

**Displacing Identity Politics  
Relocating Sites of Representation in the Work of Jin-me Yoon**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores new directions for critical discourses about identity in Art History. Using art as a generative site for discussion, I have employed works by contemporary Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon from the 1990s to offer new discursive possibilities that move beyond the limited discourses of identity politics that circulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

This research traces Yoon's commitment to photoconceptual practices and her dialogic affiliation to the Vancouver School for a nuanced understanding of her multifarious conceptual strategies. Yoon's work illustrates critical responses to national and ideological landscapes that have shaped representations of Canadian identity. At the intersections of multicultural feminism and cultural race politics expressed in Yoon's work, I propose the term transmodal feminism. This thesis follows Yoon's practice to reimagine the language used to discuss the politics of culture and representation that hopes to speak to *all* identities.

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## **Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One.....	12
Through the Lens: Refocusing Photoconceptualism in Vancouver	
Chapter Two.....	39
Our Home and Native Land: Relocating Canadian Landscapes	
Chapter Three.....	74
Transmodal Feminism: Regendering Narratives	
Conclusion.....	103
Figures.....	107
Bibliography.....	131

## List of Illustrations

### Chapter One

- Figure 1.1 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991.  
Figure 1.2 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Installation view)  
Figure 1.3 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)  
Figure 1.4 Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979  
Figure 1.5 Jeff Wall *Steves Farm, Stevenston*, 1980  
Figure 1.6 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Installation view)  
Figure 1.7 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1990 (Installation view)  
Figure 1.8 Dan Graham *Homes for America*, 1966-67 (Detail)  
Figure 1.9 Robert Smithson *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, 1967 (Detail)  
Figure 1.10 Jeff Wall *Landscape Manual*, 1969 (Detail)  
Figure 1.11 Christos Dikeakos *Instant Photo Information*, 1970 (Detail)  
Figure 1.12 Ian Wallace *La Melancholie de la Rue*, 1973  
Figure 1.13 Roy Arden *Construction Site and Suntower, Vancouver, B.C.*, 1992.  
Figure 1.14 Jeff Wall *The Pine on the Corner*, 1990  
Figure 1.15 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Detail, video still of Thomas Edison's *Train Ride Through Kicking Horse Pass*, 1898)  
Figure 1.16 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Detail, video stills)  
Figure 1.17 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)  
Figure 1.18 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)

### Chapter Two

- Figure 2.1 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996  
Figure 2.2 Lawren Harris *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park*, 1924  
Figure 2.3 Emily Carr *Old Time Coastal Village*, 1929-1930  
Figure 2.4 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Installation view)  
Figure 2.5 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Detail)  
Figure 2.6 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Detail)  
Figure 2.7 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Installation view)  
Figure 2.8 Joyce Wieland *109 Views*, 1970-1971  
Figure 2.9 Michael Snow *Plus Tard*, 1977  
Figure 2.10 Greg Curnoe *Map of North America*, 1972  
Figure 2.11 Christos Dikeakos *Ch'e Chée Lmun*, 1992  
Figure 2.12 Stan Douglas *Nu·tka·*, 1996 (Detail, video stills)  
Figure 2.13 Rodney Graham *Linden, Ronse (Flanders Trees)*, 1989

## **Chapter Three**

- Figure 3.1 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)  
Figure 3.2 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993  
Figure 3.3 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)  
Figure 3.4 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)  
Figure 3.5 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)  
Figure 3.6 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)  
Figure 3.7 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)  
Figure 3.8 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)  
Figure 3.9 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)  
Figure 3.10 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)  
Figure 3.11 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)

## Introduction

*The site of representation has always been integral to the cultural politics of difference.*  
- Monika Kin Gagnon

*A landscape is that site encountered as image or “sight.”*  
- W. J. T. Mitchell

Since early 2006 when I began the research for this thesis, there have been a number of exhibitions attending to the question; “Is identity politics dead?” In a time when race has been reinscribed into our everyday lives and the meaning of culture is once again a highly contested term, race and culture have moved to the forefront of political discourses and Canadian arts communities have returned to questions and concerns generated by identity politics with renewed vigour. Between 2006 and 2008, the increasing number of group exhibitions addressing the politics of culture and race in the Canadian context demonstrates that these issues are intensely relevant and crucially current.

One of the first of these exhibitions, *the life and death of i.d.*, was held at McMaster University in 2006. Curator Sally Frater framed the works of eight artists to question whether it is possible to have entered into an era of “post-identity” given the many contemporary examples of racism and social injustice that shape our everyday lives. She suggested that post-identity discourses result from the conspicuous absence of a forum for discourse and dialogue surrounding these issues at a time when “the need for

interrogation and resolution certainly still exists.”<sup>1</sup> Frater’s exhibition preceded Liz Park’s *Limits of Tolerance: Re-framing Multicultural State Policy*, exhibited at Centre A in Vancouver, which revisited artworks produced between 1988 and 1995 during a time when Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists were engaging in intense debates about race. Her exhibition reiterated the critical response of cultural producers who responded to what Park calls the “paradoxical pairing of equality and difference, which are deeply embedded in the rhetoric of multiculturalism” that shapes popular perceptions of cultural diversity.<sup>2</sup> These two exhibitions marked a return to the issues and questions brought forth by identity politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Exhibitions such as *Anthem: Perspectives on Home and Native Land* and *Leaving Deep Water* posed similar questions within contemporary contexts.<sup>3</sup>

These exhibitions mark a resurgence of artistic production that grapples with the politics of culture, race, gender, sexuality, and class, substantiating the sense that, in our contemporary situation, issues of identity are far from resolved. Furthermore, cultural producers and thinkers are proposing a reimaging of the discourses used to tackle these important and difficult questions. What has emerged is a recognition of the need to rewrite the terms used to discuss the politics of culture and race that acknowledges the trappings of the politics of identity, yet continually seeks to move beyond its restrictive vocabulary.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Frater, “The Life and Death of I.D.” exhibition pamphlet (Hamilton: McMaster Museum of Art, 2006), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> Liz Park, *The Limits of Tolerance: Re-framing Multicultural State Policy*, ed. Joni Low, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 2007), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Anthem: Perspectives on Home and Native Land* (2007), curated by Ryan Rice. Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa. *Leaving Deep Water* (2008), curated by Minh Nguyen. Galerie SAW Gallery, Ottawa.

For almost two decades, artist Jin-me Yoon has contended with the social and cultural narratives that produce subjectivity. She has consistently employed a strategy of quoting the structures that contain subjectivity while disrupting the very terms by which they operate. In an interview in 1996, Yoon declared “I’ve been thinking about systems of containment, certain narratives which function to neatly construct ‘us’ and ‘them’ in a Canadian context.”<sup>4</sup> Working with and within these narratives, Yoon proposes that “all aspects of identity are intertwined and interarticulated.”<sup>5</sup> Her work poignantly and candidly contends with discourses that contain and direct processes of identification and, at the same time, reveals sites of possibility to express intersections of identification. In response to these previous statements, Yoon suggests:

Perhaps this is what is at the basis of my production so far. What I hope for is more flexible and fluid identities that are future-focused towards social transformation and greater freedom. I’m compelled to re-work the past since identities do not exist outside discursive articulation; however, I want to imagine new identities that aren’t reliant on binaristic antagonisms.<sup>6</sup>

Yoon was born in Seoul, Korea, in 1960 and immigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia, with her family in 1968 where she currently lives and works. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and liberal arts from the University of British Columbia in 1985 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1990. In 1992 she began teaching at the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University after receiving a Masters of Fine Arts from Concordia

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<sup>4</sup> Jin-me Yoon, “Other Conundrums: Monika Kin Gagnon in Conversation with Jin-me Yoon,” interview by Monika Kin Gagnon, *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival* exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 64.

University in Montreal, Quebec. Since 1989, Yoon's work has been exhibited in solo and group shows in North America, Asia, Australia, and Europe.

Yoon's artistic practice critically and creatively pursues and questions the constructs of cultural identity and, in particular, Canadian identity. While she often uses herself as the subject, she states that "what may appear to be personal narratives in fact imply larger social and historical considerations. Seen in this light, what I choose to recount is no longer about me as an isolated individual."<sup>7</sup> Her work interrogates the intersections between the personal, regional, and national narratives to present a critically nuanced, visually engaging representation of Canadian identity.

As a well-established artist, there have been a number of articles and exhibitions devoted to Yoon's work. Writing about her work has been fairly diffuse, and there has been no scholarly investigation of her oeuvre as a whole. However, there have been catalogues written for solo and group exhibitions that provide useful insights into her work. The catalogue for Yoon's solo exhibition, *between departure and arrival* (1998), is perhaps the most comprehensive writing devoted to her work with an in-depth catalogue essay by Hyun Yi Kang that situates *between departure and arrival* in the context of Yoon's earlier work. The catalogue also includes an engaging interview with Yoon by Monika Kin Gagnon in which Yoon imparts invaluable insights regarding her practice. Two other catalogues for solo exhibitions, *Touring Home from Away* (2003) and *Unbidden* (2004), focus insightful discussions on the respective pieces but give only cursory attention to contextualizing Yoon's work.

Discussions of Yoon's work have also appeared in a number of group exhibition catalogues. *Crossings* (1998) and *Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art* (1995) are

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<sup>7</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 46-47.

of particular note for their discussions of the tension between displacement and representations of Canadian identity present in Yoon's work. However, while these themes are certainly important to Yoon's work, she also addresses other issues that are absent from these discussions; issues which I will discuss in my thesis. Both of the above mentioned exhibitions included *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, and thus the discussion concentrated on situating this work within the curatorial context of each exhibition. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* was first exhibited for *Topographies*, and Grant Arnold includes an important description of the context for the work's creation in the catalogue essay noting, briefly, Yoon's engagement with constructions of Canadian identity. In the catalogue for *Crossings*, Germain Koh provides a substantive and insightful reading of a selection of Yoon's works while Diana Nemiroff frames *A Group of Sixty-Seven* within the curatorial scaffold of exile and diaspora—ideas that are certainly vital but not exclusively explored in Yoon's work.

Other group exhibition catalogues touch only superficially on Yoon's work. They are often limited to positioning one work within a curatorial framework or providing a useful anecdote about the work. For this thesis, their value lies primarily in understanding the contexts in which Yoon's work was exhibited and discussed. *Between Views and Points of View* (1991), *Body Takes* (1991), *Corpus* (1993), and *Beaver Tales* (2000) all approach Yoon's *Souvenirs of the Self* from the perspective of her engagement with identity politics, concentrating on the dissonance between the racialized body and the Canadian landscape. *Fertile Ground* (1996) and *Urban Fictions* (1997) present refreshing perspectives on *Intersections*, a work that addresses maternal and feminist concerns. This particular work proves Yoon's profound interest in these questions. Yet,

feminism is widely excluded from discussions of Yoon's other works, which are distilled into issues of racialization, Canadian identity, and identity politics. The only group exhibition catalogue that even touches on Yoon's choice of medium is *Dark Display* (1999). Judy Radul offers discerning comments on the integral role of video and projection in advancing the theoretical considerations of *between departure and arrival*.

There are a number of books and journal articles that make reference to Yoon's work, most often focusing on *Souvenirs of the Self* and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*. Laura Hyun Yi Kang's *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (2002) offers a substantive examination the performed subjectivity in *Souvenirs of the Self* within one of the chapters. In her book, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home and Identity in Canada* (2003), Erin Manning touches on *A Group of Sixty-Seven* to introduce concepts of territorialisation in landscape art. Sarah Phillips Casteel's *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writings of the Americas* (2007) insightfully uses literary theory to compare the articulations of diasporic identities in the pastoral landscapes of *Touring Home from Away* with a film installation by Isaac Julien. Brenda Lafleur's essay, "Resting in History: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon" (1996) offers an invaluable exploration of the deconstructive potential of *Souvenirs of the Self*. Lynda Jessup discusses the same work in her article, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist or The More Things Change..." (2002), which introduces Yoon's engagement with the Group of Seven. Casteel, Lafleur, and Jessup's writing on Yoon's work provided a foundation for my analysis of her engagement with the landscape and are of particular significance to my research. However, far too often, books and anthologies about photography or landscape provide only a cursory inclusion of Yoon's work, and

she certainly has not been included in texts regarding the Vancouver School or photoconceptualism.<sup>8</sup>

Newspaper and magazine reviews of Yoon's work offer little more than a reiteration that posits her work in the context of identity politics. While the construction of identity is an issue that informs her practice, focusing on this one aspect glosses over the possible complexities of a layered, multivalent reading of Yoon's work that I will outline in this thesis. Yoon's personal history is almost always used to situate her work within discourses of identity politics, foregrounding her Korean-Canadian identity, rather than uncovering relevant conceptual and theoretical considerations using an analysis of her work. While Yoon does explore autobiography as an integral tool in her work, she employs it as a mechanism to address the social and cultural constructions of identity, and not to articulate her own identity as a Korean-Canadian woman, as is suggested by this kind of writing.

There seems to be an overwhelming emphasis on the dissonance between the racialized body and Canadian landscapes in the writings about Yoon's work. This discomfort is significant to the critical discourses she engages with her work. However, much of the writing does not unpack the multifaceted relationships and interactions at play. In Chapters Two and Three, I will delve into the complexity of issues that Yoon reveals and interrogates through her work; questions of the social and cultural constructions of race marked on the body, constructions of national identity housed in the

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<sup>8</sup> The most recent examples of these passing references to Yoon's work can be found in: John O'Brian and Peter White, eds, *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2007); Lori Pauli, ed. *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006); Karen Love, ed, *Facing History: Portraits from Vancouver* (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2004); Penny Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death: Canadian Photography and the Canadian Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); and the list goes on.

landscape, and her exploration of gender issues and transnational narratives. Finally, in all but three cases, these short articles dismiss her formal engagements with discourses in contemporary art and, in particular, with the Vancouver School and photoconceptualism.<sup>9</sup>

Yoon's work is most often referred to within the context of identity politics, with almost exclusive reference to issues of race. I propose a rewriting of the discourses about her work from the 1990s that places the complexity and subtlety with which she investigates questions of identity in the foreground. In doing so, I hope to provide a critically rigorous foundation for a contemporary dialogue that is situated in political intersectionality and both acknowledges existing power structures and moves beyond their restrictive limits. There have been many scholars and cultural producers who have expressed criticisms and concerns with the terms and language of identity politics. In conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon, Richard Fung simply and astutely explains:

Identity politics ... is popularly used to indicate the discourses of minoritized subjects whether "of colour," indigenous, gay, or whatever. Sometimes it's neutral, but more often it's used dismissively to conjure a simplistic, single-issue politics of self-righteous rage and guilt-mongering. It's counterposed to criticality and rigour, and to class-based analysis. I am critical of a kind of self-defined anti-racist, feminist and/or queer politics that does not integrate an analysis of how various forms of oppression intersect and merge. There is a kind of moralism around identity that often passes for politics.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The only articles that I have found mentioning Yoon's engagement with photoconceptualism with a sentence or two: Robin Laurence, "Yoon Makes Amazing Images of Motherhood, Milk, and Kimchi" *Georgia Straight* (Vancouver), 10-16 May 2001; and Adrienne Lai, "Renegotiating the Terms of Inclusion: Institutional Space, (Dis)location and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*," *Fuse* 23.1 (April 2000): 18; Grant Arnold provides a slightly more in depth analysis of Yoon's work in relation to photoconceptualism in a relatively inaccessible publication "Purism, Heterogeneity and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*" in *Collapse #3: Home Improvements: Institutions and Other Perversions*, Judith Mastai and John O'Brian eds (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Forum, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Fung, "Framings," conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon, in *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 20.

Fung candidly expresses the hesitation and weariness among cultural producers whose works are labelled by identity politics, a term that simplifies the work and undermines “criticality and rigour.” Vancouver photoconceptual artist Ken Lum expresses a concern that often the art of the late 1970s to early 1990s that dealt with identity had essentializing tendencies. His comment, “I thought the form was dull and it shut down criticism because it was only the subject matter that counted,”<sup>11</sup> reiterates Fung’s frustration with the lack of complexity associated with the terms of identity politics.

Coco Fusco expresses her criticism of the backlash against socially-engaged art practices of identity politics that implies that colonialism, institutional racism, and a history of Eurocentrism never existed.<sup>12</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih suggest that one of the major pitfalls of identity politics as a critique of the centre is that it seems only to enhance its dominance. They suggest that “the marginal or the other remains a philosophical concept and futuristic promise: the other never ‘arrives,’ he or she is always ‘à venir.’”<sup>13</sup> This temporally situates the other as always already late in a binary and vertical relationship of the major and the minor.<sup>14</sup> Sneja Gunew, in *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, critiques the theoretical debates associated with identity politics as founded on “essentialism and claims for authenticity which reinstate the sovereign subject and reified notions of origin.”<sup>15</sup> While attending to issues of identity with intricacy and subtlety, Yoon’s artistic practice works to reveal and

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<sup>11</sup> Ken Lum, “Art +/or Politics?” conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon, in *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 60.

<sup>12</sup> Coco Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), xv.

<sup>13</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, “Introduction: Thinking Through the Minor, Transnationally,” in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Lionnet and Shih, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 15.

contest the limiting and reductive vocabulary of identity politics. In the following chapters, I will explore Yoon’s engagement with photoconceptualism, critical landscape practices, and what I call “transmodal feminism” to uncover the nuances and complexities of her artistic practice.

In Chapter One, I trace Yoon’s commitment to photoconceptual practices and her dialogic affiliation to the Vancouver School. I argue that an appreciation of the formal foundation for her work is essential to an understanding of her multifarious conceptual strategies. I compile a definition of photoconceptualism to establish Yoon’s alignment to these discourses and to map out a brief narrative of the Vancouver School as it relates to Yoon’s practice. In doing so, I suggest possible reasons for the absence of any writing that connects Yoon’s practice with photoconceptualism or the Vancouver School.

Chapters Two and Three provide an in-depth exploration of Yoon’s conceptual practices. Chapter Two offers a response to the countless articles and reviews which address Yoon’s engagement with Canadian identity and the politics of culture and race. However, I present her work within a discussion of the nationalist and ideological landscapes that shape popular conceptions of Canadian identity. First, using *A Group of Sixty-Seven* as a roadmap, I trace a brief narrative of the institutions that generate and preserve an art historical narrative that privileges the Group of Seven and landscape art in Canada. Secondly, using the same work, I explore how conditions of representation uphold national ideologies and produce conditions of containment, inclusion, and exclusion. Finally, I provide a narrative of conceptual landscape practices that respond to institutional and ideological constructions of Canadian identity represented by landscape art and situate Yoon’s work in dialogue with these practices. Chapter Three explores the

intersections of multicultural feminism and cultural race politics expressed in Yoon's work. In that chapter, I propose adopting the term transmodal feminism to discuss politically active feminism situated in the subtleties of experience and that suggests a commonality that moves within and between subjectivities. I provide a thorough analysis of *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Screens* to outline Yoon's employment of the body and autobiographical statements as sites of representation for transmodal feminism.

The investigation of Yoon's artistic practice that I outline with this thesis reveals the nuanced complexity with which she contends with questions and issues of identity. By means of a comprehensive analysis of her practice, I hope to rewrite and reimagine the language used to discuss the constructions of identity. Yoon's work provides the forum to explore a vocabulary that moves beyond identity politics. Yoon states, “[language] cannot be naturalized; transparent meaning does not exist. I think that this constructedness of language becomes heightened when you have to learn another language. . . . it is not just about acquiring another tool to communicate but about learning an entire world view through syntax.”<sup>16</sup> Evident in our contemporary moment is the need for a new language, a new syntax to respond to and reimagine our world view.

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<sup>16</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 61.

## **Chapter One**

### **Through the Lens: Refocusing Photoconceptualism in Vancouver**

In this chapter, I argue that an analysis of Yoon's commitment to photoconceptualism in the context of the Vancouver School is crucial to a more thorough and profound understanding of her work. I explore how Yoon's formal and aesthetic practices shape her work and contribute to Canadian art historical narratives. Further, as one of Canada's most internationally recognized contemporary art movements, it is valuable to acknowledge the relevance of Yoon's work to the discourses of the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism and to explore the reasons why Yoon's work has been excluded from its narrative. Educated in Vancouver with a compelling interest in photoconceptual practices, Yoon's artistic production participates in a critical dialogue with these artistic movements. To demonstrate Yoon's correlation, I offer definitions of photoconceptualism and a brief narrative of the Vancouver School as it relates to her practice. Delving into both the conceptual foundation and the visual identity of photoconceptualism in Vancouver reveals conclusive parallels between Yoon's work and that of artists recognized as the Vancouver School. Further, I present an in-depth analysis of the Vancouver School's continued treatment of the city as a subject and outline Yoon's response to these works, situated in the rural and wilderness landscapes of Canada. Lastly, I explore possible reasons for Yoon's conspicuous absence from the discourses about the Vancouver School or in the context of photoconceptualism.

An analysis of Yoon's oeuvre within the context of photoconceptual practices in Vancouver offers evidence of her critical dialogue with the Vancouver School. Two questions that arise are: 1) why has Yoon not been included in these discourses and 2) why is a formal analysis of her practice overshadowed by discussions of identity politics? This conspicuous absence of any discussion of Yoon's work as it relates to the Vancouver School or photoconceptualism denies her formal engagement and participation with a significant Canadian artistic movement. In this chapter, I will address the questions posed above and why her work is ostensibly marginalized within the restrictive category of identity politics as I suggested in my review of the literature attending to Yoon's practice. This is not to deny her engagement with the politics of culture and race, but rather to offer this discourse as a function of the photoconceptual project. I will also suggest other socially conscious semiotic systems revealed in Yoon's work, such as feminism, gender politics, and critical representations of nationalism, that both situate her work within photoconceptualism and perhaps explain her exclusion from the discourses of that very movement.

The nature of photoconceptual practices in Vancouver is closely tied to the written discourses of intellectuals, artists, and writers and thus, this community must also be considered. Marina Roy and Reid Shier explore the vital connections between photography and text through an examination of the entangled relationship of writers and artist-intellectuals who were writing about artistic production in Vancouver.<sup>17</sup> Both cite the importance of artists theorizing their own work and the intimate relationship between the

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<sup>17</sup> Marina Roy, "Adventures in Reading Landscape," in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, ed. Melanie O'Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 76; Reid Shier, "Buddies, Pals" in *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*, eds. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, exhibition catalogue (Verona: AZ Grafiche, 2005), 80-82.

Vancouver School and the Kootenay School of Writing, supported by the Or Gallery and Artspeak—both artist-run centres in Vancouver dedicated to writing and publishing.<sup>18</sup> Clint Burnham, too, argues that the emergence of photoconceptualism was associated with the role of universities, the institutionalization of cultural production, and the intellectualization of artists and their education.<sup>19</sup> This fertile relationship between artists and writers took root in the 1980s,<sup>20</sup> around the same time that Melanie O'Brian suggests that the Vancouver School had gained currency in the international art market. Wall, too, discusses his influential role as an artist-intellectual, particularly between 1975 and 1985 when he was both writing and teaching. He acknowledges his role in writing catalogue essays and critical texts about his peers and colleagues.<sup>21</sup> While he denounces writing as integral to his own artistic development, his work as a writer attests to Roy and Shier's statements about the centrality of artist-intellectuals in establishing the community that became known as the Vancouver School. Roy concludes that language can be "instrumental in constructing a seemingly cohesive art scene or movement through its intentional inclusions and exclusions" and that "the dominant contemporary art narrative circulating locally [in Vancouver] and internationally is a construction based on stylistic avant-gardisms, largely devoid of socio-political intentions."<sup>22</sup>

This begins to explain Yoon's exclusion from the discourse of photoconceptualism and the Vancouver School. Although, as I argue below, her work is aesthetically and conceptually in dialogue with the Vancouver School, her artistic practice is ripe with socio-

<sup>18</sup> Roy, 76; Shier, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Clint Burnham, "Fourteen Reasons for Photoconceptualism," *West Coast Line* 47 (Fall 2005): 103.

<sup>20</sup> Roy, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Wall, "Post-'60s Photography and Its Modernist Context: A Conversation between Jeff Wall and John Roberts," in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 331-333.

<sup>22</sup> Roy, 90-91.

political intentions, saturating the conceptual and theoretical frameworks with issues that align her work with the politics of culture, race, and gender. Her conceptual practice is to contest the social and cultural constructions of race and identity and thus does not easily fit into an art movement that, as Roy argues, is “largely devoid of socio-political intentions.”

Ian Wallace, in his important text “Photoconceptualism in Vancouver,” also partners the formal aims of photoconceptualism with a depoliticizing of the movement. He outlines the connection between the process of addressing the image as object in photoconceptualism and Duchamp’s ready-made, which “played upon the decontextualization of conventional readings of the everyday object,” and specifically in photoconceptualism, the image.<sup>23</sup>

Wallace states that now, this process has become a “cipher for the arbitrariness of the sign” consequently diverting the political critique for a critique of the legitimacy of the signifier itself.<sup>24</sup> While Yoon maintains this critique of the signifier, she does so from a politically and socially critical position. Further, as I outline in the subsequent text, her work functions in a critical dialogue with the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism. Yoon demonstrates the limitations of the group’s cohesiveness and questions strategies of inclusion and exclusion by both positioning her work within the photoconceptualist framework, using the vocabulary of the movement to critique its self-professed definitions from within its structures. Indeed, her work has yet to be written about by either the Vancouver School’s artist-intellectuals or Vancouver’s community of writers, which

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Wallace, “Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver,” in *Thirteen Essays on Photography* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, 1988), 100. Blake Stimson, in his essay “The Promise of Conceptual Art,” explores the leftist political landscape from which Conceptualism emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s. He suggests that this generated a politically charged approach to the art object and the art market, but did not necessarily translate into politically motivated subject matter in Conceptualism. Given the definitions of Photoconceptualism outlined in this chapter, I think the same could apply here.

Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999), xxxix-lii.

<sup>24</sup> Wallace, 100-101.

further perpetuates her exclusion from the Vancouver School. This is not to say that Yoon must be considered a member of the movement, but understanding her engagement in Vancouver's photoconceptual practices provides a critical framework for the examination of both Yoon's formal considerations and for the formation of the Vancouver School.

### **Photoconceptual Practices**

In 1988, Ian Wallace wrote a foundational text that is often cited as the first writing on the subject, entitled "Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver." He refers to photoconceptual art as "photographic work that originated in conceptual art."<sup>25</sup> With strong roots in the modernist project, Wallace states that photoconceptualism simultaneously critiqued modernism's hegemonic practices with the heterogeneity and marginality that aligns photoconceptualism with postmodernist activity.<sup>26</sup> Clint Burnham's narrative of photoconceptualism announces the movement with an epistemic break or rupture in the canon of art photography in the way that it sought to de-reify the art photograph.<sup>27</sup> Photography was previously (and often still is) associated with photojournalism, street photography, amateur photography, advertising, mass media, and documentary photography, media popularly thought of as unmediated images of reality. This narrative structure aligns the development of photoconceptualism with modernist movements in painting and sculpture. Both Burnham and Wallace situate the epistemic shift in artistic discourses of photoconceptualism as the defining feature of modernisms. Christopher Brayshaw's essay, "Out of Sight: The Image Beyond the Index," offers a number of observations that clarify and expand on some of Wallace's earlier musings on this

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<sup>25</sup> Wallace, 95.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace, 95

<sup>27</sup> Burnham, 100, 102.

emerging artistic movement in Vancouver. Like Wallace and Burnham, Brayshaw equates photoconceptualism with Greenbergian modernism and lays out a narrative that parallels the trajectory of photography's development with modernisms in painting and sculpture.<sup>28</sup> Quoting Clement Greenberg's writing entitled "Modernist Painting," Brayshaw reiterates that "what had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art."<sup>29</sup> Brayshaw points out that while the modernist project of painting and sculpture was to distil content to formalism, materiality, and self-referentiality, he observes that the "lovely irony" is that photography's modernist aims could not be similarly reductivist because the essence of a photograph is to depict things.<sup>30</sup>

Brayshaw argues that photoconceptualism uncovers the photographic text to reveal that images are not "self-contained, but are composed of numerous, often conflicting semiotic systems."<sup>31</sup> According to Victor Burgin

There is no single *signifying system* (as opposed to technical apparatus) upon which all photographs depend, in the sense in which all texts in English ultimately depend on the English language; there is no 'language of photography' in the sense of a *langue*. There is rather a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw... Each photographic text signifies on the basis of a plurality of codes, the number and type of codes involved varying between texts...<sup>32</sup>

In following the modernist project of distilling a medium to its purest form, photography explores and reveals the numerous semiotic systems that inform an image. In doing so, the artist uncovers and exposes the plurality of often conflicting codes of a seemingly self-

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<sup>28</sup> Christopher Brayshaw, "Out of Sight: A Historical Context for Some Recent Photographs and Videos," in *Out of Sight: The Image Beyond the Index* (Surrey: Surrey Art Gallery, 2000), 4-7.

<sup>29</sup> Clement Greenberg, quoted in Brayshaw, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Brayshaw, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Brayshaw, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Victor Burgin, quoted in Brayshaw, 9.

contained photograph. This “complex of codes” or the lack of a *langue* of photography enabled a framework for Yoon’s investigations of identity.

In subsequent chapters, I will provide an in-depth analysis of Yoon’s conceptual practice. Here, I will briefly mention some of the conceptual frameworks employed in Yoon’s works in order to demonstrate her participation in photoconceptualism. In many of her works, such as *Souvenirs of the Self* (fig. 1.1), *between departure and arrival* (fig. 1.2), and *Touring Home From Away* (fig. 1.3), Yoon engages with constructions of identity to expose the semiotic systems that impose or create subjectivity. All three of these examples juxtapose the body and the landscape in varying configurations to expose the semiotic systems of race, gender, and landscape that construct subjectivity. Yoon reveals the textuality of the landscape used in Canada to represent a specific construction of Canadian identity as associated with the north, with Anglo-Saxon or northern European origin. The narratives of colonialism are also written into the North American landscape, depicted as empty of human presence and synonymous with visualizing territoriality. Yoon’s works represent, both literally and figuratively, the art historical texts that have informed Canadian art history and visual representations of Canadian identity. The visual codes of race and the processes of racialization are represented on the marked body, emphasized by the dress of the figures in these three works. Yoon also engages with a feminist vocabulary, located on the gendered body and represented by the relationships between figures that Yoon sets out in her photographs. The stance and expression of the figures in *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Touring Home From Away* call to mind tourist imagery of the postcard or the family snapshot, evoking the languages of mobility. While this brief exploration of Yoon’s conceptual frameworks only alludes to the depth of her work, even a

cursory examination of these works reveals multiple semiotic systems and offers evidence of an artistic oeuvre entrenched in photoconceptual practices. I will provide a detailed analysis of Yoon's conceptual engagement in the following chapters.

In his essay, "Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver," Wallace traces the development of photoconceptualism, starting with the appearance of photographs in conceptual art practices in the 1960s and citing the work of N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter), Jeff Wall, and Christos Dikeakos.<sup>33</sup> According to the definitions of photoconceptualism outlined above, a conceptual foundation for artistic production is the defining feature of the movement. The first reference in writing to conceptual art has been attributed to Sol LeWitt. In his essay, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," he states: "In conceptual art the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."<sup>34</sup> Lucy Lippard describes Conceptual art ("with a capital C") as "work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious, and/or 'dematerialized.'"<sup>35</sup> She distinguishes this from Sol LeWitt's conceptual art ("with a small c") in which "material forms were often conventional, although generated by a paramount idea." In Vancouver, N.E. Thing Co., the collaborative artist company of Iain and Ingrid Baxter, contributed to conceptual art discourses.

Photography played an integral role in documenting their conceptual processes. For

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<sup>33</sup> Wallace, 96.

<sup>34</sup> Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 12. Reprint from *Artforum*, 5:10 (Summer 1967): 79-84.

<sup>35</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996), 17.

example, in 1968, N. E. Thing Co. began producing their *Act* project, wherein the company legally claimed landscapes or views, natural and built, as “Aesthetically Claimed Things.” The work was the act of claiming the landscape, but it was the photograph and the sign designating the vista as aesthetically claimed that together produced the view. N.E. Thing Co.’s use of photography provided a foundation for the Vancouver lineage of photoconceptual practices.

Wallace writes that the 1970s saw the development of cinematic narratives and semiotic engagements in the work of artists such as Rodney Graham and Ken Lum and with the emergence of Wall’s large, back-lit Cibachrome images in 1977.<sup>36</sup> This was followed by an artistic turn to the critical and deconstructive interventions of images from mass-media of the 1980s, citing the same artists and adding the works of Stan Douglas.<sup>37</sup> In 1988 when Wallace wrote the essay, he argued that “since there was literally no regional market ... the primacy of the art object as such was never a question.”<sup>38</sup> However, it was right around this time that Vancouver art rose to prominence in the international art market, as Melanie O’Brian argues in *Vancouver Art and Economies*.<sup>39</sup>

Melanie O’Brian attributes the “Vancouver School” label that emerged in the 1980s to international interest in a group of artists, most often focusing on the work of Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, and Ian Wallace (and sometimes Roy Arden and Stan Douglas). O’Brian argues that their work was exported and presented in important international museums, exhibitions, biennales, and art fairs, and that works by the

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<sup>36</sup> Wallace, 99. Backlit transparency photographs were arguably pioneered by Iain Baxter in 1967; Scott Watson, “Urban Renewal: Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties,” in *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*, eds. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, exhibition catalogue (Verona: AZ Grafiche, 2005), 36.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, 99.

<sup>38</sup> Wallace, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Melanie O’Brian, “Introduction,” in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, ed. Melanie O’Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 22

Vancouver School were marketed to an international audience and were rarely exhibited in Vancouver.<sup>40</sup> The international authors of *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*, Bart De Baere and Dieter Roelstraete, define the Vancouver School according to its “distinctively cerebral ‘Vancouver style’ or mode of thought,” the especially postmodern juxtaposition of the globalized city in a particularly localized setting, and the “intricate web of artistic lineages that gave rise to or evolved from [photoconceptualism].”<sup>41</sup> They subtly but tellingly differentiate a “Vancouver style” from photoconceptualism suggesting that the Vancouver School, which arguably was founded on conceptual practices, developed a kind of visual identity with aesthetic and formal coherence that was promoted on the international art market. Burnham situates his larger argument about the social context of the “Vancouver school of photoconceptualism” as pertaining to “this aesthetic period” with a “unity of practice” or a “‘family resemblance’ to Vancouver photoconceptualism.”<sup>42</sup> Sharla Sava points out that Vancouver’s regional artistic production has become synonymous with photoconceptualism even though there were artists producing work outside of this aesthetic and theoretical milieu.<sup>43</sup> Wallace discusses a turn to vanguardist attitudes towards form between 1968 to 1974, with large format backlit photographic prints on lightboxes taking on a minimalist sculptural quality and with the emergence of book works with photographs, photo documentation of performances, and video.<sup>44</sup> What has developed over recent decades is that there are certain aesthetic and formal articulations of

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<sup>40</sup> O’Brian, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Bart De Baere and Dieter Roelstraete, “Introducing Intertidal,” in *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*, eds. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, exhibition catalogue (Verona: AZ Grafiche, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>42</sup> Burnham, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Sava cites Judith Mastai and Greg Simpson; Sharla Sava, “Cinematic Pictures: The Legacy of the Vancouver Counter-Tradition,” in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, ed. Melanie O’Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Wallace 99, 101. Video becomes significant to Yoon’s later works, such as *between departure and arrival* and her most recent works *Unbidden* and *The Dreaming Collective Knows No History (U.S. Embassy to Japanese Embassy, Seoul)*.

photoconceptualism that have come to visually represent the Vancouver School, regardless of the fundamental definitions of the movement. Though it is possible to argue that this aesthetic is attributed to the manner in which conceptual practices manifest themselves formally and compositionally or that there is an aesthetic intrinsic to photoconceptual practices, it is most likely that the intimate regional arts community and Vancouver's formidable artistic lineage have produced a relatively coherent aesthetic. Regardless, O'Brian's observations about the Vancouver School label pertain to the group's visual identity and are reiterated by Wallace, Burnham, and Brayshaw in their descriptions of the aesthetic considerations of works by the Vancouver School.

This visual identity is associated with the presentation of the photograph rather than just its conceptual content. Large scale photography has become a prevalent format used by the Vancouver School of photoconceptualists ever since it was introduced by Jeff Wall in 1977 with works such as *Faking Death* (1977), *The Destroyed Room* (1978), *Picture for Women* (1979) (fig. 1.4), and *Steve's Farm, Stevenston* (1980) (fig. 1.5), which were all mounted on lightboxes. This format was taken up by founding artists such as Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, and Roy Arden among others. Yoon uses large scale photography in a number of her works including installations of *Souvenirs of the Self, Screens, Touring Home from Away, Intersections*, and video stills from *Unbidden*. Often, her large scale photographs are mounted on lightboxes, most notably in *Touring Home from Away* (fig. 1.6). Here, Yoon installed photographs on double sided lightboxes showing slightly different views of the same scene. This installation strategy juxtaposes two frames and contexts for the image to critically expose the role of the frame in constructing an image. The sculptural form of the lightbox bears a likeness to the high modernist minimalist

sculptures of Donald Judd. This is particularly evident in Yoon's installation of *Screens* (fig. 1.7). Here, she invokes the lineage of minimalism, and responds to Donald Judd's essay "Specific Objects," which stressed the importance of uncovering the essence of the medium.<sup>45</sup>

Yoon's photo essay *Screens*, published in *Ms.* magazine, specifically addresses works by key figures who appeared at the beginning of the Vancouver School's art historical narrative. Brayshaw describes the relevance of Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966-67, *Arts Magazine*) (fig. 1.8) and Robert Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967, *Artforum*) (fig. 1.9) in establishing the idea of "photographic texts." Smithson pairs images with text to propose as one possible means of unpacking the image, encouraging the viewer to continue the process.<sup>46</sup> Like the works by Graham and Smithson, *Screens* responds to photoconceptualism's interest in the textuality of the image, offering the reader an entry into their own textual and conceptual engagement with the images. This medium and format reveals the reification of photographic images from mass media (advertisements found in magazines), photojournalism (the marriage of text and image to create fact), and amateur photography (Yoon's use of family photographs) by blurring the boundaries between these genres of photography. *Screens* further works against notions the original and unique art object by circulating multiple editions of the artwork in a popular magazine. She continues to pursue this particular medium with artist pages in magazines, such as *The Dreaming Collective Knows No*

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<sup>45</sup> Tim Lee, "Specific Objects and Social Subjects: Industrial Facture and the Production of Polemics in Vancouver," in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, ed. Melanie O'Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 101, 103.

<sup>46</sup> Brayshaw, 16.

*History* published in *Blackflash* magazine (2008).<sup>47</sup> These works provide examples of Yoon's participation, both theoretically and formally, in Vancouver's photoconceptual practices.

Sharla Sava succinctly outlines a turn to pictorial devices employed to generate a counter-tradition and vanguardist practices. This was a driving force in the regional arts community that produced a particular aesthetic associated with photoconceptualism in Vancouver.<sup>48</sup> She argues that, in other cities, conceptualism became the basis for deconstruction whereas, in Vancouver, conceptualism became the motivation for a return to pictorial strategies. This led to a common aesthetic among Vancouver artists. During the 1960s and 1970s, the trend of vanguardism was to move towards abstraction. Thus, figurative, pictorial, and narrative photography provided a means to both critique the limitations of vanguardism and to follow a counter-tradition.<sup>49</sup> In her work, Yoon juxtaposes figural and pictorial devices to reveal their respective narrative strategies. The landscapes in her work evoke the history of modernist painting in Canada both metaphorically, as in *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Touring Home From Away*, and literally, as in *A Group of Sixty-Seven*. Yoon inhabits these empty landscapes with figural presence. It is this juxtaposition that reveals the narrative strategies present in the respective semiotic systems. She also pushes this pictorial counter-tradition to extend to mass-media film and video footage in *between departure and arrival*, which literally uses archival media footage, and *Unbidden*, which metaphorically evokes media footage of the Vietnam War. More commonly, members of the Vancouver School employ pictorial narratives to make

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<sup>47</sup> Jin-me Yoon, "The Dreaming Collective Knows No History (U.S. Embassy to Japanese Embassy, Seoul)," *Blackflash* 25.1 (2007): artist pages (n.p.).

<sup>48</sup> Sava, 53-55.

<sup>49</sup> Sava, 55

specific art historical references. This is also seen in Yoon's earlier work, but she expands the concept with reference to press media imagery. Yoon's use of mass-media images function as a critique of the Vancouver School's elitist participation in reinstating their significance in art history by employing art historical images. This also allows Yoon to implicate popular systems of representation in the construction of subjectivities as well as historical systems of representation. Yoon's use of pictorial strategies both situates her practice within the discourses and aesthetics of the Vancouver School and offers a critical examination of this device.

### **Constructed Landscapes, Conceptual Photographs**

In Chapter Two, I will examine how Yoon conceptually unpacks the landscape as a semiotic system that constructs subjectivity and in particular, Canadian identity. I also provide additional in-depth comparisons between Yoon's work and the work of artists associated with the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism who employ conceptual landscape practices, such as Christos Dikeakos, Rodney Graham, and Stan Douglas. Here, I am interested in how Yoon critically responds to Vancouver's regional history of landscape art. Artists of the Vancouver School established a close connection between photoconceptual practices and the suburban landscape of Vancouver. Cityscapes were employed to locate and critically engage capitalist structures and were the sites for exploring the history of formal conventions that have shaped landscape art. For Yoon, the rural and wilderness landscapes of Canada are as constructed as the skyscrapers, bridges, streets and suburban homes of the city, and therefore, are also an important site for the exploration of these conceptual art practices.

Early photoconceptualists established the link between cityscapes and conceptual art, constructed environments and the articulation of consciousness. Burnham cites Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual* (1969) (fig. 1.10) and Christos Dikeakos' *Instant Photo Information* (1970) (fig. 1.11) as two works that mark a defining moment for photoconceptualism.<sup>50</sup> Scott Watson offers these two works as evidence of the inception of conceptual practices in Vancouver in response to the influential conceptual practices of Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, William Burroughs, and the Situationist practices of documenting the *dérive*.<sup>51</sup> *Landscape Manual* consisted of printed text with Wall's handwritten edits and photographic examples that set out instructions for capturing narratives of consciousness as they relate to the terrain of the city. The manual outlines a methodology of taking pictures, using one roll of film shot at random from the window of a car driving through a suburban area.<sup>52</sup> According to Watson, the resulting proposition is a "defeatured landscape;" an urban environment that was Vancouver, yet "something universal and generic ... because modernism and capitalism have abstract and universal characteristics."<sup>53</sup>

Christos Dikeakos used the United States' Farm Security Administration subject list of structures recommended for pictures, issued in the 1930s, to direct this *Instant Photo Information* project.<sup>54</sup> Dikeakos' interest in creating an "image of Vancouver which is precisely anonymous and mundane as any other industrialized urban landscape," also arguably produced a defeatured landscape.<sup>55</sup> What followed these groundbreaking works was a continued interest in representing the defeatured landscapes of the city—such as Ian

<sup>50</sup> Burnham, 102.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, "Urban Renewal," 35.

<sup>52</sup> Scott Watson, "Discovering the Defeatured Landscape," in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Practices of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 255.

<sup>53</sup> Watson, "Defeatured," 258.

<sup>54</sup> Watson, "Defeatured," 258. Note that the influential American photographer, Walker Evans, worked for the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s.

<sup>55</sup> Christos Dikeakos, quoted in Watson, "Defeatured," 258.

Wallace's *La Melancholie de la Rue* (1973) (fig. 1.12), Ken Lum's *Entertainment for Surrey* (1978), Roy Arden's *Construction Site and Suntower, Vancouver, B.C.* (1992) (fig. 1.13), Stan Douglas' *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001), and Jeff Wall's later photographs such as *Pin on the Corner* (1990) (fig. 1.14), to name only a few examples.

Watson proposes that this interest in representing the city first grew out of a concern with the ever changing landscape of the city, beginning in the mid-1950s and 1960s with the move out of the downtown and inner neighbourhoods to the suburbs that were expanding into the surrounding wilderness.<sup>56</sup> Vancouver seemed to be exemplary of the global trends of capitalism and the post-war cycles of demolition and reconstruction projects.<sup>57</sup> Arguably, this may have been a particularly ironic transformation for what was once a terminal city at the end of a national railway as it changed into the metropolis of a transnational gateway to the ever developing Pacific Rim. The examples given above of Wall, Dikeakos, Wallace, and Arden in particular, suggest that, at first, this interest in the city assumed a particularly critical stance towards the anonymous universalising effects of globalization. Later, the structures of capitalism were represented and expressed in local examples revealing the specificity of regional cityscapes such as the above examples of Lum and Douglas.

However, this is not to say, as Watson warns, that "a 'theme' runs through Vancouver art and that we can call this theme 'the city' or 'the conflict between the city and its natural setting.'"<sup>58</sup> Rather, Watson suggests that earlier articulations of photoconceptualism that employed the city were a "means to visualize the abstractions of

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<sup>56</sup> Watson, "Urban Renewal," 37.

<sup>57</sup> Watson, "Urban Renewal," 38.

<sup>58</sup> Watson, *Intertidal*, 33.

capitalism that were transforming the city.”<sup>59</sup> In his essay, “About Making Landscapes,” Jeff Wall states that he makes landscapes, or cityscapes, to “study the process of settlement” and to explore the landscape genre.<sup>60</sup> He expresses an interest in understanding the evolution and history of landscape art to identify the conventions that constitute its form.<sup>61</sup> Referring to definitions of photoconceptualism previously outlined, photography’s modernism was to explore and reveal the numerous semiotic systems that inform the image. Here, the aim of employing the city as the subject was to visualize a semiotic system that signifies the capitalist structures that shape the city. This was illustrated using the conventions of landscape art, introducing a second semiotic system. As a result, the connection between cityscapes and conceptual art, the constructed environment and consciousness, became the foundation for photoconceptual production in Vancouver.

Yoon’s work also illustrates an interest in semiotic structures that shape constructed environments. However, she demonstrates that rural and wilderness landscapes are as constructed as those of the cityscape, fostering a critique of assumptions about built environments and the city as the site of capitalism. Yoon’s work often presents the viewer with natural landscapes, as in *Touring Home from Away, Souvenirs of the Self*, and the paintings of natural landscapes in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* and considers these landscapes to be just as constructed as the built environment of the city.<sup>62</sup> She demonstrates that these landscapes are also representative of capitalist structures, particularly those allied with tourism, nationalism, and mobility, and repositions conventions of landscape art. Rather

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<sup>59</sup> Watson, *Intertidal*, 33.

<sup>60</sup> Jeff Wall, “About Making Landscapes,” in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 169-170.

<sup>61</sup> Wall, 170.

<sup>62</sup> Jin-me Yoon, interview by author, digital recording, Vancouver, B.C., 20 June 2007.

than being constructed by buildings and urban infrastructure, rural landscapes are constructed by the structures of image and language; the proliferation of images and rhetoric that make landscapes recognizable signifiers of identity. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* incorporates two of the very paintings that have constructed ideologies and identities from natural landscapes through institutionalized repetition and propagation of recognizable and canonized images.<sup>63</sup> Here, she employs Lawren Harris' *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) and Emily Carr's *Old Time Coastal Village* (1929-1930). The landscapes Yoon contends with are constructed by discourses of nationalism, produced and reproduced by Canada's art historical canon, and by the tourism industry, which uses landscape as a destination. Within these national and tourist landscapes, Yoon addresses issues pertaining to mobility, displacement, access, and exclusion to generate a shift in landscape convention, which I will explore further in chapter two.

Yoon's *between departure and arrival* combines images of cityscapes and Canada's wilderness landscapes to articulate the connection between constructed landscapes. She captures the cityscapes of Vancouver and Seoul using video footage of the respective cities, shot out the window of a moving car. Like the resulting photographs from Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual* (fig. 1.10), the video is shot at random as a moving vehicle meanders through the city streets. However, in contrast to Wall's work, there is the element of movement permitted by the medium—the car and the bodies moving through cities construct culturally specific articulations of similar structures that constitute urban spaces. While these views of cityscapes could be considered what early photoconceptualists called the “defeatured landscape,” the juxtaposition of the two

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<sup>63</sup> This is particularly evident in *Souvenirs of the Self* where Yoon employs tourist imagery, instantly recognizable as representative of Banff National Park and the wilderness tourism industry.

cityscapes reveal the distinctive features of each city. Without reducing the city to a single feature such as the mountain or the ocean of Vancouver or the Han River of Seoul, the subtle articulations of place, pace, and locality woven into the fabric of the city are visible in Yoon's moving images, even in the metropolis or globalized city. This juxtaposition also exposes the homogenizing and universalizing language of globalization, distilling culturally specific experiences of the movement of capital to the static structures of capital—to the built structures of the metropolis rather than the individuals whose movements articulate the city.

Embedded within these moving images of the city is archival footage that captures the wilderness landscapes of western Canada. Yoon includes clips of Thomas Edison's *Train Ride Through Kicking Horse Pass* (1898) (fig. 1.15), the oldest archival footage on film housed in British Columbia's archives.<sup>64</sup> Like Wall's and Yoon's engagement with cityscapes, Edison shot the landscapes of the Rocky Mountains from the window of a train. The historic footage of Canada's iconic vistas has also been used by Stan Douglas and Toronto-based video artist Richard Fung, attesting to the prominent role held by this American in capturing Canada's wilderness landscapes.<sup>65</sup>

This use of the *Kicking Horse Pass* footage is a comment on the history of wilderness representations in western Canada. Yoon further disrupts the notion of the empty and untouched wilderness by making the connection between the representation and constructed quality of cityscapes and wilderness landscapes. *between departure and arrival* proposes that wilderness landscapes are constructed through the images that capture it, in Edison's footage and paintings by the Group of Seven—both connected to the railway

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<sup>64</sup> Judy Radul, "At the Station: Notes on *between departure and arrival*," in *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival* (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Radul, 19.

that crosses and weaves through the Canadian west and has become a testament to the processes of industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Yoon also includes early twentieth century archival media footage of the transportation and movement of Asian immigrants in Canada—of Chinese labourers and Japanese-Canadian World War II internees in transit. She incorporates newsreel clips of Canadian troops preparing for the Korean War (fig. 1.16).<sup>66</sup> The juxtaposition of these images disrupts Canada’s historical narrative, bringing together chronologically and spatially disparate events to evoke Canada’s consistent and decisive participation in covert and overt racism. Together with Edison’s moving wilderness landscapes, Yoon addresses the fundamental role of the railway in constructing Canada’s history and national unity. She also exposes its notorious place in Canadian colonization of internal others, here, by alluding to the treacherous working conditions of Chinese-Canadians who built the railroad. Yoon reveals the structural violence against Asian-Canadians embodied in the physical structures of the railroad and the wilderness landscape. In *between departure and arrival*, Yoon offers images of the landscape that were both established and developed out of the semiotic systems that construct the visual identity of Canada’s wilderness.

Yoon explores patterns of settlement and displacement instituted through capitalist structures by disrupting chronological narrative structures and juxtaposing images from disparate locations in *between departure and arrival*. She also points to the processes of uprooting displaced identities that are expressed in the landscape. Sarah Phillips Casteel points out that “urban settings tend to be privileged as sites in which diasporic and marginalized identities are constructed” and employs Yoon’s work in her investigation

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<sup>66</sup>Radul, 15; Germain Koh, “Jin-me Yoon,” in *Crossings*, ed. Diana Nemiroff, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 182.

because “it departs from the urban setting that we often associate with diasporic cultural production.”<sup>67</sup> Yoon’s turn to the rural landscapes of Canada is not only a “rethinking, rather than rejecting [of] roots,”<sup>68</sup> as Casteel observes, but it is also a rethinking of the visual terms that construct landscape rather than rejecting those terms. In “About Making Landscapes,” Jeff Wall suggests that, to make landscapes, “we must withdraw a *certain distance*—far enough to detach ourselves from the immediate presence of the other people (figures) ... it is just at the point where we begin to lose sight of the figures as *agents* that landscape crystallizes as a genre.”<sup>69</sup> Here, Wall defines landscape as an uninhabited genre, without human presence. This idea of the landscape relates to W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of the landscape when he states that it “ignore[s] all particulars.”<sup>70</sup> Particularly evident in the portrayal of empty wilderness and pastoral Canadian landscapes as canonized by the Group of Seven, this “certain distance” from the “presence of people (figures)” denotes the displacement and uprooting of First Nations peoples.<sup>71</sup> Further, the construction of “distance” that denies particulars within the landscape displaces the possibility for diasporic identities “rerooting” in the rural places of Canada’s iconic landscapes or the urban environments portrayed in the Vancouver School’s photographs.

Yoon produces possibilities of settlement and includes figures as agents to reveal the tensions embedded in the structures of landscape. In her book, *Second Arrivals*:

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah Phillips Casteel, “Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in the Landscape Aesthetics of Jin-me Yoon,” in *Exclusions / Inclusions: Déplacements Économico-symboliques et perspectives américaines, Economic and Symbolic Displacements in the Americas* (New York, Ottawa and Toronto: Legas, 2005), 159, 160.

<sup>68</sup> Casteel, 161.

<sup>69</sup> Jeff Wall, “About Making Landscapes,” 171. My emphasis

<sup>70</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Preface,” in *Landscape and Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii.

<sup>71</sup> Lynda Jessup and Brenda Lafleur provide compelling discussions of representations of *terra nullius* in paintings by the Group of Seven. Lynda Jessup, “The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change...” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37.1 (2002); Brenda Lafleur, “‘Resting’ in History: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon,” in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

*Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas*, Casteel theorizes the polarization of mobility and place in Diaspora studies and the work of cultural producers “reinventing place by engaging rural and wilderness landscapes.”<sup>72</sup> Here, I draw on Casteel’s in-depth exploration of Yoon’s visual articulations of place situated in Canada’s rural and wilderness landscapes.<sup>73</sup> Yoon’s figures are given agency to question the power structures of landscape imagery, particularly in the Canadian context. Yoon visualizes possibilities for “rerooting” diasporic identities. She does so compositionally by assigning the figures and the landscapes in *Touring Home from Away* equal presence and space in the frame. The figures play a key role in directing the viewer’s gaze to assist in reading the landscape. Yoon also allows the figures in the photographs to develop a relationship with each other through the interaction of their gaze and stance with one another. In *between departure and arrival*, Yoon demonstrates the ways in which the movement of bodies produces the landscape and responds to the structures that construct subjectivity.

Casteel provides a reading of one pair of photographs in *Touring Home from Away* that, in particular, reveals the forces of capitalism that construct the pastoral landscape of Prince Edward Island (fig. 1.17). These two images are presented on opposite sides of a lightbox suspended in a gallery space. The first photograph captures an Asian woman and a Native man standing in long, wild grass looking towards what looks like wild grassland with a body of water forming on the left. Walking around the two sided lightbox, the viewer encounters a second photograph with the same Asian woman and Native man looking towards a slightly different, more expansive view of the same landscape as the first

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<sup>72</sup> Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Casteel, “Landscape and Indigeneity in the Installation Art of Isaac Julien and Jin-me Yoon,” in *Second Arrivals*, 163-190.

photograph, this time revealing a golf course. What at first appears to be a natural, wilderness landscape is in fact a built landscape, constructed by the forces of real estate, capitalism, and especially in P.E.I, tourism. This juxtaposition reveals two semiotic systems at play in the landscapes of P.E.I. First, there is the pastoral landscape imagery of the province that was the birthplace of Canada; the origins of the Charlottetown accord and the historical narrative bringing the provinces together in peaceful discussion to establish the nation of Canada. These pastoral landscapes are constructed as natural, beautiful, and serene, a place that does not visually mark the colonial violence of the founding of Canada. Paired with other photographs in the installation that capture monuments and historic sites, this photograph reveals the connection between P.E.I's pastoral landscape and Canadian history. Secondly, the image of the golf course represents the landscape shaped by the tourism industry driven by capitalism. The juxtaposition of the two photographs exposes the economies that shape the aesthetics of the landscape as idealized in the golf course. In this second photograph, the Native man, who is Mi'kmaq activist John Joe Sark, has his arms crossed across his chest and the Asian woman looks towards him rather than the landscape to indicate the tensions between displaced identities.<sup>74</sup>

Yoon continues to explore expressions of mobile and displaced identities in *Touring Home From Away*. The title suggests questions of home, belonging and settlement and how this is constructed for those “from away.” Like Wall, who proposes an interest in patterns of settlement, Yoon presents a tour of Canada’s long settlement history as depicted by monuments, plaques, and tourist destinations in P.E.I. The photograph of the Asian woman and Native man suggests the tensions between place and displacement, exploring

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<sup>74</sup> Sarah Phillips Casteel fleshes out an analysis of these images in “Landscape and Indigeneity in the Installation Art of Isaac Julien and Jin-me Yoon,” 288.

the commonalities and discord between indigenous communities and diasporic peoples.<sup>75</sup>

Other photographs capture the Asian woman looking at a war monument and sitting in front of Anne of Green Gables house with a woman with long red braids (fig. 1.18). Yoon poses questions about access to the histories these structures represent and whether the figures are “touring home” or “from away”—as well as proposing homeland tourism. In another photograph, she depicts the same Asian woman with a white man and young child between them, standing firmly planted in the soil of a tilled field looking out towards the landscape (fig. 1.3). The stance of the three figures as it relates to the landscape offers complex questions and articulations of the connection between home, settlement and territoriality. Yoon connects the mobility of tourism and migration to suggest similar structures that allow or deny the movement of capital and situates these systems of capitalism in the natural landscapes of P.E.I. What Yoon proposes is an examination of capitalist structures that shape mobility, a vital factor in processes of settlement. Like Wall, Yoon portrays an interest in the *process* of settlement, however she articulates this interest as a verb or action (rather than situated in the fixed objects of settlement) while using landscape conventions to maintain the tension between settlement and displacement.

### **Inclusions and Exclusions**

The foundation of photoconceptualism for Yoon’s practice, for her, has uncovered a commitment to investigating an image’s complex of codes that construct subjectivities. However, the hesitation around politically engaged artistic production of the Vancouver

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<sup>75</sup> Ryan Rice presented an insightful conference paper that outlined the tensions, differences, and commonalities between First Nations and minority activism in Canada. Ryan Rice, “Anthem: Not Another Exhibition About Identity” (paper presented at *Complicated Entanglements: Rethinking Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Carleton University conference, April 2008).

School, outlined previously, is coupled with a widespread reluctance towards identity politics in the arts. In the past decade, identity politics have been considered passé and it has been argued that we have entered into an era of “post-identity.”<sup>76</sup> This is despite increasing evidence that the politics of race and culture are ever more relevant and timely in our post-9/11 world, with examples such as Quebec’s Taylor-Bouchard commission on reasonable accommodation, protests against land claims made by Six Nations in Caledonia, and increased Canadian-American border security, to name only a few. Even in the 1980s and early 1990s when identity politics were considered at the forefront of contemporary art, many Vancouver artists’ conspicuous silence marked a refusal to engage with identity issues, including African-Canadian artist Stan Douglas and Asian-Canadian artist Ken Lum. Often, artists addressing identity politics face ethnic ghettoization and their work becomes branded, regardless of the issues addressed in the work at hand. For example, Roy Arden, a prominent figure of the Vancouver School, critiques identity politics as being a “retreat into the politics of tribalism” turning the work into “something other than art.”<sup>77</sup> Arden’s statements exemplify the stigma against identity politics that excludes artists who address issues of identity from the other art historical narratives pertinent to their work. The absence of Yoon’s work from texts about photoconceptualism indicates the subtle exclusionary practices of art historical discourses and reinforces the limitations and stigma against identity politics, reiterated by Arden’s statements. Further, Yoon herself has not expressed an engagement with identity politics, *per se*, yet as I argued in the introduction,

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<sup>76</sup> Among others, Terry Eagleton is noted for contritely stating that cultural theory “cannot afford simply to keep recounting the same narratives of class, race and gender, indispensable as these topics are. It needs to chance its arm, break out of a rather stifling orthodoxy and explore new topics.” Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 222.

<sup>77</sup> Roy Arden, quoted in Grant Arnold, “Purism, Heterogeneity and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*,” in *Collapse #3, Home Improvements: Institutions and Other Perversions*, eds. Judith Mastai and John O’Brian (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Forum, 1997), 148.

reviews and catalogue essays often discuss her work within this framework. While I must emphasize that representations of the politics of race and culture found in the photographic image are fundamental semiotic systems exposed in Yoon's artistic practice, this is, in fact, only one system explored in her work and contributes to her overall conceptual and formal practices.

Another system Yoon actively employs is the semiotics of feminism, which I will discuss in Chapter Three, and perhaps presents another reason for her exclusion from the Vancouver School. As previously mentioned, the first members of the Vancouver School were all men and even the artists who have since been included in the discourses of photoconceptualism and recent Vancouver art economies are most often male—Geoffrey Farmer, Tim Lee, Damian Moppett, and Kevin Schmidt to name a few. Not only is Yoon a woman, but she actively critiques the masculinisation of art history and art markets, which I will discuss further in Chapter Three. While she directly addresses gendered condition of modernist practices and the Group of Seven, this can certainly be applied to the contemporary art circumstances of the Vancouver School.

Lastly, Yoon continues to contend with the semiotic systems that construct and represent national identity in the Canadian landscape. It has been suggested that the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism was a label initiated by international exhibitions, interest, and critical response. The subtleties and nuances of Yoon's work articulated in specifically regional and national landscapes may not be fully appreciated by an international audience, who as a result, may not include her work in the discourses of the Vancouver School. Yoon candidly situates her work in the local and regional landscapes and institutions of Canada. She employs specificity to undertake broader issues rather than

accede to the sometimes universalizing and anonymous images used by the Vancouver School, as was suggested previously. For example, Yoon address conventions of landscape art by employing the images of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island or Banff, Alberta, instead of the defeatured landscape of a globalized metropolis. A number of her works have been produced for artist residencies at regional Canadian art centres; *Souvenirs of the Self* at the Banff Centre for the Arts, *Touring Home From Away* at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum in Charlottetown, and *Unbidden* at the Kamloops Art Gallery. These works also respond to the institutions in which they are created, just as *A Group of Sixty-Seven* similarly functions in dialogue with the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada where it was produced and exhibited. Yoon's work, situated at the intersection of specificity and universality, may locate her artistic production on the periphery the Vancouver School.

It is not self-evident why Yoon's work has been excluded from discourses of the Vancouver School or why her commitment to photoconceptualism is rarely and only superficially discussed, especially given that an analysis of Yoon's participation in photoconceptualism uncovers an obvious affiliation with the movement. It is important to understand this affiliation for a nuanced analysis of her work and writing of art history. As Ken Lum suggests, a critical understanding of an artist's work must account for both formal and conceptual practices.<sup>78</sup> I have proposed some possible reasons for this omission here, all of which seem to highlight a continued and underlying reluctance in photoconceptualism towards cultural production that acknowledges specificity and denies the universal.

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<sup>78</sup> Ken Lum, "Art +/or Politics?" conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon, in *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 60.

## Chapter Two

### **Our Home and Native Land: Relocating Canadian Landscapes**

In this chapter, I explore how Yoon's work reveals discourses of landscape art that Canada's public galleries and the art historical canon have employed to represent Canadian nationalist ideologies. I will consider the intimate correlations between museums and national ideologies and how institutions inaugurate the histories and structures that construct the "imagined community" of the nation.<sup>79</sup> In doing so, I will consider the way works by the Group of Seven are employed to reiterate national ideologies by public institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), and the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG). I will focus my discussion on *A Group of Sixty-Seven* to reveal how these institutions establish and disseminate national ideologies. I will investigate how this work presents tools to theorize the limitations and propose possibilities embedded in the framework of landscape conventions.

Yoon's work critically examines current institutionalized articulations of national identity, represented by landscape art, that are maintained despite an inability or unwillingness to give visibility to the complexities of identity. She exposes the absence of a structural framework in this genre necessary to critically address the constructions of race and culture. I argue that it is for this reason that Yoon finds it useful to employ landscape art to express critiques of Canada's official multiculturalism. She makes

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<sup>79</sup> I am using this term as defined by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

reference to recognizable landscapes which she exposes as exclusionary in the way they frame representations that visualize subjectivity. She also reveals and reframes the act of viewing to encourage the audience to uncover the layers of conceptual and critical meaning of landscape art.

A central strategy in Yoon's work is to re-present landscape art that constitutes Canada's art historical canon. Her work acquires meaning and depth in the way it resonates with previously viewed landscapes. It is therefore important to understand the history and primacy of landscape imagery in Canada to fully and critically engage with the dialogue explored in Yoon's project. She is one of many voices that critically address the dominant position of landscape in Canadian art, which is often associated with the Group of Seven. Yoon's work functions in dialogue with the history of the Group of Seven, but also in dialogue with artists from the latter part of the twentieth century who sought to undo traditional conventions of landscape art in Canada.<sup>80</sup> I will examine how Yoon exposes institutionalized ideologies that are represented by landscape art in Canada which she then subverts to rearticulate new possibilities for representing subjectivity in the landscape.

### National Landscapes

*A Group of Sixty-Seven* (fig. 2.1) engages directly with Canadian art historical narratives. This work responds specifically to a history that positions the Group of Seven and modernist landscape painting at the beginning of a linear continuum of avant-garde art unique to Canada and upheld by certain critics, curators, and institutions as art that

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<sup>80</sup> John O'Brian and Peter White, "Extensions of Technology," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, eds. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 40.

allegedly speaks for the Canadian public.<sup>81</sup> The title, *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, makes a layered reference to Canada's historical narratives that have constructed a national identity. The first is a play on the name of Canada's most widely known figures in art history, the Group of Seven. It also refers to the year 1967, which marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the confederation of Canada when the nation state was established and the national celebrations associated with this historical moment included the famed Expo '67. It was also the year the Canadian government introduced new regulations in the *Immigration Act* and established an independent regulatory body, the *Immigration Appeal Board Act*, to implement a new system designed to eliminate prejudice and discrimination based on nationality or race.<sup>82</sup> Yoon offers this title as a guide to the subtleties visually articulated in the work and unveils a contentious history narrated by landscape painting in Canada.

The Group of Seven has been identified as a producer of iconic Canadian identity imagined in landscape art. In doing so, the imagery of a particular genre of landscape painting that focused on the wilderness of the Precambrian shield in northern Ontario came to represent the prevailing narrative of Canadian territory and identity. There has been extensive scholarship on the Group of Seven, their dominant position in Canada's art history, their relationship to the founding of the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), and on the profound influence

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<sup>81</sup> Joyce Zemans, "Establishing the Canon: Nationhood, Identity, and the National Gallery's First Reproduction Programme of Canadian Art," in *Beyond Wilderness*, 185; Lynda Jessup, "Art for a Nation?" *Fuse* 19.4 (Summer 1996): 12.

<sup>82</sup> "Forging Our Legacy: Canadian Citizenship and Immigration, 1900-1977," Citizenship and Immigration Canada, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/ENGLISH/resources/publications/legacy/chap-6.asp>, (accessed May 28, 2008).

of these artists on Canadian Art.<sup>83</sup> Anne Whitelaw outlines the collaborative relationship of the Group of Seven with the National Gallery of Canada to represent Canadian national unity and identity in her essay, “‘Whiffs of Balsam, Pine and Spruce’: Art Museums and the Production of a Canadian Aesthetic.” She argues that culture is “a pivotal point around which the contestation of national identity has occurred in Canada,” and that the national institutions that acquire and cultivate the objects of culture have directed their focus on collecting local culture.<sup>84</sup> Many art historians have written a narrative of a Canadian aesthetic that emerged from the work of the Group of Seven to distinguished Canadian art from the picturesque style of its European predecessors, a narrative supported by the NGC’s exhibition practices.<sup>85</sup> The legacy of the Group of Seven is their unified formal style and subject matter—an almost exclusive treatment of landscape.<sup>86</sup> Thus, coupled with the emergence of The Group of Seven as a cohesive unit coupled with the end of the First World War, when the concepts and constructs of nationalism were taking hold, the paintings of these artists became a visual vocabulary for a conception of territory and nationhood.<sup>87</sup>

As a national institution, the NGC worked to establish and propagate the Group of Seven within an art historical narrative. This project began in 1913 when the Gallery established a mandate to work towards the “encouragement and cultivation of correct

<sup>83</sup> John O’Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007); This text provides an excellent overview of excerpts from the extensive scholarship that has been written about the Group of Seven along with critical responses.

<sup>84</sup> Anne Whitelaw, “‘Whiffs of Balsam, Pine, and Spruce’: Art Museums and the Production of a Canadian Aesthetic,” in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelly Hornstein (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>85</sup> Whitelaw, 123.

<sup>86</sup> Whitelaw, 124

<sup>87</sup> Whitelaw, 124.

“artistic taste” and “the promotion of the interests in art, in general, in Canada.”<sup>88</sup> Seven years later in 1920, the NGC held the first exhibition of the Group of Seven based on strong support by Edmund Walker, a trustee for the NGC and president of the Art Gallery of Toronto.<sup>89</sup> This narrative has been maintained and cultivated in the decades that followed. In the fall of 1995, the National Gallery of Canada launched *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, an exhibition that marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Group of Seven’s first group show in 1920. Over the course of the following year, the exhibition toured to the Art Gallery of Ontario where it was exhibited as part of the gallery’s *OH! Canada Project*. Then it continued to the Vancouver Art Gallery and finally showed at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (MBAM). After starting in the nation’s capital, the blockbuster exhibition travelled across the country to Canada’s three metropolitan centres garnering a healthy dose of criticism.

*The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* was critiqued for its role in institutionally and ideologically reiterating the Group of Seven as the founder of a discourse that imagines Canadian nationalism in landscape imagery. Erin Manning highlights the language used in the exhibition catalogue as rhetorically emphasizing national ideologies by referring to the Group of Seven as “talented artists who *defined* how Canadians view the land” by the way they captured the “essence” of Canada.<sup>90</sup> Charles C. Hill opens the introduction of the exhibition catalogue with: “The artists of the Group of Seven remain the most celebrated in Canadian history.”<sup>91</sup> He continues to acknowledge the criticism of

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<sup>88</sup> National Gallery of Canada Act (1913), quoted in Whitelaw, 125-126.

<sup>89</sup> Denis Reid, “Introduction to *The Group of Seven*,” in *Beyond Wildernes*, 104.

<sup>90</sup> Charles C. Hill, quoted in Erin Manning, my emphasis; Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 9. Charles C. Hill, “Introduction,” in *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995), 5.

<sup>91</sup> Charles C. Hill, 15.

the Group of Seven's position as celebrated artists without providing critical counterarguments to justify an exhibition that claims the Group of Seven's works as Art for a Nation. Rather, he continues to outline a history of the group, using their own writing and that of their contemporaries to reaffirm their dominance in Canadian art history. Repeating these same words three quarters of a century later reiterates and reinstates the primacy of the Group of Seven for new generations of Canadians.

The AGO exhibited *Art for a Nation* within the framework of the *OH! Canada Project* which also addressed discourses of landscape and nation by including the work of contemporary community-based installations by First Nations, Latino, African-Canadian, Chinese, and Hamilton-based artists.<sup>92</sup> Rinaldo Walcott criticises this exhibition strategy for spatially privileging the Group of Seven over the “alternative community” projects included in the exhibition framework, delegating these works to corridors, corners, and behind promotional and educational displays.<sup>93</sup> He refers to Rasheed Araeen who suggests that ethnic arts are the “new primitive” that are “physically present within the dominant culture as *exotic*,” and participate in and reinforce the structures of colonialism.<sup>94</sup> Walcott states that this proposition is reiterated in the physical arrangement of the *OH! Canada Project* at the AGO, in which the presence of the Group of Seven dominated the space with tangential representations of alternative definitions of imagined communities, interspersed with the glaring silences within national ideologies that are unrepresentable in a public institution.<sup>95</sup> Walcott suggests that pervasiveness of the Group of Seven landscapes incited nostalgic uncritical recollections of an imagined

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<sup>92</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, “Lament for a Nation: The Racial Geography of the ‘Oh Canada Project,’” *Fuse* 19.4 (Summer 1996): 15.

<sup>93</sup> Walcott, 16.

<sup>94</sup> Rasheed Araeen, quoted in Walcott, 18.

<sup>95</sup> Walcott, 18.

collective history.<sup>96</sup> Lynda Jessup explains that, “history is written by those in power,” referring to the NGC’s historical narrative of the Group of Seven and implicating the power structures that maintain their primacy in art historical narratives.<sup>97</sup> These critiques were ultimately directed to the continued role of the National Gallery in cultivating the Group of Seven as the definitive aesthetic and subject matter for Canadian art.

During the presentation of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the summer of 1996, Yoon organized a series of dinners for sixty-seven members of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver. After the dinners, Trevor Mills, the VAG staff photographer, took two photographs of these sixty-seven Korean Canadians, one in front of Lawren Harris’ *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) (fig. 2.2) and the other looking towards Emily Carr’s *Old Time Coastal Village* (1929-1930) (fig. 2.3) which is part of VAG’s permanent collection. Yoon’s role as artist was essentially to orchestrate the dinners and direct the outcome of the photographs, creating a social and community event and initiating a dialogue about paintings, the artists, and the exhibitions. Arranged in a grid pattern and placed on adjacent walls in a corner of the gallery (fig. 2.4), these photographs were exhibited as *A Group of Sixty-Seven* in the fall of 1996 as part of the exhibition, *topographies: recent b.c. art*, held at the VAG.

Yoon described the project of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* as a “negotiated institutional intervention”<sup>98</sup> and functioned as a response to the NGC exhibition in dialogue with critiques such as those voiced by Jessup, Manning and Walcott. The dinners, organized for the participants of the project, transformed the gallery space into a

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<sup>96</sup> Walcott, 16.

<sup>97</sup> Jessup, “Art for a Nation?” 11.

<sup>98</sup> Jin-me Yoon, “Other Conundrums: Monika Kin Gagnon in Conversation with Jin-me Yoon,” interview by Monika Kin Gagnon, *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 57.

place for community gatherings. Set in the backdrop of the modernist white cube gallery space and British Columbia's provincial gallery, these community gatherings juxtaposed and contested the autonomy and hierarchy of the gallery. This act within the gallery space was visually reiterated by presenting the sixty-seven participants of the Korean-Canadian community together in these modernist landscapes.

Visually articulated within the context of iconic Canadian landscapes, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* juxtaposes formations of communities; the static “imagined community” of Canada, represented by landscapes, is positioned in contrast to the dynamic community events and images of real people who participate in local communities. Yoon transforms the built gallery spaces that cultivate these representations of the imagined community of Canada into spaces that build community participation and interaction.

Yoon carefully chose the paintings by Harris and Carr to be used in *The Group of Sixty-Seven*. As mentioned above, *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* appeared in the *Art for a Nation* exhibition making a direct connection between Yoon’s work and the NGC’s exhibition practices. Yoon directly engaged the discourses presented in *Art for a Nation* by creating an event at the VAG. She questioned the institutional construction of Canadian identity that this painting has come to represent and contested the hierarchies of art institutions and gallery spaces by transforming the VAG into a community centre.<sup>99</sup> Yoon inserted figures into Harris’ landscape to inhabit the formerly exclusionary image, empty of human presence, and thereby pointing to a long lineage of critiques of the use of

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<sup>99</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 58.

the Group of Seven to perpetuate colonial representations of the land as void of inhabitants, *terra nullius*, a land available to be conquered and constructed.<sup>100</sup>

Emily Carr's *Old Time Coastal Village* carries with it similar associations to that of the Lawren Harris work. During the exhibition of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* at the VAG, the Emily Carr painting was mounted in the adjoining room at Yoon's request. This work, from the VAG permanent collection, is upheld as a significant work in the gallery's collection. In many ways, Carr has become, for Vancouver, what the Group of Seven have come to represent in Ontario—the figure associated with establishing and founding art on Canada's West Coast. Yoon's choice to pair Carr's work with Harris' work is significant. Carr's landmark exhibition entitled *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art – Native and Modern* became the point of contact for Carr and the Group of Seven, after which Harris became her friend and mentor and establishing a close connection between the two artists and their work.<sup>101</sup> Both the VAG and the NGC have contributed to inducting Carr into the canon of Canadian art history, using her to announce a continuum of avant-garde, modernist practices imbued with national rhetoric.

In the summer of 1990, the National Gallery of Canada presented a retrospective of Emily Carr's work entitled simply, *Emily Carr*.<sup>102</sup> As the viewer was welcomed into the gallery, the introductory panel to the exhibition extolled Carr as "a child of British

<sup>100</sup> As discussed by authors such as Brenda Lafleur, Marcia Crosby, Jonathan Bordo, Lynda Jessup, among others.

<sup>101</sup> "About the Exhibition," *Emily Carr: New Perspectives*, National Gallery of Canada, <http://www.national.gallery.ca/emily/en/about/about.html> (accessed May 28, 2008).

<sup>102</sup> In 1927, the NGC held the landmark exhibition, *Exhibition of West Coast Art Native and Modern*, consisting of many works by Carr. It toured to the Art Gallery of Toronto, the McGill University and the Art Association, Montreal. In 1938 the VAG presented *Exhibition by Emily Carr*. Since then, there have been numerous exhibitions at Canada's national and provincial institutions. Most recently, the NGC organized *Emily Carr: New Perspectives* (2006-2008), which exhibited in Ottawa and toured to the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.

Columbia” who “forged a deep bond with the native heritage and natural environment of that province.”<sup>103</sup> Like *Art for a Nation*, this exhibition garnered significant criticism. This criticism focused particularly on the presentation of Carr’s work, declaring that the exhibition reinforced the exclusions and absences represented in modernist landscapes. This unproblematised approach, critics said, reflected a bias for Western methodologies of art and art history as a means of perpetuating exclusionary and uncritical constructions of Canadian identity and Canadian history.

Marcia Crosby criticised the didactic texts and exhibition catalogue for constructing the image of a homogenous “Imaginary Indian” instead of addressing the exclusions and absences in Carr’s paintings that reflect the position of privilege she held as part of the dominant culture.<sup>104</sup> Crosby’s critique referred to language that reinforced Carr’s position, stating that she “forged a deep bond with the native heritage and natural environment” and had a “profound understanding of the meaning of that heritage”.<sup>105</sup> Scott Watson declared that “Carr’s ruins are carcass-like... this morbidity in her was stimulated and fuelled by the idea of cultural extinction and annihilation.”<sup>106</sup> Robert Fulford remarked on the controversy generated by the Carr exhibition as “nibbling at the pedestal on which she stood for two generations” where she was upheld as representing West Coast art and as the token woman who participated in Canada’s national art historical narrative.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Introduction panel to the *Emily Carr* exhibition, quoted by Marcia Crosby; Marcia Crosby, “Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Practices of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 277.

<sup>104</sup> Crosby, 277.

<sup>105</sup> Crosby, 277.

<sup>106</sup> Scott Watson, “Disfigured Nature,” in *Eye of Nature*, eds. Diana Augaitis and Helga Pakasaar, exhibition catalogue (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1991), 109.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Fulford, “The Trouble with Emily,” in *Beyond Wilderness*, 223-224.

Yoon's *Group of Sixty-Seven* functions in dialogue with these critiques of Carr's paintings and the institutions that cultivate and position her work within art historical and national narratives. In the original painting, *Old Time Coastal Village*, Carr painted evidence of a Native village, which disappears entirely in Yoon's work (figs. 2.3 and 2.5). She photographs the figures looking towards the landscapes, blocking what is left of the Native village in the Carr painting. By doing this, Yoon states that she hopes to "discuss our position as immigrants to these inherited representations vis-a-vis First Peoples."<sup>108</sup> She visually articulates the erasure and absence of First Nations peoples in modernist paintings brought to light by Crosby, Watson and Fulford. She also reinforces the absences within the narratives of a settler society represented by an Anglo-Saxon, dominant culture, both visually and in the title of the work.

*A Group of Sixty-Seven* was first shown at the VAG's *topographies* exhibition and was later included in the NGC's 1998 exhibition, *Crossings*. This latter exhibition sought to bring together international and Canadian artists engaging with ideas and theories of migration and movement, displacement and exile.<sup>109</sup> Yoon had already produced *between departure and arrival* (fig. 2.7) a video, projected image, audio and photographic installation that explored concepts of travel, migration and displacement. For this work she used video to elaborate on her earlier photographic practice which was explicitly concerned with outward markers of race which produced a durational relationship between art and viewer. Yoon stated in an interview, "...still photography is

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<sup>108</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 60.

<sup>109</sup> Diana Nemiroff, "Crossings," in *Crossings*, ed. Diana Nemiroff, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 13.

a wonderful formal way of talking about containment,” whereas video “has a different relationship [with the viewer] of immersion and immediacy.”<sup>110</sup>

*A Group of Sixty-Seven* generates an interaction between markers that are projected on to the body and markers of national identity projected by the landscape in Canada. Because of Yoon’s use of photography, these markers of identity and difference are static and contained, starkly juxtaposed against each other. Conversely, the moving images in *between departure and arrival* evoke the mechanisms of displacement, represented by clouds captured from the window of an airplane, cityscapes shot from a moving vehicle, and the moving images of the archival film and media footage. The durational nature of video invites the viewer to spend time with the work and to be immersed in the movement of bodies through time and space. The images present displacement and dispossession of Asian immigrants in Canada; of Japanese-Canadians being transported to internment camps, Chinese railroad workers, and Canadian troops leaving for the Korean War.<sup>111</sup> As the work unfolds, the viewer is confronted with often silenced chapters of Canada’s historical narrative situated in the movement and displacement of bodies rather than fixed representations of national landscapes or territoriality. *between departure and arrival* succinctly articulates the curatorial framework of *Crossings* by addressing migration and movement, displacement and exile. However, the two works considered for *Crossings* were *Souvenirs of the Self* and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, both part of the collection at the NGC. Both employed canonical Canadian landscapes and therefore exist within the national narratives (even if only to

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<sup>110</sup> Jin-me Yoon, interview by author, digital recording, Vancouver, B.C., 20 June 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Judy Radul, “At the Station: Notes on *between departure and arrival*,” in *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival* (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 15; Germain Koh, “Jin-me Yoon,” in *Crossings*, ed. Diana Nemiroff, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 182.

question them) produced by national cultural institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada. As Curator Diana Nemiroff explained, “because the history of the National Gallery was so bound up with that of the Group of Seven, I thought [*A Group of Sixty-Seven*] would have special resonance shown at the National Gallery.”<sup>112</sup>

The NGC’s exhibition and acquisition of a work such as *A Group of Sixty-Seven* rather than *between departure and arrival*, both of which would fit into the curatorial premise of *Crossings*, demonstrates the integral role of landscape art as an example of what Tony Bennett calls the “exhibitionary complex.” Bennett states that public museums “provided the modern state with a deep and continuous ideological backdrop.”<sup>113</sup> The National Gallery of Canada expresses this “ideological backdrop” in its vision for the gallery, “to provide Canadians with a sense of identity with and pride in Canada’s rich visual-arts heritage.”<sup>114</sup> As Bennett explains, the institution of the museum produces and cultivates a sense of national solidarity and permanence.<sup>115</sup> The NGC envisions the gallery as the provider of identity founded on a visual-arts heritage constructed in the exhibitionary practices of the institution.

Bennett continues to explain that exhibitions produced by these institutions render “ideological configurations more pliable” and respond strategically to immediate ideological and political situations of the present moment.<sup>116</sup> *A Group of Sixty-Seven* employs landscape art as the site for the nation’s “ideological backdrop” and “Canada’s rich visual-arts heritage” while also representing its “ideological configurations” brought

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<sup>112</sup> Diana Nemiroff, email to author, 4 December 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 80.

<sup>114</sup> “About NGC: A Compelling Vision,” National Gallery of Canada, <http://www.gallery.ca/english/91.htm> (accessed 3 June 2008).

<sup>115</sup> Bennett, 80.

<sup>116</sup> Bennett, 80-81.

forth by Canada's multicultural policy that claims to uphold a diverse cultural heritage. It is possible that *A Group of Sixty-Seven* can be interpreted as maintaining national ideologies represented by Canadian landscape painting while also providing a visual articulation of Canada's multicultural mosaic. Anne Whitelaw suggests that, in Canada, a centralized legislated support of culture has been crucial in the construction of a Canadian national identity bringing together disparate regions of the political and geographical Canadian landscape and providing a place for immigrant cultures within the Canadian "mosaic."<sup>117</sup> Within federal institutions like the NGC, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* both functions within a national ideological backdrop, yet responds to official ideological configurations instituted by the Multiculturalism Act. Without the events held at the VAG that critically questioned the role of the institution, this work conceivably perpetuates Bennett's exhibitionary complex.

In self-consciously asking the questions about the role of museums in multicultural initiatives (using British institutions as examples), Anne E. Coombe suggests that it is "difficult to escape the legacy left by the historical formation of the institution itself."<sup>118</sup> This legacy, according to Bennett, is pivotal in the formation of the nation-state by educating a populace with "civilizing agencies" that produce interest and participation of the public as citizens of the nation and, as Coombs indicates, reinforces the illusion of a homogenous culture.<sup>119</sup> The NGC employs *A Group of Sixty-Seven* in the exhibition, *Crossings*, to present both the imagined community of the dominant culture, represented by landscape painting, and Canada's policy of multiculturalism,

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<sup>117</sup> Whitelaw, 122.

<sup>118</sup> Annie E. Coombs, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, eds. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 294.

<sup>119</sup> Bennett, 66; Coombs, 293.

represented by the real community of Korean-Canadians. The work also satisfies what Whitelaw calls “the remote regions of the Canadian political landscape” by employing landscape imagery and its critical responses—Canada’s ideological backdrop and its configurations as outlined by Bennett.

### Ideological Landscapes

In *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, Yoon employs iconic Canadian landscape paintings of Emily Carr and Lawren Harris that have come to represent Canada’s dominant culture. She populates the previously uninhabited landscapes with bodies that bear markers of difference in a Canadian context. These landscapes, now inhabited, carry with them institutional and ideological power structures that Yoon exposes by juxtaposing the body and the landscape. Much of the critical scholarship on the Group of Seven traces a biographical history and provides an artistic lineage of European landscape painting to argue that the landscapes represent a dominant culture characterized by white, Anglo-Saxon males.<sup>120</sup>

I am proposing a consideration of the modernist landscape paintings of the Group of Seven and Emily Carr as racialized based on the ways in which landscape constructs ways of seeing. Yoon presents racialization associated with the visibility of difference with structures that construct the act of looking. W. J. T. Mitchell discusses landscape imagery as the “site encountered as image or ‘sight.’”<sup>121</sup> He explains that the concept of landscape is one connected to a view or the act of looking. Yoon juxtaposes the bodies of

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<sup>120</sup> Examples, cited in this thesis, can be found in the scholarship by Lynda Jessup, Brenda Lafleur, Erin Manning, John O’Brian, and Peter White.

<sup>121</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Preface to the Second Edition,” in *Landscape and Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), x.

sixty seven Korean-Canadians with previously uninhabited modernist landscapes, inviting the viewer to look at the landscape and at the bodies. Yoon encourages the viewer to critically consider the act of looking and the ways in which looking constructs identities, particularly in the context of Canada's national imagery represented by landscape painting. She poses the question to her audience: "Imaged in the heroic setting of the Canadian [landscape], can I as a non-Western woman enjoy a 'naturalized' relationship to this landscape?"<sup>122</sup> Yoon visually questions the term "visible minority," used in Canada's multiculturalism policy, that continually reiterates the visibility of difference within policies of equity and multiculturalism. Her criticism reveals itself in the tensions that occur at the intersection of the landscape and the body, both carrying markers of culture and race.

In his discussion of citizenship in Canada, Roy Miki states that when Asian-Canadians (and by extension other visible minorities) were "incorporated into the nation's body, they could do so only through the shadows of difference—shadows that marked their distance from normative whiteness."<sup>123</sup> Situated in the "site of sight" of the landscape, which has been established as representative of the "normative" white, heterosexual male and ideologically upheld by Canadian institutions, what becomes intensely visible in Yoon's work is the marking of the difference of "visible minorities." This illustrates the emphasis on *looking* at the body in Canadian policy. The act of looking also recreates tensions written into Canada's multicultural policy which foregrounds and perpetuates difference marked by visible articulations of race under the rubric of tolerance.

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<sup>122</sup> Yoon, quoted in Koh, 182.

<sup>123</sup> Roy Miki, "'Inside the Black Egg': Cultural Practice, Citizenship, and Belonging in a Globalizing Canadian Nation," *Mosaic* 38.3 (September 2005): 6.

Yoon presents another criticism of Canadian multiculturalism, charging the policy with perpetuating ethnic ghettoization.<sup>124</sup> The gathering of a community of Korean-Canadians for the production and exhibition of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* suggests, what Miki calls, “a complex manifestation of a double-edged cultural condition.”<sup>125</sup> The members of this community of sixty-seven are gathered because of their minority status as Korean-Canadians, a status constituted by “state-endorsed constructions of difference,” which can also be mobilized as the basis for solidarity in a political critique of the state itself.<sup>126</sup> The tension that appears reflects debates about the creation of communities based on individuals’ minority status; debates that, on the one hand, uphold this kind of community building as strategic essentialism, and on the other hand, are criticized as ethnic ghettoization.

Yoon participates in this debate by focusing on representing the individual within the community (fig. 2.6). Each participant gazes directly at the viewer, engaging the viewer in a relationship with each individual participant. This frontal view of the figures’ head and shoulders alludes to passport photographs as a signifier of state instituted individual identity particularly salient to an immigrant. Yet, the figures all wear the same stoic, impassive expression similar to those required for passport photographs, denying the viewer an intimate sense of individuality. The other adjacent photographs of the figures are of the head and shoulders of the participants seen from behind, subverting the authority of the passport and official identification which captures the identity of an individual (fig. 2.5). Furthermore, the way in which the portraits are arranged in a grid

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<sup>124</sup> Monika Kin Gagnon and Scott Toguri McFarlane, “The Capacity of Cultural Difference,” *Minister’s Forum on Diversity and Culture, Canadian Heritage* [http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bg/05\\_e.cfm](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bg/05_e.cfm) (accessed 25 September 2006).

<sup>125</sup> Miki, 6.

<sup>126</sup> Miki, 6.

pattern, all with the same landscape in the background repeated behind them as if in a photo studio, causes the individuality of each portrait to lose its force.

What Yoon illustrates in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* are the tensions between articulations of the particular and the collective, the specific and the general. Yoon demonstrates how this tension exists within the Canadian landscape. Mitchell states that to look at landscape is an invitation not to look at any specific *thing*, but to ignore all particulars in favour of an appreciation of total gestalt, a vista or scene that may be dominated by some specific feature, but is not simply reducible to that feature.<sup>127</sup>

Yoon re-photographs the landscape painting layered with the portrait. This layering generates tension because both features of the work carry equal dominance; essentially giving the landscape a specific feature, yet also pointing to the absence of any single dominating feature in the original works. The landscape and the body are equally dominant in the work. The focus oscillates between the two elements to create a kind of visual movement that emphasizes the complexity of identity.

Mitchell's definition of landscape is particularly useful in understanding the limitations of the landscape as a signifier of Canadian identity, especially in the way it relates to Canada's official multicultural policy as another signifier of Canadian identity. Canada's multicultural policy was criticized for ignoring or whitewashing the particular in the service of the total gestalt of a unified nation. This vision of Canada is dominated by a specific feature—tolerance—but in reality, it is not reducible to this feature. It actually diverts attention away from the realities of the politics of culture and race by protecting Canada's official policy of tolerance. In her book, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, Eva Mackey explores the ways in

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<sup>127</sup> Mitchell, vii.

which the multicultural state of Canada, like landscape, enacts less overt power over its subjects by mobilizing tolerance to manage populations and create identities. This form of power is enacted by “constructing forms of difference and heterogeneity” through liberal practices of tolerance towards pluralism and diversity which are, in fact, “endlessly recuperative and mobile, flexible … as well as totalizing.”<sup>128</sup> Similar to Mitchell’s description of landscape, which “ignore[s] all particulars in favour of an appreciation of a total gestalt,” multiculturalism establishes a totalizing idiom of “diversity” that homogenizes the voices of individuals and communities. It also implies the power structure of a dominant culture which, through tolerance, processes the power to tolerate and by implication, the power to be intolerant.<sup>129</sup> In this way, the use of landscape as a signifier for Canadian identity does not theoretically conflict with Canada’s multicultural identity; the landscape does not focus on particulars or identities the way that other art forms might. However, through an awareness of the absences in iconic Canadian landscapes, the realities, violence, and silences of Canadian history are revealed, as with Canadian multiculturalism.

Yoon’s photographs of Vancouver’s Korean-Canadian community give presence to an otherwise absent image of the community in Canada’s dominant culture signified here by the canonical Canadian landscape paintings of Lawren Harris and Emily Carr. Formally, the figures and the landscape occupy an equal amount of the picture plane of the photograph; one is not privileged over the other. If the landscape paintings are meant to represent the Canadian nation, Yoon presents the individuals and communities that constitute the landscape of Canadian citizenship rather than abstracting notions of

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<sup>128</sup> Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Mackey, 16.

belonging with the gestalt of landscape. Mackey outlines how, ironically, the development of Canada as a pluralist and flexible nation emerged as an alternative means of creating a *common* national culture that would differentiate Canada from other nations, particularly the United States, by institutionalizing the Canadian “mosaic” as a contrast to the American “melting pot.”<sup>130</sup> *A Group of Sixty-Seven* visually refers to the “mosaic” of Canadian culture by repeating the same landscape sixty-seven times with sixty-seven different portraits, one contained within each frame (fig. 2.1). No portrait of an individual is repeated, and they are all wearing different and brightly coloured clothing. Yet the repeated framework for the portraits is the same alluding to the institutional “melting pot” that subsumes differences under the overarching rhetoric of “diversity.”

Mackey’s argument continues to state that, rather than being a nation without identity (as is often suggested) and in a constant state of crisis, the discourse of pluralism in Canada is used to reproduce identity crises.<sup>131</sup> This becomes the site where state institutions, such as museums and official national celebrations, intervene in the politics of identity and cultural production with the intention of creating subjectivities.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps, because Canadian identity was always central to the debates of cultural race politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it worked to reinforce the constructs of the nation. In doing so, the nation and its institutions were able to maintain power by constantly responding to the crises of identity, in part, brought forth by the discourses of identity politics. Miki also argues that that the nation is “undergoing far-reaching alterations” and that the connections between nation and place no longer hold the same

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<sup>130</sup> Mackey, 13.

<sup>131</sup> Mackey, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Mackey, 13.

power.<sup>133</sup> Yet “the narrative of the ‘nation’ remains a potent site of contestation, negotiation, and cultural struggles to open up more flexible forms of mediation.”<sup>134</sup> It is possible that the criticism visually represented by Yoon’s *A Group of Sixty-Seven* employs and potentially reinforces the Canadian nation as a means of demonstrating the “crisis” of identity present within traditional representations of Canadian identity signified by landscape painting. Exhibited first at the Vancouver Art Gallery in *topographies*, and then in 1998 at the National Gallery of Canada in *Crossings*, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* was employed by these two prominent Canadian institutions as an intervention in the politics of identity and cultural production. It is used as a means of creating subjectivity to be subsumed under the rubric of Canadian identity, as discussed by Mackey.

### **Conceptual Landscape Art**

The narrative of the Group of Seven as producers of a national art has been the subject of critical art practices, particularly in the late twentieth century. The Canadian landscape has continued to fascinate artists; it is important to consider how Yoon’s work functions in dialogue with contemporary landscape art practices. Yoon is not simply critically responding to historical articulations of landscape art, she is participating in a discourse about landscape, institutionalized nationalism, and Canadian identity. In her writing on 1960s art in Canada, Johanne Sloan coined the term “Conceptual Landscape Art” for art production that evolved alongside conceptual art and land art.<sup>135</sup> She loosely

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<sup>133</sup> Miki, 4.

<sup>134</sup> Miki, 4.

<sup>135</sup> Johanne Sloan, “Conceptual Landscape Art: Joyce Wieland and Michael Snow,” in *Beyond Wilderness*, 73.

applies this term to art that demonstrates “the structural and theoretical basis of landscape” and dismantles the landscape genre to “lay bare its conventions, reveal its inner mechanisms.”<sup>136</sup> Sloan announces this period of artistic production using Michael Snow and Joyce Wieland as key examples, though she does acknowledge the parallel practices of other experimental landscape projects from the late 1960s and early 1970s by multimedia artists such as N. E. Thing Co., Robert Smithson and Richard Long.<sup>137</sup>

This idea of conceptual landscape art is particularly useful for understanding Yoon’s artistic production as she delves into the established structural and theoretical foundations of the history of landscape art in Canada. For Yoon, this interest exposes the structures that construct subjectivity, particularly in the iconic landscapes that have come to represent Canadian identity. She situates her work within these very landscapes, inhabiting them with figures to dismantle the genre of the empty wilderness landscape and to lay bare the conventions that racialized both landscape and body. Yoon’s work also functions in dialogue with other artists engaged in conceptual landscape art practices, and I will explore this narrative as it relates to Yoon’s artistic production revealing both the legacy of landscape art in Canada and why it is an important site of articulating and contesting constructions of identity.

Yoon’s earlier work often directly addressed representations of the constructions of the nation and the “burden of racialization.”<sup>138</sup> She felt that this was a necessary step in her artistic practice, both ethically and because she is constantly aware of the “contingencies of power” that influence her subjectivity.<sup>139</sup> Works such as *Souvenirs of*

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<sup>136</sup> Sloan, 73.

<sup>137</sup> Sloan, 73.

<sup>138</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>139</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

*the Self, A Group of Sixty-Seven, between departure and arrival, and Touring Home From Away* structurally deconstruct these forms of power so that Yoon felt she could develop her practice, addressing gender and racialization more subtly in the context of global movements, technological developments, and changing structures of power.<sup>140</sup>

The term, conceptual landscape art, relates to artistic practices that unveil and reinterpret traditional landscape conventions to reveal the genre as an “already-mediated perceptual field.”<sup>141</sup> Specifically, Sloan makes the connection between pictorial conventions in the Western tradition that horizontally frames the landscape, with its “built-in horizon line,” acting as a key element that lays out the natural scene for “visual consumption.”<sup>142</sup> This critical approach to landscape art signifies for Sloan a rupture with modern schools of landscape art which, in Canada, resulted in many artists directly responding to the art historical narrative of the Group of Seven.<sup>143</sup> Particularly in central Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, there were a number of artists who were conceptually unravelling the dominant narrative of the Group of Seven as visual representation of Canadian identity. For example, Joyce Wieland’s film *Far Shore* (1976, also known as *True Patriot Love* and *L’Autre Rive*), included Tom Thomson as a character caught in a love triangle with a Canadian couple on vacation. The film sought to propose a revisionary art history by denaturalizing the mythology of the painter as a solitary, chaste man in the wild.<sup>144</sup>

Wieland’s work critically engages with the structures and hierarchies of art history, particularly at a time when feminist revisionism was a new concept, in order to

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<sup>140</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>141</sup> Sloan, 74.

<sup>142</sup> Sloan, 74.

<sup>143</sup> Sloan, 75.

<sup>144</sup> Sloan, 77.

question the gendering of art historical discourses that both established the discipline and Canadian identity as inherently masculine. Her work, *109 Views* (1970-71) (fig. 2.8), was made up of 109 abstracted, quilted landscapes. It refers to landscapes in the tradition of the Group of Seven, yet the cartoon-like images, abstracted due to the nature of the medium, act as a parody of the Group of Seven's legacy. It further distils landscape art to a formula; the basic shape is supplied by the frame with two or three horizontal bands to suggest earth, sky, and the imperative horizon line.<sup>145</sup> These landscapes are based on stills from her film, *Reason over Passion* (1969), which was shot from a car window as she drove from the Atlantic coast across Canada to the Pacific coast to capture the nation's landscapes. The practice of capturing moving images of the landscape was also employed by Jeff Wall in his *Landscape Manual* (1969) and later by Yoon in *between departure and arrival* (1997) (discussed in chapter one).

*109 Views* was a collaborative piece, involving Joyce Martin and her sister Joan Stewart (who also collaborated on two other works from the same year). Yet the work was ultimately attributed to Wieland herself in her 1971 NGC exhibition, *True Patriot Love/Veritable Amour Patriotique*.<sup>146</sup> The collaborative nature of this work comments critically on the mythos of the artist as a solitary and unique individual, embodied in the mythological figure of Tom Thomson in the context of Canadian art history. The quilt, as an artistic medium, suggests the domestic intimacy of a blanket, presenting a contrast to the distance of the empty, wilderness landscapes of the Group of Seven. Further, the

<sup>145</sup> Sloan, 75.

<sup>146</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Issues of Feminist Aesthetics: Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland," *Woman's Art Journal* 1.2 (Autumn 1980): 39. Interestingly, this exhibition predates Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979) by eight years and employs many similar goals of bringing women's "craft" and feminist articulations of the female body into gallery spaces. This was also the first retrospective exhibition that featured a living, woman artist held at the National Gallery of Canada. I think it is of note that the work's collaborative element was forsaken for attributing it to a single artist, and I wonder if this is a function of new collaborative, feminist projects fitting into predominantly male institutional structures.

work offers a layered exploration of the gendering of mediums; the quilt representative of traditional women's work, sewing circles and family heirlooms, and is associated with craft whereas painting has traditionally been part of the male domain and revered on the pedestals of high art institutions.

Yoon's work functions in dialogue with feminist discourses pioneered by artists like Wieland. Both Yoon and Wieland employ the Group of Seven to situate their feminist critiques. For *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, Yoon employs a work by Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris, and *Souvenirs of the Self* juxtaposes the natural landscapes made famous by the Group of Seven with a female figure. Like Wieland, Yoon critiques the mythology of the solitary artist as genius and the unique art object that has come to denote patriarchal and hierarchical art systems; Yoon does so by repeating the image of the Harris painting sixty-seven times. Furthermore, many of her works show collaborative creative processes. The Asian woman in *Souvenirs of the Self* is Yoon herself, and she worked with artist Cheryl Bellows who photographed this work. As mentioned previously, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* was a collaboration between sixty-seven members of Vancouver's Korean-Canadian community, including Yoon's own family, and photographer Trevor Mills. For Yoon, these partnerships and collaborations are integral to her artistic practice.<sup>147</sup> Collaborative processes also allowed Yoon to stand as the figure in *Souvenirs of the Self* and for both men and women to inhabit the landscapes of Lawren Harris and Emily Carr in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* in order to both expose and question conventions that gender the landscape as masculine. Like Wieland, Yoon presents a complementary narrative of the landscape that reveals its gendered constructions. Brenda Lafleur also discusses how Yoon's work reveals the prevalence of

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<sup>147</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 58.

images of the northern landscape in Canadian art.<sup>148</sup> Images of the north have been associated with early twentieth century discourses around the Canadian nation as being “strong and free,” male, white and associated with other Northern European and Scandinavian countries and races.<sup>149</sup>

The collaborative project by Gu Xiong and Andrew Hunter also employs the constructions of Canadian identity established and perpetuated by art historical narratives of the Group of Seven. Taking the form of a conversation between two friends, the exhibition and publication project, *Ding Ho / Group of 7* (2000), explores the perceptions of “individual and national identity, cultural stereotypes, private memories, official histories and propaganda”<sup>150</sup> from the perspective of two Canadians using personal memories and musings, family photographs, sketches, prints, photographs and reproductions of paintings. Gu writes that his first impressions of Canada developed after seeing Canadian landscapes of the Group of Seven, printed in magazines after an exhibition was held in China in 1975, the first foreign exhibition during the Cultural Revolution. At first, he thought that the Group of Seven’s landscapes were without political messages, unlike Chinese landscape art which was controlled by Mao’s revolutionary art theories at the time.<sup>151</sup> Gu’s sentiments subtly reflect the similarities and connections expressed in the images of propaganda and politics in both China and Canada. This work reveals that, while the Group of Seven is often presented as a group of apolitical modernist painters, their work, in fact, exists within a formidable, robust, and

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<sup>148</sup> Brenda Lafleur, “‘Resting’ in History: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon,” in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>149</sup> Roald Nasgaard, “The Mystic North,” in *Beyond Wilderness*, 251-252.

<sup>150</sup> Gu Xiong, *Ding Ho / Group of 7*, exhibition catalogue (Kleinburg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 2000), 3.

<sup>151</sup> Xiong, 24.

politically charged historical and institutional framework which is expressed both at home and abroad.

Michael Snow also explored similar aspects of the politics of representation in the Group of Seven's paintings. For his work, *Plus Tard* (1977) (fig. 2.9), Michael Snow photographed an installation of Group of Seven paintings at the National Gallery of Canada. The fifty-three photographs are softly blurred, capturing the slight movements of a hand held camera, yet still maintaining enough clarity to recognize the paintings in the photographs. Snow draws the viewer's attention to the medium of photography as well as the politics of representation.<sup>152</sup> He reveals, re-interprets and layers questions of artistic representation and presentation, alluding to similar issues around the original and unique art object introduced by Wieland and taken up by Yoon in *A Group of Sixty-Seven*. The title, *Plus Tard*, further suggests references to time, delay, memory and recall,<sup>153</sup> referring to the art historical discourses in Canada that have constructed the Group of Seven as seminal founding constituents in Canada's avant-garde. He includes visual cues from the structure of the gallery such as exit signs, text labels, frames, and the gallery walls. Snow addresses the entangled narratives that bind the Group of Seven and the National Gallery of Canada to undertake some of the same issues I outlined in my discussion of *A Group of Sixty-Seven*.

The interest in a particular and unified expression of Canadian identity as represented by the Group of Seven was more prevalent in central Canada than in the rest of Canada. Artists such as Wieland, Snow, and Greg Curnoe, all from central Canada,

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<sup>152</sup> Louise Dompierre, "Embodied Vision: The Painting, Sculpture, Photo-Work, Sound Installation, Music, Holographic Work, Films and Books of Michael Snow from 1970 to 1993," in *Visual Art, 1951-1993: The Michael Snow Project*, exhibition catalogue (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1994), 436.

<sup>153</sup> Regina Cornwell, *Snow Seen: The Films and Photographs of Michael Snow* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1980), 57.

emphasized Canada as distinct from the United States. Greg Curnoe's *Map of North America* (1972) (fig. 2.10) is a particularly poignant example of the anti-American sentiment employed in defining Canadian identity. This work visually imagines articulations of Canadian identity, represented by a map, to express the correlations between territoriality, geographical context, and national identity. It maps out his fiercely anti-American political view of Canadian identity using the land, territory, and their visual representation—the map—as a means of articulating difference, exclusivity, and specificity. This work reiterates his sentiments expressed in “Amendments to Continental Refusal / Refus Continental” published in *Cents Magazine*.<sup>154</sup>

Artists on the West Coast were also interested in the landscape but they focused less on the relationship between landscape art and Canadian nationalism (specifically the Group of Seven) than did their Ontarian contemporaries. The artistic community in Vancouver developed a regional aesthetic that aligned with local communities along the Pacific coast, particularly in California, and with other cities along the Pacific Rim.<sup>155</sup> These transnational relationships were at odds with anti-American sentiments that were fostered in central Canada. Instead, artists in Vancouver, who did not identify with the intense central Canadian nationalism, connected with American artists like Dan Graham and Robert Smithson.<sup>156</sup>

A central argument in Yoon's oeuvre is her concern with constructions of canonical landscapes that represent the structures of colonialism. Though the Canadian

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<sup>154</sup> Greg Curnoe, in *Beyond Wilderness*, 57-58. Reprint of Greg Curnoe, “Amendments to Continental Refusal / Refus Continental,” *20 Cents Magazine* 4.1 (April 1970).

<sup>155</sup> Scott Watson, “Urban Renewal: Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties,” in *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*, eds. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, exhibition catalogue (Verona: AZ Grafiche, 2005), 44.

<sup>156</sup> Watson, “Urban Renewal,” 44.

modernist landscape painting that appears in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is connected to a colonial history, Yoon also contends with other colonial landscapes in works such as *Touring Home From Away* and *between departure and arrival*. One of Vancouver's prominent photoconceptualists, Christos Dikeakos, layers photographs of contemporary landscapes with history and cultural inquiry.<sup>157</sup> His panorama photographs of the 1990s, such as *Ch'e Chée Lmun* (1992) (fig. 2.11), developed from his late-1960s and mid-1980s work where he captured the ever changing, defeatured urban landscapes of Vancouver in an attempt to "de-mystify perceived representations of reality."<sup>158</sup> His most recent project combines panoramic views of contemporary urban landscapes of Vancouver (and later of Saskatoon) in front of which he mounts a plexi-glass panel with Native and non-Native place names inscribed into the glass. These names refer specifically to the history of the site and the layered narratives buried beneath the existing present-day urban landscape. He states that his photographs present

[q]uestions of discovery, the systematic pre-empting of land and property, control of space, the commodification of land, its natural resources, and layers of silenced history with its colonial master narrative of official history... the project now has become a process of redocumentation, of putting an encompassing, historical frame over a familiar contemporary landscape.<sup>159</sup>

Dikeakos contends with the site's colonial history and the impact of capitalist structures articulated in the landscape. He juxtaposes image and text to uncover the processes of historical accumulations and erasure physically built into the landscape. Yoon's works such as *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Touring Home From Away* bear these same issues by

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<sup>157</sup> Christos Dikeakos, "Some Background Notes for 'Sites and Place Names: Vancouver / Saskatoon,'" in *Christos Dikeakos Sites and Place Names: Vancouver / Saskatoon*, exhibition catalogue (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1994), 7.

<sup>158</sup> Dikeakos, 5-6.

<sup>159</sup> Dikeakos, 7.

juxtaposing the body and the landscape to unveil constructions of subjectivity shaped by colonialism and capitalism.

Jamelie Hassan produced a similar project for the 1993 exhibition, *Post-Colonial Landscapes*. For this exhibition, curator Joyce Whitebear Reed of the Mendel Art Gallery commissioned four artists to create work that used landscape as the subject that would be exhibited on a billboard and integrated into the fabric of the city of Saskatoon. Using a photograph of a landscape of palm trees and sandy marshes from southern Iraq, Hassan inscribed text onto the image that was taken from a 1993 *London Free Press* (London, Ontario) article regarding the negative health effects of nuclear warfare during the Gulf War on the people of Iraq.<sup>160</sup> The title, *Linkages*, and the site specificity of the work also referred to Saskatchewan's uranium industry, reminding the viewer of the complex narratives and layered geographies of what Whitebear Reed calls a “post-colonial landscape [that] is also a multi-national, post-industrial landscape.”<sup>161</sup> Hassan situated her continued participation in cultural race politics in the real landscape of the city (the billboard) and the reproduced landscape (the image and text). As Monika Kin Gagnon points out, underpinning Hassan’s work is “a theme that implicitly holds to the optimistic possibilities of alternate modes of representation ... the very fabric of Hassan’s artistic practice can itself be recognized as a distinctive, alternative cultural language.”<sup>162</sup>

Like Hassan, Yoon has established and continues to develop her own distinctive, alternative language to enunciate possibilities of alternate modes of representation. While Hassan often couples image and text, Yoon articulates an alternative language

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<sup>160</sup> Joyce Whitebear Reed, *The Post-Colonial Landscape: A Billboard Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1993), 8.

<sup>161</sup> Whitebear Reed, 8.

<sup>162</sup> Monika Kin Gagnon, *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture and Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 158.

using landscape and the body. Hassan's *Linkages* reveals the textuality of the media image used for the work; Yoon uncovers textuality in landscape imagery by exposing the tensions that exist when inhabited by a figure, particularly one marked by race. This engagement with textuality articulated with the photographic image is an apparatus of photoconceptualism.

Though Stan Douglas is not expressly involved in cultural race politics as are Yoon and Hassan, his installation, *Nu·tka* (1996) explores the colonial history embodied by the scenic west coast landscapes of Nootka Sound (fig. 2.12). Douglas uses photoconceptual practices and applies the same conceptual approach to the image in this film, as is also seen in Yoon's works such as *between departure and arrival*, and her more recent works, *Unbidden* and *The Dreaming Collective Knows No History*. The images are accompanied by an audio track of the narratives of two eighteenth century explorers; one, a Spanish explorer, Juan Pérez, who arrived there in 1774, and the other, an Englishman, James Cook, who arrived four years later. Their overlapping monologues mirror the unfocused and doubled images of Nootka Sound.<sup>163</sup> As Daina Augaitis points out, Douglas' work "uses the narrative form to grapple with the legacies of ... the values prescribed by modernism as universal truths, and its single, central canon which excludes different subjectivities."<sup>164</sup> Using landscape imagery to situate historical narratives, Douglas presents the voices of colonialism in Canada. Speaking loudly, these voices signal the remarkably absent silence of the colonized people, the Mowachaht who lived in the area.

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<sup>163</sup> Stan Douglas, "Nu·tka: Historical Background," in *Stan Douglas*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1999), 43.

<sup>164</sup> Daina Augaitis, "Casting Doubt: The Narratives of Stan Douglas," in *Stan Douglas*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1999), 33.

Rodney Graham also turns to film for *Vexation Island* (1997) which took the structure of a self-contained, looped film projection.<sup>165</sup> Situated on the beach of a tropical island, Graham employs a prominent image in post-colonial literature which also refers to the cycles of exploration and colonialism.<sup>166</sup> However, his central interest is to complicate or reframe the very nature of the medium. The cyclical, enclosed nature of the work is a deliberate denial of a cinematic narrative. It reframes the work, likening Graham's island cycle to a painting, more so than to a film.<sup>167</sup> These examples by Douglas and Graham both produce subtle shifts in the structure of the medium of film to reveal the frame and narrative conventions of the medium. This interest in deconstructing the very nature of the medium is founded in photoconceptualism.

Graham also employed the conceptual structures of landscape in order to engage with mechanisms of representation and viewing. His 1989 work *Linden, Ronse (Flanders Trees)* (fig. 2.13) forces us to see the image through the device that captured it, the camera obscura.<sup>168</sup> Today, the camera obscura alludes to a history of photography and representation and thus new discourses of representation and a visual understanding of the world around us. The inversion of the image "displaces the act of perception,"<sup>169</sup> drawing attention to the act of looking. Graham's interest in the mechanisms of representation and viewing as they relate to landscape has been present since the early years of his practice. Graham describes one of his earliest works, *75 Polaroids* (1976), as the result of the processing functions of a Polaroid SX-70 which illuminated tree

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<sup>165</sup> This work was presented at the Venice Biennale in 1997.

<sup>166</sup> Michael Taussig, "The Beach (A Fantasy)," in *Landscape and Power*, 317-346.

<sup>167</sup> Jack Liang, "Another Day in Paradise," in *Rodney Graham: Vexation Island and Other Works*, exhibition catalogue (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1998), 6.

<sup>168</sup> Lesley Johnstone, *Sites of the Visual: Rodney Graham, Steven Pippin, David Tomas*, exhibition catalogue (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1997), 13.

<sup>169</sup> Johnstone, 13.

branches as he walked through a forest.<sup>170</sup> *Illuminated Ravine* (1979) expands on this idea by inviting his audience to experience the landscape illuminated by the pulsating light of a generator powered light-tower which was then thrown over the edge of a ravine during a two hour showing on two nights.<sup>171</sup> Graham employs the landscape of the ravine as the site for this alternative theatre of viewing and begins to address Mitchell's definition of landscape imagery as the "site encountered as image or 'sight'"<sup>172</sup> that I discussed in relation to Yoon's work.

Like Graham, Yoon engages with the history of the medium of photography which is conventionally associated with an objective record. By the 1860s, photography was being used as a utilitarian medium for documentation of the land. In the American West, photographers were commissioned to contribute to geological surveys for mining, lumber, and railroad interests.<sup>173</sup> Photography was considered to be a transparent representation of nature, yet the sublime and picturesque framing of landscape photographs inspired and informed contemporary landscape painters such as the Group of Seven.<sup>174</sup> Photographic landscapes were often left unpopulated or with minimal human presence to deny cultural construction and artifice and imply objectivity.<sup>175</sup> The depiction of landscapes without human presence or witness was based on a tradition of landscape painting that defined the wilderness as savage and void of culture prevalent in

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<sup>170</sup> Rodney Graham, "The Way I Use Photography," in *Sites of the Visual: Rodney Graham, Steven Pippin, David Tomas*, exhibition catalogue (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1997), 19.

<sup>171</sup> Graham, 20.

<sup>172</sup> Mitchell, x.

<sup>173</sup> Joel Snyder, "Territorial Photography," in *Landscape and Power*, 187.

<sup>174</sup> Snyder, 185. Painters of America's West such as Albert Bierstadt, William Keith, and Thomas Moran looked to photographer Carleton Watkins for images of the landscape. Members of the Group of Seven, Jackson, Carmichael, Casson, and MacDonald, also produced illustrations for a Canadian National Railroad brochure, *Jasper National Park*, based on photographs. Lynda Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change..." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37.1 (2002): 159.

<sup>175</sup> Snyder, 185.

depictions of the North American West.<sup>176</sup> In *Souvenirs of the Self*, Yoon inserted the body of an Asian woman into the landscape to confront the transparency of landscape photography as a record of the natural world. She denaturalized the perception of photography and landscape as outside of cultural constructs by conflating familiar imagery of the Canadian wilderness with a human witness.

Landscape imagery has been employed by artists to visually explore spaces, understand new lands, and articulate a sense of place and belonging, generating a relationship with one's environment. The artistic tradition in Canada has been particularly invested in landscape art; in her work, Yoon engages with this complex history and the layered meanings that surround images of the landscape focusing particularly on Canadian landscapes.

In summary, this chapter has explored how Yoon's artistic practice functions in dialogue with the history of landscape imagery in Canada, the ways in which this historical narrative has been recorded in Canada's art history and institutions, and how her work engages with contemporary practices in landscape art. Her use of landscapes that hold a significant place in the Canadian national imagination enables a layered critical reading of the formation of Canadian subjectivities. The first layer explores the institutional frameworks that have established and perpetuated a traditional and dated understanding of the land through landscape painting that has been inducted into the Canadian art historical cannon and become the visual signifier for Canadian identity. The second layer considers Canadian national discourses and ideologies, imagined in the landscape, which frame and direct ways of seeing to produce a sense of place and belonging that is exclusionary and produced by dominant cultures in Canada. Finally,

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<sup>176</sup> Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," in *Landscape and Power*, 292, 295.

her work functions in a critical dialogue with Canadian artists producing a new critical language to explore the physical and conceptual environment.

## Chapter Three

### Transmodal Feminism: Regendering Narratives

As I demonstrated in Chapter One, Yoon's oeuvre is grounded in photoconceptual practices that seek to expose the multiple semiotic systems that inform and construct photographic images. In chapter two, I outlined the semiotic systems of the institutionalized nation, imbedded in the landscape art that Yoon reveals and critiques through her work. In this chapter, I will discuss Yoon's work using a framework of multicultural feminism and cultural race politics. She employs the visual vocabulary of feminism expressed through the use of the body and autobiographical statements as the site of representation. Yoon's work illustrates discourses of multicultural feminism and cultural race politics, exploring how the body and autobiography both bear the power structures that construct race, displacement, and gender, and thus presents possibilities to question these power structures. I propose the term "transmodal feminism" to describe this intersection of discourses, represented in Yoon's artistic practice.

#### **Representing Transmodal Feminism**

In a conversation about her work, Yoon recalled her early influences and said that she was "trained in feminist practices where the personal is the political."<sup>177</sup> She states that works such as *Souvenirs of the Self* (fig. 3.1) and *Screens* (fig. 3.2) "resonate with feminist work from the early 60s that conflated the body as subject and object at once."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Jin-me Yoon, interview by author, digital recording, Vancouver, B.C., 20 June 2007.

<sup>178</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

Yoon also identified the shifting positions of feminist discourses in the early 1990s that moved beyond purely critiquing masculine ideologies and expanded to include the multiplicity and complexity of identity.<sup>179</sup> Ella Shohat responds to this shift identified by Yoon in her book, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. She proposes a “reimagining of community affiliations and cultural practices, articulated not in isolation but in relation” under the rubric of multicultural feminism.<sup>180</sup> Shohat argues that bringing the two terms together highlights “political intersectionality” and refuses hierarchies of class, racial, national, sexual, and gender-based struggles.<sup>181</sup> This collection of essays proffers the voices of scholars, artists, critics, and curators, all articulating concepts of feminism from different perspectives and with diverse objectives. Monika Kin Gagnon also affirms this shift in feminism from a “homogenizing rally cry” to “critiques and acknowledgements of difference ‘within.’”<sup>182</sup> Shohat emphasizes that this “political intersectionality” shares the common goal of “transforming social stratifications and hegemonic epistemologies … forging alternative epistemologies and imaginative alliances.”<sup>183</sup> Particularly useful for understanding Yoon’s work is an underlying framework of feminism that acknowledges multiple perspectives, understandings, articulations, and transformative possibilities of feminist practices.

In *Souvenirs of the Self*, Yoon encourages multiple perspectives by inviting her viewers’ participation and perspectives in the creative process. *Souvenirs of the Self* was circulated as a postcard project comprised of a series of six images with captions printed

<sup>179</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>180</sup> Ella Shohat, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>181</sup> Shohat, 1.

<sup>182</sup> Monika Kin Gagnon, “Other Solitudes,” in *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics*, eds. Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung (Montreal: Artexiles Editions, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>183</sup> Shohat, 2.

on the reverse (figs. 1.1 and 3.1). Inserted into gift shop shelves in Banff, Alberta, these postcards were available for purchase by tourists to send to loved ones as a memento of their own travels. The images capture the same Asian woman standing in six iconic landscapes around Banff. The figure's deliberately neutral stance and expression is repeating throughout the six images, mimicking common tourist snapshots. The figure stands in front of the landscapes typically used for postcards; the Canadian Pacific Banff Springs Hotel, the majestic view of Lake Louise, the main street of Banff with mountains towering behind, and amongst a group of white tourists in front of a tour bus. The images combine picturesque locations, conventionally used as signifiers of Canadian national identity, with tourist snapshots as a symbol of the individual experience of these sites. Yoon invites unsuspecting viewers of these postcards to explore their own personal interpretation of the work. She does not provide obvious indicators for reading the subject, thus inviting the viewers' analysis. The direct gaze of the subject in the photograph engages the viewer in a dialogue rather than passively accepting the gaze of the viewer. This encourages the viewers' subjective interpretation and response to the work and provides the means for a multifarious reading of the image, ripe with multiple sites of identification and representation.

*Screens* was created as a photo essay in 1993 for *Ms.*, a magazine dedicated to women's issues and feminist concerns. Founded in 1971 in New York City, *Ms.* magazine declares itself to be "the first national magazine to make feminist voices audible, feminist journalism tenable, and a feminist worldview available to the public."<sup>184</sup> Also exhibited as an installation, *Screens* draws on a collection of documentation,

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<sup>184</sup> "HerStory: 1971-Present," *Ms. Magazine*, <http://www.msmagazine.com/about.asp>, (accessed 12 June 2008).

photographs, and letters. The documentation includes a family passport, photographs of her family home and members of Yoon's family, and letters written by Yoon's mother from various periods of her family's new life in Canada. Yoon illustrates experiences from Korea and Canada providing translations of language and image to symbolize the connections and divisions between generations, between two places called home, between Korean and Canadian cultures. Yoon reveals the multiple voices that participate in cultivating identity expressed by the women in a family unit who articulate the languages of feminism from within experiences of displacement, diaspora, imperialism, and racialization.

Gagnon includes feminism in the social and political movements that provided the groundwork for what she terms "cultural race politics." At its foundation she cites post-World War II civil rights movements such as the American Black liberation movements and the early women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>185</sup> She introduces the term cultural race politics to refer to the "processes of self-identification and self-organization by Native artists and artists of colour into communities, with the goals of making interventions in the larger Canadian cultural domain."<sup>186</sup> While she positions these ideas within a particular time (the 1980s and 1990s) and place (Canada), Gagnon points out that "at their very foundation, these cultural movements and activities bring into question (and problematize) who defines, determines and controls cultural value."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Gagnon, *13 Conversations*, 12.

<sup>186</sup> Monika Kin Gagnon, *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 22-23.

<sup>187</sup> Gagnon, *13 Conversations*, 12.

This term also denotes a shift towards struggles over issues of representation, questions of visibility and the “politics of knowledge.”<sup>188</sup>

Gagnon’s definition of cultural race politics shares much of the conceptual framework outlined by Shohat, giving her concepts specificity identifiable by historical moments and collective activist practices in the arts in Canada. Gagnon situates her discussion in the debates and activism of cultural producers interested in articulating the politics of culture and race in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s. She references the dramatic changes concerning cultural equity in the arts that took root at the Canada Council for the Arts, particularly in the 1990s, and effected change to administrative, organizational, and ideological definitions of national culture developed through the council’s funding structure.<sup>189</sup> While Canada’s official policy of multiculturalism impacted institutions and funding structures for artists of colour and aboriginal artists, M. Nourbese Philips argues that these changes maintained flawed policies and hierarchies, sustaining structures that continued to distinguish between dominant and ‘multicultural’ cultural production.<sup>190</sup> In Canada, official multiculturalism policies have been fiercely critiqued by cultural critics such as Himani Bannerji, Neil Bissoondath, and William Gairdner, and have charged the policies with perpetuating language that continues to operate within the structures of systemic racism and instituted ethnic ghettoization.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 23; Gagnon, *13 Conversations*, 12.

<sup>189</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 24-25.

<sup>190</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 25 ; Marlene Nourbese Philip, “The ‘Multicultural’ Whitewash: Racism in Ontario’s Arts Funding System,” in *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992), 110-133.

<sup>191</sup> Himani Bannerji *Dark Side of the Nation: Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Racism* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2000); Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994); William Gairdner, *The Trouble With Canada: A Citizen Speaks Out* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1994); For a more comprehensive discussion of the critical response to Canada’s official multiculturalism see Monika Kin Gagnon and Scott Toguri McFarlane, “The Capacity of Cultural

Shohat defends her use of the term multicultural against allegations that it participates in a “liberal-pluralist discourse,” by promoting a “polycentric multiculturalism” that entails a “profound reconceptualization and restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond the nation state.”<sup>192</sup> However, Audrey Kobayashi points out that, in Canada, multiculturalism is an institution within the federal government that necessarily participates in the structures of the nation state and relates to ethno-cultural diversity, symbolic official ideology, and structural legislation.<sup>193</sup> While Shohat’s concepts and exploration of political intersectionality are particularly useful, the term multiculturalism is too loaded in the Canadian context. Therefore, I suggest an exploration of Shohat’s theoretical approach to feminism that is grounded in the specificity of Gagnon’s historical narrative of a cultural movement in Canada, for which I propose the term “transmodal feminism.”

The term “modal” is defined as relating to or expressing the mood of a verb and is most frequently used as a musical term, relating to a particular tonality or mood of the music. This adjective captures the subtleties of expression of a verb, here, relating to feminism as an active verb. I propose a feminism that is both active and situated; that is constantly changing and in motion, and that responds to the subtleties of experiences and expression. Using the term *transmodal* suggests commonality that moves within and between subjectivities, reflecting and relating to the structure of transnationalism, indicating flows of experience and expression that refuses a universalizing language that feminism and identity politics are often charged with upholding.

Difference,” *Minister’s Forum on Diversity and Culture, Canadian Heritage*, [http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bg/05\\_e.cfm](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bg/05_e.cfm) (accessed September 25, 2006).

<sup>192</sup> Shohat, 2.

<sup>193</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, “Multiculturalism: Representing a Canadian Institution,” in *Place / Culture / Representation*, eds. James Duncan and David Ley (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 205.

Both Shohat and Gagnon have developed a language that critiques the problematic and limiting terminology of identity politics. Gagnon plainly defines identity politics as “the self-naming and self-identification of individuals and communities around a common identity category in order to make a political intervention.”<sup>194</sup> While the distinction between Gagnon’s definition of cultural race politics and identity politics may be subtle, the crucial difference is the former maintains a more determined consideration of representation and difference across communities with a focus on state intervention. The emphasis of cultural race politics on “self-organization” rather than “self-naming” indicates an active and subversive involvement in the very structures and institutions that perpetuate the categories of naming. Shohat strives to surpass the “often debilitating confines of identity politics” in favour of “politics of identification, affiliation, and social transformation.”<sup>195</sup> Transmodal feminism, which I propose here, draws on the distinction between identity politics outlined by Gagnon and Shohat, employing an active and critically engaged intervention on dominant cultural narratives rather than a self-naming that results in simplistic, fixed identities. Situating commonality in the nuanced expressions of experience, transmodal feminism generates collective and active intervention on the language and terms of self-identification and within the politics of culture and race. It is for this reason that I have argued against categorizing Yoon’s oeuvre under the rubric of identity politics, yet I maintain that her engagement with cultural race politics and transmodal feminism is imperative to her practice as it relates to photoconceptualism and her theoretical practice as she addresses the structures that construct subjectivity.

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<sup>194</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 22.

<sup>195</sup> Shohat, 9.

## Body Politics

Gagnon states that “the site of representation has always been integral to the cultural politics of difference.”<sup>196</sup> For Yoon, the body is an important site for contesting the power structures and politics of difference and to challenge the constructs of race that are literally marked on to the body.<sup>197</sup> In *Souvenirs of the Self and Screens*, Yoon employs the marked body as a deconstructive indicator to reveal the fissures and contingencies within ideologies of landscape and place that signify Canadian national identity. In her essay, “the bodies that were not ours,” Fusco outlines this connection between the American black body, fear, and collective trauma.<sup>198</sup> She discusses how the legacy of trauma is literally marked onto the racialized body.<sup>199</sup> Fusco illustrates the deep connection between race and the body that exceeds the visibility of difference to include the violence that has historically been enacted on the racialized body. It is this entrenched and deep-seated history of violence towards the racialized body, the Asian-Canadian body, which Yoon portrays in her work.

Yoon engages with feminist deployments of the body as a site of representation and contestation of gender and race. She employs the marked body—marked by dress, hairstyle, stance and facial expression—to highlight the way race and gender is visibly marked on the body. Feminist art historian Brenda Lafleur uses Derridian deconstruction to discuss *Souvenirs of the Self*. She defines deconstructive indicators as “linking one side to another” of a binary opposition.<sup>200</sup> These indicators create the possibility of

<sup>196</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 23.

<sup>197</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>198</sup> Coco Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 3-17.

<sup>199</sup> Fusco, 4.

<sup>200</sup> Brenda Lafleur, “‘Resting’ in history: Translating the Art of Jin-me Yoon,” in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), 222

turning to either of opposing positions.<sup>201</sup> For example, deconstructive indicators disrupt binaries such as fixed/unfixed, male/female, Canadian/non-Canadian, settler/migrant, self/other, home/not-home.<sup>202</sup> Yoon positions the body as the subject rather than the object of the gaze, as was the goal in feminist discourses. She elaborates on this deployment of the body as subject to reveal a continual deferral and movement between the positions to portray the body as both subject and object at once. The deconstructive indicators of the marked body initiate this movement or deferral between opposing positions. In doing this with the body, Yoon also sets up the possibilities for the same movement and continual displacement to occur in the relationship of the body to the landscape, as in *Souvenirs of the Self*, or the body to place, as in *Screens*. In this deconstruction of the imagery of landscape and place, she confronts the nationalist ideologies illustrated by landscape art, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Yoon also illustrates how a similar continual displacement is possible in the imagery of the landscape. This is illustrated by the tensions that occur when juxtaposing the body and the landscape. Just as the purpose of transmodal feminism is to disturb the concept of identity as fixed and singular, Yoon's work also contests the constructs of landscape and place that construct identity as fixed and singular. Lafleur provides an explanation for how Yoon's body simultaneously invites and frustrates identification by arguing that the body wears deconstructive indicators when inserted into the landscape, constantly unsettling and deferring meaning.<sup>203</sup>

Lafleur argues that representations of the Canadian landscape are constructed by a nationalist mythology associated with the north, a rugged frontier history, strength and

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<sup>201</sup> Lafleur, 222.

<sup>202</sup> Lafleur, 222.

<sup>203</sup> Lafleur, 222, 223.

independence from former British colonization. She derives this construction of the nation and colonization in gender-related terms where the colony is feminine and the nation masculine.<sup>204</sup> Lafleur points to the markers worn on the body that act as deconstructive indicators (fig. 3.4). The Scandinavian sweater signifies the “northernness” cultivated in Canadian narratives and her blue jeans suggest notions of pioneer cowboys and pioneer spirit in the west. Yet these signifiers are worn by an Asian woman, placed on a body of constructed “Otherness” in relation to the surrounding landscape.<sup>205</sup> They illustrate subtle expressions of the politics of representation actively exposed by transmodal feminist practices.

Yoon includes Group of Seven paintings in the installations of *Souvenirs of the Self*, implicating their paintings in constructing national landscapes in Canada. Lafleur argues that Yoon uses her body to confront the representations of the empty landscape, untouched by human presence in paintings by the Group of Seven, to denote the silences and gaps in this national imaginary. She argues that the stiff pose of the single figure in the landscape refers to iconic Group of Seven paintings that depict a solitary tree in the landscape such as Tom Thomson’s *The Jack Pine* (1916-17) and *Athabasca Valley*, *Jasper Park* (1924) by Lawren Harris.<sup>206</sup> By inhabiting previously empty landscapes, the juxtaposition of body and landscape reveals the rigidity of these landscapes and their inability to embrace or stand for all Canadian identities. In fact, this demonstrates the ambivalence of Canadian nationalist ideologies that Lafleur calls the pervasive myth

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<sup>204</sup> Lafleur, 220.

<sup>205</sup> Lafleur, 222. Here, Yoon also employs Judith Butler’s notions of performativity and may have been particularly influenced by her important text, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published the year before Yoon produced *Souvenirs of the Self*. The figure’s body is clothed in a costume that Lafleur argues signifies “northernness,” performing conventional expressions of Canadian identity, yet also performs the role of tourist, exotic other, and Canadian citizen. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>206</sup> Lafleur, 223.

about Canada—a nation defined by absences and what it is not, implying a lack of fixity.<sup>207</sup> By placing her body into the Canadian landscape in this way, Lafleur states, “Yoon makes visible the power of the nationalist project to construct and foster ‘Otherness.’”<sup>208</sup>

Yoon explores how the body’s Otherness is constructed by representations of the Canadian landscape. Engaging with a feminist deployment of the body, she illustrates transmodal expressions of this practice. As she explained in an interview, she explores how her Asian body “inherits” mistaken identities projected onto her body.<sup>209</sup> One postcard captures Yoon with a plaque marking the area where Chinese railroad workers lived (fig. 3.5). This plaque denotes a history of the railroad as a symbol of a unified Canada; a symbol for human ingenuity rising above geographic obstacles and moving through the land; a symbol for Canada’s history of exploitation of Chinese labourers and the loaded history of discrimination and racial segregation of Asian immigrants in Canada. On the back of the postcard, Yoon included text written in Japanese, Chinese and Korean; text of the three languages that she feels her body has inherited in Canada. The combination of image and text reveals the constructed nature of the Canadian landscape, its inability to stand as a signifier for all Canadians and the complexities of Canada’s less than perfect past. It also exemplifies the constructions of race that whitewashes identity. Conflating the histories, narratives and experiences of Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-Canadians by using the racial category of Asian-Canadian denies specificity and overlooks the colonial histories of these nations.

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<sup>207</sup> Lafleur, 219-220.

<sup>208</sup> Lafleur, 223.

<sup>209</sup> Jin-me Yoon, “Other Conundrums: Monika Kin Gagnon in Conversation with Jin-me Yoon,” interview by Monika Kin Gagnon, *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 49-50.

Yoon uses the body as the site of representation to deconstruct landscape and race in *Souvenirs of the Self*. In *Screens*, she employs fragmented bodies to illustrate the disconnectedness and displacement of a migrant body from one socio-cultural context to another. A passport photograph figures prominently in the photo essay that portrays Yoon with her mother and sisters. The photograph captures the head and shoulders of the figures, fragmenting their bodies. This official document used to indicate identity evokes the issues of origin and authenticity, citizenship and belonging. For the diasporic identity, these notions are hardly as straightforward as a passport photo suggests, and in the case of the immigrant identity, the passport comes to represent displacement.

*Screens* opens with an image of a hand holding the family passport (fig. 3.2) signalling that this form of identification is mediated; the viewer is made aware of the indirect viewing of a document that alludes to the official structures of the nation-state which mediate identity construction. On the following pages, this photograph is reproduced with another photograph that mimics the group at a later stage in life (fig. 3.6). The restaging of the initial photograph appears almost uncanny or perverse, like a futile attempt to recuperate past identity. The figures mimic the innocent, childlike gazes and pigtails which now seem inappropriate and troubling on the adult family, pointing to the inability of the passport to capture the complexities of constantly changing identity.<sup>210</sup>

On the next page, Yoon includes an old photograph that appears to be in a photo album of Korean children with American soldiers in front of an American warship (fig. 3.7). She fragments and reframes the image to focus on two elements; a young girl, a few of her classmates and four American soldiers. Again, the subjects are fragmented,

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<sup>210</sup> Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian / American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 253.

reframed to capture only a stiff frontal head and shoulders, and disconnected from the social and historical context encapsulated by the rest of the original photograph. This fragmentation suggests the displacement of the body (both Korean and American) from its context in the process of migration due to war. The photograph and its fragments are paired with a text that recounts the child's memory of the encounter, narrating childhood awe and curiosity. The memory, written in the summer of 1952 in Kunsan, an American military base in Korea, reads:

There was an American warship in the port of Kunsan. Since I am only used to small boats, this American ship looked like a palace. Since we came to see the ship, the big-nosed American gave us American candy which tasted so good. Normally, American soldiers are frightening. Even the ship is so big and wonderful, how much better must America be? Can I go there in a dream?

The image and text together convey the child's ambivalent feelings towards the American presence in Korea. This illustrates the deeply entrenched ambivalent relationship between Korea and North America which articulates itself in diasporic identities. These kinds of experiences reveal themselves in intergenerational autobiographical statements which I will explore later in this chapter.

On another page, Yoon includes an image that captures the top of a woman's head with hair neatly parted in the middle and pulled back in a traditional Korean style (fig. 3.8). No facial features or other parts of the body are visible. As Germaine Koh suggests, this is a visual metaphor for divided subjectivity.<sup>211</sup> The disembodied, abject representation of the corporeal can also be read as a kind of "Kristevan semiotic disturbance" of the body as the site of identity formation, refiguring biological and socio-

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<sup>211</sup> Germain Koh, "Jin-me Yoon," in *Crossings*, ed. Diana Nemiroff, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 181.

cultural images of the body.<sup>212</sup> Using postcolonial feminist literature as her example, Lionnet states that the gendered and racialized body is a “...partial object on which are written various cultural scripts...”<sup>213</sup> In *Screens*, Yoon literally layers the fragmented images of the bodies of the women in her family with text written in both Korean and English. These texts relay memories to the reader of displacement by recounting fragments from a family’s narrative of immigration. Yoon includes part of a letter written by her mother in 1968, when she first arrived in Vancouver: “...On the tenth day, Jin-me and Jin-sun went to school. On the first day of school, Jin-me came home ... she said, ‘Hi, Mom’ in English. I was so surprised to hear her saying this in English. She doesn’t even think twice about saying ‘No’ in English...” (fig. 3.8). This interaction between mother and daughter reveals the intergenerational experiences of immigration enunciated in the use and understanding of language. Illustrating transmodal feminist expressions, Yoon further complicates this new female subjectivity with indicators of the displaced, migrant body using the disconnected image of a house to illustrate the linguistic displacement between generations experienced within the home.

Yoon’s representation of the disconnected, fragmented body problematizes simple racial identification and reveals the formations of socio-cultural inscriptions projected onto the body. Lionnet further argues that within the ideological contexts within which narratives are constructed, “the body has therefore a double function: to represent the real, and to mediate the possible.”<sup>214</sup> First, the body has the role of revealing experiences of racialization, as Yoon does, by employing images and texts that relay her mother’s

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<sup>212</sup> Jessica Bradley, *Corpus*, exhibition catalogue (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1993), 72.

<sup>213</sup> Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 87.

<sup>214</sup> Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations*, 92.

encounter with the American warship and of the family's first experiences upon arrival in Canada. Second, the body must reflect the "strategic choices forced upon the alienated and colonized subject."<sup>215</sup> Yoon demonstrates this by using images of the fragmented bodies of herself and her mother enacting a conversation regarding her choice to grapple with difficult issues of race and culture in her artistic practice. Her mother asks: "Beloved Daughter, Why do you make this kind of art that doesn't even make any money? Take beautiful and pretty pictures. Why do you only think of such serious things?" (fig. 3.9). Yoon felt that it was necessary for her to confront the histories that construct race and gender because she is very aware of these power structures.<sup>216</sup> It was a strategic move on her part to confront viewers with the processes of racialization projected onto and signified by her body in order to enable the possibility of addressing broader questions and concerns through her artistic practice.<sup>217</sup> Yoon's deployment of the same body in both *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Screens* reveals transmodal expressions of this feminist site of contestation.

### **Autobiographical Statements**

Lionnet points to feminist critic Susan Gubar's discussion of artistic creation, indicating the "perilous relationship" between the female author and her body, who must negotiate perceiving her body "as both her own and as other," because it is so often subjected to the male gaze and reduced to an object.<sup>218</sup> Lionnet suggests that the personal experience of displacement is translated by the representation of the female body,

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<sup>215</sup> Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations*, 93.

<sup>216</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>217</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>218</sup> Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations*, 94.

eliminating the distance between life and art, the lived and the imagined. In an interview about her work, Yoon recounted her reaction to seeing the negatives for *Souvenirs of the Self* for the first time and feeling “profoundly upset to see [herself] as an object.” She further contended that “It is the actual strategic visual replay of what racism feels like” in that the images objectified her self.<sup>219</sup> The fact that Yoon uses her own body and not that of another Asian woman creates a constant deferral of her position as subject and object in the work and further begs the question as to who is the author of the work. Lafleur points to this as “assist[ing] in the project of de-essentializing the author, text and reader.”<sup>220</sup> It is precisely this use of Yoon’s body that also compels the viewer to explore the autobiographical constructions of the work.

Yoon positions the body as the site of autobiographical stagings of identity through self-expression of both the artist and the viewer. Art historian Hyun Yi Kang observes that, in *Souvenirs of the Self*, Yoon deploys her own body to invite but also challenge the idea of “self-expression.”<sup>221</sup> She encourages viewers to consider both Yoon’s expression of the self and their own self-expression in viewing the work, indicating a continual deferral of self-expression. This constant deferral or transfer of self-expression suggests a commonality that moves within and between subjectivities, conveying transmodal feminist practices. She does so in the changing details of the backdrop, decorative prop, and the body’s corporeality—hairstyle, dress, facial

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<sup>219</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>220</sup> Lafleur, 224.

<sup>221</sup> Hyun Yi Kang, “The Autobiographical Stagings of Jin-me Yoon,” in *Jin-me Yoon: between departure and arrival*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Western Front, 1998), 25.

expression and stance—to problematize or evade a fixed, consistent individual identity.<sup>222</sup>

As Kang points out,

Yoon's self-imaginings simultaneously invite and frustrate the identification of her body as a particular "body type" belonging to and representative of a specific social constituency delineated by race, gender, class, sexuality and also nationality.<sup>223</sup>

The site of representation—the body—is integral to uncovering an understanding of the work thereby addressing the social structures that construct subjectivity for both the figure in the work and the viewer.

Yoon employs autobiographical fragments to contest the idea of a fixed identity, revealing the fissures in naturalized articulations of Canadian identity. Autobiography was a tool implemented in feminist discourses to articulate woman as subject and to subvert writing about women as object. Influential feminist Hélène Cixous states that "by writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display ... censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time."<sup>224</sup> Cixous makes a strong connection between the body and writing about the self in feminist practices. Yoon recognizes the importance of addressing both the body and autobiography to articulate her transmodal feminist interventions in the landscape.

*Screens* presents personal narratives with ambiguity locating the work within and across the national borders of Korea and Canada. Yoon illustrates autobiographical stagings of a female perspective on experiences of immigration using her mother's letters, memories of the interactions between mother and daughter, and photographs of

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<sup>222</sup> Kang, "Autobiographical Stagings," 25.

<sup>223</sup> Kang, "Autobiographical Stagings," 25.

<sup>224</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 250.

Yoon with her mother and sisters. She imbues feminist treatments of autobiography with complexity by using photographs of her family and by employing her mother's perspectives on events that shaped the whole family's experiences and understanding of Canada, America, and the West. Yoon implicates the familial structure in the construction of subjectivity and enunciates autobiographical statements using voices other than her own. Rather than simply presenting her own autobiography, Yoon employs biographical fragments to denote multiple perspectives of identity that embody the complexity of identity formation situated in larger social, cultural, and familial structures. This articulates the multiplicity of feminist perspectives and illustrates transmodal feminism. In an interview about her work, Yoon states that she found that "what may appear to be personal narratives in fact implicate larger social and historical considerations. Seen in this light, what I choose to recount is no longer about me as an isolated individual."<sup>225</sup>

Similarly *Souvenirs of the Self* employs autobiographical statements that invite the viewer to participate in biographical constructions of the subject and the viewers' own autobiographical exploration. The title of the work suggests a collection of souvenirs, in this case tourist snapshots and postcards, which together compose a narrative about the self, here, within iconic Canadian landscapes. The figure in the six photographs is Yoon herself, suggesting an autobiographical process. However, "Souvenirs of the self," rather than "*my Self*," implies that the work is biographical as well as autobiographical, encouraging the viewer to create a narrative for the figure in the photograph.

Yoon suggests that her work should "operate as a critical mirror to position each viewer within a particular narrative of Canada and of how national identities have been

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<sup>225</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 46-47.

naturalized.”<sup>226</sup> She asks, “Who can take national identity for granted and who cannot?”<sup>227</sup> In *Souvenirs of the Self* she strives to incite the viewer to explore his or her own perception of the figure in the image, whether that viewer is Yoon herself or another person. The photographs and accompanying captions challenge each viewer to interpret or create a narrative for how this particular body came to be situated in these specific places. Is she a Canadian citizen? An Asian tourist? A Canadian tourist? This is perhaps why Yoon used her own body in *Souvenirs of the Self* and experienced the shock of Otherness that she felt upon first seeing the photographs in print, reproducing her own experience of racialization and racism.<sup>228</sup> She acknowledges the influence of feminism in this process that uses the body and the self as object in order to become a subject of history.<sup>229</sup>

On the postcard in which Yoon stands before a landscape highlighted by the Banff Springs Hotel the caption reads, “Indulge in the European elegance and grandeur of days gone by. She remembers being told that tradition is something you can always count on.” (fig. 3.10) The viewer is encouraged to question the dominance of European tradition in the construction of Canadian identity and how the figure in the landscape participates in this tradition. Questions arise such as: Who told her that tradition is something you can always count on? Which tradition does this imply? How does she participate in tradition? Can tradition be changed? The viewer must then confront his or her own reading of the identity of this woman who is situated within a geographical context loaded with meaning that is constructed by the traditions of European landscape

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<sup>226</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 60.

<sup>227</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 60.

<sup>228</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

<sup>229</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

painting and the Group of Seven. In doing so, the viewer creates a biographical narrative for the figure in the photographs while simultaneously facing his or her own perceptions of the figure's identity and definition of Canadian identity. This process, therefore, has the potential to act as an autobiographical statement for the viewer. The viewer is confronted by his or her own position in relation to the signifiers of Canadian identity and the viewer's process of identification within those representations. By implicating this kind of autobiographical statement of the viewer projected onto the work, Yoon further complicates the subject of the autobiographical statements in this work. This creates a continual movement and displacement of the subject and object of the image. The viewer is also the object of the work and the work itself is the subject. This complicates the idea of a singular autobiographical narrative or construction of the self.

In her book, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, Françoise Lionnet illuminates the role of autobiography in feminist practices. She writes, "To read a narrative that depicts the journey of a female self striving to become the subject of her own discourse, the narrator of her own story, is to witness the unfolding of an autobiographical project."<sup>230</sup> In *Screens*, Yoon presents elements of an autobiographical project—a compilation of fragmented transmodal narratives told through text and image of her mother's experiences that have become a part of Yoon's family narrative. While her work is representative of the "journey of a female self striving to become the subject of her own discourse," she does not present a unified or chronological narrative. The images and text are not organized according to a linear timeline, nor are the text and image presented together necessarily representative of a single memory capturing one

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<sup>230</sup> Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 91.

moment in time. Again, Yoon presents transmodal feminist perspectives for the autobiographical statement with a disrupted journey and many narratives of her own story.

Yoon has expressed her interest in implicating larger social and cultural structures in which subjectivities are constructed, an approach Lionnet classifies as autoethnography. She defines the term as “one’s subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis … that amounts to a kind of ‘figural anthropology’ of the self.”<sup>231</sup> However, Lionnet acknowledges a “scepticism about the writing of culture” in that it can become an “allegory of an ethnographic project” that moves between the general and the particular implications of an exploration of the self.<sup>232</sup> Reflecting the changing conception of both the self and society, Deborah Reed-Danahay defines autoethnography as a synthesis of “both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question.”<sup>233</sup> This concept of autoethnography highlights and questions the politics of representation where questions of identity, of voice and authenticity, of cultural displacement and exile tend to come to the fore.<sup>234</sup> Though their definitions take on different nuances, both Lionnet and Reed-Danahay characterize autoethnography as an ethnographic exploration of culture that is equally subjective and objective and is situated in autobiographical statements.

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<sup>231</sup> Lionnet, 99.

<sup>232</sup> Lionnet, 99-100.

<sup>233</sup> Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto / ethnography: Writing the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 2.

<sup>234</sup> Reed-Danahay, 3.

In response to these questions of subjectivity within the discourses of autobiography, transnational and post-colonial feminist theorist, Inderpal Grewal, addresses the contested issue of the “subject.” The feminist autobiographical project has been one of situating the female subject within dominant discourses, which was then employed by certain forms of identity politics with the aim of providing a full subject position for those seen as objects or Other.<sup>235</sup> Grewal refers to theorists such as Gayatri Spivak who points out that the concept of the subject as an individual (that is unitary and centred) is rooted in a Western philosophical tradition. She also cites Norma Alarcón who seeks to position the self as “subject(s),” as heterogeneous, political, and inclusive.<sup>236</sup> This can be expressed through a postmodern conception of autobiography. Nancy Hartsock questioned this postmodern approach to autobiography by criticizing it as silencing the possibility of subjectivity, undercutting nationalism and depoliticizing feminist aims.<sup>237</sup> Yet Grewal points out that Hartsock problematically refers to an “us” that universalizes female subjectivity based on a concept of individualism from Western feminism that works towards positioning the Other as Subject, but continues to operate within “Western models of imperial subjectivity.”<sup>238</sup> This implies a singular Self constructed by the Other.<sup>239</sup> Grewal continues to argue that the terms of autobiography established by Western philosophy are not adequate to discuss heterogeneous subjectivities that are multiple and varied with shared overlappings.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Inderpal Grewal, “Autobiographic Subjects and Diasporic Locations: *Meatless Days and Borderlands*” in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, eds. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 231-232.

<sup>236</sup> Grewal, 234.

<sup>237</sup> Grewal, 233.

<sup>238</sup> Grewal, 234.

<sup>239</sup> Grewal, 234.

<sup>240</sup> Grewal, 238, 240.

*Screens* complicates the idea of autoethnography by engaging familial, social and historical structures within the discourse of autobiography. The layering of text, languages and images presents multiple terms, perspective, and subjectivities that overlap to construct an autobiographical statement. This use of multiple media—text in both Korean and English, a photograph, a photo essay, and circulation in a magazine—physically and literally layers the autobiographical terms of the heterogeneous subjectivities of her mother, her family, and Yoon herself. Within the different perspectives presented, subjectivity is multiple and heterogeneous and not limited to a singular or individual self. Here, subjectivity works towards breaking down the binary concept of self and other established by what Grewal calls “Western modes of imperial subjectivity,” expressed through autobiography.

As was previously pointed out, *Souvenirs of the Self* invites the autobiographical statement of the viewer through his or her response to the work. Yoon invites viewers to project their perspective onto the work and situate the subjectivity of the figure in the image to reflect that of the viewer, thereby layering perspectives to construct multiple subjectivities. In a sense, Yoon must always be in the position of object enabling the construction of the viewer as subject of his or her own autobiographical statements to be projected onto the image. It is for this reason that Yoon found it so difficult to see the photographic prints of this work with her own body as the object.<sup>241</sup> Yet, Yoon is still the subject of the work in that she is the author of the work, orchestrating the viewer’s biographical projections onto her body within the context of the landscape. There is a constant movement and continual displacement between Yoon and the viewer as both subject and object. Yoon also implies a third subject as author of the work—Cheryl

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<sup>241</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

Bellows who photographed the work. The authorship of the work is constantly shifting, enunciating transmodal expressions. Yoon conceived of and orchestrated *Souvenirs of the Self*, Bellows collaborated in its production, and the viewer (as outlined above) is also implicated in the authorship of the work. This complex shift between subject positions demonstrates the limitations of a binary concept of subject and object; an opposition that is static and unproblematically oppositional. Thus Yoon reveals the fissures and slippages in a binary construction of self and other.

Kathleen McHugh's essay, "Giving 'Minor' Pasts a Future: Narrating History in Transnational Cinematic Autobiography," on cinematic autobiographical works by contemporary feminist and minority filmmakers discusses issues pertinent to an understanding of the layered narratives and complexities of Yoon's autobiographical statements in *Screens* and *Souvenirs of the Self*. McHugh states that

contemporary transnational minority and feminist filmmakers frequently use autobiography and self-narration to undermine the coherence of their own voice and identity. The autobiographical form foregrounds the speaker's voice and experiences, while the use of self-reflexive formal and narrative strategies allow the filmmaker to concretely yet paradoxically to register "the nonidentity experience by minorities as the oppressive effects of Western philosophies of identity" (JanMohamed and Lloyd 16).<sup>242</sup>

Yoon alludes to the autobiographical intention in *Souvenirs of the Self*, yet does not specify who "the self" or autobiography refers to, whether it is her own or that of the viewer. The caption on the postcard of the figure standing on Banff Avenue reads: "Banff has been charming visitors from around the world for over a hundred years. She has trouble finding that perfect souvenir for herself." (fig. 3.15) This kind of personal reflection on the idea of a typical or general tourist experience along with the use of

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<sup>242</sup> Kathleen McHugh, "Giving 'Minor' Pasts a Future: Narrating History in Transnational Cinematic Autobiography," in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 156.

Yoon's own body in the image certainly suggests an autobiographical statement. Yet, she undermines the coherence of the voice and identity presented by the use of the third person, inviting the viewer to identify a voice for the figure and enabling biographical constructions to be projected onto the figure.

In *Screens*, Yoon's autobiographical statements are revealed in her mother's fragmented memories. Together, these memories present the framework for a narrative that can be constructed and inferred by the reader. Her mother's memories also include other family members that partake in the construction of individual and collective identity. These memories also hold signifiers of the histories and national narratives of Korea and Canada. This kind of writing has been labelled a multicultural statement and has been critiqued (particularly in literature) as being autobiographical and therefore of secondary importance or "stuck in the convention of literary realism."<sup>243</sup> Yet, arguably, these statements constitute an important stage in the development of multicultural writing and pluralism in the arts.<sup>244</sup> In an interview, Yoon stated that she felt that this early work, which dealt directly with constructions of subjectivity, was necessary so that she could continue to address other issues.<sup>245</sup> Her interests in social, cultural, and historical structures that influence personal narratives implicate multiple subjectivities. It is for this reason that Yoon presents a complex layering of autobiographical statements to the viewer and reader.

McHugh explains that perhaps the importance of autobiography in multicultural arts is its potential to "invert the conventional relationship between autobiography and

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<sup>243</sup> Elanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, "Introduction," in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, eds. Elanor Ty and Christl Verduyn (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>244</sup> Ty and Verduyn, 14.

<sup>245</sup> Yoon, interview by author.

history.”<sup>246</sup> Here, autobiography serves as the overarching framework within which history is explicitly narrated, situated, and embodied, overturning history as the overarching and implicit narrative in which autobiography takes place.<sup>247</sup> Deployed as a transmodal feminist practice, Yoon offers multiple locations for autobiographical statements, disrupting the idea of a single voice that narrates history.

In *Screens*, Yoon presents her mother’s memory to articulate the history of the American presence in Korea since the Korean War and employs her mother’s letter to family in Korea to express a history of Canadian immigration. The complexity acquired through an in-depth reading of *Screens* is due to the layering of many narratives. As McHugh explains:

the problem of history is compounded with that of geography, of origin, of home. In transnational cinematic autobiography, the conventional coordinates of narrative and of self-narration—orientation in (national) space and (historical) time—become multiple, fragmented, contradictory...<sup>248</sup>

Yoon employs an investigation of the self to explore and problematize broader structures such as the deployment of notions like origin and citizenship used to naturalize national identities. The tensions in *Souvenirs of the Self* suggest that the markers of the body’s “Korean origin” or “Asian descent” inhibit straightforward and unquestioned access to citizenship despite institutionalized attempts by official multiculturalism to celebrate diversity as an integral part of Canadian identity.<sup>249</sup>

In one postcard, the figure stands beside a plaque with a dirt mound and leafless tree situated directly behind her and mountains towering in the background. The caption

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<sup>246</sup> McHugh, 158.

<sup>247</sup> McHugh, 158.

<sup>248</sup> McHugh, 155-156.

<sup>249</sup> Kang, “Autobiographical Stagings,” 26.

on the back of the postcard reads: “Bankhead (1904-1922) – Explore the riches to rags drama of this historic coal mining town. She discovers that Chinese workers lived on the other side of the slack heaps.” (fig. 3.5) Bankhead was a coal mining town established by the Pacific Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It is now a ghost town near Banff that has become a relatively popular tourist destination and includes government funded educational and historical exhibits about the local geology, historical mining operations and community life.<sup>250</sup>

The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was an integral part of physically constructing a unified Canada. The railroad also played an integral part in establishing the visual imaginary of Canada, as shown by Lynda Jessup and as I addressed in chapter two.<sup>251</sup> The CPR developed tourist destinations in the Rocky Mountains by constructing hotels and resorts to accommodate travelers. It also supported artists from the Group of Seven who produced paintings of the landscapes from along the railroad as advertisements for the company. These were read in metropolitan centres as “evidence of Canada’s colony-to-nation trajectory, whether they were viewed as products of a developing national culture or as pictures of western scenery opened up by rail.”<sup>252</sup> At the foundation of the construction of the railroad was the labour of Chinese workers, a history often avoided and given diminished visibility in tourist locations like Bankhead. The caption on the postcard refers to this history without revealing the labour strikes that eventually shut down the town in 1922 nor the extreme working conditions and high

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<sup>250</sup> Jackie Gold Banff Crag and Canyon Staff, “Coal Brought Bankhead to Life,” *Heritage Tourism Corporation*, [http://www.banffheritagetourism.com/2005/banffs\\_history\\_9.htm](http://www.banffheritagetourism.com/2005/banffs_history_9.htm) (accessed 21 August 2007); “Bankhead,” <http://www.ghosttowns.com/canada/alberta/bankhead.html>, (accessed 21 August 2007).

<sup>251</sup> Lynda Jessup, “The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change...” *Journal of Canadian Studies*. 37.1 (2002).

<sup>252</sup> Jessup, 149, 151.

death rate among the hundreds of Chinese who laboured to build the railroad. Even though she herself is of Korean decent, Yoon states, “I think that I’ve ‘inherited’—by virtue of my body bearing the burden of signification as a ‘Asian’ woman in the Canadian context—a whole history of discrimination and injustices against East Asians, especially the Japanese and the Chinese in Canada.”<sup>253</sup> By virtue of the racial signifiers projected onto her body, the history of all East Asian-Canadian citizens influence her construction of the self, identifying with the history of discrimination established within the national imaginary of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Personal memories presented in *Screens* disrupt and complicate naturalized notions of origin and citizenship associated with ‘birthplace’ and ‘background.’ Yoon reorders the chronology of these memories to problematize the idea that origin, citizenship and belonging are straightforward and uncomplicated concepts associated with time and place. She also presents events and representations of the entangled histories of Canada and Korea, complicating the cultivation of authenticity in national narratives. The first image in *Screens* is of a hand holding a family passport used to immigrate to Canada, denoting the process of migration rather than an affiliation with one fixed national identity. Next, the reader encounters the translated and interweaving languages of a family adjusting to new cultural circumstances. Snapshots from Korea depict children standing with an American sailor and his boat, indicating Korea’s entangled history with the West, colonialism, and a civil war that, technically, has not been resolved. Yoon uses images and words that capture moments from personal narratives that reveal an identity associated with displacement, colonialism, transnational

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<sup>253</sup> Yoon, interview, *between departure and arrival*, 49.

migration, and the search for belonging and citizenship within a nation and familial community.

Yoon presents the many voices and nuances that articulate autobiographical statements used to illustrate the political intersectionality of feminism. As Gagnon aptly states, “the site of representation has always been integral to the cultural politics of difference.”<sup>254</sup> Yoon critically employs the body as the site of representation and explores how autobiographical statements are generated by the deconstructive indicators worn on the racialized, gendered body. She reveals a vocabulary for illustrating transmodal feminist discourse that exposes the fissures in the historical narratives of the nation, the Canadian and Korean nation. Yoon’s work astutely denounces the flattening and dismissive term, identity politics. *Souvenirs of the Self* and *Screens* offer the potential of articulating subjectivity that disengages the power structures which contain and fix identity, opening discourses to new possibilities.

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<sup>254</sup> Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 23.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored possibilities for a new vocabulary that hopes to produce critical discussions about identity. Using art as a generative site for dialogue, I have employed works by Jin-me Yoon to explore visual strategies she proposes that both reference powerful cultural narratives that contain identity, while disrupting the very terms by which they operate. I provide a close analysis of Yoon's work to explore her engagement with the established and sometimes restrictive discourses of Canadian art history that perpetuate structures of inclusion and exclusion. I do so to develop avenues to open up and reroute these discourses. My writing aims to parallel Yoon's artistic practice to offer possibilities for terms that move beyond the flattening discourse of identity politics and the problematic language of official multiculturalism in order to contribute to new critical art historical and national narratives.

In April 2008, Carleton University hosted a conference, *Complicated Entanglements: Rethinking Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which was co-organized by Ming Tiampo, Caroline Vanderloo, and me. This conference brought together cultural producers—artists, curators, scholars, and cultural policy makers—from across Canada and internationally. Participants in the conference engaged in critical dialogue about the state of pluralism in the twenty first century and its implications for Canada in an international context. It became evident from the discussions that transpired, both informally and through panel discussions, that there is a pressing need to carefully and critically generate a new language for thinking about the politics of race, gender, class,

and culture. The artists' panel expressed exciting potentialities for producing sites to open this discourse.

The artists on the panel, *Pluralism in Practice: Artist Perspectives*, included Jinme Yoon, Glen Lowry, Shelly Bahl, Gerard Choy, and Jamelie Hassan. They discussed their practice as sites for creating discursive potentials and possibilities. Two themes arose repeatedly in the panel discussion; the first was a pursuit of new language to articulate historical narratives, the second sought new sites of conceptualizing community and collaboration. Glen Lowry, presenting on his interdisciplinary collaborative research with Henry Tsang, spoke about reimagining transurban relationships to re-evaluate modes of identification that move beyond the nation-state by tracing a history of urbanization. Similarly, Yoon's latest work creates commonalities by depicting the terms and language of power imbedded in the built environment of the city, exploring transnational historical narratives. Conversely, Gerard Choy spoke about the object which houses its own material language to express historical narratives and presents potential sites for community affiliations. Shelly Bahl offered a personal account of her involvement with artist-run organizations and coalition building to locate community narratives that aim to disrupt and circumvent dominant institutional structures. Finally, Jamelie Hassan described her current work depicting the indicators of language that construct identity and the public responses which reveal the general uneasiness and pervasive apprehension towards critical discourses of the politics of culture.

These presentations underline the importance of continuing to investigate new directions for a language that critically expresses and addresses the politics of representation and the politics of knowledge—a language that responds to the ever

changing political and social landscape of our contemporary moment. My writing about Yoon's artistic practice proposes strategies for a critical art history that seeks to function in dialogue with the concerns of cultural producers such as those present at the *Complicated Entanglements* conference. In doing so, I have focused this investigation on opening established narratives of photoconceptualism and the Vancouver School, one of Canada's most prominent contemporary art movements. I have done so to address Yoon's informed aesthetic and formal practice, and I have drawn connections between the Vancouver School and Yoon's work as well as artists working in conceptual landscape practices in Canada. Her work offered an opportunity to uncover the politics of representation shaped by Canadian institutional and national ideologies and present strategies that both represent and disrupt these ideologies. Finally, I proposed the term "transmodal feminism" to suggest active feminist interventions located in the subtleties of personal experience and situated contexts.

This research posits Yoon's work within a conceptual and critical framework and proposes a potential foundation for future discussions of her work. In conversation about her most recent works, *Unbidden* and *The Dreaming Collective Knows No History (U.S. Embassy to Japanese Embassy, Seoul)*, Yoon stated, "I can only do this now because I already laid the foundation before. ... Ethically, I felt like I needed to start there before tackling more generalized notions of the human condition like sorrow, grief, death."<sup>255</sup> These works explore commonalities present in the human condition such as sorrow, grief, and death, while still employing previous strategies of revealing and contesting established cultural narratives to present promising avenues for future research. Yoon's theoretical framework of transnationalism and collective memory is also linked to works

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<sup>255</sup> Jin-me Yoon, interview by author, digital recording, Vancouver, B.C., 20 June 2007.

by other contemporary Canadian cultural producers, especially Henry Tsang and Glen Lowry, Roy Miki, Melinda Molineaux, Jamelie Hassan, and Lucie Chan, to name but a few.

The research for this thesis has unveiled many promising avenues for further theoretical and art historical investigation. Yoon's multifarious artistic practice presents several sites to explore the politics of representation, a discussion that would benefit from including other artists with similar objectives. Given the scope of this thesis, I focused my analysis on Yoon's work because it provided a rich opportunity to explore a number of conceptual frameworks. However, throughout the time I spent on this project, I also began pursuing future writing and curatorial projects that expand my research, including an upcoming exhibition entitled *ImagiNation: New Cultural Topographies* at the Carleton University Art Gallery, as well as a published interview with Jin-me Yoon and Glen Lowry for West Coast Line.

At present we find ourselves at a critical juncture where rethinking discourses of the past and reimagining new languages for the future is essential. With art punctuating the experiences of everyday life using poignant and poetic interventions, artists like Jin-me Yoon remind us of important and exciting discussions about the politics of culture and representation that shape *all* identities. Yoon affirms this when speaking about our contemporary moment:

I intensely feel this urgency of thinking about 'being-together' given the horrors of our world. While this statement may sound histrionic, and certainly the dark-humour and the awareness of history in my work undercuts any heroic impulse towards a universal *bright* horizon, the overwhelming cultural cynicism and reactive violence will not do.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Jin-me Yoon, email correspondence with Susan Edelstein, *Unbidden: Jin-me Yoon*, exhibition catalogue (Kamloops: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2004), 20.

Figure 1.1 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991

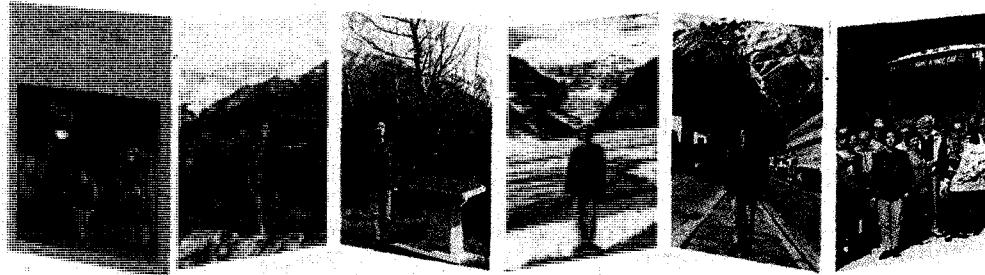


Figure 1.2 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Installation view)

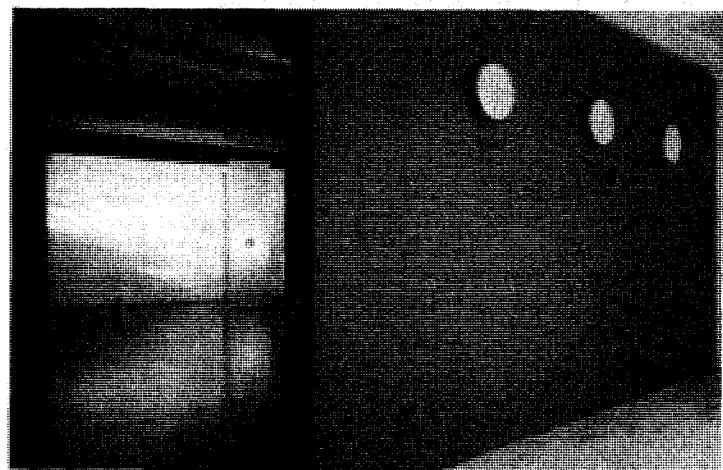


Figure 1.3 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)



Figure 1.4 Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979

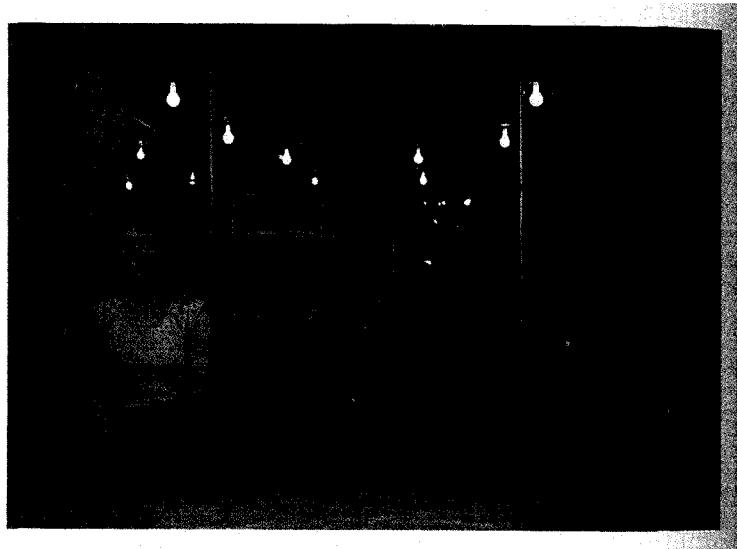


Figure 1.5 Jeff Wall *Steves Farm, Stevenston*, 1980



Figure 1.6 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Installation view)



Figure 1.7 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1990 (Installation view)

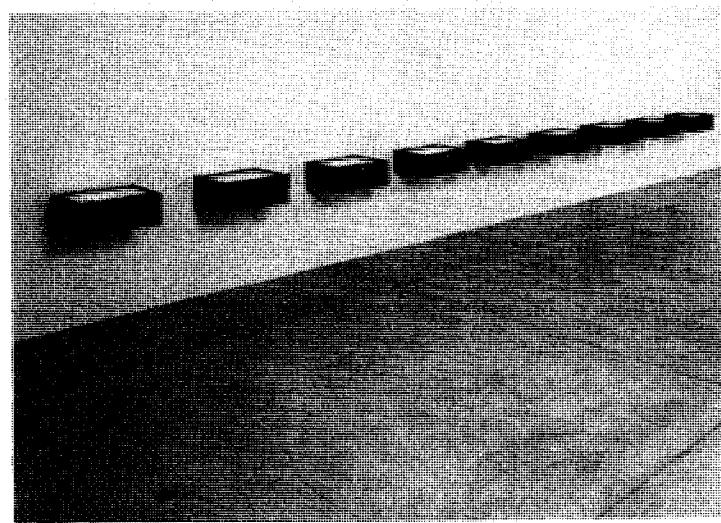


Figure 1.8 Dan Graham *Homes for America*, 1966-67 (Detail)

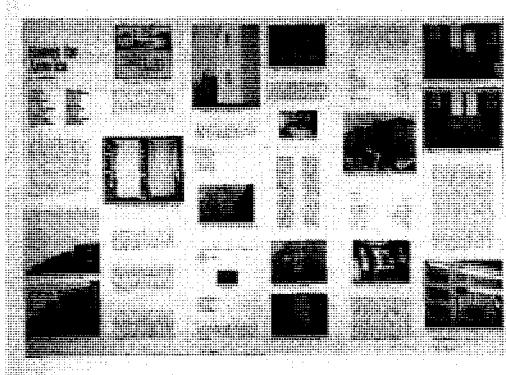


Figure 1.9 Robert Smithson *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, 1967 (Detail)

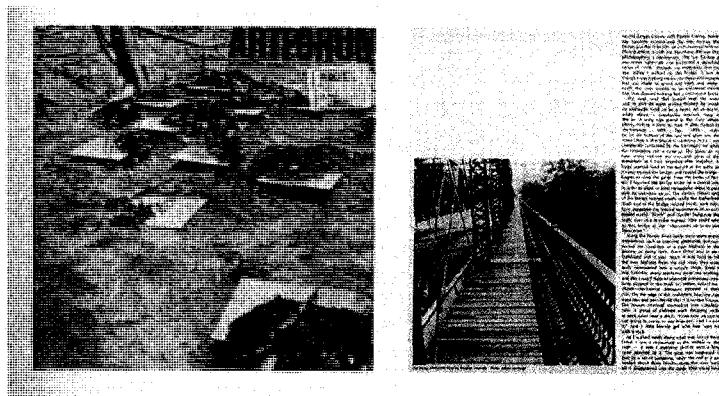


Figure 1.10 Jeff Wall *Landscape Manual*, 1969 (Detail)

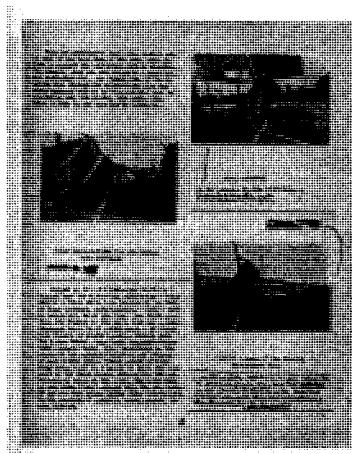
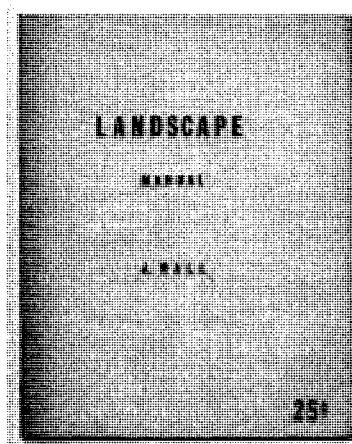


Figure 1.11 Christos Dikeakos *Instant Photo Information*, 1970 (Detail)

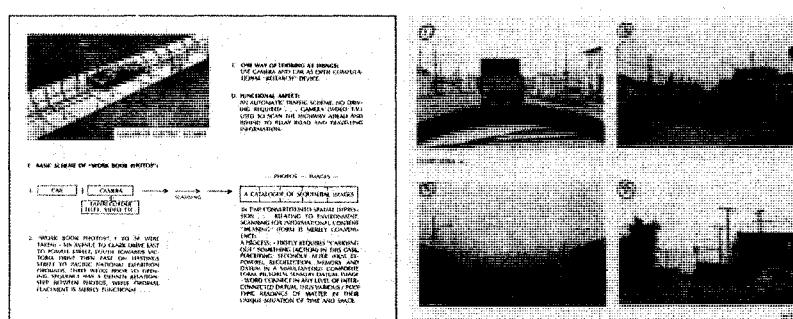


Figure 1.12 Ian Wallace *La Melancholie de la Rue*, 1973

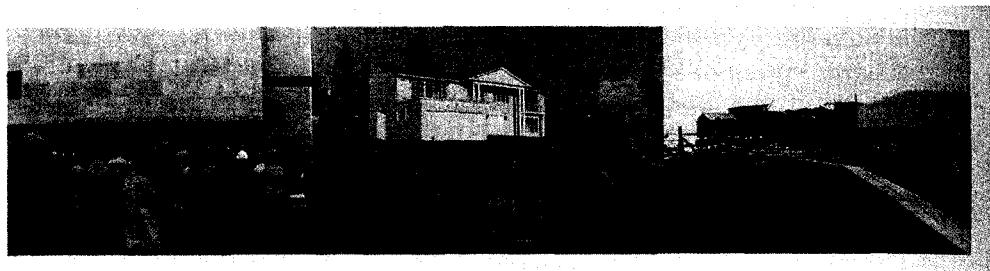


Figure 1.13 Roy Arden *Construction Site and Suntower, Vancouver, B.C.*, 1992.



Figure 1.14 Jeff Wall *The Pine on the Corner*, 1990



Figure 1.15 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Detail, video still of Thomas Edison's *Train Ride Through Kicking Horse Pass*, 1898)



Figure 1.16 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Detail, video stills)

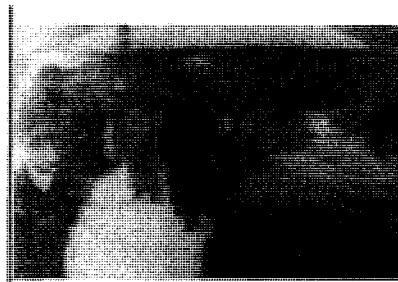


Figure 1.17 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)

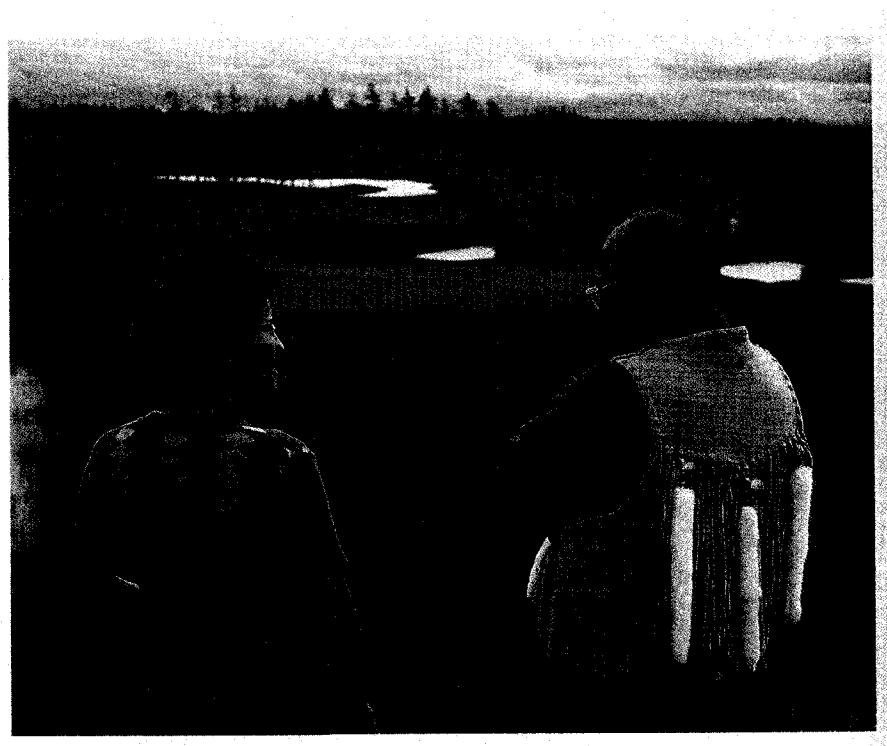


Figure 1.18 Jin-me Yoon *Touring Home From Away*, 1998 (Detail)



Figure 2.1 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996

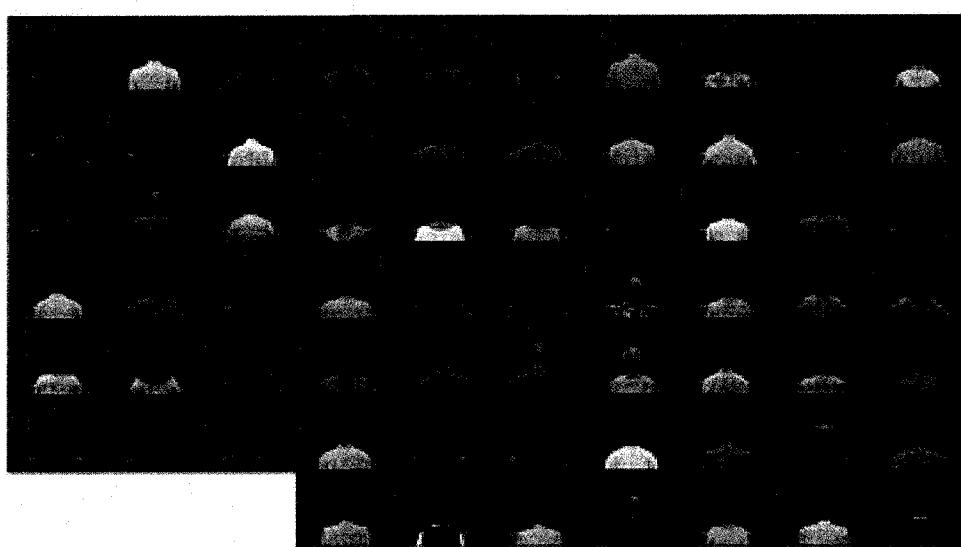


Figure 2.2 Lawren Harris *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park*, 1924

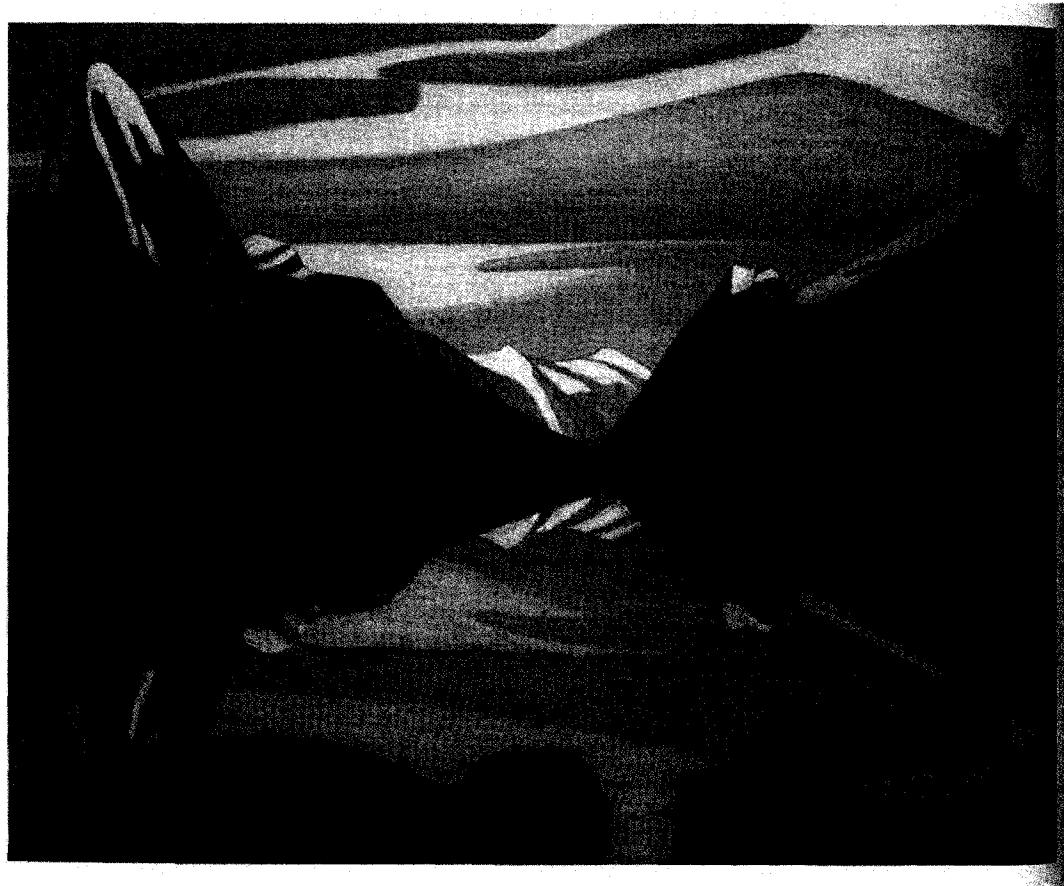


Figure 2.3 Emily Carr *Old Time Coastal Village*, 1929-1930

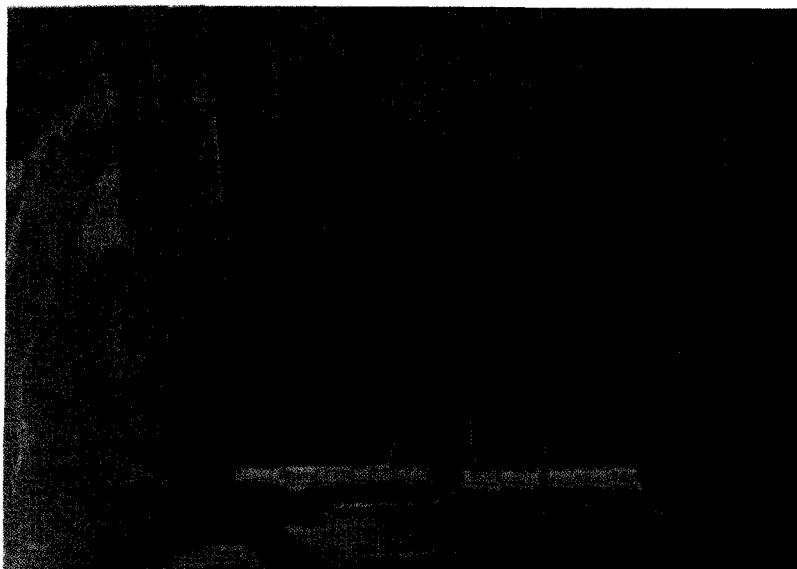


Figure 2.4 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Installation view)

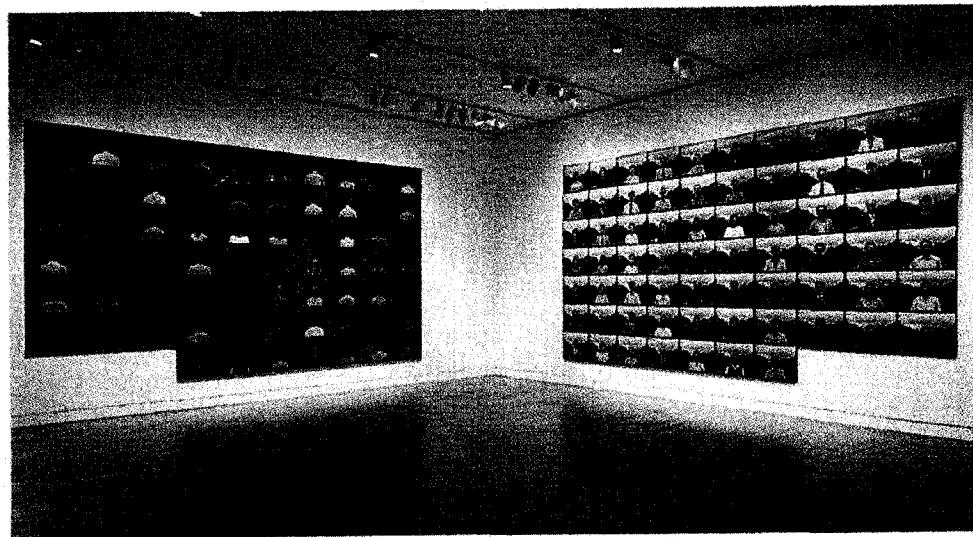


Figure 2.5 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Detail)

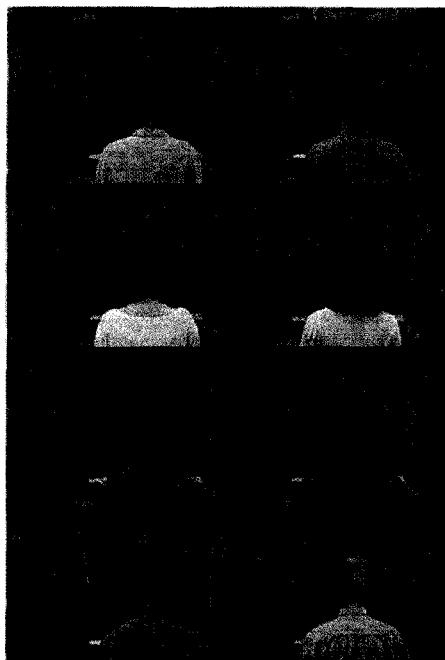


Figure 2.6 Jin-me Yoon *A Group of Sixty Seven*, 1996 (Detail)



Figure 2.7 Jin-me Yoon *between departure and arrival*, 1997 (Installation view)

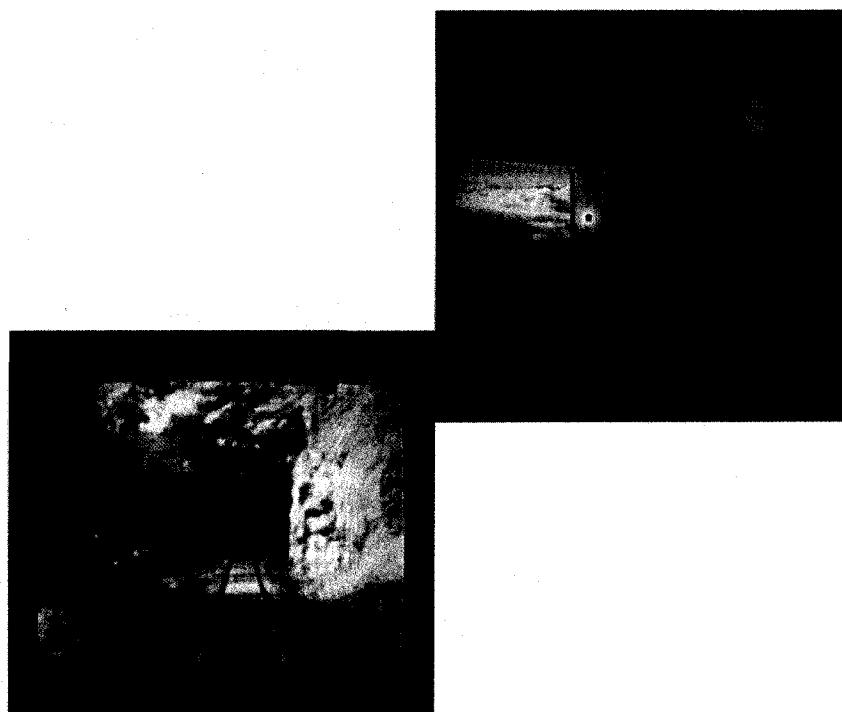


Figure 2.8 Joyce Wieland *109 Views*, 1970-1971

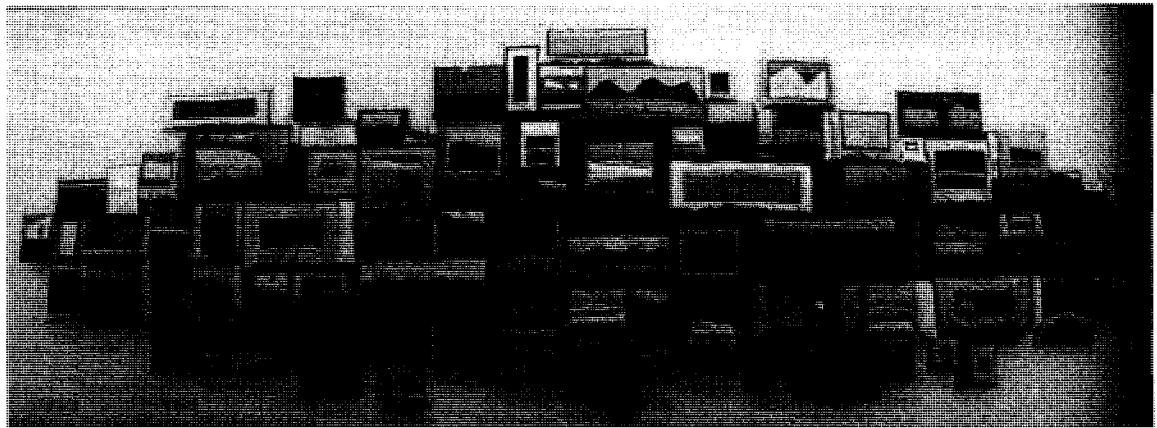


Figure 2.9 Michael Snow *Plus Tard*, 1977

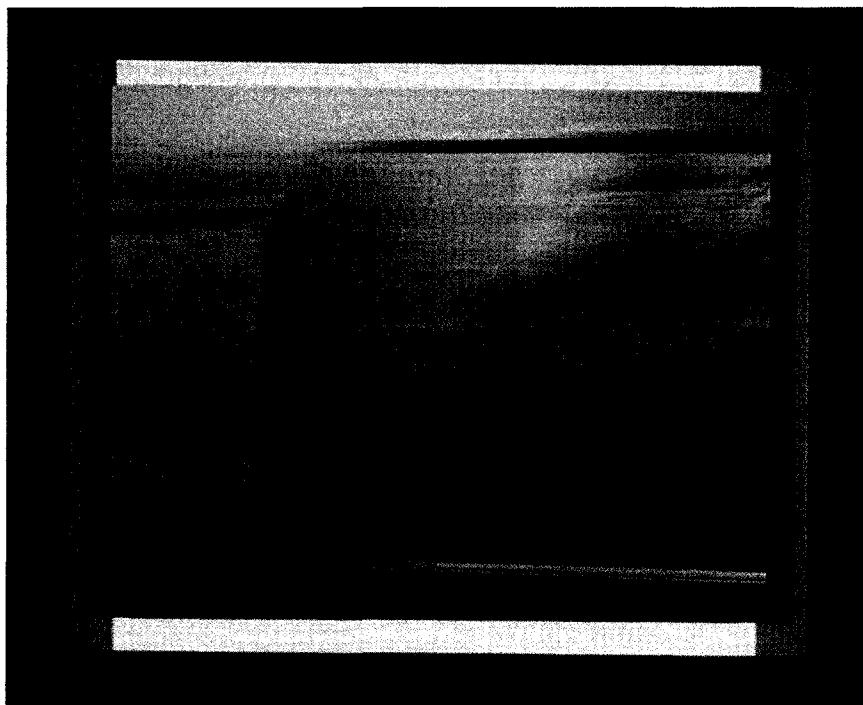


Figure 2.10 Greg Curnoe *Map of North America*, 1972

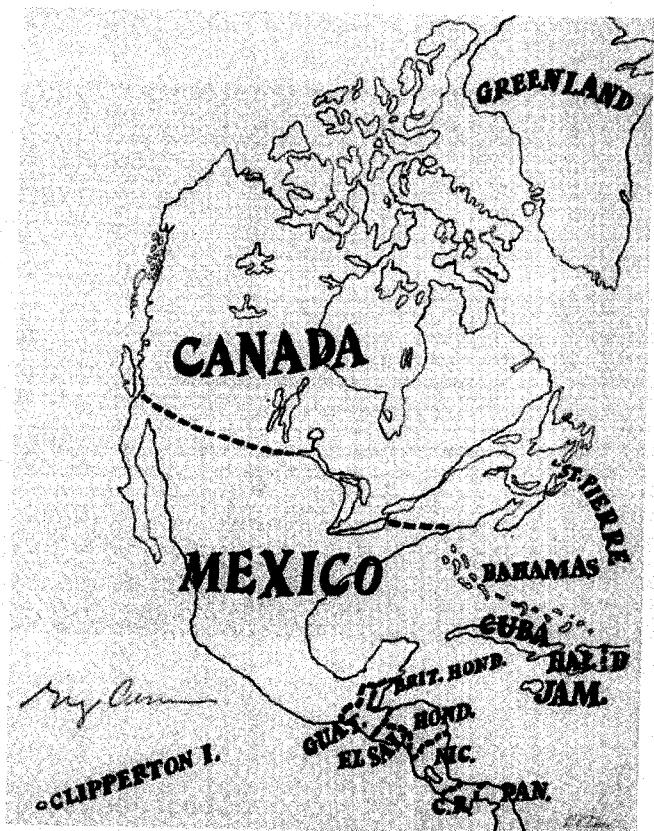


Figure 2.11 Christos Dikeakos *Ch'e Chée Lmun*, 1992

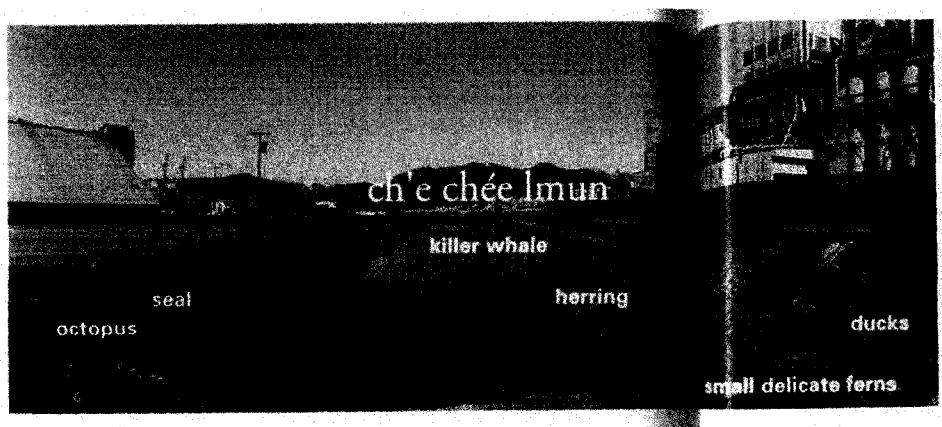


Figure 2.12 Stan Douglas *Nu·tka·*, 1996 (Detail, video stills)

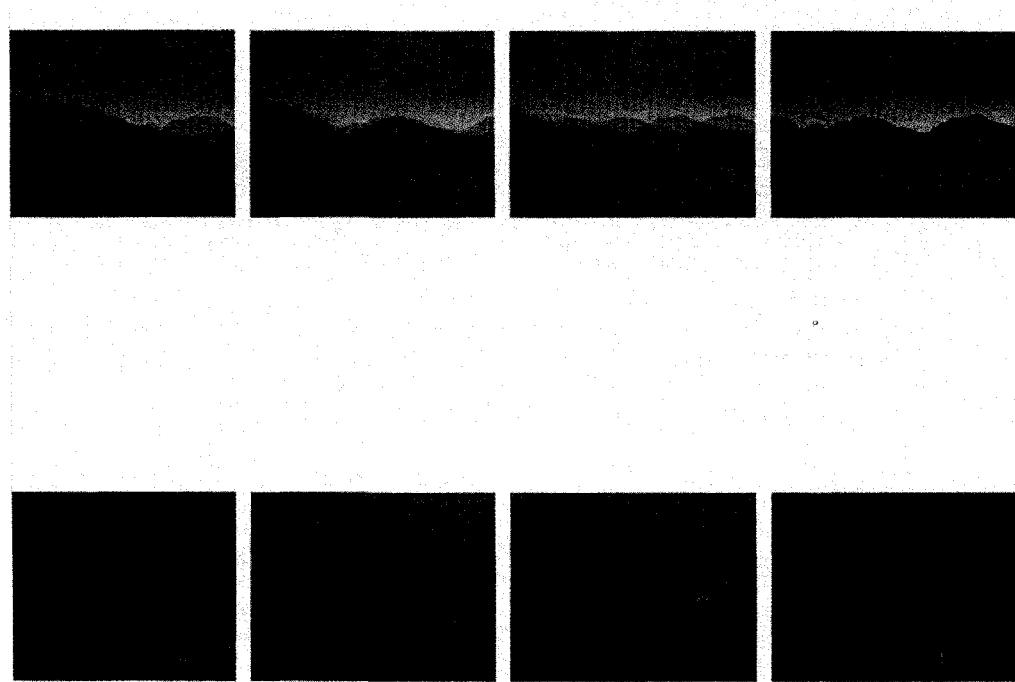


Figure 2.13 Rodney Graham *Linden, Ronse (Flanders Trees)*, 1989



Figure 3.1 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)

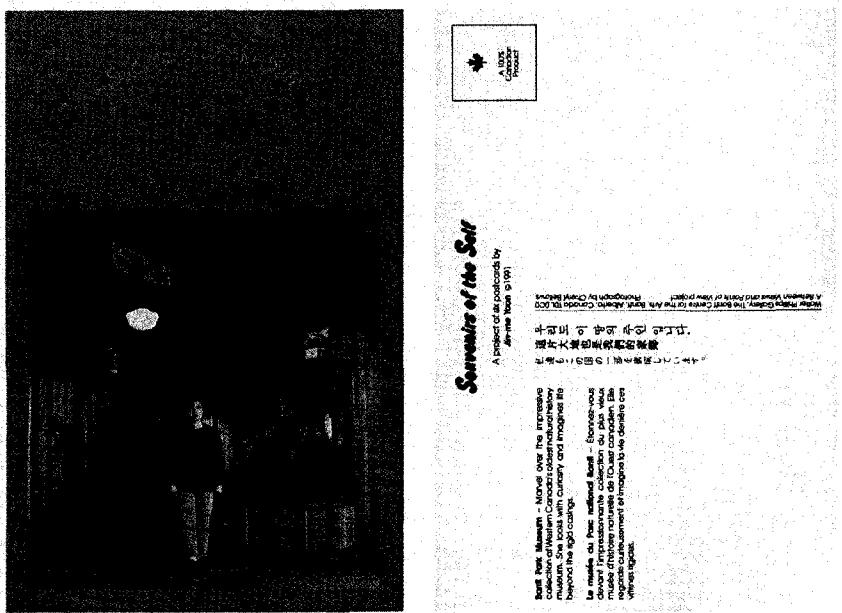


Figure 3.2 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993

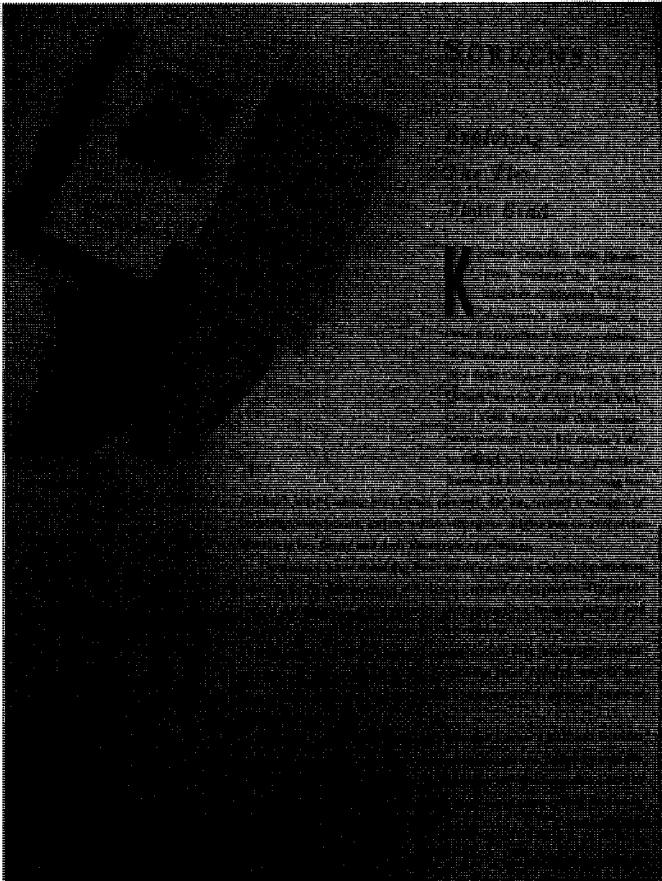


Figure 3.3 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)

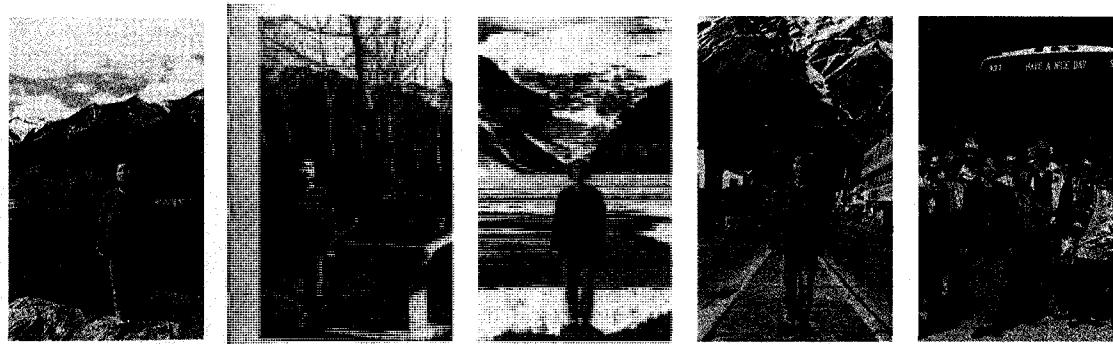


Figure 3.4 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)



Figure 3.5 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)



Figure 3.6 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)

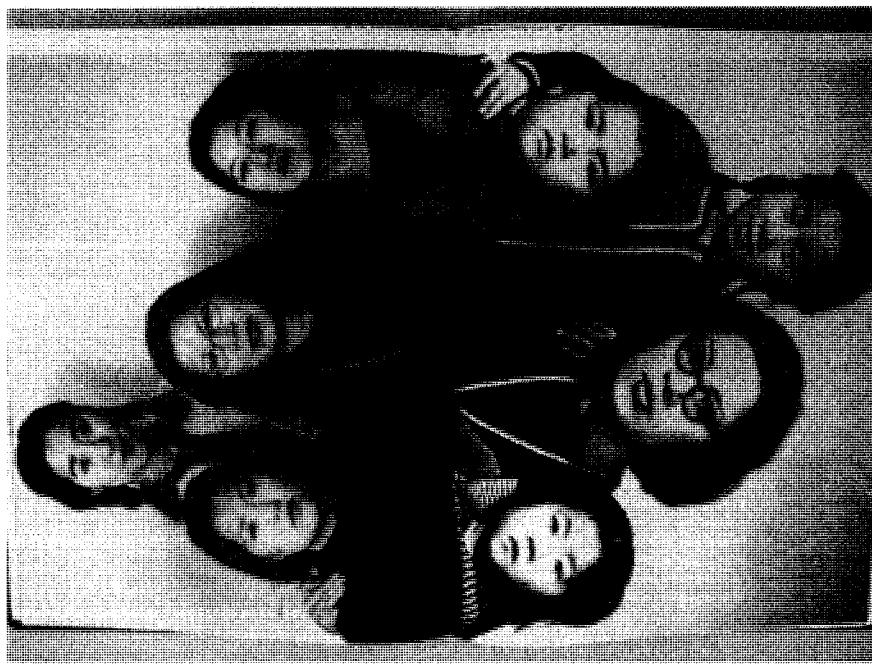


Figure 3.7 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)

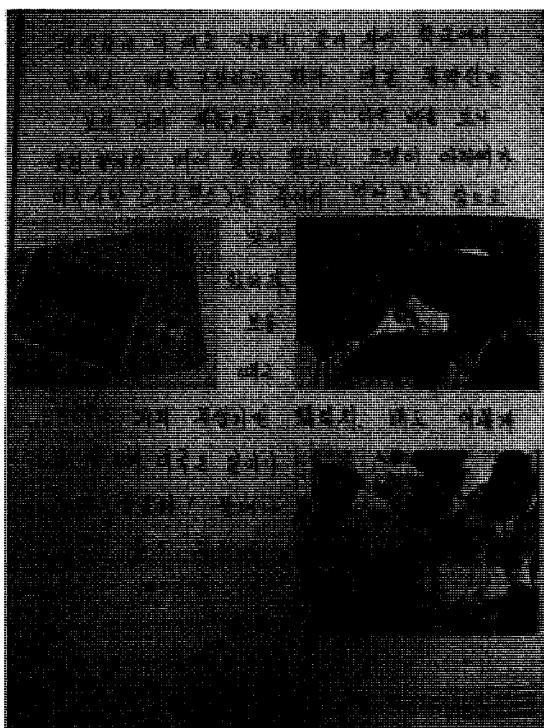


Figure 3.8 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)

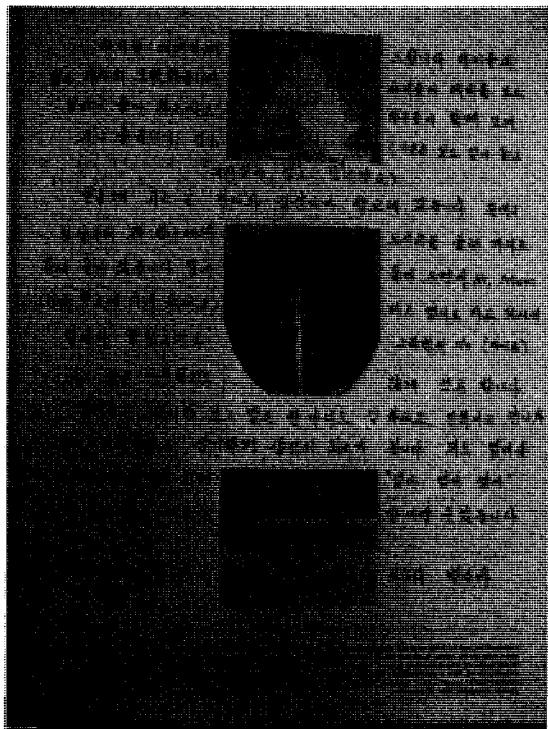


Figure 3.9 Jin-me Yoon *Screens*, 1993 (Detail)

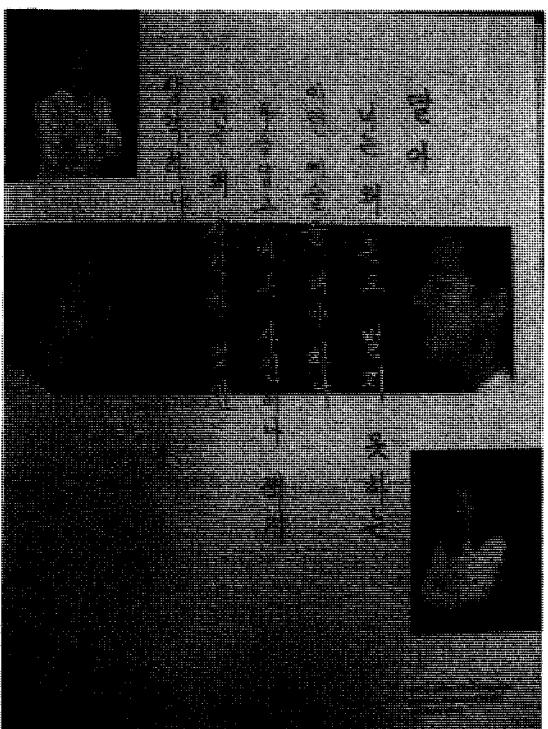


Figure 3.10 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)

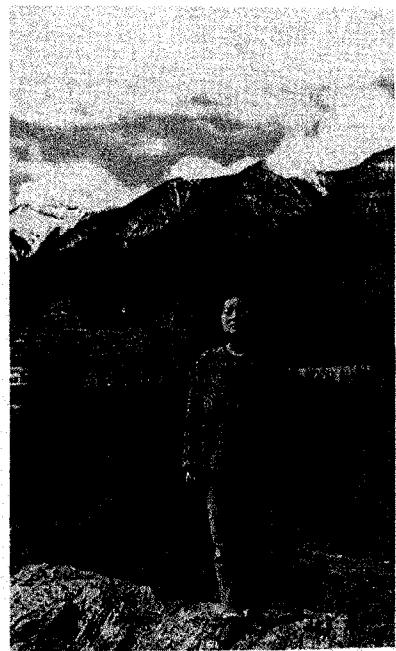


Figure 3.11 Jin-me Yoon *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991 (Detail)



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