posits postmodernism as the logical extension of modernism, Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project," In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 3-15. Although the parameters of this study cannot adequately address this subject, I wish to acknowledge my own position.

Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) have also been reliable sources. For this thesis, my interpretations are based as much as possible on the primary source of the art object, on reproductions in documents such as found in exhibition catalogues or on slides from collections. My decision against conducting interviews with each of the artists is not motivated by disregard for their intentions but rather in favour of acknowledging the textual properties of the photograph, open to simultaneous possible readings. Enough primary and secondary sources were available to adequately approach the artists and their works. These interpretations will be presented in conjunction with my own readings. Of necessity one interview was conducted with Lorraine Gilbert who generously provided access to the body of work discussed in this research document. The series of Polaroids in the artist's possession remains in the archive and in the phase of post-production.

In terms of methodology, this thesis recognizes that it is a narrative and thus driven and compiled by subjective interests. It is also informed by the notion that legitimating narrative is a construction based on subjective, ideologically based experience. Additionally it fully rejects the aspects of totality embodied by the scientific method. The ethics informing this document rely on the legitimacy of texts as signs produced by the author and mediated between source and recipient.

From a postmodern perspective, textual meaning is never singular. Form gives rise to multivalent readings, not to closure. Rather than offering a chronology of 'proof' my intention is therefore to offer possible readings that arise from the contemplation of the objects in conjunction with contemporary thought and theory. Hayden White writes that the articulation of history, "far from being ideologically neutral is essentially conservative, its very language

constricting the range of what is to be accounted acceptable and possible."²² Contrary to favouring ambivalence this strategy of refraining from narrative closure in favor of discontinuity offers the possibility of making history available and open to the multiplicity of narratives implicit in experience. According to Martin Jay the term 'discourse' emerged from the Latin *discurrere*, defined as "a running around in all directions. Discourse remains the best term to denote the level on which this inquiry is located, that being a corpus of more or less loosely interwoven arguments, metaphors, assertions, and prejudices cohere more associatively than logically in any strict sense of the term."²³

The conceptual model for this thesis is the collage, the assembling of disparate elements of time and space to create a previously unconsidered entity. Elizabeth Ermarth contends the collage "has the virtue of liberating historians from the constraints of linearity, or from the representation of events in such a way as to suggest an inevitability of outcome."²⁴ The reader is therefore instructed to consider the following text as a discourse, a construction of parts that coming together, constitutes another picture, an assemblage of material organized by the convergent and cumulative interests and intentions of this inquiry.

Chapter One will establish the critical foundation in preparation for analysis of the artworks applied to the critique of landscape representation in the canon of Canadian art. Landscape representation in Canada may be approached as a lexical currency, which, like that of any nation, builds cohesion in a collective history and mythology. Representation of landscape is critical to the Canadian colonial context in which symbolism and iconography of

²² Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1973), cited in Southgate, 116.

²³ Jay, 15.

²⁴ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), cited in Southgate, 123.

the land have become historically and ideologically linked to the development and position of identity within the construction of the national character narrative. 'Space' as an emergent discourse and site of reference will be outlined. In colonial and postcolonial Canada the configuration of iconography articulates signs specific to social and geographical constructs. Scholars agree that landscape representation in the visual arts has figured prominently in the determination of the 'official' and 'unofficial' Canadian identity ultimately with consequences upon self and knowledge.

Following this discussion, Chapter One will proceed to look at the historical role of early colonial landscape representation and initial developments in nineteenth century photography and empirical ideology in the evolution of a Canadian identity narrative. The two eras of photographic activity relevant for our purposes are the period of empiricism of the nineteenth century when the photographic image was perceived as a carrier and conveyor of 'Truth' and the postmodern conceptual phase characteristic of theoretical discourse beginning in the late 1960's. Fundamentally raising issue with the authority of the photograph, this critical phase witnesses artists making deliberate use of the photograph's semiotic properties as signifier and social index.

Chapter Two examines precedents set by two artists in Canada. Selected works by Michael Snow and Jin-me Yoon will be presented as initiators of a postmodernist critique of landscape representation within the context of the canonical Canadian identity narrative.

Chapter Three addresses the work of Vancouver-based artist Rodney Graham, in particular the series of inverted trees represented by *Stanley Park Cedar No. 7* (1991). Similarly, the analysis of work by individual artists Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert respectively in Chapters Four and Five pertains to the appropriation and reconfiguration of

space within their landscape discourse. The artists' strategies of formulating photographic representations of altered terrains within the trajectory of a postcolonial and postmodern conceptual milieu will be the central focus of this investigation.

Chapter I

-I-

*Landscape can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal.*¹

In order to address contemporary interventions into landscape, the interpretive apparatus of historical narratives must first be established. From the onset of the colonial period Canada has been intrinsically defined by a distinct reliance on the land. The Euro-Canadian settler² for example, is often forged as an idealized figure in the national consciousness, featured navigating rushing rivers in the voyageur persona or comfortably installed in cultivated early urban and rural environments following European models. The depiction of a landscape reminiscent of European topography is also characteristic of much early Canadian art. Depictions of an imagined ease in the landscape on canvas can be interpreted as a strategy of survival, a projected imaginary devised to cope with uncertainty, apprehension and ambivalence despite the arduous conditions.

Persist and survive, the settlers became a permanent fixture in the landscape. With the increasing permanence of European settlements, carved and cultivated images of scenic landscape emerged that projected the socioeconomic, cultural and pictorial conventions of the times. According to Tim Nowlin "everyday life in the early settlements and frontiers of Canada was intimately connected with the land, so the land naturally became a favourite

¹ John Berger (1967) cited in Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape in Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.

² Townsend-Gault cautions against generalizations of the European "intruders": The intruders were not "Europeans", she states, "but Basque whalers, West Country English fishermen, Dutch traders, and French missionaries whose "different natures and purposes" meant that they established different relationships with the inhabitants. Generalized indictments against Europeans miss this point." Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Kinds of Knowing," In *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 82.

subject of itinerant artists as well as colonial officers with an interest of art."³ Landscape came to be depicted as the lush Romantic backdrop for the ease of civilized life in the New World. (Figure 2) Bourgeois and aristocratic values associated with eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, for example, are evident in the contents of paintings and art artifacts. These paintings are social indexes characterized by a poetic order in the landscape. Consistent with the objective of creating a nation tied to the concept of "transforming 'wilderness' into 'civilization'"⁴ they convey the impression that the attributes of the Empire were naturalized and comfortably established. (Figures 3 and 4)

The mythic heroic attributes of the settler and trader were first and foremost the ability to prevail over the harsh conditions of land and climate. The legacy of the colonial identity within what became the Dominion of Canada is grounded in the imposition of civilization upon the primal conditions of the land. A successful working relationship with First Nations also had to be negotiated. History suggests that the success of initial contact was dependent upon the trust, guidance and benevolence of First Nations peoples whose function as guides to early explorers enabled their survival. Eva Mackey writes "the main goal of the early Imperial presence was resource extraction through the fur-trade, an economic activity that absolutely depended on Native people's labour and knowledge."⁵ Charlotte Townsend-Gault adds "many aboriginal groups at first welcomed the visitors, having things to teach, as well as to trade with them, and situations of mutual dependency

³ Tim Nowlin, "Imagining Eden: The Contemporary Canadian Landscape," In *LandScape'96: Placing Site/Siting Place* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1996), 21.

⁴ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London & NY: Routledge, 1999), 17.

⁵ Ibid, 25.

developed out of commercial relationships and military alliances."⁶

The complexity of this historical situation is reflected in depictions of early colonial life. Within early landscape views caricatures of indigenous peoples often appear sometimes idealized or otherwise depicted as a perilous threat to 'civilized' settler life. There are countless instances of the Aboriginal figuring in a subservient position to the European, a prominent example being Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770). According to Townsend-Gault "those who intruded upon, surveyed and settled North America wielded intellectual, personal, administrative and military powers that they seldom doubted were superior to, and more enduring than, the powers of those upon whom they imposed."⁷

With the passage of time, native culture was dismissed by the encroachment and expansionist policies of colonial rule. Physically removed onto reserves, First Peoples were rendered absent from the pictorial frame of Euro-Canadian culture, 'disappeared' from the emergent imagined nation. This is one of the significant and insidious ways that the concept of landscape has been employed to support the position of a Canadian settler identity. Carol Williams notes that "nineteenth-century visual and literary representations of Native peoples as a 'vanishing race' were crucial to the 'successful' conquest of the western 'frontier'."⁸ Once the original inhabitants were no longer an impediment to formulating the concept of a homeland to colonial settlers, new symbols were called upon to signify national characteristics. One of the foremost motifs defining this colonial identity would be the northern wilderness.

⁶ Townsend-Gault states that "generalisations about the "European societies from which 'settlers' have emanated since the sixteenth century help to account for the history of difference that persists to the present. These societies were highly stratified and their governments were coercive in nature. European countries were not just structured societies and authoritarian polities; they were also acquisitive economies", 82-3.

⁷ Ibid, 82.

⁸ Carol Williams, "The Wests Within the West, Geographies of the Photographic 'I'," In *Search, Image and Identity: Voicing our West* (Saskatoon: The Photographer's Gallery, 1994), 11.

Accordingly, semiotic discourse has provided invaluable tools for the study of Canadian landscape representation. As visual text, art offers a wealth of information reflecting the times in which objects emerged. By looking at the representation of landscape in Canada, values underlying the construction of a national consciousness and identity can be surmised. Scholars have, for example, argued "that nature is a construction of knowledge" and that "the political intent of aesthetic conventions in landscape imagery can be interpreted by placing work within its social context."⁹

We need only to turn to examples of Canadian iconography in order to verify David Jacobson's claim that "the icon in a palpable sense *becomes* the nation."¹⁰ The most cherished Canadian national icons called upon to comprise a collective heritage are all symbols of the origins of Canada upon which the first 'voyageur' trading economy and persona were built, the industrious beaver and the canoe and paddle. Other later symbols of Canada include the locomotive, cutting through the landscape, signifying the spread of settlement and political consolidation and the Rocky Mountains, the symbol for Canada of adventure, achievement, spiritual purity and the sublime. The single red maple leaf on the Canadian flag became the national emblem in 1965. Initially politically motivated, it was designed to foster the centralized forces of confederation in a new bid for a national identity. A tender maple sapling figure also appears as a central protagonist in A.Y. Jackson's 1914 painting *The Red Maple*. (Figure 5) Emblematic of northern nature imagery popularized by the Group of Seven, this celebrated work evokes the stirrings of nationalist sentiments brought by Canada's participation in WWI. Blown about by the north wind, the lone tree clings to the

⁹ Denise Oleksijczuk, *Lost Illusions: Recent Landscape Art* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991), 5.

¹⁰ David Jacobson, *Place and Belonging in America* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 131.

edge of a remote cliff. Vulnerable, isolated and under relentless threat from the rugged remote environment the red maple, like the Canadian, tenaciously survives.¹¹

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined community" formulated and defined by a linear narrative through time to shape the myth of common experience and shared identity.¹² Mackey adds that "nationalism often entails the project of delineating and elaborating that identity in art and literature."¹³ She also reports that the effort to carve out a distinct definition of nationality in Canada has consistently eluded definition: "Canadian identity is seen as crisis-ridden, as a fragile and weak entity under constant attack and in need of vigilant defence. Some people say that Canada has no identity at all. Even a report from the federal government suggests that Canada is a 'nation without nationality'."¹⁴

Mackey implies this may be due "to traditional European understandings of nationhood [that] deny the legitimacy of 'post-colonial societies' because these societies do not rest on traditions that are the outcomes of long continuous histories."¹⁵ For Canada, a nation without a lengthy history, landscape was the foremost signifier of a distinct identity. As the ideal backdrop for the *tableau vivant* of European settler life, representations of landscape and nature in Canadian art history have played critical roles in establishing a mythic national identity and notion of a collective history.

¹¹ Diana Nemiroff interprets this imagery similarly in the catalogue essay "Beyond National Identities," In *Spirits on the Crossing, Travellers to/from Nowhere: Contemporary Art in Canada 1980-94* (Kyoto: National Museum of Modern Art, 1995). The editors of Cybarmuse in "Red in the Canadian Imagination," *The Red Show*, on the National Gallery of Canada web site also propose this interpretation.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).

¹³ Eva Mackey elaborates on the contribution of art and literature to the 'landscaping' of Canadian national identity in *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 40-49.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁵ Anderson cited in Mackey, 10.

-II-

*Our attempts to create a unifying national myth have come at a time when such narratives have lost their credibility.*¹⁶

In the domain of contemporary postmodern visual culture, ideas relating space to the orientation of identity circulate through representations of landscape, displacement and diaspora. Conditions of geography and space have been identified by scholars as critical elements in the emergent discourse surrounding issues of identity.¹⁷ It has already been posited that landscape has prominently figured in the Canadian colonial narrative. The discussion of the discourse of 'space' in this part of the chapter builds upon the parallel between landscape discourse and Canadian national identity. Following will be a discussion of developments in the art of early twentieth century Canada that indelibly associated landscape with identity in the Canadian consciousness. The purpose here is to establish landscape as a signifier of 'place', one that artists appropriate and apply to a critique.

Discourses of space are invaluable to the examination of the ties between culture, self and landscape. As noted by Nigel Thrift, "places form a reservoir of meanings which people can draw upon to tell stories about and thereby position themselves. Thus place and identity are inexorably linked."¹⁸ Subsequently, difference and disruption represented by

¹⁶ Bruce Ferguson, *Ruidos do norte: Northern noises; Résonances boréales: 19th Sao Paulo International Biennial*, 2.10.87-13.12.87, curated by Bruce Ferguson (Winnipeg : Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1987) cited in Diana Nemiroff, *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art* (Ottawa: NGC, 1989), 16.

¹⁷ Two critical texts are Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Edward Soja, 'History: geography: modernity', ed. Simon During, *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993). Also W.J.T. Mitchell ed. *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) provides invaluable insight into issues surrounding space and identity.

¹⁸ Nigel Thrift, "'Us' and 'Them': Re-Imagining Places, Re-Imagining Identities," *Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. Hugh Mackay (London: Sage, 1997) in Shauna McCabe, "Visible Veneers: Jin-me Yoon's Touring Home From Away," *Lost Homelands: Manuel Pina, Edward Poitras, Jorma Puranen, Jin-me Yoon* (Kamloops: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2000), 57. The artists in this exhibition "critically examine the multi-layered implications as it relates to homeland, belonging, and the creation and meaning of national identities."

colonization, migration and variables of experience with the land are acknowledged as conceding to the fluid sense of identity suggested by Paula Gustafson "not as the unique essence of a unified subject but as a continuously shifting network of "subject positions."¹⁹ One of the foremost elements of postmodernist and post-colonialist discourses is the shifting notions of place that play in the fragmentation of the subject. Of this Angelika Bammer writes:

Our sense of identity is marked by the postmodern geography of identity: both here and there and neither here nor there at one and the same time. It is in this sense and for this reason that marginality and otherness increasingly figures as the predominant affirmative signifiers of (postmodern) identity. Indeed, it would appear, almost by definition, that to "be" in the postmodern sense is somehow to be an Other: displaced.²⁰

In Canada as elsewhere internationally the paradigms of place and homeland have been at the forefront of recent contemporary art discourse. The National Gallery of Canada's exhibition of international contemporary art *Crossings* (1998) offers a case in point. "Explicitly transnational and cross-cultural,"²¹ the exhibition circulated around themes of exile, displacement, instability and estrangement. Diana Nemiroff draws attention to an emergent post-national paradigm in art practice where "questions of identity, both individual and collective to the fore, 'signal' a definitive shift from modernism to postmodernism, the breaking down of institutional canons, an emphasis on pluralism, and an interest in exploring questions of difference served to weaken the ethnocentrism of the art establishment."²²

¹⁹ Paula Gustafson, "(Re) Inventing the West," In *Search, Image and Identity: Voicing Our West* (Saskatoon: The Photographer's Gallery, 1994), 21.

²⁰ Angelika Bammer ed. *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xii.

²¹ Pierre Théberge, *Crossings* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 7.

²² Nemiroff, "Modernism, Nationalism and Beyond," 35-6.

Some cultural geography scholars have turned to art to articulate the subject's position within space. Irit Rogoff considers geography an epistemological structure in the configuration of identity and looks to representation of landscape in art as a tool of analysis. "Art has become a useful interlocutor in engaging with the concept of geography. As an epistemic structure its signifying practices shape and structure not just national and economic relations but also identity constitution and identity fragmentation."²³

Issues of space and the position of the subject were initiated by Michel Foucault who "provided material for reflections about geography and more generally about ideologies and strategies of space,"²⁴ making liberal use of such terms as "territory, domain, soil, horizon, archipelago, geopolitics, region, landscape, position, displacement, site, field and confinement to illustrate his concepts."²⁵ Metaphors of space served Foucault in his configurations of human relations in which place was viewed as a critical factor to the dynamics of power.²⁶ According to Foucault "a whole history remains to be written of space- which would at the same time be the history of power - from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat."²⁷

²³ Geography's figurative importance is defined by Rogoff as an, "a system of classification, a mode of location, a site of collective national, cultural, linguistic and topographic histories." Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 8.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 - 1977/Michel Foucault*, edited and translated by Colin Gordon et al. (Brighton: Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 63.

²⁵ Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 49.

²⁶ In *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and *Discipline and Punishment* (1977) Foucault outlines the structures put into place to delineate divisions of power, primarily, the panoptic observation tower of the prison, the division of space of the mental institution, the town square. The point of view that photography is a form of control yielded by authority is also put forth by Terence Wright: "photography can be substituted for the idea of discipline/surveillance in almost all of Foucault's writing," Terence Wright, "Photography as a Cultural Critique," In *The Photography Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 147.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 - 1977/Michel Foucault*, edited and translated by Colin Gordon, et al. (Brighton: Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 198.

Informed by the discourse of cultural geography, Vincenzo Guarrasi defines landscape "inhabited or not, [as] culture: that is, a means of signification and communication best envisioned as discourse or even a form of rhetoric."²⁸

Upon a world of 'natural' phenomena, we inscribe an artificial 'order', that of 'culture' as a signifying system within which every material object is associated with a mental representation; every signifier with a corresponding signified. All manifestations of human spatiality are thus both material and mental objects - they are signs. And if we hold the above to be true, then space and culture become indistinguishable.²⁹

Religion and politics have also played a wide historical role linking landscape to identity. For example, the influences of French Catholicism and then forms of English Protestantism determined a relationship to land that was aligned with morality. As David Jacobson describes it, "physical form and moral place are inherently related to one another."³⁰ In Post-Reformation Europe for example the rise of religious Protestant nationalism led to the territorialization of faith and the sanctification of the land.³¹ Furthermore, as Jacobson states, "the moral connection of a nation-state to a bounded territory was not only religious or nationalist but also inherent in the *political* culture that began to emerge in seventeenth-century Europe. In the civic polity, territory becomes the counterpart to kinship."³² Post-Reformation European pilgrims arrived in the New World with a politico-religious regard for territoriality.

Simon Schama's writing on the cultural and historical significance of land has been occupied with the role of landscape in figuring identity, home and belonging. Like an extension of the physical and emotional body, identification and bonds to the land evoke, according to Schama, a profound sense of cultural identity. For Annette Hurlig, Schama

²⁸ Vincenzo Guarrasi, "Paradoxes of Modern and Postmodern Geography: Heterotopia of Landscape and Cartographic Logic," In *Postmodern Geography: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Claudio Minca (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 226-7.

²⁹ Ibid, 226.

³⁰ Jacobson, 1.

illustrates that the history of Western cultural and historical experience with the land is encoded in mythology, narrative, collective history and national identity:

Exploring the cultural function of geographic features such as rivers, forests and mountains, his treatment of landscape and memory identifies some of the most important and compelling European and American myths of place and belonging. Schama identifies landscape metaphors and myths as purposeful cultural mechanisms. Ideological, and therefore necessarily selective, their function is to produce social cohesion through a sense of belonging.³³

In the history of Western Art, significantly in painting, landscape has often been invoked to convey the metaphysical, spiritual and economic conditions of social and cultural life. Malcolm Andrews links the genre diachronically to conceptual developments in art and philosophy and remarks that landscape has always reflected an artificial construct. In fact Schama reports that the Dutch word for landscape, *landschap*, entered the English language at the end of the sixteenth century signifying "a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction."³⁴ The *landskip*, as it was known in early colloquial English, was a popular pastoral genre throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries figuring prominently as a marker of nostalgia for pre-industrialization and pre-urbanization. A true sense of a national identity, says Schama, is rooted in strong tradition and authentic identification with the myths of the past involving primeval ritual associated with forests and species of trees, rivers and ancient rock. Further, "the cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacredness of nature."³⁵

³¹ Ibid, 11.

³² Ibid, 9-10.

³³ Annette Hurlig, "Everywhere, Elsewhere: Lost Histories, Lost Homelands," In *Lost Homelands* (Kamloops: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2000), 18.

³⁴ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Vintage, 1996, 10.

³⁵ Ibid, 18

Encompassing a relationship to nature and pictorially depicted in varying ways throughout history, landscape encodes complex social and economic conditions. Similarly, Denis Cosgrove argues that "landscape is an ideological concept,"³⁶ one reflecting an awareness of the construction of human society in relation to the physical world and also a way of imagining the world:

Pre-eminently spatial control was achieved through a technique of perspective, a technique which Renaissance artists regarded as their most significant discovery and the means for realistic representation of the world. Perspective was regarded not merely as a technique, a visual device, but as a truth itself, the discovery of an objective property of space rather than solely of vision.³⁷

It was in this period of early modern history that linear optical perspective became a standard model for rational understanding, as Cosgrove points out, "a device for controlling the world of things related to a cosmology in the Renaissance which regarded creation as ordained by fixed geometric rules."³⁸ Guarrasi writes, landscape "as a way of seeing, was born in Renaissance Europe. The map, Renaissance perspective painting and the landscape ideal are all closely related - all three the 'effects of the linear projection of a multi-dimensional world."³⁹ Although landscape is typically perceived as the rendering objective point of view, it is in fact subjective, a perspective imposed by the status of the observer, not the participant.

Alberti's fifteenth century treatise on art and architecture afforded landscape representation a precise role: "to serve the purpose of reflecting back to the powerful viewer,

³⁶ Denis E. Cosgrove, "The Idea of Landscape," In *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscapes*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Croom Helm 1984), 15.

³⁷ Ibid, 21.

³⁸ Ibid, 25

³⁹ Guarrasi, 229

at ease in his villa, the image of a controlled and well-ordered, productive and relaxed world wherein serious matters are laid aside."⁴⁰ During this historical period in which art first became a collected and coveted commodity, landscape painting displayed class distinction whereby cultural identity could be represented, situated and recorded for posterity.

Landscape representation is thus a socio-political cultural process by which social and subjective identities are constructed. W.J.T. Mitchell locates the two foremost shifts in landscape practice of the twentieth century:

...the first (associated with modernism) attempted to read the history of landscape primarily on the basis of a history of landscape painting, and to narrativize that history as a progressive movement toward purification of the visual field; the second (associated with postmodernism) tended to decenter the role of painting and pure formal visuality in favor of a semiotic and hermeneutic approach that treated landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes.⁴¹

Mitchell also examines how landscape functions as a determinant body of codes, a signifier of meaning and, as ideology, a highly tuned "instrument of cultural power."⁴² Landscape operates discursively in the construction of identity, within the individual, collective, or the nation:

Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable.⁴³

Within Canada, landscape has played an important role in supporting an ideology of national identity as distinct from indigenous population and European experience. Mackey notes that Northern wilderness would come to represent Canada, in particular through the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁴¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

⁴² Ibid, 2.

⁴³ Ibid, 3.

paintings of the Group of Seven, which for her "embody the dreamwork of settler nationalism in Canada:"⁴⁴

Th(e) semiotic features of landscape, and the historical narratives they generate, are tailor-made for the discourse of imperialism, which conceives itself precisely (and simultaneously) as an expansion of landscape understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of "culture" and "civilization" into a "natural" space in a progress that is itself narrated as "natural".⁴⁵

Likewise Malcolm Andrews refers to the phenomenon of "pictorial colonization"⁴⁶ in which European painting conventions are projected and superimposed upon appropriated territory and naturalized as 'native'. For Canada this manifested in the form of an alien settler body, the encroachment of the European foreigner upon land that was inhabited by indigenous peoples. The European colonists, appropriating the land as their possession, sought a configuration of the landscape that represented their own imported ideals. The critical awareness that has emerged, writes Mitchell, of a "'dark side of landscape', a moral, ideological and political darkness that idealizes possession of territory"⁴⁷ can be applied to the issue of Canadian landscape.

Artifacts in Canada's national art collections reflect the ideals of European civilization transposed to the New World. Early paintings depict what we see today as representations of the First Nations from the European point of view. Portrayed stereotypically, they appear as pagans, converts, idealized heroes or simply absent from the space of the 'New World'. The wilderness was fashioned in a manner emulating European codes of cultivation: clean, spacious, orderly architecture, a flourishing agricultural and merchant economy, picturesque, romanticized and embellished. With European expansionism and the legislation of

⁴⁴ Mackey, 44.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁶ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape in Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 162.

⁴⁷ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of Landscape* (Cambridge, 1980) cited in W.J.T Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

reservations, the figure of the 'Indian' gradually disappeared altogether from the frame, indicative of a growing absence of indigenous presence in the colonial consciousness. Land that had previously been the site of indigenous activity, history and livelihood for centuries came to be depicted as an empty bountiful territory rich with resources, available and open to the settler and explorer.

-III-

*Every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes. They are part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared ideas and memories and feelings that bind a people together.*⁴⁸

Recently questions have been raised regarding the part that the Canadian collective myth has played in constituting a national identity. This part of the chapter will review the establishment of landscape as a key signifier of Canadian identity and will look in particular at the Group of Seven's influence to the paradigm of landscape as nation.

Canada has consistently struggled with something of an 'identity crisis'. This is attributed by some to the omnipresent American ethos and a reluctance to fully relinquish Monarchy and Empire. As a result, until recently and in spite of its largesse, Canada has been regarded as little more than a British colony. Even scholarship in Canadian literature has struggled with defining a national identity, most often defined in the survival archetype articulated by Northrop Frye and others as a 'garrison mentality'.⁴⁹ In Mackey's words: "Canada has produced a 'veritable canon of strategical exploration and description of its ongoing identity crisis' now among the 'most dense bodies of inquiry into culture and nationhood in the industrialized world'."⁵⁰ Following Anderson, Mackey considers the requirement for colonies to initiate and establish pronounced identities in order to take root

⁴⁸ D.W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D. W. Meinig, J. B. Jackson et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) quoted in Brian Osborne, "Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art," *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 162.

⁴⁹ Margaret Atwood's book *Survival* (1972) is a good example of this articulation of Canadian identity as the attempt merely to survive the harsh conditions posed by land and climate. According to Widdis, Northrop Frye "adopted an historical geographical approach to the study of Canadian identity" and identified a fundamental tension "between national unity and regional identity." Following Frye, "the important question is not 'Who am I?' but 'Where is here?' contributing to "a definite geographical dimension to the paradox of Canadian identity, [one] strongly anchored in the territorial experiences of the people of Canada." Randy William Widdis, "Borders, Borderlands and Canadian Identity: A Canadian Perspective," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 (Spring 1997), 52.

⁵⁰ Jody Berland, "Marginal Notes on Cultural Studies in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 64 (4): 514-25, in Mackey, 9.

and survive. Due to the unique circumstance of Canadian history, the negotiation of identity has been a tenuous navigation between diversity and inclusion:

Since Canada, because of its particular history, could not and cannot fit the identity model of European nationhood, it, like other settler colonies, has had to look for alternative models of nationhood and national identity, and has had to do so 'across competing forms of ethnicity and against a history of occupation and dispossession of the original inhabitants'.⁵¹

Ironically the urge for nationalist sentiment emerges, from what Edward Said refers to as a 'condition of estrangement'.⁵²

This ongoing search for a definition of subjective and collective identity arose distinctly for Canada in the early twentieth century. Rising sentiments of nationalist fervour emerged from the circumstances of Canada's participation in World War I. An even earlier display of Commonwealth nationalism is located by Mackey in the nineteenth century when concepts of progress, civilization and natural evolution were paralleled to racial profiling. Prior to this time, "'civilization' was the potential and destined goal of all humankind."⁵³ In the nineteenth century, however, only certain 'races' were perceived as capable of the "advanced stage or system of social development" defined as 'civilization'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, this ideology of racial determinism emerged concurrently to the expansion of settlement and the widespread belief in the near extinction of Native people:

In Canada these trends were reflected in the near universal belief amongst whites that native people, as they had existed, were disappearing with the inevitable march of progress. In tandem with global trends of the nineteenth century, this assumption meant that Aboriginal cultural artifacts were collected and classified. Aboriginal people were also photographed, painted and written about, in an attempt to document what was perceived as civilization's picturesque yet less developed past.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Anderson (1994) cited in Mackey, 13.

⁵² Said cited in Nemiroff, *Crossings*, 18.

⁵³ Mackey, 29.

⁵⁴ As defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 10th ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Mackey, 29.

The 'Canada First Movement' appearing shortly after Confederation in 1867 drew on "specific forms of racial ideology that had developed on a global scale."⁵⁶ The movement set out to cement nationalist links with Britain. Racial superiority was articulated and justified by a discourse of "environmental relativism" that drew parallels between refined qualities of a 'Northern' character and the environment, serving to elevate the character of Northern dwellers:

One of the most persistent benefits articulated about Canada was that, unlike the United States, its northern climate would keep the country 'uncontaminated' by weaker southern races...the northern climate was one of Canada's 'greatest blessings', 'a fundamental political and social advantage which the Dominion enjoys over the United States', because it resulted in a 'persistent process of natural selection'.⁵⁷

Since Dominion in 1867 explains Mackey, "images of nature, the wilderness, and the north have defined Canadian national identity, often in racialised terms as white settler identity,"⁵⁸ because in nationalist mythology the nation is often represented as if embodied in the landscape itself.

Until the early twentieth century, cultural expression in Canada had been largely influenced and even derivative of artistic styles and precedents set in Europe and the United States:

In the colonial period, European interpretations of the natural world of North America were projections of European ideals, values and tastes. An encyclopedic fascination and a spirit of empiricism characterized this tradition. By the mid-nineteenth century representations emulated the categories of English landscape painting. This picturesque aesthetic offered relief from the impenetrable and savage forests, and by creating a vision of civilized and 'improved' nature, made the new terrain accessible to colonialists.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid, 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁹ Eva Mackey, "Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology," *Canadian Women's Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 125.

With no remarkable means to distinguish themselves from the cultural shadows cast by Britain and Europe as a whole, as noted earlier, settlers at first rejected the wilderness or simply transposed a European aesthetic upon it. Osborne writes that the "Canadian settler hates a tree, regards it as his natural enemy, something to be destroyed, eradicated, annihilated by all and every mean."⁶⁰ Landscape appeared in all its historical genres: charming and picturesque, then hauntingly Romantic and sublime, all genres serving specific ideological needs. "By the mid-nineteenth century," adds Osborne, "North American landscapes were being molded into categories advanced by Burke, Gilpin, and Ruskin and their representation was increasingly distorted by the artistic conventions developed in English landscape painting, notably by Constable and Turner."⁶¹ Anne Whitelaw remarks that a preoccupation with the land as a distinct national motif was a prevalent trope throughout representation in art:

The work of earlier artists - from Cornelius Krieghoff's paintings of habitants in the nineteenth century and Paul Kane's voyages west to capture "the vanishing Indian", to the romanticized paintings of Lucius O'Brien and Horatio Walker - also took as their subject matter elements of the distinct Canadian landscape. These early depictions, however, were poetic and idealized visions of the land, virtually indistinguishable from the picturesque and romantic European paintings avidly collected in Montreal and Toronto. They nonetheless point to the importance of landscape in artistic articulations of national identity in Canada.⁶²

In an 1874 art review in the Canadian journal *The Nation* a critic lamented that "Canada is barren of the picturesque," calling "for an imagery that would depict a cultivated Canadian scenery, one that registered farming and the exploitation of natural resources so

⁶⁰ Osborne, 165.

⁶¹ Ibid, 163.

⁶² Anne Whitelaw, *Exhibiting Canada: Articulations of National Identity at the National Gallery of Canada*. PhD Dissertation (Montreal: Concordia University, 1995), 141.

crucial to white settlement within the country.⁶³ In the campaign to characterize a subject matter appropriate to a new Canadian art, the same journal later published an art review decrying the excessive picturesque content of Native subject matter,⁶⁴ an indication perhaps of the extent to which the Native culture captivated artists and was disdained by critics. Regardless, the desire to efface the presence of the aboriginal from artistic renderings indicates the extent to which the collective imagination of white settler culture was still searching for its place:

Colonization continued with the dominance of the landscape genre engaging in what Ryan cites as "a metaphorical or 'imaginative appropriation' of the land"⁶⁵ coupled by the representation of the Native culture as fading into obscurity. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writes Nowlin, "the government of Canada, as well as the national railroads, commissioned large numbers of paintings, drawings, and photographs that were used to lure immigrants into the hinterlands."⁶⁶ Also, "picturesque and pioneering stereotypes gave way to attempts to represent the regionally distinctive cultural landscapes emerging throughout Canada."⁶⁷

By the early twentieth century then, landscape came to be relied upon as the principal referent of the unique and notable qualities particular to Canada. Nowhere is this more

⁶³ Maureen Ryan, "Picturing Canada's Native Landscape: Colonial Expansion, National Identity, and the Image of a 'Dying Race'," *Canadian Art Review*, XVII, 2 (1990), 139. Ryan quotes: "We are disappointed to see the very narrow range of subjects covered by the exhibition. Little or no attempts are made to depict the varied and picturesque marine life of Canada; none to delineate our farms, our cattle, or horses, our sports or fishing, shooting and hunting, our wild animals, our backwoods - full of incident as it is - in the various exiting scenes in the lumberer's occupation."

⁶⁴ "We are brought full face with *les sauvages*...and we in vain try to escape from them. There are Indians in every position that can by any conceivable stretch of the imagination be called Picturesque; they are paddling, fishing, shooting, playing: they permeate the whole of the space devoted to oil pictures: so much so that...the wearied visitor is inclined to wish them all wiped out -- not from existence, but from the canvas." Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Nowlin, 21

⁶⁷ Ibid.

prominently seen than in the artistic expression and nationalist discourse of members of the Group of Seven. Gerta Moray writes that their efforts established the Northern wilderness landscape as the symbol of modern Canadian national identity."⁶⁸ Packaged and presented as the territory of a common and native national heritage, northern distinctiveness became central to the iconography of Canadian landscape:⁶⁹

The land, geography, is transformed into culture: it is the stuff which forms 'our national heritage'; it can somehow be 'owned' and appropriated for the purposes of securing some form of affective identification with the abstract concept of nationhood. And in this linking of the eternal landscape with a temporally and spatially bound conception of the national formation, the idea of Canada as a nation, with all the concomitant notions of tradition and historical continuity, is legitimized by some sense of foundation in the past.⁷⁰

Osborne notes the Group's "avowed mission was the enhancement of Canadian national identity," the catalogue to their 1920 exhibition trumpeting this patriotic objective: "The group of seven artists whose pictures are here exhibited have for several years held a like vision concerning Art in Canada. They are all imbued with the idea that an Art must grow and flower in the land before the country will be a real home for its people."⁷¹

The viewing of a 1913 exhibition of Scandinavian landscapes in Buffalo is believed to have made a distinct impression on members of the Group. With newfound conviction and confidence the opportunity to contribute to Canada's national image was seized upon by portraying landscape in a similar Symbolist style. The Group was inspired to impart a fresh visual sensibility of the unique 'Northern' spirit of the territory and to assume the initiate position of Canada's first national painters. "For the artists of the Group of Seven, the

⁶⁸ Gerta Moray, "Wilderness, Modernity and Aboriginality in the Paintings of Emily Carr," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33, No. 2 (Summer 1998), 43.

⁶⁹ Osborne, 166.

⁷⁰ Whitelaw, 260.

⁷¹ Osborne, 172.

flourishing of Canadian art was only possible once the artistic conventions of Europe lost their dominance. And a truly Canadian art form could only occur out of a spiritual engagement with the environment, an engagement which in the formative years of the Group took place in the Canadian Shield."⁷²

The challenge to articulate a national iconography that could be seen as a distinct departure from familiar genres and representations of Canadian experience was embraced by the Group. This exuberance was tied to an effort to elevate the status of the artist in Canadian society, to gain respect in a culture that was inclined to pragmatism and achieve recognition as important economic and cultural factors in Canadian life. In 1918 A.Y. Jackson was quoted in saying that "(t)he aim of patriotism is a full expression of the beneficent spirit of a particular people, and this expression is stunted without a native art."⁷³ Writing on Canada in 1928 Lawren Harris spoke of the nationalist rhetoric of the Group:

....the effect of the expanse and freedom of the new environment has created new values in the north, in the west, and among individuals in the older centers, grows a powerful consciousness of the Canadian spirit. This spirit is not precise; it lacks detail and finish, and is therefore considered somewhat crude. We, who are true Canadians imbued with the North, are an upstart people with our traditions in the making.⁷⁴

Bolstered by these aspirations, the Group set out to make their unique contribution to "the creation of new myths and symbols that expressed the Canadian identity and clarify its meaning."⁷⁵ Regular sketching and painting trips were made into the wilderness and the Group became collectively known for their paintings of "a primordial, unpeopled North."⁷⁶ In fact, the pristine wilderness of the Canadian Shield the Group claimed to represent was

⁷² Osborne, 169.

⁷³ Whitelaw, 143.

⁷⁴ Charles C. Hill, *Terre Sauvage: Canadian Landscape Painting and the Group of Seven*, supplement. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1999), 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

actually Algoma, Toronto's cottage country and seasonal playground of Toronto's new industrial elite. Georgian Bay, another frequented area was the locale of many holiday resorts and a place that "had been even more radically transformed by the lumber industry."⁷⁷

The Group's popularity was buoyed by an optimistic, burgeoning economic phase in central Canadian history, a time that saw substantial developments in industrialization and technology. Additionally a patriotic spirit was awakened by the Canadian effort in the war. The Group's mythic summer and fall excursions into cottage and resort country to revel in "going native"-what Walton refers to as the "Grey Owl Syndrome", were sponsored by wealthy businessmen and patrons of the arts.⁷⁸ This romantic, still prevalent notion, resulted in the imitation and appropriation of indigenous culture and lifestyles by the European.⁷⁹ The Group's representation of an unpeopled North is now seen by many as a critical signifier in the discourse that the wilderness was empty and ripe for extraction and expansion. Brenda Lafleur concedes that the appropriation, promotion and dissemination of the Group's images of Canadian landscape by various political and cultural institutions was a deliberate strategy of fostering a unified vision of Canada and promoting a sense of nationalism and national unity.⁸⁰ Anne Whitelaw sees parallels between "the visual vocabulary of the Group of Seven [and] the particular origins and interests of Canada's political and cultural elite."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Osborne, 169.

⁷⁸ Paul Walton, "The Group of Seven and Northern Development," *RACAR XVII: 2* (1990), 173.

⁷⁹ What Homi K. Bhabha "would call mimicry - all that colonial discourse is capable of." Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Kinds of Knowing," In *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 95. Jessup also notes that the 'real' Canadian artist ushered in by the Group was perceived "as the wild man of Toronto's recreational hinterland". The Group's excursions into the hinterland mirrored "the journey much touted by contemporary advocates and advertisers of the area...as a 'journey inwards to discover the primitive self, and back to a time when 'the race' as a whole was more vigorous, more self-reliant, more alive to its place in nature." Lynda Jessup, "Bushwackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," In *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. L. Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 133.

⁸⁰ Brenda Lafleur, "'Resting' in History: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon." *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock, et al. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 217-27.

⁸¹ Whitelaw, 144.

The image of the artist as heroic trailblazer, adventurer, prospector and pioneer that came to be personified by the Group and their followers was paralleled by the entrepreneur of modern industry. Walton notes the Group's influence and ties to industry:

The Group's sense of kinship with the business community was reciprocated in a practical way when a significant number of industrialists, financiers, and corporations began to purchase their works...one senses a recognition on their part that the artists they patronized employed, like modern industry, what were regarded then as the most advanced methods of extracting artistic treasure, emphatic design, colour and expressive effects, from the same hills, forests, rivers, and waterfalls that were the basis of so much material wealth in Ontario and Canada.⁸²

The Group's decorative painting style, which at first outraged many viewers, served to render the wilderness accessible, approachable, appealing and poetically legitimize the *raison d'être* of a culture "based on resource extraction."⁸³ Walton is troubled by the environmental implications of the vision "embedded in the Group's paintings. As celebrations of the beauty and spiritual energy of the North and symbols of resources that, deep down, many believed to be inexhaustible."⁸⁴ Lynda Jessup makes a distinction between landscape depicted by the Group as inherently possessing character when, more appropriately "it should be approached as having been invested with character."⁸⁵ Jessup also suggests that wilderness is a culturally constructed concept identified with values of civilization: Interpretation may be derived, from bold use of colour and brushstroke within the context of the artist's agenda and response to landscape, but a narrative all the same.⁸⁶ The Group's projection of an available,

⁸² Walton, 176

⁸³ Ibid, 174.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 176

⁸⁵ Lynda Jessup, "Prospectors, Bushwackers, Painters: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 17 (Spring 1998), 134.

⁸⁶ Jessup writes "The wilderness in the artists' paintings not only embodied the artists' response to landscape, but was also the object of emotion itself, and thus was capable of stimulating a response from the viewer that, although triggered by pictorial effects, was seen to be an emotional reaction to the landscape depicted." Ibid, 199.

accessible, infinitely resource-laden territory has had unquestionable significance for the land.

Inscribed with formidable beauty, absence and neutrality the landscape presented the possibility of unmitigated potential for access. Like Bordo, Moray notes the elimination of the aboriginal presence from the landscape positioning of the spectator "in an intimate bond with the landscape imagined as 'wilderness'. This landscape is the site of a spiritual birth, of the nativity of the modern Canadian who emerges from union with the land."⁸⁷ Moray also sees the picturing of "landscape as wilderness, the canvas as *tabula rasa*" as "attempts to exorcise the ghosts of cultural difference - difference between the aboriginal and the invader, between the classed hierarchy of the Old World and the equal birthright of the New."⁸⁸

With the Northern territory packaged and presented as images of a common native national heritage, northern distinctiveness became central to the iconography of Canadian landscape. Jessup attributes the promotion of the English Canadian perspective to the collecting practices of such institutions as the Art Gallery of Toronto and the National Gallery of Canada. The Group's polemic, as late as 1995, was convenient for the agenda of valorizing and perpetuating the appearance of populist interests of the national art collecting institution.⁸⁹ Arguing that the identity of supporters championing the Group "reveals their essentially British Canadianism... characteristic of what can be more precisely defined as

⁸⁷ Moray, 143.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See both of Jessup's writings on this topic. Here, despite Jessup's polemical stance the Group's ongoing association with art collecting institutions is interpreted as a timely convergence of interests and series of events on behalf of many opportunistic bodies. The fact that the Group of Seven aesthetic appeals to a mass and vast audience is an important consideration for collections.

Ontario regionalism,"⁹⁰ Jessup notes the nationalistic features in the agenda of the modern museum:

The single most important development [in the area of museum and heritage policies and sites] has consisted in the production of a completely autonomized national past. This has entailed the organization of a new discursive space for the time-space coordinates of the nation, ones which sever its dependency on those of Europe and allow it to emerge as a free-standing entity rooted in its own past.⁹¹

The pre-eminence of Anglo-Canadian renditions of the landscape presupposes a hegemonic agenda of the economic and cultural élite. Further, "the initial ingredients of an Anglo-Canadian national identity was based primarily on a British cultural tradition."⁹² Jessup argues that this perspective, oriented to be an agency of the commonplace, correspondingly negates the experiences of cultural groups. The conspicuous absence of the cultural other from the picture frame is further exacerbated by the discursive negation in the exhibition space of the museum.

Although we can but speculate as to the original motivations behind the Group of Seven phenomena, the enormity of their influence on the canon of Canadian art must be duly acknowledged. As visual elements employed to narrate and impart the 'Canadian' imagination and sense of identity these images of landscape still resonate as cultural signifiers. As we shall see, contemporary postmodern artists, including those employing photography, have appropriated this same imagery applying it as a means to a discourse of critique. In the following section, the specifics of photography's depictions of the land will be discussed.

⁹⁰ Jessup, 136.

⁹¹ This rendition becomes even more problematic when the aboriginal culture is described in the National Gallery of Canada's 1927 exhibition catalogue as "having sprung up wholly from the soil and sea within our national boundaries", implying that nothing existed before the European set foot upon the shores across the Atlantic. Ibid.

⁹² Randy William Widdis, "Borders, Borderlands and Canadian Identity: A Canadian Perspective," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 (Spring 1997), 56.

IV

*What we should demand of the photographer is the ability to place his picture in such a context that it cannot be read as a fashionable pictorial cliché but is given some new, some revolutionary meaning.*⁹³

Photography has made a significant contribution to the discourse on 'space'. From its inception photography was regarded "as one of the marvels of nineteenth century science,"⁹⁴ an empirical tool providing passive recordings of 'unmediated truth'. The replicas produced by the camera provided unprecedented visual immediacy that was believed to be undeniably 'true'. Allan Sekula refers to the "social-scientific appropriation of photography" as "a genre of instrumental realism" thus "hitching photography to the locomotive of positivism."⁹⁵ Advances in photographic technology did much to contribute to its reception. According to Snyder, "changes in the technical practice of photography resulted in photographic prints that looked machine-made because of their high finish and endless detail, and that consequently were thought to be precise, accurate and faithful to the objects or scenes they represented."⁹⁶ Yet in the 1890's, photography also appeared in the form of *pictorialism*, an artistic movement that imitated painterly qualities to articulate a subjectively motivated expressionist sensibility.

Throughout its history photography has consistently existed on the fine line between truth and artifice as a process of document and invention. During the Victorian era photography ranged from the exotic photographic travel documents of Maxime du Camp to

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, cited in Wright, 97.

⁹⁴ This reading of photography is advanced in both Joan M. Schwartz, "The Geography Lesson: Photographs and the Construction of Imaginative Geographies," *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 1 (1996), 19 and Joel Snyder "Territorial Photography," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (University of Chicago Press), 176.

⁹⁵ Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs." *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1983), 124-5.

⁹⁶ Snyder, 175.

the highly personal renderings of Julia Margaret Cameron's dreamy portraits. Yet, as Snyder argues, the middle-class Victorian consumer became increasingly distanced from the hand-made, pictorial rendering in preference for photography's qualities as a tool of the modern and scientific.⁹⁷

Scholars are generally in agreement as to the enormous influence of photography on perceptions and perspectives of landscape. For the Victorians, photography emerged as a window on the world. By the end of the 1850s, according to Schwartz, developments

....in both photographic and transportation technology ushered in a golden age of photography. The era was marked by the rise of the professional photographer, the commercialization of photographic practice, the proliferation of photographic applications and the widespread consumption of photographic images. It was during these first decades that the relationship between an increasingly visual society and an evolving photographic technology established new ways of seeing the world.⁹⁸

Most popular was the European travel photography genre. Coloured by the tropes of European colonial perspective and Orientalist discourse some of its most salient features were the absence of native residents and the ethnographic documentation of "racial types."⁹⁹ In addition landscape was exoticized - emphasized as distant and different.¹⁰⁰ As Schwartz and others have argued, the photograph is a cultural construct that consistently reveals more vis-a-vis the perspective of the photographer and the intended audience than about the subject itself. The collective experience of travel photography distributed through advances in the medium and in printing technology introduced and reinforced the concepts of colonial expansion, rule and racial superiority to Victorian Europeans:

...as a pool of visual facts...as symbols of imperial expansion, colonial development, commercial enterprise...and scientific knowledge, these mutually held visual images contributed to national identity...As an instrument of cultural imperialism, the photograph helped to establish and affirm identity. It confirmed the progress of

⁹⁷ Ibid, 176.

⁹⁸ Schwartz, 18.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 30.

Western civilization...In so doing, travel photographs presented not just topography but ideology. The camera...depicted the world in Western terms.¹⁰¹

Snyder notes the stylistic features of photography that mimicked the pictorial conventions of landscape painting to establish itself as a viable medium. Yet the emphasis was placed on the documentary aspect of the medium. Pictorial features were derived "not from conventions of illustrations or from the photographer's unfettered imagination, but from physical facts about the world as it appeared before the camera at the time of exposure."¹⁰² Thus photography was distanced from painting, the process of invention to one that was believed to reproduce a "true" likeness of the world.

The result was the production of commercial high quality prints from 20" x 24" negatives made with a view camera that borrowed from the tradition in painting of the sublime. Awe-inspiring aspects of Nature were presenting in the form of photographic precision to be regarded in a scientific fashion. This school of landscape photography, established by figures like the Americans Carleton Watkins, Timothy O'Sullivan and William Henry Jackson still informs landscape photography today. The emphasis on the sublime and scientific accuracy in this genre of landscape photography has persisted. A recent series of photographs by Canadian astronaut/photographer Roberta Bondar attests to the endurance of this category of photography. Backed by generous grants from the Government of Canada's Millenium Fund, Bondar is airlifted to remote vistas of landscape where, with a large format camera, authoritative color photographs are produced depicting the grandeur of a breathtakingly sublime, unoccupied Canadian landscape.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 31.

¹⁰² Snyder, 181.

¹⁰³ Hamish Buchanan and Nina Levitt agree that "two traditions have dominated the history of landscape photography: the topographic/scientific, in which nature is measured and catalogued for potential exploitation; and the romantic/formalist, in which nature is portrayed as a sublime participant in human experience". They note, however, "the distinctions between these traditions have been blurred in recent decades as photographers

The conventions of nineteenth century photography were enlisted by North American government and industry for promotional strategies of economic investment, immigration and expansion. Photographs were used to naturalize the presence of railroads, mining and lumber camps, and settlements in the landscape "to portray a visual harmony between the land and the new tokens of progress symbolized by the industrialization of the lands itself."¹⁰⁴ Such images recall early paintings of Lower Canada depicting the European leisure class resting on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, watching merchant ships breeze in and out of port. Images of this nature functioned as ideological markers of the colonial occupation of the landscape and the established predominance of European market economy. It was at this time that photographers mimicked the role of prospector and pioneer, seeking out profit and new territory. Foucault's reference to geographers transposing expanses of land into diagrams and maps, is applicable to the survey photographer: "those seventeenth century travelers and nineteenth century geographers were actually intelligence-gatherers, collecting and mapping information which was directly exploitable by colonial powers, strategists, traders and industrialists."¹⁰⁵

Photographs presenting the landscape as frontier, unpopulated and romanticized, served to fuel economic and expansionist interests of the North American nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discursive function of landscape and photography, especially at this time, was one of conquest and free enterprise. James R. Ryan regards the study of photographs from this period in particular as a useful keeping of records: "in the context of

have employed traditional practices for different purposes", "On Mapping a Decade," In *Public Exposures: One Decade of Contemporary Canadian Photography* (Toronto: Toronto Photographers Workshop, 1999), 49

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, 187.

¹⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography: interviews with the editors of *Herodote*." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, by Michel Foucault, edited by Colin Gordon. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1980), 75.

post-colonialism it is apparent that the photographic archive also represents a form of collective colonial memory." ¹⁰⁶ Ryan remarks in *Picturing Empire* that:

...photographic images do not simply 'speak for themselves' or show us the world through an innocent historical eye. Rather, they are invested with meanings framed by and produced within specific cultural conditions and historical circumstances...photographs - composed, reproduced, circulated and arranged for consumption...reveal as much about the imaginative landscapes of imperial culture as they do about the physical spaces or people pictured within their frame. In this respect they are themselves expressions of the knowledge and power that shaped the reality of Empire. ¹⁰⁷

Similar to the work of nineteenth century American photographer/surveyor Timothy O'Sullivan, whose landscape photographs "were made in an expeditionary context...as 'views' to supply information for the United States government on the geography and resources of the unexplored West...the history of landscape photography of the Canadian west in the second half of the nineteenth century shows how photography was closely applied to topographical surveying and the marketing of the Canadian Pacific Railway, completed in 1885." ¹⁰⁸

The rhetoric of ties between landscape and national identity that determine the demarcation of territory is repeated in the delineation of territory in the photograph. ¹⁰⁹ The complicity of landscape photography in the conquest of the wilderness is further noted by Ryan. In imposing a British perspective onto a North American context, "imperial landscape" was presented as "an objective record of sight" and "as a natural way of seeing." ¹¹⁰ Nineteenth century photographic discourse was synonymously colonial, informed

¹⁰⁶ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰⁹ Marcel Blouin, "The Moment of an Image," In *L'éternel et l'éphémère*, translated by Anne-Marie Garceau (Montréal: Le Mois de la Photo, 1995), 4.

¹¹⁰ Ryan, 47.

by a British picturesque, romantic and pastoral aesthetic and a "masterly gaze."¹¹¹ The predominance of these features of landscape photography, sublime, concerned with grand proportions and scale and requiring great "physical difficulty and manly exertion"¹¹² informed the parameters of photography well into twentieth century modernism.

Skepticism towards the representational function of the photograph was largely prompted by widespread disenchantment permeating post-WWII Western thought. Distrust of Enlightenment epistemology, known as 'instrumental reason' led many to fundamentally question appearances and motives. In the art world precedents were set in gestures by the Surrealists and Dadaists who used photography ironically and subversively as a strategy of transgression and a response to propaganda. Postmodernism, or the repudiation of the fundamental tenets of modernism—a universal point of view, the supremacy of the romantic notion of the artist and the detached spiritual function of art—is really a tendency in art with a long tradition that questions perspective. Artists turned to photography in order to adopt a critical stance towards historical complicity and establish a new trajectory of discourse within social documentary that fully engages with issues of the culture.

Scholars have looked to the critical thought that evokes the systematic function of narratives formulated by cultures to entrench systems of power and ideologies. Visual information is regarded as a form of language that could be decoded to reveal the particular values of the culture. In *Elements of Semiology*, for example, first appearing in France in 1964, Roland Barthes approaches semiotics with structuralist theory, formulating an "analogy between 'natural' language (the phenomenon of speech and language) and visual

¹¹¹ Ibid, 57.

¹¹² Ibid, 60.

'languages'.¹¹³ In *Mythologies*, Barthes writes about the photograph as a potent signifier of ideology, especially in relation to the dominant myths of society played out in media and advertising.¹¹⁴

Burgin defines semiotics as "the study of signs, with the object of identifying the systematic regularities from which meanings are construed."¹¹⁵ Each photograph is thus approached as a text eliciting a discourse to be read and decoded. Informed by the semiotics theory of Pierce the structure of society itself came to be seen "as a universe of signs".¹¹⁶ Sekula attributes a rhetorical function to photography - as a discourse and a "system of information exchange - an utterance...an incomplete text dependent upon a domain of readability and context to carry forth its latent meaning."¹¹⁷ With its indexical characteristics the photograph permits a privileged symbolic relationship to the real and can carry universal resonance. Yet as signifier it also becomes multi-dimensional, culturally specific, encoded and dependent upon culturally specific visual literacy in order to function as a resonant object and carrier of nuance and meaning. According to Sekula, "A photographic discourse is a system within which the culture harnesses photographs to various representational tasks."¹¹⁸ Also, it is "a site of intersection of various orders of theoretical understanding related to its production, publication and consumption or reading."¹¹⁹ It is thus the viewer who becomes the reader and author of meaning, with the photograph functioning as a referent to familiar ground or as a bridge to unencountered configurations of meaning.

¹¹³ Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs, 1977," in *Representation and Photography: A Screen Education Reader*, edited by Manuel Alvarado, E. Buscombe and R. Collins (NY: Palgrave, 2001), 66.

¹¹⁴ Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* and John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* write specifically on visual information promoted through art, entertainment and advertising determining thought and being.

¹¹⁵ Burgin, 67.

¹¹⁶ Townsend-Gault, 23.

¹¹⁷ Alan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Photography in Print*, edited by Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1981), 452.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 455.

The photograph for Burgin is "a *place of work*...a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to *make sense*."¹²⁰

Semiotics is embedded in the postmodern reflex to question all previous knowledge and understanding, in which the neutrality of all signs is dismissed. Linda Hutcheon defines it as a practice with an "initial concern to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we may unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us."¹²¹ One way postmodernist practice operates is by 'highlighting', a strategy of duplicity that adopts a convention and simultaneously uses it to subvert meaning, becoming so transparent as to 'naturalize' its own underminings.¹²² As a result of postmodernism, art-making and art criticism have become a practice, a conceptual theory-driven undertaking aware of itself as discourse, in which language is invented, manipulated or re-contextualized to articulate an idea, an ethic or a poetic.

In Canada, as elsewhere, the postmodernism of the early 1970s brought substantial change to all artistic mediums, but especially to photography, due in large part, as Burgin and others have suggested, to the advent of semiotic theory. As Burgin notes, "Early 'semiotic studies' radically oriented the theory of photography."¹²³ The medium underwent a radical shift, on account of its potential for manipulation, its wide-reaching influence on popular culture, advertising and the media and its privileged relation to the real. In 1961 "the prevailing mode [was still] the photojournalism of the large-circulation picture magazines,

¹¹⁹ Liz Wells ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 51.

¹²⁰ Burgin, 74.

¹²¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹²³ Burgin, 66.

and the spirit that informed the special issue was that of Edward Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibition, with an optimistic belief in the regenerative social power of the photograph."¹²⁴ In Canada up until the 1970's much photographic activity was conducted under the auspices of the National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division.

In the 1974 *ArtsCanada* special issue on photography, note is taken of a significant shift in conventional photography practice. Geoffrey James articulates an altered status of photography, demarcating a new territory of social landscape practice as pluralist and resistant to facile generalizations. The new vocabulary for photography elicits such terms as 'ambivalence', 'irony', 'snapshot', 'aleatory', indicating a decisive shift from traditional practice. This substantial reorientation of documentary photography in Canada expanded in the 1980s.¹²⁵ As a result of postmodernist and post-colonial discourse, photography took on a new social documentary position emphasizing critique, one in which the previously disregarded or misrepresented contradictions of Canadian history and society came under scrutiny. " Coined by Nathan Lyons in 1966, the term "social landscape" is defined as "an ironic, self-conscious, and socially critical approach to documentary photography."¹²⁶ Artists in Canada began to use photography with tones of irony and detachment, for its ability to render its role in propaganda problematic and to critically engage with the implications relevant to nation and culture. Anthropologist Rochelle Kolodny uses the concept of collusion "to describe how cultural assumptions bind the members of a culture to a shared reality," that "mutual collaboration is necessary to maintain that reality by methods as

¹²⁴ Geoffrey James, "Responding to Photographs: A Canadian Portfolio," *ArtsCanada: An Inquiry Into the Aesthetics of Photography* XXXI, Nos. 3 & 4, Issue Nos. 192/193/194/195 (Dec 1974), 4.

¹²⁵ Wollheim cited in Buchanan and Levitt, 48.

¹²⁶ Payne, "A Canadian Document: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division." In *A Canadian Document/ Un Document Canadien* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography/Musée canadien de la photographie contemporaine, 1991), 15.

diverse...as shared patterns of representation and commodity exchange."¹²⁷ In order to articulate that "there is not truth, only positioning and motivation,"¹²⁸ artists in Canada began to repudiate the collaboration of narratives in representational practice art supporting national ideology. Naturally, the genre of landscape painting that had come to most define Canadian art was wide open to scrutiny and re-evaluation. As a signifier integral to the historical formulation of the Canadian identity, with all its implications, landscape became raw material for strategies in critical art practice.

The following chapter will address precedents in Canadian landscape discourse set by postmodernists Toronto artist Michael Snow and Vancouver-based Jin-me Yoon. Their discourse forms an important part of the critical apparatus that will be useful in the subsequent consideration of the work of Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert. In photographic appropriations these artists critically engage specifically with the presence of the Group of Seven in the canon of Canadian art, while undermining conventional notions of reception and the supposed naturalized equation between landscape and national identity.

¹²⁷ Rochelle Kolodny, "Colluding in a Vision," In *Public Exposures: One Decade of Contemporary Canadian Photography*, (Toronto: Toronto Photographers Workshop, 1999), 27.

¹²⁸ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Wavelength to Paternity: Epistemology with a Camera," In *Frame of Mind: Viewpoints on Photography in Contemporary Canadian Art*, ed. Diana Augaitis (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1993), 23.

Chapter II

Postmodern Precedents: Michael Snow and Jin-me Yoon

*When the first perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we are dealing with the realm of phantoms.*¹

Canadian artists Michael Snow and Jin-me Yoon have been occupied with the political and ethical heritage of landscape treatment by the Group of Seven. They situate themselves outside this canonical rhetoric with a deliberate repositioning in relation to their precedents. Their work transgresses expectation and tradition, engaging in new configurations that dialogue with the status of landscape iconography in the Canadian context. Also implicated in their critique are the collecting and exhibiting practices of the museum and its historical role in perpetuating a conventional version of history. The intention of decentering the legacy, the stylistic influence and the fundamentally ethical consequences of equating landscape representation with national identity informs their practice. A brief discussion of principal works by Michael Snow and Jin-me Yoon, two highly influential figures whom have set important precedents reframing perspective with the camera, will lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow on the photo-based work of artists Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert.

Into the Light (2001), an exhibition recently organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, acknowledges Toronto artist Michael Snow as an important figure in the pivotal historical moment of the late 1960s and early 70s when the parameters of art

¹ Jacques Derrida quoted by Thomas Zimmer, "Projection and Dis/embodiment: Genealogies of the Virtual," In *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 72.

and reception were altered and redefined. This period of flux, comprised of Pop, Minimalism and Conceptual impulses, was mediated by the novel use of photographic technology and installation. As a result the dominance of linear single-point perception and concept of a fixed horizon was permanently undermined. Artists used the strategy of "engaging the viewer in a phenomenological experience of objects in relation to the architectural dimensions of the gallery - not to pictorial space - transforming actual space into a perceptual field."² Furthermore, the kaleidoscopic perspective introduced by the conjunction between photographic image and space succeeded in "the prising of the viewer's gaze from the single screen into the surrounding space mimicking the inherent mobility of the camera itself."³ The properties of the camera, the model and metaphor for the vision of the human eye since the Renaissance, were radically revisited and re-evaluated during this period.⁴ As an alternative to the empirical tool utilized for impartial recording, the multi-dimensional cinematic strategy of the postminimalists showcased the camera as "an extension of the body's own mental and ocular recording system [through] the seriality of the sequence and the interlocking structure of multiple images."⁵

Michael Snow made some of the earliest transgressive gestures towards the canon of landscape representation during this period. This re-invention of landscape was

² Chrissie Iles, "Between the Still and Moving Image, "In *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 34.

³ Ibid.

⁴ These artists were taking into account the properties of the moving camera and multi-channeled video recordings on shifting perspectives. Iles goes to great lengths to place these gestures soundly within an historical trajectory. "This final dismantling of traditional linear perspective" she writes, "completed the earlier experiments of stereoscopic photography. Paul Cézanne's breaking up of temporality and Marcel Duchamp's experiments with multiple perspectives, opticality, perception, and the fourth dimension, all of which laid the groundwork for this Postminimalist decentering of the viewing subject. Iles extends this analysis all the way back to philosophical discourses on vision from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 35.

⁵ Iles, 34.

precipitated by the disclosure of the recording apparatus as a component in mediating and perception. Accordingly, to Johanne Sloan, in *La région centrale* (1970-71) Snow installed a "customized movie camera in a remote part of northern Québec so that it might endlessly record the inhospitable terrain. Images of the bundled up artist alongside his robotic machine have entered into the lore of twentieth century art reminiscent, perhaps, of how nineteenth century *pleinairistes*, brushes poised mid-air, were captured by cameras for posterity."⁶ Snow's painterly gesture, executed with a camera designed to move in "figure-8s, arcs, scallops, sweeps, zigzags...along with a shaking effect and angling or tilting of the image within the frame,"⁷ parodied the contingency of the landscape tradition and especially highlighted the arbitrary nature of representation. In fact Snow has stated: "I am trying to continue the soloist aspect of painting without painting. I have added the camera and its products to the traditional tools of the painter/sculptor. That cameras are mirrors with memories is the first important understanding. That "subjects" are transformed to become photographs is the second."⁸ Embedded in Snow's work is the constant reminder that "whatever the location of the scenery, whatever the medium...even the simplest act of framing a scene implies a process of metaphoric *dislocation*."⁹

⁶ Johanne Sloan, "Outside Matters," In *Elusive Paradise: The Millenium Prize* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2001), 47.

⁷ Regina Cornwell, *Snow Seen: The Films and Photographs of Michael Snow* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1980), 111.

⁸ Michael Snow, "Notes on the Whys and Hows of My Photographic Works," In *Michael Snow Panoramique: Oeuvres Photographiques & Films/Photographic Works & Films 1962-1999* (Paris: Centre National de la Photographie, 1999), 113.

⁹ Sloan, 48.

Comprised of a series of 25 dye coupler prints heavily framed in black, Snow's *Plus Tard* (1977) employs the mechanics of still photography to consider the megalithic influence of the Group of Seven. The artist reconfigures a relationship to the place of Group of Seven landscape representation within the gallery space by altering the privileged status of its occupation within the permanent exhibition practice of the National Gallery of Canada. Snow uses the effect of "panning the camera during exposure"¹⁰ to create "a moving panorama" thrusting "events into automotive time."¹¹ The series, according to Jacqueline Fry "is a literal quotation of a collection once housed on the third floor of the National Gallery of Canada"¹² in its previous incarnation, the modest Lorne Building on Elgin Street in Ottawa.

In *Plus Tard* (Figure 6) Snow appropriates and re- photographs such iconic Canadian works as Thomson's *Jack Pine* in situ and effectively re-frames history by transforming them into ghost of themselves, a series of blurred, out of focus, faded color photographs. In so doing, Snow repositions Canadian icons as past, passed by, gone, out of commission, disappearing, dissolving into obscurity, or at least, in proposing this possibility, Snow suggests the likelihood of this occurrence. *Plus Tard* subverts the fiction of the masterly gaze and perception. As Nemiroff notes, "The subject of *Plus Tard* is inherently unstable: it is the land seen through its representations, and painting viewed through the mobile gaze of the spectator/photographer. *Plus Tard* shifts our iconic object

¹⁰ Snow, 117.

¹¹ Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Toronto : Between the Lines, 1991) cited in Sloan, 48.

¹² Jacqueline Fry, "The Museum in a Number of Recent Works," In *Sightlines: Readings of Contemporary Canadian Art* eds., Jessica Bradley and Lesley Johnstone (Montréal: Artextes, 1994), 123.

to the act of looking itself."¹³ In making photographic renderings of images that were in themselves interpretive abstractions of nature, paint and brushstroke on canvas, Snow calls attention to the subjectivity inherent to the process of representation.¹⁴

Remarkably, this series, an overt challenge to the revered tradition of art history in Canada, did not generate more of a stir beyond the occasional expression of mild bafflement. Perhaps, at the time of its appearance, the significance of Snow's gesture was not fully grasped.¹⁵ The sacred cow of Group of Seven landscape is abstracted, essentially disfigured, signified as irrelevant and thrust into the distant historical past, indicates the changing intellectual climate among artists of the avant-garde at the time. Snow's gesture alludes to the archival process of documentation in which artifacts are recorded by the camera for purposes of preservation, research and posterity. The act of documentation simultaneously pays tribute to the importance of the Group of Seven while impeding such a reading by the blurred inaccuracy of the recordings. *Plus Tard* exemplifies the problematic of the contemporary artist within art history in Canada. In "Beyond National Identities" (1995) Nemiroff remarks that "the nationalism that led the painters who formed the Group of Seven in the 1920s to attempt the creation of a national style based in the depiction of the northern landscape is alien to the outlook of most

¹³ Diana Nemiroff, "Beyond National Identities," In *Spirits on the Crossing: Travellers to/From Nowhere: Contemporary Art in Canada 1980-94* (Kyoto: National Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 128-9.

¹⁴ I am referring here to Michael Snow's own explanation of his process, cited by Fry, 140.

¹⁵ Peter White, reviewing Snow for the *Globe and Mail* in 1977, states of *Plus Tard*, "A first reaction might be that Snow is debunking the Group by obscuring its finest work. Yet the feeling one has following along is a quiet delight...By the blurs, by the double, sometimes triple exposures, by the restrained milky qualities of the colour, Snow seems to be saying the Group cannot be improved upon". Peter White, "Snow Gets Solo Show in Paris," the *Globe and Mail*, July 19, 1977. Writing on *Plus Tard* for the *Vancouver Sun* Eve Johnson, confesses "to not really getting the point". Eve Johnson "Thawing the ideas of Mr. Snow", *Vancouver Sun*, March 5, 1980, 1. In general I have found there to be inadequate critical attention to this series.

artists today."¹⁶ *Plus Tard* comments on the mediation of artifacts by cultural forces to inform a particular feature of national character, in this case, the alignment of geographical conditions with a sense of Canadian identity housed and validated by the national institution. Snow's nod to this experience of the museum "calls pictorial stability into question"¹⁷ and questions the fundamental issues inherent to the authority of collecting and exhibiting practice. Snow, in fact, casts light on the narrative condition of the interpretive apparatus. The sequence pays homage to the paintings of the Group of Seven, but signals distance and departure from the epoch of artistic production they represent. As postmodernism calls into question the incredulity of historical forms of knowledge, so Snow subverts the cornerstone of cultural baggage, the claim to authority of perception.

Another conceptual artist taking specific issue with Canadian landscape is Korean Canadian Jin-me Yoon. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) is an astonishingly blunt statement using strategies of conventional portraiture and appropriation to address assumptions of naturalized Canadian national identity associations with Group of Seven landscape iconography. Although Yoon's work in relation the politics of national identity has been satisfactorily addressed by elsewhere,¹⁸ the context of this report requires a discussion of her practice to establish the environment in Canadian art discourse that is engaged with issues of landscape.

¹⁶ Nemiroff, "Beyond National Identities", 128.

¹⁷ Fry, 124.

¹⁸ The significance of Yoon's work has addressed by Brenda Lafleur in "'Resting' in History: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon," In *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

In the earlier photo-construction series of postcards, *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991), Yoon positions herself, an Asian-born Canadian, in the foreground of the picture frame with Lake Louise and the Rocky Mountains in the distance, (Figure 7) standing beside a tour bus with other tourists and in a museum shop. By installing and positioning herself as a tourist in the landscape Yoon posits the incongruities between self as Korean Canadian and traditional assumptions of national identity. Western Canada, in fact, is Yoon's adopted home. In the context of the work, she is made to appear as a visitor. Referring to this body of work, Yoon states, "I am interested in appropriating the genre of landscape photography to question the constructed 'nature' of Canadian identity. Imaged in the heroic setting of the Canadian Rockies, can I as a non-Western woman enjoy a 'naturalized' relationship to this landscape?"¹⁹ Yoon's point was further punctuated by the juxtaposition in situ with a Lawren Harris painting of a stylized Western Canadian landscape. Using installation, photography and the artist's performance before the camera, *Souvenirs of the Self* highlights the constructive nature of identity and the notion that the landscape, while enduring as a marker of Canadian heritage for tourist consumption, has outworn its ability to represent a cohesive Canadian identity.

A Group of Sixty-Seven (1996), was initially commissioned for the 1996 Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition *Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art*. Yoon produced the work in situ at the Vancouver Art Gallery²⁰ in response to the ideological

¹⁹ Yoon cited by Nemiroff in *Crossings* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 182.

²⁰ See Grant Arnold, "Shared Terrain/Contested Spaces," In *Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art* edited by Grant Arnold, Monika Kin Gagnon and Doreen Jensen (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1996), 9, and Grant Arnold, "Jin-me Yoon: Purism, Heterogeneity and A Group of Sixty-Seven," In *Home Improvements: Institutions and Other Perversions, Collapse 3*, ed. Judith Mastai and John O'Brian (Vancouver, B.C: Vancouver Art Forum Society, 1997), 149.

underpinnings of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, the circulating National Gallery of Canada exhibition marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Group's inaugural show. In this photo-construction installation, Yoon combines a series of lush dye-coupler portraits of individual Asian-Canadians in two separate grid formations. In the first formation the individuals are photographed framed by a canonical Lawren Harris western landscape painting. (Figure 8) Gazing directly at the viewer, the sitter is positioned to thwart access to the view of the horizon of *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924). In foregrounding the individual Yoon relegates the historical landscape painting to a secondary status of prop or backdrop. The second group is photographed facing into an Emily Carr painting, their backs turned to the viewer. (Figure 9) They are also positioned to obstruct the focal point of *Old Time Coast Village* (1929-30), literally offset as background. Yoon's work highlights the "apparent disjunction between the identity of the sitters and the sense of national identity constructed around Carr and the Group of Seven."²¹ More recently exhibited in *Crossings* (NGC, 1998), *A Group of Sixty-Seven* puts forth the incongruities between "the Euro-Canadian signature on the landscape and identity" and that which "ethnically other" citizens must face."²² Of the work Yoon states, "I employed the recognizable genre of landscape painting - potent with symbols of regional and national identity - to question socio-historical constructions of national identity."²³ Grant Arnold writes:

For many viewers, the initial effect of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is to point towards an apparent disjunction between the identity of the sitters and the sense of

²¹ Arnold, "Shared Terrain/Contested Spaces," 9.

²² Moray, 53.

²³ Jin-me Yoon, "Touring Home From Away 1998-1999," In *Lost Homelands: Manuel Piña, Edward Poitras, Jorma Puranen, Jin-me Yoon* (Kamloops : Kamloops Art Gallery, 2000), 52.

national identity constructed around the Group of Seven and disseminated through projects like *Art for a Nation*. This appearance of disjunction raises questions regarding the exclusions that underlie a conception of Canadian-ness naturalized, in part, through a specific imaging of the land.²⁴

Canada's centennial year, 1967, is alluded to in the title, but *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is, of course, more obviously a pun on Canada's national painters. As Arnold explains, the year 1967 is significant to Canadians of Korean origin as it marks changes in the Canadian Immigration Act that eased passage to Canada.²⁵ Fundamentally conceptual, Yoon's work uses the photo-construction strategy to locate a disjunction between present identity in Canada and an historically established identity located in landscape figuration.

The work

denies the conception of a singular or ideal subject upon which essentialized identity rests. Rather, while pointing toward the degree to which nationalism serves as one of the major sites for articulation of the self, Yoon's work insists on difference while asserting a conception of identity as something that is positioned at the shifting conjuncture of cultures and histories.²⁶

Yoon alludes to the specificity of the experience of the Asian immigrant within present Canadian society and in history. To many Canadians of Asian origin, the Rocky Mountains and the Trans Canada Highway are reminders of a period of hardship. These moments of history, however, are glossed over and suppressed by "the Eurocentric monumentalizations of Canadian history and geography...the dominant national historiographies that Asian Canadians are subjected to."²⁷

²⁴ Arnold, *Home Improvements* 151.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 153.

²⁷ Judy Radul, "At the Station," In *Jin-me Yoon: Between Departure and Arrival* (Vancouver: Western Front, 1997), 33.

Yoon's strategy of staging scenarios using photographic images creates visual juxtapositions devised to question assumptions of Canadian identity. She has stated that a strain of her work "reflects the preoccupations of a migrant coming up against the complex narratives of Canada as a nation. The relationship of self and subjectivity to dominant cultural representations and definitions of landscape continue to preoccupy me as an artist."²⁸ In keeping with the photo-conceptualist method and aesthetic, the properties of the medium are utilized as an effective tool, a means of re-evaluation. Yoon is "engaged in the use of language and the language of photography, questioning the way in which photographic meaning is naturalized in the world"²⁹ and how identity is then naturalized through identification with image. Finally, Yoon's intention is to de-mystify and de-romanticize the Canadian landscape, using the work to open up a critical space and "operate as a critical mirror to position each viewer within a particular narrative of Canada and show how national identities have been naturalized."³⁰

This conceptual framework in relation to historical and contemporary signifiers is governed by what has been termed as a crisis of meaning. Informed by postmodernism, postcolonial theory and a post-documentary aesthetic, contemporary artists in Canada introduce the intersection of photography with naturalized iconography in order to decode the landscape. This engagement with shifting concepts and meaning of landscape in the Canadian colonial context and the visual object as carrier of knowledge fundamentally questions assumptions of national identity. Implicit in Snow and Yoon's

²⁸ Jin-me Yoon, "Touring Home From Away," 52.

²⁹ Ibid, 60.

³⁰ Ibid.

critique of the coalescence of landscape and identity is the influential role that housing institutions play in promotional narrative. *Plus Tard* and *A Group of Sixty-Seven* have both been exhibited recently and temporarily in the contemporary art galleries at the National Gallery of Canada, only a short distance from their subjects, the Group of Seven paintings in permanent position as icons of Canadian history in the first floor galleries. Thus the work widens the scope of critique vis-à-vis identity perception to a questioning of the fundamental role of institutional bodies. The work falls into the timeframe in which "the gallery space became more critical than ever before, as a structure and symbol within or against which temporally based art works of all kinds could be shown, performed, documented, referred to, or measured. [The} work engages directly with the space of the gallery, even if it rejects its traditional spatial and presentational parameters.

The following chapters will present an analysis of the photo-based work of Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert that falls into the context of this critique. As illustrated with the selections by Michael Snow and Jin-me Yoon, the artists address the issues embedded in the Canadian landscape tradition in the configuration of altered space in familiar terrain.

Chapter III

Rodney Graham: Inverting Landscape

*The art which still remains possible must be incidental or retrospective, but in both variants it is, as it were, the art of scholars. For it can only emerge from an insight which cannot be acquired in the creative process itself and must therefore precede it. If art itself can no longer be theory, yet it is required of the artist to be a theorist.*¹

Rodney Graham (b.1949) emerged from the photo-conceptualist environment of mid-1970's Vancouver. Like his peers, the internationally acclaimed artists Stan Douglas, Jeff Wall and Dan Graham, Rodney Graham's art production was formulated around the hub of the theory-driven Fine Arts Department at the University of British Columbia.² Faithful to the postmodern imperative, Graham has adopted a photo-conceptualist strategy of identifying ruptures in schematization to propose alternate readings. For the past twenty years, Graham has drawn on a wide range of media and materials including film, video, and photography, to books, texts, graphics, drawings, architecture, and music.³

A critical component of Graham's practice addresses landscape. Graham incorporates the photograph in a pronounced manner that emphasizes technical intervention. He draws attention to the appropriation of the camera as an optical

¹ Dieter Henrich, "The Relevance of Hegel's Aesthetics," In *Hegel*, ed. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 201 cited in Ian Heywood, "An Art of Scholars," *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 123.

² Brandon Taylor, *Avant-Garde and After: Rethinking Art Now* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 133. Note also Ian Wallace's reminiscences on the contemporary community of Vancouver artists of which Graham was part: "We originally came together through our mutual attraction to avant-garde negativity, identifying with the history of transgressions and its ciphers for a combative, antagonistic and sometimes even reclusive and melancholic response to the insufficiency of the world. Our world bonded then to a tradition of critical modernism - often tangentially, and in opposition, but always in relation to it." Ian Wallace, *Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace* (NY: 49th Parallel, 1985).

³ Lynn Cooke, *Rodney Graham and Vera Lutter: Time Traced*
<http://www.diacenter.org/exhibs/timetraced/essay.html>

mechanism infused with ideological baggage. For Graham the camera is an ideologically charged signifying tool marked by presumptions about the 'neutrality' of the scientific 'objective' eye.⁴ Graham's work is said to reside in an 'annexation' of reality through systems:

Graham's annexation is of nature - or more specifically of the pacified nature which exists today as a material resource - through an almost pathological repetition of its appearances which restores to Nature a sense of the uncanny. *Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.⁵

Informed by the philosophical components motivating Graham's photo-conceptualist practice, this chapter will provide an analysis of Graham's photo-based work to date with particular attention to the theme of empirical critique. It will proceed to demonstrate how Graham incorporates postmodern strategies to address the problematic of landscape, in particular the series of inverted trees represented by *Stanley Park Cedar No. 7* (1991) (Figure 10). The chapter will identify the underpinnings of a landscape ideology that have emerged as pertinent to the regional discourses surrounding environmental issues in British Columbia and by extension, to perceptions of identity in Canada motivated by a nationalist impulse.

Throughout his career Graham has been engaged with the conventions of landscape representation. According to Matthew Teitelbaum, Graham's work "bridges experience of the natural world with those cognitive processes we invoke to understand it."⁶ Robert Kleyn notes

⁴ Baudry's essay lays out the schemata surrounding the far-reaching consequences of the development of the optical apparatus on Western thought, perception and the psyche. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, trans. Alan Williams (NY: Tanam Press, 1980), 25-37.

⁵ Willard Holmes, "Introduction," *Rodney Graham* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), 7-8.

⁶ Matthew Teitelbaum, "Returning to the Present or Writing a Place in the World: Rodney Graham," In *Rodney Graham: Works from 1976-1994* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1994), 29.

[i]n Graham's work, nature seems to stand in for overt political engagement [and] refers to a discourse regarding mastery itself. Since the Renaissance, the study of nature has been held as the source of all truth. Of course, nature, like truth, is a "social category" as Lukacs would have it. Furthermore, it is the ultimate open system - not only that infinite nature that is the universe, but also that maternal, planetary force.⁷

Prominently figuring alongside the central signifiers of nature and landscape is the inquiry into narrative as reliable form of knowledge. Graham's interests stem from what he terms "culturally swept-out or depopulated landscapes, and with images of nature construed from the perspective of Romanticism and its critique,"⁸ and what Brayer refers to as "the cleft between nature and language and between the visible and its narration in imagery."⁹ In short, Graham's work circulates around the central theme of landscape as a cultural construct. As a result of being 'landscaped', in Graham's oeuvre 'nature' has become de-natured and transformed into a constructed category.

Another critical feature of Graham's practice is the investigation of the ideologies that have informed photographic discourse. Lynne Cooke suggests that Graham "draws on the formal operation of the camera obscura in his practice in order to engage with the conceptual legacy of this apparatus, utilizing it as a filter to probe visionary as much as visual heritage from the art of the past."¹⁰ The photographic apparatus performs as a participant in Graham's representation and is frequently incorporated within the context of the installation of the work.

In defiance of a formalist tradition, Graham takes issue with the precursory ideologies determining the way the camera 'sees', the *perspectiva artificialis*,¹¹ by

⁷ Robert Kleyn, "Method, Method," *C Magazine* 22 (Summer 1989): 43.

⁸ Teitelbaum, 34

⁹ Graham quoted in Teitelbaum, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cooke.

¹¹ Baudry, 25.

repeatedly engaging in a dialogue of interplay between camera apparatus and landscape as ideology. Consistent with a photo-conceptualist practice, Graham uses the camera as a tool of *exposé*. Of this appropriation he states emphatically:

I have used photography in my work on and off for about twenty years. The key words in this sentence are *used* and *on and off*. That is to say I have not done photography, but rather employed it (as one would employ, or use the services of someone or something) and I have employed it intermittently.¹²

It follows that Graham takes issue with the historical rhetoric privileging Renaissance perspective. This is accomplished by establishing photographic traces that critique optical centrality and its corresponding ideological configurations. The camera is used by Graham to mimic the revision in perspective that shifted the conception of space, and thus the status of the subject, throughout Renaissance Europe. Of the camera Baudry writes, "fabricated on the model of the *camera obscura*, it permits the construction of an image analogous to the perspective projections developed during the Italian Renaissance."¹³ Jonathan Crary notes that during the seventeenth century

...the camera obscura was without question the most widely used model for explaining human vision, and for representing the relation of a perceiver and the position of a knowing subject to an external ...For two centuries, it stood as a model, in both rational and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world; at the same time the physical incarnation of that model was a widely used means of observing the visible world, an instrument of popular entertainment, of scientific inquiry, and of aesthetic practice.¹⁴

Crary demonstrates how perspective was grounded in a nexus of specific socio-cultural relations and discourses. Furthermore, Renaissance depiction of space elaborated "a

¹² Graham quoted in Lesley Johnstone, *Sites of the Visual: Rodney Graham, Steven Pippin, David Tomas* (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1997), 19.

¹³ Baudry, 27.

¹⁴ Cooke.

centered space" determined by "the subject."¹⁵ The demise of this paradigm, as a result of developments in photography by the end of the nineteenth century, meant that "the very apparatus that a century earlier was the site of truth [became] a model for procedures and forces that conceal, invent, and mystify truth."¹⁶ Graham's critique is directed to the exposure of the constructed premise of perspective, one that appears naturalized yet is wholly ideological in origin.

Graham's work is decidedly neo-Dadaist. Teitelbaum notes Graham employs "a privileging of the links between the unconscious and personal experience and the operations of chance."¹⁷ The influence of Duchamp, the readymade and the paradigm of irreverence are all guiding features of Graham's production. Critical to an understanding of Graham's work and motivation is the element played by chance. Therein lies the convergence with Duchamp that Max Kozloff suggests "probably agrees that humanist and materialist discriminations are acts of will but would insist that these acts are nothing as compared to an attitude that recognizes the random as the governing principle of life."¹⁸

Graham's partiality to the experimental is apparent in *Rome Ruins* (1978) an early work that reveals the artist's delight in transgressing formal conventions of photographic practice. Claiming the loss of his original camera,¹⁹ the work was accomplished via two pinhole cameras improvised from found objects "assembled out of the detritus of the present - a matchbox, cigarette pack tin foil, tape, toothpaste."²⁰ From these lens-less

¹⁵ Baudry, 28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Teitelbaum, 29.

¹⁸ Ibid, 31.

¹⁹ Cooke.

²⁰ Ibid.

handcrafted instruments Graham made exposures of well-known tourist views of the Roman Forum and its environs. In camera exposure of negative film enabled Graham to produce a series of enlarged prints later on. Upon completion, *Rome Ruins* consisted of ten colour enlargements, 35 x 28 cm each.

The decision to work with the indeterminacy of the pinhole cameras, one made out of a matchbox, the other a cigarette pack, carries further significance. The pinhole camera, synonymous with the camera obscura, is the most elemental form of camera capable of producing a permanent image. It consists of a closed light-proof container²¹ with a pinhole opening. Light sensitive material, inserted opposite the minuscule opening inside the mechanism must be exposed for extended and indeterminate periods of time, judged according to light conditions. The unpredictability of the outcome makes this medium impervious to acute methodical procedure. Lack of adjustable focus due to the absence or improvised quality of the lens results in photographs that are impressionistic and blurry, “with soft overall definition.”²²

As universally represented in picture postcard format, Rome's classical ruins are remade by Graham, rendered distorted, dreamy and mediated by the experimental indeterminacy of the pinhole medium. Rome essentially encodes and imprints itself onto the negative emulsion with minimal control of the artist. Johnstone suggests that “the hazy photographs are typical tourist views of the Roman Forum that have been reproduced so often they no longer hold any significant meaning. Thus they function primarily as traces of the process of making the camera and taking pictures - their

²¹ Pin-hole cameras can be fashioned out of anything from cookie tins to shoeboxes. Recently, artist Marian Roth ingeniously transformed her Dodge vehicle into a 'pinhole van'. See *Making Time: Marion Roth* (Provincetown, M.A: Schoolhouse Centre, 2001).

²² This definition of the pinhole camera extracted from Gordon Baldwin, *Looking at Photographs: A Guide to Technical Terms*, (LA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1991), 70

meaning includes the mode of production.”²³ The submission of the makeshift camera itself in the gallery installation, aside from being unorthodox, serves to introduce the spectator to the artist's process, the role of the photographic device and furthermore, enlarges the parameters of the reading. Including the means of production with the art object allows Graham to both expose the conceptual basis of the work and demystify the working process. Furthermore, he makes allusion in *Rome Ruins* to the technical mediation inherent to the nature of representation, a recurrent theme in his work.

Throughout his production, Graham has made repeated reference to the artifice of representation. Often this has taken the form of cinematic interventions in the natural landscape in the guise of audiovisual recordings, including the component of public attendance. In 1976, Graham exhibited *75 Polaroids*, the first in a series of the body of work *Illuminations*.²⁴ This early installation, comprising seventy-five instantaneous exposures,

....explored the idea of the intermittent illumination of nature by means of a Polaroid SX-70 camera with flash attachment: It was the flash unit that facilitated my nocturnal movements through, and exploration of, forests and parks. I saw the flash as a kind of drug that opened up a hallucinatory domain, albeit briefly. It was like walking into a room and switching the lights on, and then off. The fact that the light unit was attached to a camera provided useful evidence of my insight...I contemplated the photograph's coming into being as the negative image of the scene - exposed to me, as to the camera, for the first time when the flash went off - was fading from my retina. The black tangled branches of a winter tree, for example, appeared before me (eyes open, eyes closed - it didn't matter) as a skein of white filaments, coruscating briefly, then dying away. The "resulting" photograph was a sort of pathetic reminder or sentimental token of a more complete bodily experience...I subscribe to the cliché that photographs are windows; this sort of flash photography provides windows to other interiors.²⁵

²³ Johnstone, 12.

²⁴ "Catalogue Raisonné," *Rodney Graham Works From 1976-1994* (Toronto: York University Art Gallery, 1994), 71.

²⁵ Graham quoted in Johnstone, 19.

The treatment of landscape as a readymade and the choice of the Polaroid snapshot format as a medium characterized by spontaneity and chance are critical here. As residual marking, the Polaroid photograph is a trace of an instantaneous glimpse of landscape, stumbled upon in the dark and 'illuminated' by the sole means of the artist's flash. As a unique object, the Polaroid stands as a singular recording, diametrically opposed to a preconceived, empirically determined representation, in this case, of landscape. Graham appropriates the 'mobile' technology of the Polaroid camera to signal a shift in "the process of vision and the subjectivation of reality."²⁶ Brayer notes

The mutation in the phenomenon of vision which occurred in the early years of the 19th century goes some way towards explaining Graham's interest...in the course of the 19th century, both the subject and his mode of vision became more autonomous. If "modernization effected a deterritorialization and a revaluation of vision," it has also deterritorialized the subject, by transforming him into a mobile figure in space.²⁷

Compelled once more by his interest in the element of chance and the unknown, Graham adopts the position of "flâneur" and launches himself, camera in tow, into the unknown territory of the night woods. With 75 *Polaroids*, "vision becomes ambulatory, and fragments its visual terrain."²⁸ The artist adopts the persona of this "new observer, carrying with him his own subjective perception, simultaneously initiates a new naming process, as he has lost all fixed identity."²⁹

Illuminated Ravine (1979), termed by Jeff Wall as "nature theatre,"³⁰ is Graham's second performance/installation work. For two hours on two consecutive nights, Graham

²⁶ Marie-Ange Brayer, "Rodney Graham, An Optical Involution: The Name Augmented," *Rodney Graham Works From 1976-1994* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1994), 60.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid 62.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jeff Wall, "Into the Forest," *Rodney Graham Works From 1976-1994* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1994), 21.

lit a ravine to a public audience on the campus of Simon Fraser University by means of one generator-powered mercury-vapour lamp. Graham describes, how

it was doubly irritating insofar as it was accompanied by noxious fumes as well as noise. Even as this nocturnal illumination (open during "theatre hours" two nights running) escalated the modest flash method of the earliest work its aim was reductive; what one takes away from the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, its indexical trace, is a headache. Though the work was outside, the light, which projected down onto the hollow of the ravine and which projected into a dome-like panoply of foliage above, defined a kind of interior space.³¹

Illuminated Ravine problematizes the post-industrial relationship to nature by reproducing an alienated replica of urban spectatorship. As Wall explained, "*Illuminated Ravine* created an agitated, transient model of our real relation to parklands and nature reserves: it recognized them as stage-sets, isolated objects of alienated contemplation. Ravine explicitly staged this isolation of nature and spectators from each other, and made the experience of "special place" one of anxiety rather than absorptive repose."³² With its noise, noxious fumes and intermittent flashing lights, *Ravine* explicitly draws attention to the artificial means by which nature is mediated.

The recurrent theme of technical intervention with the visual occurs five years later with *Two Generators* (1984). Graham intended this work "as a burlesque travesty and a spectacle that would inspire negative thoughts about cinema, which he neurotically hated at the time."³³ Also orchestrated as a nocturnal event, this work encompassed a four-minute loop screened to an audience over the duration of an hour in a darkened cinema. The deafening sound of the filming machinery enacts the role of soundtrack accompaniment to the visual of an illuminated rushing river. The absence of a linear

³¹ Johnstone, 20.

³² Wall, 22.

³³ Jack Liang, "Another Day in Paradise," *Rodney Graham: Vexation Island and Other Works* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1998), 14

narrative suggests the true subject of the work is an antithesis of the cinema. Wall posits that *Two Generators* "occupies the institution of cinema antagonistically. The audience is conceived of as totally separate from nature: [it] is a very cool emblem of the 'unhappy consciousness'."³⁴ In this work, nature appears in the form of a flowing torrent, "the opposite of individuation", while the other components, the obvious artifice of the cinematographic process for instance, appears "as the principle for humanity, one which contains strong destructive and alienating elements."³⁵

The series *Camera Obscura* (1979) (Figure 11) led to Graham's ongoing documentation of lone trees in open landscapes, relics of ancient forests that, according to the artist, are increasingly rare and difficult to find. The initial production, in which Graham exhibited documentation of the custom built camera obscura with the picture of the inverted tree, was the precursor for a series of large-scale photographs begun later in 1989 with which he is most often associated. A site-specific installation, *Camera Obscura* was made with a giant pinhole camera about the size of a tool shed, 2.4 x 2.7 x 4.3 metres designed and built by Graham. The artist installed the structure via crane on the slope of a farm in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The performance component of this intervention is typical to Graham's production in which the presence of the technical mediation is overt and paramount. As the artist states, "the aim [was] to register on an interior wall a single tree by means of a well known optical principle."³⁶

The choice of the camera obscura, the ancestor of the modern camera, is critical and multivalent. We have already considered the implications of ideological perspective historically established by the central subject and 'neutral' eye of the picture-making

³⁴ Wall, 22-3.

³⁵ Wall, 23.

apparatus. In addition, the *camera obscura* produces a reflection, projecting through a hole that inverts reality as seen by the human eye. By exposing the subject as inverted, how the camera actually 'sees' and functions, Graham renders the mechanics of representation transparent. Furthermore Graham alludes to the principles of perspective that have governed representation since the changes brought about in draughtsmanship by the technique of the *camera obscura*. Johnstone explains,

in the photographs themselves Graham displaces the act of perception. The operation of inversion destabilizes our reading of what otherwise would be just another beautiful photograph of an oak or cedar tree. We are forced to see the tree through the device that produced it. The whole history of photography is present, the act of perception and our conception of vision as a disembodied sense are subverted through this simple inversion. We see a photograph of a natural phenomenon, but are forced to acknowledge its status as culturally determined and the ideology of the device that produced it.³⁷

At issue in this as in much of Graham's work is the correspondence between representation and ideology. Presented in the gallery with an architectural model of the installation *in situ* alongside the cibachrome print (142 cm x 121 cm) of the inverted tree, *Camera Obscura* demonstrates that photography's properties of mediation are predicated on deception.

In the ongoing portraits of trees begun in 1989, Graham set aside the large-scale camera obscura construction choosing instead to commission the services of a photographer with a view camera. This decision, a strategy consistent with his photo-conceptualist practice, attests to the evolution of the conceptual nature of the project. For

³⁶ Rodney Graham, "Appendix 1 - Artist's Notes," In *Rodney Graham Works from 1976 - 1994* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1994), 83.

³⁷ Johnstone, 13. The metaphor of the *camera obscura* is used by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1846) to illustrate the visual manifestation of false consciousness: "If in ideology men and their realizations appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on their retina does on their physical life-process." Quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998), 26.

example, the view camera with adjustable lens and focus is more easily transportable and produces a large negative with little grain. Furthermore Graham needn't be concerned with cost or technical mastery of the contraption. In this manner, the photographic element of the work serves the overall conceptual strategy. Graham demonstrates that the artist, like a film director, can assemble material on a conceptual and formal basis but needn't be the operator of the equipment.³⁸ The view camera, the empirical tool of choice for the study of landscape and architecture, takes on a symbolic role as Graham uses it to document monumental lone trees in the landscapes of Belgium, Holland, France, England and British Columbia, then exhibits them upside down as they originally appear reflected on to the back of the camera. *Stanley Park Cedar, No. 7* (1991), a large-scale monochrome colour print (267 x 183 cm) will be considered as exemplary of this series.

Stanley Park Cedar, No. 7 (1991) features a close-up of the lower trunk of mythically proportioned old-growth tree in Vancouver's Stanley Park. Situated at the western-most point of the mainland, the Stanley Park acts as a giant urban recreation center as well as a managed preserve of the ancient British Columbia rain forest. With paved roads snaking through it, visitors are transported by shuttle bus to various sites around the designated parameters of the park. Stops are made strategically at confection stands, panoramic lookouts, tourist shops, an outdoor water playground, a 'teaching' aquarium and a fine restaurant. There are outdoor spaces for theatre and performance. Interspersed through cultivated lawns of grass are flowerbeds, fountains, park benches

³⁸ This strategy is used by many contemporary artists rendering as falsehood and illusion the Romantic notion of the artist as artisan in studio. An artist can function much like a conductor, orchestrating a production conceptually but not actually involved in the hands-on making of it. As a result, many photo-based artists, like Graham and Jin-me Yoon, employ photographers for their technical expertise, send the work to be printed in the lab, then to the framers to finish the work.

and canopies. Meandering through the dense forest are trails that hikers have created over years of exploring the woodlands. The park is used extensively by cyclists, runners, countless fitness and outdoor enthusiasts and others from the varied spectrum of the urban populace for which Vancouver is renowned.

According to Scott Watson, the division between nature and culture that impacted Vancouver during the rapid urban development of the 1980's contributed to the increased conceptual use of photography. "Artists became more interested in photography" Watson explains, "as the recording device most appropriate to the construction of an index or semiotic of the urban environment, which in turn could be used to contest the images of the dominant culture."³⁹ With this in mind, Graham's somber depiction of the inverted old-growth tree stands in stark contrast to the popularized postcard pictures of Vancouver to which we are accustomed. Cropped from the lower trunk, the fragment of tree resembles the leg of an old elephant, cut off at the knee. Once whole and majestic, the tree is pictured inverted, fragmented and mutilated. Graham counters the rendering of the old tree into spectacle. Positioned as relic of an historical past, its nobility denied, in *Stanley Park Cedar 7* Graham suggests that the world has been turned upside down.

The richly evocative symbol of the single tree is historically resonant and open to interpretation on many fundamental levels both beyond and of relevance to the Canadian context. Historically the tree has been invoked as a potent national metaphor, both for its symbolic properties and its representation as link to land and identity. According to Schama, "national identity would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and

³⁹ Scott Watson. "Discovering the Defeated Landscape," *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 251.

enriched as a homeland." ⁴⁰ Schama demonstrates how, fundamental to economy and social life, the forest has preoccupied the European imagination for centuries, manifesting in mythology, art, literature and national narratives. ⁴¹

Landscape and Memory traces the development of landscape's symbolic place in the formulation of national identities and demonstrates how the notion of "native land" has come to be characterized by individual and nation. While nature worship is discussed by Schama as a rich and empowering force of culture, there is also disclosure of the paradoxical implications of national, tribal myth. Schama writes "[t]he long, undeniable connections between the mythic memory of the forest and militant nationalism have created a zone of great moral angst in Germany." ⁴² Works of German literature published in the 1930's "attributed German racial and national distinctiveness to its woodland heritage." ⁴³ Furthermore,

Tacitus' s observation that their isolated habitat had made the Germans the least mixed of all European peoples would of course become the lethal obsession of the Nazi tyranny. *Germanentum* - the idea of a biologically pure and inviolate race, as "natural to its terrain as indigenous species of trees - featured in much of the prehistorical literature before and after the First World War. ⁴⁴

Graham's gesture of inverting the old growth trees may be aligned to the ruptures enacted in the German landscape tradition in works by Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys

⁴⁰ Schama, 15.

⁴¹ In Germany, for example, "the forest primeval was the site of tribal self-assertion. Enormous oak trees began to figure in elaborately allegorical paintings, as the emblem of Germania itself...the promised triumph of German greenery over Latin masonry produc[ing] a virtual oak-fetish in art and literature." Schama notes that "[a]t the same time the Crown presented itself as the custodian of the old, free greenwood...England began to envision itself as an Empire. In Britain, repeated analogies were made between the character of the [oak] and the character of the nation". Ibid, 15, 102-3, 153, 164.

⁴² Ibid, 119.

⁴³ Schama, 118.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

in the 1970's, the same decade *Camera Obscura* was produced.⁴⁵ Kiefer's approach, for example, collapsed art and landscape icons of the German cultural identity by alluding to the appropriation of these images in fascist rhetoric. For Kiefer, the forest provided abundant references with which to create material that caused ceaseless disturbance.⁴⁶

In the reversal of a sacrosanct national symbol, Graham's intervention functions somewhat equivalently. Albeit, to show the great signifier of human spirit and accomplishment, the mythic endurance and majesty of the ancient tree inverted and decapitated is to suggest an image of a collapsed utopia, an enormously mournful regard for history, inevitably, as a tragic event. Even in Canada the forests hold many ghosts.

Commenting on their significance Jeff Wall notes that: "The lone tree is a great symbol of the mortal individual, rooted in the totality of nature, yet suffering its solitary destiny."⁴⁷ In Wall's regard the tragedy in the imagery of the lone, inverted tree is the reference to the disappearance of "totality of nature."⁴⁸ Wall laments the incorporation of landscape into architecture:

Each of these trees loses its identity in the process of its inclusion in the parody of palace gardening which is contemporary urban planning. It is divested of what might be called its "natural selfhood", and is obliged to function like the "young Negro in a French uniform saluting the tricolour" Barthes claimed that the image serves the youth's own colonial masters as a mythic representation of the rationality and justness of their domination of parts in Africa. Here, the tree does the same thing in relation to the false reconciliation of city and countryside.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Although this is not the place to justifiably provide an analysis of the work by these artists, Schama does provocatively evoke them in his discussion to provide examples of transgression to German landscape tradition. This is useful for our purposes in acknowledging the multifold ways in which Graham's intervention is significant.

⁴⁶ Anselm Kiefer quoted in Schama: "In 1945, after the 'accident' as it is so emphatically put, people thought now we start from scratch. The past was taboo, [my] dragging it up only caused repulsion and distaste."

122.

⁴⁷ Wall, "Into the Forest," 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The lone tree left intact in the rural landscape stands as an historical signifier of the passage of time; as settlement occurred, land was cleared and cultivated. Left standing in the city park and set apart amidst cultivated lawn and garden it becomes a decorative emblem, a monument to the urban landscape, a symbol of the colonization of the land.

Wall suggests that Graham may have had de Saussure's image of the tree as a universal symbol in mind. If so, "Saussure's little drawing of a tree used as a universal sign in a discussion of signifier and signified"⁵⁰ takes on enormous significance when Graham upsets the narrative: "The wrenching of traditional picturing systems finds its true elegiac forms in the large format photographs of inverted trees. Here uprootedness is pictured both as a declaration of discontinuity, and of a true detachment from organic systems."⁵¹

In Canada, the image of the lone inverted tree takes on subsequent readings of the historical experience with the land through histories of colonization and of art production. While Graham's *Stanley Park Cedar*, singles out "semi-colonial, natural resource-based economy"⁵² of British Columbia, it also stands equally effectively for the trope of landscape in Canada as a whole. According to Teitelbaum, "For many Canadians the single tree strikes a particularly nationalistic image that the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson popularized for the Canadian public. In the popular imagination and the mythos of the new Dominion, the twisting windswept single tree, with its art nouveau and German romantic inspirations, came to symbolize a pioneering spirit crystallizing at the edge of an unknown space."⁵³ The single tree imaged by the Group of Seven highlighted

⁵⁰ Ibid, 21.

⁵¹ Teitelbaum, "Rodney Graham: Returning to the Present", 39.

⁵² Wall, 19.

⁵³ Matthew Teitelbaum, "Seeing the Single Tree: Sighting the New Found Land," *Eye of Nature* (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1991), 71.

the noble isolated spirit, the possessive individual that came to personify the national identity of the Canadian in the early twentieth century. Against the backdrop of the raw pictorialization of a temperamental wilderness the icon of the lone tree became "a touchstone for that experience of nature that evoked feelings of belonging and attachment to new territory."⁵⁴ The tree, in other words, signified the entrepreneur and the newcomer. Teitelbaum writes that "the many works by Tom Thomson and the Group which image an isolated tree twisting in a ravaging storm are layered to elicit empathy in the viewer through a signification of mortal man, alone and heroic...survival at the edge of the frontier."⁵⁵ Carried forth from deep-rooted European origins to represent new interests in the colonies, the Romantic characterization of a national landscape was also pragmatic, it naturalized ties between human spiritual and economic interests. By extension, the representation of the tree in rich, colourful, evocative paintings, standing triumphantly upright in the midst of chaos, established emotional bonds to the land, decreeing possession and ownership.

One remarkable feature of Group of Seven landscape painting is the consistent lack of human presence. More specifically, as Jonathan Bordo has argued, the under-representation of the aboriginal presence contributes to "the subliminal history of the Euro-Canadian wilderness sublime,"⁵⁶ the dominant ethos by which modern Canada has been conceived. Bordo suggests that "the deliberate and systematic absencing of human presence has no consistent precedent in the European landscape tradition."⁵⁷ Nevertheless

⁵⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Bordo, "Jack Pine - Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal from the Landscape," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, No. 4 (Winter 1992-93), 101.

⁵⁶ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press ; London: Routledge, 2002), 44.

⁵⁷ Teitelbaum (1991), 75.

nature is depicted as devoid of inhabitants and primogenitor is illegitimized. Nineteenth and early twentieth century rhetoric in the form of landscape representations established an emerging nation founded upon a colonialist discourse - the widespread doctrine that the aboriginal nations were vanishing and had even disappeared. Hence, the young tree takes on the symbolic role of surveyor of newly inherited land.⁵⁸ Bordo posits the placement of the foregrounded tree in landscapes absent of aboriginal peoples as a signifier that the emergent colonial presence could relate to - the indigenous tree, a stand-in for the Euro-Canadian:

The characteristic landscape image of the Group, namely a landscape devoid of human presence, [was] organized compositionally and symbolically by the figure of a foregrounded Northern tree, the Jack Pine.⁵⁹

Bordo identifies the human absence in the landscape as a site of trauma in which neurosis is signified and witnessed. His suggestion is that the emptied landscape signifies unresolved anxiety of the absence-d identity that coincides with the bewildered state of being lost and engulfed by the wilderness. Landscape pictures manifest this repressed condition: As stand-ins for the "unnameable," the pictures from the Group of Seven are proxies, therefore, for this anxiety-ridden state:

*The wilderness as enunciated from Tom Thomson's *The Jack Pine* is a condition that...denies access to the presence of a Subject....Being....unrepresentable, the wilderness leaves a picture as a testamental deposit for that which the picture was unable to picture. These pictures of landscape deny human presence by depicting landscapes without figural witnesses.*⁶⁰

Bordo posits the tree iconography as "the mark of the site as if it were an incident, an X. The absence is the incident that is signed by the figure of the solitary tree."⁶¹ Noting the

⁵⁸ Bordo, "Jack Pine", 102.

⁵⁹ Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of Wilderness", *Critical Inquiry* 26, (Winter 2000), 229.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

anthropomorphic apparatus associated with tree imagery throughout the tradition of the history of art Bordo concludes that the absence of human presence in Group of Seven pictures coupled with the single tree as subject signifies the malaise associated with a lack of identity and subjectivity.

Eva Mackey also posits that the work of the Group of Seven "contributed most to the development of a national identification with a distinctive sense of place."⁶² She departs, however, from the interpretation of the manner in which European painting styles were adapted to the colonial Canadian experience. In Mackey's view, harmony between human beings and nature, a convention of the picturesque, was not achieved by Canada's national painters:

The paintings of the Group of Seven were distinct from the European tradition from which they emerged. The paintings turn the picturesque invitation on its head in a search for a truly Canadian aesthetic that would differentiate Canadian from European art. These paintings were impenetrable, and certainly uninviting, wilderness.⁶³

Mackey argues instead that a Canadian aesthetic is founded on an opposition to the landscape "based on the obliterating and overpowering sense of uncontrollable wilderness."⁶⁴ The relationship to landscape remains problematic and unresolved, a discourse that embodies both the fear of being lost or engulfed and the urge to penetrate the wilderness as natural resource. Landscape in Canada, in other words, constitutes "the 'dreamwork of imperialism', disclosing both 'utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect' and images of 'unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance'."⁶⁵

⁶² Osborne (1988: 169) cited in Mackey, *The House of Difference*, 40.

⁶³ Mackey, 42-43

⁶⁴ Mackey, 44.

⁶⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell (1994:10) cited in Mackey, 44.

These unresolved elements are invoked and alluded to in Graham's series of inverted trees. Everything we thought to be true must be reconsidered. Graham emerged from the British Columbia environment referred to by Wall as a repudiation of "commonwealth romanticism" ⁶⁶ in which Graham and others positioned their work "in opposition to cultural traditions going back to Emily Carr." ⁶⁷ According to Judith Mastai, Carr's work "can be seen as an ideological reconciliation with the destruction of the forest." ⁶⁸ The generations of artists who followed the figurehead of Carr either embraced her aesthetic or strove to disassociate themselves from a romanticized depiction of the landscape aligned with colonialism. Carr is held as dear to the hearts of the Canadian public as the Group of Seven. West Coast contemporary artists like Graham, engaged in the critical discourse of the last thirty years, are confronted by a complex colonial history entrenched in local narrative. Similar to the Group of Seven's lyrical representations of the Algoma landscape, in actuality an exploited environment, "reconciliation with nature as it is experienced in Carr's painting can be seen as the mark of a fantasized reconciliation with the economy, a means by which an actuality of forest-destruction is lived through and acquiesced to." ⁶⁹

Graham's inversion of the mature tree can therefore be read as a reference to colonialism, cultural dominance, land ownership and landscape. Graham's interventions isolate and problematize the conventional 'view' of landscape. His reversal of the lone tree in the landscape, the symbol that has come to be identified with the relentless Canadian spirit upsets iconographic tradition associated with canonical works in

⁶⁶Judith Mastai, "The Post-Colonial Landscape," *Blackflash* 14, No. 2 (Summer 1996), 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Canadian art and concepts of national identity. We may have dominated the landscape, but at what cost?

In the gesture of turning the world upside down, like Alice in Wonderland, Graham aspires to unsettle cemented perspectives in Western epistemology. A distinct voice in regional West Coast and Canadian landscape ideology, the discourse of Graham's work is nevertheless of widespread influence and international in sphere. The signifier of tree is one to which most of us can relate. Using conventions of landscape and photography, Graham's art practice is grounded in the ethics of being a modern subject. In the context of landscape and identity politics in Canada, the expression of the postcolonial, postmodern viewpoint is essential to a questioning of the structures that perpetuate what may have become an out-dated and out-moded definition of what constitutes a Canadian identity, assuming one should be constituted at all.

It is fitting to conclude, on a thematic note, with a brief discussion of *Vexation Island* (1997), the video installation with which Graham represented Canada at the 47th annual Venice Biennial to critical acclaim. Typical of Graham's characteristic wit, irreverence, theoretical foundation and skill the eight-minute 35mm film transfer video loop parodies notions of history and narrative as concrete systems of knowledge, themes Graham has often revisited in his work. Reputed for his biting mockery of Western civilization's most endeared and cherished concepts, the failure of logic, *Vexation Island* takes particular aim at the repetitive and inescapable cost of human nature. A wry appropriation of grand epic cinema and the archetypal figure of the shipwrecked sailor, the narrative features a male, supposedly English character dressed as an eighteenth century seafarer stranded on a tropical island accompanied only by a squawking parrot.

Apparently asleep, the protagonist awakens only to be knocked promptly out of consciousness by a falling coconut. Via the continuous repetition of this scenario Graham invokes an exasperated critique of the narratives of imperialism enacted by the Western individual resigned to compulsive repetition of that which contributes to his perpetual demise. Will we ever learn?

Like many of his generation, Graham has adopted a postmodern critical stance toward history adopting the strategies of appropriation, irony and parody. His interest lies principally in the illustration of the slippages of history, dismantling it like a house of cards. Informed by postmodernism, Graham relies on the tools of photography, film and video to appropriate familiarized discourse and communicate alternative readings. Graham has been an instrumental figure in redefining photographic practice as emphatically conceptual and semiotic. His reconfigurations hold particular resonance to the issues of Canadian landscape, however the critique extends effortlessly to the forum of international postnationalism. With a discourse of the counter-narrative Graham undermines the historical Canadian convergence between landscape and identity, rendering them, finally, irreconcilable.

Chapter IV

Sylvie Readman: The Contingency of Landscapes

In her body of work Sylvie Readman, like Rodney Graham, has consistently questioned the reliability of perspective by addressing the contingencies of representation. Images construct fictions, she maintains, and based on subjectivity should be regarded as reflections and illuminations, like clouds passing in the sky they appear and vanish again, interspersing light. This chapter will examine Readman's art practice of the past twenty years, but shall be principally occupied with a reading of the silver gelatin series *Petite histoire des ombres* (1991) (Figures 12 to 15).

Petite histoire des ombres proposes a critique of the premise of historical knowledge founded on the empirical gaze. With the transparency of images, Readman's work questions how truth could ever possibly be based on the precariousness of representation. Readman's work transgresses key presuppositions regarding empirical epistemology. This is accomplished through the questioning of the mechanisms of representation, the exposure of the photographic image as a rendering of abstraction determined by subjectivity. Knowledge, posits Readman, is a layering of perceptions, selective information, chance and memories - what has metaphorically been referred to as a palimpsest¹ built on indeterminate qualities of time and space, an archeological site that can be excavated, layer by layer, for traces of signification. Knowledge is contingent on the precarious condition of being, a conjunction between conditions of exteriority and

¹ Sylvain Campeau uses the palimpsest metaphor in reference to Readman's layering technique in his review of her exhibition, "Sylvie Readman: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal," *C Magazine* 44 (Winter 1994), 46.

interiority that formulates, ultimately, the configuration of the subject. Fundamentally, Readman's practice undermines homogeneity of ideology by demonstrating through an emphasis on photographic manipulation that perception is not naturalized and universal, but rather mediated and variable.

Born in Québec City in 1958, Readman holds a B.F.A. from Université Laval (1981) and a M.F.A. in photography from Concordia University (1988). The impact of Readman's presence on the contemporary Québécois photography scene has been notable and acknowledged by scholars as significant. Readman is regarded as a key player in the shift from the dominant mode of documentary practice that permeated Québec photography prior to the 1980's, emerging as part of a group of artists motivated by the shift to the semiotics of photography as a signifying discourse. Like many of her contemporaries, Sylvie Readman has devoted her inquiry to a critique of the correlation between vision and knowledge. Employing the discourses of the landscape genre as her raw material Readman queries the role of the optical apparatus in the ideological underpinnings of Enlightenment epistemology and perspective. As a key signifying process of Western art, landscape is the discursive terrain across which codes have been engaged and established. Furthermore, Readman's poetic renderings and compositions of landscape work against the scientifically determined sensibilities set by her precedents. While the roles of landscape and photography in the construction of memory and identity figure predominantly in the artist's lexicon, Readman employs the genre mnemonically to both invoke the document as narrative and implode it as a reliable source.

Les vertus cardinales (1991) sets the ground for the discourse on perspective that would rapidly follow in Readman's body of work. This work, with a title translating into English as 'The Cardinal Virtues' pokes fun at the orthodoxy within the photographic

tradition as well as the mode of representation upon which laws of perspective are based. The triptych of colour photographs begins with a close-up of an aging home-crafted birdhouse high up in a tree (173 cm x 219 cm). Marked features are the perch for the bird, a darkened hole circled in red as place of entry lit by a tiny light bulb, fading red letters that spell out 'Pierre' and a red diagram of a grid on the side. The second image (53 cm x 63 cm) offers a simulated view of the landscape the bird might see from inside its shelter, as if through a peephole aperture - distant land, water, horizon and sky in full focus. The final image of the triptych (132 x 163 cm) appears to be of the same landscape, but it is slightly blurred view of vibrant green pastures, distant dwellings, open water, horizon, light blue sky, but viewed as if from a bird's eye view in mid-flight. Unmistakably, the birdhouse is a witty allusion to the camera obscura and the pinhole camera. In fact, a birdhouse could easily serve as a picture-taking device. Like Rodney Graham's conceptual references to the ideological premises of the camera obscura in his work, the subject of this work by Readman is clearly the tentative and subjective scope of a long-established mode of representation. 'Pierre', 'stone' in English, characteristically offers Readman's signature play on words: it could be interpreted as a metaphor of the strength of the enduring foundation, *le fondation ancien*, upon which the optical condition has been founded and based. As rhetorical device, the roughly hewn charms of the homemade weathered birdhouse, alludes to a primitive phase of innocence, the primal condition represented by the symbol of the bird perhaps, but a rudimentary condition all the same, imperative to move beyond.

Thomas Docherty classifies photography as a postmodern art, "the truly revolutionary means of production"² that has had the greatest impact on reconfiguring a world 'dematerialised' and 'deterritorialised' of nineteenth century positivism. According to Docherty, photography has contributed "to a major shift in the geopolitical axis of the cultural mapping of the world. The revolution proposed by photography lacks a specificity of direction and threatens the dematerialization of historical fact itself....it dissolves the certainty of historical linearity, not to mention the supposed materiality of historical evidence which it is conventionally thought to document."³ Johnstone grounds postmodern photography practice, like Readman's, in such century works as Duchamp's readymades and constructions, Rauschenberg's combines and Warhol's pop appropriations of mass culture.⁴ In fact, the shift from passive 'objective' viewing and recording of what was perceived as the outside world to active conceptual discourse with central issues of Western culture marks a decisive break from modernism's dispassionately remote formalist paradigm. Johnstone notes:

Photography has had a particularly fertile role in what Douglas Crimp calls the 'contamination' of the purity of modernist categories...This 'perversion' has led to what he called a 'wholly new and radicalized artistic practice:' postmodernism.⁵

Fundamentally, much postmodern photography disrupts the configuration grounded in Western perspective that the camera apparatus accurately mimics the activity of the human eye. As a result, scepticism is cast upon optical sources of knowledge. As Docherty has remarked, developments in shutter speeds, both fast and slow, enlarged the

² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Glasgow: Fontana, 1973) cited in Thomas Docherty, "Photography as Postmodern Cartography," In *After Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 74.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lesley Johnstone, "Process and Image: Some Contemporary Photo Sculptures," *Photo Sculpture*, (Montréal: Artexes, 1991), 37-39.

⁵ Ibid, 39.

spectre of invisibility permeating everything and underscored the limitations of the seeing eye. With its capability of recording the invisible, photography's impact upon the perception of the observable world was critical and irrevocable. According to Docherty, "photography made it clear that observable phenomena were not necessarily positive facts; and the world suddenly becomes in some sense hardly observable at all."⁶ One of the foremost impacts of photography was, ironically perhaps, a disenchantment with the widespread concept of positivism. The introduction of possible worlds offered by the photographic image ushered in the return and renewed status of enchantment. Perception based on the tenets of positivism may have been irreversibly eroded, but concurrently, realms of the imaginary were vindicated and the unseen reinstated as a legitimate realm of pursuit.

The repercussions of these shifts, fundamental to and informing the practice of Sylvie Readman, are still in process. The very premise of the Readman's work, which relies on the notions of the phantom and the immaterial, is the ethereal nature of knowledge, a condition constituting the composition of the subject. While Readman does not wholly dismiss the value of the narrative, she reorients it into the format of a mediated paradigm, that, like art production, incorporates the imaginary and builds upon aspects of the conscious and preconscious minds.

⁶ Docherty, 79.

II

*The explorers who went to the Arctic from Europe were not looking for the Arctic at all; they were in search of a passage - the Northwest Passage - a passage from Europe to the Indies. What they intended to find was a land of silk and spices. What they found was an obstruction, a blankness, a frozen sea, an unknown which baffled their very narrative of exploration/exploitation. What they encountered above all else was the intolerable blank page. They could not find on it so much as a trace of their own knowing.*⁷

A photo reconstruction, Readman demonstrates in *Petite histoire des ombres* a confluence of experience and memory that ultimately denies access to landscape and presumptive mastery of the subject. This work was recently showcased in *Trouble en vue* as a contribution to the 2002-2003 photography festival Le Mois de la photo à Paris at the Centre culturel canadien.⁸ The mandate of the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris is to showcase contemporary Canadian art to an international audience. The inclusion of *Petite histoire des ombres* in this prominent art festival attests to the endurance of its critical status. The organizers of *Trouble en vue* responded to the 2002 festival theme *Femmes d'images*, not with the imaging of women, but with "le regard féminin,"⁹ the perspective of women.

The original series of eight small silver gelatin images (51 cm x 61 cm each) operates as a thematic variation: the denigration of the authority of the gaze, the demise of landscape as a genre and the redemptive quality of the composite. This series portrays ghostly transparencies of interwoven landscapes of remote vistas: mountains, forests,

⁷ Robert Kroetsch, "An Arkeology of (My) Canadian Postmodern," In *International Postmodernism*, ed. Hans Bertens & Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), 308.

⁸ The exhibition, which includes works by Canadian artist Marian Penner Bancroft, opened in Paris 20 November 2002 and closed 8 February 2003.

⁹ Robert Desbiens, "Préface," *Trouble en vue* (Paris: Centre culturel canadien, 2002), 7. Original French terminology will appear when it is deemed to express the intended concept with more precision than would be represented by the translation into English.

lakes and shorelines. The works are unsettling because the narrative is unclear: accessible entry points are denied leaving the eye to scan surfaces. In two of the works tiny male figures have been projected into the landscape. One is pictured leaning against a tree that seems to be fading away. (Figure 13) In another a figure is projected onto a mountainside overlooking a chasm peering into the distance through a telescope. (Figure 12) Bédard writes that "faced with unearthly views and the subtle impenetrability of nature, there is something absurd about the figure who contemplates the vista."¹⁰ The tiny explorers figure as the colonial paradigm shadowing our vision. Within the landscape the explorer acts as a historical referent, but as phantoms their presence represents impermanence. Within the context of the rest of the series in which nature is rendered impenetrable they signify the futility of schematization and ownership.

Readman's play on words in the title offers additional insight. *Petite histoire des ombres* is translated into English by Bédard as a 'Shady Little Tale'. Readman collapses the whole epistemology of landscape and perspective to the realm of fiction. Readman suggests that images as subjective fabrications mediated by technique are also stories and not to be taken as 'truth', that history itself is but a story and a fable portrayed through conjecture and projection.

Bédard writes of Readman's viewpoint that it "expresses a categorical refusal to succumb to the widely celebrated power of picture-taking to shape the "view" that we "take" of the world, [however, with Readman] the very power of photography itself becomes a source of resistance."¹¹ The images are achieved through the strategy of rephotography: the production of second and third generation photographs that

¹⁰ Catherine Bédard, "The Readman Inversion: A Change of Seen," In *Trouble en Vue* (Paris: Centre culturel canadien, 2002), 106.

¹¹ Ibid, 99.

increasingly removed from their original state, degenerate and become more and more atmospheric, like apparitions. Readman creates montages by blending appropriated nineteenth century archival survey images with her own photographed landscape views.¹² Layered as such they become new exposures, ones that render transparent the ghostly imprints remnant of the photographic act. The manipulation and abstraction of the topography is well served by the monochrome qualities of the black and white medium. Referring to the works as hallucinatory mirages, Léger comments: "we are confronted by images that have been taken to the limit."¹³ With no indication that the referent is aligned with any designated territorial space, Readman "builds a distance into the image which plays against the immediate, indexical nature of the photography...by drawing attention to the *photographic act* as a calculated process of selection, deliberately framed and consciously constructed."¹⁴ The strategy of collapsing historically and spatially distinct images creates a record of an unprecedented event and announces the fictive nature of representation. A new resonance is generated evoking a narrative of displacement, with difficult entry, of the remoteness of landscape. The work underscores the fictive nature of picture and story-making which Cheryl Simon describes as:

The superimpositions of nineteenth century landscape paintings over landscape photographs maintain a finely tuned critical ambiguity. *Petite Histoire des Ombres* addresses us multifariously: as hauntingly surreal landscapes, as landscape about landscape and its pictorial foundations; and finally as landscape about the impossibility of representing landscape...The ghostliness discerned in Readman's photographs underlines a critical engagement with the notion of

¹² Susan Gibson Garvey, *Rephotographing the Land* (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1992). Garvey verifies that the artist contributes her own photographic images of "the rural landscape outside her home in Québec" to her artistic process, 5.

¹³ Danielle Léger, "The *Tessitura* of Images," In *Sylvie Readman*, trans. Daniel Anderson, Michael Bailey (Montréal: Galerie Samuel Lallouz, 1992), 20.

¹⁴ Media Release, January 19, 2001, (Toronto: Gallery 44: Centre for Contemporary Photography).

presence used by Douglas Crimp to describe postmodern photography. Readman's photographs demonstrate the same multiplicity of meanings: "presence which is about being there, the presence which is a ghost and therefore really an absence..."¹⁵

With this strategy of both degeneration and construction, Readman addresses the limitations and possibilities of the image, "the enigmatic relationship of the objects of photographic representation to their referents in the real world, and the relationship of the photograph, as an artifact, to its referent in the discourse of representation."¹⁶ Readman's degeneration of the image may be seen as a means for destabilization, but also as an inflection of the original source. In so doing she re-reads history by re-representing, or recontextualizing it as fundamentally unknowable. History is a story, Readman proposes in her own play on words, like ourselves a composite of images and memories, ghosts that appear, recede and eventually fade away. The montage of disparate elements accomplishes not only an ethereal poetic but also a fictionalization of historical perspective. This has the effect of questioning landscape as a fixed category and transforms it into a component of the imaginary, a blend of the historically inherited gaze and the unquantifiable gauge of the imagination.

Fundamentally, the subject of the series, accomplished with seductive, hypnotic textural qualities, is the deferment of synthesis. The tension created by the dissonant elements in the landscape produces an amplified presence of the irreconcilable. The inability to resolve these fictional realms is maddening. One must be contented with loose ends. In these construed landscapes, haunting, disorienting and even playful at times, Readman renders landscape impenetrable and inaccessible to the gaze, ultimately forcing

¹⁵ Cheryl Simon, "In Excess of Representation," *Sylvie Readman* (Montreal: Galerie Samuel Lallouz, 1992), 28

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

the spectator " to confront the ambiguity of our relationship to reality,"¹⁷ and to do away with conviction for closure.

Readman's practice of the early 1990's, according to Léger, encapsulated a "concerted study of the landscape genre."¹⁸ The rephotographic strategy was taken up by Readman for the series *Manèges* (1991), a triptych of three composite photographs 137.5 x 169.5 cm each. This time in luminous baroque colour reminiscent of the Technicolor land of Oz, *Manèges* is accomplished with the montaged projection of layers of depictions of historical representations of landscape superimposed with Readman's original photographs of the rural Québec landscape. These "heterogeneous fictions" blending, according to Susan Gibson Garvey, the bucolic scenes of the American Hudson River School¹⁹ with Northeastern woodlands is a playful and schematic gesture, as the play on words in the title indicates.²⁰ Like *Petite histoire des ombres*, but now with reference to the cinematic, *Manèges* provides juxtapositions that are disorienting, hallucinogenic and unresolved, like stills from dreams.

Johanne Lamoureux notes that landscape has not played as significant a role in the shaping of the national identity of the Québec culture; instead she suggests that language has been the defining factor within the province's recent visual culture. The means by which national cohesion is expressed strikes Lamoureux as a particular site of cultural difference. For example, while Canada's "From sea to shining sea" denotes a sentiment of nationalist territorial expansionism, Québec's own motto "Je me souviens" constitutes a relationship of the individual tied to cultural memory and grounded in

¹⁷ Paulette Gagnon, *Sylvie Readman: Champs d'éclipses*, trans. Judith Terry (Montréal: Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal, 1993), unpaginated.

¹⁸ Léger, 19.

¹⁹ Susan Gibson Garvey, *Rephotographing the Land* (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1992), 5.

²⁰ 'Manèges' translates as both merry-go-round and ploy.

historical time. As Lamoureux notes, "the affirmation of identity through language [set in motion by the rise of the independence movement in the 1960's] was conceived particularly in terms of an affirmation of speech, accent and voice."²¹

In light of the language and landscape issues pertaining to both Canadian and Québécois nationalisms and her own position as a Québec nationalist,²² Readman's choice of superimposing Québec landscape onto nineteenth century Hudson River School arcadian representations of Northeastern American landscape is exceptional among Québec artists. According to Angela Miller the "northeastern bias" intrinsic to the portrayal of idealized landscapes hinged on a narrative of national identity and destiny. Miller writes how the Hudson River School "imbued the mute geography of nature with a cultural program. In this "sequential" landscape specific temporal correlates were assigned to the organizing planes within the image, embedding historical meaning in the very structure of natural space itself."²³ Similar to Canada, in the United States landscape became the site wherein an imagined identity could be projected onto the nation as a whole. Léger remarks that the Hudson River School "conferred aesthetic, religious and moral values onto contemplative, and meticulously rendered nature scenes. Their studied landscapes rapidly took on a nationalist tone."²⁴ In depicting the territory as sublime and Edenic, these painters aligned territorial expansion with the eternal garden bestowed by

²¹ Johanne Lamoureux, *Seeing in Tongues: A Narrative of Language and Visual Arts in Quebec* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, n.d.), 1.

²² At the Burlington Art Centre's 1999 group exhibition *Imagining (An) Other Canada: Reconsidering Images of Nationalism in the Canadian Landscape*, Readman is said to have expressed a certain level of discomfort with the title of the show to curator Carol Podedworny "saying that she considers herself to be from Québec, not Canada." Elaine Hujer, "Women offer another view of Canada," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 3 Nov, 1999.

²³ Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics 1825-1875* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

²⁴ Léger, 20.

original creation and thus was born the beholden sense of manifest destiny still orienting the motivations of the United States.

The decision to align Québec terrain with a particular American school of painting is suggestive of the artist's own preferences. Jonathan Bordo notes that the Québec landscape is regarded by Boulizon as "the diametrical opposite of what he calls in quotation marks "The Canadian Landscape". Not only is it marked by a diversity of themes and styles but, more to the point, its principal characteristic is that the Québec paysage is occupied in the widest and deepest sense of the word."²⁵ Thus it is the heritage of the inhabited paysage that distinguishes Québécois landscape sensibility from the human absence typified by Anglo-European nationalist representation. For Boulizon the French nationalist claim to territory is embedded "in the visual evidence of human occupancy."²⁶ In light of this, Readman's omission in her imagery of landscapes associated with Canada's national identity narrative may be seen as a deliberate strategy in her visual vocabulary. The absence of the landscapes of the Group of Seven, 'Canada's' national school of painters, is one that speaks volumes.

The *double entendre* of *Manèges* aligns the work with at least two possible readings. In combining images of an uncultivated land with pastoral conventions, Readman signals the romanticization of nature with ultimate consequences upon the integrity of the wilderness. The uneasy coexistence of the two conditions of wilderness and pastoral rendered in the pictures seems tentative and impermanent. The superimposition of a grid in the second panel highlights the artificiality of scientific

²⁵ Guy Boulizon, *Le Paysage dans la peinture au Québec* (Laprairie: Editions Marcel Broquet, 1984) cited in Jonathan Bordo, "Jack Pine-Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, No. 4 (Winter 1992-93), 111.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 112.

formatting and alludes to the schematic order enacted on the landscape by the surveying tradition. The lines of the grid remain confined to the middle of the image and are prevented by Readman from being extended fully to either side, failing to enclose nature or fully exert control over harmonious human activity. Just below the grid, the artist has placed a shepherd and his flock depicted moving into a meadow infused with golden light, as if to elucidate the concept of access beyond all confines or limitations.

The final panel of *Manèges* features the encroaching presence of darkened wilderness. In the distance is a pictorial extract depicting figures resting in quiet discussion on an illuminated riverbank. Further on tiny figures leisurely wade the rivers shallow waters. *Manèges* introduces a schema of an imaginary naturalized condition of coexistence between wilderness and arcadian pastoralism. By deferring closure it demonstrates the infinitude of irreconcilable separation and posits a problematic of the coexistence of the two conditions. Alternatively, through a fusion or synthesis of pastoral sentiment with raw wilderness, *Manèges* suggests that the integration of the two conditions may be limited only by our imaginations.

The conceptual strength of Readman's work is grounded in the intertextual components of the irreconcilable. Readman's discourse proposes a visual language that lends itself to an open textual reading of landscape, consequently, within a space of uncertainty, destabilizing notions of fixed identity. In this milieu the spectator has come to be reconsidered as an active participant in the construction of meaning rather than a passive receptor of information. As Terry Eagleton has written,

Reading is not a straight-forward linear movement, a merely cumulative affair: our initial speculations generate a frame of reference within which to interpret what comes next, but what comes next may retrospectively transform our original understanding highlighting some features of it and backgrounding others....each sentence opens up a new horizon which is confirmed, challenged or undermined,

by the next. We read backwards and forwards simultaneously, predicting and recollecting, perhaps aware of other realizations of the text which our reading has neglected.²⁷

Photographs are treated as material and collaged by Readman to enact conjecture. The artist instigates the disruption of conventional representations of landscape by creating works that are 'intertextual', leaving the work open-ended, without closure, as Norris has suggested, by disturbing "the classical economy of language and representation"²⁸. In so doing, the artist can evoke meaning beyond limitations of specificity and "create multiple visual and intellectual associations both within and beyond the intent of the producer of that image."²⁹

Readman's superimposition strategy, play with dimensionality and abstraction of perspective work together to question optical conventions and by extension, prevalent ideology. Gagnon notes that "Readman goes far beyond facile hybridization. What she offers is the chance to meditate on the strange silence of senses and of places, and on all the potential meanings of things....which emerge like the opening up of a new visual dimension to reveal a genuine photographic experience."³⁰ This playful and mesmerizing reconfiguration of space constitutes a postmodern ethic that transcends the limitations of empiricism:

It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in-between" space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The "past-present" becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.³¹

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 77.

²⁸ Nicholas Mirzeoff, "The Multiple Viewpoint: Diasporic Visual Cultures," In *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (London & NY: Routledge, 2000), 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gagnon, unpaginated.

³¹ Mirzeoff, 7.

The methodology of response "lies in refigur[ing] the past in order to facilitate the theoretical and phenomenological understanding of the multiple viewpoint. Such work embraces a mode of thought that is destined to be incomplete."³² Furthermore, the postmodern paradigm, as practiced by artists, allows the configuration of narrative reading to sediment in the interactive space between the work and the spectator. The objective is for the work to act as departure point, open to possibility and an enlargement of perspective rather than emulating outdated schools of thought.

For Mirzeoff, "postmodernism aligns itself with the concept of diaspora, the historical dispersion of unified cultures and ethnicities from their places of origin or homelands across the globe, mingling with and imploding homogenous societies, and finally, categorically eroding the ideology of any single national identity."³³ As metaphor, postmodernists apply the categories of the condition of diaspora to foreground the sense of multiplicity, of *différance*.³⁴ The coexistence of the multiple viewpoint and absence of resolution offered by Readman promotes a vision that transcends the one-point perspective of Cartesian rationalism and foregrounds the premise of the imaginary. Kroetsch believes that Canada is the definitive embodiment of postmodernism, a postmodernism that necessarily includes the postcolonial.³⁵ In such a milieu, postmodernists move beyond narratives of Empire to introduce the legitimate paradigm of collage. "Just as a "nation" can no longer support the burden of a permanent and homogeneous identity" write Ferguson and Varga, "so an individual is full of similar

³² Ibid.

³³ Bhabha (1994), 7 cited in Mirzeoff 6.

³⁴ *Différance* is Derrida's term to designate something more than that denoted by difference - "as a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding...It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the trace of its other meanings....suspended between the two French verbs "to differ" and "to defer" (postpone), both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning....that meaning is always deferred." incurred as a result of the phenomenon. Ibid, 26.

³⁵ Kroetsch, 308.

conflicts and contradictions that work against the status of permanent identity.

[P]reviously comforting narratives of social, national, familial, gender, or sexual identities are now also seen to be unstable, fragmentary, unfixed, and even annulled.

Identity is now understood to be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in a regular and mediated way. Far from being a question of 'essence', "identity is basically a matter of strategies."³⁶ Artist Sylvie Readman accomplishes this negation of singular focus in her work, but it is a negation that proposes a myriad of possibility.

³⁶ Bruce Ferguson and Dick Hebdige, *Longing and Belonging: From the Faraway Nearby* (SITE Santa Fe, 1995), 131.

Chapter V

Lorraine Gilbert: Ambiguous Spaces

I

With a background in forestry, science and art, Lorraine Gilbert imparts a distinctive vision to the study of Canadian landscape.¹ Equally informed by a postmodernist approach, Gilbert, like the other artists addressed in this study, engages with certain conventions of the canon of art history. In the photographic configuration of de-centred, non-linear perspective Gilbert contributes to the critique of what Lyotard has termed the "post-Enlightenment narratives of legitimation."² Oriented by feminism and environmental ethics, Gilbert's work lends itself to a reading informed by recent feminist geography theory and current discourse around the ideology of landscape. For Gilbert, space is culturally determined, inhabited and configured thus by particular framing(s). For our purposes, the artist's depiction of the altered Canadian landscape undermines the designated associations of this genre and opens it to a reading that problematizes conventional equations with stable identity. Furthermore, adopted photographic strategies contribute to the achievement of counter-narratives. Gilbert intersects with the discursive operatives of photography in order to revise the empirical framework of interpretive apparatus. With the rendering of ambiguous space, the work transcends the genre of the familiar into the contingency of the incommensurable sublime in the sense that Lyotard

¹ Gilbert holds an undergraduate degree in Environmental Biology (BSc), (McGill) as well as an MFA in Photography (Concordia).

² Jon Bird, "Art History and Hegemony," In *The Block Reader in Visual Culture*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London & NY: Routledge, 1996), 79.

gives it - " a stronger sense of the unrepresentable...that which denies itself the solace of good forms [and] is not governed by pre-established rules."³

This chapter will principally address excerpts drawn from *North American Landscapes*, an un-exhibited body of work (Figures 17 to 20) that forms part of a larger project, a final cut of thirty exposures drawn from a substantial collection of Polaroid SX-70s. Made by Gilbert from 1978-1986 at the outset of her photographic practice this series constitutes some of the artist's initial gestures in the landscape. This formative phase was a deliberate response to the formalist standards of traditional landscape representation exemplified set by the work of Ansel Adams.⁴ What Gilbert now terms *North American Landscapes* is a body of work deemed critical to the consideration of Gilbert's practice. It provides access to unknown and thus unconsidered aspects of the artist's sensibility that have informed her subsequent projects.⁵ *North American Landscapes* predates Gilbert's signature work of the later 1980's, the series on logging and tree-planters while Gilbert worked as a seasonal tree-planter, for example. Like this work, the SX-70s contribute to the critique of Canadian landscape representation. Before analyzing the four selections from *North American Landscapes* the appropriate theoretical content for a contextual reading of Lorraine Gilbert's reconfigured terrains will be proposed with particular emphasis on readings of space articulated by recent scholarship in feminist geography.

³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism," In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

⁴ Lorraine Gilbert in recorded interview with the author. 2002.

⁵ Ibid.

According to Hirsch and Smith, since the 1970's "feminist scholarship has been driven by the desire to redefine culture through the retrieval and inclusion of women's work, stories and artifacts."⁶ Feminist critiques of culturally constructed space, however, have been sparse and limited mainly to scholarship emerging from the disciplines of geography and architecture.⁷ Adams and Robins note the extensive attention devoted to discussions of the role played by gender in art historical discourse over the past two decades but take care to point out that "this debate has focused almost entirely on the gendered body. For the most part landscape art has on the whole escaped sustained art historical examination."⁸ In 2001 Adams and Robins also noted the significance of gender issues and landscape interpretation on art discourse in recent visual and cultural history, but pointed out that "landscape art has yet to be subject to an analysis informed by an understanding of gender."⁹ Anthea Callen considers landscape art as "one terrain relatively untouched by the disruptions of a feminist art history."¹⁰

According to Johnson feminist approaches to perspective and space representation emerged with the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Increasing awareness of gender issues within feminism addressed factors of exclusion from the construction of knowledge in such male-dominated academic disciplines as geography. In the 1980's and 1990's exclusionary aspects of feminist discourse itself came under the

⁶ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 1 (2002), 3.

⁷ Both Gillian Rose and Louise Johnson should be consulted as excellent sources for the situation of feminism in geography in their texts.

⁸ Steven Adams and Anna Greutzner Robins eds. *Gendering Landscape Art* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 2.

⁹ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁰ Anthea Callen, "Technique and gender: landscape, ideology and the art of Monet in the 1890's," In *Gendering Landscape Art*, ed. Steven Adams and Anna Greutzner Robins (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 26.

scrutiny of a post-colonial critique. Consequently the questioning of gendered space by feminist geographers "broadened to include a postcolonial critique of the discipline."¹¹ Johnson notes the "'crisis of representation' prompted, in part, by feminist and postcolonial assessments of existing bodies of Western knowledge...critiques [have] successfully exposed the exclusivity and partiality of previously hallowed universals."¹²

As a result of such significant developments, there has seen a shift in the way 'place' is regarded. Landscape has come to be viewed as an ideologically loaded 'site', a mode of representation rather than a neutral reflection of the natural world. Postmodernism and post-colonialism, influenced in part by such aspects of feminist theory and gender discourse, have skewed the way in which landscape is viewed. At issue in landscape is the politics of representation. Subject to multiple readings, these treatments of landscape have come to figure in the dissolution of universal and fixed systems of knowledge. One recurrent theme in postmodernist thought is the preference for the ambiguity of *différance*, shifting deferred meanings produced by fluid discourses. According to Johnson, "the deconstruction of a fixed identity, which is derived from an emancipatory politics, is part of the postmodern move to reimagine the individual as the fragmented subject and product of discourse."¹³

Gillian Rose notes the articulation in feminist theory of parallels "between masculinity, men, knowledge and power."¹⁴ By drawing on discourses of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, feminist theory "connects masculine subjectivity to

¹¹ An excellent discussion of this topic is provided by Louise Johnson, in *Placebound: Australian Feminist Geographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158-67.

¹² *Ibid.*, 122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 5.

powerful claims to know." ¹⁵ Johnson acknowledges Foucault's influence on both feminist and postcolonial theory citing discourses formulated by "socially influential groups or individuals [lending to] these utterances a particular currency or authority which is actively engaged by others."¹⁶ Such readings propose a route by which latencies embedded in utterances are exposed.

In 1993, at the time of Rose's publication, the field of geography remained male-dominated, persisting in an attitude of detachment and neutral objectivity. In Rose's view this manifested foremost in a denial of positionality. Similar to the imperialist ideology overseeing the work of early land surveyors,¹⁷ she cites, "geographers see themselves as 'detached explorers' who produce 'transcendent visions' of neutral truth untouched by the contexts in which they are produced," a partiality "produced and reproduced by their power as master subjects."¹⁸ Perhaps due to its historical complicity with imperialist doctrines, the discipline of geography had been slow to negotiate the consequences of geographical knowledge. Furthermore, Rose locates critical junctions between the tradition of fieldwork in geography, the consequent representation of landscape and the power relations in society. The gaze of the fieldworker is rendered a problematic component of visual ideology that reflects "an important critique of the unequal social relations implicit in one element of geographical epistemology."¹⁹

On the subject of feminism and science, Sandra Harding uses the metaphor of art to note the predominance of the masculine perspective in the discourse of representation.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Johnson, 124.

¹⁷ See Chapter One where this theme is expanded upon.

¹⁸ L. Borndi and M. Domosh, "Other Figures in Other Landscapes: On Feminism, Postmodernism and Geography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10 (1992), 199-213, cited in Rose 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 87.

Harding argues that "men-but rarely women-have for centuries projected their fears and desires onto the canvas of the world around them through the scientific pictures they construct."²⁰ Furthermore, historians of science and theorists of scientific knowledge concede that "Western scientific thought gained legitimacy because [it] both reflected and reinforced certain historical aspects of the experiences of men in the dominant groups."²¹

As a discursive system, science reflects a constructed ideology, an organization of signifiers that reflect gender and power relations. Claims to objectivity as well as the scientific method are rendered suspect and even regarded as dubious and misleading.²²

Lyotard challenges the supremacy of science by coding it as another 'language game'.

Lyotard, a skeptic of the premise of science, dismisses data methodology and interpretation as unreliable narratives and thus intrinsically flawed. He then illustrates the reductionism of 'proofs' to the servility of perpetuation and legitimation:

The production of proof, which is in principle only part of an augmentation process designed to win agreement from the addressees of scientific messages, thus falls under the control of another language game, in which the goal is no longer truth but performativity - that is, the best possible input/output equation. The State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power.²³

Feminist critiques of geography and science are transferable to the analysis of landscape representation in the visual arts. As the activity of mapping, for example, has

²⁰ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 69.

²¹ Ibid, 70. Here Harding acknowledges the contributions of such scholars as Susan Bordo, Evelyn Fox Keller, Carolyn Merchant, Donna Haraway, Hilary Rose and Londa Schiebinger.

²² Suspicions of science are nothing new to the Western tradition, in fact, innovations in science often resulted in charges of heresy with dire consequences. An example of a more modern expression of caution and skepticism might be the timeless tale of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which the dangers of science are made apparent.

²³ Lyotard, 46.

been subject to a postcolonial critique, so then is the analysis of artistic representation as a signifier of colonial ideology. In writing of Australia, with its comparable colonial history to Canada, Johnson notes that "the naming of Australian landscape features in English and the creation of maps with large areas of blank space suggesting no occupancy, were imperial rather than scientific acts. These acts discursively obliterated an Aboriginal presence and indigenous landscape relations and names."²⁴

Like Australia, Canada was considered a *terra nullius*, an empty continent by colonists. The representation of landscape in Canada, both under the rubrics of science and art, rendered the indigenous presence irrelevant to the point of absence. In Chapter One it was considered how iconic landscape representations by Canada's revered national school of painters neglected aboriginal presence in their treatments of the land. Imbued with imperialist ideology, the discourse of the Group of Seven portrayed the land as raw material rather than the ancestral and inhabited territory of a substantial population and culture. It is this colonial perspective, one that is instrumental in the construction of a national identity, that is at stake in the disruption of forms. In reconfiguring the landscape Lorraine Gilbert rewrites this idiom, constructing an imaginary distinct from the ideology derived from the inherited cloak of imperialism.

Notwithstanding the projection of hetero-male desire and psyche onto landscape as the feminine body implicit in both art and geography discourse, the product of the dominant male gaze onto the landscape is a 'science' characteristic of Western social and political ideology.²⁵ As Denis Cosgrove has pointed out, the genre of landscape that

²⁴ Another obvious parallel is the representation of absence in the Northern landscape by Canada's national painters. Ibid, 163.

²⁵ Rose states that "the sensual topography of land and skin is mapped by a gaze that is eroticized as masculine and heterosexual". Women have historically been regarded as closest to nature, in fact, "the

emerged in fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italy was "bound up with both Renaissance theories of space and with the practical appropriation of space."²⁶ Developments in draughtsmanship popularized by Alberti in 1435 introduced new possibilities to the rendering of three-dimensional perspective and established spatial control, "a particular viewpoint for the spectator in painting - a single, fixed point of the bourgeois individual...with perspectival as well as material control over the land."²⁷ The domain of 'rationally-established'²⁸ perspective, determined by social, economic and political conditions and traceable throughout the trajectory of geography is also represented on the canvases of the visual arts. This critique drawing from feminist postcolonial geography discourse and representation of the constructed landscape is fundamental to a reading of landscape representation in Lorraine Gilbert's work.

The consideration of space as ideologically redolent is fundamental to Gilbert's production. Inherent to the work is a critique of Cartesian perspective, the philosophical foundations of Western rationality and the "counterculture of science" that determines "the Western scientific world-view or mind-set."²⁹ Of central issue is the implication of such formulations of space from the feminist perspective. In addition to articulating a gendered space, landscape depiction is "a site for the articulation of class relations, a

allegory of nature itself", 9. See Rose's "Looking at Landscape: The Uneasy Pleasures of Power," In *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) for an expanded discussion of this issue.

²⁶ Denis Cosgrove, 'Prospect, perspective and the evolution of the landscape idea', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 10 (1985), 45-62, in Rose, 90.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ In reference the duality in Western thought linking reason and logic to inherent masculine qualities while women are believed to be defined by emotion and biology Genevieve Lloyd writes: "The obstacles to female cultivation of Reason spring to a large extent from the fact that our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion." Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984), cited in Johnson, 15.

²⁹ Harding, 3.

means of forming national identity or a conduit for the exercise of colonial power."³⁰ As texts, landscapes can be read and interpreted from an ideological basis, not as products of naturalized expression, but evidence of ideological 'sediment'.³¹ Adams and Robins situate the discourse of landscape art within the mastery and control of Nature established by a prevalent Cartesian ethos. "Just as cartography can be seen to be a project for making Nature legible", they write, "so the rules of perspective, the invention of new compositions for landscape, the growing stress on the importance of viewpoint for representing nature are factors of the 'male gaze'".³²

Gilbert's reconfigurations are in contradistinction to a conventional landscape tradition. Whether informed by gender theory or derived from a postmodernist tendency, the artist's interventions advance a re-evaluation of landscape and ask that it be experienced, interpreted and recorded in a form of dialogue that abstains from closure. Furthermore the work challenges "processes of subjugation refracted through discourses in geography,"³³ rendering problematic geographical readings of landscape that neglect a "larger semiotic field."³⁴

³⁰ Adams and Robins, 1.

³¹ J. Duncan, N. Duncan, "(Re)reading the landscape," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6, (1988), 117. Here the authors borrow from Barthes, "among the most astute readers of the landscape" for his semiotic and post-structuralist based terminology to establish the textual qualities of landscapes and how these ideological underpinnings are embedded into the social process. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

³² Ibid, 3. Laura Mulvey established the concept of the male gaze with the enormously influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In her analysis of the representation of women in film Mulvey notes the construction of images according to male-defined codes and desire, in fact, these elements are identified as confirmation of the identity of the subject. The masculine dominated empire of representation that made up the bulk of Western art history was henceforth regarded as an ideological product of the male gaze. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," In *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1989).

³³ Adams and Robins, 5.

³⁴ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition 1740-1860* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California press, 1989) cited in Adams and Robins, 5.

II

Gilbert acquired extensive knowledge of the complexities of deforestation during seasonal work as a tree-planter in the 1980's. Her knowledge of the ecology and the environment is drawn from both her academic studies in forestry and her direct experience with the economics of the logging industry. Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's Gilbert was employed on reforestation teams interspersed with studies in art and photography. During the years 1987-1994 she assembled material for the *Silviculture Project*, a collection of photographs that documented "tree-planters, their camp life, and the landscapes they were employed to restore"³⁵ in the format of large-scale black and white and colour photographs. The large-scale silver gelatin prints made in the late 1980's, represented here by *Ram Creek Valley, Invermere, B.C.* (1989) (Figure 16) documents the rampant clear-cutting of the landscape. A triptych of three 20" x 24" prints from the *Silviculture* series, the work mimics the panorama genre in landscape representation but undermines it with a stark depiction of devastation of the Canadian forest. The exposure of the brutality inflicted on the landscape in an artistic context poses particular resonance for a viewing public that associates landscape with a sense of identity and sublime beauty. Inherent to the images of clear-cuts is the critique of dominance over nature that legitimizes the reckless economic pursuit. The documentary recording of the ruined state of the land not only makes publicly visible critical environmental issues pertaining to the heritage of the Canadian landscape, but extends also to a scrutiny of the idealization of land within the configuration of identity. In

³⁵ Robert Evans, *Lorraine Gilbert: Portraits from the New Forest* (Ottawa: Carleton University Art Gallery, 2001), unpaginated.

picturing stark images of environmental desecration the works of this period elucidate pressing environmental concerns. However, Larry Bremner noted in 1990, "as a forestry graduate, Gilbert does not condemn the industry but opposes the short-term economic expediency of current logging practices."³⁶

By her own admission, Gilbert knowingly appropriated the heroic travails of the traditional male photographer figure in her excursions into the sublime British Columbia landscape. Equipped with an 8 x 10 view camera, according to Bremner "the principle tool of the idealized North American landscape aesthetic, [Gilbert] reclaims and re-employs the landscape tradition, evoking the expansionist survey photography of the late 1800's."³⁷ In the production of technically superb large-scale works 'in the field', the artist parodies the heroic male-dominated tradition of landscape photography, supplanting it with graphic monochrome depictions of the shocking bleakness inflicted by industry. In so doing, Gilbert exposes the ethical imperative of the industry's logging practices and comments subversively on "photography's historical complicity with notions of nature's endless abundance."³⁸

Ram Creek Valley, Invermere, B.C. represents a challenge to the conventions of the surveying tradition in photography, the modern regard for land-use and the tradition of landscape representation in Canadian art. In shocking black and white documents of a bleak ruined landscape Gilbert's gesture towards idealized landscape iconography associated with Canadian nationalism is duly noted: her interventions provoke allusions to idealized emblems of identity. Additionally, the images of destroyed landscapes reference the smokescreens that have been erected to maintain the illusions of the pristine

³⁶ Larry Bremner, *Lorraine Gilbert: Allowable Cuts* (Vancouver: Or Gallery, 1990), unpaginated.

³⁷ Ibid.

landscape associated with the Canadian national sensibility as represented in art. One cannot help but recall landscapes painted by the Group of Seven that consistently refrained from making reference to the impact of industry on their subject. Romanticized images of the mighty old-growth forests of British Columbia that may have held sway in the imagination in the past is more commonly supplanted today with the knowledge that behind a picturesque roadside veneer of trees is oftentimes the bald expanse of needlessly wasted sites of old-growth forest.

III

*We are spectators. If we were actors in a film, there would be a script. We are merely present. The only action is the creation of a marvelous setting with no characters. It is like a film of which the critic writes, 'The real star is the rugged landscape of such-and-such a place.'*³⁹

While the *Silviculture* series may be characterized as a disclosure of altered landscape traces made by others, the 1978-1986 Polaroid series *North American Landscapes* represents the artist's own reconfigurations and projections of an imaginary in the landscape. Gilbert set out initially to make these pictures to fulfill an assignment for a photography workshop in Banff, Alberta where she was enrolled in the summer of 1978. While Gilbert has said she was already accustomed to literally making hundreds of exposures on negative film every week, this particular exercise demanded a limit of only ten exposures per day. Choosing the Polaroid SX-70 camera for the immediacy of instant results, according to the artist herself, Gilbert's incentive was to make pictures "about

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Raymonde April, "A Fly in Paradise," In *Thirteen Essays on Photography* (Ottawa: CMCP, 1990), 197.

space. To not put anything in the picture and frame it in such a way that *creates* space."⁴⁰

Enraptured by the surface, physical quality and the varnished appearance of the translucent surfaces offered by the Polaroid palette, Gilbert continued working with qualities of space mediated by the SX-70 in her travels across North America.

From the years 1978 to 1984 an SX-70 camera accompanied Gilbert everywhere, resulting in the accumulation of approximately six hundred Polaroid exposures. *North American Landscapes* comprises thirty final images selected from the original series with a final fifty exposures added later on. The images are striking in invoking the intimacy of private experience and the enduring presence of time. These abstracted landscapes are radical departures from the straight documentary-style large-scale work with which she is familiarly associated. As a result, the alluring lush, painterly and otherworldly features of the images are also unsettling. Some of the images appear experimental and read as exploratory exercises. Others abstract the landscape to the point that they could be exquisitely rendered Renaissance studies of a distant forest or the pyramids of Egypt in the desert. Considered as a group, the series reads as a study of the act of seeing landscape, the repeated attempt of the artist to depart from conditioned perspective. The selection represented for the context of this discussion were chosen by the author as a small series that best illustrates the reconfigured space of landscape. Rather than sentimentalize or render the landscape nostalgic, these images make reference to the elusive epic moment and manifest the impalpable, ironically, in the form of instant, plastic products.

⁴⁰ In interview with Lorraine Gilbert, 2002.

In reproduction format, it is difficult if not impossible to surmise that these images are derived from Polaroid technology or are even photographs.⁴¹ The painterly qualities are such that they present as pigment on ground. Once the initial surprise of the 2" x 2" Polaroid format and Gilbert's authorship are overcome, the work can be contemplated on its own merits. Representation of space is paramount in setting these works apart from the norm in landscape representation. *Anarchist Mountain* (1986) (Figure 17) illustrates the regard and framing of space that disrupts convention. As in *Anarchist Valley* (1986), (Figure 18) *Osoyoos* (1986) (Figure 19) and *Swamp* (1985) (Figure 20) the British Columbia settings are unorthodox subjects and as a result, dimly recognizable. The land is pictured as inclusively as the small viewfinder and framing device allow, with each element contributing visual weight to the final exposure. The absence of a specific focal point, one tree, the small lake directs the gaze to encompass the picture frame so that the landscape represents itself in entirety. Not knowing what the picture is 'about' the spectator may consider the resonant atmosphere of the site as the subject of representation, the quality of being, site of recognition.

This moment of pictorial clarity, elusive and ungraspable occurs via the convergence of the movement into nature, the quality of space and the artist's motivation, the exchange of which is transmitted and recorded on to Polaroid film. The pictures reconsider a relationship to territory and establish a rapport with landscape based on witnessing. The atmosphere of the images are thick with the presence of the artist, so much so that they not only transmit the act of looking, they redefine it. The subject is not

⁴¹ These images were first encountered in digitized format on the Internet and only later was access to the actual objects acquired via Gilbert. The measure to which reproduction transforms the object is remarkable and an issue that arises worthy of consideration as a consequence.

the delineation of any one specific perspective, but rather the re-acquaintance for the spectator with evocative moments, encounters and framing of space. However captivating the pictures are as beautiful and precious objects they also serve as triggers to memory or as suggestions to possibility of experience, and in so doing, free the landscape from the parameters of utility and serviceability.

To return to the landscape its integrity as a site of poetic resonance and beauty risks dismissal as an irksome romantic gesture unworthy of attention by earnest discourse. This conundrum of effectively addressing landscape in light of contemporary critical theory is of profound concern to the artist. Gilbert avoids lapsing into pastoral sentimentality, however, with the choice of medium and approach to subject. The SX-70 produces instantaneous, plastic, original, intimate objects, with a palette as seductive as any oil, acrylic or pastel painting. The painterly qualities of the medium act as an ironic nod to the masterly tradition of the painter's craft, with results that rival anything produced by pigment and brushstroke. The work of art is achieved through a conjunction of subject, quality of light, exposure, lens and emulsion. The camera essentially draws with light, the results ejected via a mechanized electronic system. By exposing it to the instantaneous non-manipulated Polaroid chemical vibrant colour process the landscape literally paints itself. The sense of gratification is instantaneous, unparalleled and liberating. The artist can exert only minimal control over the process and is limited largely to the choices of framing and light conditions. Of the innovative possibilities introduced by the Polaroid SX-70 released in 1972, the first fully automated, pocket-sized

camera able to produce color prints without a peel-apart sheet, Max Kozloff writes:

The SX-70 fuses photographic objectives and advanced technology with transformed rendering. It encourages the most nakedly candid revelations, which are both vernacular and unassuming, but tends also to produce quite mysteriously evocative images. It performs a complex sequence of operations, repeatedly, and yet it sustains itself as an experimental form.⁴²

The Polaroid camera opened new territory for photo-based artistic expression, bringing freedom of movement, a more visceral working process and unprecedented methodology. At the time, the camera was an emergent technology and Gilbert was excited by the novelty of new possibilities of expression. For example, "the color balance of SX-70 film is sensitive to temperature and the color of the light source utilized"⁴³ and the emulsion layers can be manipulated. The medium is unpredictable and allows for repeated instances of unique results. Since the exposures cannot be precisely determined, the artist is required to forfeit full control and negotiate the uncertain outcome the process. Unlike the large-format camera, with its potential and traditional use for producing large negatives with precision and detail, the Polaroid camera delivers an interpretive snapshot, hardly a document hand-printed with scientific precision. There are no manipulations, such as dodging and burning, taking place in the darkroom. Furthermore, the small dimensions of the hand-held apparatus enables mobility and conveys a participatory dynamic, as if interaction, engaged experience and the pure element of chance motivate the artist rather than a deliberate recording from a calculated distance.

⁴² Deborah Martin Kao, "Edwin Land's Polaroid: 'A New Eye,'" In *Innovation/Imagination: 50 Years of Polaroid Photography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1999), 18.

⁴³ Ibid, 115.

The Polaroid process is therefore an exercise in randomness and absolving of power, a genre of photography that circumvents the enclosure of nature in favour of interpretive response to site in fluid, expressive tones. There is drama and immediacy to the performative interaction with subject. Furthermore, with the imprecision and technical parameters of the Polaroid, the landscape achieves a substantial degree of autonomy with which it may be seen to imprint itself.⁴⁴ For the artist, the process is one of invention and discovery.

Gilbert's point of departure therefore, may be read as one that aspires to allow space to be represented within landscape in and for itself. In this way, her work - particularly through her denial of conventional scopic possession - reflects aspects of a feminist treatment of space. Social constructions of gender extend to the configuration of the position of the subject within landscape and also the way landscape is read. In her attempts to reconfigure the consideration of space as a point of departure Gilbert strives to achieve a reading of landscape that is not imposed or informed by Cartesian perspective. In this dismissal of a schematic reading, Gilbert resists the pre-determined conventional depiction of Nature as a space "represented, symbolised and imagined"⁴⁵ by masculine categories and instead asserts its autonomy. In this regard, it is the intent, process and the approach to landscape that is most identifiably significant in determining the result. The exercise of witnessing prescribes the striving for an alternate gaze that signifies the quality of 'being in the landscape'; an experiment in acquiring a gaze informed as much as possible by authenticity, not derived by rules of perspective.

⁴⁴ The Polaroid process is comparable, in spirit, to the 'Photogenic Drawing', the result of Talbot's experiments with exposure and fixative begun in 1834.

⁴⁵ Adams and Robins, 2.

Moreover space is freed from a gaze determined by industrial and economic interests. It presents as sublime and inaccessible through no point of discernable entry. The picturing of inclusion, of everything and nothing in particular, the absence of a centered viewpoint, principal subject, clear horizon line and product of a conventional recording apparatus skews convention. The conjunction of these elements may contribute to a certain amount of disorientation, unsettling a viewer demanding the confirmation of a delineated representation. Looking upon these Polaroids, it becomes apparent access has been granted to a private moment, a long and redolent pause in landscape that is preserved in the saturated hues of the glossy emulsion.

The work proposes that this other way of seeing is precipitated by an individual language that resists predetermined forms dependent on limitations or a hierarchy of knowledge. The reorientation of perspective implies that empirical assumptions be fundamentally reconsidered. Gilbert has discussed in an interview that she was inspired at this time, when she first became acquainted with photography, by the challenge to record the landscape outside the conventions of perspective. Her objective, in fact, was to train herself to un-see, to bring to the landscape an authentic gaze, one motivated, as much as possible, by an unbiased eye. The elusion of a central subject in Gilbert's Polaroid landscape images proposes a material relationship to space that renders the narrowness of single-point perspective, the Western assumption of the past few hundred years, palpably evident. In these works Gilbert makes tangible another way of seeing and being in the landscape. The seemingly simple gesture of the Polaroid exposure disrupts empirical orthodoxy, correspondingly elevating the proposition that space is experienced distinctively and multilaterally.

Gilbert's gesture in the landscape may be compared to Rodney Graham's 1976 intervention *75 Polaroids*, in which, equipped with a Polaroid camera and a flash, he stumbled blindly through darkened woods, making random exposures of unfathomable landscape. In addition to sharing an exploratory point of departure, the works share the aspect of performance, of the artist and the subject. The presence of the artist's sensibility is immediately apparent. There is a playful, uncalculated, experimental imperative to their approach, one that is also refreshingly humble. Significant to the work is the unorthodox choice of locations. Both artists are occupied with redefining landscape in the context specific to Canadian iconography. Graham ironically 'loses' himself in the tangled thickets of the urban foliage of Vancouver, Gilbert wanders in the Okanagan Valley, a regional domain that has not been part of the collective consciousness of the nation. The works mock principles of ownership common to a colonial mentality. By allowing the landscape to speak for itself, to be witnessed, Nature is not enclosed by preconceptions, but shown to exist in and for itself. Furthermore, these interventions have important implications for the analysis of national identity. If landscape is informed by colonial discourse and governed by an imperious gaze, it follows that this perspective, once aligned with the dubious concept of a national identity, begins to erode. The concept of an authoritative homogenous experience encompassing a universal viewpoint is also discredited. The medium allows Gilbert to expand upon the land survey tradition, turning to the instantaneous gratification of the Polaroid exposure, plastic, painterly and uncontrollable.

North American Landscapes proposes a narrative of a renewed outlook towards nature, one that makes a large and unprecedented degree of space for the autonomy of the land. The referent of the photograph is the integrity of the space. The implications of this work therefore, extend beyond those tied to the landscape genre in visual arts to the politics of perspective and space as articulated, for example, by feminist geography. If landscape representation is the site wherein the configurations of human nature are made explicit, then this deliberate shift in perspective by Gilbert indubitably contributes to a conceptual opening of the landscape tradition in Canada into the realm of the "decolonial imaginary".⁴⁶

In view of Lorraine Gilbert's later practice *North American Landscapes* is important to consider. It is interesting to note that the artist chose to devote her practice to documenting the environmental impact of clear-cutting that later became her signature work. In light of this, it is safe to presume that Gilbert decided to use photography for its maximum impact potential with images that spoke most directly to the pressing issue of land use in the 1980's. Nevertheless, the Polaroid series is a vital contribution to the corpus of reconfigured territories in Canadian landscape representation and a process vital to Gilbert's development that brought her to the space of the desecrated forest. The outstanding feature of this series may be the way space is addressed as a discursive field.

⁴⁶ I wish to acknowledge the terminology of Emma Pérez which exquisitely describes what has been occurring as a result of the re-visitation of the landscape genre in the context of the colonial history of Canada. Quintana writes that "Pérez addresses the colonialist impulse of conventional historiography" in "clearing the way for what she calls a 'decolonial imaginary', an alternative perspective that holds the potential to challenge or transcend many of the political and discursive barriers that have shaped late-twentieth-century historical knowledge. Once Pérez has provided the foundation for her critique concerning the colonialist impulse of the historical method she uses the balance of her book to rewrite history from the perspective of a decolonialist imaginary, representing a series of women's narratives that were formerly erased or at best contained by the politics of historical writing. Pérez's decolonial methodology opens rather than closes discursive academic practices." Alvina E. Quintana, "Book Review: The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History," *Signs*: 28, No. 2 (Winter 2002), 724.

Throughout her practice, Gilbert has been consistently concerned with what she refers to as a 'geopoetic', the ontology of landscape and the meta-narratives of photography. As a postmodernist Gilbert is fully committed to the divulgence of perspective through the photo-based strategy of reframing, however I believe she would be unable and unwilling to do so at the cost of relinquishing the land.

Conclusion

Mundus est fabula

In Canada, landscape is an enduring icon of nationhood, a symbol adapted and naturalized to distinguish and promote Canadian identity. Prominently within the canon of Canadian art, pictorial depictions of majestic territory portrayed a wealth of available natural resources with indigenous presence diminished or even erased. However, if it weren't for the expanse of land and the abundance of natural resources, fur, lumber, agriculture and minerals few would have entertained the thought of remaining to persevere under the formidable conditions. I consider the settlement of Canada to be a mixed blessing. While many have found refuge and prosperity here, my own family included, the aboriginal peoples have suffered the greatest loss and born the highest cost. Also, the environment has been exploited to the extreme. It is inequities such as these, I believe, that have prompted those motivated by postcolonial and postmodern practice to fundamental reconsiderations of the way in which landscape is represented in Canada

This thesis has examined works by three artists that have contributed to the discourse countering conventional readings of Canadian landscape. I have argued that they use photography to disrupt pictorial conventions and by extension sacrosanct notions of national identity. Some, as was noted in the work of Jin-me Yoon have addressed the issue of naturalized assumptions outright and explicitly. As Yoon notes, "I am interested in appropriating the genre of landscape photography to question the constructed 'nature'

of Canadian identity."¹ The icon of landscape has proved itself inadequate to represent the myriad of experiences that constitute the identities that have assembled in this region over the past centuries.

As landscape as a subject has been instrumental for projecting a narrative of Canadian identity, accordingly it also became fodder for photo-based postmodernists who strategically challenge and target that symbolic code. The pointed appropriation of Group of Seven imagery by artists Jin-me Yoon and Michael Snow, as we have seen, is concerned with deconstructing a residual legacy implicating subsequent generations of Canadians and Canadian artists. Shifts in perspective set forth by Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert in their respective works accomplish disruption of the norm with renewed signification: *mundus est fabula* - the world is a fiction and not as it seems. Fundamentally, the relevance of the work is the ignition of a critical approach to the way in which positions and postures are established and maintained.

This questioning of perspective, so prevalent to postmodern production, is part of a rich tradition in which artists have pushed beyond boundaries of perception belonging to their predecessors and contemporaries. Narratives of history can be interpreted through these trajectories of transgression, in which disruption of signifiers most noticeably mark the dialectical upheavals and changes. Even during the dawning of Cartesian perspective seventeenth century artists maintained through their paintings "the gap between the subject and its representation....the nature of illusion, the precariousness and uncertainty of the real....that all is conjecture and subjectivity."² The ontological nature of

¹ Jin-me Yoon, *Constructing National Identity: Jin-me Yoon, Bob Boyer, Liz Magor* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1991), 5.

² Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, "Staring at the Self in Order to Imagine the Self," In *The Mirror: A History* trans. Katharine H. Jewett (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 167-68.

specularity and the gaze has been an ongoing source of interest and investigation - the variables are the ideological assumptions. Photography is but another tool in the tradition of questioning received categories of truth, authenticity and 'nature'. It may be one of the ironies of history that a tool once so relied upon for its positivist qualities of objectivity could be employed to discredit this very same system of belief. Questions of truth, narrative and representation, so fundamental to being, may most often be associated with postmodern theory and methodologies, but have actually been our preoccupations for a very long time.

The motivation for this investigation has been the reconfiguration of space informed by the condition of displacement. I am intrigued by how artists collapse and refigure boundaries in profound and compelling aesthetic and conceptual ways. In Canada, as elsewhere, the concept of 'place' is undergoing scrutiny because of what it has come to represent in terms of displacement, loss and disenfranchisement of the subject. Such gestures by artists bring forth the ruptures evident in changed geographies and shifting concepts of identity. From the point of departure of my own work, I understand that the re-envisioned representation of space signifies a degree of alienation emerging from my own 'lens'-in that it reflects the condition of being home and at the same time not at home. There is an incongruity of comfort and lament in this unresolved state. I have, however, made my peace with it. This is the foremost sentiment that I understand as resonating from this picture of landscape that almost seems to have emerged of its own making. Such is the magic of art and photography, that the object is mediated, yet maintains autonomy and speaks for itself.

I believe this experience, by choice or by circumstance, of being both within and displaced from landscape is shared by many landed Canadians. Artists engaged with this condition reverberate interventions with landscape that disclose matters of critical attention in postmodernist discourse: the destabilization of narratives in the presentation of the postmodern sublime - an unresolved condition of uncertainty accomplished through the perpetual "blurring of identity."³ In reference to the ethical imperative of art as a practice Julia Kristeva writes:

Practice, such as we have defined it, positing and dissolving meaning and the unity of the subject, therefore encompasses the ethical. The text, in its signifying disposition and its signification, is a practice assuming all positivity in order to negativize it and thereby make visible the *process* underlying it. It can thus be considered, precisely, as that which carries out the ethical imperative....

The ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such a practice."⁴ Fundamentally, the subject of this thesis, the reconfiguration of landscape accomplished by visual artists Rodney Graham, Sylvie Readman and Lorraine Gilbert, is the ethics of engagement that persists in inquiry. Embedded in such practice and production is what Mallarmé demanded of art, that "no trace of philosophy, ethics or metaphysics shows through, but must be included and latent."⁵

³ Noëlle McAfee, "Abject Strangers," In *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writings*, edited by Kelly Oliver (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 120.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 233-4.

⁵ Ibid.

Epilogue

Julian's Dream, February 2003

A slide projector is showing him pictures, familiar images he has seen before and knows well. There is a button on the projector. By pressing it down you are transported into the corresponding picture and find yourself inside the photograph. You become part of it.

One of the pictures projected by the slide carousel is the landscape of North Gower. Julian has seen the enlargement every day for over a year. But he was also through that landscape. He was on the school bus.

What happens when you go in the picture - what does it feel like I ask.

It feels really good, he says. I am standing in the middle of the field facing the road and in the distance a school bus is coming. When the bus passes by I see a bright flash from the window.

In his dream, Julian enters the picture and becomes part of the landscape. He is there, watching me take the photograph.

Figure 1.

Figure 1. Susan Bernard, *Untitled Landscape* (1998)
Silver gelatin print, 30" x 36".
Collection of the artist.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 2. Thomas Davies, *A View of Montreal in Canada, Taken from Isle St. Helena* (1762)
Watercolour over graphit on laid paper, 35.3 x 53.5 cm.
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Unknown,

Figure 3. Mr. and Mrs. William Croscups's Painted Room (c.1846) Detail.
Oil, charcoal and grahite on plaster.
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 4. Homer Watson, *On the Grand river at Doon* (c.1880)
Oil on canvas, 61 x 91.6 cm
Collection of the National Gallery

Figure 5.

Figure 5. A.Y. Jackson, *The Red Maple* (1914)
Oil on canvas. 82 x 99.5 cm.
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 6. Michael Snow, *Plus Tard* (1977) Detail
25 framed dye coupler prints 86.4 x 107.2 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 7. Jin-me Yon, *Souvernirs of the Self* (1991)
Detail of the installation.
6 C-prints in heavy wood frames, 64.5 x 40" each.
From the University of Lethbridge Art Collection.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 8. Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) Detail
Cibachrome photograph on paper, 40 x 50 cm,
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, VAG 97.2 a-zzzz
Photo: Trevor Mills

Figure 9. Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) Detail
Cibachrome photograph on paper, 40 x 50 cm.
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, VAG 97.2 a-zzzz
Photo: Trevor Mills.

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

Figure 10. Rodney Graham, *Stanley Park Cedar, No.7* (1991)
 Colour photo, 264.5 x 180.5 cm
 Collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 11. Rodney Graham and David Hepworth, *Camera Obscura* (1979)
 Cardboard, cibachrome photograph, paint, wood and plexiglass,
 Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, VAG 86.21 a-c
 Photo: Trevor Mills.

Figure 12.

Figure 13.

Figure 14.

Figure 15

Figure 12. Sylvie Readman, *Petite histoire des ombres* (1991) Detail
Series of eight black and white photographs, 51 x 61 cm

Figure 13. Sylvie Readman, *Petite histoire des ombres* (1991) Detail
Series of eight black and white photographs, 51 x 61 cm

Figure 14. Sylvie Readman, *Petite histoire des ombres* (1991) Detail
Series of eight black and white photographs, 51 x 61 cm

Figure 15. Sylvie Readman, *Petite histoire des ombres* (1991) Detail
Series of eight black and white photographs, 51 x 61 cm

Figure 16.

Figure 16. Lorraine Gilbert, *Ram Creek Valley, Invermere, B.C.* (1989)
Silver gelatin triptych, 20" x 24" each.
Collection of the artist.

Figure 17.

Figure 19.

Figure 20.

Figure 18.

Figure 17. Lorraine Gilbert, *Anarchist Mountain* (1986)
 SX-70 Polaroid, 3.5" x 4.25"
 Collection of the artist.

Figure 18. Lorraine Gilbert, *Anarchist Valley* (1986)
 SX-70 Polaroid, 3.5" x 4.25"
 Collection of the artist.

Figure 19. Lorraine Gilbert, *Osoyoos*, (1986)
 SX-70 Polaroid, 3.5" x 4.25"
 Collection of the artist.

Figure 20. Lorraine Gilbert, *Swamp* (1985)
 SX-70 Polaroid, 3.5" x 4.25"
 Collection of the artist.

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