

North as Nature: An Ecocritical Analysis of Royal Canadian Air Force Photography
and Leslie Reid's *Mapping Time*

by

Hannah Keating

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Abstract

A semiotic analysis of visual narratives, this thesis explores representations of Arctic landscape to uncover discourses of North and Nature. In the mid-twentieth century, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was tasked with photographing the Canadian Arctic to construct accurate maps of the region. And, following a residency with the Canadian Forces Artists Program in 2013, contemporary artist Leslie Reid began an ongoing series of paintings and photo-mosaics: *Mapping Time*. This trans-historical thesis is dedicated to an ecologically sensitive approach and considers how aerial photographs of the RCAF not only represent space, but also construct narratives of Canadian sovereignty and contribute to an idea of North as Nature. Integrating examples of RCAF photographs into her photomontages, Reid asks viewers to contemplate the history of Arctic mapping and her paintings welcome a critical approach to representations of place, space, and landscape.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Illustrations	v
List of Appendices	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A Historical Overview of Nature, North, and Aerial Photography	20
Chapter Two: <i>Mapping Time</i>	46
Conclusion	71
Illustrations	76
Bibliography	81
Appendix A	87
Appendix B	88

List of Illustrations

Figure 1.1 Royal Canadian Air Force, "Photograph A11447.187," *National Air Photo Library*, July 1948.

Figure 1.2 Royal Canadian Air Force, "Photograph A11447.188," *National Air Photo Library*, July 1948.

Figure 2.1 Leslie Reid, *Kaskawulsh II 60°41'N; 137°53'W*, 2014.

Figure 2.2 Leslie Reid, *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W*, 2014.

Figure 2.3 Leslie Reid, *Kaskawulsh: Mosaic*, 2016.

Figure 2.4 Leslie Reid, *Yellowknife: Mosaic*, 2016.

Figure 2.5 Leslie Reid, *Resolute: Mosaic*, 2016.

Figure 2.6 Leslie Reid, *Llewellyn: Mosaic*, 2016.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Copyright Permissions

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Introduction

The topic for this thesis began with a personal interest in the Arctic as a site for contemporary creativity. It seemed to be an endless source of inspiration for artistic contemplations of space. Climate change debates and an increased awareness of Canada's colonial history have generated more public attention for the region. Having never been to Arctic myself, it was interesting to me that representations served to construct a rather full version of what a place is like. An ongoing creative process of defining northern space, artworks of Arctic landscapes invite romantic exploration in public imaginations.

In the midst of what turned out to be a very complicated space for pondering art, ideas, and relationships, I realized a couple important things: First, the Arctic is always already many things, simultaneously. It is defined in multiple and contradictory terms, yet, as I will discuss further in Chapter Two, the *idea* of North is unified in the face of this inconsistency; diverse encounters with Arctic representations maintain cohesion despite the actual multiplicity of the region. This phenomenon is strikingly similar to Edward Said's description of colonialism in *Orientalism*. In this text, Said suggests that a central feature of colonial power is the definition of the colonizer through the construction of an "Other." Framed as the antithesis of Western civilization—pure wilderness—the North has been used to define Canadian identity for centuries. For even longer, the Arctic occupied the imagination of explorers from around the world as the ultimate in unattainability, and nature at its most pure and threatening. But, over time and with new

technologies, it became more and more attainable in the eyes of Western imperialists, like John Barrow of England and Nikolai Rumyantsev of Russia.¹ Following a long line of hero-adventurers, aerial photography of the twentieth century then accomplished complete cartographic coverage of the Arctic terrain and waterways that had been long considered impenetrable.

Here was my second important realization: narratives of the North looked strikingly like constructions of Nature. In addition to controlling people, Nature is also manipulated by the imperial gaze and constructed in visual culture. The history of masculine rhetoric in Arctic exploration and the feminization of nature are both applicable to the construction of North as Nature in the visual history of landscape painting. When it comes to representations of the North, it is uncommon for artists to turn their backs to a sublime view or to shy away from creating imaginative natural spaces. In fact, paintings of the land proliferate non-native interpretations. This is certainly true for contemporary artist Leslie Reid whose recent paintings, examined in detail in these pages, are indeed representations of Arctic space. However, the visual language of her works appears different from the historical landscape works I had seen and I was curious to explore what those differences might be and what sort of consequences they had in terms of representing a relationship between nature and culture.

This thesis attends to the complex interactions of the abovementioned ideas to investigate the idea of North as Nature. Much has been said about the framing of the North through signs of varying kinds and degrees, but I will manoeuvre through

¹ John McCannon, *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), 127-128.

the North insofar as it is represented as a natural space and as significant to Canadian sovereignty. I examine two main groups of images. The first are photographs that were made for, and employed in, a project of mapping the Canadian Arctic. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was employed to fly planes outfitted with cameras over Arctic terrain; I will be looking at images made during the peak years of the Arctic-mapping program (1948-1951). The second group of images examined here are Reid's recent paintings and photographic collages from the series *Mapping Time*. Not only does Reid incorporate RCAF photographs into her work, but she also draws on her own expedition to the Canadian Arctic in 2013, which was sponsored by the Canadian Forces Artists Program. Settler representations of North, by military personnel in the first instance and an artist in the second, have been chosen as the subject of this study to demonstrate how these specific images have contributed to a construction of northern space for southern audiences. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to pursue an exploration of Inuit and Indigenous visual culture, I wish to acknowledge that a further study on representations produced within and by northern communities would yield valuable criticisms and perspectives. This thesis reflects on the history of mapping in the north, interactions between people and places, and the notion of landscape in contemporary art; Reid's works present an opportunity to explore multiple meanings of North across time.

I will argue that aerial photographic mapping in the Arctic was an exercise in imperial power. The RCAF photographs are consistent with a visual history in the medium of landscape that frames Nature as independent from humanity, and more

importantly, as available for colonial attainment. Not only tools in a process of knowledge production, the photographs are also visual objects that represent, and therefore help to construct, ideas of North and of Nature. The communicative potential of these images are broadened by their inclusion in Leslie Reid's work, which I argue make use of a visual language that in places coheres, but more often complicates, an easy relationship to spaces of the North. Moreover, I will demonstrate how Reid's paintings and mosaics are fruitful invitations to consider more critically the discursive and extra-discursive qualities of Nature.

It is the breadth of their interpretive potential that makes Reid's photographic mosaics and paintings an ideal case study for examining changing relationships to the North. The mosaics are transformative projects; making use of archival photographs, Reid recruits visual objects made for a very specific purpose and for limited viewership into a broader cultural forum. Introducing new viewers and viewing contexts to photographic mapping operations not only opens up an interpretive opportunity with regard to the actual photographs, it also introduces a rarely discussed period in the history of Canadian sovereignty debates to new audiences. In addition to the photographs that reach from the pre-Cold War era to the present, Reid's paintings are triggers for intellectual and emotional engagement as contemporary images of Arctic spaces. This thesis both provides an introduction to the era of twentieth-century photographic mapping of the north and delves into the multiple meanings produced within the spaces of Reid's visual reflections on land, memory, and identity.

State of the Literature

The topic of this thesis is interdisciplinary and is, therefore, particularly broad in scope. As such, my analyses fit within a diverse field of academic research and are not easily categorized into any one specialized area. The scholarly literature I have drawn on for this study ranges from that which addresses Leslie Reid's contemporary practice to the history of RCAF photography and from scholarly conceptualizations of "North" to ecologically sensitive visual histories.

Catalogues and print articles related to Leslie Reid's exhibitions account for much of her bibliography.² Reid was born and currently resides in Ottawa, Ontario. Her artwork has been exhibited locally at the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Carleton University Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, and, most recently, the Diefenbunker, Canada's Cold War Museum. Reid has also shown works across Canada, including in Toronto, Montréal, Calgary, Kingston, and Oshawa, as well as in international venues. Relevant to this thesis are Laura Brandon's catalogue *Group 6: The Canadian Forces Artists Program, 2012-2013* (2015) and articles in *Galleries West*, *Border Crossings*, and *Ottawa Magazine*.³ With notable accomplishments nationally and abroad, and as a professor of fine arts at the University of Ottawa for decades, Reid's influence extends beyond the City of Ottawa and to generations of students. Her works warrant a more sustained piece of writing given her reputation

² For a full list of publications: Leslie Reid, "CV," <http://www.lesliereid.ca/bio.html>.

³ Laura Brandon, *Group 6: The Canadian Forces Artists Program, 2012-2013* (Ottawa: Diefenbunker, Canada's Cold War Museum, 2015); Paul Gessell, "Mapping the North," *Galleries West*, print edition (Spring 2016): 34-37; Petra Halkes, *Border Crossings* 34, 3 (Fall 2015): 129-130; Paul Gessell, "Profiles: Arctic inspires new art by Leslie Reid," *Ottawa Magazine*, online edition (2014); Paul Gessell, "Arctic Attraction," *Ottawa Magazine*, print edition (Winter 2014): 37-39.

in the Canadian contemporary art scene and the relevance of her more recent works to pressing issues of today.

With regard to literature on the Arctic operations of the RCAF, the resources are somewhat limited and have three primary points of focus: historical, political, and scientific. Some of these materials provide insights into contemporary military thinking at the time. A report published in 1950 by the *Arctic Institute of North America* and written by Wing Commander R. I. Thomas of the RCAF is one such example. In his report, Thomas summarizes the accomplishments, challenges, and technical details of the RCAF, all of which offers valuable first-hand accounts of the Arctic mapping operations. This source is also beneficial as it is dedicated to the peak years of the Arctic operations and therefore pertinent to this study.

Legion Magazine has published a series of articles by Hugh Halliday charting the history of RCAF activities. Two of these articles pertain to Arctic photographic operations and their content covers the introduction of photography to the RCAF's mandate in the early 1920s to the final years of these projects in the 1960s. Peter Kikkert explores the historical and political dimensions of the RCAF operations in an electronic publication from the Department of National Defence: *De-icing Required!: The Historical Dimension of the Canadian Air Force's Experience in the Arctic* (2012).⁴ An earlier governmental publication, *Skyview Canada: A Story of Aerial Photography in Canada* (1975), is another survey whose chapters on "Postwar Military Air Surveys" and "The National Air Photo Library" are of particular interest in the

⁴ Peter Kikkert, *De-icing Required!: The Historical Dimension of the Canadian Air Force's Experience in the Arctic* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2012).

context of this thesis.⁵ *Photographing Canada from Flying Canoes* is a comprehensive survey of aerial photography in Canada before 1940.⁶ While this literature offers valuable insights into this technical endeavour and attends to some of the political motivations for cartographic production, the photographs themselves have received virtually no attention. By bringing together histories of the pre-Cold War and post-colonial theory, my thesis will offer new perspectives on the Arctic operations of the RCAF and consider the semiotic value of the mapping photographs as agents in the processes of establishing borders and defining territory.

Sherrill E. Grace's comprehensive, interdisciplinary survey of the North and its discourses constitutes an important investigation into how current perceptions of the Arctic in the Canadian south have been shaped according to a number of social and cultural forces. *Canada and the Idea of North* (2008) draws on visual, literary, and historical analysis to better understand how 'southerners' in Canada think about the North and why that relationship is important.⁷ In terms of analyzing how images construct an idea of North, Grace's theory is influential in the methods of visual analysis undertaken in this thesis.

Scholar Renée Hulan similarly argues that constructions of nordicity are idealized and artificial.⁸ Approaching the discussion through critical ethnology and literary theory, Hulan's book is focused on disputing the myth of collective identity

⁵ Don W. Thomson, *Skyview Canada: A Story of Aerial Photography in Canada* (Ottawa: Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, 1975).

⁶ S. Bernard Shaw, *Photographing Canada from Flying Canoes* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 2001).

⁷ Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North*, electronic document (Saint-Lazare: Gibson Library Connections, 2008).

⁸ Renée Hulan, *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

based in Canada's "wilderness." Both of these sources have become important contributions to the study of North as a cultural construction, but what they do not address is the construction of nature-culture dichotomies. Grace's project is based on the discursive formation of the North as a multiplicity of ideas, constantly in flux; therefore, she proposes that much remains to be done. My project, for one, will add a further layer to "the multifaceted North" by investigating a new case study relevant to the larger cultural framework of ideas of North.

This thesis also draws on the rich body of ecocriticism, which—as I discuss at more length below—is defined by Alan C. Braddock and Christopher Irmscher as a "pointedly ethical integration of visual analysis, cultural interpretation, and environmental history."⁹ In 2013, Nicholas Bradley and Ella Soper edited a collection of ecocritical writings titled *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013).¹⁰ Spanning forty years of ecocritical work in Canadian literary studies, the publication demonstrates the fecundity of this particular field, and the need to expand its reach to visual arts.

A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History (2009) represents one such effort in a U.S. context. In the volume's introduction, editors Braddock and Irmscher state that "ecocritical art history recognizes that the world is not exclusively the province of human beings."¹¹ Elena Glasberg has also successfully applied an ecocritical approach to art historical analysis in a number of

⁹ Alan C. Braddock and Chrstoph Irmscher eds, *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 4.

¹⁰ Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013).

¹¹ Braddock and Irmscher, 4.

publications. In “Living Ice: Rediscovery of the Poles in an Era of Climate Crisis” (2011), Glasberg moves beyond a conception of land as attainable territory and instead analyzes artists who “work with, rather than suppress, the paradox of human presence.”¹² As artists like Reid produce works that challenge pre-existing southern conceptualizations of the Arctic, an ecocritical approach to their works will be beneficial in opening up discussions about human-nature relations. Breaking down the nature-culture dichotomy in this way has precedents in other related fields, but represents a new project of intellectual investigation in art history.

Certainly, more interdisciplinary texts shape the broader field of literature on the topics addressed in this thesis. William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness” (1996) and Kate Soper’s *What is Nature?* (1995) are important anthropological and historical explorations into the definition of nature.¹³ Philosophical inquiries form the base of much of this interdisciplinary work. Post-Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, G.W.F. Hegel, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Marx have been influential in the modern literatures on nature, culture, and humanity. For instance, drawing on Marxist themes, Raymond Williams has written extensively on the topic of nature and culture. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1975), he suggests that “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language.”¹⁴

¹² Elena Glasberg, “Living Ice: Rediscovery of the Poles in an Era of Climate Crisis,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 39 (2011): 223.

¹³ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996); Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-human* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995).

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1975), 219.

Like Williams, and many others who have criticised exchange economies as the source of rupture in nature-human unity, Neil Smith employs Marx's theories on human alienation to show how nature is produced within capitalist structures. What is of interest to Marx, and to Smith, is the consequences cultural processes have had on social systems, including the exploitation of the labouring classes and alienation from one's own labour.¹⁵ These familiar Marxist discussions are relevant to an ecocritical approach because they offer modes of interpretation and historically grounded perspectives from which to view ideas about nature in artistic representations. Drawing heavily on Kate Soper's argument in *What is Nature?*, I demonstrate in this thesis how ideas about Nature are both constructed in human society and "extra-discursive," which allows for, and in fact demands, ecocritical analyses in art.

Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives (2010) edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt is a collection of ecocritical essays organized geographically, with one essay in the North American section on the topic of the Arctic.¹⁶ A similar, but far more extensive study into the natural and cultural history of the polar region, particularly its glaciers, is described in Julie Cruikshank's *Do*

¹⁵ Ultimately, Marx proposes that in an early, pre-capitalist stage, human society and nature were unified. Social relations developed out of an awareness of others and value in cooperation in productive activity. Nature and "man" were then both contaminated by the transformative process of production in capitalism. Nature, as that which is untouched or unaffected by human dealings, is a common interpretation in the literature and in colloquial usage. The idea that humans have been torn from a unity with nature is also central to an ecological perspective. For more on Neil Smith's analysis, see Neil Smith, "The Production of Nature" *Uneven Development*, Third Edition (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt eds, *Post-colonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination (2005). Cruikshank studies oral histories and worldviews of the Tlingit and Athapaskan peoples of the St. Elias mountain range. In addition to highlighting and introducing readers to Indigenous conceptualizations of the relationships between humans and nature, she demonstrates how indigenous and settler narratives produce social landscapes.¹⁷ *Postcolonial Green and Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (2009) similarly explore the contributions Indigenous histories and knowledge can make to global debates on climate and the environment.¹⁸ All of these texts are testaments to the growing field of ecocriticism, but they also welcome further reflections on the definition of space and nature-culture relations.

Methodology

The theoretical approach for this thesis has three key facets. The first is my chosen method of visual analysis, informed by ecocriticism and semiotics. The second aspect of my method is postcolonial criticism, informed by Edward Said's concept of "imagined geographies" and the affective ability of images to control and mediate power relations. Lastly, I will make use of W.J.T. Mitchell's redefinition of landscape as a medium rather than a genre to propose that Reid's works serve to communicate new ideas about nature-culture relations and highlight the value of Arctic landscapes on local and global scales. Importantly, this value, though place-

¹⁷ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 2009).

focused, must be viewed as something more than economic, strategic, or imperial, which highlights the need for the interdisciplinary and ethical ecocritical approach that is so central to the entire thesis.

Ecocriticism is a developing area of specialization in several fields of intellectual inquiry. Well-established in literary studies, the approach is still relatively new to art history. Finis Dunaway's paper "Reframing the Last Frontier: Subhankar Banerjee and the Visual Politics of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge" provides an exemplary model for scholarship following an ecocritical framework. Dunaway illustrates how artists like Banerjee have disrupted the binaries of nature and culture and made the contradictions between pure wilderness and manufactured civilizations visible.¹⁹ But the point of an ecocritical approach "is not simply to explore complexity or contradiction for its own sake; rather, ecocritical art history attempts to sort through a given problem in order to articulate a more environmentally aware and responsive interpretation of the work of art."²⁰ This is the approach I am taking in my analysis of the RCAF photographs and Reid's contemporary practice. Demonstrating how the RCAF images simultaneously adhere to and break from conventional representations of Arctic landscapes and, moreover, how Reid's intervention and personal reflections aid in critiquing their objectification of the land, the thesis will provide a nuanced critical analysis of the representation of Arctic space, place, and landscape in these images.

¹⁹ Finis Dunaway, "Reframing the Last Frontier: Subhankar Banerjee and the Visual Politics of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* edited by Alan C. Braddock and Chrsitoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 254-274.

²⁰ Braddock and Irmscher, 9.

In this exercise in ecocriticism, I will specifically employ semiotics as a method of visual interpretation. Semiotics, as a tool, is sensitive to the complexity of visual narratives and allows for the analysis of images of all kinds, given the democratized categorization of all images as makers of meaning. Therefore, it provides this thesis liberating opportunities to analyse image codes not otherwise intended for “artistic” consideration. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson have argued that semiotics “offers a theory and a set of analytic tools that are not bound to a particular object domain. Thus it liberates the analyst from the problem that transferring concepts from one discipline into another entails.”²¹ When discussing, through visual analysis, ecological themes and narratives, semiotics will ensure this interaction of disciplines does not override the ultimate goal of producing an art historical thesis. Interestingly, Reid’s intervention, in itself, achieves similar interdisciplinary reach. Pairing scientific images with an artistic project encourages a semiotic reading of the RCAF photographs and the work as a whole.

To a similar end, rather than construct a historical context for the given works, my thesis will refer to the framing of signs. The problem with context, as highlighted by semiotics, relates to its constructed nature, as a text itself. Context is a distanced interpretation of the past and consists of signs that require their own interpretation. Bal and Bryson promote framing over context because “by examining the social factors that frame the signs, it is possible to analyze simultaneously the practices of the past and our own interaction with them.”²² Bal and Bryson propose

²¹ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 73, 2 (1991): 176, accessed April 19, 2015, JSTOR.

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

a narrative theory or “narratology” based in semiotics, applicable to the study of images:

[The] act of looking at a narrative painting is a dynamic process. The viewer moves about the surface to anchor his or her look at a variety of positions. These positions are not just alternatives, as a pluralistic view would have it, but are interrelated and embedded... [The] atomization of narrative within a discursive order, the integration of pluralization with embeddedness allows for an account of ideology that breaks away from monolithic readings without falling back into an “innocent” relativism.²³

I will follow this model of interpreting signs and uncovering embedded narratives to demonstrate how images, as constructed representations of landscapes, support or subvert narratives of the North, its people and its land.

Collapsing time and space is another function of Reid’s constructions.

Appropriately, Bal proposes a semiotic process that privileges the present in looking at images from the past. Bal’s assertion that meaning is an event, that experiences with artworks are generated in the present with “powerful cultural effects,”²⁴ gains particular relevance in this thesis wherein both historical and contemporary images will be considered from the position of my own social and temporal moment. Bal and Bryson characterize this position in the following way:

This addition from the present is emphatically not to be taken as a flaw in our historical awareness, or a sign of failure to distance ourselves from our own

²³ Ibid., 205.

²⁴ Norman Bryson, “Introduction,” in *Looking in: The Art of Viewing*, ed. Mieke Bal, (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 2001), 2.

time, but as an absolutely inevitable proof of the presence of the cultural position of the analyst within the analysis, which, from a semiotic point of view, is not surprising. To take that presence into account makes the analysis, in fact, more rather than less historically responsible.²⁵

As stated above, Reid has, in many ways, already privileged the present in appropriating images from the past in her contemporary, personal ruminations on place and memory.²⁶ As such, my methodological or theoretical approach complements Reid's own spatiotemporal collapse; the RCAF photographs are considered for the work they did nearly seventy years ago, but also for the meanings they might communicate to viewers today.

The notion of constructed landscape is closely related to the performance of colonization articulated by Edward Said in his canonical text, *Orientalism*. One aspect of Said's discussion that is of particular relevance to the idea of North is the notion of imaginative geography, which will unify my theoretical approach. It is central to this project because it responds to the creative action undertaken by human imagination, as it relates to time and space, history and geography. Furthermore, an important quality of imaginative geography, according to Said, is its constant "vacillation" in meaning, over time and according to the needs and perspectives of those responsible for constructing the narratives, and those who

²⁵ Bal and Bryson, 207.

²⁶ In the second chapter of this thesis, direct quotes and paraphrased statements from Leslie Reid are provided to compliment my own interpretations of her work. These excerpts come from an interview with the artist. The Carleton University Research Ethics Board (Project Number 103844), provided ethics clearance for this interview with the artist.

receive them.²⁷ Representations of North are in a constant state of flux, moving between contradictory ideas and changing according to the needs of the time.

The impulse to make spaces is tied to a desire for self-definition. Said cites Claude Lévi-Strauss and his science of the concrete to explain the mind's desire for order.²⁸ Said suggests that organizing perceptions and beliefs into clear spaces, ones that can be located and responded to again and again, bestows purpose in "the economy of objects and identities that make up an environment."²⁹ Moreover, he claims that "there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away."³⁰ In the case of the North, perceptions of distance and difference have played central roles in how the area is experienced first and second hand.

The geographical distance between Resolute Bay in the High Arctic and Ottawa in southeastern Ontario is substantial, but then so is the distance between Inuvik in the Northwest Territories and Iqaluit in Nunavut, or Montréal, Quebec and Winnipeg, Manitoba. It quickly becomes clear that the "substantial" distance between North and south is more related to "dramatized distance;" otherness reveals itself to be culturally and geographically relative. Soper argues that *nature* is "the idea through which we conceptualize what is 'other' to ourselves."³¹ With nature at the heart of Arctic conceptualizations and representations, Nature and

²⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 58.

²⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), chps 1-7, cited on page 53 of *Orientalism*.

²⁹ Said, 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

³¹ Kate Soper, 16.

North become closely related in a construction of otherness. Here, dramatization refers to an over-exaggeration of separateness and, in the vast North, of blankness. It therefore pertains to a construction of North as Nature for the purpose of retailing “emptiness as a hyperborean space of possibility”³² in the context of colonialism.

Imagery produced by southerners both in response to real experiences in the Arctic or inspired by the idea of North must be approached critically. Said’s notion of imaginative geography reveals how time and space are transformed by cultural imagination into the “truths” of history and geography and how ‘near’ and ‘far’ are relative terms. Constructions of North frequently do not account for cultural and geographical relativism, but the Arctic is many places and many things, rather than one singularly definable thing. Reid’s works will provide an intellectual space within which to reflect on and engage with the Arctic landscape.

Reid’s paintings also help to emphasize the role of art in constructing ideas, not just of the North, but also of the relationship between place, space, and landscape. W.J.T. Mitchell’s essay *Imperial Landscape* will provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of these works. His (re)formation of the term landscape as a medium, rather than a genre, gets to the heart of Reid’s project, which is to create artworks of the light and space of a given place within which she has experienced the realities of the landscape. It is personal and unique to a particular moment in time and it is about the senses and memory.

³² Pavel Cenkl, “Narrative Currency in a Changing Climate: Grounding the Arctic Amid Shifting Terrain,” in *Post-colonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 146.

Mitchell also makes meaningful connections between landscape and imperialism. He charts the rise of landscape across three periods of emancipation, naturalization, and unification. The first stage sees the land freed from serving ends that are literary or religious. It encompasses the historical moment when land was supposedly enjoyed for its own sake, rather than any other decorative or illustrative end. This stage is followed by a “freeing [of] nature from the bonds of convention”; in this way, it is naturalized towards a purity that is fulfilled in the third stage of unification. Mitchell characterizes this stage as one in which “nature is unified in the perception and representation of landscape.”³³ His ultimate question is whether landscape painting itself is a medium through which the West “emancipates, naturalizes, and unifies the world for its own purposes.”³⁴

It is easy to see the connection between Mitchell’s assertion that landscape painting is closely associated with the “dreamwork” of imperialism³⁵ and Said’s narration of western imperialism over the east as a sort of imagined geography. Said suggests that the colonial construction of space, in spite of its more lived and material realities, is created and consumed by the imposing force of imperialism. In both theorizations, images of the land are caught up in a relationship of power and control. Mitchell calls it the “secret silent language” of Western imperialism and paints “landscape as a medium of cultural expression.”³⁶ This thesis will use these theories to explore the imperial work of RCAF photographs.

³³ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Organization of Chapters

The body of this thesis is organized into two chapters that correspond to the two groups of images at the centre of my discussion. I will demonstrate how the RCAF photographs represent space in a manner similar to paintings of the Arctic from the seventeenth to nineteenth century, while also recognizing their unique aerial perspective. They will be shown to participate in the construction of North as technologies of power. Michel Foucault's theorizations of power and Sherrill Grace's "idea of North" will inform this interpretation. The purpose of the first chapter is also to dig into the rich history of the RCAF mapping project, framing it within centuries of exploration and in the pre-Cold War moment of geopolitical tension. My discussion of this history and imaging rhetoric reflects Reid's own interactions with the RCAF images and her works will form the core of Chapter Two.

Expanding more fully into the question of North as Nature, the second chapter is a theoretical exercise in defining nature, with contemporary artist Leslie Reid's work as a reference point. Mosaics that refer to the construction of landscape through photographic means and paintings that present new versions of 'landscape' are Reid's personal and reflective contributions to visual cultures of North. *Mapping Time* is an apt title for her spatiotemporal exploration and is representative of the ideas in space, place, and landscape that will form the backbone of this chapter. The RCAF photographs will receive more attention in terms of the ways they participate in the new narratives Reid constructs in her mosaics and discussions of Arctic visual history and the relationship between power and landscape will continue into this chapter as well.

Chapter One: A Historical Overview of Nature, North, and Aerial Photography

At first glance, A11447.187 and A11447.188 from the National Air Photo Library (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) look nearly identical, but in fact, they are two distinct images, a pair in a geographically expansive series. The pictures were taken sometime between the second and fifth of July 1948 from a flying altitude of 20,000 feet. Posted from a military base in the Arctic to Ottawa, the negatives arrived at the Canadian government's aerial photographic laboratories in Rockcliffe a few weeks later and were printed in August.³⁷ Their visual similarity is attributable to an intentional overlap of 66%. An overlapping of two thirds is a standard measure for ensuring complete coverage and accuracy in photographic mapping. This means that the second image, A11447.188, adds an additional 33% of new information to image A11447.187. The subsequent image, A11447.189, would then partially cover its predecessor, effectively producing a series of repeated geographic data.

As scientific tools, these representations of Arctic landscape were meaningful only insofar as they related to the serial quality of a whole collection of photographs. Remarkably, that collection numbers in the millions. Layered one atop the next, the purpose of their creation was to reconstruct space according to scientifically rigorous repetition and sequence. Essentially, skilled technicians reassembled an image of Arctic territory one photograph at a time, transforming an already translated object—the photographic image—into another sort of image: a map.

³⁷ National Air Photo Library (Ottawa), "Catalogue Card," *Box A11447 (1-442)*.

A critical engagement with the aerial photographs of the late 1940s and early 1950s, like the examples introduced above, leads to a broader consideration of other Arctic representations that have helped to construct the North as a rich, yet intangible, vast, yet definable place in popular imagination. In this chapter, I will frame the photographs and, more specifically, the RCAF's project of mapping within an historical climate characterized by colonial ambition and dichotomized conceptions of nature and culture. This, in turn, will reveal narratives of heroism and wilderness, as well as a keen striving for sovereignty and national identity. Representations of land, in painting, photographs, and maps will be considered as techniques of power similar to structures of control defined by Michel Foucault.

Constructing North as Nature: A Brief Visual History of the Arctic

In his book, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*, Edward Casey argues that maps and landscape paintings have been employed across time by expanding empires. As differing, but sometimes-converging, modes of spatial representation, maps and landscapes paintings have distinct histories in Roman, Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, French, and English pictorial traditions. In the growth of each of these empires, nature-based themes and subject matters coincided with the takeover or claiming of territory. This suggests a meaningful connection between the representation of space and its objectification in imperialism.³⁸

W.J.T. Mitchell makes a similar argument in his essay "Imperial Landscape." Like paint or language, Mitchell argues that landscape is a "material means" or "a

³⁸ Edward Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values.”³⁹ Pointing to the same history of mapping and landscape painting as Casey, Mitchell likewise highlights how these cultural traditions developed during sustained periods of imperial conquest. Not because of this history, but as demonstrated by its trajectory, Mitchell suggests that landscape is a medium capable of expressing value and meaning: “landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc.),” well before it is transformed into any sort of secondary representation.⁴⁰ The representation of space in myriad forms extends to the North American landscape tradition in the West and the North, where the promise of purity in wilderness and the gleam of frontier territory were interwoven in the viewing of landscapes and their representations. In this section on the visual history of the North, Casey and Mitchell’s evaluation of the connection between landscape and power will be elaborated.

Simultaneously an “adventure-filled frontier,” a site of liberation from the oppressions of civilization, and a space of despair and disorder, the Arctic has been a lucrative source of inspiration for artists over the course of Western contact.⁴¹ For instance, whaling expeditions and hand-coloured engravings introduced the seas and icy landscapes of the North to European imagination. Popular among seventeenth-century Dutch merchants and traders, painters like Abraham Storck captured the excitement of Arctic hunts. In the nineteenth century, a boom in Arctic

³⁹ Mitchell, 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ McCannon, 126.

expeditions saw government-funded voyages swarming to the pole. Artists frequently accompanied these expeditions and their drawings were “made into prints for publication and paintings for exhibition.”⁴² One of the most celebrated of these works is *The Icebergs* (1861), by American painter Fredrick Edwin Church. This canvas, an imaginative homage to Franklin’s lost ship, speaks of the artist’s belief in the spiritual sublime, as seen in the majesty of the ice and romantic drama of a fallen ship’s wooden mast.⁴³

Images of the Arctic produced in parallel with exploration by sailors, whalers, adventurers, and traders, are continually dependent on a masculine heroic narrative and notions of the sublime and wilderness. From the seventeenth century through to the nineteenth, artworks and literature presented stories that pit men against the terrors of nature. Strength and resolve were celebrated in these works, whether or not the quest was successful, and images of art and science were equally invested in such glorifications in the context of nature’s northern sublime.

Frederick William Beechey’s *HMS Hecla in Baffin Bay* (1821) is a conventional view of the Arctic from the nineteenth century. This work was made to illustrate a publication outlining the “exploration of eight hundred miles of uncharted coastline and the discovery of the entrance to the Northwest Passage,” from the 1819-1820 expedition of the British navy.⁴⁴ *HMS Hecla in Baffin Bay*, featuring a ship sailing past a towering iceberg, evokes the danger of the expedition and the beauty of the sea and sky, while capturing the majesty of an iceberg, which

⁴² Barbara C. Matilsky, *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775-2012* (Bellingham: Whatcom Museum, 2013), 62.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

was a motif much beloved by curious western viewers.⁴⁵ Artistic views of sublime nature such as this one were seen as sources of terror, beauty, and awe. This, and the Arctic's perceived emptiness, led to representations of the land and sea as a space with potential threats to human life, but also as a place that could host human triumph.

Not unlike the nineteenth-century construction of the American frontier in the West, the Arctic was perceived as 'pure' nature in its lack of human presence. An obvious falsehood given a long history of Inuit occupation, William Cronon describes the interaction between "wilderness" and "frontier" as a dichotomization of nature and culture. Nature is characterized by Cronon's historical analysis as a *lack* of human presence; natural spaces are yet-to-be-civilized domains of promising renewal in an age of ever-growing urbanism.⁴⁶ But the frontier myth in the West was inherently and knowingly ephemeral; once settled and developed, the frontier became domesticated, and thus no longer "wild."⁴⁷ At different moments in the history of western contact with the Arctic, it was both considered and condemned as a site of colonial settlement. The Arctic was a site of eternal wilderness and a desirable, conquerable territory that promised to offer a supply of valuable natural resources. Not quite a nurturing Eden, the Arctic nevertheless held promise of wealth and was presented as a stage upon which imperialistic ambitions could be performed. Nature and humanity were thus decidedly separate entities.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 62-3.

⁴⁶ Cronon, 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

Twentieth-century conceptualizations of the Arctic as an object of imperial interest are summarized by Don W. Thomson, author of *Skyview Canada: A Story of Aerial Photography in Canada*. His 1975 statement reflects technological optimism of the day and champions the promise of human achievement, here aided by the technology of aerial photography:

Aerial surveys now reach into the most remote corners of Canada, rapidly extending the framework of our knowledge of this country's less accessible regions and helping to speed the rate of discovery of natural resources in those areas.⁴⁸

With this frame, RCAF photographs can be seen as agents in the rapid extension of knowledge. They record information, but also produce power. Interestingly, there are meaningful connections to be made between this modern perspective of access to territory and resources made possible through technology, innovation, and human ambition, and exploration of the Arctic by Western nations over centuries. This continuity in visual history and imperial ambition supports Casey and Mitchell's theories on landscape and power.

While I do not mean to confuse survey photography with the tradition of landscape in art, it is valuable to consider the role of photography as a tool in the imperial project. American historian Alan Trachtenberg writes on photographs as survey tools in the context of the United States Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel (1867-1872). This frontier survey charted, mapped, and analyzed the territory of the American West, bringing "the alien and unfamiliar into a familiar

⁴⁸ Thomson, 2.

system of knowledge.”⁴⁹ Trachtenberg aligns the acts of photography, mapping, and naming, stating that a “named view is one that has been seen, known, and thereby already possessed.”⁵⁰ In this geological survey, scientific measurement was meant to make land economically and culturally accessible. Similarly, the RCAF photographs made Arctic land ideologically attainable and are therefore connected to early and ongoing efforts to know, name, and possess.

“To an aircraft, no country is inaccessible”: Aerial Photography and Technologies of Control

One of the first things viewers of A11447.188 (Fig. 1.2) might note is the apparent invisibility of any human presence on the ground—no lights, buildings, roads, or people. The land appears wild in the truest sense of the term. Black and white terrain is defined through highlights and shade, indicating variations in elevation. Most of the photograph is occupied by an intricacy of braided streams moving across the land. While an untrained eye cannot come to more complex geological or botanical conclusions, it is fairly evident that traversing the land on foot seems a near impossibility. Or at least, such a trek is more possible in a plane. The aerial perspective, as an indicator of modern technologies and an elevated position of power, is central to the symbolic quality of the RCAF photographs.

The pairing of technologies in aerial photography is often cited in the history of photography as an inevitability: the camera and the airplane were almost

⁴⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 127.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

contemporaneous products of modernity. The chosen aircraft of the RCAF for photo-survey was the Avro Lancaster. Designed as a bomber in the Second World War, it was capable of flying higher than the pre-war Avro Ansons and was therefore able to photograph more territory.⁵¹ In a report from 1950, Wing Commander R.I. Thomas of the RCAF describes the make-up of 408 Squadron, which was the main unit in the program: “Tri-camera photography is undertaken exclusively by 408 Squadron. This squadron consists of eight long-range Lancaster X aircraft, quipped with three Fairchild F224 cameras precision-mounted in a single mount.”⁵² Photographing such a vast and diverse territory as the Arctic depended on the precision and capabilities of these planes and their specialized photographic equipment. In spite of the challenges associated with photographing in the unique conditions posed by the Arctic, aerial photography, and its applications for geographic projects, were praised for liberating and redefining the possibilities of remote accessibility.

Thomson identifies 1920-1970 as a boom era in aerial photography across Western nations. He argues that the effects of this escalation were “nowhere more dramatic than in Canada,” where “rapid, almost breathtaking changes” occurred.⁵³ Unparalleled access to remote terrain and the resulting improvements in the development of natural resources, commercial business, and sovereignty are among

⁵¹ Hugh Halliday, “Mapping in Full Flight: Air Force, Part 28,” *Legion Magazine*, (March 11, 2008): unpaginated, accessed January 15, 2016, <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2008/08/mapping-in-full-flight/>.

⁵² R. I. Thomas, “Photographic Operations of the Royal Canadian Air Force,” *Arctic Institute of North America* 3, 3 (1950): 156, accessed October 2015, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14430/arctic3963>.

⁵³ Thomson, 2.

the key changes to which Thomson refers. In a 1966 publication from the *Committee for Aerial Photography*, contributor W. W. Williams offers similar accolades for the potential of aerial photography. Williams asserts that “a map with blank spaces is no map” and, with an enthusiasm characteristic of mid-twentieth-century faith in technology and the notion of progress, he proclaims: “to an aircraft no country is inaccessible.”⁵⁴ The RCAF photographs, therefore, can be read as views that flatten and reduce territory to a surface for calculated exploitation and military strategy. This relationship is illuminated by Michel Foucault’s theorizations on society’s structures of control.

According to Foucault, social coding controls bodies; societal structures and processes are the techniques through which power is maintained. In tracing the historic trajectory of modern technologies of power, Foucault stops to discuss the role of the ‘table’ in the eighteenth century. As tools of categorization, tables used in scientific, political, and economic research were used to “arrange... observe, supervise... inspect... and distribute.” Like tables, maps organize concrete space and abstract ideas into structural data. Recognizing the pursuit of accurate maps as an effect of governmental control over the Arctic exposes the close connection between the project at hand and the technologies of power Foucault articulates.

Describing the role of discipline in these structures, Foucault states that the creation of complex spaces through classification “provide[s] fixed positions and permit[s] circulation; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture.” He is speaking here, specifically, of the organization

⁵⁴ Williams, 36.

of bodies through structures of rank; extrapolating these statements to apply to maps and RCAF photographs is revealing. As tools of classification that permit circulation, we can see how movement in the North—of the Canadian and American military, international traders and travellers, Indigenous peoples, as well as tourists—is facilitated and controlled by the geographical knowledge produced by the maps.

Notably, Foucault uses the military as a definitive example of the distribution and control of bodies. The fact that an arm of the Canadian military was given the task of photographing the North prompts a consideration of past and ongoing structures of power in the region. Its land, sea, and ice are subjected to these efforts. Observed in photographs and arranged into maps, Nature is supervised, inspected, and its resources distributed. Indeed, as I suggest throughout this thesis, by extension, the North too is supervised, inspected, and distributed.

The subject of this thesis is the control and construction of Nature, or “North as Nature,” but it is important to note that a vital aspect of this history concerns Inuit and other Indigenous peoples from the northern regions of North America. Subject to manipulative strategies and exploited as “human flag poles,”⁵⁵ attempts to control the movements of these groups and to assert Canadian sovereignty in the North has had lasting negative effects on Inuit and other Indigenous populations. Relocation, residential schools, and other forms of colonial subjugation have attempted to place them in powerless, yet tactical, positions. While my aim is to unpack constructions of Nature, it is important to pause to acknowledge how

⁵⁵ The Polar Sea, “Episode 5: Arctic Exiles,” accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.polarsea360.com/episodes/05/>.

narratives of northern Indigenous peoples have also been shaped by colonial prejudice and unequal distributions of power. In works ranging from the 1922 documentary film *Nanook of the North* to current tourist imagery, the Indigenous peoples of the north have been framed in the tropes of primitivism, throughout the history of contact. Thus, the representation of these groups to and by southern audiences similarly exemplifies social construction and control.

Precedents and Pressures: Early Days of Canadian Sovereignty

Having introduced the RCAF photographs as images participating in the visual language and history of Arctic representations, I will now present a historical discussion that frames the mapping project more explicitly within Canada's quest for sovereignty. This history is valuable for understanding the photographs not just as representations of North as Nature, but also as tools in a broader imperial project. Modern exploration of the region (post-1800) has been influential in Arctic sovereignty debates of the last one hundred years. Most importantly, British expeditions during this era significantly contributed to the grounds upon which Canada would fight for its rights to Arctic territory.

Because this history is extensive, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss any more than a few key points of interest; however, framing the photographs in this way illuminates the reasons for Canada's concerns and reveals impulses pertaining to mapping and questions of imperialism in the Arctic. Conceived simultaneously as a place for heroic adventure, scientific and economic richness, and as central to twentieth century geopolitical negotiations, it will also

demonstrate how RCAF photographs are one more example of Canada looking north.

I will begin with the nineteenth century, during which time a renewed interest in *terra nullis*, the Arctic as empty terrain, prompted a series of influential interdisciplinary expeditions; in turn, their discoveries and accounts captured the public's imagination, reaching into and affecting views of the Arctic for the century and a half that followed. In English history, the father of modern Arctic exploration is Sir John Barrow. His perspective regarding the Arctic, while coloured by prestige and national accomplishment, saw the region as economically important and, with growing threats from Russian and American explorers, a matter of security for the British Empire.⁵⁶ With a newly unoccupied navy following the conclusion of Napoleonic wars, Barrow coordinated two convoys on expeditions to the Arctic under the leadership of John Franklin and John Ross. In the words of historian John McCannon, "thus, it is said, began the Western World's nine-decade assault on the pole."⁵⁷ These early English expeditions were publicized, popular, and influential in producing an impression of Arctic drama in the nineteenth century. For example, stories of Sir John Franklin's failed 1845 expedition to find the Northwest Passage was, at the time, one of the most popular sources of public fascination. This interest endures today, with the mysterious journey continuing to produce symbols for Arctic imaginaries.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ McCannon, 127.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁸ In September 2014, a Canadian expedition led by Parks Canada discovered the wreck of Franklin's lost ship, *The HMS Erebus*. In addition to support from public, private, and non-profit organizations, the expedition was also funded by the

Despite the dominating presence of British explorers, the burst of activity in the first half of the nineteenth century also saw naturalists, scientists, and painters from Russia, Germany, France, and Scandinavia in the Arctic, traversing coastlines, naming sounds, inlets, and islands, recording, describing, rendering, and patrolling. Artists and authors called upon the imagery and conceptualizations of the North as Nature in their work; just as had been done in previous centuries, these representations were amended with “explorers’ press reports and autobiographies” in order to place the Arctic “well within the public’s mental grasp.”⁵⁹ In many ways, the Arctic “remained a wild and remote space” in these publications; none of the century’s expeditions were yet successful in reaching the North Pole, or sailing the whole of the Northwest Passage, quests which galvanized public interest, particularly in Britain.⁶⁰ As an empty, desolate, and dangerous place, Sir John Barrow thought the Arctic worthless for human settlement.⁶¹ Thus, the Arctic persisted as an image of “the ultimate in unattainability.” However, into the later decades of the century, a growing number of expeditions claiming major successes changed this perception until the Arctic gradually transitioned into a symbol for “the limitless possibilities of Western civilization in the modern age.”⁶²

To be sure, the promise of “attaining” the Arctic seemed even more likely at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. Because the Arctic was one of the few places on

Canadian Government, suggesting a continued national interest in and promotion of this historic saga. Parks Canada, “The Franklin Expedition,” <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/culture/franklin/index.aspx>.

⁵⁹ McCannon, 126.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁶¹ John English, *Ice and Water: Politics, Peoples, and the Arctic Council* (Toronto: Penguin Canada Books Inc., 2013), 47.

⁶² McCannon, 126 and 132.

Earth that had areas of “yet-unclaimed” territory, global interest escalated and, in a scramble for unclaimed territory, imperialism became widespread among western nations by the late 1800s.⁶³ Only a few years after 1 July 1867, the Canadian government acquired Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Territory from Britain, which was followed by the transfer of the Arctic Archipelago from Britain to Canada in 1880. And yet, Canadian claims to the Arctic were not nearly as solid as was thought at the time, or even is popularly conceived today. While naming and mapping Arctic islands and waterways, most nations, including Canada, were less interested in governing or occupying that territory. But by the twentieth century, it was clear to the Canadian government that sovereignty in the north would require direct governance.⁶⁴

In the fall of 1902, a report was ordered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s government to investigate the state of Canada’s claims to Arctic territory. The confidential report, co-written by Comptroller Fred White of the North West Mounted Police, Commissioner John McDougald of the Customs Department, and Robert Bell of the Geological Survey of Canada, called for “immediate steps to assert [Canadian] authority in the Arctic.”⁶⁵ There are a number of reasons why Canadian claims came into question. First, it was doubted that the land transfer of the Arctic Archipelago was binding; prior to the transfer, state authority had not ratified the transfer, nor had it been “confirmed by exercise of jurisdiction.” Essentially this meant that there was some concern pertaining to the strength of these claims on an international

⁶³ English, 49.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁵ Shelagh D. Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 198.

stage.⁶⁶ What is more, Norwegian, American, and Russian explorers continued to make notable contributions to Arctic discovery. For instance, in 1905 Roald Amundsen of Norway, completed the first successful voyage through the Northwest Passage and in 1909, American Robert Peary announced he had reached the North Pole. It has been suggested that Peary's team actually came short of the pole, but regardless of the veracity of his accomplishment, the fact of international interest and activity in the Arctic was a threat to Canadian claims.

The Dominion Government Expedition of 1903-1904 marked one attempt to assert Canadian authority in the eastern Arctic. The expedition ship *The Neptune* carried a group of scientists and a detachment of the Royal Mounted Police into the eastern Arctic and took every opportunity to make foreign vessels aware that they were within Canadian borders and subject to Canadian law.⁶⁷ In later years, Captain Joseph-Elzear Bernier "collected fees and duties" and facilitated research to "demonstrate Canadian use and occupation" between 1906 and 1911, installing a plaque declaring Canadian ownership over the entire Arctic Archipelago in 1909.⁶⁸

Around the same time, Canadian explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson mapped areas of northern territory and "discovered" four unclaimed islands. He is best known today for three Arctic expeditions undertaken between the years 1903 and 1918.⁶⁹ Curious and ambitious, Stefansson's expeditions were federally funded and received support from admiring publics and then-Prime Minister Robert Borden. He

⁶⁶ Grant, 205.

⁶⁷ McCannon, 187.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Blunt, "Landscaping a Sovereign North: Photography and the Discourse of North in the Publications of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918" (Masters Thesis, Carleton University, 2007).

is credited with debunking a number of negative stereotypes pertaining to the Arctic landscape and the Inuit. Stefansson's critics point to his overly romantic stories and expeditions plagued by illness and death as exemplary of his poor qualities as a leader. Despite these controversies, Stefansson made significant contributions to the definition of Canadian sovereignty in the early 1900s.⁷⁰

Art and literature also played a significant role in connecting Canadians with national identity grounded in the idea of North. Sherrill E. Grace has compiled a thorough and insightful survey of some of the most influential examples of these works. She highlights how popular culture presented audiences with images of the north that they could relate to, examples of which can be seen in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), Herman Vodden's *Six Canadian Plays* (1930), expedition accounts from the notorious Canadian explorer, Vihjalmur Stefansson, and television programs such as *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* (1955-58). In discussing *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, Grace asserts: "clearly authenticity was not important; heroic masculine adventure with a strong, clear moral message about law and order in Canada's north was."⁷¹ Popular representations of the Arctic by the Group of Seven's Lawren Harris and A. Y. Jackson have similar masculine messages associated with a heroic, pristine wilderness, and a northern Canadian character. John McCannon, author of *A History of the Arctic*, suggests that these formative years in Canadian nation building were focused geographically and politically on the north; Canada was "the True North."⁷²

⁷⁰ Grace, 6-8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4-12.

⁷² McCannon, 146.

In ongoing efforts to assert sovereignty, a governmental committee published the influential “Statement of Canada’s Claims to the Arctic Islands” in 1925. This document provides a justification of boundaries that accorded with the Sector Principle, a system originally proposed by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier’s government. The Sector Principle extended the country’s eastern and western boundaries north and combated American claims to territory by requiring the U.S. to gain permission from the Canadian Government before entering the territory.⁷³ The additional fact that Denmark and Norway recognized Canadian sovereignty helped to reinforce “Canada’s political right of authority.” Proactive strategies like implementing the Arctic Islands Game Preserve, which covered the whole Arctic Archipelago, also contributed to the protection of Canadian sovereignty.⁷⁴

Mid-Twentieth Century Sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic

Settler efforts to map the Arctic have a long history. Initiated in 1902, ground surveys represent the first attempt by the Canadian government to map the Arctic. To quicken the pace of these surveys, the RCAF attempted aerial surveys. According to Wing Commander Thomas, the results of these operations “were sufficiently successful to reveal the possibilities of aerial photography.”⁷⁵ In addition to sustained military presence, RCMP stations in the Arctic represented an extension of state authority, even if the infrastructure was “developed unevenly.”⁷⁶ Following the Second World War, twenty-three years after the first attempts at aerial

⁷³ Grant, 230.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁷⁵ Thomas, 150.

⁷⁶ McCannon, 198.

photographic mapping, the Arctic would become the focus of RCAF efforts to map the country in its entirety.

The Second World War was instrumental in developing the strategies that would be employed in RCAF mapping operations, but it also ushered in an awareness of new pressures and threats to national security and sovereignty in the Arctic. An era of uncertainty, concerns for borders and alliances were at the forefront of international relations as the Second World War came to an end and Cold War tensions emerged. The attack on Pearl Harbour (1941), the occupation of Alaskan islands (1942), and the US military presence in the Arctic throughout the War demonstrate how this northern environ “had great strategic significance” on the world stage.⁷⁷ Moreover, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended the War in August 1945 had proven the devastating effects of nuclear warfare and the Gouzenko Affair in Canada shifted attention to the geographical threat of Russian access to North America over the Arctic.

Ultimately, Canada was out of the loop when it came to the nuclear secret and the government of the day was not interested in inheriting any responsibility; the country was nevertheless involved since northern Canadian mines had supplied uranium for the bomb. Many Canadians supported the idea of creating of an international governing body that could “protect the social welfare of all peoples” and eliminate the possibility of one country ruling through force.⁷⁸ The U.S. had other ambitions; “American globalism... was viewed by many Canadians as the crux

⁷⁷ English, 69-70.

⁷⁸ Robert Teigrob, *Warming Up to the Cold War: Canada and the United States' Coalition of the Willing, from Hiroshima to Korea* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 46-7.

of recent global violence and the overriding threat to future peace.”⁷⁹ Therefore, American occupation of the Arctic was of growing concern.

In the early decades of the century, Canadian presence in the Arctic was limited and dedicated to learning more about operations under extreme conditions. The American military had similar goals, but its capacity to see these ambitions through was possible on a much larger scale. Throughout the Second World War, the U.S. had approximately 43,000 personnel in the region.⁸⁰ Protection of the continent was accomplished by “building an integrated air defence system, along with air warning, weather forecasting, communications networks, surveillance, anti-submarine capabilities, and mobile strike forces.”⁸¹ Historian Robert Tiegrob demonstrates how throughout the Cold War, “U.S. officials frequently challenged Canada’s claims to much of its northern territory, arguing that ownership be determined according to the principle of ‘effective occupation’: that is, the presence of public and private citizens and organizations.”⁸² With such a dominant presence in the north, the imperialistic ambitions of the American government were especially worrying.

The Gouzenko Affair, while perhaps a minor event in the broader global community, was a significant event in Canadian Cold War history. The revelation of Soviet espionage triggered latent, but staunch criticisms of socialism in Canadian culture, resulting in public prejudice and anxieties. It has been argued that the sensationalism of the event, particularly in Canadian and American media, was an

⁷⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 49.

⁸¹ Kikkert, 34.

⁸² Teigrob, 49.

overreaction whose fallout, including “widespread abuse of individual rights, the vast expenditures of public resources, and the shattering of so many innocent lives,” was perhaps not worth it.⁸³ But Gouzenko’s evidence had to be taken seriously, especially in light of the disintegrating alliance that had once existed between Russia and the West; political action was deemed to be required. More than anything, the presence of Soviet spies in Canada had provided concrete evidence that Canada was on USSR’s radar. Added to the fear that a Russian assault on the U.S. would follow the shortest route, over the Arctic, Canada saw itself geographically threatened from the south and the north, with tensions focused on the Arctic.⁸⁴

Taking pictures, making maps: RCAF Aerial Mapping in the Arctic

Peter Kikkert has called the Arctic mapping project “the lynchpin of the government’s sovereignty strategy.”⁸⁵ While “survey operations came to a standstill” in the years of the Second World War, domestic work was begun again in 1944.⁸⁶ During that year, a number of governmental sectors employed the RCAF, which photographed a total of 20,390 square miles for the Department of Mines and Resources, the Office of the Surveyor General of Canada, the Department of Agriculture, the Farm Rehabilitation Administration, and the Government of New Brunswick.⁸⁷ While other nations, such as Britain, contracted private firms to do

⁸³ Amy Knight, *How the Cold War Began: The Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt for Soviet Spies* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2005), 12.

⁸⁴ Kikkert, 34.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁶ Thomas, 151.

⁸⁷ Thomson, 130.

aerial photography surveys, the RCAF dominated Canadian mapping efforts; Canada's was a project deeply connected to the Dominion and nation building.

In addition to these commitments, the RCAF turned its attention to the Arctic. General Andrew McNaughton had initiated a "northern training programme for the RCAF" in the mid-1920s, which Kikkert admits at least "acknowledged the country's northern boundaries,"⁸⁸ but it was not until the 1940s that Arctic mapping really took off. Thomas cites "the urgency for maps along the Alcan Highway and the Mackenzie Basin" as key motivating factors; the urgency "was so great that two squadrons were committed to photo survey" by 1945. All of the photographs from the missions of the RCAF were processed in Ottawa. The permanent aerial photographic laboratories were opened in 1936 in Rockcliffe. Popularly known as the White House, its facilities were state of the art.⁸⁹

Once again, "combat techniques learned overseas" were adapted to suit domestic aerial projects.⁹⁰ The Avro Lancasters, Britain's acclaimed Second World War bomber planes, were introduced to the Arctic operations in 1946-1947. They flew higher than the earlier contemporary aircraft and, therefore, could achieve greater photographic coverage. Vertical and tri-camera photography were used; the former creates more detailed and accurate photographs, while the later offers greater coverage. Technological advances such as these allowed the RCAF to surpass many of its goals and led to the most productive flying seasons in the history of Canadian Arctic photo survey. Thomson specifically highlights 1948 and 1949 as

⁸⁸ Kikkert, 33.

⁸⁹ In his text, Thomson claims that the White House was regarded as "the world's most impressive accommodation for aerial photographic laboratories," 127.

⁹⁰ Halliday, unpaginated.

“peak years” in the history of the RCAF’s “remarkable achievements.”⁹¹ This assertion is supported by Wing Commander Thomas’ report. Thomas notes 1948 as the record-breaking year, with 911,500 square miles covered. An additional 1,741,500 square miles were photographed between 1949 and 1950 so that by the year 1951, a total of 3,750,000 photographs were in the collection of the Royal Canadian Air Force.⁹² In 1949 and 1950 the northern units were composed of approximately 550 personnel and 33 aircraft.⁹³

While the sheer quantity of photographs signalled efficiency, the accuracy of the images, as data, was of equal importance. International standards for scale had been set in recent years and the Canadian government was keen to keep up and comply with international models for map making. As such, aerial mapping projects of the mid-twentieth century were largely motivated by a desire to map the nation’s territory on a 1:250,000 scale.⁹⁴ Short Range Aid to Navigation (SHORAN) was instrumental in offering the RCAF the accuracy they sought. A method of measuring distance electronically through radar, it was also used in the Second World War to improve military bombing accuracy. The SHORAN system was adopted by the RCAF to control the position of a plane between two ground points, increasing the efficiency and quality of photographs. It proved to be a more accurate system than ones previously in use, which were based on astronomical fixes.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Thomson, 127.

⁹² Thomas, 151.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁴ Thomson, 130.

⁹⁵ Thomas, 156.

At regular intervals throughout a flying season, the RCAF would send exposed film with reports detailing the area covered, the weather conditions at the time of exposure, the height and speed of the aircraft, and other details to the Rockcliffe laboratories.⁹⁶ Accuracy of photographic negatives was tested on backlit “annotating tables.” The technicians would look for gaps in the ground cover, errors in overlap, or poor quality in the photographic mosaics and label each successful photograph with a reference number. Messages sent back to the field would allow the RCAF crews to re-photograph necessary areas. The efficiency of this process was conditional on the expertise of the personnel at Rockcliffe and their ability “to analyse camera faults quickly from the negatives and pass the information to the detachment in the field.”⁹⁷

The process was collaborative, yet each section was dedicated to its own distinct responsibilities. In his report, Wing Commander Thomas is clear that “the RCAF [was] not responsible for map making,” suggesting that its role in aerial photography was limited to flying the aircraft and data collection. Finished prints were the working tools of the Rockcliffe laboratory team. However, earlier in the report, Thomas emphasizes the closeness of these working relationships, characterizing the peak years of aerial mapping as “the closest possible cooperation... between the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, the National Research Council, and the Royal Canadian Air Force,” with each group in turn responsible for photogrammetry, research, and air operation respectively.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 164-165.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 150.

Photogrammetry is a two-fold process of interpretation: first, it involves taking measurements through photographic means; second, it refers to the analysis of these images for the purpose of translating photographic information into maps and charts. In a national photogrammetric pursuit to map the Arctic, the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys interpreted millions of aerial photographs in order to convert them into maps. Filed in boxes that fill shelves of the National Air Photo Library in Ottawa, these photographs had an intended audience of very few people. They were not made for public viewership, but instead as data. They represent stored information, memory of terrain and measurements of space. Interpreters trained in photogrammetry would arrange the photographs of a given flight path in an overlapping mosaic of plains and mountains, rivers and glaciers. An expertly trained-eye is able to read the photographs, “to see the whole landscape and the relationship of its constituent parts” with a “relatively high degree of accuracy” in order to make conclusions about the terrain based on patterns and appearance.⁹⁹ Overlapping photographs were taken to help ensure accuracy, with two thirds of each image overlapping the image before and after in the shooting sequence. The activity of reconstructing space and producing knowledge in this way is both an expression and exertion of imperial control.

Following centuries of Arctic exploration and concerted efforts to make complete maps of the region, aerial photography and photogrammetry completed the task in a few short years. They ‘corrected’ past errors and filled ‘blank’ spaces. The Arctic Archipelago’s scattering of islands proved particularly challenging to

⁹⁹ Thomson, 225.

early explorers and mapmakers. Compounded by the presence of sea ice and the navigational difficulties associated with sailing these waters, it was not until aerial photography that certain discrepancies and holes in these areas could be charted with accuracy. For example, in 1947, a pair of islands, which had been mapped by Stefansson in 1917 as a single island, were observed and photographed—Stefansson had interpreted the presence of a strait as a sound. In the following survey season of 1948, a unit flying over Foxe Basin “discovered themselves over land... where only water had been charted.” Two islands and a total of 5000 square miles were added to Canadian territory as a result of this survey.¹⁰⁰ Those are just a few examples illustrating how the airplane and aerial photography radically changed Arctic exploration.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I want to revisit photographs A11447.187 and A11447.188 (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). While these photographs were produced to construct a map of Arctic territory, the purpose of this chapter was to relate map making and the RCAF photographs to the construction of political and cultural ideas of North. This chapter has acknowledged a particular moment in Canadian photo-history—the operations of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in the mid-twentieth century. As technologies of control, the photographs, and the maps they produced, were directly related to colonial control and the symbolic ownership of northern land and resources. Beyond the decades studied here, the maps were instrumental in sovereignty operations of the Canadian military well into the second

¹⁰⁰ Halliday, unpaginated.

half of the twentieth-century, including in the establishment of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Lines.¹⁰¹

Surely, a geographer could find within the RCAF project multiple points of entry that would lead to some very interesting discussions regarding mapping and its processes and effects. I hope to touch on some of those, but as an art historian, I choose to enter into these and other topics through the work of an artist proper. Accordingly, the next chapter examines artist Leslie Reid's appropriation of RCAF aerial images and intervention into this history. Though my own disinclination to categorize and to consequently reinforce binaries of art and science requires me to state that I think productive interdisciplinary conversations reveal the possibilities each camp provides to the other, I do believe that it is in Reid's staging of the past with her physical and emotional present that certain conversations open up. It is precisely in her own project of mapping that Reid effectively collapses space and time, art and science into an amalgam of reflections on place, landscape, and the mutually constructive activities of mapmakers and landscape artists.

¹⁰¹ McCannon, 243.

Chapter Two: *Mapping Time*

Leslie Reid has been making works in response to her experience in the North for only two years, but these works reflect her decades of practice as an artist and her deep connections with the land. This most recent series continues to develop as more research and artworks are completed. Collectively, Reid has referred to this series under the umbrella title *Mapping Time*. A solo exhibition of these works was shown at Galerie Laroche/Joncas in Montréal in 2015 and two paintings and a video from the series were shown in *Group 6: the Canadian Forces Artists Program, 2012-2013* at the Diefenbunker Museum in Carp (2015-2016). Reid's most recent show, *Mapping a Cold War*, is a solo exhibition of new works curated by Lindsey Sharman at the Founders' Gallery at the Military Museum in Calgary, Alberta. The title of this show glances back to the decades of the Cold War, an era of multifaceted global interest in the Arctic. In post-War Canada, it is the period in which the RCAF mapping operations took place. But Reid's works are also very much of the present insofar as they integrate contemporary imagery of her own trip to the High Arctic through the Canadian Forces Artists Program (2013). Through an exploration of space and passing time, Reid effectively comments on pressing concerns of today, just as much as she addresses the difficult and complex histories of defence and northern populations. In this way, *Mapping a "Cold War"* could be interpreted as a continuation of conflict, but of a different kind. Social and ecological effects of climate change and colonial legacies are framed as active and immediate concerns for northern Polar Regions, locally and globally.

This chapter is an ecocritical analysis of Reid's body of work in the series *Mapping Time*. The first three sections will meander through the narratives of Reid's painted works, starting with theoretical positioning in the discourse of space, place, and landscape, followed by in-depth visual analyses complemented by narratology. The fourth section will address Reid's photo-mosaics. Combining 9in x 9in prints of RCAF photographs from the National Air Photo Library and 9in x 13.5in prints of her own photographs, Reid composes large-scale, structured photomontages that represent the multiplicity and materiality of her Arctic experience.

Space, Place, and Landscape

Reid's paintings are unhurried and quiet. Visually and conceptually dense, their narratives unravel slowly. Viewers move easily from one line of reflection to the next and back again because the embedded themes are complementary and interconnected. *Space*, as a single term, heavy with multiple and complex connotations, is perhaps the most broad and encompassing theme for all of Reid's work. Certainly, this is true for this most recent series, but it has been a source of intellectual and emotional intrigue throughout her career.

When asked about her practice, Reid expresses a longstanding entanglement of land, self, and art. Her inspiration comes from being immersed in a certain place and her aim is to produce paintings that take over the viewer's "sensory being." The logistics of her long-standing process were determined by an interest in the constructive properties of light in defining space. Reid begins by taking photographs of a place, capturing tonal values and light effects that cannot be sketched *en plein*

air. She then paints working from photographic inspiration. Importantly, the details of the photograph are met by the transformative effects of a new medium, oil and graphite, producing canvases that are not quite photographic, and yet distinctly photo-like in their evocation of memory and light. Occasionally, Reid knows a photograph will lead to a painting immediately after she takes it; at other times, she says, “a photograph is a little more neutral, but [she knows] that when it becomes a painting, the transformation will actually bring what [she] is looking for.”¹⁰²

When it came to her time in the High Arctic with the Canadian Forces Artists Program, Reid’s immersive experience was physical and emotional. Among the most affective aspects of her residency were interactions with people. Military hosts and members of the local Inuit community had a profound effect on Reid’s understanding of the Arctic as a lived space. While a great deal of her work has been produced after photographs taken from military aircraft, Reid also expresses the affective experience of standing on Arctic ground. Like interactions with its residents, her direct experience with place, as the physical ground beneath her feet, provided Reid with a perspective on northern landscape that was historical and material. It was historical in a personal sense, since her father was a pilot with the RCAF during the years of the photographic mapping operations, but also in a geological sense, in that the Nature of the North spoke loudly to her of deep ecological time.¹⁰³

In these preliminary introductions, my use of “space, place, and landscape” has accorded with what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the opening up of a “more capacious

¹⁰² Leslie Reid, in conversation with the author, November 21, 2015.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

and differentiated theoretical field.”¹⁰⁴ Henri Lefebvre’s influential text, *The Production of Space*, had particular influence on Mitchell’s formulations. Lefebvre insists on a concept of space that unifies the social, the mental, and the physical. His perspective on space delineates: the perceived, that is social space, like the perception of social patterns in a worn path; the conceived, that is the mental space of the sort belonging to city planners; and the lived, that is physical space, which is representational and mediated through images and symbols. Lefebvre suggests that “(social) space is a (social) product” and, moreover, that social space is “indistinguishable from mental or physical space.”¹⁰⁵ Crucially, this layering of the social, the mental, and the physical is present in all spaces; they are mutually constitutive.

The triadic combination of space, place, and landscape is an important aspect of my approach to an ecocritical analysis of Reid’s Arctic imagery. While Reid does not self-identify as a “landscape artist,” the effect of thinking and speaking about representations, and spaces themselves, in the way just described, prompts a historical consideration of human presence in the land. It is also a more critical stance from which to evaluate what it means to be a perceiving body in the material world, responding as well to the constructions of narrative and power inherent in an apprehension of landscape. My argument does not depend on labelling Reid as a landscape artist, but it is important to recognize how her work converges with the “space, place, landscape” concept. Mitchell is cognisant of the effects “both the

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, x.

¹⁰⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 27.

phenomenological and historical materialist traditions” have had on this subject in relegating landscape to mere aesthetics, while privileging “the real properties of space and places.”¹⁰⁶ However, he rightly insists that “landscape” is necessary in these discussions, and that the discourse opens as a whole when this triad is permitted to overlap and coexist. The discourse of space, place, and landscape recognizes that spaces are simultaneously real and imagined, material and ever changing. Therefore, it provides a better understanding of how landscapes have functioned in the past and how they might be re-imagined today.

Landscape, as a concept, has to do with an encounter of narrative and symbolic features.¹⁰⁷ As stated above, Reid is interested in immersive experiences, saying: “in looking and being immersed in a landscape and not the view, but the physicality of the land and the space, [that] was what was affecting me.”¹⁰⁸ The material and symbolic qualities of nature as a medium encompassed within the term “landscape,” as defined in Chapter One, and the possibility of foregrounding the idea of light, the feeling and creation of space, and personal relationships to place, herein defined, “space, place, and landscape” is central to Reid’s work.

Space and Light: A Material Approach Land and its Representation

Reid reflects on “the physicality of our experience, especially the perceptual limits of light and space”¹⁰⁹ in a painting from the area around Kaskawulsh Glacier

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell, viii.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., x.

¹⁰⁸ Leslie Reid, in conversation with the author, November 21, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Leslie Reid, “Artist Statement,” <http://www.lesliereid.ca/bio.html>, accessed April 3, 2016.

in Kluane National Park, Yukon.¹¹⁰ *Kaskawulsh II 60°41'N; 137°53'W* (Fig. 2.1) has the immediacy of personal experience and a haziness that forces the viewer to slow down and share in the captured moment. The layering of luminescent paint effectively reproduces an impression of memory: a narrative of space and light, a single moment in time, but also the persistent passage from one moment to the next.

With a soft white flooding across a muted plane, rivers and tributaries escape from their source to produce intricate patterns of greys and whites. Braided within the mud ground, they allude to the reliable pull of water from its source to sea. Movement begins in the top right, across the canvas, to the bottom left. Of course, these are not the true beginnings or ends. Reid's cropped images frequently allude to the space beyond, reminding the viewer that this is merely one part in a larger system, all while suggesting that this one place is as valuable as any other. Booming with the sound of waterfalls and rapids, or whispering in the trickle of streams, water seems always to be about impermanence: ever flowing, ever changing. There are origins, like the glaciers of the Arctic, and there are destinations, but then it begins again: growth, decline, re-birth. Always moving.

And yet, the stillness persists. In short lives, so much of the world feels permanent. The primordial rock of the Arctic feels old. Mountains are stubborn in their immobility and lakes faithful in their summer warmth. Caught between ancient processes and undeniable change, the viewer might reflect on the passage of time, of the rapid and devastating consequences of climate change, and of the value of

¹¹⁰ Nora Foy et al., "Recent volume and area changes of Kaskawulsh Glacier, Yukon, Canada," *Journal of Glaciology* 57, 203 (2011), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.igsoc.org:8000/journal/57/201/j10J097.pdf>.

environments, places in human life. This is one of the hopes Reid holds for her work, that her canvases might incite in the viewer an awareness of the fragility of ecology in the face of human exploitation of nature.¹¹¹ The interconnectedness of ecological systems, as signified in this painting points to the value of place in relation to others.

As represented by Reid in her work, these are also spaces of remembrance; the visual field is an archive of Reid's own experience. Mediating a moment through the act of painting, Reid attempts to connect the viewer with a nature that is both outside and other, but in another sense unified with humanity. Artist Judith Tucker similarly explores how the medium of landscape is a material means through which artists attempt to mediate an experience with place.¹¹² The immersion Reid speaks of, being and marking presence in space, is a recognition, or a hope, for unity. Tucker proposes that tension is created in the realization of distance, from other bodies and the separate material world.¹¹³ This pull between unity and separateness complicates the relationship between nature and culture, intertwining perception and representation of unity with distanced difference. It also demonstrates that there is some truth to an extra-discursive nature. Real experiences are found in the mediation between personal and cultural representations.

The notion of remembrance in Reid's work alludes to the Earth's memories as well. Geologists and ecologists like to speak about the deep history of the earth as being written in its rocks and trees; and in the Arctic, ice cores provide scientists

¹¹¹ Leslie Reid, in conversation with the author, November 21, 2015.

¹¹² Judith Tucker, "Resort: Re/visiting, Re/visioning, Re/placing," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5 (2006): 95-106, accessed March 28, 2016, doi: 10.1386/jvap.5.1and2.95/1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

with data about the world's climatic history. The meandering of glacial melt in *Kaskawulsh II 60°44'N; 138°04'W* calls to mind something physiological. A representation, therefore, of nature's memories and processes, the allusion to human bodies in the representation of landscape entangles the memories of space and its perception with the embodied experience of being in a material world.

The narrative of this painting welcomes an integration of actual embodied and historical stories with the land. Indigenous Tlingit and Athapaskan peoples have lived in the region of Kaskawulsh Glacier for centuries. Located in the St. Elias Mountains on the border between the Yukon and Alaska, the glacier features in stories told about the migration of the Kwáashk'i Kwáan clan from inland to the coast. Julie Cruikshank recounts this story and others in her book *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*. Combining oral histories of the Indigenous Tlingit and Athapaskan peoples with explorer accounts of the last 200 years, Cruikshank demonstrates how spaces are constructed into meaningful places through social interaction. She summarizes three retellings of the migration story from conversations she has had with members of the clan. Reaching Mount St. Elias in their journey to the coast, the story goes that the ancestors were guided through the mountain in poor weather by trekking over the glacier. In two of the accounts, the mountain is mistaken for a rabbit, snowy and white, which acted as a compass, leading the travellers in their journey.¹¹⁴

Cruikshank demonstrates how narrative and landscape are entangled in Indigenous worldview, particularly in stories of morality and local history. As stated

¹¹⁴ Cruikshank, 33-35.

elsewhere, this thesis focuses on settler representations of North, but historic and contemporary presence of Indigenous people in the story just described is an enriching compliment to Reid's painting of Kaskawulsh Glacier. In spite of perceived absences on the canvas, viewers can read into the artwork multiple stories of landscape and people, beyond those that might have been intended by the artist. Therefore, this brief account from the Kwáashk'i Kwáan clan is meant to show how, as Cruikshank argues, such stories can reveal themselves to be fundamental in providing a "framework for understanding historical and contemporary issues."¹¹⁵

Revealing an approach to human and non-human relationships, where animals and "features of landscape, like glaciers... share characteristics of personhood," the Kwáashk'i Kwáan clan story contrasts with the dichotomy of explorer and settler conceptualizations of nature and culture defined in Chapter One.¹¹⁶ Highlighting culturally-specific approaches to nature not only underlines the argument that Nature is, in part, the product of cultural construction, it sheds light on how historical and contemporary issues might benefit from varying interpretations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. However, mediating multiple interests in the Arctic, whether social, economic, or scientific, is a question for another time; so to conclude, I will echo Pavel Cenk, who summarizes how Indigenous perspectives can serve ecocritical approaches. Cenk suggests that "it is in the actuality... of inhabited and storied terrain that words become critical not as

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

symbols but as tangible ties to the land.”¹¹⁷ That tangibility could facilitate a more equitable account of human-nature relations and Reid’s canvases invite such narrative overlays and meaningful reflections. Following a close reading of settler imagery, as I do in this thesis, another interesting space for understanding Arctic landscape can be found in Indigenous stories and voices.

Painting Place: Articulating Perception, Anticipating Terrain

Representations of light and space, Reid’s works also hearken back to dreamy narrative visions of northern landscapes. In *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W* (Fig. 2.2) the space of the canvas hesitates between providing an image contingent on the allure of heroic adventure and a more ethical-ecological reverence for the Arctic.¹¹⁸ Petra Halkes describes her experience of being lulled into a dream-state in the presence of Reid’s paintings in a review of *Glacial*: “[Haunted] by past ethereal representations of the North,” the works “draw the viewer deeply into this myth and then implicate the artist herself as well as the viewers in sustaining this dream.”¹¹⁹

With the exception of a crowning of blue sky, the not-quite white of the icy mass of Llewellyn Glacier looms large in *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W*. A muted palette glows with impressive luminosity. ‘Simple’ is an impulsive first impression

¹¹⁷ Pavel Cenkl, “Narrative Currency in a Changing Climate: Grounding the Arctic Amid Shifting Terrain,” in *Post-colonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, ed. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 143.

¹¹⁸ Reid herself seems caught between these two narratives. In my interview with her, she spoke passionately about the abuse of resources in the Arctic on behalf of governments and big business. She also proclaimed her interest in Arctic explorers, remarking on the “marvellous history” of exploration. (Leslie Reid, in conversation with the author, November 21, 2015).

¹¹⁹ Petra Halkes, “Leslie Reid,” *Border Crossings* 34, 3 (2015): 129.

given the restricted palette and minimal composition, but it proves to be a widely inaccurate description of the work whose forms are given shape, depth, and detail from the visually generative effects of light. It is unclear whether that light is inherent to the landscape depicted or whether the paint is simply enlivened by the light in the viewer's space. Then again, it could be both. The work stimulates an awareness of perception.

The evocation of memory, of the land and the experience of *being* there, is once again conveyed through the haziness of the canvas. Looking at something for a long time has the effect of making it less clear. That effect is both recreated and stimulated in this work. The blurring of sustained looking imbues objects with the power of not being exactly in focus. What sort of power might this be? Is the object of the gaze powerful by consequence of its commanding such attention? Or is the object so powerful that the gaze is unsustainable? In and out of focus, powerful objects produce powerful images.¹²⁰

Subtle details in the painting reveal themselves to the viewer who sustains a longer interaction with the piece; the far left segment of the glacier is everywhere defined by small cracks and crevasses and the play of shadows against highlights communicates a varied surface. The fullness of this work and this space is accomplished gradually. Halkes similarly cites such subtle subversions as a call from

¹²⁰ Potter Edmund de Waal is interested in the activity of looking. Producing artworks that ask the viewer to look for a long time, his motivations are centred on forcing the viewer to look and to think. His practice has strong parallels in Reid's work and was helpful in defining what sort of effects Reid's work might have on viewers. See "1/2 Edmund de Waal – What do artists do all day?" *Art Documentaries Channel*, accessed January 11, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me2EmbWZYH8>.

Reid's works to "wake up."¹²¹ For in another glance, the smoothness of the paint and the directness of the representation reorient the viewer's perception. What a moment ago felt decidedly large-scale, monumental in stature, now appears as if on a micro scale. The same effect is equally pronounced in *Kaskawulsh II 60°44'N; 138°04'W*. Much like the RCAF photographs, discussed in the previous chapter, the aerial perspective of these works by Reid creates a sensation of vacillating between the macro and the micro. Creating a space for contemplation, Reid invites viewers to think more deeply, not only about their relationship to the painting as a visual object, but also about their relation to all spaces, most particularly their relationship to the natural world.

While Reid's works are *of the land*, viewers can fairly quickly perceive that these paintings contrast with conventional landscapes. Gradual unearthing, comprehension by way of perceptual engagement, is quite unlike an invitation to simply "look at the view." Mitchell has theorized that this colloquial expression is a suggestion to "look at" that which is normally "overlooked." Furthermore, like this common phrase, he proposes that landscape artists ignore particulars "in favour of an appreciation of a total gestalt." This pulling back offers "a safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance," which in turn liberates the viewer from any "practical or moral claim[s]" that landscape might demand.¹²² The land and seascapes of the eighteenth and nineteenth century produced seductive scenes that were unburdened by the complex realities of the Arctic, both in terms of its materiality and its objectification for colonial exploitation. Reid's immediate perspectives deny

¹²¹ Halkes, 129.

¹²² Mitchell, viii.

a safe or aestheticized distance. While “views” are a representation of the act of looking itself,¹²³ Reid’s canvases of space, light, and memory represent experience. Close framing does not translate into absolute comprehension of the complexities of the North, but it triggers the viewer to consider new ideas and approaches to space.

John Moss articulates his own account of northern landscape in the following way: “I am of two minds: real in the landscape of the world, remote in geography.”¹²⁴ Standing on the ground, above the Arctic Circle, Moss is sure of two realities. The first is his presence within the landscape; the second are the myriad representations of North that place him “far away.” Reminded of the cultural relativity of imagined geographies, Moss’s statement has a lot to do with the realness of ‘here,’ which is subverted in the geographical construction of the North as Other—far away and over ‘there.’ Reid represents the local quality of her experience in the place of the North, particularly in her photo-mosaics, which will be the topic of the following section. In paintings like *Kaskawulsh II 60°44'N; 138°04'W* and *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W* she creates spaces of immediate perception and intrigue that subvert what Halkes calls the “dream-image” of North.

Conscious of how influential these geographical representations are, Moss further assesses his experience in this way: “we read maps and books; their lines articulate perception, anticipate terrain.”¹²⁵ Images shape his experience of traversing the Arctic, guiding him and anticipating terrain, all while existing outside, or in addition to, his own experience in the material landscape. The coordinates of

¹²³ Mitchell, vii-viii.

¹²⁴ John Moss, *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape* (Concord: Anansi Press Limited, 1994), 3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

latitude and longitude in the titles of Reid's paintings mark an explicit connection between her images and the science of mapping. While this could be seen as an endorsement of the scientific overlay of colonial concepts, which Cenkel claims inherently perpetuates an ideological power structure,¹²⁶ the measured grids of latitude and longitude also allow Reid to make specific reference to the exact location of the places in her paintings. Painting from personal experience, Reid's works depend on the remembered experience of being in a particular place. The titles, therefore, invite viewers to comprehend the specificity of the landscapes perceived and emphasize a sense of 'here' over 'there.' It is like a motion to the past, a prompt to recall historical interactions with the spaces of the Arctic, while also, very practically, situating viewers in a certain place.

New Framing, New Meaning: Leslie Reid's Reframing of RCAF Photographs

With this notion of specificity in mind, I turn now to Reid's mosaics. These montages are undoubtedly works inspired by place, and especially the nature of place. The land, but also "the sky, the weather, time:" nature as in landscape, as in "the natural world without benefit of human consciousness, although not excluding human presence."¹²⁷ Whereas nineteenth and twentieth-century canvases were purportedly exemplary of the Arctic as a whole, Reid's work has the impression of offering several views among many.

Privileging the multiple over the singular, Reid's montages are somewhat similar to RCAF mapping mosaics. As I argued at length in Chapter One, the RCAF

¹²⁶ Cenkl, 146.

¹²⁷ Moss, 5.

photographs are signifiers of a twentieth-century colonial desire to know. Framed by the historic definition of the Arctic as a space of wilderness and within the narratives of Canadian sovereignty, this was articulated as a desire to understand and control the North. Furthermore, I suggested that visual narratives of the Arctic sublime and of the glory in human achievement were consistent with existing constructions of North. Enacting control through Foucauldian techniques of power is, therefore, one way to view the photographs through the historical frame of Arctic exploration and the exertion of Canadian sovereignty.

However, the depth of their communicative potential is given expression in Reid's photo-mosaics. Whereas the systematic succession of images in the RCAF reconstructions swallowed the possibility for individual visual expression, in Reid's works, they are permitted to communicate more freely. In collaboration with contemporary images, RCAF aerial photographs are simultaneously representative of a historical view of Arctic terrain that constructed it as a trove of resources and as a site of heroic adventure and also, as a memory-filled space unto itself. The quality of abstraction and flattening in an aerial perspective is met with multiple perspectives in Reid's mosaics to produce a work that recognizes the fragmented character of space and memory. Thus, Reid opens a space for colonial critique while also existing within, and as a result of, that history.

The four photo-mosaics from *Mapping Time* made their exhibition debut at the Military Museum in Calgary. *Kaskawulsh*, *Llewellyn*, *Resolute*, and *Yellowknife*, each subtitled "*Mosaic*," are populated by rivers and mountains, coastlines and glaciers, military personnel and Inuit. In a scan of *Kaskawulsh: Mosaic* (Fig. 2.3), the

viewer will notice the aerial images discussed in the preceding chapter. Side by side, A11447.187 and A11447.188 are placed at the centre of the composition, in the row second to the bottom. Others like them, each a black and white square of geographical data, offer the same perpendicular perspective. They maintain an impression of precision that was central to their making. Helicopters, planes, and communing groups of RCAF personnel are repeated motifs in Reid's contemporary images, pointing to past and current military presence in the Arctic.

The aerial perspective of the RCAF photographs, and many of Reid's own images, collapses the infinite detail of a mountainside into a shadow, just as nineteenth-century landscape paintings represent a forest of trees with a single green brush stroke. For gallery visitors, the aerial perspective also has the effect of making the land appear more abstract, especially with the RCAF images. In these photographs, landscape features blur into patterns and, as time passes, it becomes difficult to distinguish valleys from mountain peaks and land from water. The RCAF images also hold onto a scientific quality that is hard to define; despite the breakdown in readable territory, the viewer might be inclined to concede that for a person trained in photogrammetry, the images likely contain valuable geological and geographical information. As relics of the mapping process, the photographs can still be read as imperial images that, within the larger mosaic, are tempered by new perspectives.

Australian academic Rod Giblett has proposed that landscape is "a capitalist masculine category," further asserting that "the camera objectifies the land as

landscape.”¹²⁸ The RCAF aerial photographs were tools in a capitalist project of exploitation, since the maps they produced enabled exploration and extraction of resources in and for the North American economy. Furthermore, the distanced perspective of aerial images makes territorial depth invisible and mute, thus performing the objectification of land Giblett describes. Touted for its reach in otherwise inaccessible territory and for its scientific objectivity, aerial photographs constructed surface-images and in turn, colonial surfaces.

In this way, the RCAF photographs can also be read as representations of nature as conceived by the colonizer: “both a nurturant force... and a ‘virgin’ terrain ripe for penetration.”¹²⁹ Imbuing Arctic space with a sense of cultural otherness, this sort of conceptualization presents the North as both vulnerable and unyielding. The feminization and objectification of the region through cultural constructions shares an obvious parallel with Edward Said’s theorizations on colonialism. Characterizing colonial relationships in terms of “power, domination, and varying degrees of a complex hegemony,” Said’s theory is productively applied to the idea of North.

The notion of imaginative geographies is particularly illuminating here. In hegemonic systems of colonial power, Said proposes that a process of imaginative definition of space takes place; “all we know about time and space, or rather history and geography, is more than anything else imaginative.”¹³⁰ A natural inclination for

¹²⁸ Rod Giblett, "Chapter 3: Landscape," *Critical Photography Series* (2012): 53-54, accessed April 5, 2016. Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost.

¹²⁹ Kate Soper, “Nature, Friend and Foe,” *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-human* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), 104-5.

¹³⁰ Said, 55.

order and security provokes the construction of an idea of place, which is seen concretely in the RCAF photographs and subsequent maps.

However, in Reid's *Kaskawulsh: Mosaic* (2.3), viewers are both made aware of the imaginative geographies of North and encouraged to view this history with a nuanced and critical eye. Reid's mosaics recall the visual order of the original montage of RCAF photographs at the Rockcliffe laboratories. Manipulating, shaping, and constructing the space of the North, the work demonstrates the possibility of constructing meaning not only through viewing photographs, but also in holding and sorting them. The materiality of the medium prompts a consideration of the materiality of the subject matter. Therefore, repeating the mosaic form of photographic mapping does not implicate Reid in a re-inscription of the imperial act; instead, it reinforces the notion that our image of the North is an assembly of views and ideas repeatedly constructed over time. In other words, these narrative montages engage the viewer in a dynamic process of perception.

In an analysis of László Moholy-Nagy's, *Painting Photography Film*, which is considered a foundational work in the tradition of photomontage, Andrea Nelson states that Moholy-Nagy's use of the technique is "a way to explain the conditions under which new modes of thought, perception and reception take place." Nelson further suggests that narrative montage "points backwards as much as it does forwards" because of the play between individual images and the construction of a unified series.¹³¹ As the reader will recall from Chapter One, I termed the collection of RCAF photographs "a geographically expansive series." They were used to

¹³¹ Andrea Nelson, "László Moholy-Nagy and *Painting Photography Film*: A guide to narrative montage," *History of Photography*, 30, 3 (2006): 269.

manipulate and reconstruct space, meaningful only as a piece in a puzzle. In this original context, the photographs, one layered atop the next, are systematic and structured in their seriality. Meanwhile, historic and contemporary images from Reid's work assert individual presence. Reaching through time and across space, they contribute to visual relationships and conversations between images.

In an encounter with Reid's photo-mosaics, viewers "exercise their vision" by "analysing the interconnections between various photographic images" in the dynamic juxtaposition of narrative montage.¹³² In *Yellowknife: Mosaic* (Fig 2.4) and *Resolute: Mosaic* (Fig. 2.5), Reid emphasizes military presence in the Arctic. Photographs of RCAF personnel and building interiors are equally matched by images of aircraft. This is a direct and intentional reference to the history and legacy of aerial photography and the role of flight in Arctic life and military operations. Viewers might contemplate how technologies are symbolic of human dominion over nature, or how, as extensions of human nature, they actually reconcile a presumed human-nature divide. With a celebratory tone, the mosaics pay homage to modern Arctic exploration in the same way that nineteenth century canvases like Beechey's did for Britain. But then, a neighbouring collection of images taps the viewer on the shoulder, subtly gesturing to other aspects of the narrative.

For instance, *Llewellyn: Mosaic* (Fig 2.6) presents multiple angles of Llewellyn Glacier. Coloured and perhaps even burdened by the statistics and rhetoric of climate change, glaciers and their rapid deterioration have been key concerns and symbols for climate change supporters. Despite a sense of urgency, such messages

¹³² Ibid., 262.

are often met with inaction. Reid's glacial images carry the impact of these popular public discourses and convey a sense of ecological history, with representations of Arctic place from the past and today. Other photographs communicate the familiar aesthetic of "pure wilderness." Beautiful, sublime even, they echo a long-standing reverence for the spaces of the Arctic. Reid's photographs become aligned with the RCAF photographs as representations of northern sublime and empty territory, but they also stage an encounter in which nature's beauty is perceived within and outside of its objection by an imperial gaze. Moreover, the inclusion of human figures in subsequent photographs makes it impossible to accept that natural purity depends on human absence.

In *Resolute: Mosaic* (Fig. 2.5) Reid has deliberately pictured people and place. This helps the viewer comprehend a more nuanced illustration of Reid's experience that includes her own interactions with military personnel and Inuit. An abandoned building in *Resolute: Mosaic*, communicates a history of occupation and retreat, colonialism, and loss. A few panels away, an image of a heart, held in someone's hand, grabs the viewer's attention. With the information from other photographs, it has come from the animal lying dead in the water. The vulnerability is striking: life and death held in a hand. In a video of this experience, Reid captures an enigmatic moment wherein the heart, removed from its body, still beats to an even rhythm. The beating heart speaks of survival. It is visceral and real.

In the same work, a figure leaps across a gap in the ice. Caught in the decisive moment between leaping off and landing, the figure's precarious position is reminiscent of the current state of global climate change. Having made certain

choices and constructed certain relationships, it feels like Canada, and other nations worldwide, are mid-leap. Productive responses to environmental and social issues will shape the state of ecosystems; future generations depend on the actions of today. Therefore, partnerships and initiatives regarding northern nature and culture will determine where humanity will land after leaping into the modern era.

Cenkl is just one among a chorus of voices that lays bare the need for local voices in such climate change discussions.¹³³ Responding to the notion of global connectivity—in ecology and human social systems—Cenkl calls for paying equal attention to local communities whose residents are in the best position to speak about the effects of climate change in their personal experience. Inuit and other northern Indigenous groups have rich and integrated oral traditions that are relevant to these discussions, as suggested above. Histories and knowledge, passed through generations, are valuable assets to people living in these communities as a means of physical and cultural survival. While colonial structures have been a devastating barrier to the Inuit way of life, relationships between people and environments must be renewed with respect and compassion.

This is a promising area of future research for this project. In a similar way, the state of Reid's current series could be seen as an early stage in promised further engagement with themes of Indigenous presence and land. Time and new academic venues will determine how these engagements materialize, but, importantly, Reid offers an introduction to these discussions and future analysis may reveal how well these endeavours proceed.

¹³³ Cenkl, 151.

The plurality of Reid's mosaics is effective because it allows the viewer to draw personal connections and engage on several levels, some of which have just been described. While there are clear similarities in their construction, form, and sometimes in message, Reid's photomontages are unlike the RCAF mosaics in their fragmentation and multiplicity. Blake Stimson's history of art photography in post-War America in *The Pivot of the World* is an analysis of different forms of seriality. It complements the short discussion of photomontage above by comparing the mediums of film and photo essay. The "rigor and incisive particularity" Stimson attributes to film¹³⁴ is similar to that of the RCAF photographs. Contrasting this with an evaluation of the photo essay, Stimson demonstrates how both forms work according to an adherence to seriality. However, a key difference is the preservation of each representation with each subsequent addition in the photo essay.¹³⁵ Building the RCAF mosaic was a process of displacement, but Reid's mosaics construct a story, rather than a surface; they facilitate conversations and engagement between images and with the viewer.

Conclusion

Kate Soper summarizes the value in addressing representations in a quest to understand how nature and culture might relate:

Indeed there is perhaps something inherently mistaken in the attempt to define what nature is, independently of how it is thought about, talked about

¹³⁴ Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 32.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

and culturally represented. There can be no adequate attempt, that is, to explore 'what nature is' that is not centrally concerned with what it has been said to be, however much we might want to challenge that discourse in light of our theoretical rulings.¹³⁶

In this chapter, Reid's artworks of Arctic space have been helpful in unpacking some of what the North as Nature might be today. Her recent works support a conceptualization of Arctic significance on local and global scales. They have also begun to demonstrate the value of nature *with* humanity, not *because* of it. The dichotomization of nature and culture, which was central to landscape paintings produced in parallel with western exploration of the Arctic is still common today. Visual, literary, and scientific representations of nature tend to exploit notions of the sublime to emphasize the aesthetic appeal of the Arctic as a space of true wilderness and majesty. Reid's works do share similarities with these images, but they also complicate this aestheticization, offering viewers with an opportunity to question their preconceptions and expand homogenizing notions of the Arctic as one, definable place.

By comparing the RCAF mosaics with Leslie Reid's photographic works, I have demonstrated how Reid produces "new modes of thought, perception and reception" that specifically relate to Arctic space and an understanding of Nature and North. Like her paintings, Reid's mosaics provide a sense of *being* in the land, rather than *looking* at the land, which is a core contribution of her works to ecocritical treatments of landscape and nature. While millions of images make up

¹³⁶ Kate Soper, 21.

the National Photo Library's collection of RCAF photographs, Reid's inclusion of contemporary views and varied perspectives demonstrates how selective the survey was, despite being thorough, precise, and geographically far-reaching. Approximately 500 photographs are used in the four photo-mosaics and practically shout out the possibility for new perspectives.

The multitude of images, the nature of a mosaic itself, also serves to engage through extended looking. RCAF photographs that belong in a sequence (such as A11447.187 and A11447.188) prompt the viewer to question whether similar photographs are actually the same photograph. In perceiving a difference, the next step might be to ponder why such images were made, which has the effect of drawing attention to how aerial mapping works and opening conversations between images. Additionally, *Kaskawulsh II 60°44'N; 138°04'W* and *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W*, as paintings that refuse easy readings because their hazy effects, do not work towards clarity. Depth comes in and out of focus, effectively drawing the viewer closer to the work and to the place over a period of sustained looking. Disputing an inclination to perceive blurriness as disengaging or disassociating, Reid's works do not distance the viewer from the scene. Instead, the viewer is drawn in. Facilitating intellectual and emotional engagement, viewers are required to slow down, to look through layers of paint, or in the photo-mosaics, between photographic images. Here, articulating space is an exploration in defining the significance of space and the nature of the North.

It is very challenging to define nature. I would argue that this difficulty is due to its being discursively constructed, a proposition that has been supported

throughout this chapter and its predecessor. In short, the numerous, contradictory, and ambiguous ways people have thought about nature and defined it, are, in turn, the direct result of its being defined and redefined by history and culture.¹³⁷ And because places like the Arctic have been constructed as intrinsically “natural,” it has taken on a persona whose traits are multitudinous. Defining landscapes with symbolic meaning in this way is a semiotic process. Interestingly, the structure of signification itself is frequently called upon as *the* feature that distinguishes humanity from the non-human. With varied symbols, and therefore wide-ranging meanings, the struggle to define nature and so-called natural spaces becomes necessarily complex and clearly the product of socio-cultural construction. Thus, in its many forms, and over many years, has been the case with the Arctic.

¹³⁷ Soper, “The Discourses of Nature,” *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-human* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), 15-36.

Conclusion

The pages of this thesis are dedicated to the notion that images of places and landscapes not only represent space, but also construct it. Exploring images of the North to show how settler representations of Arctic space construct narratives of national histories and personal experiences, this thesis argues that images have the power to shape perception and, conversely, challenge assumptions. The questions posed in this thesis are motivated by a desire to mediate the embodied experience of viewing art with the semiotic meanings and narratives produced in their representations of natural forms. The materiality of art and land is emphasized throughout my analyses. Existing in myriad forms – paintings, maps, photographs, literature, documentary – according to divergent motivations and perspectives, the production of Arctic landscapes over centuries is plentiful. Although there is a large mass of Arctic imagery and discussions of them, this thesis' interdisciplinary attention to military visual culture, semiotic analysis, and contemporary art provides a new contribution to the literature.

The ecocritical approach also supports continued critique of and reflection on the messages of past and present Arctic imagery. An interesting assessment of the compulsive (re)definition of Arctic space is given by John Moss: “The struggle to define geography is a question of being, where in the world are we? We yearn for a familiar perspective... Place marking time, and time in place.”¹³⁸ Recalling Petra Halkes' review of *Glacial*, from Chapter Two, a longing for pure Nature and an allusion to the history of the mystical North is present in Leslie Reid's work and has

¹³⁸ Moss, 2.

to do with a desire for transcendence and self-defining clarity. As such, perhaps the impulse to frame the Arctic through artistic construction simply serves to reinforce the “Othering” of the North by appealing to centuries old ideas of cultural blankness. But, persistent fascination might also be due to the fact that the Arctic actually has a lot to say. As a diverse region, full of people and places, it has many stories to tell. A selection of some of those stories is provided in the chapters of this thesis.

Specifically, I have addressed two settler representational strategies.¹³⁹

Chapter One explores the complex history of RCAF aerial photography produced in the years 1948-1951. Framed by contemporaneous concerns for Canadian Arctic sovereignty and the dynamics of worldwide geopolitics, RCAF photographs of the early 1940s and 1950s participated in the definition of borders. In this military operation, the act of taking photographs was instrumental in organizing and governing land. I suggest that the looming threats of the Cold War, building international tensions, and American globalism were important aspects of this historical moment that spotlighted the region’s significance in international affairs. I also argue that as objects of visual culture, RCAF photographs belong in a category of imagery produced over centuries that frame the Arctic as a space of wilderness, natural purity, and heroic opportunity. Landscape paintings of Western exploration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had wide-reaching appeal and

¹³⁹ I have emphasized in numerous places that the scope of this thesis pertains to the representation of Nature and North in the RCAF photographs and Leslie Reid’s artworks. In further research on these images, on the idea of North, and on concepts of nature more broadly, Inuit and Indigenous voices, which are in places completely and intentionally absent from these representations (for instance, in the framing of an “empty land” for colonial mapping), call for more attention. Here, groundwork has been laid for such opportunities.

captured the imagination of many artists and viewers. An enduring interest in the North still exists today.

Contemporary artist Leslie Reid is proof of that ongoing fascination. Her recent artworks from the series *Mapping Time* make interesting contributions to narratives of North by sharing memories and engaging viewers in critical reflections of space. I argue that her photographic mosaics present the history of the RCAF Arctic operations to contemporary audiences. Given new life in compositions that mimic and subvert the arrangement of aerial photographs on the tables of the Rockcliffe laboratories, the RCAF photographs participate in the mosaics' trans-historical storytelling. They communicate the imperialist ambitions of mapmaking and the objectification of nature, but are also apart of Reid's re-imagining of Arctic space. Demonstrating how these mosaics confront the notion of North as Nature, the analyses of Reid's works are informed by ecocriticism, accounting for an equitable approach to nature-culture relations. I argue that Reid's images highlight the constructed nature of North, while providing a view of nature as valuable outside of its potential as attainable territory.

In a similar way, I provide an analysis of her paintings, taking cues from W.J.T. Mitchell's theorizations on the medium of landscape and the discourse of space, place, and landscape. I take the position that recognizing this triadic conceptualization of landscape is the best frame through which to view Reid's paintings of light and space. Memories of experience, Reid's canvases are illuminating, both in their visual qualities and in their provocation of intellectual and emotional reflection. They make viewers more aware of their own perception,

calling attention to the ways people look at and engage with spaces. What is natural? What is cultural? Why does the distinction matter?

More broadly, this thesis is unified by an interest in these questions pertaining to the relationship between nature and culture. I agree with Kate Soper's assertion that engaging in these quandaries requires an acceptance of some kind of distinction. But is it a matter of type, or degree? My conclusion is that Nature, and more specifically "North as Nature," is partially, if not largely, a product of social and cultural construction. Images from this thesis participate in these constructions and their significance to local and global issues justifies the need to consider humanity's relationship to the natural world. Reactions to climate change and post-colonial interventions will benefit from an understanding of past conceptions of North and more productive re-presentations.

This thesis works towards a critical analysis of these narratives, opening the possibility for new stories that better account for the multiplicity of Arctic experience. While I have only examined Leslie Reid's contribution to this endeavour, several other artists, Inuit and non-Inuit, have made works that speak to their own experiences, attend to ecological themes, and are critical of romantic idealization of the Arctic. Charles Stankiech is one such artist. His *Magnetic Norths* installation is historically sensitive, like Reid's own work. In this project, the gallery "functions both as a historical repository and as a fantasy projection space."¹⁴⁰ Weaving together multi-media and conceptual works, Stankiech stages an exhibition of environmental, colonial, technological, and cartographic critique. Shuvina Ashoona

¹⁴⁰ Charles Stankiech, "Magnetic Norths," <http://www.stankiech.net/projects/magneticnorths/index.html>.

is a contemporary Inuit artist who has made fascinating and stimulating works of life in the Arctic. Frequently combining a thoughtful perspective of the local with insightful, nuanced gestures towards the interconnectedness of the global, her works encourage an ethical and conscientious approach to nature and place. The ideas explored in this thesis are applicable to a range of contemporary practices and the fecundity of these discussions welcomes more research.

While narratives will continue to produce discursive realities, repetitions of colonial constructions will add little to conversations on the topics of responsibility, stewardship, and cooperation. However, this thesis shows how the employment of landscape, as a medium, can produce valuable reflections on the history of nature-culture relations and thought-provoking projections for relationships between people and places today. Rapid global changes in climate will continue to affect local communities around the world, including in the Arctic, which could continue to lose glaciers, traditional ways of life, and animal habitats in this human-nature crisis. An important aim of this thesis is to bring together art historical analysis and critical approaches to landscape in order to animate and arouse awareness of environmental issues. In this sense, framing RCAF images within imperial ideologies and Reid's artworks within multiple narratives, I contend that art and the discipline of art history have valuable insights and perspectives to offer environmental debates. Historical, critical, and sensitive to nuance, this art themed thesis is grounded in and by the real and imagined Arctic.

Illustrations



Figure 1.1 Royal Canadian Air Force, "Photograph A11447.187," *National Air Photo Library*, July 1948. Courtesy of the National Air Photo Library, Ottawa, Canada.

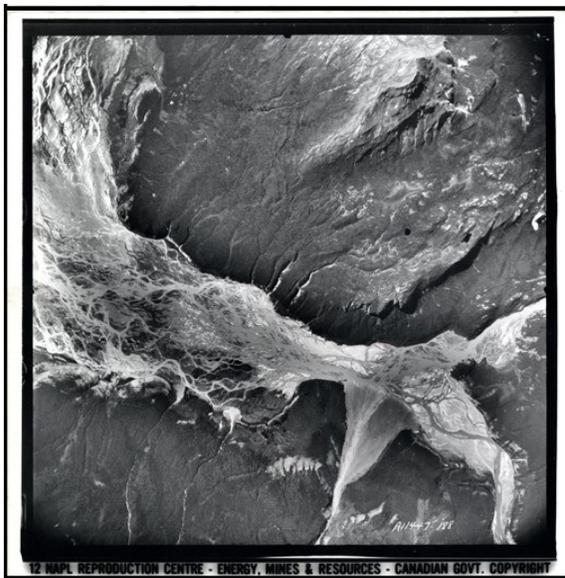


Figure 1.2 Royal Canadian Air Force, "Photograph A11447.188," *National Air Photo Library*, July 1948. Courtesy of the National Air Photo Library, Ottawa, Canada.



Figure 2.1 Leslie Reid, *Kaskawulsh II 60°41'N; 137°53'W*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2.2 Leslie Reid, *Llewellyn II 59°04'N; 134°05'W*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2.3 Leslie Reid, *Kaskawulsh: Mosaic*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

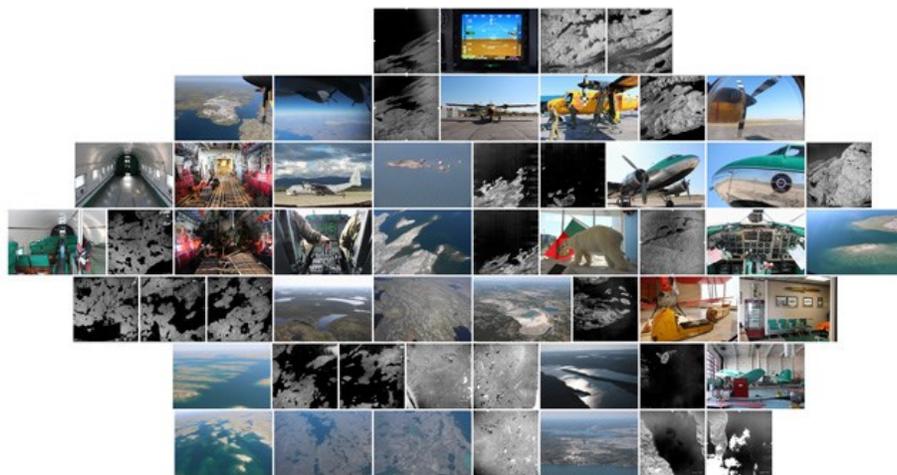


Figure 2.4 Leslie Reid, *Yellowknife: Mosaic*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

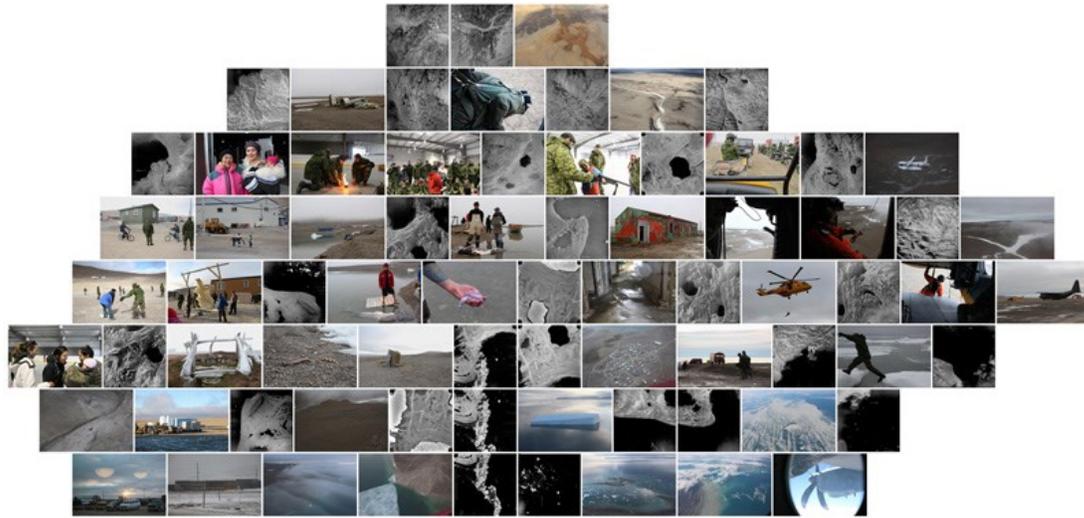


Figure 2.5 Leslie Reid, *Resolute: Mosaic*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

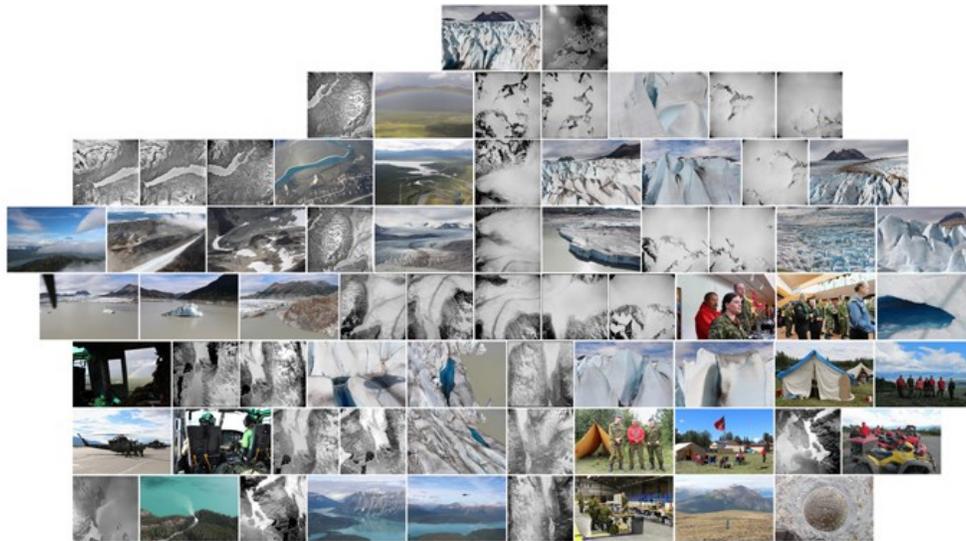


Figure 2.6 Leslie Reid, *Llewellyn: Mosaic*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

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Appendix A

Copyright Permissions

Figures 1.1 and 1.2

Photographs A11447.187 and A11447.188 have been reproduced in this thesis with the permission of the National Air Photo Library, Ottawa, Canada. The two mentioned photographs have been approved for use in any future presentation, paper, or publication resulting from this thesis research. (April 2016.)

Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6

Artworks by Leslie Reid have been reproduced in this thesis with the artist's permission. (April 2016.)

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Title: Constructing Place in Arctic Spaces: Aerial Landscapes in the Canadian North

Funding Source: SSHRC Award

Date of ethics clearance: January 6, 2016

Ethics Clearance for the Collection of Data Expires: May 31, 2016

I _____, choose to participate in a study of my artwork, specifically the paintings belonging to the *Glacial* series. This study aims to unpack the constructed nature of the North in Canadian imagination and to reflect on the consequences of these constructions to lived spaces and perceived relationships between nature and culture. **The researcher for this study is Hannah Keating in the School for Studies in Art and Culture.** She is working under the supervision of Dr. Carol Payne in the Department of Art History.

This study involves one 60-90 minute interview. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. The recording will be transcribed. By agreeing to this interview, you agree to the use of your full name and direct quotations or paraphrases in the researcher's MA thesis and in any future publications. Any additional communication that takes place leading up to and following the scheduled interview may also be included in the researcher's thesis, with your permission, proper citation, and according to any corrections or clarifications.

Your participation in this study has been determined to pose minimal risk to your psychological, physical, and social well-being. You will not be asked to reveal sensitive or personal information.

You have the right to decline answering questions. You also have the right to end your participation in the study after the interview has taken place, for any reason, up to two weeks following the date of the interview. You can withdraw by emailing the researcher. If you withdraw from the study, all information you have provided will be immediately destroyed. A digital copy of the transcribed interview will be sent to you within a week following the interview and you will be asked to provide corrections or additions where necessary.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be stored on a password protected hard drive. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher.

Once the project is completed, all research data will be retained and potentially used for other research projects on related topics and potential publications.

If you would like a copy of the finished research project, you are invited to contact

the researcher to request an electronic copy, which will be provided to you.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. Should you have questions or concerns related to your involvement in this research, please contact:

CUREB contact information:

Dr. Louise Heslop, Chair
Dr. Andy Adler, Vice Chair
Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A
Carleton University Research Ethics and Compliance Office
511 Tory, Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6
613-520-2600 ext. 2517
ethics@carleton.ca

Researcher contact information:

Hannah Keating
Art History
Carleton University
Email: hannah.keating@carleton.ca

Supervisor contact information:

Dr. Carol Payne
Art History
Carleton University
Email: Carol_Payne@carleton.ca

Do you agree to be audio-recorded: Yes No

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

Date