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Engendering a Counter-Tradition: Jeff Wall, Photo-conceptualism, and the Sexual Politics of the Defeatured Landscape

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Leah Modigliani

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation analyses the work of photographer Jeff Wall between the years of 1970 and 1979 in order to argue that the counter tradition he helped develop with other photo-conceptual artists in the Canadian city of Vancouver has included a gendered bifurcation of space since its earliest incarnation in 1970 as the "defeatured landscape." By analyzing the existence of eroticized images of women within the defeatured landscapes of Wall and his peers, the Vancouver counter-tradition of large-scale photography is shown to depend in part on the old modern trope of woman-as-nature. Rather than simply considering space as a particular place, space is considered here an active field that includes the control of art-historical discourse, and the conscious opposition towards the historical position once held in the Vancouver art community by an older generation of landscape artists, most notably Emily Carr. Furthermore, I show that during this time frame (1970-1979) the control of art-historical discourse involved

adapting to and negotiating new constraints placed on figurative art by a burgeoning feminist consciousness. This study shows that the negotiation of gender relations appears as an important, but hitherto unexamined factor to be considered in the photo-conceptual artists successful bid for the vanguard in Vancouver during the decade of the 1970s.

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Introduction

   This dissertation analyses the work of photographer Jeff Wall between the years

of 1970 and 1979 in order to argue that the counter-tradition he helped develop with other

photo-conceptual artists in the Canadian City of Vancouver has included a gendered

bifurcation of space since its earliest incarnation in 1970 as the "defeatured landscape."

By analyzing the existence of eroticized images of women within the defeatured

landscapes of Wall and his peers, the Vancouver counter-tradition of large-scale

photography is shown to depend in part on the old modern trope of woman-as-nature.

Rather than simply considering space as a particular place, space is considered here an

active field that includes the control of art-historical discourse, and the conscious

opposition towards the historical position once held in the Vancouver art community by

an older generation of landscape artists, most notably Emily Carr. Furthermore, I show

that during this time frame (1970-1979) the control of art-historical discourse involved

adapting to and negotiating new constraints placed on figurative art by a burgeoning

feminist consciousness.

   The City of Vancouver and the coastal region of British Columbia occupy a

central position in my argument. Its landscapes, urban and wild, are the preferred subjects

of the twentieth century's most revered British Columbian artists, from Emily Carr to Jeff

Wall. The differences in style, subject and discursive positioning of these two artists are however vast. When analyzed, they reveal the ways that specific individual's interests and actions lead to the general political and cultural negotiations required to develop any avant-garde movement. In Vancouver between 1970 and 1979, I find that the negotiation of gender relations appears as an important, but hitherto unexamined factor to be considered in the photo-conceptual artists successful bid for the vanguard. Now that Jeff Wall and a number of his male peers enjoy international recognition as the "Vancouver School," it is important to identify reasons why women are not included in this group, despite its otherwise amorphous constitution of styles and subject matter. Rather than being simply accidental or coincidental, I argue that a discourse was created early on that supported certain kinds of artists and artworks implicitly by example and excluded others. This situation is a matter of historical circumstance, and not a question of the degree (or relevance) by which particular artists are invested in the creation of a diverse art community. To suggest that Jeff Wall or his peers should have any responsibility towards a feminist point of view in their work would be to mandate some moral code of behavior, which is not my intention. However, it is my intention to point to occlusions in the historical record of why and how this work came to prominence, the social context that led to its creation, and the social context that its creation helped constitute. I give more attention to the writing and photography of Jeff Wall than to other artists because he has emerged as the most successful of the group internationally, and therefore commands a level of authority and influence not accorded to many other artists.

My analysis is based on close readings of Wall's own art-historical writings, previously published interviews, and my observation of specific works of art he has made

since 1970. The transition of his work over a decade shows his canny adaptation to changes in discourse brought about by the woman's movement, in particular the challenges to figural representation initiated around 1975 by British film theorist Laura Mulvey and artists such as Mary Kelly. In order to show this effectively, the dissertation also analyses artists either closely associated with Wall and his work, such as his friend and peer Ian Wallace, as well as those influential to his early artistic development, such as the collaborative group N.E. Thing Co. It also considers antagonistic responses to his and his peers work as late as 1991 to see how the discourse they initiated became somewhat hegemonic itself in the region by that time. I argue that feminists' political negotiations of discursive space – "a room of their own" so to speak – are internalized, negotiated, and reconstituted in Wall's artworks that then appear to support feminist critiques, while still maintaining control of the discourse.

Despite the volume of research already done on Jeff Wall's production over nearly the last forty years, the relationship of his early work to the feminist influence of the time has largely gone unremarked upon. This is no doubt partially the result of Wall's articulate ability to represent himself art-historically and participate in the terms of the debate surrounding his work by even the most erudite commentators, those of whom have been numerous.[1] Through books, essays, lectures and interviews, these terms of debate inevitably concentrate on the relationship of Wall's photography to the contemporary

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[1] Many well known art historians and critics of the last several decades have participated in these discussions: Michael Fried, Benjamin Buchloh, T. J. Clark, Thomas Crow, Thierry de Duve, Donald Kuspit, and Kaja Silverman amongst others. Their arguments are addressed in subsequent chapters here.

relevance and efficacy of the avant-garde project of social critique within capitalism, and its relationship to specific art-historical sources and references (such as the now almost cliché reference of his practice as a renewed "painting of modern life").

Most recently Michael Fried has emerged as a particularly vocal champion of Wall's work, which he highlights in his 2008 book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.[2] Fried continues to follow through with the theatricality vs. anti-theatricality (or absorption) argument that he initiated in his 1967 *Artforum* essay "Art and Objecthood," and which he has developed in subsequent texts such as *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). In general, this argument describes two modes of spectatorial engagement with pictorial scenes; one in which the audience is made aware of the figures performing for it in some way, and one in which the figures in the artwork are so absorbed in their own activity that seem to ignore the audience, or render the audience irrelevant.[3] He applies this argument to large-scale contemporary photography, which he suggests is uniquely positioned to incorporate both modes of engagement (theatrical and anti-theatrical) simultaneously. Nonetheless, like other historians writing about Wall, this argument is largely founded on an examination of modern painting and Wall's photography's relationship to it. Thomas Crow, Kaja Silverman, and Thierry de Duve also have strong arguments for ways to

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[2] See Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2008); *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[3] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer, 1967). Reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 835-846; and *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

consider Wall's photography in relationship to the history of modern European painting; arguments that I respond to in chapter three.

Clearly, it is with some trepidation that I offer my own analysis to the body of critical work that already exists on Jeff Wall. I do so because I believe that it is politically important to continue to analyze the particular ways that visual art is framed theoretically and art-historically. Such framings operate to control social and political space in art communities or amongst constituents with competing agendas and motivations. The resulting operation(s) of social power require ongoing interrogation and transparency. I have found Jeff Wall's art and writing to be a particularly rich case study in this regard because his educational background as an art historian has enabled him to be the leading advocate of the ways his art should be incorporated into the art-historical canon in tandem with his creation of visual art.

My methodological approach has been inspired by social approaches to art history that since the 1960s have incorporated Marxist, feminist and semiotic critiques into the formal analyses of art to reveal the ways that art objects are implicated in particular economies, geographies, and discourses at particular moments of time. Having said this, I have drawn from the examples and challenges raised by a broad group of scholars, some of which have included art historians, and some of whom are working in disciplines outside of art history, such as political science, geography, and film theory. Some of the more influential scholars on my thinking have included Henri Lefevbre and his classic text *The Production of Space*; David Harvey's work on the relationships between space, capital and neoliberal economics (also influenced by Lefevbre); John Barrell's influential study on the class dynamics embedded in eighteenth and nineteenth century English

landscape painting; Laura Mulvey's deconstruction of woman as fetish in Hollywood

cinema; and Michel Foucault's writing on authorship, discourse and power.[4] At the heart

of much of these works is the enduring influence of Marxist philosophy, to which I am

also not immune. I came to an interest in Marxism through reading works by members of

the Frankfurt School, in particular texts by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and

Walter Benjamin that applied Marx's dialectical method to art, media, and technology as

experienced in an increasingly industrialized modern society after World War II.[5]

Collectively these inspired me to look for, recognize and articulate the contingencies of

artistic production and viewership in specific case studies; contingencies that, when

exposed, might serve a critical social role in making operations of power transparent at

the level of visual representation and language.

I am also drawing from one specific discourse within the discipline of art history.

This is the growing body of research on what constitutes an avant-garde movement, and

its relationship to the capitalist political economy as a critique. The emergence, existence,

and conceptual understanding of the avant-garde artist has evolved in tandem with the

development of capitalism (and the philosophical critiques mounted against it) from the

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[4] See: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), and
Spaces of Capital: Towards A Critical Geography (New York: Routledge, 2001); Henri Lefebvre, *The
Social Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1991); John Barrell, *The Dark Side of
The Landscape, the Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1980); Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University
Press, 1989); Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New
York: Vintage Books, 1995), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).
[5] Of the many articles and books produced by the scholars associated with the Frankfurt School, I have
found the following the most helpful in my own understanding of the ways culture is embedded in socio-
political systems, and the ways cultural forms can influence human subjectivity within these greater
structures: Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann ed., *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkeheimer, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr
ed., Edmund Jephcott trans., *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002);
Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Henri Lonitz ed., Nicholas Walker trans., *The Complete
Correspondence 1928-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

mid eighteenth century until today. This is a result of society's growing belief that artists have some sort of special social status as a "free" individuals, when measured against Marx's classic concept of alienated labor. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx asserted that man becomes estranged from himself and his community (i.e. alienated) when his labor is commodified as surplus value by his employer.[6] Unlike animals, as a "species being" man is cognizant of his own agency in the production of the objective world. Consequently, when his labor is not his own ("working for the man") he becomes simultaneously estranged from himself, others, and the world. In this theory, the value of all human life, once recognized in productive and self-initiated labor that helps to create the world, is now only comprehended externally through the products of one's work for others. Marx's critique claims that capitalism blocks individuals' potential for productive work through the naturalization of capitalist labor relations. The idea of the avant-garde artist has always contrasted the notion of one's labor being alienated from one's sense of self-identity or life-purpose. The popular imagination sees the avant-garde artist as an eccentric dandy (e.g. Charles Baudelaire or Andy Warhol) or provocateur (e.g. Pablo Picasso or Marcel Duchamp) that lives by his/her own rules, and even if poor, is free.[7] The key idea here is that *the avant-garde artist is perceived as being engaged in unalienated labor*.[8] It is for this reason that the creation of art has occupied a central role

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[6] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., Robert C. Tucker ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 70-81.

[7] In fact, it is important to note that from the beginning the ways these artists were able to work has also undergone a process of historical mystification. Many of the most famous avant-garde artists of western history were independently wealthy or had livelihoods unrelated to their artistic production. Baudelaire originally lived off of a family inheritance until he was cut off and forced to write art criticism in order to pay the bills, Matisse did not have to work for a living, and Duchamp depended on friends and girlfriends financial support. This is too long a tangent to go into here, but it seems that the idea of the avant-garde artist as "free" was economically conditional from the earliest stages.

[8] The dialectic between alienated and unalienated labor in capitalism as it applies to artistic production has had an enduring presence in art criticism, much of which I address later in this chapter in terms of theories

in critiques of capitalism because its existence and reception have served as gauges for assessing the quality of social life, and the balance between the social, economic and political spheres that exist in particular societies at specific historical junctures.

In the context of this study, these references to Marx, alienation and the avant-garde are important because so much of Jeff Wall and his peers' theory about art derives from these sources.[9] In 1968, the same general time frame that Wall and his peers were starting to exhibit their early works publicly, the first book-length work analyzing the literary and artistic avant-garde as a socio-political reaction to society was published in English—Renato Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*.[10] Poggioli wanted to study avant-garde art as a historical concept; "not so much an aesthetic fact as a sociological one."[11] In order to do this, he established a series of theoretical relations which he applied to various historical avant-garde movements (Futurism, Dada, German Expressionism, etc): activism (the spirit of adventure), agonism (the spirit of sacrifice), futurism (the

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of the avant-garde. However, in recent decades this dialectic has come under some criticism, with scholars arguing that artists are in fact aware of their participation in consumer society, and often embrace it. Consider Johanna Drucker's *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On pages 49-50 Drucker writes:

> The belief that difficult works of art make gestures of political resistance through their unconsumability is a legacy of the avant-garde. The idea that aesthetic expressions should be marked by a conspicuous difference from the forms created by the culture industry is the critical lynchpin of this belief system. . . . That stubbornly persistent belief in radical aesthetics is the baby to be thrown out here. The tenacious core of outmoded discourse is that art exists to serve some utopian agenda of social transformation through intervention in the symbolic orders of cultural life. Its dreadful, reified rhetoric of elitist posturing . . . has become the managed, bureaucratic discourse of new academicism, as repressively formulaic as any of the nineteenth century salon and atelier styles it disdains.

Other scholars have argued against the modern art object itself, suggesting that artists work within society, not against it, to affect positive social change through participatory models of social engagement. See Suzy Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1991); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

[9] For more on Jeff Wall's identification with Marxist philosophy go to "Jeff Wall's Origins and "Notion of Context," here in Chapter 1, page 62-71.

[10] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1968). This book was first published in Italian in 1962.

[11] Ibid., 3.

present subordinated to the future), and unpopularity and fashion (oscillation between old and new). He stressed the point that ideology is a social phenomenon revealing common psychological conditions that manifest as "formulas of logic:" "in the case of the avant-garde, it is an argument of self assertion or self-defense used by society in the strict sense against society in the larger sense."[12] Thus the artist's alienation from society causes an antagonistic response (a self-defense mechanism) towards that same society that is founded in the belief that a better, more progressive future exists for all. For Poggioli the avant-garde artist must therefore exist in a temporal limbo, because each age attains fullness only in a state of becoming something better, not in the terms of its present-day self. The present can only be validated in relation to the future, a situation he calls the Dialectic of the Zeitgeist.[13]

Poggioli's theories were criticized most effectively by Peter Bürger in his later book of nearly the same title (*Theory of the Avant-Garde)*. Bürger suggested that Poggioli's work was not a theory of the avant-garde but a history of it, and that it was a history located in a stylistic analysis that assumed the ahistoricity of the concept of the autonomous art object. In contrast, Bürger develops his own theory from the point of view of ideology critique, a dialectical framework that he credits to Adorno and Lukács (with some reservations).[14] Through this dialectical method, he theorized that the development of an avant-garde is tied to art's own critical awareness of itself as an

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[12] Ibid., 4.

[13] Ibid., 73-76.

[14] He criticizes their dialectical method as being compromised by their focus on the idea of autonomous art. He states, "Lukács and Adorno argue within the institution that is art, and are unable to criticize it as an institution for that very reason. For them, the autonomy doctrine is the horizon within which they think. In the approach I propose, by contrast, that doctrine as the normative instrumentality of an institution in bourgeois society becomes the object of the investigation." See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), lii. The book was first published in German in 1974.

institution within bourgeois culture. Analyzing the function of art as an ideological tool should therefore be separated theoretically from any analyses of the form an artwork takes as an "autonomous" object. For Bürger, Poggioli failed to acknowledge the historicity of avant-garde art movements' own position in regards to the dominant ideology of the time. As I discuss later in chapter one, Jeff Wall's master's thesis in art history reflects this same approach towards the use of dialectical method in his analyses of the Berlin Dada group. As I will show, it is clear that Wall's thesis work and understanding of the processes and development of art history served as a methodological model for the production of his later art and writing.[15]

Theories of the avant-garde have expanded in subsequent decades in an attempt to reconcile the political efficacy of the avant-garde project in the context of what Adorno and Horkheimer famously called "the culture industry," that is the subsuming of all cultural expressions into the reified capitalist economy of supply and demand.[16] High and low art are both given equal aesthetic consideration within high capitalism, and the aesthetic value that was the bedrock of modernist art appears to be decided through market success or institutional context, rather than through the artworks' formal attributes. At the heart of this problematic is the question of whether or not repetitions of modernist avant-garde gestures can be politically effective as critique the second time around. According to Bürger, they cannot, as such repetitions simply consolidate the

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[15] Wall's thesis however, was approved three years before the first German printing of Bürger's book, so Wall evidently came to similar conclusions through his own research.

[16] "The Culture Industry" is the name Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer gave to an integrated system of cultural activities, artworks and phenomenon that they claimed has been subsumed as general culture under the greater capitalist economy. This process is so complete that culture can no longer offer social critique but instead sells passive new art experiences to consumers that help indoctrinate them further into the established economy. See: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136. Also: Theodor W. Adorno, J.M Bernstein ed., *The Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001).

avant-garde as a historical tradition, and therefore can no longer also be oppositional, or socially antagonistic, because they have devolved into acceptable, and expected genres.

The critic Benjamin Buchloh has been one of the most prolific writers on the subject to argue against this position. For him, repetitions of avant-garde gestures must be considered from the viewpoint that the historical avant-garde created a discursive position that changed the way art was viewed moving forward, and neo-avant-gardes must therefore be considered in the context of this complex historical relationship of cause and effect.[17] He suggests that Bürger, despite his advanced thinking on the ability of the avant-garde to understand self-reflexively its own institutional position within society, fails to consider how avant-garde gestures' social meaning changes in different (later) historical contexts. By the late 1950s, avant-garde artworks' meaning is no longer created through an individual's contemplation of discrete objects, but instead is created from the outside,

> [that is] the process of their reception – the audience's disposition and
> demands, the cultural legitimation the works are asked to perform, the
> institutional mediation between demand and legitimation. For the work of
> the neo-avant-garde, then, meaning becomes visibly a matter of projection,
> of aesthetic and ideological investment, shared by a particular community
> for a particular moment in time.[18]

This issue of the potential for a returning avant-garde is central to much of Jeff Wall's work and writing, and much that has been written about his work by others.[19] For

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[17] For example, Buchloh analyzes the differences between two historical manifestations of the use of the monochrome in avant-garde art: Rodchenko's triptych *Pure Colors: Red, Yellow, Blue* of 1921, and the 1957 series of identical Yves Klein's blue monochrome paintings. See: Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer, 1986): 41-52.

[18] Ibid., 48.

[19] In regards to the avant-garde, Jeff Wall has been quoted as saying to the art historian Serge Guilbaut:

example, Wall has consistently used the term "counter-tradition" to indicate new regional or international artistic movements that have displaced older, now ineffective, artistic movements. Such affirmations of the relative value of one tradition over another imply a particular critical challenge within the discourse of the avant-garde. If the legitimization of such works comes from the outside, as Buchloh suggests, who will analyze who constitutes that outside, and what the underlying motivation is for their legitimization of those works as socially effective? While there is no point in analyzing the formal qualities of one Andy Warhol soup can silkscreen in relation to another (as Buchloh says), I also think there is a point to be made in analyzing the differences in value that result from the different institutional contexts of a Warhol Brillo Box made in 1969, and one made by Mike Bidlo in 1991.[20]

Following this, it is worth stating that my interest in analyzing contemporary art has always been tied to my concern with how it has been framed by language in the public arena; specifically how language is used to support or elucidate the relative social value of specific artworks that conforms or does not conform with the meaning that can be derived from the visual communication of the work alone. I am especially interested in

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Serge, you and I once had a conversation in class in which I accused you art historians of being more avant-garde than the artists, because art historians were trying to keep thinking about what avant-garde meant, and by implication, what it means, or where it went. They were more interested in it than many artists, who seem to have gone on to other things, like expressing themselves.

See: Jeff Wall, TJ Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, Anne Wagner, "Representation, Suspicions, and Critical Transparency: an Interview with Jeff Wall by TJ Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, and Anne Wagner," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 224.

[20] One philosophical take on this particular analysis can be found in a number of Arthur Danto's essays and books, in which Warhol's 1964 Brillo Boxes serve as the inspiration for Danto's theories about a "post-historical" period of pluralistic art in the subsequent decades. The comparison of Warhol to Bidlo is actually made in Danto's introduction to his book *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 2, 12. Earlier references to the Brillo Boxes can be found in a number of his essays in *Beyond the Brillo Box* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), and *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

the discrepancies that arise between what can be seen and understood in a work of art by diverse viewers, and the specific discourse positions articulated by curatorial texts, critical reviews, artist's statements and other textual supports to the work's meaning. The wider these discrepancies appear to be, the more I am led to question what individuals or systems are in control of the forms of knowledge offered by the artwork.

Such discrepancies exist in the work of Jeff Wall because understanding the complex motivations behind his works depends on familiarity with a number of academic and philosophical discourses that are not obvious in the pictures themselves. These discourses have largely been initiated by Wall himself through his prolific writing and interviews, and have worked to support the cultural legitimacy of his overall body of photography over several decades. On the other hand, an analysis of Wall's artworks can reveal other discourses that have not been adequately addressed in the body of writing that accompanies his oeuvre.

I have consolidated enough evidence to suggest strongly that the defeatured landscape(s) and counter-tradition of Vancouver art have been defined negatively by what they are not; both the earlier expressionist landscape painting epitomized by Emily Carr, and 1970s feminist critiques of figural representation. By default, an anti-feminine discourse was silently established around a new avant-garde movement in the city, one that was never directly addressed because the terms of the new discourse were consistently defined under other criteria having to do with first the work's relationship to the historical avant-garde of Europe in the 1920s, and later, nineteenth century French painting and literature. This is not to say that competing art movements did not exist with competing motivations in Vancouver, but the fact remains that the Vancouver School of

Photo-conceptualists (as it is also sometimes called) under the central figure of Jeff Wall, has overwhelmingly become the most successful and internationally famous group of artists to be have emerged from that city. Thus, this is a study of the limits of the counter-tradition of Vancouver art: a critical questioning of the factors that silently and negatively defined that tradition after 1970 until 1979, when the counter-tradition of large scale pictorial photography is often said to have begun with the exhibition of Jeff Wall's first large Cibachrome transparencies.

Outline of Chapters

The very use of the term "counter-tradition" implies a dialectic because the new tradition must be countering another one that preceded it. In the specific historical and regional locale of Vancouver, the most prevalent and popular contemporary art of the first half of the twentieth century was landscape painting, and this was the tradition that young conceptual artists explicitly rejected in the 1960s.

Chapter one, "Emily Carr and the Legacy of Commonwealth Modernism," establishes Jeff Wall's connection to the historical figure of British Columbian painter Emily Carr and expressionist landscape painting in general, as well as examines his statements about whether or not it is important that his home and place of work is Vancouver. First I examine the role that expressionist landscape painting played in creating a feeling of nationalist solidarity across Canada between the two World Wars. Nature, often feminized as Mother Nature, played a symbolic role in artists' contributions to the development of Canada's national identity, which was imagined as separate and

distinct from the old countries of Europe. Artists like Emily Carr and the Group of Seven cultivated a stoic northern identity through symbolic paintings of remote wilderness locations that included strong trees, solid rocks and impervious bodies of water.

The cultivation of national identity was often articulated in language by artists and their supporters that attributed it with racial and spiritual characteristics. The racial character of the new country was primarily imagined by English-heritage artists as northern European, a fact that I show corresponded with Canadian immigration preferences of the early twentieth century. Like their European counterparts at the same time, Canadian modern artists found inspiration in Theosophy. Theosophy offered clear directives for expressing the divine in painting, and imbued the artists' sojourns into unpopulated and barren landscapes with a political and social legitimacy that might not have existed otherwise. While Emily Carr eventually rejected Theosophy as a religion, her paintings continued to be associated with a particular view of British Columbia's wilderness as a uniquely mythical and spiritual place.

The longstanding association of Canadian landscape painting with a particular strain of mystical spirituality and physical adventurism would lead Jeff Wall to characterize it as both "inner landscape" and representative of British colonial aspirations. Chapter one continues with an analysis of statements made by Jeff Wall about Emily Carr over recent decades. I show that Wall recognized the influence of Emily Carr on his generation, but rejected her work as limited by its historical position within the context of British Colonial society. Her art is construed by him as part of a general cultural and political British imperative to solidify their economic interests in the Coastal regions by appearing to conquer wilderness. For Wall, Carr's work is locked into this historical

moment and is therefore not socially critical enough to be adopted as a model for a future avant-garde artwork. I also bring to light Wall's vigorous denial that a personal attachment to home, or a specific place, can be beneficial in the construction of socially critical artworks. Alienation from homeland, which he identifies with critical distance and objectivity, is a necessary component of avant-garde practice for Wall.

A close reading of Jeff Wall's 1970 Master's thesis, *Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context* provides an explanation for how Wall has imagined that an effective avant-garde movement can come into being and remain effective as social critique.   This document clearly reveals Wall's belief that a programmatic model for the construction of an avant-garde movement and its support through discourse in the form of written manifestos has existed historically in the form of the Berlin Dada group. I also show how this early art-historical research led Wall to associate German expressionist painting with Canadian Expressionist painting, characterizing both as operations of socio-political escapism. It is my contention that much of Wall's thesis functions as a guideline for how Wall has managed his art career in the intervening years, although of course adapted and modified for contemporary life.

Chapter two shows how by the 1960s, a rejection of what was then being described as a "mythological," "mystical" or "escapist" expressionist landscape painting tradition was the basis for new conceptual art practices that highlighted the urban environment. The new conceptually-based landscapes were called "defeatured" by the artists and writers involved, and referred to artists' focus on industrial areas, urban sprawl, city streets, and other aspects of Vancouver that were believed common to all modern north American cities. In contradistinction, Emily Carr's depiction of British

Columbia's wilderness is consistently referred to as the "hegemonic inner landscape" by Jeff Wall and his peers, men exposed to New Left Marxist philosophy through their education in universities and the world-wide student protests of 1968. The defeatured landscape clearly emerged as an antagonistic response to such "inner landscapes."

Two of the earliest and most successful conceptual artists in Vancouver whose work regularly depicted the urban environment were the collaborative group N.E. Thing Co. (hereafter NETCO). Iain and Ingrid Baxter, the NETCO artists, are important to this overall history because they were the first to picture explicitly Vancouver's industrial zones in their work. As such, they were influential on Jeff Wall and the emerging community of conceptual artists in Vancouver. I examine one of NETCO's best-known works, *Portfolio of Piles* (1969), from a feminist perspective to show an overt instance of the erotic woman embedded in the image of the defeatured landscape. This work presents a single image of a naked woman's breasts within a series of photographs of piles of industrial products and detritus found and documented in Vancouver's commercial, trade and construction sites. She represents a natural and organic site of pleasure within the sequence of cold rational building supplies and consumer materials, a pairing that implicitly reappears in Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace's later work.

The chapter continues by discussing the influence Robert Smithson had on Vancouver conceptual artists when he visited the city to complete his unrealized earthwork *Island of Broken Glass*, amongst other projects over three months in 1969-70. Smithson's interactions with local artists, as well as his philosophical reflections of landscape, particularly his ability to view cities from the point of view of a detached observer (like a tour guide), complemented and reinforced Vancouver conceptual artists

attempts to depict a materialist and unromantic view of their city. Ironically however, Smithson's earthworks were also perceived negatively by Jeff Wall who saw them as escapist, "flight[s] into the wilderness" and "unreflective repris[als] of the American frontier myth," that did not deal with the real social dynamics of the cities and art world that Smithson was deeply involved with.[21] By characterizing some of Smithson's most important works this way, Wall links Smithson to what he perceived as the problematic aspects of Carr's work, a correlation that works to distinguish Wall and his peers from their American counterparts.   Thus, in positive and negative ways, Smithson's work in Vancouver helped solidify the terms of debate regarding how best to picture the urban landscape and the social ramifications of doing so.

Following the initial examples set by NETCO and the later influence of Smithson, by 1970 artists were extending the idea of nature or wilderness to the city, so that the term "urban wilderness" began to be used unironically to describe the social alienation felt by individuals locked into urban structures that were both material and ideological. The grid of the city was intellectually associated with language as a linguistic structure because both were seen as manifestations of controlling state ideologies, and so the defeatured landscapes were often comprised of both text and city imagery in their construction. Behind the rigid and controlling structures of language and state ideology, however, is the subjective consciousness and will of the artist who occupies these physical and discursive spaces. Chapter two concludes by revisiting two important artworks produced by Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace discussed earlier in the chapter (*Landscape Manual*, 1970; *Magazine Piece*, 1970) from a feminist perspective to show

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[21] Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," *Jeff Wall Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 46.

how erotic images of women and representations of domestic space continue to operate

after NETCO as a counterbalance to the rational image of the grid of industrial city.

These works show that the body of woman continues to function symbolically as the

expression of libidinous desires in the minds of the male artists associated with early

Vancouver photo-conceptual artworks.

Chapter three takes up the social and discursive context for why these libidinous

expressions continue to populate Vancouver conceptual art between 1970 and 1978. The

woman's movement in the United States and Canada, the blossoming of feminist art, and

psychoanalytic inspired critiques of figurative representation introduced to the art world

through British film theorists in 1975 are introduced as important influencers on the

1970s Vancouver art world. I critique several key photographic works by Jeff Wall and

Ian Wallace made in the mid to late 1970s to show how the gendered division space

evident in the work from 1970 is still operating in these later works, but in transmuted

form: Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) and *Destroyed Room* (1978); and Ian

Wallace's *The Summer Script I and II* (1973-74), *Attack on Literature* (1975), and

Image/Text (1979). When compared to existing interpretations of these works, this

critique shows how other scholars have concentrated on the artists' relationship to the

historical avant-garde at the expense of pursuing other avenues of analysis suggested by

the subject matter of the images themselves.

Chapter three also articulates the theoretical parameters of an expanded notion of

landscape that can be applied to both the defeatured landscapes of 1969-1970 and the

large scale narrative photography of the later 1970s and links them both. The defeatured

landscapes of the late 1960s served as a discursive challenge to longstanding notions of

what constitutes a beautiful and spiritual work of landscape art. This challenge demarcated, in Jeff Wall's terms, a new "field of conflict" in Vancouver art that could be no longer dominated by the specter of Emily Carr and the "hegemonic inner landscape." By incorporating the feminist critique of representation into the Cibachrome transparencies of 1978-79 on his own terms, Wall was later able to secure a position for himself internationally and locally within the art historical canon, articulating his own practice as a "counter-tradition."

Once in control of a historical field of conflict, however, one is in danger of losing it. Such is the pattern of the avant-garde, which is always in dialectical tension with its antithesis, and finds its reason for being in the destruction of what has been the avant-garde before it. In my conclusion I follow up on the notion of conflicted sites of discourse by briefly describing Vancouver women artists' challenges to what they perceived were increasingly institutionalized and exclusionary sites of discourse between 1983 and 1991. These challenges coincided with the rapid rise of the Vancouver School as a global brand, the point at which the counter-tradition of the photo-conceptualists could no longer be viewed as a radical neo-avant-garde emerging from a peripheral location in the world. Instead it would be viewed as an institutionalized discourse within a global community of artists, one that in the context of the culture wars of the 1980s and 90s appeared increasingly to be lacking diversity in its make-up and world-view.

Chapter 1

Emily Carr and The Legacy of Commonwealth Modernism

The idea of an art religion, and the sense of experiencing religiosity in nature set the tone in British Columbia for a kind of treatment of the landscape which, by the 1940s, and especially in the 1950s, becomes hegemonic and has been called inner landscape. From this point of view the painting is an expression, by means of landscape, of the inner world of the artist, but also of the genius loci, the indwelling spirit of the place painted. This can be seen as a normative part of the British or Imperial Romanticism I outlined earlier, a modernization of English aesthetic ideas in the context of actual isolation of artists in the marginal, frontier setting of Vancouver. Emily Carr's isolation, which she experienced at several levels, is therefore, emblematic of the condition of painters, of artists overall, in this region, at least until recently.

Jeff Wall[22]

In the late 1960s the theory of the defeatured landscape arose amongst artists, curators and critics in Vancouver, British Columbia, as a way of shifting emphasis away from the dominant institutional and public interest in local landscape painting. Jeff Wall, referencing Robert Linsley in this quote, called these paintings modernist expressions of a *hegemonic inner landscape*, or an indwelling of the spirit of a place, thereby signaling a changed attitude towards an historical art form that had long dominated the region. At

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[22] Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art: A Deeper Background for Ken Lum's Work," *The Lectures* (Rotterdam: With de Witte, 1991), 69.

the center of this theoretical and artistic shift are changing ideas of what wilderness is or could be at the time. The artists addressed in this study all came to maturity in the late 1960s, when wilderness was no longer mystified as a place of spiritual contemplation and invigoration, but instead was seen as a refuge or escape from the material realities of industrialized urban living. The need to address the social-politics of what would eventually be referred to as the "urban wilderness" became a central concern of academically trained artists inspired by Marxist-derived theories of urban space and historical materialism. Thus Jeff Wall's quote serves as an introduction to a set of art historical problems related to how Canadian artists' depictions of landscape were politicized representations of nature in the early twentieth century, and how these representations were interpreted by later artists in the 1960s and 1970s. The following pages describe this set of problems in more detail in order to better understand the defeatured landscape as a distinctive theoretical and artistic break from the concepts of wilderness, nature and spirituality that were established in Canadian art-making decades earlier.

Canadian Nationalism and The Group of Seven

Any discussion of landscape, wilderness or nature in Canadian art of the twentieth century is inevitably bracketed by discussions of the expressionist paintings of Eastern Canada's Group of Seven (Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, Frederick Varley) and the West Coast's Emily Carr. These artists are all credited with developing uniquely Canadian idioms of

modern expression through landscape imagery at a time that coincided politically with

Canada's effort to forge a unique sense of nationhood separate from both the British

Commonwealth and the United States. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the

development of nationhood became inextricably associated with ideas about wilderness

in both Canada and the United States. In the early days of the American Republic urban

settlements on the East Coast were associated with civilization, whereas the vast

unexplored and unpopulated areas of the country were imagined as refuges of savagery,

vice and disease.[23] As Eric Kaufman describes it, by the early 1800s the popular story of

Daniel Boone's life, which was published in different writers' fictional and non-fictional

accounts in the United States and Europe, exemplified for Americans the myth of a

heroic male on the frontier of a hostile wilderness, forging his way against the odds.[24]

Kaufman suggests that the mythologizing of a stereotyped Boone—hunter and trailblazer

extraordinaire—continued throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries,

becoming progressively more romanticized as industrial expansion moved steadily

westward; a story that Kaufman sees neatly summarized for posterity in example and

content by the publication of Theodore Roosevelt's epic *Winning of the West* in 1889.[25]

Henry David Thoreau also saw the untamed wilderness as the source of

America's greatness and virility. The "frontiersman is infused with the power of nature,

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[23] This notion of "unpopulated" was itself a misrepresentation, as the land was successfully settled and managed by native populations long before the arrival of Europeans. See William Cronon's *Changes in the Land* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) for a classic study on the ways native populations and English colonists influenced land use in New England from the early seventeenth century onwards.

[24] Eric Kaufmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation': The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (Oct., 1998): 673. Daniel Boone's biography was told and popularized through several sources such as John Filson's "The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone," *The Discovery, Settlement And Present State of Kentucky* (1784) which was translated into French and German; Timothy Flint, *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (1833).

[25] Ibid., 675.

which in turn defines the entire nation."[26] For many of these writers, the ability to tame

the great expanse of the land was associated with virility. This is of course symbolized by

the many references to "penetrating" the land that occur in nineteenth century poetry and

prose. Too much cultivation of nature could produce a weak or unproductive country – a

fear reflected in Thoreau's 1855 complaint that he felt he was already living in "a tamed,

and, as it were, emasculated country."[27] As the ecological historian William Cronon

summarized it, "a changed landscape meant a loss of wildness and virility that was

ultimately spiritual in its import, a sign of declension in both nature and humanity."[28]

Even the geography of the United States could fulfill the role of historical origin and

explain the positive attributes of a social solidarity that the older nation states of Europe

had acquired through longevity.[29]

Farther north, and much later, Canada had a similar identity crisis to wrestle with

that was also partially defined by its wilderness. The idea of a natural, untamed land as an

asset and symbol of nationhood did not really take root until the end of the nineteenth

century. This was partially because imagining a real conscious Canadian nationalism did

not arise until *after* Canada's 1867 confederation, and because Canada's Anglo settlers, a

much smaller population than in the United States, were too sparsely located across the

huge expanse of the country.[30]

Like their southern neighbors, the potent frontiersman was also attractive to

Canadians, and was a central component of the story of the Group of Seven painters who

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[26] Kauffmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation,'" 676.
[27] Thoreau quoted in Cronon's *Changes in the Land*, 4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Kauffmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation,'"676.
[30] Ibid., 681.

by 1927 were fully established in the public eye as having forged new territory, both

artistic and geographic. The seven painters came together earlier through their

employment as designers and engravers at the commercial art firm of Grip Limited in

Toronto, and through weekend sketching trips taken together in Northern Ontario, around

1910.[31] Their earliest biographer and promoter, Frederick Housser, was keen to describe

most of the group as "natural artists," meaning that they were not trained by European

academies or through extensive time spent overseas. Whenever possible Housser

bolstered this claim by carefully highlighting their authentic "Canadianness," even when

foreign born.

> J.E.H. MacDonald was a sort of father to the tribe. . . . MacDonald came
> to Canada from Durham, England, at the age of thirteen, but his father was
> a Canadian by birth, so that the son's line of tradition is here; indeed his
> forbears were real pioneers.[32]

For Housser, the Group's real significance lay in their building up of a new national style

of painting that perfectly, and nationalistically, integrated subject with style. Earlier

Canadian painters, according to Housser, were saddled with the disjunct of picturing

Canadian scenes through Dutch and French styles that did not accommodate the "sharper

outlines of forms and the absence of atmosphere in Canadian landscape."[33] This the

group did with a "bushwacker's" and "prospector's" energy and commitment unburdened

by old world history:

> This task [the creation of a "Northern type"] demands a new type of artist;
> one who divests himself of the velvet coat and flowing tie of his caste,
> puts on the outfit of the bushwacker and prospector; closes with his

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[31] Frederick Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1926), 14-15. Housser was the first major biographer and champion of the Group of Seven. This book was popular with the public and along with the Group's own self-promotion, did much to establish the Group of Seven's fame in Canada.

[32] Ibid., 26-27.

[33] Ibid., 31.

environment; paddles, portages and makes camp; sleeps in the out-of-
doors under the stars; climbs mountains with his sketch box on his back.[34]

Housser's use of terminology like pioneer, bushwacker, and prospector to describe the
Group of Seven's trips into territory not yet seen by industry or artist is important, and
signifies the desire and need for Canadians, like Americans, to find or create a home-
grown identity separate from Europe.[35] Letting go of the perceived castes and fashions of
European history would be one of the ways the new Canadian could imagine forging his
own way in a fresh new environment, "draw[ing] inspiration from the past of this
country, the wilderness."[36]

Canadians attempts to forge a new collective identity should be considered in
light of the tumultuous Canadian immigration patterns that occurred in the first decades
of the twentieth century. Between 1896 and 1914, Canada experienced one of its most
rapid influx of immigrants in the nation's history; the numbers of annual immigrants
increased from 17,000 in 1896 to 400,000 in 1913, and over the course of these eighteen
years the total figure was close to three million people.[37] This is remarkable when one
considers that the national population was approximately seven million in 1911.[38] These
immigrants facilitated industrial expansion brought on by favorable foreign trade in

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[34] Ibid., 14-15.

[35] One is reminded of Harold Rosenberg's suggestion that a distinctive modern American art has the same spirit as "Coonskinned Trappers," who easily kill "Redcoats" on the battle field by hiding behind native trees. The Redcoats are too locked into their own European history, dress, and marching formation (or style) to notice the trees or the Coonskinners. They therefore misinterpret the landscape in more ways than one. Rosenberg called this, "the hallucination of the displaced terrain, originating in style." In the same tenor as Houuser's "bushwacker" or "prospector," Rosenberg describes "the new man [as] not a condition but an effort – an effort that follows a revelation in behalf of which existing forms are discarded as irrelevant or are radically revised. . . . I call this anti-formal, or transformal effort Coonskinnism." See: Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960), 13-25.

[36] Frederick Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement*, 145.

[37] Ninette Kelley and M. J. Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 111.

[38] Ibid., 112.

Canadian products like wheat, lower transportation costs which helped facilitate this trade, and new technological advances leading to pulp and paper production and hydro-electric power.[39] The majority of immigrants moved to the cities to take industrial jobs, although the recruitment of immigrants by Canadian officials was primarily described in terms of needing agricultural labor. For twenty five years prior to 1890 sixty percent of all immigrants were from Great Britain, but after 1896 the ethnic diversity of immigrants expanded in order to fill the need for workers. By 1914, 38% were still British, approximately 25% came from central, eastern and southern Europe, and 34% came from the United States.[40] For city-dwelling Anglophone Canadians like Housser, these changes in population density and ethnic diversity would be hard to ignore.

Between 1913 and 1926 xenophobic immigration policies developed that were based on general cultural fears and the economic hardships of meeting the labor needs of quickly expanding and contracting industrial production during the war years. Deportations of already-settled immigrants and restrictive amendments to existing immigration laws between 1913 and 1920 sought first to purge Canada of "enemy aliens, foreign socialists, and revolutionaries," but later expanded to restrict the arrival of any ethnicity or race deemed unacceptable at the time. By 1926, the year Housser wrote about the Group of Seven, a four-tiered immigration policy was in place:

> British and American citizens were permitted to enter Canada relatively
> freely, provided they either had employment or could support themselves,
> and were not black. Immigrants from the preferred countries of Northern
> Europe and Scandinavia could enter Canada provided they had valid
> passports, were sponsored by Canadian relatives, or had an occupation of
> which Canada was in need. Immigrants from the non-preferred countries

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[39] Ibid., 111.
[40] Ibid., 113.

of Eastern and Southern Europe were admitted through special permits, and those from Asia or Africa were virtually excluded.[41]

An effective screening process was taking place in which northerners were more desirable than southerners.

Robert Linsley has discussed Canadian modern artists' interest in and use of landscape imagery as a way of picturing a strong northern identity for Canada that is free from the influence of the increasing influx of immigrants in his essay, "Landscapes in Motion: Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, and the Heterogeneous Modern Nation."[42] Linsley's essay shows that early twentieth century Canadian landscape painting partially functioned aesthetically as a response to the perceived threat of new immigrant populations after the first World War. As Linsley discusses in his essay, the restrictive immigration policies instituted in the 1920s were also largely anti-Semitic, with Jews being one of several groups requiring special permits unless they held British citizenship. One can detect a fair amount of anti-Semitic rhetoric in the writings about politics, art, and society in the *Canadian Theosophist* articles that Housser published during these years.[43]

Thus the as-of-yet untapped potential of Canadian identity must be understood in the context of these artists' desire to create an identity based in Anglophone or Northern European culture, while still being uniquely Canadian. For Housser and the Group of Seven the wilderness was the repository for this untapped national potential, something that could be mastered ideologically through art, and presented as a new 'spirit' to the

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[41] Ibid., 189.

[42] I am much indebted to Linsley for this fascinating essay, which called my attention to the fact that the "northern type" mentioned by Housser was mostly imagined as a white Canadian of Northern European origin. Robert Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion: Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, and the Heterogeneous Modern Nation," *Oxford Art Journal* 19, no. 1 (1996): 80-95.

[43] For more examples and details of Housser's attitudes towards Jews during this time see Linsley's article, pages 82-84.

public. Not surprisingly, the new spirit of Canada as exemplified by its nature was often

talked about as though it had a racial character: "The wilderness has influenced our trade

routes and has undoubtedly had an effect in the formation of our racial character,"[44] and

the farmlands of Canada lacked "that racial stamp given by generations of work and

peasantry" such as that found in Europe.[45] Housser wanted "Canada to find a true racial

expression of herself through art,"[46] regularly using the word "race" to support his claims

that the Group of Seven had found a spiritually pure and authentic depiction of the north

in their landscapes:

> Through the art of each race we are able to enter into the life and
> spiritually understand that race and yet, as it were, that mysterious
> something that makes that people different from all other peoples . . .
> National and social environment attract souls suited to it in incarnation.[47]

And further on in the same article:

> The reason why the racial quality of these Canadian pictures is so thrilling
> to a Canadian is because as a race we are so young that nine-tenths of us
> do not know what it is to have a religious feeling about our country. We
> still think of the old world as the home of our culture and do not believe
> enough in our own potentialities.[48]

While the 'racial character' of Canada and Canadian art is never explicitly

described, it *is* often described in terms of what it is not—or not wanted to be—that is

one associated with immigrants' race, ethnicity or religion (particularly Jewish). For

example, lamenting the loss of earlier talented Canadian artists, Housser suggests:

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[44] Frederick Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement*, 14.

[45] Ibid., 144.

[46] Ibid., 17.

[47] Frederick B. Housser, "Art – The Initiator," *The Canadian Theosophist* 8 (April 15, 1927): 23; also quoted in Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion," 82.

[48] Frederick B. Housser, "Art – The Initiator," 24.

> Other young painters of promise, returning from overseas to Montreal,
> found the country absorbed in Israels, Weissenbrucks, and the Maris
> family, and they migrated to the United States, or returned to Europe and
> spent most of their time there.[49]

Here an authentic Canadian art is decidedly not to be found in those living in Canada but still following the example of the nineteenth-century Hague School.[50] It is curious and perhaps revealing that of all the French or Dutch artists to choose from as negative examples of then-popular art in Canada, he chose artists of Jewish descent.

Later in the same book in a chapter on Lawren Harris' canvasses of city scenes, Housser describes the absent "anchorage of tradition" he believes Ontario cities represent, a lack that he sees as humanely identified by Harris through his sensitivities as a mystical artist. While Harris uses bright colors and light to welcome "in his heart both Jew and Gentile and accepts them as they are with a friendly gesture which speaks the essence of a democratic faith,"[51] one cannot be so sure that Housser, the art critic, does the same:

> The use of decorative design was never put to better use than in his
> [Harris'] ward and slum pictures. The Jews who live in the ward are not a
> melancholy people. They have a hilarious gayety of temperament which
> offsets their race's temperamental melancholy. They enjoy community
> life. Rarely do we find the Jew a farmer. They crowd by preference into
> closely confined districts of cities unless they are rich enough to ape the
> opulent gentile.[52]

Clearly, Jews seem to have been particularly symbolic of the defiling of Canada's potential greatness in Housser's imagination, a greatness sullied by involvement in the

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[49] Ibid., 23.

[50] The Hague School refers to a group of Dutch artists who lived in the Hague and worked there between 1860-1890. They were plein air painters of the landscape and were influenced by the French Barbizon school, but initially used darker and more somber color palettes than the French. Some of the artists included in the Hague School were Jozef Israëls, Jacob and Willem Maris and Anton Mauve, three of which Housser mentions explicitly in the quotation above.

[51] Frederick Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement*, 185.

[52] Ibid., 184.

"British War," an influx of immigrants, and by association, immigrant art. The fact that in his mind they were city-dwellers not associated with agricultural work, suggests that they could then not be considered part of the push to recognize and encourage Canada's latent potential, which for Housser was linked to nature.

Linsley also suggests that the anti-immigrant / anti-semitic bias may have extended to Canadian artists' conceptions of what was progressive modern art at the time. While it has been widely reported by scholars that the Group of Seven developed their mature work after members saw the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* in Buffalo.[53] Linsley brings attention to the disinterest they showed in other modern European art developments in evidence at the 1913 New York Armory exhibition which opened just one month later:

> Not [often] discussed to my knowledge are the implications of the fact that
> with one exception, (Franz Johnston, the most minor and least influential
> of the seven) the members of the group did not attend the Armory show,
> and that the provincial hostility toward the same expressed by the
> Canadian press was shared by those artists who saw themselves as leaders
> of a new national school. [54]

Linsley characterized this hostility as containing ". . . a strong anti-European and anti-modernist rhetoric," that would later, in the Group of Seven paintings, be channeled into

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[53] This exhibition was organized by the American-Scandinavian Society in New York, patronized by the King of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and exhibited between 1912 and 1913 in New York, Buffalo, Toledo, Chicago and Boston. See: Christian Brinton, *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* (New York: The American Scandinavian Society, 1912). The importance of this exhibition on the Group of Seven in connection to the construction of national identity has been addressed by a number of scholars, some of which include: Robert Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion;" Ruth Stevens Appelhof, "Emily Carr, Canadian Modernist," in Ruth Stevens Appelhof, ed., *The Expressionist Landscape* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1987), 27-85; Eric Kaufmann, "Naturalizing the Nation"; and Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).
[54] Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion," 81.

a "rural, symbolic and mystical art [that] was also a conscious rejection of the synthesizing character of modernism."[55]

By "synthesizing," Linsley is referring to the rapid and diverse influx of immigrants coming into New York, which included modern artists who fused the high art traditions of the old world with the "low" depictions of contemporary urban life. Synthesizing thus refers to both the European modernists' mixing of high and low art and the mixing of diverse immigrant populations. Because Canadian nationhood was closely tied to a spiritual appreciation of nature, and the necessity of working the land in the minds of Housser and the artists he championed, they were selective about what aspects of European modernist art they would embrace. They favored the spiritual influence of artists like Kandinsky and Mondrian but rejected modernist representations of urban life, since immigrants coalescing in cities did not to them appear to advance Canada's greatness, which lay in her agricultural potential.

This was of particular concern because so many Americans were immigrating to Canada in those and subsequent years, and because Housser and some of the Group of Seven artists were deeply invested in Theosophy, a religion that saw all of North America linked in common goals (and ironically popularized by European artists like Mondrian and Kandinsky). This will be addressed in more detail shortly. Thus Linsley suggests that the 'synthesizing' effects of immigration that Housser and other Canadians objected to in culture and immigration policy, which to our ears sounds prejudicial and anti-semitic, could be imagined by them as occurring in the United States through the example of the many Eastern European Jews exhibiting in the 1913 Armory exhibition:

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[55] Ibid.

The actual material role that modern art could play in catalyzing social integration is demonstrated by the careers of those artists who emerged in New York in the thirties. The Newmans, Rothkos, Greenbergs, Rosenbergs, Reinhardts and Gorky's belonged to the first generation of immigrants from the great influx to enter the culture, and it was modernism that provided the entry point.[56]

As just mentioned, for a number of Canadian artists at the time, the linchpin holding art, mysticism and nationhood together was Theosophy, embraced and promoted by Housser and Lawren Harris, both of whom published numerous articles in *The Canadian Theosophist*. Theosophists believed that social change was immanent, but eschewed organized religions or mass political movements in favor of believing that spiritual leadership (often their own) would organically cultivate a more humane and just society by spreading spiritual awareness. On the surface, following the direction of Helene Petrovina Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875, Theosophists endorsed "the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color."[57] In Theosophical doctrine, the artist was given a central role because he/she has the potential to break through the seductive and distracting surface of the material world to access the hidden mysteries of a deeper existence.[58] Artistic sensibility therefore was likened to spiritual training, and artists like

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Elizabeth Preston and Christmas Humphreys, *An Abridgement of the Secret Doctrine by H. P. Blavatsky* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), quoted in Linda Street, "Emily Carr: Contact with Lawren Harris and Central Canada, 1927-1933," (Masters Thesis, Carleton University, 1980), 66.

[58] Harris was well aware of the leading European modern artists also associated with Theosophy. In 1927 he worked tirelessly to ensure that the Art Gallery of Toronto would host *Société Anonyme's International Exhibition of Modern Art*, even offering to underwrite the exhibition, and finding an alternative venue should the Art Gallery of Toronto back out. The exhibition, which included Kandinsky, Mondrian, and other modernists, had already been shown at the Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo. The Société Anonyme was an association founded by Katherine Dreier, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp in New York from 1920-1940 with the purpose of supporting the exhibition of modern art. Harris had been included in the Brooklyn exhibition, and met Dreier there at the opening. See: Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 2008), 27.

Lawren Harris who were influenced by Theosophy saw their role as a spiritual educator: "Art is not an amusement, nor a distraction, nor is it, as many men maintain an escape from life. On the contrary, it is high training of the soul, essential to the soul's growth, to its unfoldment."[59] Housser echoed this by defining the artist as "an initiator;" "a creative seer of deep inner experience who uses the medium of the arts to express the experiences of his inner life."[60] Housser was purposefully likening the artist to the long tradition of ceremonial religious initiates. Theosophy's search for Divine Knowledge and philosophical truth was symbolized by the image of a ray of pure white light:

> Mme. Blavatsky felt that various philosophies and religions had been responsible for the diffraction of this white light into the various colours of the spectrum, as pure truth had become adulterated through time. The early leaders therefore regarded the Christian Church with hostility. It was seen as an obstacle to true religion . . . .[61]

For Canadian artists of the 1920s many of these Theosophical concepts dovetailed nicely with Canada's search for identity in her native landscape. The recognition and experience of beauty through art awakened man's sense of his own divinity. For Harris, beauty was the "continuity of ecstasy in the higher life of man."[62] In Canada, where nature—the land itself—was infused with the indwelling of nationalist spirit, the painter of the landscape had an important role in bringing this spirit to the surface of social understanding through his delivery of experiences of beauty.

However, while Theosophy officially endorsed a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity it is not at all clear that this was to be programmatically adhered to or

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[59] Lawren Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14 (July 15, 1933): 130.
[60] Housser, "Art – The Initiator," 21.
[61] Linda Street, "Emily Carr: Contact with Lawren Harris," 67.
[62] Harris, "Theosophy and Art," 131.

necessarily internalized by individuals involved in the movement, especially during the tension-filled years between the World Wars. Of the many involved in the movement, Lawren Harris' writing in the *Canadian Theosophist* and in the bulk of correspondence written between he and the British Columbian artist Emily Carr suggests that Harris was unusually progressive and tolerant of other people's beliefs and customs, regardless of race or sex. On the other hand, Frederick Housser, the most vocal supporter of the Group of Seven, was more strident in his claims that landscape was linked to idealized racial characteristics, which were implicitly imagined as northern European.

The significance of Linsley's work lies in his revealing the ways that Theosophy redirected real political and economic tensions over increased immigration and industrialization into landscape imagery that could be recognized as simultaneously spiritual, culturally pure, and resistant to change. Linsley himself sums this up very well:

> Theosophy functioned at a time of widespread class struggle to channel utopian and millenarian impulses into an apolitical spirituality, and . . . further functioned in Canada to displace anxiety about social change and miscegenation through a nationalist reading of landscape imagery.[63]

For The Group of Seven, wilderness was a kind of virgin territory meant to be conquered through discovery, so that the secrets of a latent nationalist spirit could be discovered. For Carr, as we will see, the wilderness was a spiritual entity through which one might channel the divine, and in some cases a somewhat fearsome mother figure that birthed and supported her.

Emily Carr: West Coast Modernism

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[63] Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion," 81.

Most recent histories of modern art produced in Vancouver begin with Emily
Carr, eventually highlighting her oeuvre as the epitome of artistic achievement in the
region's history. Consequently, Jeff Wall has aptly called her an "originary figure" in the
history of British Columbian art; one whom he and all artists referencing the local
landscape since the early twentieth-century must refer back to or acknowledge in some
way.[64]

Carr was born in 1871 in Victoria, B.C., to strict protestant English parents and
died there at the age of 73 in 1945. By most accounts she was a spinster, adventurer, may
have been a lesbian, and was certainly a woman who lived an uncommon life during this
time period. She lived alone with a menagerie of pets (one was a monkey) and traveled
frequently internationally, nationally and regionally. Despite early attempts to ascribe the
success of her "primal" landscapes to her regional isolation on Vancouver Island, it is
clear that she was also influenced by her sojourns abroad for education.[65] These included
stays in San Francisco (1890-93), London (1899-1903), Paris (1910-12), and shorter trips
to Eastern Canada and the United States to cultivate friendships with Canadian, American
and European artists.

Like most other artists, her art evolved stylistically over time. In late 1910, she
went to Paris where she met and studied with William Phelan "Harry" Gibb, a British
expatriate, with the hope of "find[ing]out what this 'New Art' was about," referring to the

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[64] Wall, "Traditions and Counter-Traditions…," 67.

[65] Perhaps the earliest most influential accountings of Carr's life and work is Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979). Shadbolt divided Carr's life into three periods 1907-1913, 1914-1927, and 1928-1945. The latter period was described as Carr's breakthrough, where she developed a unique vision based on the integration of her fascination of native villages and other west coast imagery into a deep personal and spiritual abstraction. Shadbolt describes this process as one in which "the elements of her art become integrated at a higher level"(195).

style we now call Fauvism.[66] In France, Carr's formal training became affected by her enthusiasm for French modernism, and even as her work encountered hostility in British Columbia after she returned in 1911, she continued to use bolder color, experimented with scale and perspective, and used more energetic brushwork. An often-published example of her work during this period is *Tanoo, Queen Charlotte Islands* (1913; Figure 1.1). While not technically Fauvist like the works of André Derain, Maurice Vlaminck and others (there are no broad flat planes of color, or particularly "vulgar" contrasting color applications), this painting does show the influence of post-impressionist developments through Carr's use of bright unmixed color, circular brushstrokes to create a moody abstracted sky in the background, and vertical brushstrokes to delineate the background forest and foreground grasses from the three central totem poles in the foreground.

Between 1907 and 1912 Carr traveled widely along the coast of British Columbia where she drew inspiration from aboriginal villages and their totem poles, which she recorded in hundreds of sketches and oil-on-canvas painted studies. As *Tanoo, Queen Charlotte Islands* suggests, these works were still fairly realistically painted accounts of what she saw, a documentary technique that resulted from her self-professed desire to record them before they would "rot and topple to the earth, unless white men came and carried them away to museums . . . [where] they would be labeled as exhibits, dumb before the crowds who gaped and laughed . . . . "[67] Certainly this statement and this

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[66] Emily Carr, "Growing Pains," in Doris Shadbolt, ed., *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 429.
[67] Emily Carr, "Greenville," *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, 51.

documentary work refute the idea of an artist only engaged in the representation of an "inner landscape," despite the attention given to new techniques learned abroad.[68]

The interest Carr had in aboriginal culture and the remote forests of British Columbia that aboriginal communities were situated in would sustain and inspire her work for her whole life, but after 1927 her expression of these scenes became markedly more abstract, dark and moody. It is noteworthy that this new period of abstraction coincides with Carr's big career break, her inclusion in *The Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern* held at the National Gallery in Ottawa that same year. While traveling to Eastern Canada to attend the exhibition, she met and established friendships with several members of the Group of Seven whose work was included in the show. One such visit to A. Y. Jackson at his studio particularly impressed Carr. Jackson's paintings of native villages in British Columbia completed in 1926 struck her as significantly more dynamic than her own: "I felt a little as if beaten at my own game. His Indian pictures have something mine lack – rhythm, poetry. Mine are so downright. . . . I worked for history and cold fact. Next time I paint Indians I'm going off on a tangent tear."[69]

After meeting the Group of Seven, the Theosophist members Arthur Lismer and Lawren Harris would have the greatest affect on the direction of Carr's work. Carr, who spent much of her life struggling with her own spirituality and the expression of it in her work, found much that was inspiring in these artists. In particular she was drawn to their steadfast belief as Theosophists that they could achieve higher states of spirituality while

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[68] See Jeff Wall's quotation in the epigraph to Chapter 1 where he references "inner landscape:" note 22 on page 21.

[69] Emily Carr, "Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of An Artist," *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, 656. Also quoted in Ruth Stevens Appelhoff, *The Expressionist Landscape*, 48.

serving the progressive needs of a budding new nationality. On November 15th, 1927,

Carr wrote:

> These men are very interesting and big and inspiring, so different from the foolish little artists filled with conceit that one usually meets. . . . I know they are building an art worthy of our great country, and I want to have my share, to put in a little spoke for the West, one woman holding up my end.[70]

Two days later she was positively smitten:

> Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? Something has spoken to the very soul of me, wonderful, mighty, not of this world. . . . It is surging through my whole being, the wonder of it all . . . . Jackson, Johnson, Varley, Lismer, Harris—up-up-up-up-up! Lismer and Harris stir me most. Lismer is swirling, sweeping on, but Harris is rising into serene, uplifted planes, above the swirl into holy places.[71]

Upon her return to British Columbia she quickly began to incorporate this mood

of sweeping, swirling, and uplifting nature into her own work, although she would not

reach the height of this new style until several years later. By 1928 however, the year

after her visit to Eastern Canada, one can notice marked formal changes in her images of

forests and totem poles. This is most obviously noticed in her finished oil paintings and

less in her graphite and water color sketches, although even the latter show an increase in

upward moving brushstrokes, simplified color choices, and the paring down of complex

shapes into solid and somewhat abstracted forms. The painting *The Raven* (1928-29;

Figure 1.2) shows the clear influence of Lawren Harris' series of paintings of mountains,

such as his early version of *Mountain Forms* (1928; Figure 1.3) that Carr had seen at the

Royal Canadian Academy in Montreal in 1927 and which she described as "beautiful,"

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[70] Emily Carr, "Hundreds and Thousands," 657.
[71] Ibid., 657-658.

"glorious" and "serene."[72] *The Raven* shows its namesake on the top of a totem pole or house post reaching into the sky. The composition has been designed so that the central components of pole, bird, trees, and sky all thrust upwards in sharp angles that seem to meet at the bird's beak at the top right of the painting. Importantly, because they clearly show Harris' influence, the tops of two evergreen trees at the bottom right of the painting have been reduced to lightly modeled cone shapes that both ground the image but work to lift it upwards. This imagery recalls the appreciative prose Carr wrote about Harris' *Mountain Forms*, saying "it occupied the centre of one wall—one great cone filled with snow and serenely rising to a sky filled with wonderful light around it in halo-circles."[73] Obviously Carr internalized what she found so inspiring in this work of Harris,' because her raven and cone-shaped trees rise in front of, and are framed by, a kind of angular clerestory-window of light forms. The divine mood of this painting is further enhanced by Carr's reduction of elements in the painted field, quite unlike the more documentary-like approach she had taken earlier in *Tanoo, Queen Charlotte Islands*, which sought to faithfully record the group of totem poles' visual context.   Thus as it reaches for the sky *The Raven* becomes metaphoric and symbolic of the life, death and spiritual potential of the land it rises from, while it is also appears severed from its social and political context.

In the early 1930s Carr continued to paint trees and forest interiors with the same dedication to expressing a metaphoric spirituality through abstracted natural forms as she had begun in the late 1920s with works like *The Raven*. On January 18th 1931, she expressed the thoughts she was having about sketches she had recently done that would eventually result in a large group of finished paintings of pine trees later that year:

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[72] Emily Carr, "Hundreds and Thousands," 662.

[73] Ibid.

I have done a charcoal sketch today of young pines at the foot of a forest. I may take a canvas out of it. It should lead from joy back to mystery— young pines full of light and joyousness against a background of moving, mysterious forest. [74]

The painting called *A Young Tree* (1931; Figure 1.4) may well be the image she was imagining in this quote. A central cone-shaped tree painted in layers of bright shades of yellow and green fills most of the frame of the painting. The tree has been painted without branches, needles or other details, so it appears somewhat like a sheet of paper twisted into a cone-like form, like one of those paper roses children are taught to make at a young age in their school's art class. The ground it sits upon is rendered as a slightly shaded surface of burnt sienna, which in places is almost beige by the addition of white paint. In the immediate foreground, a tubular-shaped and brighter red and brown fallen log recedes at a forty-five degree angle to the viewer's left, with its roots reaching out and up like a lively twisting Medusa's head of snakes. Behind the young tree Carr has painted a wall of cone-shaped trees in shades of green, paynes gray and blue. These point upwards and to the center of the canvas slightly as if to frame and support the top of the young tree's cone shape which is in the foreground, and which extends up and out of the picture plane. *A Young Tree* shows a now-ensconced commitment to abstracting the organic forms of the forest into simple geometric shapes, many of which retain the upward thrust and cone shapes evident in *The Raven* and in Harris' *Mountain Forms*. The whole composition suggests a sacred place, a clearing in the forest where the young tree can grow. The stages of youth and the passage of time are implied by the title and by the division of the painting into the old dead tree trunk at the base, the young tree at the

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[74] Ibid., 671.

center, and the older (perhaps wiser?) bank of trees standing like sentries in the background.

For Carr it is clear from her many journal writings that painting the mystery of the forest was akin to searching for her own spiritual meaning. By November of 1932 she was writing long passages in her journal about her desire to find God "out there in the glory of the woods:"[75]

> The only thing worth striving for is to express God. Every living thing is God made manifest. All real art is the eternal seeking to express God, the one substance out of which all things are made. . . . finding the divine in all; when one can do all this, maybe then one can paint.[76]

It is important to note that this was the height of her involvement in Theosophy, and while always religious (her mother was Anglican, her father Presbyterian, and she would attend an Episcopalian church on and off in Victoria), she would eventually reject Theosophy in 1933 because of the restrictions she felt it placed on one's relationship to God. In fact, both Christ and God are figureheads disavowed by Theosophists in favor of a general unknowable principle, and at the end of the day, Carr could not renounce the Christian God she saw reflected in the forests she frequently visited.[77]

While the isolated forests of British Columbia held the possibility of experiencing the divine, this was a divinity only made possible through a kind of physical and psychological subjugation resulting from the considerable difficulties and discomforts of actually getting to such remote locations, and in the case of Carr, a dependence on the

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[75] Ibid., 675.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Linda Street, "Emily Carr: Contact with Lawren Harris," 88.

help of native people to do so.[78] The immense uninhabited space of Canada in the early-twentieth century made it simply unknowable for many Canadians who could not travel into it very easily and who were nevertheless no doubt impressed by what they understood abstractly to be the size and geographical diversity of their great country. For instance, for the first twenty years after Canada's confederation in 1867 there was no national railroad connecting the East to the West, and even to this day with the use of automobiles, there remain large tracts of wilderness that are sparsely populated and difficult to access. By hiking, camping and canoeing into remote wilderness locations to draw and paint, modern Canadian artists in the early-twentieth century could use their resulting images to inspire the then-nascent development and potential of Canadian identity.

Because both Canada and Nature were described in feminine terms by the artists involved, it is feasible to suggest that the penetration of hitherto untraveled forests, lakes and mountains of the West and East, can be likened to the goal of impregnating the new country with the seeds of a new national consciousness. This analogy is more obviously made in reference to the all-male Group of Seven, and Carr herself seems to have identified with nature more as a mother figure. Quoting Lawren Harris in a public lecture about modern art in 1955 she said, "Our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North, in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new

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[78] It is interesting to note that one of the most famous Group of Seven artists, Tom Thompson, died very young while on a canoe trip in Ontario's Algonquin Park in 1917. While there were mysterious circumstances that were never resolved, the official cause of death was ruled accidental drowning. This story added to his mystique as an artist and suggests that part of the Group's popularity no doubt had to do with their dogged travel at personal peril into remote areas of the country.

race and new age."[79] Carr follows this passage with a longer description of artists'

relationship to nature and Canada, which are both described as female, and artists

responsibility in recognizing and picturing such characteristics: "she's young but very

big," "[understanding] her aspect, moods and spirit," and "[seeing] her great wealth and

design and color patterns."[80]   Carr describes art as a dress worn by this female nature: If

we dressed her [Canada] in the art dresses of the older countries she would burst them. So

we will have to make her a dress of her own."[81]

In her book *Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own*, Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall

outlines the connection between the myth of Canadian wilderness as the locus of national

origin, and the concept of wilderness as a primeval mother figure for Carr. This

connection is primarily identified through an analysis of Carr's painting and writing about

her encounters with the totemic forms of mythical First Nations Goddess D'Sonoqua.[82]

D'Sonoqua is a kind of fearsome earth mother/goddess that exists in the mythology of the

West Coast aboriginal Kwakiutl, Tsimshian and Haida peoples, and has been researched

by Claude Levi Strauss who described her this way:

> [She is from] a class of supernatural beings, most often female, but
> endowed with breasts no matter what their sex. . . . [who] dwell far inside
> the woods; they are savage giantesses, also ogresses, who kidnap Indians/
> children to eat them. Yet, the relations they maintain with humans are
> ambiguous, sometimes hostile, sometimes imbued with a certain
> complicity.[83]

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[79] Lawren Harris quoted by Emily Carr in *An Address by Emily Carr* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1955), 9.

[80] Emily Carr, *An Address*, 9.

[81] Ibid., 10.

[82] See Chapter One, "Landscape and Identity," in Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall, *Carr, O'Keefffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

[83] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975; reprint 1982) 59; quoted in Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall, *Carr, O'Keefffe, Kahlo,* 36.

In Carr's book *Klee Wyck*, which was published in 1941, she describes her first encounter with D'Sonoqua in a dramatic story of the same title. After being dropped off at her request at a remote and seasonally abandoned village to draw, Carr describes herself fighting through rain and stinging nettles only to stumble literally upon the statue of a "terrifying" woman with an overpowering stare who "tower[ed] above" her, causing her to cry out loud in astonishment.[84] Carr describes the figure as seemingly merged with the great trunk of the tree used to carve her, with arms socketed to the main trunk, "flung wide in a circling compelling movement," and breasts rendered as eagle-heads, and deep round eye sockets set in "wider rounds of white" under "wide, black eyebrows"[85] (See Figure 1.5). She had black hands tipped by painted-white fingers, and large round ears that stuck straight out. The figure seemed to Carr to emerge visually in and out of the rainy mist of the forest, a fact that attenuated her supernatural qualities. She was to encounter this woman again in other locations, and when she asked a local man who the figure was, she was told that she is the "wild woman of the woods [who] steals children" for "sometimes bad . . . sometimes good" reasons.[86] Carr summarized what would be the profound experience of this encounter with various D'Sonoqua figures:

> She appeared neither wooden or stationary, but a singing spirit, young and fresh, passing through the jungle. No violence coarsened her; no power domineered to wither her. She was graciously feminine. . . . She caught your breath, this D'Sonoqua, alive in the dead bole of the cedar. She summed up the depth and charm of the whole forest, driving away its menace.[87]

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[84] Emily Carr, "Klee Wyck," *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, 40-44.
[85] Ibid., 40.
[86] Ibid., 42.
[87] Ibid., 44.

Ironically the fearsome qualities of the spirit were somewhat lessened through the patina of age and the quiet stillness of the forest that had settled in after its native villages were abandoned. It seems to me, that D'Sonoqua as a figure may represent a number of feelings about the feminine aspects of Canada that Carr brought with her into the rainforest: where Canada was "young but big" with a specific "mood and spirit," D'Sonoqua was a giant "young and fresh singing spirit." At the same time, spiritually understanding the woman of the woods required an adventuring mortal spirit to overcome the menace of an unknown landscape that contained, dominated, and separated Carr from the ambivalent safety of her British upbringing and customs. As such, Carr may have found a kindred spirit in the fearsome woman of the woods, a reminder that one could literally and figuratively carve out a space for oneself as a woman in Victorian Canada by embracing one's identity as an eccentric outsider. Carr's exposure to D'Sonoqua and the drawings she did of her would result in *Guyasdoms D'Sonoqua* (1930) (Figure 2.5), a painting later acclaimed as one of her best.

Although Carr has now achieved iconic status in Canada and holds a central place in Canadian culture as the embodiment of national ideals and west coast geography, this was not always the case. After very little recognition in her early career, Carr's reputation began to rise slowly in the national imagination after her exhibition at the National Gallery in 1927, and her contact with other important artists and curators there who began to support and promote her work as one of their respected peers. Despite this, by the time of her death in 1945 she was still not fully recognized as one of Canada's great artists. However, her reputation steadily increased from then throughout the following two decades. In 1966 A Vancouver newspaper reported on the record-breaking price of

$18,000 that the sale of her painting *Trees in the Sky* (1939) had just commanded at auction,[88] an exhibition and publication of a monograph on Carr was organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1966,[89] and her life was profiled in conjunction with a special edition newspaper celebrating the centenary of Canada's Confederation in 1967.[90] On December 22, 1970, she was the subject of a 90 minute commercial-free TV special titled *The Wonder of It All*, a musical about her life that aired on CBC.[91]

All of this attention reached a kind of nationalistic peak by 1971, the centenary of both the date British Columbia joined the Canadian Confederacy and of Carr's birth in 1871. The year of 1971 saw the opening of a major museum retrospective of Carr's work (held from May 18 – August 29) at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and while not the first comprehensive exhibition of Carr's work, this exhibition organized by then-curator Doris Shadbolt was larger in scale than previous ones.[92] Unlike those held earlier, this one included personal items like writing samples, family photographs, and other ephemera meant to familiarize the public with the artist's life.[93] The exhibition subsequently traveled to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto,

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[88] "Trees, and price were in the sky," *The Province*, Dec. 7, 1966.

[89] Joan Lowndes, "A magic moment in the life of Emily Carr," *The Province*, July 15, 1966, 10.

[90] John Shaw, "Victoria's Emily Carr," *Victoria Daily Times*, Centennial Edition, June 29, 1967, 16.

[91] Blair Kirby, "A TV Musical on Emily Carr," *The Globe and Mail*, August 26, 1970. A later ad in *Time Magazine* (Canadian Edition, Oct. 1973) suggests that the musical aired a second time on October 25, 1973, at 9pm.

[92] Doris Shadbolt (1918-2003) was a powerful figure in the Vancouver art community by that time, having served as Director of Education, Chief Curator and eventually Associate Director at the Vancouver Art Gallery for twenty-five years beginning in 1950. Besides the Emily Carr exhibitions, she organized a number of other important shows there around that time including *Arts of the Raven* (1967), *New York 13* (1969), and *Sculpture of the Inuit* (1969). She published numerous articles and books on artists and art movements and received the prestigious Order Of Canada prize in 1976. She was also married to the successful abstract painter Jack Shadbolt, who has himself been lionized as one of British Columbia's greatest post World War II artists.

[93] Previous exhibitions included *Emily Carr: Her Paintings and Sketches*, which opened in 1945 at the Art Gallery of Toronto (later named Art Gallery of Ontario) in collaboration with the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. It then traveled to the Art Association of Montreal (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

and closed in London (U.K.) at the Commonwealth Institute in 1972. The exhibition was

widely covered by local and national newspapers, the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation, magazines and other media. In a Vancouver newspaper review titled "The

Great Emily Carr," *The Province* newspaper reporter Richard Simmons called this show

"one of the most important Canadian art exhibitions of 1971."[94] Only three months prior

to this review, on Feb 12th, Carr's famous painting *Big Raven* (a later version of her 1928

The Raven discussed above) had been immortalized as a national postage stamp by

Canada Post. By 1971 she was being described as "the greatest painter in British

Columbia's history,"[95] a fact attested to by the mountainous volumes of books, press

clippings, magazine reviews and other materials that can be found on the subject of

Carr's life and work at the Vancouver Art Gallery and National Gallery archives.

As clearly noted above, Carr and her work was often highlighted at moments of

national pride as in the centenary of Canada's confederation (1967) and the centenary of

British Columbia's later joining of the confederation (1971). Carr's persona and imagery

therefore suggested themselves as exemplars of a quintessentially modern "Canadianess."

Even in the contemporary newspaper articles, one can find many references to her

symbolic status as a national icon. Consider this exchange between Richard Simmons

(reporter) and Doris Shadbolt (curator) on the Centennial Exhibition of 1971:

> Simmons: How do we resolve the question of a regional artist creating a
> national image?
>
> Shadbolt: For instance, the post office in Ottawa recently issued a stamp
> that is a reproduction of one of her most powerful paintings Big Raven. It
> combines the whole feeling of lush growth with the great totemic form. . .
> . This contributes to a West Coast identity. Though few people may know

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[94] Richard Simmons, "The Great Emily Carr," *The Province*, May 14, 1971, 3-5.
[95] Ibid., 3.

it relates to painting, it is unmistakably West Coast. Emily Carr and B.C. are indivisible. And we are part of Canada.[96] (Figure 1.6)

Carr's work has been dominated by the idea of "Carr as Organic Artist," as Bruce Braun titles it in his book about nature, culture and power in British Columbia, *The Intemperate Rainforest*.[97] What Braun means is the longstanding notion of Carr as an organic conduit for the depiction of a geographical specificity in her landscape paintings, and the regular description of her artistic vision as one born by and out of the geography she lived in; a vision unmediated by outside influences (i.e. European, or even Canadian artists or art training). This is untrue, as Braun points out, and assumes she was not influenced by the richly artistic, but non-Anglophone cultures of the aboriginal communities she frequently visited. However from the 1930s until the last decade or so, critics and curators have been consistent in their framing of Carr as an intuitive artist searching for "primal energies"[98] whose expressive drive was a direct response to her spiritual experience in and of nature. While not the first to do so, then Vancouver Art Gallery curator and director Doris Shadbolt (a powerful figure in the Vancouver art scene for many decades, and not insignificantly, an advisor on Jeff Wall's masters thesis), who wrote a number of articles and books on the artist, has done much to promote this view. Consider this excerpt from the catalog accompanying a 1971 exhibition celebrating the centennial anniversary of Carr's birth:

> The popular view which sees her as simply the west coast painter of Indian subjects and rain forests is, though incomplete, justified. She could never be an international figure in the sense of being consciously at home in the exchange of ideas and activities current in art's mainstream. . . .she

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[96] Ibid., 3-4. Note also that at this time there is also some ambivalence about how an artist so associated with a particular region can also come to represent national consciousness.

[97] Bruce Braun, "BC Seeing / Seeing BC" in *The Intemperate Rainforest* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 162.

[98] Doris Shadbolt, *Emily Carr: A Centennial Exhibition* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1971), 3-4.

> remained a non-intellectual who responded primarily to the spirit of things and people and had to learn intuitively.[99]

Thus, perhaps without meaning to, Shadbolt's attempt to lionize Carr as a West Coast artist who is intuitively inspired by her environment also works to explain why Shadbolt believes Carr could never enter the international world of avant-garde artists. This depiction is largely subjective on Shadbolt's part as Carr's frequent travels and documented networking with important American, Canadian and European modern artists suggests that she partook in the exchange of ideas circulating amongst the international avant-garde movement of modern artists. Furthermore, the deep ruminations evident in Carr's journals regarding the form, meaning and symbolism of the modern art she was exposed to suggests that she was by no means an artist who only responded intuitively to her subjects.

These comments however must also be taken in context; Shadbolt was preparing this exhibition and catalog text before and during the same time that an international network of conceptual artists was gathering in Vancouver to participate in an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery guest-curated by well known American critic and curator Lucy Lippard.[100] *Emily Carr: A Centennial Exhibition*, which opened in May 1971 would have been in the advanced stages of development in 1970, the year Lippard's exhibition *955,000* opened at the same institution. In comparison to the mostly-male conceptual artists and minimalists featured in Lippard's huge exhibition, Carr would indeed have seemed "intuitive" and out of the mainstream. This historical timing is important because the Centennial exhibition of Carr's work, described in a local newspaper as "the

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Shadbolt herself had organized an exhibition of New York artists in 1969 titled *New York 13*: See note 92, page 47.

ultimate serious treatment of an artist,"[101] held at the most powerful art institution in

Western Canada, would affect how the young artists of the time (Jeff Wall was 24 in

1970) would view her work, the regional landscape she pictured, and of course their own

work in relation to both.

Shadbolt consistently characterized Carr as a romantic and eccentric outsider,

driven to create art out of some primordial need. This is evident in one noteworthy article

she wrote for *artscanada*:

> Yet she was neither a born painter nor writer. She was a person with a
> need more driving than most of her contemporaries in Victoria to find
> meaning in existence, and her art was, so to speak, the painful by-product
> of that search. She lived the life of an artist to the outer limits of
> possibility permitted to her cultural inheritance and her personal
> endowment—romantically, fully, passionately. This, coupled with her
> achievement in painting and literature, lifted her into the realm of legend
> as well.[102]

Why Shadbolt feels the need to characterize Carr as one who was not a born painter or

writer suggests that Shadbolt was also a woman of her time and not inclined to view a

woman painter as an innate genius. I find this qualifier (Carr as neither born artist or

writer) particularly puzzling since in so many other instances she is described by

Shadbolt and others as intuitive, somewhat anti-intellectual, and naturally in tune with the

wilderness. The qualifier suggests that even in 1971, Shadbolt felt the need to rationalize

the achievement of a woman artist. Thus Carr's success and legendary status is explained

as the result of her perseverance and hard work, but not in terms of her talent. Texts like

those written by Shadbolt would also confirm the notion that Carr was locked into a kind

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[101] Joan Lowndes quoting Doris Shadbolt, "Emily Carr honored," *Province*, December, 24, 1965. This also
provides evidence that the exhibition was planned at least six years in advance of its eventual display.
[102] Doris Shadbolt, "Emily Carr: Legend and Reality," *artscanada* no. 156/157 (June/July, 1971): 20. It is
important to note that this passage concludes a feature article Shadbolt wrote for the major Canadian art
magazine of the time, so would have reached a large national audience.

of regional pictorialism, that while important historically, did not have wider international significance because of its *regional specificity*. Regardless, these articles and explanations of Carr and her work were mainstream, prevalent in major art magazines, television and newspapers, and would certainly have been read and absorbed by a whole generation of young artists who were coming to maturity in the sixties and seventies.

In fact, it is important to note that Carr's reputation reached its critical mass between 1966 and 1971, the same period of time that the young Iain Baxter, Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace would begin their experiments picturing the defeatured landscape. If Carr represented the quintessential West Coast artist, and Wall and his peers were making conceptual artworks that also referenced Vancouver, what or who were they? After Wall had achieved international success two decades later, he would specifically refer to Carr and the West Coast expressionist painting associated with her, as the tradition of "hegemonic inner landscape" that he and his peers had reacted so vehemently against, a subject I turn to next.

Commonwealth Modernism, Homeland and the Home Culture Concept

Shadbolt's characterization of Carr as a romantic, intuitive and passionate artist symbolic of British Columbia was a prevailing notion about Carr and her life, and was a consistent subtext to most monographs, reviews and articles that have appeared since her death. Only recently, over the last decade, have scholars such as Robert Linsley, Bruce Braun, Gerta Moray, and Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall begun to unpack Carr's complex

political motivations for her subjects.[103] Linsley, whose own critical writing has spanned

several decades and who is a peer of Jeff Wall's, has most recently articulated his belief

that his earlier critique of Carr's work as utopian expressionism was incomplete, because

it was based on a polarizing dialectic:

> The critical view holds that in a society that is in fact based on ruthless
> consumption of natural resources, such unity [the spiritual union with
> nature] can be nothing but a fantasy, and hence an ideological dream of
> reconciliation between the economic order and nature. Yet the strict
> polarization of these two positions shows the weakness of each. Clearly
> the socially produced alienation of the individual cannot be overcome
> through the contemplation of nature, but such contemplation may provide
> a culture with the image of another less domineering relationship to the
> world.[104]

As such, he now believes there is some middle ground, in which artists regardless of style

or subject matter can and do express varying degrees of political engagement with their

world, and need to be judged by their stance towards history in their own time and place,

not stereotyped by genre. Still, Linsley's self critique vis-à-vis a new assessment of

Carr's work is recent, and it was the earlier judgments of Carr as a utopian painter of

nature that have dominated public writing since her death. When Jeff Wall and his peers

began to develop their "counter-tradition" to an earlier landscape painting tradition, it

was this non-political evaluation of Emily Carr that they were responding to.[105] They

accepted her as a kind of West Coast Group of Seven member, but with some important

differences: namely her female-ness, her personal eccentricities, and her emotional

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[103] Besides Linsley's "Landscapes in Motion," See Gerta Moray's *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall, *Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo Places of Their Own*; and Bruce Braun, "BC Seeing / Seeing BC."

[104] Robert Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion," 91.

[105] This also indicates their tendency to prioritize the political over other forms of artistic engagement and to see the political as mutually exclusive from the spiritual or formal.

connection to native aboriginal cultures, which they assumed corresponded to her own

self-image as an outsider. Wall criticized the work's inability to address the material

realities of British Columbia's timber, ore and fishing industries, a critique shared by

others of Wall's generation, as illustrated by Robert Linsley's above-mentioned quote.

Thus, for Wall at least, Emily Carr came to negatively represent a significant history

about British Columbian art; painting's role in mystifying the modern forces of industrial

capitalization through the utopian embrace and propagandistic depiction of images of

pure uncultivated landscape—wilderness.

For Wall, Emily Carr is a significant fact of regional history. He has discussed her

work in several contexts in an effort to historicize his own work and that of his peers.

Explaining the significance of Emily Carr in the history of modern art in British

Columbia at a lecture in Rotterdam in 1991, he stressed the importance of her art as a

form of modernist expression that is based in a uprooted subjective experience - both

psychological and national – one related primarily to the landscape that contains it:

> She wrote about this place [the Victoria boarding home she operated and
> lived in] in her book 'The House of All Sorts.' I have always thought that,
> this dominant home-culture concept. As an artist, she also rebelled and
> experimented with these things, never getting outside of them but never
> accepting them, nor reconciling herself to them either. Her work is
> therefore the most intricate reflection of the revolutions and mutations of
> Imperial Romanticism and, since we contemporary Canadians have also
> not gotten outside of those traditions, her work's problematics remain
> closely linked to ours.[106]

This quote introduces a number of theoretical tensions that become interesting

when applied to the development of a returning avant-garde around 1968. Firstly, Wall's

quote reveals that as late as 1991 he believed that getting outside of the colonial traditions

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[106] Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art…," 68.

of "Imperial Romanticism," meant either to reconcile oneself to the "home-culture concept" or to leave it completely. The home-culture concept refers both to Carr's house (which she owned and out of economic necessity rented rooms to strangers), and her home country. The latter also referring to the British Colonial home country that was undergoing a constant and rapid negotiation of identity as immigrants moved in and negotiated space occupied by first nations peoples and earlier European immigrants. The revolutions and mutations Wall refers to are also a result of the social contests of space that accompanied the developing economies of the original colonies of the British Commonwealth, the birth and growth of which depended on the migrations, settlement and displacements of immigrant and indigenous populations over centuries. As shown, this social and political negotiation of space was symbolized implicitly and explicitly in landscape imagery and depictions of wilderness that served as a hub for Canadians' projected identifications with an imagined homeland they could identify with as new immigrants.

Because Wall believes modern expression is intrinsically tied to social alienation, the concept of homeland or home-culture appears problematic because he sees this as a threat to critical objectivity. He has made several comments suggesting that to be at home in Vancouver is to risk feeling too comfortable in one's autobiography and sense of place, thereby risking the ability to understand objectively the generalities of modern life.[107] An exchange between Jean-François Chevrier and Jeff Wall from 1998 makes this clear. Responding to Chevrier's question regarding whether or not Wall's choice of his "hometown"—Vancouver—as the setting for many of his large Cibrachromes in the

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[107] I would suggest that this view likely extends to the comfort Carr may have felt in British Columbia's forests, her home-away-from home.

1980s and 1990s was a deliberate choice, and whether or not this choice "shrinks the scale of the city to domesticity, to the intimacy of the family," Wall reacted strongly against the idea:

> I've always tried to avoid this idea. . . . In English, the term "hometown," or even "birthplace," tends to have a kind of pastoral quality, a kind of idealized sense of "where one comes from." . . . the hometown is a happy, harmonious sort of utopia. . . . I think there are philosophical and aesthetic problems with that kind of affection for one's birthplace. I've always had the feeling that if you pay great attention to your origins you begin to fall into something that's not good for picture-making—which is thinking of your place and people in that place as a kind of "chosen people" . . . . I'm not interested in "chosen people" . . . I'm more intrigued by the sense of the common . . . the idea of the unspecial people, the unchosen people.[108]

Chevrier here emphasizes an important aspect of Wall's theorizing of the tradition of painting that he has worked hard to contradict or counter in his own work; the historical separation of home-space and public-space that developed in modern bourgeoisie society.[109] This of course is no accident since Wall's return to pictorialism was modeled on his historical appreciation of the "painter(s) of modern life." In his 1984 essay "Unity and Fragmentation in Manet," Wall argued that Manet's significance lay in his works' challenge to the academic and Salon-governed concept of the picture and its unity; a unity relying on the mechanistic organization of bodies in perspectival space and the humane relationship between the action of an artist's hand and the body of her/his subject. Manet's historical challenge simultaneously grew out of and depicted the disintegration of the body politic in space, a social process of disintegration that Wall, following Marx, argues is a result of the new division of labor and the influx of machines

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[108] Jeff Wall, "At Home and Elsewhere: A Dialogue in Brussels Between Jeff Wall and Jean-François Chevrier," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 271-272.
[109] Obviously the separation of domestic and public space did not arise for the first time in bourgeois society, and has existed in different times and places (with differing degrees of separation) dating back to ancient cultures.

on urban life: "The meaning and value of painting's mechanized interior is transformed in the modernization process."[110] In the 1860s, Manet was still influenced by academic perspectival space, but the disunity and fragmentation of the body politic and the city started to infiltrate his paintings of *la vie moderne*. "Perspective for Manet cannot be abolished or transcended without abolishing the classical concept of the picture altogether and existing outside the law."[111] Wall argues that Manet's small fragmentations of form (sometimes called color patches) and subject make the "illegitimate or ersatz monumentalizations" that constitute a taboo of the social typology of pictures.[112] In that a taboo only exists negatively—it must react against something—for Wall, Manet's monumentalization is ultimately a kind of mortuary marker for the dead concept of the classic picture, epitomized by the Salon that Manet both depends on and disavows as now socially ineffectual. Thus from a early point in his career, Wall noticed and was concerned with the social changes brought to city life through the forces of modernity, and the ways that these changes are reflected in and constitute the cultural works of a society. Furthermore, the division of labor and the fragmentation of both pictorial subject and body politic are inextricably tied to spatial divisions; primarily the interiority of the unity of a picture vs. the exteriority of the social body.

Returning to the Chevrier-Wall interview, we can see how Wall's concerns over pictorial space (and picture-making) as a negative reflection of alienating social dynamics might lead to his further theorizing about how an artist's psychological comfort in a specific physical space (like one's home, or a particular city) might lead to an inability

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[110] Jeff Wall, "Unity and Fragmentation in Manet," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 80.
[111] Ibid., 81.
[112] Ibid., 77.

to recognize the suffering or alienation of others. This is a core value of the avant-garde project as he sees it from a Marxist point of view. However, as has already been intimated earlier by Robert Linsley's self-criticism regarding the dangers of all-inclusive polarizing dialectics, such theoretical stances can be too limiting.

If we consider the home-culture concept through an alternative analysis of the painter(s) of modern life, a different kind of spatial dynamic emerges. Wall's suggestion that paying too much attention to one's origins, or birthplace, is dangerous because it can dilute one's ability to recognize "common" man, echoes Baudelaire's assertion that the painter of modern life (in the guise of Constantin Guys) be a "man of the world" and a "spiritual citizen of the universe."[113] This in turn, reminds us of Griselda Pollock's famous essay from 1988, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in which she rather brilliantly argues through an analysis of the spatial compositions in Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot's paintings (comparing them to those of their male peers) that the city spaces of *la vie moderne* were in fact highly gendered, and reflected widespread transformations of public life that segregated gentle ladies to domestic spaces while freeing the city to the exploration and consumption of many classes of men.[114] Baudelaire's *flâneur* takes on a key role in Pollock's argument because he embodies the author's ideal artist. According to Baudelaire, for the *flâneur* it is,

> an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement. . . . To be away from home and yet feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world and to be the centre of the world and yet remain hidden from the world. . . . The lover of life makes the whole world his family.[115]

[113] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 7.

[114] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," *Vision & Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

[115] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 30.

In Pollock's account, Baudelaire's text "is structured by an opposition between home, the inside domain of the known and the constrained personality and the outside, the space of freedom, where there is liberty to look without being watched."[116] Sight and site are key components of both Baudelaire and Pollock's texts but from different ideological and historical points of view. The *flâneur* has the power of sight, which he fixes on the objects of an increasingly spectacular city. The woman is one such object: "she is divinity, a star, . . . a glittering conglomeration of all the graces of nature. . . . an idol . . . dazzling and bewitching.[117] In "Women and Prostitutes," section XII of *The Painter of Modern Life,* the flâneur makes his way through the city encountering a variety of women in different kinds of spaces; aristocratic women in theater boxes, wives of "elegant families" in public gardens, dancers in the "lowlier theatrical world," mistresses attending to their men in a café, and the "wanton" courtesan inside the casino.[118] Pollock describes this as a tour of the "erotic territories of modernism"; a city defined not only by class division but also by gender division. Baudelaire's flâneur "maps a representation of Paris as a city of women. . . . [constructing] a sexualized journey which can be correlated with impressionist practice."[119] Thus the space of the modern city is intimately tied to the social power of those who have the freedom to go certain places and why.

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[116] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," 71. It should be noted that for Baudelaire the city did provide a space free from being watched, as he spent much of his adult life in confrontations with his family who did not approve of his lifestyle and choices. Amongst other things, in 1844 his mother and stepfather were able to get the inheritance he received from his biological father managed by a court-appointed legal guardian after Baudelaire spent half of it in two years. In this sense, the domestic sphere must have indeed been perceived as constrictive by him.

[117] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 30; also quoted in Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," 71.

[118] Ibid., 34-38; also quoted in Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," 72.

[119] Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," 73.

Getting back to Jeff Wall's comments about the dangers of identifying too strongly with "homeland," a viable case can be made that he has adopted or internalized the notion that within modernity an artist's critical objectivity and intellectual freedom can best be exercised through an exploration of public space. It has so far remained unanalyzed by other scholars or critics of Wall's work how the consequent rejection of homeland might be theoretically associated with an implicit desire to master public and private space vis-à-vis a rejection of what was in earlier modern culture symbolically at least, feminine space: the home front.

Interestingly, the rejection of homeland, or home-culture, can also be theorized as constituting a gendered division of space through considering Jeff Wall's use of the term Commonwealth Modernism in his lectures about British Columbian art history:

> Emily Carr's work is generally seen as a kind of nature lyricism . . . rooted in British Romanticism. . . . This almost pantheistic nature romanticism is deeply connected to something else – a kind of adventurism. The Canadian State has, as you know, its origins in the great Western adventure of British colonialism. . . .This *Imperial Romanticism* mutates through the 20th century to the point where you might be able to call it a kind of *Commonwealth Romanticism*, one which continues [old overt colonial attitudes] in a context of the new national aspirations of former colonies. . . It continues the idea of domestication of the frontier. [original italics][120]

In the first place, by using the phrase "domesticating the frontier," Wall is acknowledging a power dynamic between those who control space and those that do not; colonizers vs. colonized, or imperial power vs. subjugated peoples. By using the term domesticating in the context of colonialism, he also implies that political power is flowing from domestic space to public space. The fact that the two longest-reigning monarchs of the British Commonwealth in the modern industrial era have been two

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[120] Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art…," 68.

Queens; Queen Victoria who ruled from 1837-1901, and Queen Elizabeth II who has ruled since 1952, also implies that females are at the center of this particular power dynamic. Wall acknowledges this symbolism of British Royalty:

> The idea of the domestication of the frontier . . . . seems to have a distinct character, one which we might call *Victorian*. This is exemplified by the public image of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as a cosily domestic couple, an image which is carried on with great sophistication by the Royal Family today. The idea has been that British culture would domesticate the wilderness and thereby universalize a British, Victorian concept of home and home culture.[121]

As stated earlier, Jeff Wall explicitly associates the "home-culture" concept and its relationship to British colonial interests with Carr because so much of her work focused on images of wilderness or of a "dying" native culture. For others, Carr's work could be construed as a deeply *ambivalent* response to the political goals and religious morays of Victorian society. She grew up in a strict Presbyterian and Anglican family, and the subjects of her artwork can also been read as one of the few available outlets for a rebellious, ambitious, and comparatively eccentric young woman of the early twentieth century British culture:

> Where Victoria symbolized British civilization, Emily embraced the wilderness; where Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen esteemed well-manicured English gardens, she sought solace in the primeval forest; where the church ladies of Victoria sponsored Christian missions among the Indians of Vancouver Island, Emily would find enlightenment and inspiration in Indian religious art —totem poles, community houses, masks, the big canoes. . . .[122]

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[121] Ibid.

[122] James Elgin Reed, "Emily Carr in God's Country 1871-1945," *Pacific Northwest Renaissance: Religion and Cultural Modernism in an Unfinished Landscape*, accessed online on July 5, 2009: www.northwest-renaissance.us. This book has not been published yet.

But for Wall, Carr's adventurism is primarily associated with the colonialism of British interests in the new world. I read Wall's many comments about Carr to mean that he sees her as an historical figure trapped both within her culture and outside of it. This is evident by his calling attention to her "isolation," a term I interpret as describing both the distance of the province from the cultural capitals of Eastern Canada and Europe as well as her social isolation as an unmarried woman artist.[123] The implication is that she is unable to distance herself from her own Christian English upbringing, while she is also unable to conform to that norm of feminine social behavior. As such it seems that Wall sees her as incapable of objectively representing the "common" or the "unchosen" people of modern Victorian society. Instead her images of natives' degraded villages and artifacts serve as reminders of the downfall of older cultures and the rise of British interests, while her depictions of uncultivated or uncut rainforests testify to the greatness of nature, and not its industrial exploitation. This signals an important aspect of Wall's theory about contemporary art in the region. He is concerned with addressing the political structures that govern the development and management of urban space, and the effect such structures have on individual subjects. It is from this avenue of critical questioning that the concept of the defeatured landscape develops, a subject I address in chapter two. After all what is a defeatured landscape if it is not a common and unchosen landscape? However, first it is important to address how Jeff Wall may have come to these viewpoints on Carr, landscape painting, and critical objectivity.

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[123] See note 22 on page 21 for the Jeff Wall quote characterizing Emily Carr as "isolated."

Jeff Wall's Origins and "Notion of Context"

In the discourse of avant-garde art it is important to ask what has shaped Wall's particular understanding of the political significance of the control of spatial structures. Significant clues can be gleaned from his 1970 Master's Thesis *Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context*.[124] Here Wall reveals a sophisticated understanding of how artistic avant-gardes like the Berlin and Paris Dada movements form and operate, along with a keen awareness of their relative strengths and weaknesses as markers of both social alienation and manifestations of ideology. The thesis makes it clear that Wall's influences stem from Marxist and Hegelian philosophy, as his use of an opening quote taken from Marx's *The German Ideology* makes clear:

> The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the dominant <u>material</u> force in society is at the same time its dominant <u>intellectual</u> force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production. . . . (original underlining)[125]

So from the opening sentence we are reminded that Wall is concerned with the correspondence between intellectual and material power. Material power is generally represented in Wall's writing (as we have seen) and his artwork (as we will see shortly) as the space of the city; its structures, its symbolic and actual representations, and the social dynamics of the people who live in it. In the second paragraph of the thesis Wall claims that he is motivated by a desire to prove that art-making in the 20th century is defined by a

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[124] Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context" (Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970).

[125] Marx quoted in Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context," ii. Also found in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 172. Wall continues to reference Marx through his subsequent published works. For examples of this see: Jeff Wall, "The Site of Culture Contradictions, Totality and the Avant-garde," *Vanguard* 12 , no. 4 (1983): 18-19; "The Interiorized Academy, Interview with Jean François Chevrier," *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 104; amongst others.

critical awareness of itself as a product of integrated social processes and its own specific

historical context. Following this, he suggests that art movements need to define

themselves negatively in relation to what has come before. This leads him to say that "art

is an expression of all that does not exist, all that is denied."[126]

As noted above, Wall's quoting of Marx's *The German Ideology* makes clear that

art, like language, is a tool of communication used to assert the intellectual dominance

(and therefore material dominance) of the bourgeois class. He then expands on this to

write that art is in a state of "tension with language" at the same time that it is "deprived

of social necessity."[127] In his view, language represents the ultimate structural system

through which a society is symbolically represented, a function that has been mystified

somewhat by the widespread belief that society and language evolved together. The

ideological structure of language became a central concern for the early conceptual

artworks produced in Vancouver by Wall and his peers, as it was for artists in New York,

Los Angeles, Toronto and other cities. So, following Marx's argument that human

beings are unique in their ability to create their world, Wall surmises that man also must

therefore create his language, and thus society exists a priori to language.

In Wall's accounting, the Berlin Dada is posited as the first twentieth-century

avant-garde group to move beyond simply rejecting society to recognizing that society

structures what art can be made at any given historical moment, and therefore a protest

against society is also a protest against art. Thus, for Wall, the Berlin Dada group was

the first to become explicitly political, a point he makes by contrasting their motivations

with the motivations of the French and Swiss Dada movements. He argues that the latter

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[126] Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context,", 3.
[127] Ibid., ii.

were both influenced too heavily by the recent history of French avant-garde poetry in

which poets like Lautréamont and Rimbaud were lauded for their "desperate negation"

and complete public denial of society, and the related influence of psychoanalysis on

visual artists who attempted to reject society by escaping into a counter reality of the

unconscious. These artists did not find anything to reject in the idea of art itself, and

instead occupied themselves with the development of new artistic expressions that would

shock the bourgeoisie as anti-establishment declarations. Wall calls these artistic

rejections of society before World War I "primitive," that is, not yet having "attained a

degree of resolution and delineation which would make possible a structured progression

out of the immediate act of negation."[128] Here he quotes Richard Huelsenbeck's

assessment of the Zurich group associated with the Cabaret Voltaire found in *En Avant

Dada*:

> None of us suspected what Dada might become, for none of us understood
> enough about the times to free ourselves from traditional views and form a
> conception of art as a moral and social phenomenon. Art just was — there
> were artists and bourgeois. You had to love one and hate the other.[129]

Within Dada's pre-war and post-war transitional process of critical self awareness,

Wall highlights the significance of the Berlin group's gradual rejection of myth as a

central component of the process. In the context of the ongoing military defeats,

blockades and casualties suffered during the war by the German people, the idea of art

itself became much more absurd to Dadaists who had grown comfortable in the neutral

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[128] Ibid., 6.

[129] Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, Paul Steegeman trans.
(Hannover: Verlag, 1920) quoted in ibid., 11. Translated as "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism," and
also found in Robert Motherwell ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: an Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1989), 27.

country of Switzerland where they had relocated. Consider this memory of Richard

Huelsenbeck upon his returning to Germany from Zurich in 1917:

> In 1917 the Germans were beginning to give a great deal of thought to
> their souls. This was only a natural defense on the part of a society that
> had been harassed, milked dry, and driven to breaking point. This was the
> time when expressionism began to enjoy a vogue, since its whole attitude
> fell in with the retreat and weariness of the German spirit. It was only
> natural that the Germans should have lost their enthusiasm for reality, to
> which before the war they had sung hymns of praise, . . . and which had
> now cost them over a million dead, while the blockade was strangling
> their children and grandchildren.[130]

The growing turn inwards to an idealized notion of German spirit during a time of

political turmoil is denounced by both Huelsenbeck in 1920 (first publication of *En Avant

Dada*) and Jeff Wall in 1970, who, I would argue, sees a parallel development in the

same historical period in Canada. For both men, Expressionism embodies what Jeff Wall

calls the "anathema of dialectical process" because of what is perceived as the painters'

"escape into the myth of 'inner reality'."[131] The German Expressionists were pejoratively

characterized by Huelsenbeck as promising the heavens to the German people by

ignoring the action on the streets, "like those famous medical quacks who promise to 'fix

everything up', looking heavenward like the gentle Muse. . . . "[132] Blind faith in spirit, or

what Wall would later characterize as "indwelling of spirit" in reference to early

twentieth-century Canadian landscape painting, is nothing more that an escape into either

religion or pure imagination. Wall seems to believe that in both cases the artist is

accepting a break between the inner world of psychology and the external world of

politics, an acceptance which prevents him/her from realizing the dialectical context of

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[130] Richard Huelsenbeck, "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism," 39.

[131] Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context," 13.

[132] Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada*, quoted in ibid., 13.

his/her own point in history and ability to shape that history; the fact that individual actions affect the whole society as it is constituted through time. In an 1996 interview with Arielle Pélenc on the subject of what constitutes an artistic transgression, Wall would suggest that the making of laws is perhaps more significant than the breaking of laws:

> It is no longer necessary to enact transgressions in order to make significant works of art, even modernist art. . . .the "culture of transgressions" involves a romantic sort of binarism. Law exists, and the soul is crushed by it. To obey the law is to live in bad faith. . . . But modern societies are constitutional; they have written, deliberately, their own foundations, and are continually rewriting them. Maybe . . . it is the writing of laws, and not the breaking of them, that is the most significant and characteristic act in modernity.[133]

This quote, and Wall's study on Dada, suggests that he believes that modern art was primarily defined by its transgressions against society, but in the late-twentieth century, in the new historical context of the post-industrial world, artists can better serve society by recognizing their position as insiders – as cultural producers that have the power through representation (in a highly visual culture after all) to be constitutive of new laws as well. In this new context the idea of the avant-garde as only transgressive is yet just another mythology that works to keep people in their place. On the face of it, this realization seems similar to Robert Linsley's recent critique that the earlier assessments of Emily Carr's work as simple mythological nature-paintings were based on a polarization that pitted artists' political motivations against artists search for spirit in a dialectic that could not comprehend a middle ground. This points to a contradiction in Wall's published

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[133] Arielle Pélenc and Jeff Wall, "Arielle Pélenc in Correspondence with Jeff Wall," *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 16.

accounts of Emily Carr's work, because he does not seem publicly to credit her imagery

with affecting any kind of shift in public consciousness. This is of course not true, as

Carr's name and imagery live on as the face of British Columbian art and geography

through street banners, postcards, books, t-shirts, and the name of the only major art

school in Vancouver (The Emily Carr University of Art and Design), amongst other

places. In any case it is clear that Jeff Wall's early study of Dada and his close reading of

Huelsenbeck's reflections on his role in the Dada movement helped shape his ideas about

what constitutes an important avant-garde practice that is self-consciously aware of its

own historical moment and effective in changing it through dialectical thinking and

practice.

Historically, Wall regards artists' manifestos as the primary "polemical tool . . . in

a dialectical situation of conflict."[134] He repeatedly uses the world struggle to articulate

the effort of artists to oppose already existing definitions of art with new critical

definitions of what art is or can be. He is careful to distinguish between the manifesto and

the artwork; the manifesto is not the artwork, but it only emerges at the point of

contestation between old and new definitions of art. The abstract nature of art renders it a

site of divergent and diverse possibilities of meanings, some of which carry critical

functions, some of which do not: "the work of art . . . can reconcile opposites, which, on

the immediate contextual level, cannot be reconciled; this occurs because the work takes

the above mentioned 'field of conflict' as its subject matter."[135] The idea of a 'field of

conflict' is for Wall informed by Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Joseph Kosuth's

writings about art as an analytic proposition. In both of these cases, art's subject matter

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[134] Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context," 33.
[135] Ibid., 34.

becomes art's historical context, which is simultaneously the "resume of the metaphorical, analogical, and <u>material</u> process of thought and meaning-application."[136] Therefore, the subject matter of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914), or Kosuth's *Three Chairs* (1965) is the presence of the artist's consciousness about the context of art's meaning at that time, but *it is also an abstraction that is open to other meanings*.

Unlike the work of art, a manifesto, as a written document, cannot be separated from the specific historical context of its making. Wall describes it as "<u>all dialectic, all specific content</u>," and "all conflict, all problem, all solution."[137] As such, it works collaboratively with the art object to reveal the different ways human consciousness manifests itself through cultural production. This is a negative operation because as a declaration of how a new understanding of art might be imagined, a manifesto helps establish *a priori* assumptions about what art is, and by default helps expose the historical context of art-making (i.e. reveals mythology). This is best summed up by a subheading in the contents of Wall's thesis: "The nature of art is dialectical. The center of art is process, revealed through theory which describes context."[138] Jeff Wall has consistently tested this view as an artist and in his theory, as he produces photographs, essays and interviews that articulate the historical context for his work.

And yet, within the bulk of his writing, Wall appears to me to have a tendency to divide artists into two camps: those whom appear to be dialectical thinkers and affect political change through an engagement with the material realities of modern life, and those who maintain the status quo through the creation of artworks that reify prevalent

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[136] Ibid., 36.
[137] Ibid., 39.
[138] Ibid., iii.

social mythologies or represent a kind of escapist imagination.[139] Of these camps, I would

summarize the following facts about what I think Wall deems important in contemporary

(and historical) art:

    a) Dialectical thinking is facilitated through an engagement with the public
       spaces of modernity: the city.

    b) Theory and practice are integrated through the ideological significance of
       language and writing; writing about art strengthens the ideological
       significance of picture making.

    c) Art should be politically engaged with revealing the mythologies of reified
       ideology, in whatever form is relevant to any given age.

    d) Art should reveal "all that does not exist, all that is denied:" the "unchosen"
       people, the "unspecial" place, the everyday.[140]

    e) Art must remain vigilantly self-conscious of itself as an ideological construct.
       This means accepting that it is and was always a part of bourgeois culture, and
       that the idea that art itself was never anti-establishment was not usually self-
       critical enough.

As we have already seen, Wall has assigned Emily Carr a significant role in

British Columbian art history as an "originary figure" in West Coast Expressionism, and

one that I would argue he assigns to the non-dialectical grouping of artists suggested

above. In a long essay on Vancouver artist Ken Lum's work in 1991, Wall describes

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[139] In general in his writing Wall is careful not to disparage other contemporary artists. Instead his preferences can be understood through his privileging of dialectical thinking and awareness of historical context as important aspects of other artists' work, and his mentioning of other artists at all, whom when mentioned usually support his interests. Ian Wallace, and Dan Graham are two artists Wall consistently refers to in this way.

[140] For Wall's use of the terms "unchosen" and "unspecial" see note 108, page 56.

Vancouver art around 1970s as having been divided into those "island" artists who celebrate "an evocation of a hippy ethos made possible by the availability of retreats on coastal islands" and those who prefer "to concentrate on the conflict between the city and its natural setting."[141] The idea of artists' retreats as escapist follows Huelsenbeck's suggestion that "The Dadaist should have nothing but contempt for those who have made a Tusculum of the "spirit," a refuge for their own weaknesses."[142] If Tusculum was the place of leisure that wealthy Romans retreated to escape the political fray of Rome, the Coastal Islands were where uncritical artists retreated to in order to escape the pressures of modern industry and the ramifications of such industry on nature. Jeff Wall has consistently articulated his work as a "counter-tradition" to this legacy of Emily Carr's work, one that he sees as emphasizing "chosen people," "homeland", or a specific geographical location.

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[141] Jeff Wall, "Four Essays on Ken Lum," *Ken Lum* (Rotterdam and Winnipeg: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art and Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 39. Scott Watson (a prolific writer and curator in Vancouver) also noticed this distinction of Wall's as significant and commented on its relationship to the classic question of how socially relevant art-for-art's sake is in modernist society:

> "[Some artists] re-engaged the historical problem of modernism and returned to the sanctuary of the autonomy of art. This distinction was given some authority by Jeff Wall who, in 1990, theorized . . . that art in Vancouver bifurcated at this time between "island" or "hippy" art and art that "prefers to concentrate on the conflict between the city and its natural setting."

See: Scott Watson, "Urban Renewal: Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos and Squats — Vancouver Art in the Sixties," Scott Watson, ed., *Intertidal : Vancouver Art and Artists* (Antwerp: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, 2005), 43.

[142] Tusculum was a fashionable retreat for wealthy Romans in the late Republic. Richard Huelsenbeck, "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism," 28.

Chapter 1 Figures

Figure 1.1   Emily Carr, *Tanoo, Queen Charlotte Islands*, 1913, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 170.8 cm., Image courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, PDP02145.

Figure 1.2   Emily Carr, *The Raven*, 1928-1929, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 45.7 cm., Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of Dr. Abraham and Mrs. Naomi Greenberg.

Figure 1.3   Lawren Harris, *Mountain Forms*, 1928, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 177.8 cm., Collection of Imperial Oil Limited. Image permission could not be secured at time of dissertation submission.

Figure 1.4   Emily Carr, *A Young Tree*, 1931, oil on canvas, 112.0 x 68.5 cm., Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust.

Figure 1.5   Emily Carr, *Guyasdoms D'Sonoqua*, c. 1930, Oil on canvas, 100.3 x 65.4 cm.; Gift from the Albert H. Robson Memorial Subscription Fund, 1942; Art Gallery of Ontario Acc. No 2705.

Figure 1.6   Canada Post stamp featuring Carr's work *The Raven* (1931) issued in 1971.

Chapter 2

**The Context and Theory of a "Defeatured Landscape" and
"Urban Wilderness"**

Jeff Wall may be viewed as the voice of a generation for a group of academically

trained artists in Vancouver who came to maturity in the 1960s, all of whom were

influenced by conceptual art and interested in picturing the urban landscape. His

authority has been a result of his ability to articulate clearly in writing, lectures and

interviews a compelling social and art-historical context for his own work and that of his

peers. Chapter one analyzed the intellectual and regional forces that shaped Wall's ideas

about what constitutes politically and aesthetically relevant art. By the 1990s it is clear

that Wall had sufficiently deconstructed these external forces, along with self-critically

reflecting on his own intellectual and artistic development, to be in the position of

describing the new "counter-tradition" that he had helped build in Vancouver a

generation earlier. It is probable that he had a remarkable platform for this because he had

achieved an unprecedented level of success in the international art market, one unheard of

for other Vancouver artists, and was traveling world-wide to exhibit and lecture

frequently. In 1990 he was asked to lecture in Rotterdam about Ken Lum's work (another

Vancouver artist), an opportunity that Wall used to describe the history of British

Columbian art and his and his peers' role in creating a new counter-tradition in their city

around 1978:

> In my essay in the catalogue for [Ken] Lum's show, I claimed that
> [Rodney Graham's] 'Illuminated Ravine,' along with Lum's furniture
> sculptures, first presented in 1978 or 1979, were the indicators of a new
> direction in the art discourse of Vancouver. . . . One could say that, at the
> moment in 1979, a new kind of literacy crystallized in overt opposition to
> the still-dominant traditions, that a counter-tradition, long in preparation,
> surfaced.[143]

This excerpt and his assertion that he did not make "hardly any earlier work" in

the1970s have helped scholars set the date of the "counter-tradition" in Vancouver to

1978 or 1979.[144] This date coincides with the year that Wall exhibited *Picture for Women*

and *Destroyed Room* for the first time. This historical timing neatly corresponds to a

resurgence in American and Canadian artists' interest in the narrative possibilities of

photography and the critical use of cinematography to critique late-twentieth century

regimes of vision and representation.[145]

In her dissertation *Cinematic Photography, Theatricality, Spectacle: the Art of*

Jeff Wall, Sharla Sava addresses the problem with this dating:

> According to Wall's lecture then, the decade prior to 1978 is not part of the
> counter-tradition; it is the formative period leading up to its emergence.
> This periodization is not inconsequential; it is significant because it leaves
> open the question of how photo-conceptualism, which dates back to the
> 1960s relates to Wall's idea of the 'counter-tradition.'[146]

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[143] See Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art," 80.

[144] For example, in a 1993 interview Wall responded to the following question by Anne-Marie Bonnet and Rainer Metzger, "Do you think that your work in the 80s has been more influenced by art history than your work in the 70s?" with "Well, there is hardly any earlier work, from the '70s." See: "A Democratic, a Bourgeois Tradition of Art: a Conversation with Jeff Wall by Anne-Marie Bonnet and Rainer Metzger," *Jeff Wall Selected Essays and Interviews*, 245.

[145] Cindy Sherman made her influential *Film Stills* between 1977 and 1980, for example.

[146] Sharla Sava, "Cinematic Photography, Theatricality, Spectacle: the Art of Jeff Wall" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2005), 59.

Sava's dissertation argues against the notion that a return to pictorial traditions in the 1970s signaled a rejection of 1960s experimentation, instead suggesting that a discourse "of theatricality . . . both pro and con, is a more productive means by which to understand the widespread return to narrative pictorialism which has occurred in contemporary art," and that such a discourse was already evident in the 1960s.[147] As such, she stresses the continuities of artistic practice across the different genres of the 1960s and 1970s. While her dissertation largely succeeds at this goal, it is nonetheless effectively limited to its subject; that is, an analysis of the emergence of an art historical discourse of theatricality as it relates to Jeff Wall's work in photography from his earliest creations. The discourse she draws upon was initiated by earlier studies of theatricality and spectacle in nineteenth-century modern painting, in particular TJ Clark's *The Painters of Modern Life: Manet and his Followers* (1984) and Michael Fried's *Manet's Modernism, or the Face of Painting in the 1860s (1996)*, and his earlier influential *Artforum* essay "Art and Objecthood" (1967).

I agree with Sava that there are in fact continuities between the photo-conceptualist art practices of the 1960s and the counter-tradition of the late 1970s. While Sava focuses on theatricality as a continuity between these historical moments, I focus on another continuity between these periods – that is the artists' internalization of public and private spatial divisions that can be theorized retrospectively as gendered. This chapter turns to this subject by considering the context of thought and practice that influenced Jeff Wall from the middle-to the late-1960s. In doing so, it is first necessary to discuss

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[147] Ibid., iii.

other artists with whom Wall found collegial friendship, and an affinity for their works that suggested connections to the content and problems Wall was attempting to address in his art and writing. Since the emphasis here is on the changing idea of wilderness, and how this concept might be theoretically linked to an implicit gendering of spaces, I turn to the defeatured landscape; the name since given to the kinds of photo-conceptual experimentations with landscape that Sava and others have addressed.[148]

In order to analyze the defeatured landscape properly, it is necessary to provide a historical accounting of what might be construed as the opposite – the featured landscape. In this context I am referring to the landscape art produced in British Columbia that Jeff Wall opposed because he saw it as a later manifestation of Emily Carr's lyricism and indwelling of spirit. Such new expressions of landscape were being practiced by a number of artists at the same time that the concept of an urban wilderness was being proposed as an alternative by Wall and his peers.

"Our Beautiful West Coast Thing"[149]

In the 1960s there was no shortage of artists preoccupied with what Jeff Wall called the "hippy ethos made possible by the availability of retreats on coastal islands [that denied the reality of local] hostility to nature and the need to dominate it which drives the resource industry in B.C."[150] Despite the distinctly pejorative tone of this

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[148] The origin of the term "defeatured landscape," and its users will be discussed throughout this chapter.

[149] This phrase comes from Gary Lee-Nova's article "Our Beautiful West Coast Thing," *artscanada* 156/157 (June/July 1971): 22-38.

[150] Jeff Wall, "Four Essays on Ken Lum," *Ken Lum* (Rotterdam: Witte de With; Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990), 39. This observation has also been made by Scott Watson in his essay "Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties," 43.

quote, many artists of Wall's peer group were still deeply attracted to the idea that British Columbia was a special place geographically and spiritually, and that a more authentic living experience distanced from the burdens of modern living could be found in its natural environment.

In her dissertation, "Borderlines of Poetry and Art: Vancouver, American Modernism and the Formation of the West Coast Avant-Garde, 1961-69," Lara Tomaszewska argues that the construction of a particular west coast identity, or "Pacific Nation" was established as early as 1961. Although the term "Pacific Nation" refers specifically to the literary journal *The Pacific Nation,* founded in 1967 by poet and Simon Fraser University professor Robin Blaser, Tomaszewska also uses the term more generally to describe a kind of mythological west coast nation that was being imagined in the minds of artists, beat poets, and American political dissidents living and traveling along the Pacific coast from Los Angeles to Vancouver.[151] Her account describes a history of exchange between poets beginning in 1956, with the appointment of Seattle-born poet Warren Tallman to the English department at the University of British Columbia. Tallman had been teaching at the University of California at Berkeley prior to his move to Vancouver. Once in Vancouver he was instrumental in bringing the ideas of a number of influential American avant-garde poets to the city by inviting them to participate in academic exchanges and by exposing his students to their work. Tomaszewska uses the following epigraph, written by Robin Blaser in *The Pacific Nation*, in her dissertation's first chapter to illustrate the coalescing desire amongst modern poets to form a new nation on the west coast of North America:

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[151] Lara Tomaszewska, "Borderlines of Poetry and Art: Vancouver, American Modernism and the formation of the West Coast Avant-Garde, 1961-69," (PhD Dissertation: University of British Columbia, 2007).

I wish to put together an imaginary nation. It is my belief that no other nation is possible, or rather, I believe that authors who count take responsibility for a map which is addressed to travelers of the earth, the world, and the spirit. Images of our cities must join our poetry.[152]

By 1971 this "ethos" was being articulated as a distinctive lifestyle characteristic of West Coast writers and artists. Where the spirit of the wilderness could be found more obviously in the forms and subject matter of the landscape paintings of Emily Carr, a younger generation influenced by new media, performance and conceptual art, as well as the general social context of the counter-culture, would define themselves as much by how they were living as what they were making. This artistic way of life was introduced to national readers in a complete *artscanada* issue dedicated to the subject, titled "West Coast Artists: Life Styles."[153] Unsurprisingly, given Carr's matriarchal dominance over modern West Coast art, and her unconventional lifestyle, the first essay was about her. "Emily Carr: Legend and Reality," written by Doris Shadbolt, continued to position Carr as the model of artistic aspiration in the region.[154]

Following Shadbolt's article, and symptomatic of Wall's hippy-ethos, was a photo-spread by a well-known Vancouver artist, Gary Lee-Nova, titled "Our Beautiful West Coast Thing."[155] Seventeen pages were devoted to the art and lifestyles of seven British Columbian artists, five of whom lived in rural areas closer to nature (Fig. 2.1). Using photographs partially selected by the artists themselves, and transcriptions of taped interviews with them, Gary Lee-Nova chose "to suspend [his] own rhetoric,

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[152] Ibid., 1. Originally published by Robin Blaser, *The Pacific Nation* 1 (1967): 3.

[153] See the themed issue "West Coast Artists: Life Styles," in *artscanada* 156/157 (June/July 1971).

[154] Ibid., 17-21.

[155] Ibid., 22-38.

preferring to convey the spirit and style of these individuals." The artists' connection to the ocean, communal living, lack of roots, and counter-cultural lifestyles were emphasized along with such photographs as an artist whale-watching, an artist posing with Ucluelet natives in ceremonial dress, and an artist discussing the advent of spring in the forest with other artists. The latter, Victor Roehrich, had a profile accompanied by two photographs of his paintings; elves in the forest smoking pipes while reclining on mushrooms and tree roots. He is quoted as saying "My principal interest is in the search for spiritual identity. I regard the best works of art as useful tools to create total awareness."[156] This raises the question of what constitutes 'total awareness'? For Jeff Wall and like-minded peers such as Ian Wallace, total awareness is complete if it includes an understanding of economic processes and Marxist dialectics. Today we might view Roehrich's elf paintings as cliché in their subject matter, even as they epitomize the idealism of the early 1970s. Other artists profiled in *artscanada* exhibited a somewhat more complex understanding of the limits, problems and ambivalent responses involved in a search for "total awareness." Tom Burrows, an active and prominent member of the Vancouver art community in the 1960s, displays this ambivalence in his transcribed interview with Lee-Nova in the same article. In it he discussed his previous education and recent travels in London, where he was exposed to Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist drawings and paintings, and the mix of religious iconography and political content (through radical abstraction) that he found co-existing in the Russian artist's work. For Burrows, even in 1971, the central problem of art and life was still how to resolve total spiritual awareness with politics:

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[156] Ibid., 28.

Suddenly I saw another attitude towards things. Those drawings of Malevich just sort of opened it up to me. It was not so much a relationship between objects as a dissociation of spatial relationships between them. . . . I think when you get to the limit of a personal sense of awareness (which isn't a static thing) . . . I think ideology just disappears.[157]

When asked by Lee-Nova if he resisted the tendency to "become sacred in a monumental kind of way," Burrows answered that he had "yet to make the separation between some sort of spiritual trip and political ideology but that's the ultimate problem. . . That union's got to come. It has happened at certain times and places but it didn't happen deep enough, or else things would have changed." What is interesting about this passage is the suggestion that the contrast between hippy/island artists and city artists is not so clearly distinguishable. While some artists like Roehrich were clearly involved in the kind of mystical escapism that Wall found dismissive, others like Burrows were wrestling with one of the great conflicts of picturing modernism, the reconciliation of spiritual life with modern industrialism.

This sharply recalls Jeff Wall's comments about a fixation on one's origins or homeland being dangerous because of the propensity to think "of your place and people in that place as a kind of 'chosen people.'"[158] Lara Tomaszewska also discussed this in relationship to the culture of avant-garde poetry in Vancouver, as exemplified in the 1967 concept of *The Pacific Nation*. She points out that the imagined (chosen) nation of west coast poets from Los Angeles to Vancouver partially depended on a "sense of freedom and liberation of history"[159] that involved a socio-political tabula rasa that ignored the troubling histories endured by Asian

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[157] Ibid., 37.

[158] See Jeff Wall quotation on page 56, note 108.

[159] Lara Tomaszewska, "Borderlines of Poetry and Art," 10-11. Beginning in 1941 Asian immigrants in Canada were subjected to internment camps during World War II, as they were in the United States. At this time their property was also confiscated.

immigrants and First Nations peoples in the region. Similarly, "Our Beautiful West Coast Thing" is clearly a celebration of a unique place and the culturally-specific lifestyles and culture that are imagined to grow organically from the geography. Consider this 1971 magazine introduction to younger artists engaged in "alternative" art practices:

> For this generation, however, the spirit of the coast is present less in their images than in their lives: in the way that their daily concerns as people resonate with their concerns as artists and in the interaction between groups of individuals which has given rise to a new sense of community.[160]

Clearly, this "spirit of the coast" was not present in the minds and life of Jeff Wall and his peers, except as negative example.

Remembering Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and other Vancouver artists he knew, Lawrence Weiner said recently in an interview, "Remember that all [these] artists . . . took the chance of losing the love of their parents, meaning their hometown, by stepping across a line and doing it out in public."[161] Stepping across a line could mean a number of things in the context of the late 1960s. Crossing the border to take one's chances with a commercial art market centered in New York might have been disparaged by people at home at a time when the United States was very unpopular (Vietnam era). Also, as Weiner recalled in a related point, more artists didn't venture outside of Canada because they were reluctant to leave the support of the Canada Council and its artists grants:

> And then you got people who couldn't step across the line because they had been brought up totally dependent upon the subsidy system.

[160] John Buckley, "Keeping it together in Vancouver: the search for alternatives," *artscanada* 156/157 (June/July 1971), 39.

[161] Cliff Lauson and Lawrence Weiner, "Vancouver from the Outside In: Part One, " *Filip* 7 (Winter, 2008), accessed online July 28, 2009: http://fillip.ca/content/vancouver-from-the-outside-in-part-one

Therefore, you didn't see what you saw before the subsidy system became rigid. . . . The bureaucracy itself was what stopped other people stepping aside and taking the chance of losing the affection of their hometown.[162]

Canada Council funding had increased six-fold between the Council's passage in 1957 and 1967, confirming Weiner's memory, and suggesting that young artists had indeed come to maturity in a historical moment of generous subsidies.[163] For example, by the late 1970s Vancouver galleries were given federal grants as part of the "Local Initiatives Project," whereby the gallery would provide an artist with six months living expenses through a competitive review process, and in return the artist would give the gallery an artwork worth the same monetary value at the end of the grant period.[164]

"Stepping across the line" is another way of articulating that certain Vancouver artists were able to establish a new historical position for themselves outside of the 'norm'. The norm was a certain kind of romantic painting, or ethos of communing with nature, that seemed to be attached to and persist in the lives and

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[162] Ibid.

[163] The Canada Council Act was passed by Parliament on March 28, 1957. Its mandate was to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts, humanities and social sciences..." The initial federal funding for grants in 1957 was 2.7 million dollars, by 1967-68 the council budget had increased six-fold to 16.9 million, and by 1975 it was at 32.6 million. This suggests that in the late 1960s and mid-1970s there were more federal funding opportunities for artists than ever before. See: http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/Background/kd127229037749843750.htm
Accessed online Feb 27, 2010.

[164] Avis Lang, "Still Making Art, Excerpts from Seven Conversations," *Ten Years Later* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1986), 6. In a conversation with artist Marian Penner Bancroft, Lang notes:

> The feeling of anybody who had their eyes open was that at a certain period, LIP funds [Local Initiatives Program] and LIP projects were everywhere. It was the way that people under a certain age . . .

[At which point Marian Penner Bancroft interupts him and continues his thought.]

> . . .got co-opted by the federal government. There was that aspect of it that is easy to see in retrospect, how a whole large group of energetic people got taken under the wing of federal government. Who knows what that energy might have produced had it not been funded . . .

genres of many younger artists of the 1960s. In contrast, Wall and his peers would

concentrate on the "everydayness" of the city itself. Wall and his peers, but Wall in

particular, were certainly able to establish important art careers in Europe long before

they did in Canada. This situation was the result of a number of factors: their

proactive networking with other American conceptual artists who were in Vancouver

in 1969 and 1970; the rejection of certain exhibition opportunities at home; the lack

of a privileged interest in their work at home; and the early positive reception to their

work by European curators.[165] A peculiar historical irony exists here that is worth

clarifying. Wall and his peers distinguished themselves from the communing-with-

nature ethos of other artists described earlier in "Our Beautiful West Coast Thing," by

rejecting an idea of homeland through images of the defeatured generic city, and

creating images that attempt to depict the alienated individual within capitalist

society. However, as hippies on the coast or on islands tried to live "off the grid," or

imagine a life for themselves outside of the confines of capitalism in the early 1970s,

Wall rose to prominence as a photo-conceptualist in the 1980s, when a burgeoning

trade in global contemporary art was made possible in part by the neo-liberal

economics of Reaganism and Thatcherism.[166]

The surprise of Wall's success abroad was only matched by the surprise that

he was so little known in Canada, as indicated in a number of Canadian newspaper

reviews and magazine articles from the late 1980s. In 1982 he was described by art

critic John Bentley Mays of the *Globe and Mail* as a "kind of radical rumor from the

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[165] This is discussed in more detail throughout the remainder of Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 3.

[166] I thank Andrew Uroskie for clarifying this point. For more on the rise of the contemporary art market and its relationship to neo-liberalism see: Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: the Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

west," who was one of only three Canadian artists and art groups to take part in Documenta VII.[167] In fact by 1982, the year of Documenta VII, Wall had had only three solo exhibitions in Canada, but had already been reviewed by Donald Kuspit at some length in *Artforum*,[168] and had been included in major gallery and museum exhibitions in New York, London, Washington D.C., and Cologne, as well as group shows in New York.[169] In 1987 the Vancouver weekly *The Georgia Straight* described Wall as an "elusive" artist who rarely gives interviews in an article that suggests he was "virtually ignored in Vancouver" because he "slipped through the cracks in terms of critical attention."[170] It is clear, however, that as Wall's career progressed he dictated the direction of the theoretical dialogue related to his work through numerous written interviews and published essays. It is equally clear that for Wall personal success as an artist was not going to be found in Vancouver's critical acceptance. Given Wall's stated objections to the notion of homeland, the frequency with which the city of Vancouver appears as a central character in his images is curious. The use of his home city imagery appears to function as a stand-in for many other modern cities—Vancouver as the quintessential modern city, and thus an apt representative of an "unspecial" or "unchosen" place. Apparently this renders Vancouver an appropriate metaphorical and literal setting for the artist-flâneur who sees and consumes the world through objective eyes. Wall's photographs that utilize

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[167] John Bentley Mays., "A questioning style," *Globe and Mail*, November, 20, 1982. The other two Canadian artists and art collectives taking part were General Idea and David Rabinowitch.

[168] Donald Kuspit, "Looking up at Jeff Wall's Modern 'Appassionamento'," *Artforum* 20, no. 7 (March 1982): 52-56. I describe some aspects of this review in greater length in the next chapter.

[169] Amongst others, Wall was included in the following: New York's Museum of Modern Art's *Information* (1970); London's Whitechapel Gallery's *Three to Infinity: New Multiple Art* (1970); New York's Hal Bromm Gallery's *New Work: Mac Adams, Roger Cutforth, Dan Graham, John Hilliard, Jeff Wall* (1980); Washington's Hirshhorn Museum's *Directions 1981*; Museums of the City of Cologne's *Westkunst: Contemporary Art Since 1939*.

[170] Jeffrey Swartz, "Jeff Wall Slips Through Critical Cracks," *The Georgia Straight*, August 14-21, 1987.

the backdrop of a generic modern city do, however, likely also render their subject matter more accessible to a range of contemporary art collectors from diverse global locations. This synergy between the defeatured landscape and global capitalism is not entirely new to the Vancouver Photo-conceptualists, but instead has as a precedent the earlier conceptual artwork of Vancouver's N.E. Thing Co.

NETCO: Precursor to the Defeatured Landscape

In the years prior to Jeff Wall and his peers reaching prominence, the best known conceptual artists in Vancouver were the collaborative duo of Iain and Ingrid Baxter, known as N.E. Thing Co. (NETCO). Like the younger conceptual artists they influenced, their work also centered on the immediate urban environment of Vancouver. As such many of their artworks are considered precursors to the defeatured landscape, and are therefore important to any discussion of it, despite the fact that they are generally not included by later artists and writers in the historical recounting of the development of the counter-tradition. The latter is routinely attributed to beginning with Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace.[171]

Iain and Ingrid Baxter founded NETCO in 1966 as an idea and ended it in early 1978 when the couple separated.[172] They met as undergraduate students at the University

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[171] In his article "Discovering the Defeatured Landscape," Scott Watson acknowledges the influence that the Baxter's photography of urban landscape images had on younger artists in the city but claims that the first theoretical articulation of an" urban semiotic" came from Jeff Wall and his peers: "The Baxters . . . can legitimately be said to have defined the strategy for an urban semiotic, although it was left to others to theorize this strategy." See Scott Watson, "Discovering the Defeatured Landscape," Stan Douglas, ed., *Vancouver Anthology, the Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 254.

[172] The Baxters were married with two children, a fact that I argue later in this chapter may have had some bearing on the work they produced.

of Idaho in 1956, where Iain was studying zoology and Ingrid music, and married in

1959.[173] In 1962 Iain earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Washington State

University in Pullman. The couple moved to Vancouver in 1964 after Iain received a

teaching position at the University of British Columbia. Two years later he became a

resident artist and teacher in the newly developed Simon Fraser University Centre for

Communications and the Arts. This institutional context allowed, indeed encouraged, the

kinds of media experimentation that Iain Baxter was committed to, and that Ingrid would

participate more fully in two years later when they founded NETCO together.[174] The year

before joining Simon Fraser University (1965), Iain had helped make a name for himself

locally by visually promoting the theories of Marshal McLuhan in a two-day event titled

the *Medium is the Message*, co-organized with dancer Helen Goodwin, artist Takao

Tanabe and architect Arthur Erickson within the ten-day run of the fifth Festival of

Contemporary Arts at the University of British Columbia.[175] The original press release

named a number of inspirational sources culled from the previous four festivals such as

the peformance by Ann Halprin's dance group in 1961, the collaboration between John

Cage and the Merce Cunningham Dancers in 1962, the participation of the San Francisco

Tape Music Center in 1963, and the presentation of Gerd Stern's multidisciplinary

'collages' in 1964.[176] The curators state their intentions of creating a 'happening' like the

ones "staged in New York, San Francisco, Paris, and elsewhere in recent years" that will

[173] Marie L. Fleming, "Baxter and N.E. Thing Co. 1965-70," *Baxter2 Any Choice Works* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982), 10.

[174] Iain Baxter's teaching CV can be found in Marie L. Fleming's *Baxter2 Any Choice Works* in note 13 on page 93. She describes both Ingrid and Iain's early work and life on pages 10-12.

[175] Joan Lowndes, "The Spirit of the Sixties by a Witness," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists*, 142. The fifth Festival of Contemporary Arts was held from Feb. 1 – 10, 1965. Earlier Festivals of Contemporary Art were held in 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1964.

[176] From original press release, archived online, and accessed on Dec 15, 2009: http://www.vancouverartinthesixties.com/archive/19

physically engage festival goers.[177] The importance of audience participation at this

historical moment is credited to McLuhan, whom they quote as saying: "a re-focussing of

aims and images to permit ever more audience involvement and participation has been

inevitable."[178] The curators' eventual success in creating this environment within the

festival was acknowledged retrospectively by Vancouver curator Alvin Balkind in 1986.

He characterized the event as "a multimedia piece of show biz" that included dancers,

specially painted slides projected onto participants and sculptural screens, and music and

sound, all of which "show[ed] that McLuhan's theories about mosaic as opposed to linear

perception had demonstrable validity."[179]

McLuhan's book *Understanding Media* was first published in 1964 and was an

instant popular success, leading to many speaking engagements in academic and

corporate settings. He was so famous that a year later he was described by influential op-

ed columnist Herb Caen in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "fabled, fabulous, revered,

and even sainted by the New Intelligentsia."[180] In his collection of essays, *Understanding

Media,* McLuhan articulated the notion that any new development of media or

technology necessarily leads to a new human environment because these technologies are

"extensions of man."[181] For him, a tool was more than a utilitarian device; its function is

determined by its use, and consequently what you do with it is what counts. He argued

that human beings' technological inventions amplify tendencies already present in human

behavior, and media analysis should not concentrate on the content of media but rather

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[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Alvin Balkind, "Body-Snatching: Performance in Vancouver, A View of its History," AA Bronson, ed. *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Toronto: Power Plant, 1986), 30.
[180] Herb Caen, "Rainy Day Session," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 August 1965, 25.
[181] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964). The original full title was *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

the "cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates."[182] He designated

certain media as either "hot" or "cool;" hot if they required low participation but provided

a high level of data (photographs, movies, radio), and cool if they required high

participation with a low level of data (telephone, TV). From this simple dichotomy

McLuhan extrapolated on the perceptual changes modern man was experiencing, and the

way in which perception is related to man's experience of time and space. He realized that

a shift was occurring from experiencing time and space in a empirical linear fashion to

one that was fragmentary and simultaneous; a time-space theoretical model visualized as

a mosaic or matrix, rather than a line.

The multi-media happening *Medium is the Message* that Iain Baxter organized at

the University of British Columbia clearly indicates McLuhan's influence on NETCO's

activities. In general, the Baxters' work centered around new media and their ability to

transport creative gestures instantly and effectively across great distances. The majority

of NETCO projects involved the visual display of data in the form of maps, charts,

printed documentation, and the transmission of instructions for art projects via telex or

telephone to collaborators in distant locales who would execute the artwork.[183] All of

their projects were distinguished by the predominant use of photography, Xerox, and

other new media, as opposed to more traditional art forms like painting, sculpture, or

older forms of printmaking.[184]

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[182] Ibid., "The Medium in the Message," 11.
[183] Telex was a global teleprinter network that was established in the 1920s for business communications, but became more commonplace in the late 1950s. After July 1957, two Canadian companies provided Telex: CPR Telegraph Company and CN Telegraph. Unlike today's email and Internet, which can be easily and relatively cheaply accessed anywhere, Telex required special equipment that was expensive to install so was not generally in use domestically.
[184] Over the years NETCO did make paintings and sculptures, but those works did not constitute the bulk of their output.

The Baxters, like their American colleagues, relied heavily on the emerging reproductive technologies. Xerox and Telex were more often used by corporations for business communications and appeared to some artists to offer a model of productive collaboration between themselves and capitalist enterprises. As Baxter said in 1970 in relation to his use of telex, "A lot of artists have antagonistic feelings about big corporations. I as a person tend to believe in joining and changing."[185] Baxter, along with many other artists, thought that one positive aspect of this "changing" could be the potential to disrupt the center-periphery model of a New York dominated art world, thereby opening up the international art world to artists like themselves who lived in smaller cities or far away from the bigger art markets of the time. New York-based conceptual art curator Seth Siegelaub confirmed this idea in 1969, when he said, " . . . New York is beginning to break down as a center. Not that there will be another city to replace it, but rather that where any artist is will be the center.[186]

Siegelaub may well have been thinking of the Baxters when he made this remark, because earlier that year he organized an important group exhibition of conceptual art at Simon Fraser University that included NETCO along with established American artists whom he had been working with (and representing) such as Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler, and others.[187] Around the same time, Siegelaub also

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[185] Joan Lowndes, "'Easel' Is A Telex," *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 49. It is also worth noting that for Jeff Wall, who was preoccupied with Marx, Hegel, Marcuse and Lefebvre (amongst others) in preparation of his Master's thesis between 1968 and 1970 while left-leaning students rioted in Paris, New York and other places, the idea that art could collude positively with business must have seemed naïve at best.
[186] Seth Siegelaub and Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large," *Studio Art International* 178 (December, 1969): 202-203.
[187] The exhibition was titled "Simon Fraser Exhibition," and was held from May 19 - June 19 at the Simon Fraser University Gallery in 1969. The complete list of artists included is Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, Robert Barry, Iain Baxter, Jan Dibbets, Stephen Kaltenbach, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt,

participated in a conference that was held in conjunction with a publication and exhibition of NETCO's work in Ottawa at the National Gallery of Canada in June and July 1969.[188] The similarities between Siegelaub, the American artists he represented, and the Baxters is significant because of the shared affinity they had towards using the growing fields of public relations and advertising to promote their own "dematerialized" artwork. In December 1968 Siegelaub helped organize the so-called "Xerox Book" project, a kind of curated exhibition of conceptual artists in the form of a book.[189] Among the artists included were Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner. Each artist was allotted twenty-five pages on which they could make a new piece using the medium of photocopying provided by the Xerox company. A few months later, Iain Baxter was invited to participate in Siegelaub's first catalog-only exhibition titled *One Month*, which Siegelaub subsequently distributed for free worldwide.[190] The "unprecedented careerism" of the Siegelaub-associated conceptual artists (because of their canny use of corporate strategies to sell art ideas to collectors who were conditioned to buy art objects) was also apparent in

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Lawrence Weiner, and Douglas Huebler. See: *Simon Fraser Exhibition* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, 1969).

[188] See the exhibition catalog *Look at the N. E. Thing Company / Voyez La Compagnie N. E. Thing* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969) and *N.E. Thing Co. Report on the Activities of the N.E. Thing Co. of North Vancouver, British Columbia, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and other locations, June 4 - July 6, 1969* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969).

[189] The Xerox Book was an exhibition organized by Seth Siegelaub and John Wendler in December, 1968 that included the following artists: Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner.

[190] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966 - 1972* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 79. The exhibition *One Month* was organized by Seth Siegelaub and ran from March 1-31, 1969. It existed in catalog form only, and each of the thirty-one artists invited were represented through one page in the catalog that corresponded to one day of the month. Iain Baxter occupied the page/day of March 7.

NETCO, whose use of Xerox and telex would line up well with the New York group Siegelaub was working with.[191]

The Baxters' clear embrace of the integration of radical art with business as reflected above is more importantly signified by their incorporation as a company (N.E. Thing Co.) on January 16, 1969.[192] Their art-business was organized into eleven corporate departments: Research, Thing, Accounting, ACT (Aesthetically Claimed Things), ART (Aesthetically Rejected Things), Photography, Printing, COP (Co-opting other artists' works as NETCO products), Movie, Project, and Consulting.[193] Within these departments the Baxters' activities were interdisciplinary. They included photography, staging performances, organizing multi media events and conferences and embarking on real business enterprises like opening a restaurant and the first photography lab in Vancouver to develop Cibachrome transparencies.[194] Most of their wide range of otherwise ephemeral performances and art objects were documented for posterity in paper formats on corporate looking letterhead, or with specially designed rubber approval stamps.

Before and after the incorporation of NETCO, the Baxter's artworks reflected a number of general themes having to do with the conceptual and physiological experience of the urban environment; a landscape that the Baxters realized was necessarily being changed by urban development, ecological threats and media expansion. Of these, the ones with greatest significance to what would emerge as the theory of the defeatured

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[191] Alexander Alberro used the term "unprecedented careerism" to refer to Siegelaub and his artists in his book *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003), 1.
[192] Derek Knight, *N.E. Thing Co: The Ubiquitous Concept* (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995), 13.
[193] Marie L. Fleming's *Baxter2 Any Choice Works*, 96.
[194] Derek Knight, *The Ubiquitous Concept*, 5, 46. The Eye Scream restaurant opened in 1977. It was decorated with NETCO photography and included a menu with food named satirically after great artists such as Oysters Michelangelo and Group of Seven Snails.

landscape, are *Ruins* (Fig. 2.2) and *Portfolio of Piles* (Fig. 2.3-11), two photography-

based artworks both produced in 1968, two years after their incorporation. The former is

a simply framed color Cibachrome of what appears to be identical suburban homes on a

hillside with a patch of blue sky in the background. In my view, there is nothing romantic

about this photograph. The fact that it is a backlit Cibachrome transparency, however,

does reflect the Baxters' deliberate decision to reference the power of the electric

advertising image, one that influences the wants and needs of a consumer-oriented

society.[195] This reference signifies its most compelling aesthetic assertion; a common and

realistic view of a typical Vancouver residential development made spectacular as a

glossy and consumable image. On the surface *Ruins* integrates and interprets a number of

McLuhan's theories in combination. First, it is an image of suburban life, a form of

rectangular and systematic housing that best embodies what McLuhan characterized in

his essay on housing as the "language of the sedentary specialist." In this environment

man is divorced from his earlier incarnations as community-oriented tribal nomad

through modern forms of employment and leisure.[196] In McLuhan's account, suburban

houses contain men and women who have "learned to practice specialization of their

senses, and fragmentation of their work skills."[197] In his terms, the content of the image

is 'hot' because the idea of the suburbs may be associated with low participation (people

who are socially alienated from others) and high data (regimental architecture is symbolic

of the specialization of tasks), and this is amplified by the use of the 'hot' medium of

photography. Additionally, the 'hot' color image emphasizes reality and immediacy, as

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[195] The Baxter's use of Cibachrome transparencies significantly predates Jeff Wall's use of the same
material, and must be considered an important influence on Wall.
[196] Marshall McLuhan, "Housing," *Understanding Media*, 125.
[197] Ibid.

opposed to a black and white or sepia image that offers a far cooler, more romantic or narrative imagining on the part of the viewer. The image also references McLuhan's many passages on the historical significance of electricity as marking the obsolescence of an older, more literate—hence active and engaged—past.

For the Baxters, however, the home may also have another significance which might altar the significance of the art. From the beginning of their incorporation both Ingrid and Iain were listed as co-presidents of their company, using their family home in North Vancouver as company headquarters. Boundaries between public space and domestic space often merged in the Baxters' multi-faceted production activities and through their marital and business partnership; in fact in these years the couple had two small children, the caretaking of whom would certainly have been made easier by the existence of a home office. For the Baxters' then, there was never any real distinction between home and work; art was life and vice-versa. Their home and office was after all essentially suburban, and both of the Baxters were actively engaged in a variety of projects that certainly attempted to resist "fragmentation of their work skills." So, in 1968 when *Ruins* was made, the Baxters were fully ensconced in suburbia, and the work might therefore also be seen as an exuberant *embrace* of suburban living – an endorsement of the sales pitch implied by the use of the Cibrachrome transparency. Unlike Jeff Wall's use of Cibachromes ten years later, as negative dialectical representations of high art's role as an ideological tool, here the photo may advertise new ways of imagining home-life. In this scenario a cooperative partnership between a wife and husband, or between an artist and a business, may be mutually productive and rewarding.

Still, the title *Ruins* reflects a feeling of stasis, a temporal convergence, and even the sense that the past is converging with the present and the future; forthcoming social changes that depending on one's viewpoint could be positive or negative. The houses in the photo can be viewed as commodities, as serial boxes placed on the hill, much like Donald Judd's numerous gallery sculptures of similar forms from the same time period.[198] In this way the artists' force us to see the traditional social unit of the family as containable and controllable entity, one in which a uniform regularity is accepted and planned for, although within each unit there may be slight differences. In contrast to Jeff Wall's monumental Cibachrome transparencies from a decade later, which from the beginning were made primarily for museum purchase, the size of *Ruins* (roughly 16 by 20 inches) suggests to me that it is accessible to a number of possible private or public buyers.[199] Here we have a telescoping mirror effect: a picture of a middle-class house among similar houses could be bought by a middle-class art collector to be placed in the same kind of house, all of which reinforce the replication of architectural form in the suburbs and their advertising through media like photography. The endorsement of the form and image of suburban homes by using it as a subject of fine art, traditionally a rarified field, also stresses this point. *Ruins* can be interpreted as either representative of man's present fall from grace through his acceptance of such housing and its attendant

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[198] I am thinking of Donald Judd's sculptures from 1967-1969 that consist of a single or series of box-like forms made out of plastics or metals, either mounted on walls or placed on the floor. An example of one such work is *Untitled (Stack)* (1967), Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Judd made many such works, almost all *Untitled*.

[199] *Ruins* is 40.6 x 50.8 x 12.7 cm. (16 x 20 x 5 in.) In comparison, Jeff Wall's *The Destroyed Room* (1978) is 159 x 234 cm. (62.6 x 92 in.). It is worth noting that while Wall may not have made these photographs specifically with museum sales in mind, from the beginning he described the influences of nineteenth century European painting traditions on his work. For example *The Destroyed Room* was inspired by Eugène Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827). This influence explains why it would be natural for Wall to create large photographs that could compete with the scale of modern museum masterpieces.

social alienation, or of a colorful and optimistic future that is already upon us, accessible for all, and open to modification.

The work *Portfolio of Piles* is a collection of fifty-nine black-and-white photographic snapshots that were first exhibited in 1968 at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery, and later published as a limited-edition portfolio through funding received from the Canada Council. The printed portfolio is approximately 3/8 x 6.5 x 9 inches, and includes a plain red paper cover, a map of Vancouver,[200] and fifty-nine black-and-white photographs of a variety of different piles of urban materials taken at different locations around the city. It also includes a number of cover sheets: the title of the work, an essay by California critic Kurt von Meier; curatorial acknowledgments to the University of British Columbia students, the Canada Council, the printers, and Imperial Oil, and a long list of city addresses that correspond to each photo and serve somewhat as titles for them.

The majority of the photographs are similar; a pile of gravel (nos. 2, 4, 43), lumber (nos. 6, 8, 16, 30, 33), tires (nos. 13, 32) metal (nos. 19, 37), rocks (nos. 12, 45) and similar construction-like substances are centered in the middle of an otherwise nondescript industrial background. There are a few images of consumer goods like freshly caught crabs, vegetables, donuts and gloves piled high in stacks on store shelves. Besides the attempt to center the piles roughly in the frame of the image, there is little attempt to make the images beautiful. There is also little attempt to place them next to humans or Vancouver-specific landmarks, choices that might make it possible for a viewer to read narrative into the otherwise banal sites. No hand reaches for a donut, no

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[200] The map was missing from the copy I saw, but references to it are included in Iain Baxter's acknowledgements.

body climbs a mountain of gravel. There are a couple of shots of a dog urinating on the piles, which seems to amplify the piles' lack of specialness. In a few instances the shadow of the photographer can be seen, and in one image the photographer (presumably Iain Baxter) is photographed from behind by someone else as he photographs a stack of what looks like Styrofoam sheets (Fig. 2.8). This proves what the images suggest; they appear to have been taken in a spontaneous manner.

In the essay that accompanies the photographs, Kurt von Meier refers to Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades as a precursor to Iain Baxter's choice of piles: "Now, well over half a century later, it may be enough to call attention to parts of the world as art through assertions, claims, titles or other directions of attention."[201] Resonating his era, von Meier continues, "Take the concept of piles out for a long dream and idea ride and you will probably return with fresh responses to and reflections on piles in the material realm."[202] This idea of taking a ride was not spoken idly, and in fact represents the fascination many conceptual artists had with investigating the city from the vantage point of a car. There was a growing awareness of the city's spread into suburbs and industrial zones. This was noticed and explored by many artists in different cities at the same time, a point that will be addressed later in this chapter. It is hard not to hear von Meier's quote without the phrase "being taken for a ride" popping into one's mind; a phrase that reflects the playful and ironic aspects of NETCO's work that may not have served them well with critics over the long term.

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[201] *Portfolio of Piles* (Vancouver: N.E. Thing Co., 1968), unpaginated.
[202] Ibid.

The New York curator and critic Lucy Lippard met the Baxters in Vancouver in February 1968,[203] subsequently curated NETCO into a number of exhibitions, and wrote in a 1993 essay tellingly titled "You are now in the Middle of a Revisionist History of the N.E. Thing Co.":

> Puns—visual and verbal—were NETCO's best tools. Their motto "Art Is All Over" still had two sharp points. In a grand, and very North American gesture, the Baxters aesthetically claimed or rejected everything, from landscapes as far as the viewer could see to objects and images made anywhere and everywhere . . . . But where the intention of most European and North American artists was to make the ordinary extraordinary, NETCO did its best to keep the ordinary ordinary, to let it lie, documented but not altered in their role of "Visual Informers," they were tourist guides rather than didacts. [204]

The Vancouver scholar and curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault remembers the Baxters' activities in similar terms; as "infectious" and marked by an "enthusiasm for the ordinary" that incorporated both "populist intent" with "some envy of the communications strategies of the business world."[205] This populist approach was perhaps most noticed by outsiders in terms of the humor that infused most of NETCO's projects. Despite their clear commitment and professionalism, the Baxters often also appeared to take a casual view towards their own work. For example, NETCO's irreverent attitude towards art and art history is evident in this letter sent to Lucy Lippard in 1968:

> It has occurred to us that Duchamp all his life tried to find an unaesthetic object but really could not do this because any object becomes good with time, social and cultural conditions, etc. Thus all his readymades are N. E.

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[203] As noted by Lucy Lippard in *Six Years*, 67. The timing suggests she saw NETCO's *Portfolio of Piles* as it was first exhibited in the Fine Arts Gallery at University of British Columbia in February 1968. She included NETCO in many subsequent exhibitions of conceptual art such as *Place and Process*, Edmonton Art Gallery, 1969; *577,087*, Seattle Art Museum, 1969; *1969955,000*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970; and *Information*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970.

[204] Lucy Lippard, "You are now in the Middle of a Revisionist History of the N.E. Thing Co," eds. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson, William Wood, *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 58-59.

[205] Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "The Obviousness of the Obvious," *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, 66.

Thing Co. ACTS . . . . While on the other hand our Research Department in cooperation with the Art Department has come up with the following important discovery—that an aesthetic object, one which does not meet the stringent visual sensitivity information requirements of the N. E. Thing Co. is called ART because it is within what gets called ART that the 5th rate unaesthetic object fails.[206]

In retrospect, it is difficult to see how pointing to the obvious leads to a critical awakening, a charge later implicitly levied by Jeff Wall to much of this earlier conceptual artwork in his attempt to distance himself from it. Regardless, the matter-of-factness of displaying the material world as it is, and not how one might want it to be, may have seemed a little hollow to Lippard, who was at the same time participating in anti-war and feminist political rallies in New York, and was a leader there in the activist group Art Workers Coalition.

In *Portfolio of Piles* the literal material of the city—the wood, metal, and rock of its construction—is documented like so many stacked consumables on the grocery shelf. And like Warhol's Brillo Boxes, it is only the gesture of relocating them to the discursive space of art that renders them special. This was especially clear in the corresponding *Piles* exhibition held at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery in 1968; a series of purposefully chosen materials (paper, eggshells, concrete blocks, twigs, etc.) displayed on rectangular pedestals in a hierarchal line formation that progressively got taller at one end; clearly an artistic arrangement within an art space. These arrangements could be construed in a number of ways: as profound philosophical gestures, as witty jokes, or disingenuous acts of deception (like taking someone for a ride). Surprisingly, Lippard considers *Portfolio of Piles* one of her favorite NETCO works because of "their peculiar blend of local and global, matter and anti-matter, ecology and electronics, . . .

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[206] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years*, 67.

comment[ary] on art . . . the environment and ecology . . . popular culture . . . you name it."[207] Then, in what can only be described as forgetfulness or oversight, Lippard makes a special point of mentioning that this work is a favorite of hers because it is "devoid of the sexist imagery all too often endorsed by NETCO."[208] In fact, *Portfolio of Piles* exists as a particularly good example of the gendering of public space that can be detected in much conceptual art of this period.

Within the fifty-nine photographic portfolio of urban scenes, there exists one unusual image that stands out from all the rest, and therefore calls the rest into question; the peep-show appearance of a pair of large breasts that is marked number 42 in the sequence (Fig. 2.9). The image is a close-up view of an anonymous woman's breasts (she is headless and bodiless), so that the two "piles" fill the frame of the photograph. The theatrical analogy of a peep-show is made all the more relevant because the opening and closing images of the portfolio are of an industrial shed that looks like a small theater with a curtain (tarp) that closes and opens (Fig. 2.10-11). Thus this theater of the city, or more aptly a narrative progression through the industrial sites of the city is punctuated mid-way through the portfolio by the sight (and site) of stereotypical masculine erotic desire.

Whereas the other fifty-eight snapshots have titles based on the site-specific street names where the picture was taken: " Seymour Sawmills, 14 Mountain Highway, North Vancouver, BC," etc., *this* image is provocatively titled after Mathew's gospel in the old testament: "Seek and Ye Shall Find." The complete biblical quote reads "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

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[207] Ibid., 59.
[208] Ibid.

The close-cropping of the woman's body, her anonymity, and the emphasis on the breasts, asserts her maternal "everywoman" quality, and in the context of this long sequence of commodified piles of urban materials and shop goods (crabs, gloves, etc.), the image suggests that her body is also an object that can found, bought and sold, and stockpiled. An alternative reading might suggest that her body is a treat—a treasure—to be found within the hunt for industrial sites in the city. She is at once like the other piles because of the shape of her breasts and because of the implication that breasts nourish growth (piles of industrial materials suggest the growth of the city) and a foil to them, because she is organic/natural and a site of pleasure. The image functions as an invitation, but one tinged with mastery and entitlement, because the implication is that once the pile can be found it can be possessed - seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. In the sequence of this particular series of images, she reminds us that nature exists in the city, but this is a kind of nature that can be sought, mastered and controlled.

Robert Smithson in Vancouver

The Baxters were not the only artists acting as tour guides in the expansive and rapidly growing industrial and suburban fringes of cities in general and Vancouver in particular. Shortly after the NETCO family (Ingrid, Iain, their kids and a dog) "roamed around Vancouver in their International truck . . . scrutinize[ing] the docks, the dumps, the leavings in empty spaces"[209] Robert Smithson came to Vancouver to research locations for various public and private commissions. He stayed there for three months

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[209] Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "The Obviousness of the Obvious," 66.

from December 1969 until February 1970, where he met the young artist and writer

Dennis Wheeler, with whom he had a number of long conversations that were later

published in Smithson's collected writings. As becomes clear later in this chapter,

Wheeler was an important figure in Vancouver at this time. He was a promising and

ambitious writer who died tragically of leukemia in 1977. With Wheeler's help he would

find a location for *Glue Pour* on the University of British Columbia's endowment lands,

and execute the piece there, later exhibiting the documentation of it in Lucy Lippard's

955,000 exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. He also spent time scouting locations

in the greater region for a large earthwork (eventually unrealized) titled *Island of Broken*

Glass that was to be carried out with the help of his Vancouver dealer, Doug Chrismas.

Unlike NETCO's embrace of life-as-is, Smithson's sometimes humorless and

heavily self-conscious ideas about urban monuments had already been widely published

in *Artforum* and other places. Lucy Lippard noticed the difference immediately, writing

in June 1969, " [Iain] Baxter's optimistic embracing of the dynamics of rapid change is

directly opposed to Robert Smithson's entropy or energy drain approach to earth, history

and time . . . ."[210] Smithson's interest in entropy as it relates to the building of suburbia is

still best reflected in his 1967 *Artforum* essay "The Monuments of Passaic," a work very

familiar with the university-educated artists of Vancouver. At the time of this essay

Smithson was becoming increasingly uneasy with the traditional gallery-museum

exhibition context and their format of short-term exhibitions. He had begun work as a

consultant for an architecture firm that was submitting a redevelopment proposal for the

Dallas - Fort Worth Airport (1966-67),[211] an experience that led him to consider the

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[210] Lucy Lippard, "Iain Baxter: New Spaces," *artscanada* no. 132/133 (June, 1969): 4.
[211] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years*, 27-28.

relationship of indoor to outdoor sites more explicitly and to consider the ramifications of creating art with an aerial perspective in mind.[212] Following this, he published a series of critical essays and travelogues, of which "The Monuments of Passaic" was one, on his experiences and thoughts about time, crystal formations, landscapes, and the built environment.[213] Essays from this time also reveal Smithson's preoccupation with time passing, and in particular, artists' self-management of their own time and the shifting historical contexts brought to bear on art objects through time passing.[214] For him, time correlates with boundaries of consciousness; to take control over time is to recognize and honor one's subjectivity in the moment. And yet, there is a distanced quality to these ruminations, as though one can never be at home in one's own consciousness; the passage of time makes all life contingent on forces beyond one's control.

Unlike Jeff Wall's disavowal of homeland, Smithson's aloofness is one that includes his own "origins" or personal history since he was born in Passaic, New Jersey, but now returns to walk its suburbs and industrial zones like an alien. "The Monuments of Passaic" takes the form of a first person report on touring the developing suburb of Passaic, which he compares in deadpan fashion to the sights one might encounter on a visit to the "eternal city" of Rome. Smithson recounts in detail the process of taking a bus from Manhattan to New Jersey, and the "monuments" he encounters upon arriving

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[212] Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," ed. Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 52-60; and also Eugenie Tsai, "Robert Smithson: Plotting a Line from Passaic, New Jersey, to Amarillo, Texas," *Robert Smithson* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 11-31.

[213] Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 25-27. The travelogues were later published as: "The Crystal Land," *Harper's Bazaar,* (May, 1966); "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum,* (December, 1967); and "Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan," *Artforum* (September, 1969).

[214] This is perhaps best read in his essay "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum* 8 (September, 1968): 44-50.

there, which he photographed with his portable Instamatic 400 camera.[215] Such

monuments included a bridge over the Passaic River, concrete abutments, bulldozers, a

pumping derrick, and suburban houses. These he described as "*ruins in reverse*, that is —

all the new construction that would eventually be built. . . . the opposite of the 'romantic

ruin' because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin

before they are built" (original italics).[216] Smithson photographed these ruins in reverse

for posterity, an action amplified by the publication of the article along with his

photographs in *Artforum* shortly afterwards. Smithson saw media, in particular film, as

attempts to "temporarily escape from physical dissolution," although such attempts are

always bound to fail because even the material of film "crumbles . . . get[s] lost and

enter[s] the state of irreversibility."[217] Thus, for Smithson, the term ruins describes the

inevitable state of entropy that all material life defaults to over time. Smithson's use of

language and word-choice in his writing has a consistently voyeuristic tone that is

complemented and highlighted by the use of film, photography and scientific-looking

displays in his visual artworks. Highways are "confounded into unitary chaos," houses

"mirrored themselves into colorlessness," and the sun is a "monstrous light bulb that

projects a detached series of 'stills.'" [218] Such references to film and time suggest that

Smithson imagined himself as a time-traveler or detached observer of a world he felt

separate from.

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[215] Kodak introduced the Instamatic 400 camera in 1963 and it was sold until 1966. It was one of the first portable cameras with automatic film advance, automatic exposure control, and a pop-up flash that ran on two AAA batteries. It was not a professional camera.
[216] Robert Smithson, "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum* 6 (December, 1967): 50. Note that NETCO's photograph *Ruins*, which was made the next year and also focuses on suburban homes, builds on Smithson's notion of ruins in reverse but glorifies them in the color spectacle of the advertising image.
[217] Ibid. 51.
[218] Ibid. 49.

Perhaps in an effort to reconcile his career as a gallery artist who creates marketable objects meant to be sold (and therefore preserved forever) with his growing awareness of the inevitability of entropic forces, he began making non-sites and displacement pieces in 1968. Within the gallery context he displayed material collected from his trips to places like New Jersey's Passaic, Bayonne, and Franklin Furnace Mines (rocks, dirt, sand, etc.) in boxes shaped like the marked-off area of the maps where the material was taken from, along with the original site maps which were also displayed. Thus a shallow square box filled with rocks might correspond to a square area of an industrial site he had visited in New Jersey or elsewhere.

In his displacement series, mirrors are covered with piles of organic materials.[219] In both of these cases, a rigid material is contrasted to the loose shape of organic matter, which spills out or over its container, thereby referring to what Eugenie Tsai summarized as a dialectic between "outside/inside and actual/abstract." This created a "thesis (the physical 'raw reality' of the site) and . . . antithesis (the interior room or 'abstract container') [to] achieve a synthesis in the nonsite."[220]

One of the primary motivations for Smithson's presence in Vancouver besides making *Glue Pour* was his plan to create his first large permanent earthwork *Island of Broken Glass* off the coast of southern British Columbia. This project was planned with the help of Vancouver gallerist Douglas Chrismas who ran the Douglas Gallery and who later became the infamous owner of the fleet of Ace Galleries in Los Angeles, New York

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[219] In September 1968, Smithson acknowledged seeing the Baxters' *Portfolio of Piles* work at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery, which had been exhibited there earlier that same year in February. He refers to the exhibition aspect of the project, not the book, and comments on the use of dumping and pouring industrial materials. He does imply that that the Baxters' piles have an anthropomorphic quality to them that he thinks avoids the idea of temporal space. See Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum* 8 (September, 1968); reprinted in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 103.
[220] Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed*, 36.

and Paris from the 1970s until the present.[221] As Grant Arnold made clear in his lengthy

description of the planning and ultimate failure to realize *Island of Broken Glass,* the

project played an important role in how Smithson would conceptualize and realize his

most famous work, the *Spiral Jetty*, just a few months after leaving Vancouver.[222] The

Island emerged from Smithson's 1969 project *Map of Glass (Atlantis)* made for an

exhibition in Loveladies, New Jersey (Fig. 2.12). That work consisted of a photograph of

a pile of broken glass in the shape of a hypothetical map of the lost city of Atlantis laid

out in a vacant lot. The *Map of Glass* was one of a number of works Smithson planned in

drawings, or made in 1969 and 1970, that explored the imagery of lost continents and

islands, and that reflected his general interest in mapping sites and non-sites.[223] Smithson

summarized this group of works in the long conversations he had with Dennis Wheeler

during this period of time:

> . . . the maps, first the *Map of Atlantis*, done at Loveladies, New Jersey,
> which is a hypothetical landmass that doesn't exist, is preceded by other
> hypothetical islands. You have a string of hypothetical islands that find
> their result in an actual island. The hypothetical islands all terminate in
> this *Island of Broken Glass*, which is in fact something that is completely
> illusive, being made materially manifest. . . [224]

The *Island of Broken Glass* was to be "materially manifest" on Miami Islet, a

small rocky outcropping about thirty kilometers west of Vancouver in the Georgia Strait

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[221]Infamous because of the scale of art Chrismas supported, his ego, and the lawsuits that have accompanied his career over the course of three decades. See Kristine McKenna, "The Ace is Wild: The Douglas Chrismas Story," *The LA Weekly*, October 16, 2003. Accessed online on January 25, 2009: http://www.laweekly.com/2003-10-16/news/the-ace-is-wild/1

[222] Grant Arnold, "Robert Smithson in Vancouver: A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation," *Robert Smithson in Vancouver: A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2004). Arnold describes the planning details and subsequent public protest that killed the project in length.

[223] Other works included *The Hypothetical Continent of Lemuria* (1969), *Hypothetical Continent in Shells: Lemuria* (1969/2001), plans for *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island* (1970/2006), and *Island Project* (1970).

[224] Robert Smithson, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson," *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 200. This conversation was first published by Eugenie Tsai in *Robert Smithson Unearthed*.

that was owned by the government of British Columbia. Its illusiveness was likely

augmented by its remote location, a place where there would be no passers-by, so while

real, it could remain somewhat mythical or legendary. Smithson planned to unload one

hundred tons of green-tinted glass ordered from a company in California onto the island

that he would then manually break into smaller pieces using hand tools, until the island

was covered in broken glass. It appears that some of these details were left out of the

written proposal Smithson and Chrismas presented to the BC government, but

nevertheless the latter agreed to grant the artist permission to execute the artwork. Still,

the land itself would have to remain a government property, and would need to be

available for the use, recreation and enjoyment of the public.[225] The remote location of

the island made such visitors highly unlikely, a fact that no doubt appealed to Smithson,

whose next major work would be the remote *Spiral Jetty* in Utah. The art would be left

to entropic forces and would not be subject to regular human intervention. In January of

1970, while waiting for the glass delivery, Smithson finished the two other artworks he

had been working on in Vancouver: the private commission *Glass Strata with Mulch and

Soil* at the home of collector Ian Davidson and *Glue Pour* for the Vancouver Art Gallery.

On January 2nd, no doubt seeking to capitalize on the presence of an important American

artist working in Vancouver, the local newspaper printed an article about Smithson and a

positive endorsement of the future *Island of Broken Glass*. To a public largely unaware of

conceptual art in general, and Smithson in particular, the publicity garnered by this

article fostered a slew of protests led by conservation groups who objected to both the

environmental ramifications of broken glass on local wildlife, and to what was perceived

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[225] Grant Arnold in "Robert Smithson in Vancouver," 17.

as the wasteful dumping of American garbage (California glass) on Canadian soil.[226] In a catalog essay on Smithson's activities in Vancouver, Grant Arnold points out that the protests must also be considered in the context of the anti-Americanism that was particularly strong during the Vietnam years in Canada. The growing public outrage and subsequent flurry of protests proved too much for the government, who cancelled the project and refused to authorize less risky alternatives for commissions proposed by Smithson for the site.

Of the works discussed above, the *Island of Broken Glass* stands out as a particularly resonant instance of a non-local artist triggering a conflict between those artists and supporters who favored a depiction of "inner landscape", and those who favored the previously taboo images of a real social and material landscape. As stated earlier, the notion of an inner landscape originated in the example of Emily Carr as an artist spiritually in tune with nature, and the later manifestation of that artistic motivation in the generation of artists living on the coast and/or on islands near Vancouver in the early 1970s. Their attitude would be contrasted by Wall and his peers who favored what was deemed a less romantic and more objective view of the realities of urban life, which they represented in defeatured landscapes of Vancouver. Smithson's work would create rancor among the public who sought to preserve a notion of pristine wilderness and their ability to commune with it, no matter how inaccessible. However, for empathetic Vancouver conceptual artists who admired Smithson's work, this incident could be viewed as another instance of one of their peers being misunderstood.

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[226] Ibid., 22-24.

Smithson's *Island of Broken Glass* also highlights this conflict because he was an American who looked at the geography of British Columbia with the same detached observation as he saw his home state and elsewhere; an observation free from the weight of influential local art histories (Carr, Shadbolt, Native art). This reflects Jeff Wall's statement, "whatever is new in the Vancouver context had its origins primarily in the thinking of people who were consistently and, I think you could say, rigorously, alienated from the whole idea about the image of nature and the city which dominated—and continues to dominate—Vancouver culture . . . ."[227] 'Alienation' and 'rigorous' are key words here because Wall refers to people who have been trained academically to understand philosophical dialectics, and who have integrated negative dialectics into their creative investigations, which function as unique visual forms of social criticism. This is apparent in his master's thesis. It is relevant to emphasize, however, that Jeff Wall is here referring to himself and likely very specific peers, but not so much Smithson, whose work (along with Michael Heizer and Walter de Maria) he described as "romantic extremism" that "expressed deep dissatisfaction with authorized artistic environments" through a "new, expanded, and aggravated form of flight into the wilderness, a desperate and often unreflective reprise of the American frontier myth, mingled with psychedelic fantasies."[228] Escaping to the wilderness, or to recreational drug use (if we can assume that's what Wall means by psychedelic fantasies), is not considered active critical engagement with one's environment for Wall, and therefore would be associated with the unreflective aspects of modernist art he associated with Expressionists like Emily Carr.[229]

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[227] Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter Traditions in Vancouver Art," 78-79.

[228] Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," *Jeff Wall Selected Essays and Interviews*, 46.

[229] It seems worthwhile to point out here that in this quote Wall's categorical dismissal of the Earthworks artists is somewhat dependent on the critical stance Wall takes towards the "American frontier myth," a

By the late 1960s and early 70s, the development of a new counter-tradition depended on both a rejection of earlier twentieth-century styles and themes pertaining to landscape, and also the rejection of current trends deemed insufficiently critical or escapist. These included the optimistic embrace of the corporate landscape found in NETCO's work, the psychedelic-tinged counterculture of artists living on the coastal islands or other remote locations, and the 'romantic extremism" of the American earthworks artists. Instead, the counter-tradition would emerge from the creation and articulation of a new urban semiotic that sought to break the taboo of picturing the alienating social and material conditions of landscape that had existed in tandem with British Columbia's history of privileging romantic representations of nature. This new urban semiotic would be called the defeatured landscape.

Articulating the Defeatured Landscape

The first clear and conscious use of the term "defeatured landscape" to signal a new "counter-tradition" emerging in and around Vancouver's young conceptual artists came from Dennis Wheeler in an *artscanada* review of a group exhibition titled *Four Artists* held at the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia in February, 1970.[230] In the magazine review that was written just a few months after the *Island of*

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stance that seems to depend on Wall's self-inclusion by contrast in Canada, an association with the Commonwealth that he otherwise seems inclined to eschew. The aforementioned quote also shows a rare and unlikely affinity between Jeff Wall and NETCO, in that he implies that "dissatisfaction with authorized artistic environments" does not mean leaving them behind altogether. In fact, Wall has developed a critical art career that is fully ensconced and dependent on the art institutions of his time; his work could not have thrived without the support of academia, museums, media, and the art market.

[230] Dennis Wheeler, "The Limits of the Defeated Landscape: A Review of *Four Artists*," *artscanada* (June 1970): 51. Note that it is widely assumed that *artscanada* misprinted the title of Wheeler's article to read

Broken Glass was cancelled and Smithson left town, Wheeler discussed the emerging

sensibility towards landscape that he felt was epitomized in the *Four Artists* exhibition.

Vancouver artists Tom Burrows, Duane Lunden, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace showed

work ranging from Wall's cheaply produced newsprint book *Landscape Manual* (1970),

to Lunden's Robert-Smithson-like map-sculpture *The Locator* (1969), to Wallace's

Magazine Piece (1970), to Burrow's abstract paintings and sculptures constructed from

industrial materials like fiberglass, foam rubber and concrete.

Wheeler noticed a common theme; the artists emphasized the "featurelessness" of

the City of Vancouver, showing a preference for urban and suburban scenes (and in

Burrow's case, materials) that were not specific to Vancouver but instead common to the

generic developments of any North American city. This "featurelessness" appeared to

have a distinctive "urban-industrial-wilderness" (i.e. not civilized) to Wheeler, who

quoted a recent essay of Ian Wallace's as a kind of rhetorical frame for the whole show:

"The determinants are the urban, suburban, and industrial environment (perhaps someday

we will recognize the wilderness of the metropolitan grid). . . ."[231] The reference to

wilderness clearly relates to the long history of landscape painting already discussed as

"commonwealth modernism," but also refers to more recent influences; in particular,

Wheeler's friendship with Smithson, conceptual art in general, and the belief that

consciousness can be revealed through a fragmentation or abstraction of otherwise

objective facts. This relates to the conceptual artist's interest in deconstructing language

and using or manipulating media for the purpose of exposing their own or their viewer's

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"defeated" instead of "defeatured," since Wheeler makes a point of using the term "defeatured" in the
review.

[231] Quoted in Dennis Wheeler, "The Limits of the Defeated Landscape," 51; the whole quote originally
found in Ian Wallace, "A Literature of Images," *Free Media Bulletin* no. 1 (Vancouver: Intermedia Press,
1969), unpaginated.

subjective and non-institutional experience of time and space. This is summed up by

Wheeler's comments that "intersections in time and space of objects and even our own

imaginations as they are thrust outward . . . are determinants more powerful than any

reductive formalist statement." Returning to Ian Wallace's quote, the city as the epitome

of concrete space is re-imagined as a site of free play through the liberation of what Karl

Marx called "man's species being" from the material cage of the city, a constraint that is

not only physiological but also linguistic, including the constrictive determinant of

language itself.[232] Artworks that result in and from creativity, and the pleasure and

consciousness free of such formal codes or behaviors, can bring man closer to a

wilderness experience whether or not he lives in the city or outside of it. As Ian Wallace

stated in "A Literature of Images:"

> The impulse here is to escape aesthetics, especially taste-based 'artiness' is
> an attempt to free the images and the language from the clichés of
> historical and aesthetic interpretation (which in effect subtract from the
> reservoir of media power of the images), to let the images fall into place as
> an unaltered fact in the index of our reality/consciousness.[233]

Unsurprisingly, the works included in the *Four Artists* exhibition emphasized free

association, the image of the city, and the generic nature of the city - the latter because

this urban wilderness is a result of industrialization the world over and not determined by

the shape or time of the City of Vancouver itself. As Wallace himself says, the key

motivation is to experience the world as an "index of images . . . which defines our

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[232] Marx refers to man as a species being in his section "Estranged Labor," in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. He argues that man as a conscious being imagines himself as universal and free, and wage labor intervenes in this process. The wage earning process of work alienates man from his relationship to nature by objectifying his needs, and linking his productivity to his ability to meet his needs through labor. See, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 70-81.

[233] Ian Wallace, "A Literature of Images," unpaginated.

consciousness of the environment as a fact . . . a philosophy of materialism."[234] This is an

excellent example of the "rigorous" alienation (i.e. Marxist alienation and historical

materialism) "from the whole idea [of] the image of nature and the city"[235] that Wall

would label the emergent "counter-tradition" of Vancouver art. Retrospectively, Jeff Wall

and Ian Wallace's artworks in this exhibition stood out as being particularly

representative of the defeatured landscape. Because Jeff Wall more than any other artist

of this period came to define the Vancouver School, and this was his first important

visual art work, I will begin with an analyses of his *Landscape Manual* (Fig. 2.13).

Landscape Manual was a limited edition artist's book of fifty-six pages created by

Wall and published by the gallery that was sold for twenty-five cents to gallery visitors.

The book was printed on newsprint and contained typewritten texts and handwritten

notes, written by Wall, and illustrated with photographs he took out of his car while

driving around the City of Vancouver. The images included in the manual primarily

consist of snapshots of drive-by urban scenery (houses and low-level apartment

buildings, shops, pavement markings, lawns, the street in front of the car, other cars)

taken through the windshield or looking through the front passenger window. These areas

are summarized by Wall as "Vast Defeatured Regions" on the first page, thus signaling

the inspiration for Wheeler's use of the term in his subsequent art review.[236] The text

portion of the manual is a kind of free association of thoughts pertaining to the forms of

the city seen from the perspective of the moving car, the form and sequence of snapshots

taken on drives which are compared to later drives and scenes, and the impossibility of

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[234] Ibid.
[235] See note 227 on page 110.
[236] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual* (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia, 1970), 1.

any subjective articulation of one's experience with concrete matter. A quick listing of the

subtitles that Wall gave to various sections throughout the manual make his attempt at

creating a defeatured artistic and linguistic space clear: Two Car Rides, Hands at His

Sides, Occurrences of Distress, Goal Structures Become Circular, Art, Invisible Empty

Maps, Unconcealed Transmitter, Cold Region Unease, The Controls, Awaken Photo,

Sizeable Contribution, etc. It is also possible at any point in the manual, almost at

random, to pick out phrases of text that point to Wall's articulation of the difficulties of

describing subjective experience through language and his photographic and textual

attempt to do so nonetheless:

> Standing or sitting behind the camera, continually conscious in the
> extreme of the "experience" sliding by on all sides past all the windows of
> your car - the necessity of coding and organizing all this data might
> become a pathological task of stunning simplicity were the entire task not
> understood as a kind of talking, a kind of pointing with the finger toward
> not talking at all --- that is, no distance between yourself and your activity
> such as could be revealed in these photographs, these printed words, etc.[237]

One is reminded of the oft-repeated remark supposedly made by painter Al Held

in the late 1960s, which served as the inspiration for John Baldessari's outsourced

pointed-hand paintings, that "all conceptual art is just pointing at things."[238] In the context

of my earlier comments about the possibly dubious nature of NETCO's work as social

commentary, Wall's assertion of his own critical self-reflection is important because he is

purposefully distinguishing himself from the other, presumably less-critical, artists. This

tendency to verbally reassert the synthesis of his creative imagination with his rigorous

intellectual training is consistent throughout Wall's writing and lectures about his work.

On the first page of the *Landscape Manual* Wall clearly states that this is not an

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[237] Ibid., 31.
[238] This remark is widely quoted, but I have not been able to find the original source, so it may well be that this is a kind of art world urban legend, more than verifiable fact.

"expository work," and is not to be "subordinate to any other particular physical process." The road of this defeatured region "exists, then, as a region of <u>primary</u> involvement, carried to the page with real primary words and actual chemical photographs [original underlining]."[239] Note the use of the term *primary* involvement here, which may be a reference to Sol Lewitt's influential essay in *Artforum,* "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967). In that essay Lewitt sarcastically refers to the "primary structures" of minimalist art as the constructed whimsy of art critics who have a "secret language [they] use when communicating with each other through the medium of art magazines."[240] In contrast, many artists including Wall began using both writing and the magazine format as a medium for art making, and not just as a place to document the results of art projects already realized. I believe that these early forays into writing helped cement the idea that the manifesto is an important tool in the creation of an avant-garde movement. The *Landscape Manual* attempts to reckon with what Douglas Huebler once asserted was conceptual art's dependence on a "system of documentation . . . photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language," existing instead as a space that is simultaneously and equally linguistic, visual and experiential.[241]

At this juncture a short digression into the strong influence of concrete poetry on the Vancouver Conceptual artists is important, because it explains in part their interest in and use of language in their visual works. From March 28th to April 19, 1969, the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia mounted an exhibition titled *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*. According to the

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[239] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 1.
[240] Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology, 1966-1977* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 14.
[241] Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 182.

catalog a committee of nine men (including Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace) organized the

exhibition of sixty-three international poets and artists. Of the artists included were

celebrated Americans Ray Johnson, Yoko Ono, Joseph Kosuth, and Bruce Nauman,

among others. Concrete poetry emerged internationally in the 1950s as an attempt to

"transcend linguistic barriers" by reducing content and elaborating on the visual

nature of poetry.[242] The exhibition included a large number of texts, drawings and

objects that all displayed word as image in some form or another. In a catalog essay

titled "Literature - Transparent and Opaque," Ian Wallace outlined his peers' interest

in concrete poetry as modernist expression:

> Recent movements in literature, concrete poetry explicitly, treat language
> as an opaque medium, which throws content back into the realm of
> literature as "something to say" rather than "what is said". . . . Gorged with
> experience, the "something to say" given by literature is no longer needed,
> or rather the preservation and accumulation of "great works" renders
> contemporary works into clichés of greatness. . . . So now we have
> nothing to say. . . . The life of literature that does last is not found in the
> energy of content, of that "something to say" served by transparent
> language, but instead by the changing outward shape of language itself.
> The power and meaning of creative speech is redirected from the sense of
> verbalization to the vehicle of verbalization.[243]

To paraphrase Wallace: because everything has been said once already, *what* is said is

not important, but *how* it is said that matters. In fact, for Wallace and his peers, what

has already been said within the domain of recent traditional literature is viewed with

extreme skepticism ("clichés of greatness"). Opaque literature is the material

constitution of language: words, letters, points on paper, and the physicality of text.

This opacity, if highlighted, creates a delay in the interpretation of meaning and

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[242] Michael Rhodes, untitled catalog essay, *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1969), unpaginated.

[243] Ian Wallace, "Literature - Transparent and Opaque," *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, unpaginated.

engenders a self-conscious awareness about reading itself. Referring to this aspect of *Landscape Manual*, Wheeler described the manual as a "record of this movement towards consciousness" in which the material of the art becomes "the 'must' of where you are, each moment you are conscious of revealing it."[244]   The relevance of this to conceptual artists is clear: images and words become tools with which to reflect back a viewer's own self-consciousness about the act of interpretation whether that be language-based or image-based. Again, in Wallace's words, "the creative act . . . is used as a means of locating the human consciousness in space and time; and culture, the creative arts, now competes with science to provide the totems of our awareness deserted by religion."[245] The utopian aspect of this project is obvious, linking the Wall-Wallace peer group to the motivations of the historical avant-garde that they modeled themselves after.

Given this interest in language, and Wall's knowledge of work being done by his peers in New York and elsewhere, it is not surprising that he conceived of the *Landscape Manual* as a how-to manual, or magazine. Magazines were being utilized by a number of Wall's peers as exhibition spaces to display their artworks. One of the best known of these and one of the most important to Wall and his peers was Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966, Fig. 2.16-17), which is discussed in more detail shortly. The structure and function of language as a primary carrier of institutional power was recognized by conceptual artists as a corollary to the growing importance of new media technologies in controlling social behavior, and magazines were places where both could be investigated at the same time.

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[244] Dennis Wheeler, "The Limits of the Defeated Landscape," 51.
[245] Ibid.

Wall's snapshots in *Landscape Manual* are meant to instruct viewers in new ways of imagining their subjectivity in the public space of the city, without relying on the traditional aesthetics and forms of high art. The suggestion that anyone could take the photograph, its lacking in specialness, along with the subjective monologue provided by Wall's text, appears to act as encouragement for others to become consciously engaged with the structures of their modern city. Wallace had said that the "dominating forces of our society . . . are not spiritual . . . but rather are technological and economic."[246] Along with language and images, the city was clearly felt to be the clear locus of such institutional domination. Echoing this, Wall described the importance of Daniel Buren, Joseph Kosuth, and Dan Graham's early work on and with city-imagery:

> [Their strategies] are, each in their own way, informed . . . by the combination of concepts drawn from the Frankfurt School tradition with related, historicist critiques of urbanism. This combination took the form of linked studies in the development of state and scientific institutions as mechanisms of social power and control, and research into the methods of siting these institutions within the modern city, or more accurately, of the rebuilding of the modern city in terms of the strategic siting of these institutions.[247]

Obviously Wall is pointing here to yet another example of the "rigorous" intellectual inquiry that he was in favor of, one that could "speak the particular language" of the dispersed urban "energy" of social power. The use of new media technologies was perceived as an exercise in speaking this language, of infiltrating it, and thereby changing it. This could be a positive way to integrate art with life (by sending it out into the world) and to dissolve the boundaries between art and other socio-political activities and production. In this context, the history of fine art photography was less important to the *Landscape Manual* than the current possibilities of photography's use in the media,

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[246] Ibid.
[247] Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays,* 35. This article was first published in 1982.

advertising and film industries as a tool of institutional power within the urban experience.

Ian Wallace's contribution to the *Four Artists* exhibition dealt most directly with the seriality of advertising images, and the possibilities for intervening in their ideological structure. His *Magazine Piece* (Fig. 2.14; 1970) consisted of individual pages taken from the popular general-interest magazine *Look*, that were stapled or taped to the wall in a large grid formation many feet high and long.[248] Wallace's installation instructions suggest taking "any magazine or published media and taping it page by page to the wall in regular formation cover side facing out with any kind of adhesive tape."[249] By reconstituting the magazine content as a flattened modernist grid on the wall, the now out-of-sequence images are more obviously exposed as the advertising products that they are. The desire of a reader to identify with the lifestyle, celebrities or products that the magazine is selling is suppressed in the collage format, where one image competes and forces a confrontation with a whole field of similar images. This is Wallace's attempt to remake the found media imagery in terms that are both visible and vulnerable. Like words in poetry, images are liberated from their regular syntax, opening up new critical interpretations. Here media, like the urban grid of the city, is presented as a kind of impenetrable wall that confronts the viewer, and the structure of the magazine is exposed and displayed as an ideological construct. As photographer Christos Dikeakos said in an essay on Wallace's work, "By juxtaposing the magazine structure and the found reality of

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[248] *Magazine Piece*, and *Look* magazine are discussed in more detail in this chapter on page 134-137.
[249] Quoted online at the University of British Columbia's Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery website, accessed on Feb. 8, 2009: http://www.belkin.ubc.ca/satellite/magazine-pieces-1970

its subject matter, this work placed the reader/viewer in a position of not merely receiving meaning, but contributing to its very formation."[250]

A year earlier, thinking of the relationship between media, poetry, the context of the art world and making critical art, Wallace reflected on the socio-cultural significance of viewing an image on a page of a book or magazine:

> The multiplicity and transferability of the image makes it invulnerable and invisible. The image is located relative to the page only and doesn't have to relate to the environment unless it be the reader's eyes and hands. That makes it invisible, for what the image refers to, what it really is, will always be somewhere else. And invulnerable, for although any single unit which contains the complete visual information may be disposed of, the information is replaced complete through the existence of other units.[251]

Wallace's work in the *Four Artists* exhibition was only the first of several *Magazine Piece(s)* he did that attempted to reckon with these dynamics, aspects of which will be described later in his chapter. Dan Graham's project *Homes for America* (1966; Fig. 2.15-16) was a seminal piece for Wallace and Wall (and many other artists) who sought to reinvigorate the historical avant-garde's social critique through conceptual art utilizing photography.[252] Several years earlier Graham had used the vehicle of a mass-produced magazine layout to combine purposefully minimalist formal concerns with Pop art's commentary on pop culture and media imagery. His photo-spread, or artwork, for

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[250] Christos Dikeakos, "Ian Wallace: Selected Works 1970-1987," *Ian Wallace: Selected Works 1970-1987* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), 9.

[251] Ian Wallace, "A Literature of Images," unpaginated.

[252] At this early point in Wall's career, *Homes for America* took precedence as a personal influence, even though home-grown NETCO was investigating similar themes in *Ruins* and *Portfolio of Piles*. This is likely because NETCO was not known for discussing their work in terms of Marxist theory or alienation critiques, but instead regularly discussed their work as an example of the promise of an art-infused-capitalism. In the context of Wall's work, *Landscape Manuel* (1970) is distinctive because as his career progressed he began to make institutionally-friendly works (museum-scale photographs in limited editions) wrapped in the theory of the historical avant-garde vis-à-vis social criticism inspired by the Frankfurt School philosophy.

Arts Magazine was called "Homes for America."[253] The article carried the subtitle "Early 20th-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discreet Cell of '66," and included images of suburban homes in conjunction with a text written by Graham that describes the visual and social conformity of these places. Such places were being built all over North America, as we saw earlier in the Baxters' photograph of a suburban development in Vancouver titled *Ruins* (1968). The conformity of homes corresponds to the wall of magazine pages laid out in a grid displayed by Wallace in his attempt to expose their common cause as advertisements. The potentially confining structure of language and urban development are equalized in long lists of the banal names of suburban developments that are also included in the graphic design of the layout (Plainview, Middleville, Pleasantville, etc), the romantic names of prefabricated model home styles (The Sonata, The Rhapsody, The Serenade, etc.), and the calming names of approved paint colors for house exteriors (White, Moonstone Grey, Seafoam Green, etc.). The ensuing combinations of the aforementioned color-style-models that were available to consumers would result in real suburban city-blocks within the overall housing development. These were represented in Graham's magazine layout as alphabetical codes—AABBCCDD or CDABCDAB—organized into an oppressive block of abstract text. Once-utopian modern architecture has morphed into a "quasi-discreet cell" available for middle-class purchase in the suburbs of New Jersey.

In the board layout that Graham did for what would be a pared-down version in the eventual magazine, he included a number of obviously Minimalist-inspired photographs of houses as illustrations to the text. As is the case with *Ruins*, these

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[253] Dan Graham, "Homes for America," *Arts Magazine* (Dec/Jan 1966/67), 21-22.

cropped photographs purposefully highlight the formal characteristics of the

developments and their modular structure, on par with the sculptures Donald Judd made

from 1967-1969. One photograph shows a pair of white front doors from a duplex,

identically mirror-imaging each other, at the top of a front landing. Another image shows

the front sides of identical homes painted different colors receding into space in a long

line. These photographs complement Graham's claim that the house owners are

"completely tangential to the product's completion," and that the houses themselves are

"not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes [and] exist apart from prior standards of

'good' architecture."[254] It should be noted that this interpretation of the suburbs of New

Jersey as language-code is somewhat different than Smithson's interpretations of the

same places as ruins in reverse. For Graham and Wallace, the implication seems to be

that the exposure of the code may lead to one's critical consciousness that an oppressive

system is aided and abetted by the aesthetics of art and advertising, whereas in Smithson's

work, his emphasis on entropy leads to an overwhelming feeling of historical destiny and

subsequent passivity, in which the future is already determined, and consciousness is

what it is in the moment.

The influence of minimalism on early forms of conceptual artwork has since been

clearly articulated by many of its leading practitioners, who dealt with themes pertaining

to urban landscape in their work. Graham summarized this well in a 2003 interview:

> During that same period, I happened to read in *Arts Magazine* an article by
> Donald Judd about the urban structure of Kansas City, which was based
> on a plan of the 19th century. Then Judd moved to New Jersey and I
> realized that he too used the material of the suburban facades as well as
> procedures drawn from urban analysis. So I said why not photograph all of
> this, the suburbia, the real original material. In 1966 I was also reading

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[254] Ibid.

Michel Butor's *La Modification*, the masterpiece of the French Nouveau Roman, which spoke about cities as labyrinths. All of this was much more interesting than the white cube used in galleries and I realized that I could establish a relation between art and town and suburb planning. Here lies the secret of Minimalist art, the secret that is never told and that was suppressed by its very authors: the city grid.[255]

What appears evident today—the institutional structure of modernity as represented in a myriad of grid-like material forms—was, for artists newly emerging from the dominance of abstract expressionism, an important discovery.

These spatial discoveries in the domain of art correspond to the critical sociology of Henri Lefebvre and his writing on cities, patterns of urbanization and the "production of space" between 1968 and 1974.[256] Alongside his work on space, Lefebvre is perhaps best known for his attempts to bridge philosophical theory with the material realities of everyday life, particularly one increasingly lived in urban centers. Unlike a Marxist-Hegelian informed dialectic that depends for existence on binary contradictions such as thesis/antithesis or proletariat/bourgeoisie, Lefebvre argued that dialectical resolutions could also arrive from the synthesis of groupings of complex social factors particular to unique times and places. Everyday activities in urban life are not so strictly dictated that small changes over time cannot add up to major socio-historical changes. After 1965 Lefebvre began lecturing to students in Nanterre on the significance of specific historical moments and the relationship between politics and the "quotidian," lectures which are

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[255] An interview with Dan Graham and Pietro Valle published online: http://architettura.supereva.com/artland/20020515/index_en.htm Accessed Sept. 24, 2008.

[256] Henri Lefebvre, *The Social Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1991). This text was first published in French in 1974. Between 1968 and 1974 Lefebvre wrote a number of texts on cities and urbanization including *Le droit à la ville* (1968), *Du rural à l'urbain* (1970), *La révolution urbaine* (1970), *La pensée marxiste et la ville* (1972). Some of Lefebvre's early texts on Marxism and its relationship to the 1968 student-led revolution were translated into English as early as 1969: Henri Lefebvre, *Sociology of Marx*, trans. N. Guterman (New York: Pantheon, 1968), *Dialectical Materialism*, trans. J. Sturrock, (London: Cape, 1968), and *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution of May 1968* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

regarded by some as helping to inspire the student-led revolts that occurred first in Nanterre, then moving to Paris in 1968.[257]

In the 1950s one of Lefebvre's students was Guy Debord, the most prominent member of the Situationist International. This group of Marxist revolutionaries inspired by avant-garde art movements, mainly surrealism, was founded in 1957, and disbanded in 1972. Members shared an interest in thinking about the productive possibilities for political action and passionate living through a critical interpretation of capital's production of cities and media. For Wall, Graham, Wallace and others who began to use photography and the style of advertising in their work, Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle seemed significant. Debord outlined the existence of a technocratic society in which rationality has become pure representation; the spectacle is the "weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was the attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision."[258] It is this same technocratic society that has rendered traditional literature empty of meaning for Wallace. In order to counteract the reification of society within capitalism, which Debord saw as epitomized by the complete commodification of life in spectacle, he and the other Situationist International members would initiate and encourage small behavioral changes that attempted to reveal the nature of the spectacle to individuals and incite them to collective revolutionary action.

Lefebvre's interpretation of the quotidian moment seemed too passive for the Situationists who imagined their own provocative creation of urban situations as more active and revolutionary. The "situationist strategies of guerilla activism" were those

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[257] See David Harvey's "Afterword" in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 425-432.
[258] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books. 1995), 17.

based on political concepts of the spectacle, dérive, détournement, psycho-geography and unitary urbanism, all active engagements with urban space. *Dérive* (drifting) was the practice of aimless wandering in the city - setting out on foot with no goal or purpose but the will to experience the city and its people in real life.[259] This concept was based on the theories of psycho-geography that suggested people had specific emotional connections to particular places, so wandering would not really be aimless, but would be influenced by unconscious desires.[260] *Détournement*, on the other hand, was an ironic form of collage, purposefully "re-arrang[ed] specific elements" in order to disrupt their accepted meanings.[261] All of these disruptive strategies could result in "unitary urbanism", a new way of imaging and living in the city oriented around the complete awakening of all human senses and impulses and the rejection of authoritative mediations (city-planners, controlling media and technology, regimentation of work, etc.).[262]

Dan Graham and Jeff Wall have both acknowledged their interest and sympathy with the post-war critical theory and the strategies of the Situationist International:

> In general, Conceptual art draws its themes, its strategies and its content from the politicized cultural critique identified broadly with the New Left. The assault on the institutions of art draws, on the one hand, upon the revival of Frankfurt School ideas of the encirclement and falsification of avant-garde culture and its traditional critical consciousness by the culture industry, and on the other, upon situationist strategies of guerilla activism, which found their most complete expression in the student revolts of 1968.[263]

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[259] Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," in *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. Ken Knapp, new and rev. ed. (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 62-66. Also accessed online on Feb. 7, 2009: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm

[260] "Definitions" *Situationist International Anthology,* 52.

[261] Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement," *Situationist International Anthology,* 14-21.

[262] Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, "Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism, "*Situationist International Anthology,* 86-89.

[263] Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," *Jeff Wall Selected Essays*, 33. This article was first published in 1982.

It is important to reiterate here that Wall was interested in *intervention* not escape. As such, his *Landscape Manual* was an attempt to penetrate the city with his own subjective experience, and to simultaneously complicate or disrupt the otherwise hegemonic *language* of city-experience. We should be reminded that Smithson and the other earthworks artists were viewed by Wall as artists who disavowed the city by escaping into the wilderness to do large projects and thus did not contribute to its betterment through social criticism. Wall's *Landscape Manual* was essentially a kind of controlled artistic experiment that combined Situationist strategies of *dérive*, *détournement* and psycho-geography with the aesthetic formal concerns of minimalist aesthetics and concrete poetry. In many places throughout the *Landscape Manual*, Wall talks about bringing photographs taken on previous drives along with him on new drives, and then reshuffling these photographic documents and re-engaging with them in an attempt to test and complicate the experience of traveling from one destination to another. In this way, the modern temporal model of experience (the car ride from A to B through space) is purposefully fragmented into documents (the snapshots outside the window) that can be shuffled at will and reorganized to trigger new subjective experiences. It is important to note the distance that is created here between the physiological or bodily experience of wandering and the intellectual or emotional one. The phenomenological experience of the city is fragmented and reflected through the windshield, the mechanics of the car, and the camera shutter. Wall's artistic intuition was to integrate the aesthetics of the modernist grid vis-à-vis the minimalist-like structure of the city and language with a psycho-geographical experience that can never be faithfully articulated through such institutions, and to do

this all while utilizing contemporary technology. In 1969 Wall was writing, "we are

critically aware of the representational system that is language---and we are aware of

the limitations language by nature has in regard to the totality of our experience," a

thought also echoed by others in Vancouver at that time.[264] For example, in a 1970

artscanada review of Lucy Lippard's conceptual art exhibition *955,000* at the

Vancouver Art Gallery, assistant curator Ted Lindberg described what he perceived

as the predicament between a "whole way of thinking that language forces us" and the

inadequacy of "orthodox language and syntax."[265]

Within this grid-like structure of contemporary urban experience, which is

associated with the authority of language, in Wall's work the car is the spatial and

technological means through which the defeatured landscape is brought into existence

and proximity. It is also by means of the car as a technological prosthesis to the human

body's movement that the vast fragmented and alienating structure of the city can be

brought closer to subjective experience and dominated intellectually. It is striking that the

space of 1950's domesticity – that is the suburban home - is rendered a "discreet cell"

whereas the space of the car, by virtue of its movement through the city, is designated as

site of potential freedom or liberation. Mobility and action seem to be posited as the

antithesis to stasis and stability, freedom vs. constraint. This is of course a kind of

wishful-thinking, or a re-assignment of symbolic importance given to the car, since it

was the mass market in automobile sales that made the suburbs possible in the first space.

In *Landscape Manual*, Jeff Wall points to the importance of the vehicle as the tool by

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[264] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 6.
[265] Ted Lindberg, "955,000: An Exhibition Organized by Lucy Lippard," *artscanada* (June 1970): 50.

which the suburbs came to creation as well as the tool by which one could physically and psychologically get away from it:

> The car, just by its very nature & seemingly unconsciously, has created here a vast defeatured region in which all information is rendered useless through the continuous and apparently imperceptible (at least to those not speaking this particular language) input of "energy" in the form of simultaneously continuous and apparently fragmented imagery.[266]

The manual's existence signals that Wall is not one of "those not speaking this particular language." His self-defined "rigorous" critique allows him to see the simultaneous language of the fragmented built environment and the semantic and indexical structure of spoken language as authority. The fragmented imagery is only "apparently" so, and is a reflection of Wall's belief stemming from Marxist historical materialism that images of modern life, no matter how blurry, fragmented, or obtuse are always reflective of a greater social dynamic.

The Limits of the Defeatured Landscape

Jeff Wall's "Notion of Context" becomes an especially resonant tool for critically understanding additional dimensions of his and his peers' work.[267] If, as Wall suggests in the example of *Landscape Manual* and through other texts and interviews, the significance of vast defeatured regions of the city lies in our ability to recognize them as smaller abstractions or fragments of greater ideological structures governing social experience, then we must also pay attention to the fragments of sexual desire and the

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[266] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 2.

[267] As noted on page 63, note 124, Jeff Wall's Master's Thesis is titled "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context."

gendered coding of spaces that exist in the defeatured region of artists' stream of consciousness.

The *imagery* of the city, with its buildings, streets, cars, sidewalks, etc., is all reflective of socially used *spaces*. Like language, the ways that city spaces are built, pictured and used are also indicative of greater power structures. Some spaces appear more masculine or feminine than others due to the historical precedent of separating public and private spaces into different categories of greater or lesser economic viability and specificity. As Eli Zaretsky showed as early as 1976, this is partially due to the fact that capital accumulation depends on naturalizing women's work in the private sphere as unproductive, so that such labor remains unpaid.[268] In this context, one can consider the suburban home as either an escape from economic reality or a commodity to be purchased within it, but not as a site of productive profit. The artistic representations of such divisions of private and public space were introduced in the last chapter in relation to the ways women and men were portrayed in Paris in nineteenth century painting, and in this chapter in relation to the peep-show appearance of breasts in NETCO's *Portfolio of Piles*. Wall's *Landscape Manual* and Wallace's *Magazine Piece* can be considered from this point of view.

On page seventeen of the *Landscape Manual*, in two consecutive sections titled "Captive Audience" and "Sketch for Patterned Tape/Film "Disturbance," Wall breaks away from the sixteen pages of car-landscape-language problematics he has been addressing to describe his experience in a movie theater. This is not as peculiar a segue

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[268] For a fascinating account of the connections between the development of industrial capitalism and the consequent need to keep public and private space separate, a separation that continues to marginalize women, see Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, The Family, and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

as it may seem, because the confining space of a car has some commonalities to that of a theater. The car, as an owned commodity, is a private space that can transverse the public space of the city; the movie theater is the opposite, a space made available to the public that can offer images of personal and private spaces to a voyeuristic audience. In both cases a window-screen is involved, a doubling that is echoed and referenced by Wall's use of a camera inside the car as the mechanized means of experiencing the public defeatured region of the city. If we return to the Baudelarian notion of the *flâneur* as one who is "away from home and yet feel[s] oneself everywhere at home; to see the world and to be the centre of the world and yet remain hidden from the world," the space of the automobile emerges as a particularly important space. And yet, a contradiction emerges because the car is still a private space, even with its windows. Thus the car is a personal space/place where a little bit of home accompanies the artist through his travels in the public space of the city. Unlike the body of the *flâneur* who travels by foot through the city, the artist in the car is significantly removed because the vehicle encloses them. In the context of Jeff Wall's particular interest in nineteenth-century painting as documented through his writing, and of feminist critiques of Parisian city spaces as necessarily gendered, it is interesting to consider whether or not the social space of a car might also be construed as gendered. Since Jeff Wall has already indicated that for him homeland is a domestic or private location that restricts one's ability to look objectivity at the rest of society, then how can we consider the private space of a vehicle? If these gendered divisions exist, then a subjective, erotic, or "feminine" aspect of the car should be articulated in Wall's stream of consciousness, which indeed it is.

In "Captive Audience," Wall describes overhearing a real but banal conversation in a movie theater between three theater employees (two female and one male), and follows up on that memory in the next section, "Sketch for Patterned Tape/Film 'Disturbance'," with a passage of text that re-writes the same two female theater employees into an imaginary pornographic drama:

> Possibly, the artwork takes another form, this time considerably more artificial and deliberately patterned: Bonnie and Diane enter through the theater doors, take their places in the lobby, carry on a conversation between themselves, maybe go into the ladies room, go into one of the cubicles lock the door – perform specific and clinically described sex acts together in the bathroom cubicle . . .[269]

The ensuing story of Bonnie and Diane's sexual experimentation is likened to artistic experimentation – the women are described as variable components or operations inside of a spatial and linguistic structure. In this imagined lesbian encounter Wall reflects male sexual desire coded through cold-reasoned, linguistic analysis, one that excludes both specific body parts or particular actions or responses. It is in fact a clinical description of a voyeuristic scene. This is somewhat different from the presence of breasts in NETCO's *Portfolio of Piles*, which is decidedly more humorous and blatant as an interjection into a sequence of images.

Bonnie and Diane make several return appearances in the *Landscape Manual*, once in a section titled "Moving Cubicles," in which the women view photos of additional lesbian encounters they have had together in a car, while driving around the city in the same car. Here the feminine or private space is clearly and obviously overlaid onto the space of the car. Near the end of this segment Wall describes the connections he

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[269] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 19.

is making between landscape, form and women's presence, articulating a space that is empty, quiet, still and "at rest."

> The mathematical language of perception bound totally to time – an image of succeeding roadways and houses, trees, corners, unwinding through the window or the mirror-frame. . . . like looking in the mirror under the cold flurescent [sic] lights of a public bathroom, Bonnie & Diane wash their hands, apply lipstick, comb their hair . . . in the mirror, beyond their looming, pale faces, the active space of the room expands; in the cubicle they have just left, the space appears inert, at rest, like words which no-one is speaking – the room an immense colourless and vacant linguistic region.[270]

This erotic sequence in the midst of the defeatured landscape presents a number of observations that warrant further discussion. One is the way that the sexualized women seem a natural device upon which to project Wall's reckoning with his own ideas about conscious and unconscious behavior through time and space. Active space is not the space that women occupy, except passively; Bonnie and Diane leave the private cubicle where they have been sexually engaged with each other to enter the public restroom which is described as active (perhaps because it holds the potential for an audience, unlike the cubicle) and which is visible *vis-à-vis* a mirror behind their "looming, pale faces." The women are not alert, not critical, and in fact appear to be Wall's intuitive foil for critical analysis. In this regard, the women have a similar function to the breasts found in *Portfolio of Piles*; they exist as a kind of mini-drama within the stage of the industrial city that offers the viewer a break from the critical challenge of intellectually interrogating the structures of the city. Besides Jeff Wall's implied presence as voyeur, it is significant that no men appear in the two pages of this erotic theater scene, only women actors and women audience members. After all, in the immediately preceding

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[270] Ibid., 20.

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segment a male theater attendant is described by Wall as present in the theater lobby. Secondly, mirrors play an important role here – they project subjectivity back to the viewer, and act as breaks in consciousness of spatial structure. They also implicate the viewer in voyeuristic looking along with Wall. In *Landscape Manual* the city-snapshots on the pages accompanying this erotic sequence are of a car side-view mirror, views through the windshield of houses' windows, which are circled by Wall, and the road ahead through the car windshield. As we will see in the next chapter, the mirror, the window, the camera and the woman return in one of his first images of the much touted counter-tradition: *Picture for Women* (1979), as does domestic space in *Destroyed Room* (1978). In *Landscape Manual*, public space is defined as a "vacant defeatured region," a characterization that also frames the author's very different psycho-geographical tour through an erotic narrative of fictionalized space (women coupling in a public restroom). The defeatured region of the city seems to be a place that the mind can control or conquer; a space open and available to this kind of critical intervention in a way that the home (home-culture concept, domestic space, homeland, etc.,) is not.

A slightly different version of this dynamic also appears to exist in Ian Wallace's *Magazine Piece*. First exhibited in 1970 in the *Four Artists* exhibition at the University of British Columbia, the work has since been shown numerous times with slight variations. It has been called an 'open-ended concept, because of its existence as a text-instruction. As such, its formal content depends on the viewer's interpretation of a newly organized semantic structure made from pages torn from one

magazine and laid out in a wall-sized grid.[271] As critic Matthew Higgs pointed out in

his review of the restaging of this work in London in April of 1997, the content of the

work is largely driven by both the choice of magazine and the gallery surroundings,

which are not random and can often "become too didactic."[272] In this restaging of the

1970 piece the wall label read, "Magazine Piece (1970). The cover and facing pages

of a mass-circulation magazine attached to a wall in a given arrangement until

exhausted by the format." Here the gallery chose to use three magazines: the

Guardian: Weekend, *Wallpaper*, and *World of Interiors*. As Higgs rightly noticed; the

modern design-oriented lifestyle magazines chosen in combination with the gallery's

modern design (white walls, Eames' chairs, etc.) suggested "a reading that engaged

with . . . the problematics of post-war modernist design," whereas a "significantly

different reading" would have resulted "had *Magazine Piece* been staged in a damp

basement and used pages from *The Big Issue* and *The Economist*."[273] Regardless of

who chooses the magazines to be used, ultimately the work's authorship is given to

Wallace regardless of its various incarnations. Thus Wallace, whether he has or has

not always been in control of the magazine choices orchestrated through his "open-

concept" artwork, is still responsible for the content generated by the work. I find this

significant as so many of the *Magazine Piece* variations over the years have used

lifestyle or domestic-centered magazines.   In the 1970 *Four Artists* exhibition at the

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[271] The size of *Magazine Piece* is always listed as "variable dimensions" because the work uses different
sized magazines in each version. The most recent exhibition of the piece in the Ian Wallace retrospective
titled *A Literature of Images*, at the Witte de Witte Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (Nov. 8,
2008 – Feb. 8, 2009), consisted of a grid of 15 magazine pages wide by 5 pages high. Each page is spaced
out, but one can hypothesize that the rough size of the total work is somewhere in the range of five feet
high by twelve feet wide.
[272] Matthew Higgs, "Ian Wallace," *Arts Monthly* 206 (May 1997): 35.
[273] Ibid., 36.

Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia, Wallace chose two

magazines: *Look*, the once-popular general-interest magazine that had flourished in

the 1930s (it was subtitled *The Monthly Picture Magazine*), but which went out of

circulation in 1971; and *National Enquirer*, the tabloid that is still in existence today

that focuses on sensational stories of sex, crime, and celebrity lives. Both magazines

were mass marketed in the 1950s and 60s to homemakers through new distribution

systems that placed them conveniently in supermarket checkout lines, a place they

still occupy. In this context *Look* and *National Enquirer* were aimed at female

consumers, and became common coffee table magazines in many American homes

along with *Life* and other popular general interest magazines.

In 1971 when Wallace exhibited *Magazine Piece* again in the Collage show at

the University of British Columbia's SUB Gallery, he chose *Seventeen* magazine, then

the premiere fashion magazine for teenage girls as it still is today.[274] Like *Look* or

Life, *Seventeen* is picture-heavy, and relies on glossy images of young women, along

with articles about beauty, fashion, and fads for consumer interest. The choices

Wallace did *not* make in constructing *Magazine Piece* in these three early instances

are notable. For example, he deliberately opted out of selecting popular men's

magazines such as *Playboy,* perhaps because such a provocative magazine choice

would negatively affect the content of his work. It is however, somewhat more

surprising that he also did not choose any popular news magazines (*Time*, *U.S. News

and World Report*, *Newsweek),* highbrow publications (*Harper's*, *Atlantic*), or trade

publications (*Car and Driver*). Off all the magazines available on the newsstands of

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[274] Wallace's preparatory notes for the exhibition, which were later published in the exhibition catalog, did however indicate that at first he considered using *Life* magazine. See: Alvin Balkind, *Collage Show* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1971), np.

the early 1970s, Wallace seems to have consistently picked those that are domestic-oriented or those that were marketed predominantly to women. Of course the reason for this may simply be his desire to choose magazines that rely heavily on images in their delivery of content. Another likely reason is his conscious and critical awareness as a conceptual artist of the spread of the suburbs in the 60s (Smithson, Graham, etc.) and their consequent use of such imagery as a way of pointing to the industrialization of social life. Still, the fact remains that despite all the dialogue about critically analyzing language and the structures of the city, *Magazine Piece* relies on a deconstruction of images aimed primarily at female consumers. In fact, in Wallace's work, the defeatured region of the city seems to reach out and encompass the domestic sphere, if we think of the magazine publishing industry's attempt to engage female consumers through glossy picture-heavy magazines made readily available to them at any store. Unlike *Landscape Manual*, which appears to have distinct divisions between public (masculine) and private (feminine) space, *Magazine Piece* combines the two: bring the woman's world (as symbolized through mass-marketed and stereotypical images) into the critical deconstruction of language and image exercised through the open-concept artwork. Wall and Wallace's early artistic gestures seem to have unconsciously incorporated the image of women or domestic space (home) into their conceptual artworks as a kind of foil to the perceived monolithic structure of ideology as recognized in the built environment of the city and its products. Home as nature or as refuge is perceived as the antithesis of active critical engagement with ideology and exists as the dialectical limit of the defeatured landscape.

Chapter 2 Figures

Figure 2.1   A page from "Our Beautiful West Coast Thing" from the themed issue "West Coast Artists: Life Styles," in *artscanada* 156/157 (June/July 1971).

Figure 2.2   N.E. Thing Co., *Ruins*, 1968 (reassembled 1990), Cibachrome transparency, light box, 40.6 x 50.8 x 12.7 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.
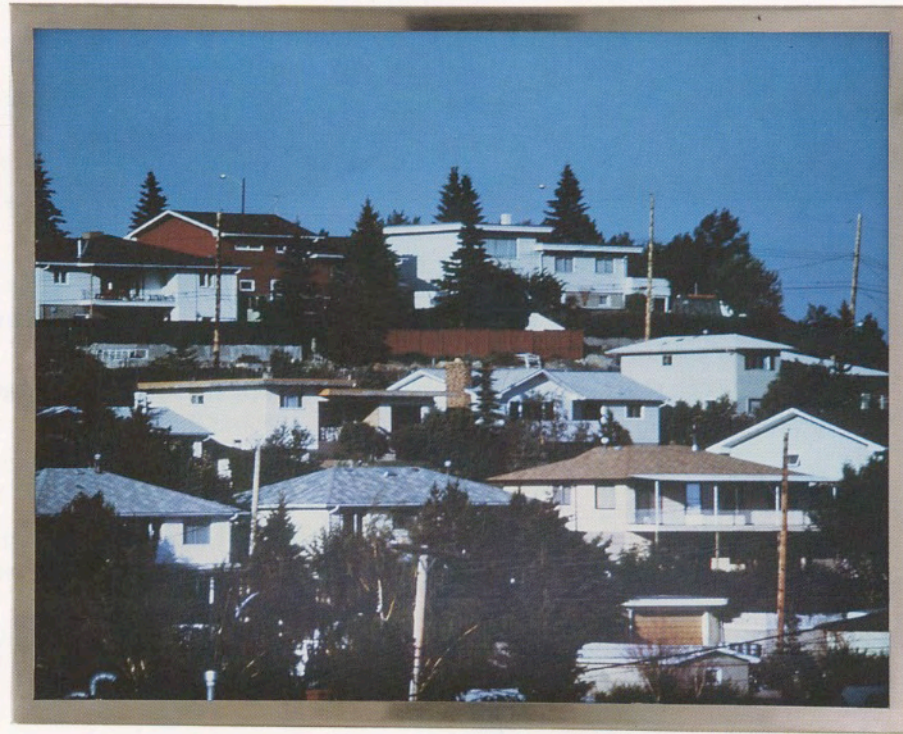

Figure 2.3   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), 1968, "Deep Sea Terminals, end of Capilano Road, North Vancouver, B.C.," Photo offset lithography, 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.

Figure 2.4   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "Seymour Sawmills, 14 Mountain Highway, North Vancouver, B.C.," Photo offset lithography, 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.
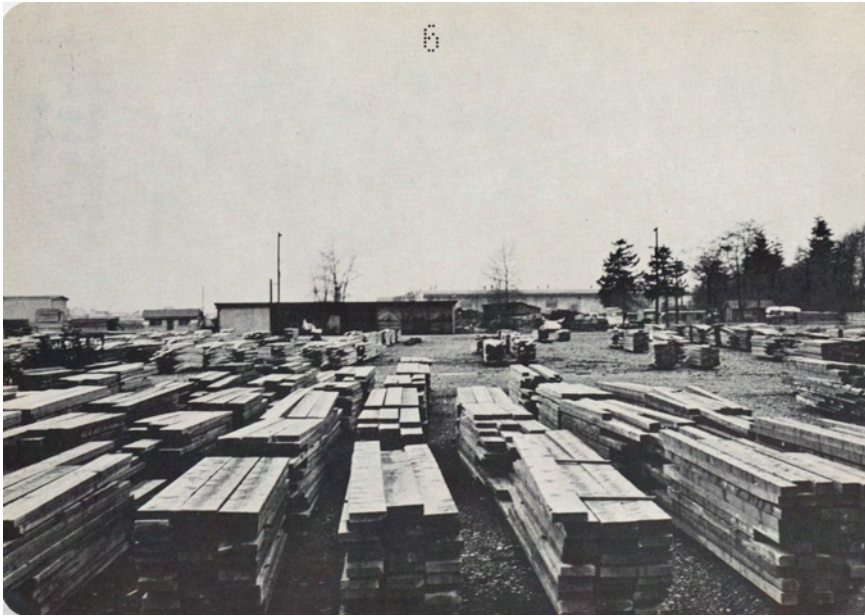

Figure 2.5   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "Dollarton Highway, North Vancouver, B.C.," Photo offset lithography, 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.

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Figure 2.7   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "Pier 94, Low Level road, North Vancouver, B.C.," Photo offset lithography; 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.
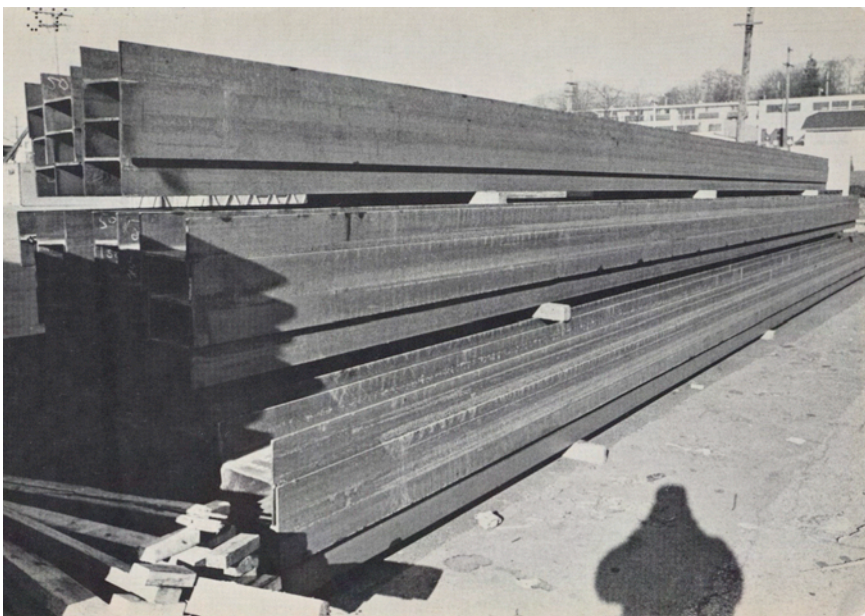
Figure 2.8   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "Lynn Terminals, 121 Harbour Avenue, N. Vanc., IAIN BAXTER, Photographer," Photo offset lithography; 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.
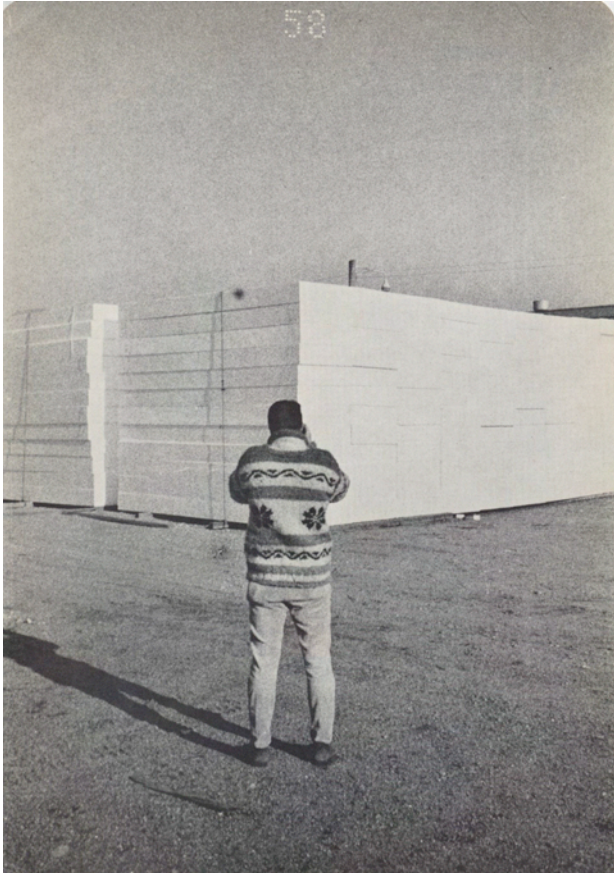
Figure 2.9   N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "Seek and Ye Shall Find," Photo offset lithography; 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.
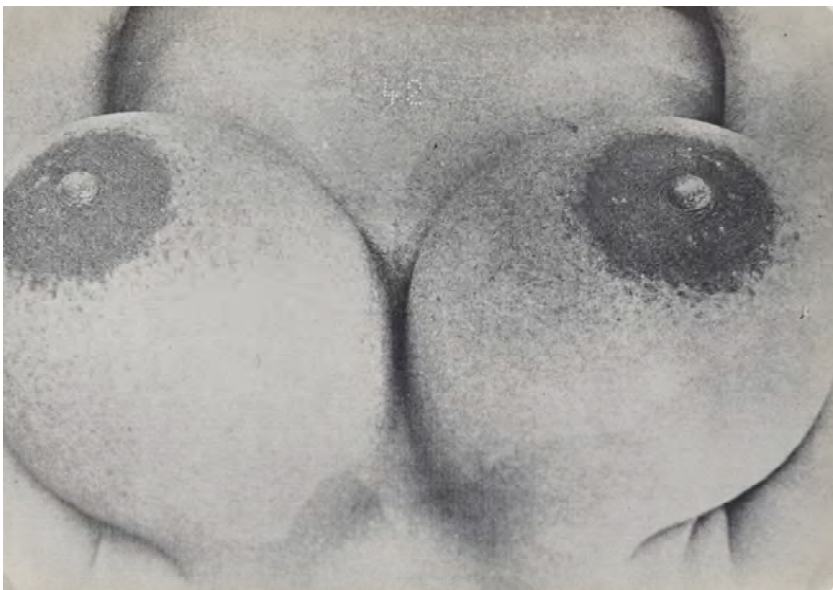
Figure 2.10 N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "End of Barrow Street, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada," Photo offset lithography; 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.

Figure 2.11 N.E. Thing Co., *Portfolio of Piles* (detail), "End of Barrow Street, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada," Photo offset lithography; 16.5 x 24 cm., Courtesy of Iain Baxter.

Figure 2.12   Robert Smithson, *Map of Broken Glass (Atlantis),* 1969, Collage and
pencil on paper, 17 x 14 inches, © Estate of Robert Smithson / licensed by VAGA, New
York, NY, Image courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York.
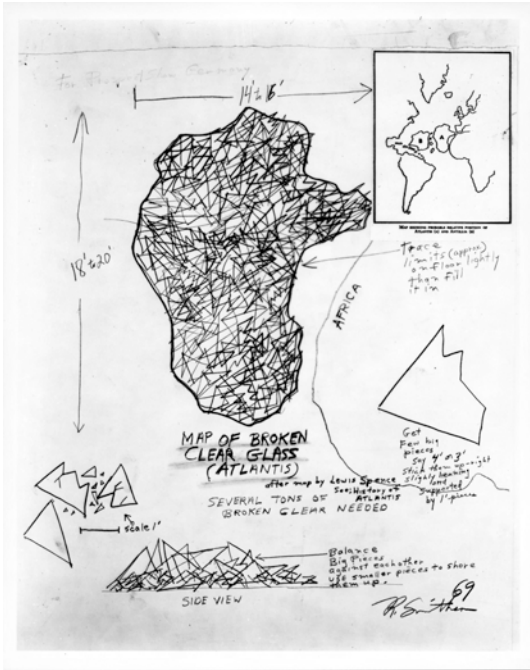
Figure 2.13   Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual* (detail), 1970, Newsprint, Courtesy of the artist.
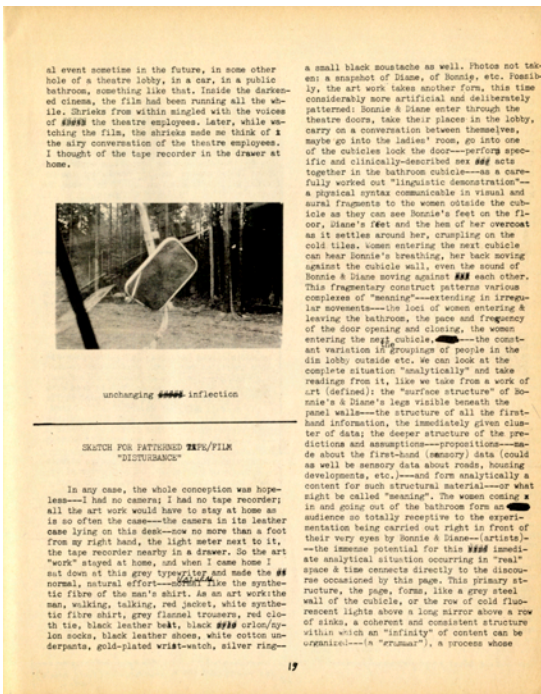
Figure 2.14   Ian Wallace, *Magazine Piece*, 1970/2008, Magazine pages and tape, Dimensions variable, Courtesy the artist.

Figure 2.15   Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1967, magazine print, 74 x 93 cm, *Arts Magazine*. Image permission could not be secured at time of dissertation submission.

Figure 2.16   Dan Graham, *Homes for America* (Detail), two photographs 25.5 x 17.5 cm. Image permission could not be secured at time of dissertation submission.

Chapter 3

1970s: The Feminist Challenge to Representation and the Gendered Spaces of the Counter-Tradition

The feminist, anti-feminist, and Romantic "centrist" currents all contested the modes of dramatization, the mise-en-scène of social and sexual life. This is the ideological content of '70s art, which produced so much discourse and so much discomfort, and which gave way to a counter-movement of affirmation around 1980.

<div align="right">Jeff Wall, 1988[275]</div>

The erotic is not reciprocal or dynamic, but domineering and objectifying. . . . For all the talk of resistance and the real struggle to make a critical art, the interest in mastery, which is at its most transparent in its imagination of women and their use for gratification, appears in the ambiguous fascination with indexes and totalizing systems.

<div align="right">Scott Watson, 1991[276]</div>

This quote by Jeff Wall indicates that his and Ian Wallace's early conceptual art was partly informed by a negative response (negative in the sense of a dialectic) to a blossoming feminist discourse that was emerging in the art world and academic circles in the early 1970s. Wall's 1988 remarks on this subject in his essay on Ian Wallace's work is

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[275] Jeff Wall, "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome in the Work of Ian Wallace 1967-82," *Ian Wallace Selected Works 1970-1987* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), 67.

[276] Scott Watson, "Discovering the Defeatured Landscape," in Stan Douglas, ed., *Vancouver Anthology, the Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 260.

an unusual instance of him reflecting critically on the issue as it relates to a number of Wallace's artworks of the 1970s. Chapters one and two outlined how these artists gravitated towards an investigation of the urban (defeatured) landscape in the 1960s in an attempt to create a vanguard position for themselves antithetical to the popular expressionist landscape paintings of the first part of the twentieth century in the region. The perceptive quote by Scott Watson also reinforces this argument, by suggesting that the emphasis on the structure of form and language in that period of conceptual art might be linked to a desire for control over one's environment, and that this desire for control appears in artists' use of imagery of women as sexualized objects.

This chapter elaborates on the connections previously established by critically analyzing a number of Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace's artworks from the late 1970s to see how the earlier attempts at controlling feminine space through "indexes and totalizing" systems might be transposed into new images that are responding to new social pressures in and out of the art world. While the development of a counter-tradition in Vancouver initially depended on the regionally-specific renouncement of the hegemonic inner landscape of the homeland (i.e. the legacy of Emily Carr-inspired expressionist painting), by 1978 it was also forced to negotiate the poststructuralist challenge of contemporary feminist aesthetics that had emerged in the mid-70s; a challenge that effectively placed a moratorium on certain kinds of images of women that had previously been accepted as natural. The large-scale photographs that emerged at the end of the 70s, which fused realism, narrative, theatricality, and the pictorial division of exterior and interior space became the locus of both of these artistic and intellectual renouncements.

Feminist Theoretical and Visual Challenges to Modernist Representation

Although the second wave of the women's movement began to gather steam in the

1960s with the founding of the National Organization for Woman in the United States

(1966) and the publication and circulation of books like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine*

Mystique (1963) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (published in English in

1953), it did not command the attention of a wide body of the public until the early years

of the 1970s. During this time, women's liberation demands, philosophies and actions

made headline news, although not usually sympathetically, as news reports commented

on and demonized the movement's general efforts by concentrating on stories of more

radical factions who advocated the rejection of the nuclear family, marriage, and

romantic love. Still, by 1972, the organized actions of politically-motivated women

resulted in real social changes: in 1968 in the United States, women occupied 13% of

seats in the Democratic Convention and by 1972 they held 40%, while amongst

Republicans the amount increased in the same period from 17% to 30%.[277] In Canada,

The Women's Movement also began to accelerate during the same historical period. In

1970 The University of Saskatoon hosted the first national conference of the Canadian

Women's Liberation Movement. The same year the Royal Commission on the Status of

Women in Canada (instituted by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in 1967 after 33

different women's groups put sustained pressure on his government to do so) filed its 488

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[277] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: the Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002), 166.

page report based on four years of compiled research that included dozens of recommendations for policy change in areas ranging from equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, pensions and many other areas of concern for women's economic well being.[278] In 1972 Rosemary Brown became the first black woman to be elected to Canadian legislature, while further south Shirley Chisholm became the first woman to run for the Democratic Presidential Nomination.

The challenges and influence of the Women's Movement's were not lost on the art world. In the late 1960s and 1970s new feminist practices flourished that emphasized women's subjectivity and the constraints imposed on them by a patriarchal society and its laws. The center of the feminist challenge both within the art world and outside of it, was the recognition that power relations beyond the individual help to structure individual subjectivity and agency. In the early years of the woman's movement, consciousness raising (getting together in supportive groups to reveal and discuss personal experiences and previously taboo subjects concerning marriage, sex, work, etc.) became a primary tool by which women could learn how their individual experiences were similar to other women's and therefore were often the result of social forces governing women as a whole. The realization that subjectivity is not a fixed and static entity, but one that changes and adapts to social influences was a politically progressive realization for feminists who saw that patriarchy could be transformed through individual and collective action emphasizing women's needs and rights.

Within visual arts, feminists took on these *political* goals through the adoption of media and subject matter that called attention to the social construction of gender in ways

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[278] See Canadian Broadcasting Corporation digital archives online. Accessed on Sept. 7, 2009: http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/rights_freedoms/topics/86/

more explicit than the traditional academic art forms of painting and sculpture, and without the attendant male-dominated history they perceived as inherent in such art forms. In particular, feminist performance art utilizing the female body expanded and critiqued precedents set in the 1950s by Jackson Pollock's action painting, Yves Klein's performances, and Alan Kaprow's happenings (amongst others); literally and figuratively embodying new and powerful statements about female subjectivity and power within the context of modern art.[279] What is important is the fact that throughout the 1970s, the art world was having to adapt to the feminist challenge of deconstructing the humanist ideal of a fixed rational subjectivity in increasing numbers of artworks like CalArts' Feminist Art Program's *Womanhouse* installation (1972), Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975), Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1977), as well as many others.

For the purpose of this study it is important to note that feminist performance art, video and sculpture consistently emphasized and critiqued the act of looking (male gaze), the gendered spaces (both literal and metaphoric) of contemporary life, and representations of the female body. Primary strategies within these visual critiques were the use of story-telling and narrative to articulate female subjectivity and thus to de-center the primacy of male subjectivity within patriarchal society, and the use of text to support the former and to call attention to the fact that subjectivity is also primarily exercised through language. Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (Fig. 3.1) has been singled out retrospectively as a particularly overt example of these concerns. In this performance,

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[279]The history and significance of feminist performance art has been carefully analyzed by a number of scholars such as Moira Roth, Amelia Jones, Jayne Wark, and others, and it is not my intention to repeat it here. However, for more information one might consult any of the following: Moira Roth ed., *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America, 1970-1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983); Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006).

Schneemann stood naked and covered in expressively applied mud in front of a live audience, while she slowly pulled a small long scroll of paper out of her vagina that she read aloud. The text, both poetic and philosophical, addressed her frustration and contempt at not being taken seriously as a woman artist by her male peers; the latter embodied in the scroll's narrative by a "structuralist filmmaker" who failed to acknowledge what he (and therefore all male artists) described (in her words) as "the personal clutter," "the persistence of feelings," "the diaristic indulgence" and the "painterly mess" of her performance works.[280] In this work, the challenge to male authority is born of woman's physiological difference from man—her "nature," her sex— while the first words uttered from this conception reinforce woman's distinctive and contradictory experience and point of view.

One of the most important feminist *theoretical* challenges to figural representation came the same year in the form of British film theorist Laura Mulvey's important essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in *Screen* magazine.[281] Mulvey analyzed the objectification and fetishization of the female body in mainstream film using the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. She argued persuasively that the reoccurring image of woman's difference from man (her lack of a penis) in visual culture functions as a structural foundation for the maintenance of a masculine, or phallocentric, symbolic order and that mainstream cinema reinforces this symbolic order through formal devices that consistently objectify and fetishize female characters. Mulvey's analysis uses theory to deconstruct and reveal the ideological

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[280] Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writing*s, *1963-1978* (New Paltz: Documentext, 1979), 239-240.

[281] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-26. First published in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn, 1975): 6-18.

constructs of common-sense understandings of identity and subjectivity. She argues that the formal devices used in mainstream film (editing, changes in distance, plot development) rely on the uneasy combination of a viewer's pleasure in looking erotically at others and his/her tendency to try to identify with the characters portrayed. This analysis came from her reading of Freud's discussions of scopophilia in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, particularly the individual's subjection of others to objecthood through a controlled pleasure in looking, and Jacques Lacan's description of the infant's misrecognition of his own idealized self in the mirror phase of ego construction. Unlike live performance, cinema has the ability to shift the emphasis, direction and distance of the viewer's gaze, and therefore heighten the pleasure derived from the act of looking, which in real life might be mitigated by direct social presence or interaction. Finally, because the female embodies the threat of castration in the unconscious of the male symbolic, these formal devices consistently highlight her as a controllable and reassuring phallic fetish within the narrative structure of the film, thereby encouraging all viewers to identify with the male gaze (i.e. masculine symbolic order).

The issues raised in Mulvey's essay were also addressed visually in British artist Mary Kelly's 1977 *Post-Partum Document* (Fig. 3.2). Consisting of visual records (stained diapers, baby hand casts, etc.) and documents (textual descriptions, graphs, diagrams, etc.) pertaining to her infant son and his early childhood development, the exhibition charts the mother-child relationship through their shared experiences while also displaying and critiquing both individuals' passage into socialization as gendered subjects. In an introduction to a later book documenting *Post-Partum Document*, Lucy Lippard stressed the importance of the lack of photography in this work, citing Kelly's

interest in visualizing "the mother / woman without 'picturing' her."[282] Kelly herself wrote

that to "use the body of the woman, her image, or person is not impossible but

problematic for feminism," because she is so often placed in the position of the object of

the male gaze.[283] Instead she sought to "foreground [femininity's] social construction as a

representation of sexual difference within specific discourses."[284] This largely

theoretically-derived suspicion over using the image of woman in art is inspired by the

same academic sources that Mulvey drew upon, and retrospectively hints at the critique

of "essentialism" that would emerge later in the woman's movement (the idea that an

essential vision of woman exists independent of socialization, class or race). Carolee

Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* might be considered representative of this category as she

purposefully put herself on display while asserting a natural and cosmic femininity

through her mud-covered body and birthing gestures. For Kelly, the prevailing popular

image of woman in visual culture at that time was inadequate and limiting since

subjectivity is learned through a process of socialization determined through institutions

like language, media, and laws.

These artists and the theoretical discourses they drew upon are important because

they were published and became known to Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace at the same time

that both men were developing ideas about how to reinvigorate the political project of the

historical avant-garde of the 1920s with figurative imagery in film and photography.[285]

Jeff Wall framed his and Ian Wallace's artistic aims of the 1970s (prior to their use of

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[282] Lucy Lippard, "Forward," *Mary Kelly Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), xiv.

[283] Mary Kelly, "Preface," Ibid., xxi.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Wall specifically mentions El Lissitsky, Sergei Tretyakov, John Heartfield, and Alexander Rodchenko as examples of artists creating "radical productivism . . . openly aimed at social utility" in "La Melancolie de la Rue…", 63.

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figures, which began later in the decade) as the attempt to "reprise the vanguardist dialectic of the monochrome."[286] Wall sees the vanguardist project as one that includes both political activism (such as the Russian Constructivists' goal of building a new socialist world through progressive technologies) and transcendentalism (utopian belief in human's ability to transgress a dying culture through progressive evolution).[287] The former is embodied by 1920s Constructivist photography, the latter through Gerhard Richter's grey rectangular monochromes which Wall describes as "rational emblems of concrete social and historical impasse."[288] For Wall and Wallace, the monochrome came to represent the historical crises of painting in modernism; the boxed-in position of painting could only realize the utopian goals of the avant-garde through the negative position of articulating the emptiness of its own medium. Wall went on to claim that "productivism and mysticism are the militant emblematic products of the survival of capitalism. The monochrome may be the hieroglyph in which the two emblems are intertwined."[289] Wallace echoed Wall's claims for the significance of the monochrome, writing in a 1992 exhibition catalog that "throughout my work of the 1970s, the monochrome remained as a latent theme developed only within the photographic subject, often as a Mallarmean metaphor of 'silence'."[290]

While Jeff Wall is not suggesting that his generation should continue to make monochromes, he is suggesting that a new avant-garde practice must encompass both the poetic aspects of transcendentalism *and* the political goals of productivism. It has been

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[286] Ibid., 65.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ian Wallace, "Photography and the Monochrome: An Apologia, An Exegesis, An Interrogation," Circulo de Bellas Artes ed., *Cameres Indiscretes* (Barcelona and Madrid: Centre d'Art Santa Monica, 1992), 121.

widely repeated that Jeff Wall credits the first "radical photo-conceptualist art," and as such the first work *of his own time* to encompass both productivism and transcendentalism, to Ian Wallace's large photographic work, *Melancolie de la Rue* (1973) (Fig. 3.3).[291] *Melancolie de la Rue* is a triptych of hand-tinted photographs that shows three architectural spaces: a group of people standing outside of the then-new modernist Winnipeg Art Gallery (left: photo taken in 1972), a white suburban house in a new housing development seen behind a passing Volkswagen Beetle (middle: photo taken in 1969), and a collection of shacks known as the Dollarton Mud Flats squatters colony (right: photo taken in 1971). As noted by Scott Watson in an essay on the tensions between nature and the city that fueled diverse art practices in post-war Vancouver, the latter image was significant because it documented the ongoing existence of one of the last refuges of civic protest against urban renewal: hippy communities flourished (and still exist) in the intertidal regions of the city due to the fact that in Canadian law, private property can only extend to the point of high tide, leaving the intertidal zone largely free from regulation or zoning.[292] Thus in the context of the other two images, the content of Ian Wallace's artwork reflects the uneasy cohabitation of industrial real estate development, the mythology of a righteous communion with nature, and the modernist expression of social alienation as represented in the physical structure and function of the soaring stone façade of the art gallery.

What this triptych has in common with the feminist discourses of the day is a keen awareness of the function of language in the construction of social organization. Social meanings are articulated through spoken language, but are also variable depending

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[291] Ibid., 67.

[292] Scott Watson, "Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties," 40.

on the discourse it is articulated in. Thus for women concerned with exposing the

structure of patriarchy, the image of woman can be re-contextualized to create new social

meanings, which in turn may affect and change the patriarchal symbolic order. For

Wallace, *Melancolie de la Rue* can affect new ways about thinking about the individual's

position in his/her built environment through a careful selection and manipulation of how

individual images are read in context with one another. Obviously this strategy was

already evident in Wallace's earlier works like *Magazine Piece*, but with *Melancolie de la*

Rue new poetic elements are added: the use of relatively straightforward representational

imagery that is not directly culled from readymade advertising is hand tinted in broad

planes of color, and therefore references the tradition and gestures of modernist painting

and the monochrome. Here political reference, the technology of photography, and the

utopian motivations of modernist painting exist in one piece, which is why Jeff Wall

credits it with being a motivational and breakthrough work.

    Melancolie de la Rue is a relatively early piece that many writers including

Wallace himself acknowledge is the very beginning of what has been described as a

"literary" turn in his work.[293] As a transition between the older conceptual artworks like

Magazine Piece, and the mural-sized works of the late 1970s such as *Image/Text* (1979),

it shares with both a concern for the spaces of the city – spaces that are physical,

psychological and literary. However, like the earlier manifestations of erotic women in

the defeatured landscapes of the 1968-70, both Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace's turn to

pictorialism in large format photography does not totally abandon a concern with the

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[293] Christos Dikeakos calls it "a significant step in the overall development of his work," while Jeff Wall describes it as "establish[ing] a structure" for Wallace's subsequent works, both in *Ian Wallace Selected Works 1970-1987* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), 9, 67. Scott Watson calls it a "seminal" piece in his essay, "Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties," 41.

gendered division of space, however much this concern is disguised within the technical and narrative structure of the new images. The pressure put on artists by feminists to be hyper vigilant in their choices of figural representation occasioned a kind of temporary taboo on sexualized images of women in the 1970s and early 1980s for critical theory-minded artists like Wall and Wallace. Nonetheless, a close analyses of key works reveals some continuities with the work of the previous decade.

Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) and *Destroyed Room* (1978)

> *But someone can remain unseen by society even when she is physically present, either in propria persona, or in the form of representation. She may even remain publicly invisible, while being hyper-visible—too conspicuous, both in her own eyes, and those of the viewer.*
> Kaja Silverman[294]

The first thing viewers unfamiliar with art history are likely to notice about Jeff Wall's *Destroyed Room* (1978; Fig. 3.4) is the fact that it is a large illuminated photograph of a ransacked women's bedroom. This fact is made obvious by the contents strewn around the room: high heeled shoes, women's sunglasses, costume jewelry, women's clothing, and chiffon and lace fabrics. Of secondary import is the fact that this is a fake room; the two by fours propping up the walls outside the doorway to the room and the interior brick wall outside give it away as a studio set. Of tertiary importance is, as a studio set, the artists choice of decoration and what that might signify about the class or occupation of this particular woman: a single bed, cheap furniture, deep red painted walls, few lights, silky fabrics and costume jewelry. At the very least the implication is

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[294] Kaja Silverman, "Total Visibility," *Jeff Wall: Photographs* (Koln: Walther König, 2003), 97.

that this is not the bedroom of a traditional housewife, rather it is the bedroom of a singe

woman who works for a living, whether or not she is a prostitute or some other kind of

sex industry worker. Thus what we *see* as viewers even before we know of any art-

historical references is the following: a blatant artist's conception of a violent aggression

made upon a working woman's intimate space (blatant because the studio set indicates

that there is no attempt to disguise this as fictional narrative or semblance of

truthfulness).[295]

Following this theme of analyzing what we see before discussing what we know

about Wall's work, let us turn to *Picture For Women* (1979; Fig. 3.5). In this large

illuminated photograph we see what appears to be a male photographer (on our right) and

a woman (on our left) standing in an empty artist's studio or classroom in front of a

mirror with a large format camera located between them, which is being controlled by the

man who is taking their picture. Both man and woman may be looking at each other or

the viewer through the implied mirror reflection, but their gaze is not direct. It is not clear

what their relationship towards each other or to us is, and in fact their clothing, stance and

age appear equal, although he is clearly in control of the photograph's construction since

he is holding the cable release for the camera. Her gaze is more confrontational because

she is looking towards the viewer or towards the camera she sees in the reflection,

whereas he is looking off center. What we see here then, before knowing about Wall's

art-historical references, is an image depicting a stand-off between a man and a woman in

relation to how their image will be constructed and controlled both by each other, the

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[295] This is not a new concept. Consider John Berger's famous observation from 1972 in *Ways of Seeing*: "In the end the art of the past is being mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes, and such a justification can no longer make sense in modern terms. . . . Mystification is the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident [in the picture itself]." See: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 11-16.

camera that sees them, and the future viewers of their image, and this stand-off is being

made in the context of the institutional space of the artist's studio or educational

classroom – either way, both are places where artists learn through trial and error how to

create images. Thus, the central subject matter of both of these images seems to be an

attempt to visualize confrontations over social and artistic space between genders.[296]

While I use the term "space" here liberally to refer to literal, institutional and discursive

space, this confrontation is mediated through two images of artist's studios created in the

style of commercial advertising (they are light boxes). The studio is the backdrop to both

the narrative of the ransacked bedroom, and the technical process of creating portraiture,

while the use of a light box reminds us of the work's social relevance outside the studio.

I felt it was important to begin an analysis of these two works with what is

obvious in the artworks themselves because so much theory that has been written about

these works since they first appeared has been based on an interest in and interpretation

of Jeff Wall's use of art-historical sources, and this emphasis has consistently downplayed

the ways that Wall may have been directly responding to the feminist challenge of the

1970s, although it has not totally disregarded it. This is partially the result of the fact that

Wall has strongly influenced the theoretical discussion of his work from the very first

gallery catalog publication of it in 1979, which included these images, along with two

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[296] As an aside I find it telling that there is an image published adjacent to the contents page of the Phaidon monograph of Jeff Wall's work in which he is shown ripping apart the mattress in the construction of the set for *The Destroyed Room*. Secondly, four male artists, some of whom were Wall's students, all apparently helped Wall construct the room, as indicated in the acknowledgement he gives them in his first catalog of this work under "Production Credits." It is peculiar to imagine the five men working hard to set-up and then destroy the set of a woman's bedroom. For the image see: Arielle Pélenc, ed., *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 6; for the production credits see Jeff Wall, *Installation of faking death, 1977, The destroyed room, 1978, Young workers, 1978, Picture for Women, 1979* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979), unpaginated.

others, *Faking Death* (1977) and *Young Workers* (1978). [297] In the catalog, produced by the Art Gallery of Victoria, nothing is said by then-curator Willard Holmes, or any other gallery staff to introduce Wall (at that point a relatively unknown artist), the exhibition, or the reasons for curating his work into the gallery programming.[298] Instead, Wall was able to choose the images published and authored the text about his own work.

The first line of the introductory essay titled "To the Spectator" reads: "I am interested primarily in subject-matter, in an art of subjects." However, after establishing this, Wall goes on to discuss in great detail his choices for using the backlit transparency of advertisers, the cost of this form of production, the relationship of this kind of production to recent art history (e.g. Dan Flavin), theatricality in general, and the relationship between high and low art within the culture industry. While he is arguing that the subject matter of his work is necessarily tied to the technical realization of it, at no point does he actually discuss the more immediate readings of the subject matter of the images that he has clearly taken pains to create. The emphasis on the theoretical and art-historical meanings of the photographs, and their context in late-twentieth-century consumer culture that Wall explains in the essay, is framed by his inclusion of images of art-historical source imagery in the catalog along with images of his work. The reproduction of *The Destroyed Room* is faced by four smaller images of Marcel Duchamp's *Étant Donnès* (1946-1966), Eugène Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), a photograph presumably taken by Wall titled *Shop Window, Paris, 1977*, and a

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[297] Although all four of these photographs were new work for Wall at the time, *The Destroyed Room* was first exhibited in 1978 at the Nova Gallery in Vancouver, where it was provocatively installed in a window facing the sidewalk.

[298] At this time Wall was teaching full time at Simon Fraser University in the Centre for the Arts, a position he had held since the fall of 1976. This academic status may account for why he would be invited to write his own curatorial texts, although it should be stated that he was by no means the well-known academic that he would become later in life.

production still of Jeff Wall on set during the making of *The Destroyed Room* (1978).[299] The reproduction of *Picture for Women* is faced by three smaller images of Diego Velazquez' *Las Meninas* (1656), Édouard Manet's *A Bar in the Folies-Bergère* (1883), and a fashion portrait of socialite and model Penelope Tree (titled *Penelope Tree*) by Richard Avedon (1967). So, from his earliest foray into the creation of large scale Cibachrome transparencies, Wall has contextualized his work theoretically and historically *in particular ways*.

These source images invoke the following histories or social contexts: the legacy of conceptual art and its attendant ready-mades, the romantic tradition of epic history paintings, the existence of erotica, the surrealist erotic spectacle and display of Parisian shop windows (and Walter Benjamin's discussions of the Parisian arcades in early twentieth century modernity), the artist's self-conscious awareness of the act of looking and the attendant social and class constructs of such acts (i.e. Duchamp, Velasquez and Manet), and the image of woman as muse and consumer object. Obviously the list could go on, but the point is that these inclusions serve to direct a discourse about his work that addresses subjects external, even if supplementary, to the pictures themselves. One might say that while the photographs in the gallery context are addressed "To the

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[299] This photograph likely references André Breton's photographs of Paris shop windows, and might also reference Marcel Duchamp's *Window Display for André Breton's Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, 1945. Michael Newman makes a strong case in his argument that Jeff Wall's visit to the Philadelphia Art Museum to see the Duchamp retrospective held there from 1973-1974 was as influential on his subsequent work as his interest in Manet. Newman credits Wall's viewing of Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* (1946-1966), along with Duchamp's *Manual of Instructions* (1966) that showed how to install *Etant Donnés*, as the primary motivation for the tableau format of *Destroyed Room* (1978). Furthermore, Newman makes the following interesting formal observations about *Destroyed Room*: the mattress is ripped in a diagonal slash that resembles a vagina, and the red color of the walls references the Dionysian initiation scenes in the murals in the Roman Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii (circa 79AD) "which was taken up by both Neo-Classical and Romantic painting – thus marking the transition from objective order into an art of subjectivity." See Michael Newman, "Towards the Reinvigoration of the "Western Tableau": Some Notes on Jeff Wall and Duchamp," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (2007): 90, 92.

Spectator", the catalog is addressed to the historian or cultural critic. As was discussed in chapter one, this is consistent for Wall who a decade earlier in his Master's thesis was writing about the significance of the manifesto for the interpretation and political relevance of avant-garde artworks that are otherwise widely open to interpretation.

Because *Picture for Women* (1979) and *The Destroyed Room* (1978) are regularly invoked as the beginning of a counter-tradition in Vancouver art, and have been singled out by international curators, critics and scholars as worthy of attention, I would like to turn now to an investigation of how scholars have or have not addressed the subject matter of the gendered division of space within these two images, and how a conflict between subject and theory seems inherent in the work itself.[300] Donald Kuspit, Thomas Crow, Kaja Silverman, Arielle Pélenc, Thierry de Duve, and many others have all weighed in on the significance and social meaning of Wall's work in general, and the visual, technical and narrative dynamics of these two photographs in particular. Of these analyses, a central theme has been the ways that Wall participates in a social critique of representation through his use of and engagement with spectatorial vision, and the degree to which the use of technology *vis-à-vis* the photographic medium helps or hinders this cause. What concerns me is whether the image of a struggle between men and women for mastery of space in these two images is actually an empowering social critique of

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[300] In a 1997 interview, responding to a question about the prevalence of photography in the contemporary art world and its difference from 1970s conceptual art, the critic Benjamin Buchloh summarized what was then becoming the established history about recent Vancouver art:

> It is interesting to look at the historical dialectics between generations or between positions. To see, for example, to what degree the legacy of conceptual art is counteracted in the late 1970s by artists like Jeff Wall, who criticized a certain model of linguistic paradigm by reintroducing a visual or representational paradigm.

What Buchloh called a counteraction, Jeff Wall calls a counter-tradition. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Politics of Representation," in Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager eds., *The Photographic Paradigm*, *Lier & Boog* 12 (1997): 18.

women's marginalized social position in the 1970s (one that leads to new ways of thinking about space itself and how it is ideologically structured *vis-à-vis* gender), or whether the pictures reflect a male artist's attempt to master space through controlling the discourse around his pictures in a way that assures him a place in a resurrected vanguard of art history. Of the critics mentioned above, I begin with an early review by Donald Kuspit, because it gets closest to the problem I have outlined regarding the discrepancy between subject seen and subject known, and because he is also one of the few art critics to acknowledge and tackle a gender dynamic operating within the narratives constructed by the artist. Other critics, whom I turn to afterwards, acknowledge Wall's visual references to 1970s feminist theory (in particular the feminist use of Lacanian psychoanalysis) but do not go so far as to question whether Wall's use of such feminist theoretical tools actually results in some kind of new feminine consciousness regarding the political empowerment of the individual; that is – do the works affect the social change that the theory that supports them purports it does? Lastly, I bring to light the fact that Wall's own peers, commenting on his work nearer to the time of its production, seem more conscious of the relationship of his work to the feminist discourse of the time.

In a 1982 *Artforum* feature, Donald Kuspit suggests that Wall's own initial writings about his art and his use of the light box testify to his "obsession with technique," an obsession that considers not only the means of production (the camera, lighting, etc.) but also more critically the ways that the act of looking is conditioned ideologically.[301] Kuspit calls Wall's concentration on technique an attempt to establish pictorially the "absolute frame of reference" of a twentieth-century "technical state of

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[301] Donald Kuspit, "Looking Up at Jeff Wall's Modern 'Appassionamento'," *Artforum* 20, no. 7 (March 1982): 52-56.

mind" in order to use it against itself; that is, to use it as a vehicle for critical awareness about how we are conditioned to look, and therefore to provide an opportunity to become liberated from it.[302] At his time of writing, while conceding that Wall's work succeeds by simply posing the idea of a consciousness liberated from technology, Kuspit appears ambivalent about whether this strategy actually works in Wall's photographs. The central concern of Kuspit's argument is that the subjects Wall chooses depend on narratives of erotic tension (a passionately ripped up room, male/female relationships, etc.) that are forever constrained by the formal techniques of the images' construction: a tension Kuspit posits as the unresolved and "underlying dementia" of the work. The erotic function of the subject matter of Wall's images is for Kuspit the only way to highlight the human existence of living ("a source of vitality and a fresh demonstration of the mystery of human existence"), within an image that is self-consciously referring to the ideological dominance of a technological state of being in the world; without this, the image is in danger of simply replicating the same technologies of looking that it seeks to critique.[303]

Quoting him, Kuspit reiterates Wall's 1978 claim that these early works were "partially suggested by a description of Goethe's sitting room at Weimer, a bourgeois interior in which he had installed a mammoth head of Hera. . . . [suggesting] the possibility of exploding the domesticity of the interior with the fixedly passionate aspect of the monumental."[304] By monumental Wall was referring to the all-knowing eye of technology – the ability of the camera and the illuminated light box to render everything normally ordinary now monumental in heightened visibility. This is a revealing and

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[302] Ibid.

[303] Ibid., 57.

[304] Ibid., 55. This quote's original source is not acknowledged in the original *Artforum* article, but may be taken from written correspondence between Wall and Kuspit that Kuspit mentioned earlier in the article.

curious quote; it likens the technologies of vision exemplified in the camera and light box to the vengeful Greek goddess of marriage and fertility while suggesting that such technologies control discourse in a manner recalling the central tower of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.[305] While this quote was made in reference to the inspiration behind another work in the same exhibition (*Young Workers*, 1978), Kuspit applies it to *Picture for Women*, noticing that the camera explodes the interior, "destroying the possibility of domestic peace between the couple."[306] It is perhaps even better applied to *Destroyed Room*, where the *literal* destruction of domesticity is monumentalized in an image Kuspit characterizes as "a metaphoric rape of inner space, of the room of her own that has become emblematic of women's identity."[307] If the photograph is a kind of central command post that makes heightened visibility possible, then the viewers are complicit in their own domination, since they are forced into a role of mediating the explosion through looking.

The trouble with this is whether or not this kind of critical looking inspires a change in consciousness—awareness about one's role as mediator—or instead just reinforces the status quo of how things are already seen: "The question of Wall's art is whether he makes the technical production of visibility the source of an unexpected, truly "trans-technical" consciousness, or whether he is only creating, like a magician, the illusion of such a consciousness."[308] In general, most critics writing about Wall's work seem to argue that his work does in fact inspire this kind of critical awareness in the

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[305] This subject was taken up at length in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, first published in English in 1977. See Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid., 56.
[308] Ibid., 54.

viewer. It seems to me this is based on an intellectual enthusiasm for his work (of which I am not immune) that tends to elide Wall's stated theoretical intentions and inspirations with what is communicated in the images themselves. For example, Arielle Pélenc, writing in 1989 about *Destroyed Room* argues that Wall is engaged in a form of social critique "that is staged through the prismatic lens of historical painting and that it establishes the libidinal grounds of his oeuvre," and that this social content of his work can be explained through a reading of Wall's essay "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel" on Dan Graham's work *Alteration to a Suburban House*.[309] She claims that Wall's insight into the relationship between suburban houses, the International Style of architecture with its attendant glass wall facades, and the resulting implications of these spatial technologies on public and private ways of looking and of being seen within modernity can and does explain the Lacanian "circularity of various sights/looks" in Wall's work. It seems that after suggesting a connection between sexual desire and domestic space Pélenc deflects this reading onto an explanation of Wall's art-historical knowledge of modern architecture and history painting. Also, she uses a theoretical essay by Wall on another artist's work as a primary source for understanding the social content of one of Wall's own works.

No doubt this reading is occasioned by the fact that both Graham's sculpture and Wall's photo depend on the formal/technical device of opening up the normally private domestic space to the visual imposition of the public passing by. It is worthwhile pointing out that much of Pélenc's argument is based on the fact that *Destroyed Room* was first installed in a storefront window in Vancouver – a social and public context that although

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[309] Arielle Pélenc, "Jeff Wall: Excavation of the Image," *Parkett* 22 (1989): 78-80. Pélenc refers to the following: Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays*, 31-75.

since unrepeated, has much greater ramifications for her argument than the subsequent

display of most of Wall's work in catalogs, galleries and museums. The fact that

Destroyed Room is based on the nineteenth century Eugène Delacroix painting *The Death*

of Sardanapalus, which Pélenc introduces at the beginning of her essay, while

fascinating, does not have any meaning for viewers unfamiliar with the source image, and

therefore that content does not exist for them, whether they are seeing it in a storefront or

in a gallery. There is certainly no harm, and in fact there exists a potentially great benefit

in elucidating these historical connections and continuities, but this does not mean that

the *image itself contributes to changed consciousness* about technologies of vision, or the

ideologies supported by such technologies. This brings forth the question of who exactly

the intended audience of these works is? Is it the "unspecial" or "unchosen" people Wall

has referred to in his interviews (albeit in terms of his interest in picturing them), or is it

an elite cohort of patrons, academics and critics?[310]

Other scholars have addressed the question of whether the underlying intentions

of the work's social critique matches what is visually communicated in the actual images.

The crux of the problem seems to be whether Wall's technique of "total visibility"— that

is his ability to render explicit the formally invisible picture plane of classical painting in

highly detailed large scale narratives—works to construct new ways of imagining what

an image can be or mean. Thierry de Duve first used the terms 'total visibility' in

reference to Wall's work his essay "The Mainstream and the Crooked Path."[311] De Duve

argues that unlike Clement Greenberg's claim that photography is naturalistic and freer

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[310] For Wall's reference to "uncommon" and "unspecial" people see note 108 on page 56.

[311] Thierry de Duve, "The Mainstream and the Crooked Path," *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 26-55.

than other media to depend on its subject matter for effect because of its mechanical nature,[312] Wall has to reckon with the history of the medium of photography because he is referencing the history of modern painting, and is therefore a *modernist photographer* (de Duve's italics).[313]   For De Duve, who follows Greenberg's general logic that requires painting to reveal its own material and formal characteristics in order to lose its literary characteristics, Wall is thus also required to reveal the opaque nature of photography as a medium. Unlike modern painting which depends on making the classic picture plane obvious to viewers by exposing them to the material reality of the painters' techniques: color, brushstroke, flatness of the canvas, etc.,—De Duve argues that Wall's great innovation was to find a way to reveal the naturalized invisibility of photography's picture plane. *Picture for Women* becomes De Duve's primary example of this innovation because the subject matter—a system of gazes between viewer, man, woman and camera that is destabilized by the effect of the picture as a mirror—echoes the technology of Wall's chosen medium, the fixed and impassive eye of the camera.

Much of de Duve's argument chooses to disregard the narrative subject matter of Wall's pictures ("forget the iconography. . . . Forget any storyline the image might suggest . . ."[314]) in a building effort to show how the pictorial effects of Wall's photography intuitively replicates the dramatic possibilities of modernist painting by re-staging and emphasizing the picture plane through the mechanical documentation of landscapes as "motif." By *motif,* he is referring to the historical juncture between

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[312] De Duve quotes Greenberg's article on Edward Weston in which Greenberg says, "Photography is the most transparent of the art mediums devised or discovered by man. . . .The final moral is: let photography be 'literary'." See Clement Greenberg, "The Camera's Glass Eye: Review of an Exhibition of Edward Weston," *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2, Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, John O'Brian ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 60-63.
[313] Thierry de Duve, "The Mainstream and the Crooked Path," 29.
[314] Ibid., 34.

landscape as genre (which includes figurative and allegorical elements; as in Poussin) and landscape as motif (in which landscape is used as a reason for painting itself; for him epitomized by Cézanne). While this may be true, De Duve states that Wall's work fails when the subject matter is too didactic or self-conscious, that this kind of over-determined subject matter destroys the imaginative possibilities for viewer response. Strangely, he does single out *Picture for Women* as a particularly successful work, despite its existence as one of the most didactic art-historical references to date of Wall's work for an informed scholar like De Duve – but this may be because it is not a classic landscape, so may be exempt from the issues of genre vs. motif that he discusses through much of the essay. At any rate, despite being focused on the relationship of Wall's photography to the historical development of modern painting, the issue of the efficacy of Wall's iconography as ideological critique emerges implicitly in De Duve's essay as it did more overtly in Kuspit's.

In her essay on Wall's work, which also singles out *Destroyed Room* and *Picture for Women*, Kaja Silverman takes up some of the themes addressed by De Duve and Kuspit, but focuses on his use of subject matter in an effort to link Wall's work the history of modern portraiture, apparatus theory and symptomatic reading. By apparatus theory she is referring to Louis Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*; his Marxist-based theory that the base of production may continue to support the superstructure after the failure of state power, because state ideology has conditioned workers to behave in production-friendly social behaviors through non-violent means using culture, school, family, and other institutional constructs. Silverman suggests that the term "total visibility," originally articulated by De Duve in response to Wall's work,

reflects Wall's situation within the post-structuralist practices of its time; that is artists'

desire to "expose [the] 'dirty secrets'" of such forms of social dominance in mass-

produced imagery through pointing them out in critical artworks and therefore

"display[ing] what is usually concealed."[315] However, she complicates this by suggesting

that Wall's works also reflect symptomatic reading, a concept introduced by Thomas

Elsaesser and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in the 1970s in relation to American television

melodramas, and the ability of such programs to project back to the viewing public a

"safe" version of the repressed anxieties experienced by that social body.[316] She suggests

that therefore the revelation of 'dirty secrets' is impossible solely through visual means,

since social repression can take place culturally as well as psychically, and photographs,

film and other visual media can hide the repressed in the blinding light of "total

visibility." Thus the quote at the beginning of this chapter section from Silverman: a

subject can *remain publicly invisible, while being hyper-visible.[317]*

For Silverman, the reconciliation between social subject matter and critical theory

in Wall's work is tied to a successful or not-so-successful negotiation of the distance

between the potential of revealing social inequity through hyper visibility and the dangers

of simply replicating public invisibility in glossy advertising images. For Silverman,

unlike De Duve, who bases his critique around the use of landscape in Wall's work, the

history of portraiture is the arena within which these distances can be breached. Because

historical portraits are usually named, Silverman suggests a historical occurrence in

which the drama of the individual as a person in the world is at odds with his/her

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[315] Kaja Silverman, "Total Visibility," 61.
[316] Ibid., 62.
[317] See note 294 on page 157.

placement within the patriarchal order, which defines him/her. The identity of the individual pictured is determined by text (through the external device of naming he/she through titling), through the sitter's incorporation of his/her social context (i.e. "state apparatus"), and through the frame that objectifies him/her in these terms, while also subjugating that individual's image to the gaze of a viewer. She suggests that Wall gets around this problem by giving his photographic portraits specific kinds of titles that make it "impossible for us to forge a stable connection between word and image."[318] This is amplified by his tendency to use actors to depict anyone he chooses, so that the identity of the "sitter" (for lack of better word) is external and unrecognizable in his/her portrait.

Of these, *Picture for Women* becomes a central example in Silverman's argument and is described by her as "one of his greatest works."[319] She argues that this photograph visually reflects the power dynamics between viewer and sitter, those who look, enframe, and attempt to master the world, and those who are looked at and who thus help to establish to the individuality of the looker:

> As Wall helps us to understand, the fictive "outside" which geometral perspective works to create is not equally available to all viewers. It has traditionally been reserved for the male spectator. Representation creates this outside by departicularizing the female body, and rendering it hyper-visible—i.e. by subsuming it to the entifying and universalizing category "woman" and "picture." Since women are subjected to this process so that men can become individuals, every image that works in the way I have described does so for, or "on behalf" of, the male viewer. In *Picture for Women*, Wall sets out to make one for the female viewer, in all of her glorious multiplicity. In order to do so, he must dismantle the category of "subject" as well as that of "individual."[320]

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[318] Kaja Silverman, "Total Visibility," 98.
[319] Ibid., 100.
[320] Ibid., 105.

I disagree with this reading because a fundamental aspect of this image is Wall holding

the cable release, and therefore controlling the gaze of all involved, since the picture will

never be seen without also seeing the man who controls the camera. It is also not at all

clear how the photograph dismantles the category of subject or individual simply by

duplicating and expanding on the number of gazes possible through the use of the mirror,

or by neglecting to title the man or the woman (which would then include them in 'name

of the father' or patriarchal order). Also as Silverman suggests, if the viewer is so

important in the construction of the sitter's identity in portraiture, it is also worth

questioning who this viewer is, as no doubt male and female viewers have different class

backgrounds with differing degrees of social power. Lastly, despite the rhetoric about the

hyper-visibility of the all-seeing camera eye, it still takes an *author* to trigger the machine

into seeing, regardless of where and to whom the author's gaze is directed in the course of

taking the picture. This fact, in conjunction with the title, actually qualifies this 'gift'

given to women as not entirely generous, perhaps suggesting something along the lines of

"you asked for it, and here it is, but on my terms." Rather than creating an image of a

woman in her "glorious multiplicity" through the dismantling of her to-be-looked-at

subjectivity, Wall's presence in the image asserts his power and control over the terms of

the discourse. Although the discourse is a feminist critique of representation coming out

of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Wall is positioning himself visually and theoretically as a

maker of that discourse. Silverman would no doubt disagree with this, as she goes on to

argue that Wall successfully unites the binary of the male-female couple through his use

of the mirror, which duplicates the couple and "foregrounds his [Wall's] otherness-to-

himself," thereby presumably deflating the struggle for power over others' subjectivity that is inherent in competing gazes.[321]

Silverman does not speak at length about *Destroyed Room* except to characterize his use of the light box at the beginning of her essay as a comment on the commodification and construction of the female gender through advertising, and as a reflection on domestic violence associated with women's inability to live up to that ideal. Contrasting Kuspit, she suggests this work is "more ideological than technical" in content and motivation.[322] Her claim that Wall "drags the skeleton of domestic violence . . . out of the closet of heterosexual relationality" has a dismissive tone, as though such "ideological" content is related to more didactic and activist-oriented feminist artworks about violence towards women happening at the same time, and as such cannot be taken as seriously as works that are *less political*.[323] It should be noted however, that overall Silverman is making a claim for Wall's efficacy as ideology critique, even if certain works fall short when compared to others.

Still, to get back to the root of the problem as I see it, is to re-articulate the fact that glossy images of men controlling women, women's space, or the gaze(s) directed at women (in these two photographs) are not without their textual support (theory written about them by the artists and others) necessarily affecting a political change of consciousness in viewers. As Wall himself said in his earliest writing, and I discussed in chapter one, artworks are open to diverse interpretations by those who see them, and it is this that distinguishes them from any manifesto that accompanies them. For Wall the role

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[321] Ibid., 107.

[322] Ibid., 61.

[323] Such as, for example, Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May* (2007) or *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977).

of the manifesto is to be a "polemical tool . . . in a dialectical situation of conflict."[324] The

situation of conflict, or field of conflict, as Wall also calls it, is the contested terrain

between what was an acceptable art form historically and what is becoming an acceptable

art form, and the artist's self-awareness of that transition in his/her making of the object,

which is part of its subject matter. However, the artwork, unlike the manifesto, "can

reconcile opposites, which, on the immediate contextual level, cannot be reconciled."[325] If

we consider *Destroyed Room* and *Picture for Women* from this perspective, we can see

why they can only function as effective social critique if they are *accompanied by their*

manifesto. By the 1970s, manifestos as they existed in early-twentieth-century Europe

(such as the Futurist and Dada manifestos for example) were no longer being widely

utilized by American or Canadian artists, supplanted instead by artists' own theoretical

writings that sought to place their work in a favorable critical discourse. As already

noted in chapter two, in the 1960s this practice dovetailed with conceptual artists' interest

in language, and language's role as "state apparatus," and artists like Joseph Kosuth,

Lawrence Weiner and others largely determined the historical context for their work

through a combined practice of art and writing. Feminist artists also employed this

strategy with more overt political intentions as is evident in the work of many artists

dealing with women's rights and the interrogation of selfhood, such as Adrian Piper's

Mythic Being I/You (Her) (1974), of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1977), which

I mentioned earlier, and many others. Jeff Wall has been no exception, although because

of his study of art history and his awareness of how the manifesto has operated in the

making of twentieth-century art history, he has more systematically presented himself as

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[324] Jeff Wall, "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context," 33. See note 134 on page 68.
[325] Ibid., 34.

both a historian and artist, even if he is careful not to call himself a historian. In her dissertation on Wall, Sharla Sava acknowledged this central aspect of his work:

> One of the most important issues in need of further consideration today is not that Jeff Wall makes pictures, but that alongside this practice he also develops a version of modern art history that legitimates the artistic and political decisions which support a return to the picture. Furthermore, this art history is used by anyone who writes with any seriousness about Wall's work. . . .[326]

Wall's self-positioning as an artist in the midst of a field of conflict, and his engagement with the discipline of art history was echoed in Thomas Crow's long 1993 *Artforum* article on his work, "Profane Illuminations: Social History and the Art of Jeff Wall." At the time of writing (1993), Crow suggested that Wall's work was responding to "the perceived radicality of social art history" in the 1970s, specifically the influence of post-Frankfurt school social critics such as Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Luce Irigaray.[327] In Crow's account, radical social art history re-emphasized subject matter, and reevaluated the iconography of modern painting in a challenge to modern critics' emphasis on formalism:

> Canonical examples of liberated technique, such as Eugène Delacroix's *La mort de Sardanapale* (Death of Sardanapalus, 1927) and Édouard Manet's *Un bar aux Folies Bergère* (Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1881-87) could be situated beyond the accounts of adventurous colorism, abbreviated description, and expressive handling of the brush, beyond even preoccupations with the artist's individual sexual psychology. Instead they were to be seen primarily as symptomatic instances of structured sexual positioning—fantasies of male visual control as indulged in the former or interrupted in the latter—potentially generalizable to the culture as a whole.[328]

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[326] Sharla Sava, "Cinematic Photography, Theatricality, Spectacle: the Art of Jeff Wall" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2005), 96.
[327] Thomas Crow, "Profane Illuminations: Social History and the Art of Jeff Wall," *Artforum* 31, no. 6, (Feb. 1993): 64.
[328] Ibid.

Expanding on what Crow suggests here in relation to art historians, the 1970s art world was clearly a "field of conflict" in the context of the women's movement and its multiple challenges to male-dominance in the arts, including a re-evaluation of the art historical canon and the ways women were pictured by male artists. Despite most art critics and historians' reluctance to take up the issue in the 1990s and later, Wall's peers seem to have zeroed in on this aspect of his work in the immediate years after the work's production, as did Donald Kuspit. Kim Gordon, in writing an article for ZG Magazine titled "Unresolved Desires: Redefining Masculinity in Some Recent Art," (1982) singled out Wall's *Double Self Portrait* (1979; Fig. 3.6) as an example of the ways that contemporary male artists were adopting a pose of femininity (sometimes through picturing themselves or other men as homosexuals) in order to enter into a dialogue with other men.[329] She includes a number of quotes by Wall himself, who in 1982 is quite explicit about his engagement with issues of femininity and masculinity and how this tension can be used in the creation of discourse:

> The homosexual contriver stands in a powerful, if fictitious position in speaking to each sex from the stand point of the other. He is displaced from sexual systems and within his particular sphere, seems to subject it to his discourse which is inherently inverted, or mirrored an opposite.[330]

This is an interesting quote because it reveals both Wall's awareness of the power of identity-subject positions in imagery, and the ability to manipulate such positions in the creation of a dialogue or discourse most beneficial to the performer. In *Double Self Portrait*, Wall poses twice within the same image; in one pose he stands near to the front of the picture plane with one hand on his hip and another on a round white chair dressed

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[329] Kim Gordon, ""Unresolved Desires: Redefining Masculinity in Some Recent Art," *ZG Magazine* (1982): unpaginated.

[330] Ibid., Wall quoted by Gordon, taken from Jeff Wall, "Problems (in visual art)," unpublished lecture, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 1979.

in casual clothing (some have characterized this as more feminine), in the other pose he stands in the background looking slightly more authoritative with his arms crossed and wearing a white professional shirt (some have characterized this as more masculine). Gordon asks "By switching clothes is he inverting the roles of model and producer?" She intuitively understands that by adopting a feminine stance through his body positioning and clothing choices, Wall is also attracting women to his cause by allowing them to identify with him in "the same way she identifies with female fashion models and mannequins, imaging herself in the same exhibitionist, public situation that holds the illusion of power."[331] The key here, is the term *illusion* of power, a qualifier that refers back to my concerns that within this particular historical field of conflict (the feminist challenge to figurative representation), the artist's presentation of open-ended (or ambivalent) photographic representations do not necessarily facilitate a political change of consciousness in viewers.

Writing about *Destroyed Room* in 1980, Wall's friend and colleague Dan Graham identified Laura Mulvey's essay as a key source informing the work. He claimed,

> Wall's work alludes to, but undermines (in not providing a fetish image to mask the representation of woman as castrated, as lack) the usual pleasure produced in this type of sexual violation (a common theme in high fashion display). These ideas also apply to Wall's *Picture for Women*. [332]

Graham can make this claim because he assumes that the lack of a real woman in the destroyed room thereby removes the fetish and deflates the argument regarding woman being the object of a controlling patriarchal gaze. But this is a simplistic understanding of the argument which does not take into account the fact that other objects can be

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[331] Ibid.

[332] Dan Graham, "The Destroyed Room of Jeff Wall," *Real Life* (March, 1980): 5.

fetishized, spaces can be gendered, and the discourse surrounding an art image can be restrictive to class, gender or race. In such an expanded view a viewer could theoretically still receive pleasure at the site of a ransacked woman's bedroom, as so many people receive pleasure from seeing an accident or crime scene after the event has left the site. Additionally, it is worth pointing out that in fact a female body does exist in the photograph anyway, in the form of a partially nude dancing doll that sits on top of the dresser and therefore serves as a surrogate for an idealized vision of femininity.

Still, for university-trained art-historians like Wall and Wallace (both have masters degrees in art history, not studio art) this "field of conflict" would be obvious and would factor into their decisions about what kinds of images to make.[333] In a 1989 interview Wall confirmed this general idea when he said that he and his peers in the early 1970s were reacting "to political life at the time, and the kinds of political decisions people were making—political decisions not in the normal or surface sense, but ones that had to do with how you imagined being an artist."[334] It seems clear that Wall's conception of being an artist depended on the political decision to theorize and publish a concurrent art history with his images. Ian Wallace reiterated this claim in regards to his own work and Wall's in 1983 when he said that he had "an historical outlook. . . . That's what actually distinguishes my work and that of Jeff Wall from most of the other artists in Vancouver. We had an historical outlook. There weren't many other artists that did."[335] The fact that this art history was not definitively worked out in 1970, explains in part why

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[333] Both of these artists no doubt represent what Crow means by "the most sophisticated wing of social art history" in his essay on Wall.

[334] Jeff Wall, TJ Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, Anne Wagner, "Representation, Suspicions, and Critical Transparency: An Interview with Jeff Wall," 205.

[335] Ian Wallace, "Ian Wallace – Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker," unpublished notes on exhibition of Wallace's work at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1983, Vancouver Art Gallery archive IW/5/70.

early works like the *Landscape Manual*, while not stricken from the Jeff Wall's catalogue raisonné, are normally discussed outside of his later "more mature" works (that is those that return to pictorialism through large format photography).

In any case, as already stated, while the *Destroyed Room* is the literal image of a *field of conflict* and as such is immediately accessible as content to everyone who sees the work, the theoretical and art-historical interpretations of that phrase are not necessarily immediately obvious to those same viewers. Therefore, without the external content revealed through access to the theoretical implications of the work, the social critique of the work may or may not be effective. This is, of course, an old argument that has been consistently leveled at conceptual art work from the 1970s as one of its "failures." I am reminded of a passage in Blake Stimson's essay "The Promise of Conceptual Art," in which Stimson reiterates Robert Smithson's 1972 observation that conceptual art was devolving into "production for production's sake:"

> Where art for art's sake had still relied on a notion of "quality" (albeit a very mystified and abstract one) to justify itself in social terms, production for production's sake could dispense with the interests of the audience altogether and justify itself simply on the basis of its own activity: it assumed that conceptualizing was valuable on its own, was "productive," without any consideration for whether or not the particular concepts produced served specific social needs or functions.[336]

At the time of the 1970 *Four Artists* exhibition at the University of British Columbia that included Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual* and Ian Wallace's *Magazine Piece*, local art critic Joan Lowndes also commented on the "extremely cerebral and esoteric" nature of the university-trained artists, quoting Duane Lunden (one of the other artists in the show) as saying "I don't make things understandable to other people, I only make things

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[336] Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* xliii.

understandable to myself."[337] This cannot be directly applied to *Destroyed Room* or *Picture for Women*, which do after all offer something substantial to the viewer: a large illuminated narrative photograph. However the quote does raise the question as to what social needs or functions are served by these works?

One of the social functions of both of these works is their ability to create an opening for Wall as an artist and intellectual in the milieu of an international art world that was already showing signs of fatigue with conceptual/abstract art and a renewed interest in figurative art. Wall's training in and knowledge of art history, especially the development of the European avant-gardes of the 1920s, along with his self-conscious contextualization of both of these photographs with art historical sources from the very beginning of their public exposure, meant that he could place himself at the center of a unique discourse: the return to figuration and realism, through photography, in the midst of a poststructuralist critique of representation that considered such images with profound suspicion. In order to do this, the images had to be viewed as more than the sum of their parts, because on their own there is arguably not enough in them to generate the theoretical content that would guarantee them being seen as more than spectacular representations of social behavior as-is. In an interview/discussion with Wall and other critics from 1990, T.J. Clark brings up a similar criticism by asking Wall, "Could it be argued that what is happening here is that all these characters and situations are being de-realized and de-animated in order to be re-realized and re-animated as part of *your* own tableau, that finally the picture is one of the artist's means of control over things (original

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[337] Joan Lowndes, "Four Artists continue 'Misconceptualism,'" *The Province*, Feb. 11, 1970, page unknown.

italics)?"[338] By 1990, Clark is concerned with what he describes as Wall's relentless push to empty the characters in his images of obvious subject positions, in order to show the repressed nature of social life (like Silverman's symptomatic reading theory) in late capitalism as a series of small gestures and "controlled actions." Clark is careful to note that this has only emerged in Wall's work after his early use of self-portraiture, which is evident in *Picture for Women*, and two other photos from the same time.[339] This strategy is described as Clark as "extremely dicey" and suggestive of the fact that Wall's tight control over his image construction ensures that his presence remains in all of his images whether or not he is actually seen as a figure in the picture. As I have been arguing here, I agree that this aspect of Wall's work appears to be a driving force behind all of his photographs, from his earliest conceptual experiments to his more recent transparencies.

From this vantage point, the tacit inclusion of women and women's space in both of these photographs can be read as a continuation of the work of the decade earlier, but with alterations carefully considered in the context of changed political and artistic contexts, and within a shifting field of conflict. If we return to Wall's *Landscape Manual* of 1970, we can recognize many similarities. Clearly, *Picture for Women*, despite being inspired by Manet's *A Bar in the Folies-Bergère*, is not the first time Wall has used mirrors in his photo-based work. The reflections of the street and views outside the car's rear view mirror and side mirrors of are of central importance to the *Landscape Manual*, as is the use of a mirror in Wall's description of the erotic sexual escapades of Bonnie and Diane, the movie theater attendants. If we recall, the room seen behind Bonnie and Diane

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[338] Jeff Wall, TJ Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, Anne Wagner, "Representation, Suspicions, and Critical Transparency: an Interview with Jeff Wall," 114.
[339] Wall used his own image in his first Cibachrome image *Faking Death* (1977) and again in *Double Self-Portrait* (1979).

as they reapply make-up after their tryst in the bathroom cubicle is seen through a mirror, and is described by Wall as seeming at first like a "immense colourless and vacant linguistic region." However, he goes on to re-characterize the room as a dynamic "<u>structure</u>, an ordering pattern for various specifics---can be sentences, words, etc. (phrases) or, analogously streets, blocks, "neighborhoods," or vast arterial freeway interchanges. . . ."[340] Furthermore, on this same page Wall has handwritten at the bottom, "Note: read this page possibly under fluorescent light – look up from page - see yourself in a mirror – (face, hair, etc.)." So eight years before *Picture for Women*, Wall was clearly already engaged in thinking about how photography and mirrors could be employed in critically revealing one's own subjective experience within the structures of the city. His direction to read the text, which on that page in the manual is about watching (and objectifying) Bonnie and Diane as reflections in a mirror, while simultaneously looking at yourself in the mirror, essentially lays out the key terms of *Picture for Women*, with one main difference. In *Landscape Manual* the artist's presence is not conceived of in the mirror image, although he is present as the author of both the text and the imagined imagery in the text. In the former, women are the focus of the author and viewer's vision, but since they are described as applying make-up in the mirror it is clear that they are not returning the gaze, they are to be looked at. In the latter, a woman looks back at us (the viewer) and the author of the work, the artist, who is made self-evident as the camera cable-release holder by his stance and black (formal) clothing. Still, the woman does not aggressively counteract any of the gazes directed at her; her body is relaxed, her hands rest casually on the table, and her facial expression is unreadable. This is a far cry from

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[340] Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 20.

the slightly confrontational body language of the barmaid in *A Bar in the Folies-Bergère* (Fig. 3.7), who grips the bar with a facial expression that instead suggests ennui and resignation. While Wall holds authorial power, as he did in writing the *Landscape Manual*, and therefore in my opinion controls the system of gazes in both artworks, *Picture for Women* does not clearly depict the woman as the object of the male gaze but instead gives her a certain degree of autonomy within the system of gazes that he has orchestrated. This allows Wall to control access to multiple levels of art-historical discourse, without risking criticism that he is objectifying the image of woman in the process.

Ian Wallace's *The Summer Script I and II* (1973-74), *Attack on Literature* (1975), and *Image/Text* (1979)

> *Image/Text* is thus an erotic work, and is related to the essays in dreamy eroticism that Wallace produced in 1977. . .The erotic pictures were an oblique provocation within the '70s context, a re-statement of a mode of sexual representation which the liberal-Left allied with feminism found unacceptable. . . . In *Image/Text* he retreated from provocation to a highly-distantiated evocation of the feminine.
>
> Jeff Wall, 1988[341]

Ian Wallace has only recently begun to be acclaimed internationally at a level near that of Jeff Wall, whose work has been commented on by an eminent roster of international critics and scholars over a much longer period. 2009 marked the first publication of a substantial monograph on his work that was organized in conjunction with a series of three exhibitions held concurrently at three institutions in Dusseldorf,

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[341] Jeff Wall, "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome. . . ," 68.

Rotterdam, and Zurich.[342] Prior to this, while certainly well known in Vancouver and the rest of Canada,[343] Wallace's work has mostly been critically analyzed through curatorial essays in exhibition catalogs, and in articles written by his peers in magazines, most notably Jeff Wall. Wallace has also contributed to the analysis of his own long career through prolific writing about his work and that of others. Therefore, the body of theoretical writing on Wallace's work from a diverse perspective is still in a developmental phase, leaving less to dissect here.

The tendency to discuss Wallace's work in relation to Jeff Wall is no accident. Wall was a student of Wallace's at the University of British Columbia in the 1960s, and is roughly the same age as his then-teacher, only three years younger. Over the years, now decades, a productive relationship developed that initially included their interaction as collegial faculty at Simon Fraser University in the 1970s, playing in a band together, and other collaborative projects. The first work of Wallace's that I want to discuss grew out of one such collaboration. *The Summer Script I and II* (1973-74; Fig. 3.8) is a work of photography that emerged out of a failed attempt by Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham,[344] and Ian Wallace to collaborate on a film about men and women sitting and talking in a garden on a summer day on the way to a wedding. After or during the collaborative process, as it became clear that the film would not actually be completed in any substantial way, Wallace adapted some of the stills for use as his own work. Black-and-white stills from

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[342] Vanessa Müller, Beatrix Ruf, Nicolaus Shafthausen, Monika Szewczyk, ed., *Ian Wallace: A Literature of Images* (Zurich: Kunstalle Zürich; Düsseldorf: Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen; Rotterdam: Witte de With Publishers; Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009).

[343] For example, in 2004 Wallace was awarded by the Canada Council for the Arts Canada's highest honor as an artist, the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. This award is usually only given to individuals who are recognized for long and fruitful national careers.

[344] Graham is another well known Vancouver artist who was also a student of Wallace's at University of British Columbia in the 1960s, and is six years younger than Wallace. Graham is often included in the moniker of "the Vancouver School of Photo Conceptualists" and like Wall has developed a healthy international art career around his work in video.

the original video takes were taken out of their narrative context by Wallace, blown up as twelve large photographic panels each approximately four by six feet, each one then hand-colored with oil tints, and originally arranged in two sets of six panels in opposite corners of the gallery space. As one looks from left to right in the first set of six images, the images progressively break down as they show the horizontal tracking of the low definition video screen. This amplifies the miscommunications suggested by various interactions between a man and a women pictured in the images; in one photo he looks at her across a table but she looks up and away, in another the couple both look off to the right, in a third image a third man (Wallace?) lurks behind the couple in the background. All of this is colored in somewhat lurid planes of apple green, turquoise, pink and red, giving the "summer" mood a kind of surreal artificiality. In the first exhibition of the work, the first set of six images was divided into threes and hung side-by-side on the left and right of the gallery corner.[345] This created a spatial situation in which the man and woman look across the corner at each other's images and not just outwards to the viewers.[346] Like *Picture for Women*, a system of gazes is being portrayed, and although a romantic liaison is insinuated, the inability of the character's gazes to meet each other and the lack of clarity in regards to whom their gaze is directed suggests an inability to emotionally connect with each other. As noted, this is strengthened by the forced breakdown of the viewer's gaze, as he/she works to put the picture back together while the visible video tracking disintegrates the surface.

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[345] Ian Wallace, *The Summer Script*, Feb 28 – April 6, Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia, 1974.

[346] This arrangement has not necessarily been reproduced in subsequent showings of the work.

The same installation format was duplicated across the gallery on an opposing

corner with the second set of six images. In this set photographs depicting the woman's

hands on a red-and-white checkered table are seen flipping through either the written

script for the unfinished video (that served as the source of the photo work), or

photographs from another black-and-white film featuring a man and a woman. The table

holds a martini bottle, two glasses and a vase of flowers, and an empty garden chair

(tinted yellow) is pulled up alongside it. As in the first set, the colored washes of red,

yellow, pink and green highlight the staged nature of the scene, and draw attention to the

script and photographs which stand out because they are left black-and-white.

Throughout the work, a kind of love-story or sexual tension is suggested through the

colors and props used, and the series of looks between men and women, but nothing can

be clearly deduced. As Eric Cameron wrote in a 1979 *Artforum* article about this work,

"the sequencing of images and gestures may create an innuendo of drama, but that does

not spell out a plot."[347] According to Cameron, the original video was planned to

obliquely reference a scene in Jean Epstein's 1924 silent film about a tragic love affair,

Coeur Fidele. The characters shown in *The Summer Script* are seen discussing an

illustration from the earlier film found in a book about cinema that sits on the table: a still

image showing a man looking at the neck of his lover. Indeed, the black-and-white photo

of the naked lover's neck is given prominence in the final image of the sequence, taking

up most of the space. Thus a melancholic feeling of lost, desired or unattainable eroticism

anchors the set of images. *The Summer Script* exists as a dense layering of references

having to do with the relationship between text and image (historical and contemporary),

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[347] Eric Cameron, "Semiology, Sensuousness and Ian Wallace," *Artforum* 17, no. 6, (Feb., 1979): 31.

ways of looking, male-female relationships, and the highlighting of communicative gestures that indicate a narrative but also compromise any specific reading.

Due to his consistent reference to language, text and poetry, Wallace's work has often been described as literary. Most of his artworks since the 1970s testify to his belief that images function as texts. Consider the consistency of the following titles over a thirty year period: "Literature - Transparent and Opaque" for an essay he wrote in 1969 for an exhibition catalog about concrete poetry; and thirty years later the title of his first major monograph (2009), *A Literature of Images*, which itself was borrowed from another essay from 1969.[348] Wallace and his commentators have acknowledged the importance of two influential texts on his work in this regard: Roland Barthes' essay "The Third Meaning: Notes on Some of Eisenstein's Stills" published in *Artforum* in 1973, and Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard (A throw of the dice will never abolish chance)* from 1897. In the former, Barthes outlined his hypothesis that there are three levels of meaning to be detected in an analysis of still-film images (specifically from Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*): an informational level consisting of basic information such as characters performing basic actions; a symbolic level consisting of the various symbolic interpretations of an image (referential, diegetic, historical, etc.); and a third level, which he characterizes as *obtuse*, that is hard to pin down but able to qualify the other two levels in viewers' unique interpretations of imagery.[349]

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[348] Ian Wallace, "A Literature of Images," unpaginated.

[349] Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985; reprint Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés* is considered an important work of symbolist literature, and a precursor to concrete poetry and free verse. In it, the poet rejects the traditional narrative logic of literature and the traditional structure of poetry, instead using metaphors, word-play and allusions to try to draw out concrete truths through fragmented abstractions. Chance, typology, empty pages and spaces between phrases are utilized as meaningful content that affects how one reads the poem itself. What is at stake for Wallace then, is the ability of fragmented images to express an open-ended narrative structure that does not decree any specific meaning but suggests many, hence Cameron's apt comment that *The Summer Script* contains the innuendo of drama without a plot. In *The Summer Script,* Wallace's use of photographic imagery as implied narrative and spatial placement in the gallery shows the influence of both Barthes' "Third Meaning," and the fragmentation of meaning culled from free verse and concrete poetry.

There are two ways of considering the flight from specific narrative or plot, in this work, found in each set of six images. On the one hand, in part one, the work can be construed as an idealized, non-didactic and democratic presentation of men and women socially engaging with each other around a table. In this case the subjectivity of the characters presented are open to interpretation and are not constituted by any specific gaze, as the latter was argued in Mulvey's essay on narrative cinema. On the other hand, contrary to one's expectations about photography's documentary "truth," part one is revealed as an artificial construction, since film stills and script notes that relate to part one are seen lying on the table in part two. The latter seems apt if one considers Mallarmé's poem from 1866, *Summer Sadness*, which may or may not have been a direct influence on Wallace's own work and title (I have not seen a direct reference anywhere to

indicate this is true). In *Summer Sadness*, the usually life-affirming season of poetry is made pale and unresponsive as a man views a woman of his desire in a relationship that seems more a construct of his fantasy than one that is reciprocal.[350] Thus, the narrative of *The Summer Script* is both open to interpretation by viewers *and* exists as a self-conscious display of the artist's particular vision and scripting.

Mallarmé's influence on *The Summer Script* resurfaced again the next year in *An Attack on Literature I & II* (1975; Fig. 3.9), which might be described as a photographic rendition of *Un coup de des* using figures. For this work, Wallace used the same format as *Summer Script*: two sets of six large black-and-white photographs (12 in total) that have been hand-colored and hung on the wall next to each other to form two long film-like strips in dialogue with each other. As the sequence progresses from left to right, we encounter a kind of ambiguous filmic narrative containing a man, two women, a typewriter, and many blank sheets of paper that fly out of the typewriter and around a darkened space. On the far left (the first panel) a man approaches a typewriter alone with his fingers outstretched as if he can conjure it into writing words for him, but it only contains a blank piece of paper. In the middle of a dark nondescript background, the illumination cast on the bent-over and gesturing man references the dramatic lighting of Caravaggio and the theatricality of Baroque painting. In the next image a shadowy woman in pants appears in the left corner, perhaps the writer's (or artist's) muse, but her presence and her help in conjuring the typewriter do not help it write over the course of the next several images. By the sixth image, blank papers start to shoot out of the typewriter. In this same panel a third woman has appeared, dressed in a polka dot dress,

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[350] My interpretation has been influenced by the notes to this poem in Stéphane Mallarmé, E. H. and A. M. Blackmore trans., *Collected Poems and Other Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 21, 238.

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and as the piece continues to the right, she becomes increasingly involved in dodging the wild papers flying about, in a scene much like Tippi Hedren's attack by seagulls in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). Unsurprisingly, in a recent interview Wallace confirmed that he was thinking about Hitchcocks's imagery around this time:

> I had my first solo show in 1974, for which I made *The Summer Script*, and another in 1975, for which I made *An Attack on Literature*. . . . They were conceived specifically to present a spectacular pictorial imagery structured by cinema . . . . I drew from . . . *Screen* magazine which had a lot of analysis of Hitchcock's imagery.[351]

Hitchcock's films *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1957) were singled out by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," as particularly strong examples of the active erotic look of the male protagonist that is directed at the passive female subject in mainstream cinema. In *An Attack on Literature*, the system of gazes outlined by Mulvey is certainly compromised as none of the three characters appear to be either looking out at the camera, or at each other. Still, it is somewhat unclear if the woman in the dress is being assaulted by the typewriter or by the man, who stands behind her and in some places has his arms raised indicating that he might be the one throwing the papers. The other woman has been relegated to the sidelines of action, as she passively stands in the background on the right leaning her hands upon a ledge of some sort, and looks a bit bored. In my view, the woman in the dress appears to be the allegorical representation of literature, since in the final panel she is clearly the primary target of the papers' attack, which surround her and partially covers her from the camera's eye while the man and other woman are seen safely standing in the background. However, another reading could identify the blank pages as literature, which attacks her.

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[351] "Then and Now and Art and Politics: Ian Wallace Interviewed by Renske Janssen," *Ian Wallace: A Literature of Images*, 141.

Unlike in *Summer Script*, it is hard to imagine any real relationship between the three people included in this work. While they occupy the same space, they do not interact with each other, and seem to be more interested in the relationship they have with the typewriter which cannot tell a story. This recalls Wallace's statement from six years before, in which he suggested contemporary literature no longer had anything to say, ruined by the precedent set by so many earlier masterpieces, and now exposed as shallow through the new forms of concrete poetry, which render the form of language visible and more meaningful than its content.[352] Here the typewriter is a machine, that, like a rifle, is shooting blanks (blank pages) at literature, who is immobilized and cannot act as muse or inspiration anymore. Thus the form (the pages) is certainly given priority over content, which is unknowable in this visual image. But what is the role of the artist in this? If we believe that the artist is played by the man in the photos, he is immediately exposed as a charlatan as he attempts to use magic to get his typewriter to write in the first image, and even the eventual presence of his muse cannot help. But there is of course another machine that can write if even to write an empty story, and that is Wallace's camera. The camera documents the action, freezing the characters and isolating them in the dark space to emphasize that not only does literature have nothing to say, but these people also appear mute. If they cannot speak, and do not interact with each other physically through gesture or touch, it is harder to identify with them as subjects.

Jeff Wall noticed this aspect of the work and suggested that Wallace's frozen bodies reflect his attempt to disengage with polemical expressions of current theories

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[352] See note 243 on page 117.

launched by "feminists and New Leftists identified with the *Screen* magazine group" [353]

regarding who could and could not be represented. He argues that during most of the

1970s Wallace chose to create images that, while including male and female figures,

could not necessarily be identified with this critique, which Wall calls a "dramatization of

social being." According to him, the feminist critique of the figure was either accepted by

male and female artists, contested by a number of mostly male artists (he specifies

Gilbert and George and Andy Warhol) or adapted in new ways by artists who, while

respecting the feminist project, veered away from it by utilizing Romantic or poetic

imagery (he specifies the photography of Anselm Kiefer and Katharina Sieverding,

amongst others).[354] For Wall, Wallace falls into this latter group because much of his

1970s work "drift[s] toward[s] a monumental art of high interiority rooted in a reprise of

Symbolist idealism . . . [withdrawn] from any polemical dramatics."[355] This theory is

largely backed up by Wallace who has been quoted as saying about this period of time, "I

quite consciously wanted to internalize politics. I didn't want to make politics the

manifest subject matter."[356] *Summer Script* and *An Attack on Literature I & II* respond to

the critical discourse(s) of female representation in media that were circulating by

simultaneously acknowledging it while deflecting it as subject matter into a discourse of

the efficacy of literature and text to represent subjectivity truthfully.

     The idea of an "art of high interiority" in Wallace's work took shape more

concretely after 1979, when he began to combine his interest in symbolist poetry with

images that document his studio or place of work. *Image / Text* (1979; Fig. 3.10) is one

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[353] Jeff Wall, "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome," 67.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ian Wallace, "Ian Wallace – Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker," unpaginated.

of the first of these images, but still contains some of the strategies found in *The Summer Script* and *An Attack on Literature*. Like these others, *Image / Text* is a large mural-sized photograph composed of twelve separate panels mounted side by side (six on top, six underneath) to form a large rectangle. Of the twelve panels, nine consist of black-and-white images (six of which have been hand-colored in pure washes; yellow, red, purple, orange-pink, green, and blue) and three consisting of white fields with poetic text printed on them spaced out across the page, in an obvious reference to Mallarmé. Samples taken from these texts include such phrases as: "words . . . the most difficult . . . of all phenomena . . . to avoid . . . vulgar mystification" and "words in poverty . . . subjectless . . . in the face of demand. . . . " The colored image panels are comprised of a variety of scenes and objects taken from one apartment or house along with one image of a peasant woman covered in what looks like a wool blanket (in red). These are: an open window covered in blinds looking from the inside out (yellow); a bookshelf full of books (green); a view into a room with a chair in front of a window from the hallway (orange-pink), a man (artist?) sorting through papers at a desk (blue); and a small table holding a vase of roses with a painting of a woman behind it and a mirror with a photo of a much smaller version of the same peasant women seen in the other panel (purple). The three that remain black and white are joined together in the top row to create one longer image of a work table holding papers with two chairs at either end. The purple panel showing the table with roses has brought about the most commentary from others about the work. Jeff Wall and Jacques Ranciére have both written about the significance of the two women pictured in this panel, the larger of which they have identified as a 1912 photograph of the Marquesa Louisa Casati by Baron de Mayer, and the smaller, an Irish peasant from

1913. According to Wall, these two woman constitute the extremes of the decadent

bourgeois aristocracy (Casati was a famous and fabled eccentric) and the struggle of

labor (the rugged and honest working woman) at the fin-de-siècle, documented at the

very time that the historical avant-garde was reaching a climax in Europe. The Irish

peasant is duplicated in much larger format in the top right image of the whole piece, so

she serves as a kind of antithesis or conscience to the purple panel in the opposite corner.

Additionally, both have suggested that the vase of flowers is a clear reference to

Mallarmé, who often used them in poetry as symbolic of the essence of perfect forms or

the purity of an object-image, describing such a search for purity as the ideal flower that

can never be found but is always sought. According to Rancière, writing in Wallace's

2009 monograph, this doubling of meanings in *Image / Text* "sums up all the inventions

and all the tensions that made the year before World War I the great moment of

triumphant modernism."[357]

Along with such historical references *Image / Text* also seeks to highlight the

quiet solitude of an artist's professional practice, which is almost made into a fetish in this

work through the absence of social interaction and the presence of color coding. The

strategy of overlaying primary colors across documentary-style photographs of an artist's

workplace reflects Wall and Wallace's concern with the historical importance of the

monochrome – the dialectic between productivism and transcendentalism.[358] In this case

transcendentalism appears to be represented through what Wallace described as

"Mallarmean silence" and what Wall describes as "high interiority;" that is the artist's

ability to retreat from politics into aesthetic contemplation, represented in this work as

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[357] Jacques Rancière, "Separated, We Are Together," *Ian Wallace: A Literature of Images*, 105.
[358] See note 289 on page 154.

empty spaces of an artist's place of production and the objects of his inspiration.[359] At the same time, the montage structure of the work itself and the historical references to the years of 1912-13 remind us of the importance of an avant-garde that at least imagines a new and better future.

Interestingly, Wall takes his analysis of *Image/ Text* further by suggesting that the pictorial representations of the two women here, the bourgeois and the proletarian, are a purposeful "anti-feminist" provocation against the "leading idealogues of the women's movement whose pictorial practice is set on the radical deconstruction of peasant-aristocratic nostalgia for the Female as 'Nature,' seeing in that symptomatic iconography the kernel of bourgeois and patriarchal culture."[360] For Wall, this political provocation is based on Wallace's reference to Symbolism, and its emphasis on the absence of women as metaphors for suppressed desire and unfulfilled creative action: *Image/ Text* is a "manifesto on the pleasures of inwardness which are the essence of art in Symbolist terms."[361]

As Wall and Wallace's work from the mid to late 1970s shows, "Female as 'Nature'" may or may not be nostalgic, but she has remarkable staying power within the imagery of avant-garde art. The social and cultural context of the 1970s woman's movement brought her to the surface of figurative imagery as content, and required artists to address it when in earlier decades such content would have gone unnoticed and

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[359] This is quite interesting because as I have already shown, in Jeff Wall's own work he is opposed to the use of recognizable domestic interiors, preferring instead generic or common locations. One cannot find many, if any, artworks authored by Jeff Wall that show his home, his studio, or Vancouver in an obviously identifiable way, although he has used himself, his wife, father, and children as actors in his photographs over the years, but there is no way to know from the works or their titles that this is the case. He seems to accept this difference in Wallace's work, which he has been consistently supportive of.

[360] Jeff Wall, "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome," 69.

[361] Ibid., 68.

unrecognized. The fact that Wall describes *Image/Text* as an "anti-feminist" reaction

towards "idealogues" indicates a clear hostility towards the feminist interventions

(perhaps felt as impositions by Wall) on discourse at the time. And yet, this hostility has

not been addressed in much of the literature since published on Wall and Wallace's

photography, even when so directly and clearly reflected in works like *Destroyed Room*.

Instead, scholars have consistently described Wall's work within the art-historical

discourse of the avant-garde; particularly the "painters of modern life," and its attendant

theatricality / anti-theatricality argument. Despite the fact that this seems almost cliché

today after nearly twenty years of discussion, it has worked to solidify Wall's position in

the canon. Importantly, it should be remembered that the linking of Wall's large-scale

photography to the discourse of the avant-garde is one that he himself initiated in 1979 by

placing his images next to images of masterpieces from different historical contexts in his

first major gallery catalog. By doing so, he directed the terms of the discourse

surrounding his work *away from* his work's relationship to the demands of contemporary

feminist discourse, an operation that is only remarkable because the subject matter of the

images themselves so clearly reckons with feminist discourse. In my view this is a more

profound reaction against the "leading idealogues of the women's movement" than what

is to be found in Wallace's *Image Text* for the following reason; it is an instance of an

artist *pictorially* engaging with one discourse (feminism) that was important at the time

the work was made, while simultaneously disavowing involvement with it by *textually*

directing attention away from it onto another historical debate that had stood the test of

time and was inherently less polemical (the avant-garde). This operation is significant

because Wall and Wallace's nascent moves towards creating a counter-tradition in

regional and international art practice were based on their return to figural representation through photography. As an important "field of conflict" that had gained considerable credibility by the mid to late 1970s, feminism overtly challenged the historical basis for such a return, and thus presented itself as a threat to Vancouver's emerging vanguard.

The Site(s) of Discourse: Landscape and Site-Specificity

The reader may wonder how these photographs produced by Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace in the mid-to late-1970s, consisting primarily of interior spaces, relate to the concept of the defeatured landscape that I outlined in chapter two. To unpack this problem is to engage with a number of recent theories surrounding an expanded notion of site-specificity in contemporary art and recent approaches to the historical study of landscapes as political and social fields. As suggested earlier, artists' conception of the City of Vancouver as a "vast defeatured region" in artworks of the 1960s, reflects a generational rejection of images of uncultivated wilderness pictured by earlier expressionist painters like Emily Carr. The characterization of such early landscape paintings as mythical or escapist eschews classical idealism in favor of an exposé of everyday life. This exposure was meant to engage the viewer in a cognitive recognition of their own subjectivity in space and real time, a phenomenological experience that would trigger consciousness about the institutional framework of art, art institutions, and the capitalist superstructure that binds all these domains together. As I discussed at length, this exposition was also tied conceptually to a deconstruction of language as one

of the primary tools by which reified capitalist consciousness is taught through state apparatuses and enacted in social institutions.

In Vancouver, images of the industrial zones of the city created by younger university-educated artists' aesthetic experimentations based on an interest in *linguistic* structures acted as the basis for a regionally specific version of conceptual art described as the *defeatured* landscape; terminology that can be thought of as a variant of what has often been called the dematerialized art object in other places of conceptual art production. Since the 1960s, conceptual art's attempt to dematerialize the objecthood of artworks in order to destabilize their commodity status and reveal their institutional context has been consistently linked to the site of their placement. This is the subject of Miwon Kwon's excellent essay "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity," which describes the pros and cons of the evolution of the concept of site-specificity as social critique from the 1960s until the present.[362] What is important to this study is her observation that what began as artists' attempts to engage viewers in particular art experiences through making artworks for a variety of specific sites—that is real locations in space that were usually chosen as the antithesis of the white-box gallery (e.g. the desert locations of Earthworks, the Hollywood mansion of *Womanhouse*, etc.) —artists began to think of sites as cultural, political, and discursive. Thus the art object, or in the case of performance, the art experience, could be addressed to, or created for, a range of sites that were not only physical locations. As she says, "the 'site' of art evolves away from its coincidence with the literal space of art, and the physical condition of a specific location recedes as the primary element in the conception of a site," leading eventually to an

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[362] I am drawing upon Miwon Kwon's essay "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 85-110; however many of these ideas were expanded into her later book *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

engagement with art's relationship to the outside world that is no longer just about the traditional art context, but in fact attempts to address a whole range of social issues.[363] While she acknowledges that this transformation has occurred over several decades, she also recognizes that it has not necessarily been a linear process of historical development; phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive sites (the three paradigms of site-specificity she describes) often operate within different artistic practices in tandem or in competition with each other.[364] Of crucial importance here however, is her claim that in contemporary site-specific art the actual location of the artwork and its institutional framework are both "subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate," and that unlike the past, "this site is not defined as a precondition . . . it is generated by the work (often as "content"), and then verified by its convergence with an existing discursive formation."[365]

Wall's understanding of historical "fields of conflict" as openings for vanguardist artistic production is a very good early example of an artist's consideration of the site-specific placement of his work in a discursive context. Wall recognizes that openings of contestation *within discourse* can appear in art history, and that these openings provide an opportunity for artists to create works that then change the parameters of the discourse (i.e. establish new sites). The fact that so many of Wall's photographs have dealt with landscape is not likely to be a coincidence if his work is looked at in the theoretical context of the expanded notion of site-specificity that Kwon has identified. The key here is the extension of the idea that the site-specific placement of artworks was originally an

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[363] Ibid., 91.
[364] Ibid., 95.
[365] Ibid., 92.

attempt to create phenomenological experiences in viewers. In a corresponding manner, Jeff Wall has confirmed that his longstanding interest in landscapes has to do with their ability to create a kind of pictorial threshold across which a viewer imagines his/her physiological and psychological relationships to other people in space: "in a landscape, persons are depicted on the point of vanishing into and/or emerging from their property. I think this phenomenology is analogous to, or mimetic of real social experience, extra-pictorial experience."[366] This logic develops from his belief that modern art has consistently been working towards the goal of exposing what he calls the "ideological ghost" of "liberal idealism's most important phantom, the 'subject', sovereign, individuated, and free."[367] The success of a classical landscape (such as one by Claude Lorrain or Nicolas Poussin) depended on the construction of an ideal and harmonious mean through the contrived placement of all objects (including figures) within the frame in order to reference a timeless pastoral Greek Arcadia. In contrast, the modern landscape (such as those by Gustave Courbet) introduced the figure as a challenge to the timeless nature of such landscapes through the imposition of social content and new painting techniques that they brought to a so-called Arcadia (e.g. *The Stonebreakers*, 1849). For Wall, the ways that the figure is situated inside landscapes over the course of several centuries represents either a negative or positive affirmation of measure against an ideal social standard, and within capitalism this standard of measure is related to surplus value, the standard measure of our time (at least for Marxist-oriented intellectuals). Thus the representation of the human figure (or lack thereof) in modern art is generally a condition

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[366]Jeff Wall, "About Making Landscapes," *Landscapes and Other Pictures* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1996): 12.
[367] Ibid.

of the critical recognition that individual subjectivity (or identity) is situated within and constituted through the ideological frameworks of modern capitalism. Returning to the notion of site specificity or phenomenological experience in Wall's work, consider this quote:

> In making landscape we must withdraw a certain distance – far enough to detach ourselves from the immediate presence of other people (figures), but not so far as to lose the ability to distinguish them as agents in social space . . . it is just at the point where we begin to lose sight of the figures as agents, that landscape crystallizes as a genre.[368]

Wall's interest in landscape appears to have to do with its ability to implicitly or explicitly reflect the alienated social condition of people within advanced capitalism. It is for this reason that he repeatedly states that making landscapes is for him a way of learning about other pictorial genres.

In an essay on his overall body of work and its relationship to landscapes, Camiel van Winkel suggests that Wall's interiors along with his exteriors (or landscapes) constitute a mutually reinforcing investigation of pictorial representation; "each is able to surface only by implying the close presence and support of the other."[369] Furthermore, van Winkel argues that the use of light box transparencies is the form that most embodies this mutually dependent relationship; it is a self-contained box representative of interior spaces that also holds a view to the outside world like a window. He also points out the frequency with which windows, doors, and holes appear in Wall's pictures as metaphoric representations of the links between interior and exterior space, and their ability to either create a feeling of closed-off space or entrapment inside, or in the opposite cases bring

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[368] Ibid., 11.
[369] Camiel van Winkel, "Figure Goes to Ground," *Landscapes and Other Pictures*, 15.

the interior space of the subject into the supposedly open space of the landscape.[370]

Echoing Wall's stated interests, van Winkel describes these pictorial affects as symbolic of the relentless merging of private and public space under capitalism, part of the ongoing creation of an "homogenous economic domain . . . called the market."[371]

The merging of public and private space as spectacle within an all encompassing consumer market, and the role of the autonomous art object in facilitating a possibly liberating aesthetic experience for individuals within this homogenous space, has been a central concern of the dialogue surrounding site-specificity at least since the famous Walter Benjamin / Theodor Adorno debates.[372] The automony of art within bourgeois society is a central concern of Adorno's in *Aesthetic Theory*. For him, art's autonomy is a characteristic of its "double character;" its reason for existence within society is dialectically tethered to its ability to criticize society, and is thus ironically dependent on society to constitute it as an anti-societal expression: "Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society."[373] If art's meaning derives from its discursive or physical context, as it does with site-specific art, then art's status as a negative sign (that is its existence as a critique of society) is compromised, and the aesthetic experience of

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[370] Ibid., 16. One may consider the following examples (some of which are discussed in van Winkel's essay and some not): The window and door in *The Destroyed Room* (1978), the bank of windows in *Picture for Women* (1979), the door in *Double Self Portrait* (1979), the tunnel-drainpipe in *The Drain* (1989), the well in *The Well* (1989), the window in *Insomnia* (1994), the windows in *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947* (1990), and others.

[371] Ibid., 17.

[372] This problem is of course debated in great detail between Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin in their respective arguments for and against the social potential of mechanical reproduction on the arts (in particular film). See Walter Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)," *Selected Writings Volume 4 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251-283; and Adorno's response to it in Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker trans., *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 127-134.

[373] Theodor Adorno, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 226.

an individual is no longer found only in the art. If this is the case, then the consumer

spectacle, or culture industry as Adorno called it, is truly all-encompassing with no

redemptive possibilities for individuals caught up inside it.

Michael Fried's 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" still stands as a central

argument in this dialogue, and is a later attempt to address the autonomy of late-modern

art.[374] In this essay, he decries minimalist (he calls it literalist) art's tendency to deflect

meaning away from the artwork itself to the viewer's experience of art "*in a situation*"

(original italics), by which he means the art, the space it is located in and the viewer's

mind and body reacting to it: i.e. site-specificity. Responding primarily to Donald Judd

and Robert Morris' essays "Specific Objects" and "Notes on Sculpture 1-3"[375] and

artworks (large box-shaped or rectangular sculptures often industrially produced and

presented in as a series of forms), Fried claimed that this new sculpture depended on a

stage presence that resulted from their anthropomorphic characteristics (because of their

life-size scale) and dependence on human physiological reaction and negotiation. The

ability to exist as "specific objects" (i.e. not aesthetically special artworks) only results

from what Fried perceives in 1967 as a "war between theatre and modernist painting,

between the theatrical and the pictorial. . . ."[376] Experiencing art in all of its discursive

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[374] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer, 1967). Reprinted in Charles
Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 835-
846.

[375] See: Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965):74-82, reprinted in *Donald Judd,
Complete Writings 1959-1975*, (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975),
181-189; and Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture 1-3," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (Feb. 1966): 42-44; *Artforum* 5,
no. 2 (Oct. 1966):20-23; *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer, 1967).

[376] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in *Art and Theory 1900-2000*, 841. While Fried takes up
"theatricality" in response to the new minimalist sculpture of his time, the argument surrounding the
relative purity of art forms had had a long history already. In the context of advanced modern visual art,
references to theatricality were first introduced implicitly by Clement Greenberg in his 1940 *Partisan
Review* article "Towards a Newer Laocoon." Greenberg argued against the blending of distinct art forms
such as music, painting and theater, and for the purifying of the formal means of expression of one from

contexts suggests a situation in which aesthetic experiences can result from individuals' interactions with any sort of object, not only artworks. For critics following Clement Greenberg's example, who sought to maintain distinctions between high and low culture, this is a problem.

A secondary social problem identified in the theatricality argument is the idea that the art-object is anthropomorphized because of its dependence on a viewer physically engaging with it by walking around it. This aspect of Fried's argument actually has some similarity with the feminist critique of female objectification within narrative cinema. In Mulvey's account, woman is defined by the voyeuristic gaze of another (the object of male gaze) and through that process is made into a subject under a patriarchal order. If one accepts the theory that the experience of art as a theatrical event is a reflexive experience determined by the material conditions of a complete spatial situation, then Fried's warning against the degraded status of art's autonomy could also be interpreted as a warning against the materialization of human subjectivity within this dynamic. Essentially, if an artwork is animated as art through a theatrical dynamic, then one might imagine that the human subject is too. A main difference between the two is the issue of fetishization; in Mulvey's account the woman's body is fetishized as phallus which is absent; within the critique of theatricality, the danger is that the aesthetic experience itself is fetishized as artwork which is absent. The point of confluence between these two critiques, which occur roughly ten years apart, is the concern over the process by which the sovereign subject is constituted in an increasingly capitalist and spectacularized world, and what role images have in this constitution.

another. See an edited version in Harrison and Wood, 554-560; or a complete version in Clement Greenberg, ed. John O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Perceptions and Judgments 1939-1944* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23-37.

The Summer Script I and II, *Attack on Literature*, and *Image/Text* all reference the existence of a kind of inadequacy of communication amongst social subjects, usually mediated through Wallace's references to literature and text as communication. He contrasts this inadequacy to the utopian belief that a liberated subjectivity can flourish within capitalism; a belief in the radical potential of an individual's inner contemplation, which is symbolized by modernist monochrome painting. These three artworks show Wallace's attempts to negotiate the discourses of feminist figural representation and the autonomy of art in his work over five years, a process reflected in his eventual choice to eliminate all the figures except himself by the time he makes *Image/Text*. In that work, the only figures accompanying Wallace in his studio/apartment are photos of women, images that might reflect what Wall called the "ideological ghost" of a phantom sovereign subject, or in 1979, the then-impossible but hoped-for image of a sovereign subject of femininity untainted by patriarchy.[377]

Unlike Wallace, whose work from the last half of the 1970s could be argued as experimental in regards to theatricality (as in *The Summer Script*), moving towards eventual withdrawal from it (as in *Image/Text*), critiques involving theatricality have consistently accompanied Jeff Wall's work because of his engagement with and reliance on staged scenes, cinematography and spectacle as important aspects of his art making from 1978 onwards, and for some scholars even earlier.[378] The argument against theatricality would be one familiar to both Wall and Wallace, and in fact Wall's

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[377] Please note that I am discussing a particular time in Wallace's overall oeuvre (the 1970s). As his work evolved and changed in the 1980s and 90s he did bring figures and landscapes back into his work. My comments should only be construed as indicative of what I believe is a particular working-through of various discursive positions that were in the air and available to politically-conscious artists at the time.

[378] As mentioned in Chapter 2, Sharla Sava argues that theatricality was already present in Jeff Wall's work in the 1960s. See pages 76-77.

Landscape Manual, if made a few years earlier, could be substituted into Fried's

argument as an example of the dangers of losing sight of the discreet artwork entirely.

Instead Fried singled out Tony Smith's description of a car ride on the unfinished New

Jersey turnpike as the unfortunate apotheosis of art as experience without an art object.[379]

In *Landscape Manual* the City of Vancouver functions as a series of objects that bring

about subjective primary experiences in the artist who drives through it (much like Smith

on the turnpike). Afterwards the artist attempts to translate that experience into new

experiences for second-hand viewers through photo and textual documentation of his

work, or through the model of his artwork, which others are free to duplicate in their own

car rides (hence a manual for the aesthetic experience of everyday things). Wall's turn

towards pictorialism in his 1978 Cibachrome transparencies, seems on the surface to be a

new turn towards theatricality because of his use of elaborate stage sets and models and

actors. As I have mentioned briefly and as Sharla Sava has discussed at length in her

dissertation, theatricality was also present in Wall's early work, specifically through his

use of cinematographic techniques like specific camera positions, shooting through

window screens, writing and presenting a corresponding text that reads like a script, and

other strategies.[380] However, if we think of this eight year period as a development of

work within the landscape genre, photographs like *The Destroyed Room* and *Picture for

Women* break from earlier conceptual projects by attempting to create an interior

landscape; that is, a work that brings the alienating aspects of the "urban wilderness"

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[379] In "Art and Objecthood" Michael Fried referred at length to Tony Smith's interview with Samuel
Wagstaff Jr. in *Artforum* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 1966): 18-19. In this interview Smith described a liberating
aesthetic experience that happened to him while driving on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike with some
art students, describing "a reality there which had not had any expression in art."
[380] For a more thorough explanation of these strategies see: Sharla Sava, "Cinematic Photography,
Theatricality, Spectacle: the Art of Jeff Wall," 49-54.

indoors through the careful placement of figures in the frame and narrative of the photograph. Instead of functioning as manuals for viewers to go out into the city to experience the urban environment and test their subjectivity against what they see and move through, the new photographs attempt to bring the alienating structure of the city's social relations to the viewer through dramatically composed scenes.[381]

Despite the significantly different forms of works like *Landscape Manual*, *Picture for Women*, *Magazine Piece* and *The Summer Script*, the subject matter relating to the body, space and representation of women remain embedded in the interior and exterior landscapes of a social life that is imagined as alienated. This suggests that certain themes remained in place when Wallace and Wall moved their exposé of the structure of the defeatured landscape indoors, and that the main site that changed was one of discursive positioning. What may have been an intuitive or accidental representation of women as nature in 1969-1970, reappears in new form by necessity of historical circumstance as a conscious and defensive discursive position against the restrictions placed on such representations at the end of the decade.

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[381] In a 1990 interview Wall discussed his use of dramatic imagery in contrast to forms of conceptual art dating back 15 years:

> To me, a critique is a philosophical practice which does not just separate good from bad – that is, give answers and make judgments. Rather it dramatizes the relations between what we want and what we are. . . . I see a lack of development in the idea of critical art and a failure by artists to appreciate how uncomplicated an image has to be, how dramatic it really is. There has to be a dramatic mediation of the conceptual element in art. . . . a program or project that was once called la peinture de la vie moderne.

See: "The Interiorized Academy, Interview with Jean François Chevrier," *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 104.

Figures Chapter 3

Fig. 3.1   Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975, Photo collage with text: beet juice, urine and coffee photographic print; 72w x 48h inches, Photo credit Anthony McCall.
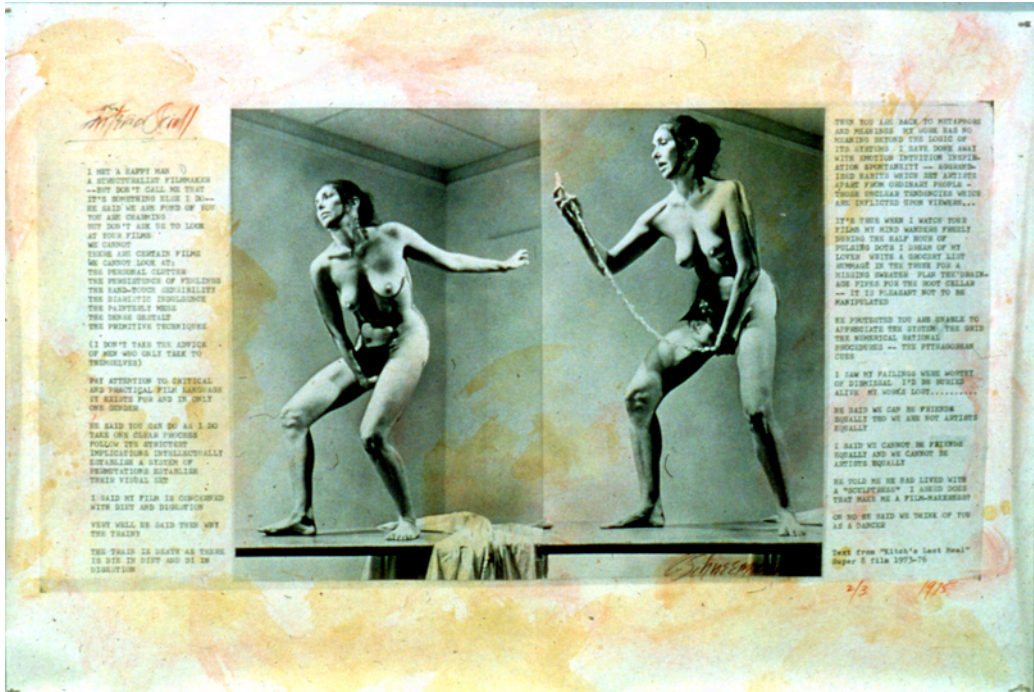

Fig. 3.2   Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document,* 1973-79, detail, Image permission could not be secured at time of dissertation submission.

Fig. 3.3   Ian Wallace, *La Mélancolie de la Rue*, 1973, 3 silver gelatin prints, oil paint, each of 3 panels: 103 x 156.5 cm., Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, VAG 86.18 a-c.

Fig. 3.4   Jeff Wall, *The Destroyed Room*, 1978, Transparency in lightbox, 159 x 234 cm., Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.5 Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979, Transparency in lightbox 142.5 x 204.5 cm., Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.6 Jeff Wall, *Double Self-Portrait*, 1979, Transparency in lightbox 172 x 229 cm., Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.7　　Édouard Manet, *A Bar in the Folies-Bergère,* 1881, Image permission could not be secured at time of dissertation submission.

Fig. 3.8　　Ian Wallace, *The Summer Script I & II*, 1974, Hand-colored photos, Silver print, 119.6 x 175.3 cm. to 120.1 x 176 cm., Courtesy of The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Photo Bob Goedewaagen.

Fig. 3.9　　Ian Wallace, *An Attack on Literature I and II* (detail), 1975, 12 hand-colored black-and-white photographs, each photograph 123.5 x 174.4 cm., Private collection, Switzerland.

Fig. 3.10   Ian Wallace, *Image/Text*, 1979, hand-colored silver gelatin print, 275.5 x 548.7 cm., Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, VAG 85.68 a-l, Photo Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.
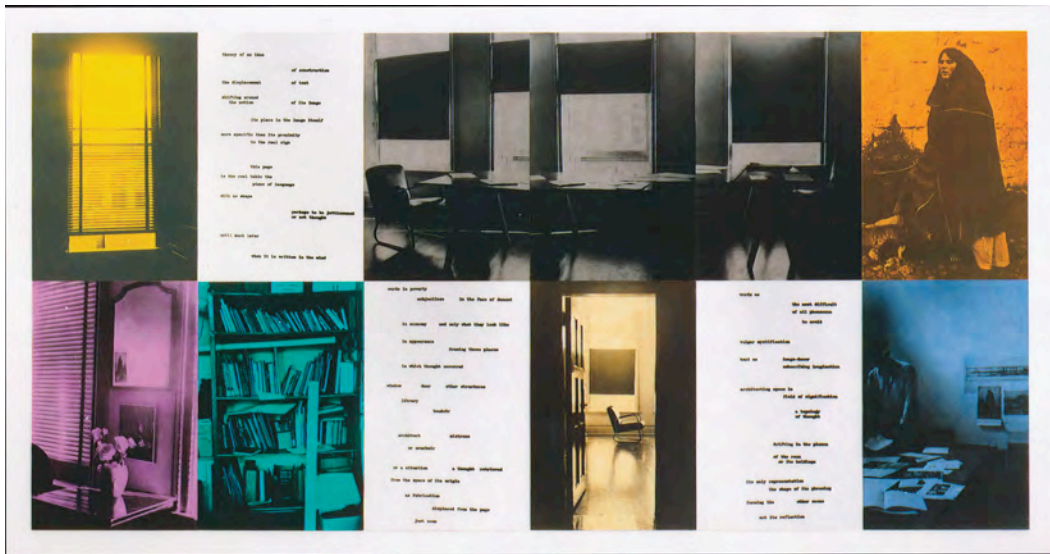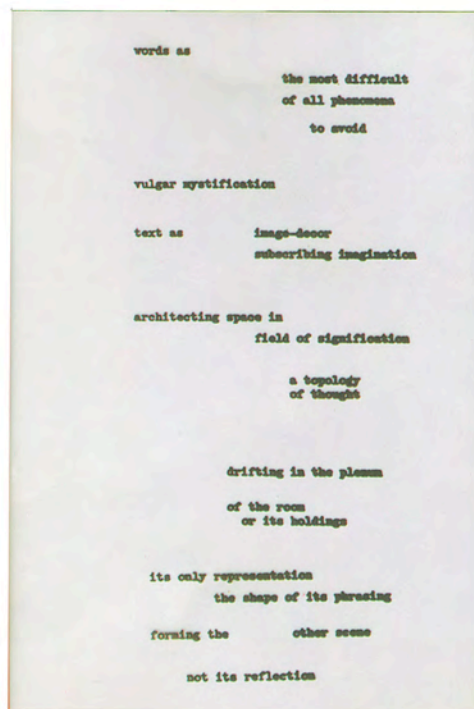

Fig. 3.11   Ian Wallace, *Image/Text* (detail), 1979, hand-colored silver gelatin print, 275.5 x 548.7 cm., Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, VAG 85.68 a-l, Photo Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Conclusion

> *Rumour has it that the institutional setting of contemporary art in the city of Vancouver . . . and the international representation of that production is controlled by a small, masculine, highly organized and certainly articulate breakfast club, known as the boy's club. . . . Like a kingdom, the boy's club is hereditary, a part of the baggage of western culture. . . . Male avant-gardes strut their stuff like peacocks, battling it out on the terrain of an all-too-familiar art history. Initially conceived as an oppositional practice, it can rapidly — ironically, through success — be re-absorbed only to re-emerge, as if miraculously, at the centre.*
>
> Sara Diamond[382]

Backlash: Naming a Majority

It is clear that Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace have actively pursued creating a theoretical discourse for their work since their earliest days as artists, a fact reflected in Wallace's quote that he and Wall were different than other artists in Vancouver because of their "historical outlook."[383] However by 1990, the field of discourse had certainly shifted, if it was ever that stable. The self-conscious positioning of themselves at the frontlines of a still-relevant avant-garde appears increasingly defensive in the climate of the culture wars of the late 1980s and 1990s; a new historical "field of conflict"

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[382] Sara Diamond, "The Boy's Club," *Fuse* (Sept. 1988): 12.
[383] See note 335 on page 178.

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noticeably crowded by voices of "others" all demanding space and institutional recognition.

Critical attention paid to addressing the thorny issue of who exactly has been empowered to speak, and whether or not this has an economic, racial, or gendered bias began to be voiced more explicitly in the city as early as 1983 by artists. In this year, the main public art institution, the Vancouver Art Gallery, relocated from an Art Deco building on West Georgia Street, where it had been since 1931, to a new location on Hornby Street in the now-repurposed 1909 Neo-Classical Provincial Law Courts. In celebration of the move the gallery mounted a large survey exhibition of 149 Vancouver artists titled *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, which included a comprehensive exhibition catalog with a number of commissioned essays. As described in the 1991 introduction to a book edited by artist Stan Douglas titled *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (which I will discuss in more detail shortly)[384] many local artists believed that the Vancouver Art Gallery's director Luke Rombout was not supportive enough of the diversity and excellence of local art, and that the resulting exhibition was not therefore representative of it.[385] Because of this, a number of them protested the opening of the new gallery in front of its entrance on October 15, 1983. As Douglas notes, there were also indications in the months prior to the gallery's opening

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[384] Stan Douglas, "Introduction," *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 11-21.

[385] Luke Rombout replaced Tony Emery as Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1975. Emery had won favor in the latter half of the 1970s amongst a large group of local artists because of his dedication to special events programming, which scheduled performance and other non-traditional arts into gallery spaces between 1970-1975. One of the first things Rombout did as director was cancel the special events programming, which he believed had taken energy away from edgier visual arts exhibitions that art collectors in the city were interested in supporting. Emery wrote in 1983 that he had not been interested in currying favor with collectors and made no effort to do so, preferring instead to encourage a larger and more diverse public audience through special events that the art community was interested in. See Luke Rombout, ed., *Vancouver Art and Artists 1931-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 257-261.

that artists accepted some responsibility themselves for what they perceived as the "inadequate situation for art in Vancouver."[386] One of the results of the perceived short fallings of the Vancouver art scene, and the therefore questionable representation of its artists in the most important city art institution, was artists' push to self-organize a series of exhibitions and critical venues to rectify the situation by creating their own exhibition opportunities.[387]

Vancouver Anthology resulted from the events and controversies of 1983, although it was not published until 1991. It has since become recognized as an important challenge to perceived institutional authority in Vancouver as a number of artists and writers came together to publish critical accounts of diverse histories of artists, collectives, and media operating in the city over the previous decades. The publication followed a series of public lectures held in 1990, during which the papers (later edited for the text) were presented for the first time. In his introduction to the book, Douglas links the events surrounding the Vancouver Art Gallery's move to its new location with the aborted attempt of a political coalition of over fifty socially progressive groups to contest publicly the cost-cutting budget proposed by the newly re-elected conservative provincial government; the British Columbia Social Credit Party.[388] These groups were marching past the Art Gallery in political protest on the same October day that the artists protested in front of the gallery.

The government was planning a policy of fiscal restraint that included cutting government salaries, limiting funds for education and medicare, privatizing Crown

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[386] Stan Douglas, "Introduction," Vancouver Anthology, 16.
[387] Ibid., 16-17. As Douglas describes, these were the October Show (1983), Warehouse Show (1984), and Artropolis (1987), large artist-curated exhibitions in temporary spaces, as well as the debut and operation of a new arts magazine titled Issue (1983-85).
[388] Ibid., 11.

corporations, and other measures.[389] This conservative policy was rationalized as good for all citizens largely on the basis of a poll that had been conducted during the election campaign by Social Credit Party that suggested that the majority of the electorate supported it. However for many residents the cutbacks seemed to "diminish the government's responsibility towards its citizens," especially in contrast to the liberal ideology of just a few years before.[390] For Douglas, the government's claims of speaking-for-the-majority in order to justify political policy that was not necessarily wanted by all, was echoed in the curatorial choices of the new municipal gallery and inspired his decision to edit a book addressing the problem of who speaks for whom and why:

> The essays that follow were all commissioned in consideration of the predicament of "majority" I have attempted to outline above; the question of who claims it and why, and of how that nomination will determine the difficult relations of art and society to local institutions. Like this introduction, they are all polemical histories meant to provoke a reassessment of past moments that may only persist today as concrete absences - as a way to reconsider past events that might potentially

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[389] Ibid. As part of these cost-cutting measures the influential womens' organization Vancouver Status of Women (VSW) had its provincial funding cut entirely by the Social Credit Government. VSW had been founded in 1971, and until 1983 had been able to fund thirteen full paid staff members,

> who conducted research, and prepared education materials for women, government officials and the general public. The organization participated in committees and task forces set up by all levels of government, advocated on behalf of individual women through our ombuds-service, ensured that women's voices were heard by publishing our newspaper Kinesis, produced a weekly television program called "Women Alive", and provided countless interviews and press releases to the general media. Educational and programming activities included consciousness-raising and assertiveness training groups for women and the organizing of numerous conferences, workshops, rallies, and celebrations.

Their publication *Kinesis*, would last from 1971 until 2001, and was extremely influential in promoting feminist viewpoints and women-centered political advocacy.
See: VSW Press release accessed online on Jan. 3, 2009:
http://www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/AZ/PDF/UV/Vancouver_Status_of_Women_1971-1978.pdf
[390] Ibid., 12. The B.C. Social Credit Party regained power on a fiscally conservative platform during a period of economic recession after the more socially progressive New Democratic Party (NDP) had been in office from 1972 to 1975.

devolve into myth, and those once self-conscious practices that all too often fall into habit.[391]

Douglas' acknowledgment that all claims to a majority consensus are founded in "polemical histories" is significant, and points to the ways that control over a "field of discourse" has been instrumental in the creation of artists' reputations, art histories, institutional support, and the relative import given to some theoretical interpretations of art over others.

Amongst those contributions to the publication *Vancouver Anthology* concerned with feminist practice was "A Working Chronology of Feminist Cultural Activities and Events in Vancouver: 1970-1990," by Carol Williams.[392] In her short essay which precedes a literal listing of woman's groups, events, and other important occurrences by date (beginning with September 28, 1970), Williams describes her choice of writing a chronology rather than a "polemical essay . . . that . . . would foreground the voice of the author and her argument to the detriment of many other important feminist voices demanding public recognition or visibility."[393] She goes on at length to describe her methodology of putting this chronology together, which she insists must be recognized as partial, subjective, and cognizant of its own exclusions: "I wished to divest myself of such singular authority."[394] This approach is notable for its verbal renunciation of being responsible for any one field of discourse, even as it attempts politically to create an alternative to an unspoken dominant "other," likely the counter-tradition Wood describes in the earlier quote, and the development of which I have outlined in this study.

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[391] Stan Douglas, *Vancouver Anthology*, 19.

[392] Carol Williams, "A Working Chronology of Feminist Cultural Activities and Events in Vancouver: 1970-1990," in Stan Douglas, ed., *Vancouver Anthology*.

[393] Ibid., 171.

[394] Ibid.

Williams' chronology reveals a growing number of women-organized events and collectives that sought actively to find or create space for women artists and artists of color to exhibit and discuss their work in Vancouver in the 1980s. Although too numerous to mention here, some of the more notable include the exhibition *Herotica: Women's Erotic Art*, which included over thirty woman artists at two galleries in 1981; *Festival '82: A Celebration of Women in the Arts*, which included dance, performance, video screenings and visual art exhibits; Judy Chicago's *The Birth Project* shown at the Vancouver Centennial Museum (1983)[395]; the Woman-juried *Women Photographers of British Columbia* exhibit mounted at Robson Square, a public space (1985); *Roundtable on Feminism*, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery including several local women vocal artists and writers (1988); and many others.[396] As Williams herself notes, all of this feminist activity was, in the time frame covered by her chronology, not devoid of "the colour-blindness of the American/Canadian women's movement," but such activities still show a clear collective orientation towards working actively to address diversity of cultural production in Vancouver.

In November 1989, an innovative and then-unusual international festival and symposium of film and video made by women from third-world countries and women of color was hosted across the city in different venues. *In Visible Colours* screened one hundred films and videos by a roster of international producers, and held thirteen panel discussions over five days that addressed issues of racial discrimination in the production and dissemination of the arts, including the systemic differences between opportunities

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[395] Ibid., 192. According to Carol Williams' chronology: [Judy Chicago's] *The Dinner Party* apparently had been offered to the Vancouver Art Gallery but was turned down by chief curator Alvin Balkind. *Kinesis* (July 1979) reports that Balkind claimed: [he was] unable to rouse enough interest in the show to justify taking it on."
[396] Ibid., 184-205.

for artists from industrialized nations verses those who were not.[397] In the summer of 1994, the city also hosted *Writing Thru Race*, a conference that brought together 180 First Nations writers and writers of color over three days. The conference was organized by the Writers Union of Canada, inspired by an initial challenge to the Union by two First Nations members who proposed at the 1989 annual meeting that the Union develop a task force to investigate whether access to funding, training, and publication was limited to writers of color.[398]

These local initiatives were happening concurrent to federal initiatives with similar intent: multiculturalism, and the support of it as official policy and law, was instituted at the highest level in the Canadian Parliament's Multiculturism Act of 1988 (July). This act was dedicated to the simultaneous cultural preservation of all citizens' heritage and the guarantee that all Canadians would have equal access to the social, political and cultural spheres of their country. Although it has become modified over time the Act generally sought (and seeks) to fund, implement and develop, diverse ethnic, racial, religious and cultural communities; broaden general cultural awareness; help a range of institutions further the aims of cultural diversity, and help federal agencies do the same through new policies and programs.

This orientation towards encouraging the recognition of diverse cultural voices was not unique to Vancouver. In the context of American, Canadian and European contemporary art, the plethora of exhibitions curated to reveal a non-white-European-male point of view that emerged from about 1989 onwards through the 1990s has been

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[397] See: Monika Kin Gagnon, "Building Blocks: Anti-Racist Initiatives in the Arts," *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 51-71.

[398] Ibid., 66-69. See also: Carol Tater, Frances Henry, Winston Mattis, "The Writing Thru Race Conference, "Challenging Racism in the Arts (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1998), 86-110.

well documented. Of these, *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, is perhaps the best known. Other important exhibitions were: *Beyond History* at the Vancouver Art Gallery (1989); *The Other Story* at London's Hayward Gallery (1989); *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered,* shown at six different artist-run centers in Canada (1990); *Africa Explores: 20th-Century African Art* at the Center for African Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (1991), *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull (1992), *Land, Spirit, Power* at the National Gallery of Canada (1992), and the now-infamous *Whitney Biennial* in New York (1993). This is by no means an exhaustive list, but they reflect the cultural activism of particular groups of artists fighting for political change and institutional recognition by putting pressure on museums and galleries to be more inclusive in their programming at that time. All of these instances show that around 1989 in Vancouver (and elsewhere) awareness about how the production and reception of the arts was or was not reflecting a non-white cultural experience began to peak.

Clearly, where Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace had built a theoretical discourse around their visual art works that assumed social alienation as a way of modern life, and rejected "homeland" as a necessary requirement of critical objectivity (i.e. maintaining social alienation in order to critique it), other Vancouver artists attempted to become politically engaged in the local art scene by challenging the power structures that they felt were excluding them. They actively tried to open up institutional and community discourse to a number of voices and approaches that were all deemed equally relevant. In this context, the historical avant-garde that Wall and Wallace positioned themselves in relation to might be seen as one particular discourse of many that may or may not have any

relevance to vastly different artists producing artwork from the perspective of widely divergent geographies, genders, ethnicities, races and cultural origins.

In this context, a somewhat defensive posture can be recognized in a paper Jeff Wall presented as a "statement of position" in a panel discussion on the subject of "The Site of Culture" at the University Art Association of Canada's annual conference as early as March, 1983.[399] In the paper, later published as a magazine article, Wall argues that the "site of culture" is the debate surrounding whether or not the historical avant-garde any longer has any legitimacy in the context of late capitalism. He describes why he disagrees with intellectuals (whom he leaves unnamed) who suggest that the revolutionary motivations and antagonisms of the avant-garde artists in early capitalism (he specified the period of 1830-1940) are no longer relevant or effective in a new fully modernized society. He argues that in this scenario any evidence of an antagonistic avant-garde becomes only one of spectacle, used to demonstrate what is socially accepted as a historical relic in the context of a now "totalized" capitalist ideology. For Wall, the site of this spectacle is inevitably found in art institutions, which are now fully co-opted by the "Culture Industry."[400] The essay as a whole argues that the idea of the death of the avant-garde is propaganda issued forth from conservative cultural institutions that hide their complicit commercial relationship with the culture industry through their association with avant-garde practices. As described earlier, the most obvious example of such a site of cultural contestation in Vancouver would be the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1983.

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[399] Although first presented as a paper, the text was later published in *Vanguard*. See: Jeff Wall, "The Site of Culture Contradictions, Totality and the Avant-garde," *Vanguard* 12 , no. 4: 18-19. It is interesting that the artist feels the need to articulate a "statement of position" in this context, and points to his ongoing need to frame his work in an art historical context, so that his intentions will not be misidentified.

[400] As is Jeff Wall in his article, I too am referring to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's theory of the Culture Industry that was originally written in their 1944 co-authored book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See note 16 on page 10 of the introduction here.

It should be noted that in 1983 Wall and Wallace were not especially well-known names in Vancouver or elsewhere, although both had begun to show internationally. It cannot therefore be said that the Vancouver Art Gallery survey exhibition of that year was by any means privileging work by Wall and is peers, and that their inclusion was then contested by others. In fact, although they were invited, Wall, Wallace and another artist later associated with the Vancouver School, Ken Lum, chose not to participate in the exhibition, which Wall criticized as not being professionally curated in a critical enough manner.[401] William Wood notes that following this incident, the "refusants" (as Wood calls Wall, Wallace and Lum) reputations' grew in stature and all would eventually be included in Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition programming in retrospectives by 1990. Thus the strategy of refusing to be included in important local programming at a significant time in the city art gallery's history, while publicly articulating a contrary stance in regards to the relevance of the historical avant-garde just as identity-politics and Canadian multiculturism began to take off, seems to have worked counter-intuitively to single these artists out as distinct and worthy of attention soon afterwards.

In fact, Wall and Wallace's careers did begin to accelerate nationally and internationally (Wall more than Wallace however) by the end of the 1980s. By 1989-1990 the term "Vancouver School" was being applied to their work by international curators and critics, which suggests that their attempts to situate themselves in the

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[401] William Wood, "The Insufficiency of the World," Scott Watson, ed., *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists* (Antwerpen: Museum van Hedendaagse; Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2006), 71. Wood states that Wall, "recognized the historical importance of the exhibition and recognized the gallery's instrumental role in constructing 'public memory,' [but] his dismay at a seeming lack of professionalism among curatorial staff—particularly [the curator, Scott] Watson's inability to produce a written framework that would provide a rationale for Wall's inclusion—led him, and subsequently Lum and Wallace, to refuse to participate."

vanguard of artistic production internationally over the decades had worked.[402] As noted, and not surprisingly, the "historical outlook" they had cultivated in photography and writing was the combined result of the careful adoption of specific histories and the rejection of others. For example regional expressionist landscape painting deemed too mystical or mythological (the "hippy" and "island artists") and 1970s feminist poststructuralist critiques were rejected, while the formal innovations of specific European avant-garde groups such as France's "Painters of Modern Life," the Berlin Dada and the Russian Constructivists (realism, montage, film, photography) were adopted. This, along with their strategic "refusals," had the effect of creating what would be perceived as a novel regional art movement easily distinguishable from local context and amenable to European (hence International) audiences by the late 1980s.

William Wood makes this last point in an essay that describes the rise of the Vancouver School artists as a kind of phenomenon of branding that resulted from like-minded artists' rigorous definition of themselves and their work in relation to avant-garde art history and the refusal of any substantial relationship to their own regional art community.[403] In the neoliberal global economic context of the late 1980s and early 1990s, one may consider the name "Vancouver School" alongside the "Dusseldorf

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[402] The "Vancouver School" or "Vancouver School of Photo-Conceptualists" began to be applied to a number of artists in Vancouver around 1990. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the use of the term(s), but it appeared in a number of catalog essays and was implied through shows curated around specific Vancouver artists utilizing video, photography, and art historical references in their work. Artists consistently included in the moniker are Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Ken Lum, and Rodney Graham, but other artists that are sometimes included are Christos Dikeakos, Roy Arden and Stan Douglas. For more on the use of the term(s) and its limitations see: William Wood, "The Insufficiency of the World;" and Clifford S. Lauson, "In Vancouver as Elsewhere: Modernism and the So-Called 'Vancouver School'" (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2009). Also, as already cited frequently here as source material, Jeff Wall's 1990 essay "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art: A Deeper Background for Ken Lum's Work," while not explicitly describing himself and his peers as a "school" certainly outlines many affinities between himself, Wallace and Lum. These affinities would reemerge as characteristics of the School in other commentators works.
[403] William Wood, "The Insufficiency of the World," 63-77.

School," "Young British Artists" (or "YBA's"), and "New Art From China" as designer brands that offered international collectors a kind of ready-made art packaging oriented around global regions that may or may not have had anything to do with the form or content of the artworks and artists included in the naming.[404] More recently this has occurred with the "New Leipzig School" of painting that has been promoted extensively since the Miami contemporary art collectors Don and Mera Rubell invested heavily in works from the region in 2003.[405]

Wood also mentions the fact that shortly after the lectures organized by Douglas in relation to the *Vancouver Anthology* debuted in the fall of 1990, Jeff Wall presented his lecture "Traditions and Counter-traditions in Vancouver Art" to an audience in Rotterdam (in Dec., 1990). In the previous chapters I have quoted from this important lecture numerous times because in it Wall clearly articulates his thoughts on the historical position of his and his peers' work in relationship to Vancouver and Vancouver's art history. As Wood notices, this lecture may be construed as a clear response to the general tenor of Stan Douglas' *Vancouver Anthology* lectures, none of whose participants seemed

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[404] Ibid., 66. I echo Wood's citation of Julian Stallabrass's work in regards to the topic of the branding of contemporary art in the twenty-first century within neoliberal capitalism: Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*.

[405] Blake Gopnik, "New Leipzig School Provides a Study in Hype," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2006. Accessed online on Nov 13, 2009: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/02/AR2006100201431.html; also Arthur Lubow, "The New Leipzig School," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 8, 2006. Accessed online on Nov. 13, 2009: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/08/magazine/08leipzig.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1
As is the case with many of these contemporary "Schools" of art, there is not much to bind the included artists together, and the "School" moniker appears to be largely an advertising campaign that assists in the trade of included artworks. The artists often included in the Leipzig School (Neo Rauch, Matthias Weischer, Martin Kobe, Christoph Ruckhäberle, Tilo Baumgärtel) are however, like Vancouver, linked somewhat through their educational choices: some members of the Leipzig School have attended the Leipzig Art Academy, and Jeff Wall was Ian Wallace's student at the University of British Columbia, while Ken Lum and Rodney Graham were students of both Wall and Wallace.

particularly concerned with the counter-tradition that Wall had described as being important. According to Wood:

> The lectures [Vancouver Anthology] were based in Vancouver and addressed "the institutional politics of art" in the city and province, where "counter-tradition" . . . did not engage most of the speakers. Their concerns were the histories of artist-run galleries and feminist practices, the history of First Nations' appropriation, activist video, experimental film, and the social history of landscape painting—precisely the type of organizations and artistic production that Wall and his associates' neo-avant-gardism appeared to discount.[406]

Like his 1983 lecture "The Site of Culture," the Rotterdam lecture represents another example of defensive historical positioning on the part of Wall, who outlined his accounting of the development of the counter-tradition in Vancouver for an international audience.

One of the first overt challenges to the perceived hegemony of the "Vancouver School of Photo Conceptualism" came in the form of an essay written in the September 1988 issue of the popular Canadian art magazine *Fuse*. Sara Diamond, artist and writer, and then the western editor of the magazine, wrote an article titled "The Boys Club," in which she argues that the city's institutions (artist-run centers, art galleries, universities and art schools) are "controlled by a small, masculine, highly organized and certainly articulate breakfast club, known as the boy's club."[407] While not explicitly citing Wall and Wallace as primary members of the Boy's Club that she has in mind, they are implicitly referenced by her suggestion that their solo exhibitions planned to be held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1990 are typical of the Vancouver Art Gallery's lack of recent or planned solo exhibitions of notable local women artists. Her article also notes

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[406] William Wood, "The Insufficiency of the World," 75.

[407] Sara Diamond, "The Boy's Club," 12-13. Diamond's article is also noted and quoted in Carol Williams, "A Working Chronology of Feminist Cultural Activities and Events in Vancouver: 1970-1990," 202-203.

the following: a recent University of British Columbia art department-hosted conference

on post-war modern painting was exclusive of any consideration of women modernists;

only 2% of the Vancouver Art Gallery's acquisitions in 1987 were of women artists; and

that the Vancouver Art Gallery's curators and guest curators (all men) seem to favor

exhibitions by other men. Her article also specifically discusses the history of the avant-

garde and what she sees as a pattern of male artists creating oppositional artistic strategies

in order to carve out space for themselves within art history. "Structures of exclusion are

at best unconscious and at worse dismissive," she continues, and suggests that after

fifteen years of feminist interventions in the art world, "the dinosaurs are still rumbling

in Vancouver." Presumably the dinosaurs are old patterns of masculine discourse holding

firm in universities and city galleries.[408] Lastly, in what appears to be a rather overt

reference to Wall and Wallace amongst other university trained artists and academics

now teaching in city art departments or art schools, she claims:

> The danger here is the familiar one of tokenism, expressed in the attitude that those who continue to ask for more are unreasonable, and that the guys really do understand what the problem is and have it under control. It remains a problem, however, to have one woman on the curatorial staff of VAG [Vancouver Art Gallery], even if the entire boys club can recite Griselda Pollock standing on their heads (although that would certainly be fun to watch).[409]

The critique on the otherwise unspoken existence of a boy's club only accelerated,

and by 1990 there are other instances of more overt vocal challenges to what was by then

becoming the institutionalization of the "counter-tradition" of Wall and his peers. On

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[408] In her article Diamond specifically refers to art historian Serge Guilbaut, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, and their peers Christos Dikeakos, Vincent Trasov, and Michael Morris, amongst others. All of these men were either students, teachers, or both at the University of British Columbia, except Morris who was a student at the Vancouver School of Art (now known as Emily Carr University of Art and Design). Morris was also a curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1966. Thus, collectively they represent important institutions in Vancouver art.

[409] Ibid., 13.

Feb. 13, 1990 the Public Programs department of the Vancouver Art Gallery hosted a

panel discussion on the subject of whether or not the critical artistic strategies of 1960s

conceptual art had any lasting influence on the "The Postmodern Era," which was defined

by the gallery as a "sense of historical eclecticism . . . in all other art forms of the 1970s

and 80s."[410] "An Evening Forum at the Vancouver Art Gallery" was organized in

conjunction with the first retrospective of Wall's work held at the gallery from January 20

until March 19, 1990.[411] It was moderated by Gallery Director Willard Holmes and

included Terry Atkinson, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Lawrence Weiner.

A published record of the evening's discussion reveals some resistance to the

gallery's theme and choice of participants on the part of the public audience. Amongst

other things they commented on was Jeff Wall and Lawrence Weiner's use of the

expression "father/son" in reference to the history of conceptual art and the creation of

master narratives: "Jeff brought out the fact that there is a father/son relationship, almost

a kind of familial scenario between originators and then 'the fans' of conceptualism. . . . I

think that sometimes, as Lawrence Weiner said earlier, linguistically we contribute in a

way, to the 'master narratives.'"[412] Following this comment the same audience member

asked the panelists directly if "conceptualism was purely a masculinist product?"[413] Terry

Atkinson responded to this question by acknowledging that in fact it was:

It was getting very near to it, and that was one of the reasons, quite rightly,
it disappeared. . . . And one of the main instruments giving it the boot, in

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[410] Judith Mastai, ed., "An Evening Forum at the Vancouver Art Gallery," (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1990), 47.

[411] A second retrospective of Wall's work was not held at the Vancouver Art Gallery until 2008.

[412] Judith Mastai, ed., "An Evening Forum at the Vancouver Art Gallery," 44.

[413] Ibid.

outing it in difficulty, was the intrusion and the emergence of a very strong and active feminist movement for so many years.[414]

Unlike Atkinson, Wall responded defensively to the question, and suggested that this line of questioning was somewhat retrograde and indicated a desire to return to critiques already addressed and closed in the 1970s:

> Well, I have a kind of seventies response to hearing a critical review from the audience of the proceedings. . . . If it's a critical review of something that has already apparently been closed, then I think the old questions of who are the spectators? Who are the performers? Where is the boundary between the performance? Who is responsible for the language that circulates in the hall? . . . [sic] If that's the case, then I think that those old, (so-called "old") seventies questions should be posed directly back into the audience…[415]

This quote closes the official publication produced by the Vancouver Art Gallery of the panel discussion, thereby effectively serving as a kind of public challenge to readers and the public.[416] Although the printed version of the panel discussion presumably appeared sometime after the actual event (the publication date is unclear on the actual document), the editor's inclusion of this particular line of questioning in the edited transcript may have been inspired by a number of angry public responses to the panel in the weeks after the event's conclusion. Several Vancouver artists wrote complaint letters to a local newspaper about the panel discussion, characterizing it as a form of exclusionary public discourse that they felt ostracized from. Jill Moran complained to the local weekly newspaper *The Georgia Straight*: "With more than 200 people in attendance, and well-publicized with a full page ad in the *Georgia Straight*, the

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[414] Ibid.

[415] Ibid., 44-45.

[416] The publication is a self-described edited transcript of the evening's conversation, and so should be recognized as an incomplete transcript of all the comments and questions raised that night.

Jeff Wall Evening Forum has been billed as an accessible open meeting, but it turned out to be a forum for elitist, intellectual, academic meanderings."[417] D. Gill and C. Williams reinforce Moran's general complaint with their own more specific observation in the same paper:

> Some panelists considered the gender and racial constituency of the panel (four white male producers and a white male moderator) an inappropriate topic for discussion. But near the end, members of the audience clearly voiced their objections to the lack of women producers, or for that matter, any producers other than male ones, either on the panel or *within the historical schemata sketched by the speakers*. . . If . . . the choices were made deliberately we would venture to say that this is an *instigation of unproductive antagonism* (my italics). [418]

The italicized phrases are important because they point to an awareness about how discourse is being presented by figures of authority, and the perceived aggression of presenting a view of history that purposefully leaves other producers out of the story. Given that antagonism is a central component of early theories about how the avant-garde works in society to contest the status quo and work towards a more progressive future,[419] the latter writers' criticism of the panel serves as a considered rebuke to the historical positioning taken up by Wall in his photography, writing and lecturing in the preceding years.

In a symposium on Emily Carr and her legacy the next year, also at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the focus on the act of naming in creating art history is again

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[417] Jill Moran, "Reader says art forum is elitist," *The Georgia Straight*, March 2-9 1990, Letters to the Editor, 7.

[418] C. Williams and D. Gill, "Gallery forum choices questioned," *The Georgia Straight*, March 2-9 1990, Letters to the Editor, 7. Prof. Carol Williams, a scholar in Canada and already noted here for her contribution to the *Vancouver Anthology*, communicated to me through email on Dec 31, 2009, that she believes this letter was written by herself and Don Gill.

[419] See pages 6-10 of introduction here. More recently the antagonisms of the avant-garde, as critiques of capitalism, have been theorized as necessary components of the capitalist superstructure: the perception of freedom is best recognized in the rebellion of artists who function symbolically for the rest of the populace as still-relevant examples of personal liberation and freedom. See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's theory of the "artistic critique" in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

evident. At this event a number of writers and artists presented papers on Emily Carr on

a variety of topics pertaining to her work, life and history. One of the first presenters

discussed her concern with and interest in the power of Carr's name in the regional

context of Vancouver:

> I've become interested in the ways that Carr entered a kind of symbolic
> which hinged a great deal on her femininity, but operated both to erase
> difference . . . to erase her femininity, but also I think has acted against the
> erasure of difference in the here and now. If I was going to continue to do
> research in this area it would be one thing I'd want to investigate, how the
> name of the mother, you know in this case Emily Carr, in any kind of active
> way has inhibited in a sense access for contemporary women artists; her
> presence, and the idea, the collection and the naming of schools . . .[420]

This comment echoes the audience's challenge to the male artists included in

the Evening Forum at the Vancouver Art Gallery the year before, in particular the

notion that the name of the father, father/son relationship, or in this case, name of

the mother, has direct bearing on who holds power in the creation of art-historical

discourses. In this comment, the speaker is suggesting that Carr may have had too

much influence as a matriarchal figure in the construction of a regional art history,

one that has since created a backlash against further contemporary advancement by

women artists.

Certainly by 1991 women involved in the Vancouver art community appear

to have gone on the written record more frequently in their fight for creating new

discourses that would recognize their work. Their direct and confrontational

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[420] "Emily Carr Symposium," (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991), sound recording on 4 cassettes, VAG 91.52. Note: the audio recordings are incomplete and do not indicate the full names of the speakers and participants being recorded. The original voices could not be identified by Vancouver Art Gallery staff when asked. It is likely however, that this voice also belongs to Prof. Carol Williams who was and continues to be a vocal critic of the Vancouver School's dominance in the city during the 1980s and 90s. She communicated this to me through email on Dec 31, 2009, and acknowledged that she believes the above quote was likely hers, although she is not certain.

rejection then of the "master narrative" of a specific history of conceptual art in their city associated with the Vancouver School confirms my thesis that this discourse was built on the studied articulation of a gendered division of space that they eventually felt compelled to respond to. Whether or not the site of discourse initiated by Wall and Wallace in the late 1960s was *intentionally* coded masculine should have no bearing on its social outcome as an *exclusionary* discourse by 1991.

The Invisible Giant in the Room

> *The Giant is a sort of imaginary monument . . .*
>
> Jeff Wall, 1996[421]

As shown in the last chapter, by 1991 Wall's counter-tradition was perceived as a exclusionary discourse by women in Vancouver, who began to speak out actively in public to challenge it and the institutional support it was receiving. By then the notion that a small group of artists associated with Jeff Wall had created a neo-avant-garde in Vancouver through their conceptually-based photographic practice had been recognized internationally, and branded by curators as the Vancouver School. This study has analyzed the early historical and social context of the development of Jeff Wall's work to see what confluence of factors led to the formation of a discourse that would be perceived as exclusionary by women in the city by 1991.

My findings suggest that by actively creating a discursive field to support his work that rejects homeland, Emily Carr's legacy of expressionist landscape painting, and

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[421] Jeff Wall, "Arielle Pélenc in Correspondence with Jeff Wall," *Jeff Wall Selected Interviews and Essays*, 254.

what he perceived to be a restrictive feminist discourse towards figurative representation in the 1970s, Wall successfully positioned his own work as a counter-tradition within the longer tradition of modernist avant-garde artistic production. He did so even as the historical avant-garde was at the same time being critiqued as male-identified by feminist artists and scholars. He was able to recognize and be sensitive to the changing discourses of art history because of his early training as an art historian, and his research into the tactical methods employed by the Berlin Dada group as they responded to their own changing art-historical, geographical, and socio-political circumstances between the first and second World Wars.[422] His particular strength was to recognize a new "field of conflict" within art history as it was evolving in the 1970s, and to position his visual work art-historically through writing and interviews in the newly emerging discursive field.[423] Without such an effort, his early photographs (such as *Destroyed Room* from 1978, and *Picture for Women* from 1979) might have been construed on the basis of their subject matter as negative examples of female representation in the context of the late 1970s.

Consequently, my analysis of his early conceptual artwork *Landscape Manual* and writing ("Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context") and the ways these ideas were channeled into his Cibachrome transparencies roughly a decade later (along with his peers' works of the same periods), suggests that a dialectic of gendered space exists in Wall's creative production between 1970 and 1979. This is made more explicit by the appearance of eroticized women within Wall and his peers' defeatured landscapes of 1969-1970 and their reappearance as representations of feminist theory (specifically the

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[422] The most important activity of the Berlin Dada group in relation to Wall's work and development is their use of manifestos.

[423] See note 135 on page 68.

theory of the gaze) in Wall's 1978-1979 photographs. These appearances in Wall and his peers' work indicate that women, and their representation in contemporary art, were an important consideration in Wall's art and writing during this time frame.

I should clarify that my understanding of the term space, and my use of it in this study is linked to an expanded interpretation of what defines a landscape image. This focus on landscape was initiated by the historical record established in Vancouver by scholars, artists and writers since 1969 who have claimed that the defeatured landscape is a defining characteristic of Wall and his peers' early conceptual artworks. The defeatured landscape was believed to be the literal and metaphoric site of social alienation and a representation of the city structure as text, and thus is configured as the opposite of the expressionist painters' romantic and mythological view of British Columbia's natural wilderness. Making art with a strong sense of home or homeland was likewise construed as personally biased, and was seen as a handicap in the pursuit of socially-conscious critical objectivity. Within this set of beliefs, the image of woman appears as a marker of the erotic, irrational and domestic space within specific artworks that are otherwise concerned with semiotic structures, social alienation, and the reinvigoration of socially relevant avant-garde artworks.

Although I have limited my study to a few specific examples of Wall's work, much more work can be done. A number of his photographs made after 1979 suggest that the preoccupation with how space can be gendered masculine or feminine and controlled through discourse continues as an evolving subtext through much of his later production. *Woman and Her Doctor* (1980-81), for example, specifically engages with feminist psychoanalytic theory (Fig. 4.1): "I thought of the woman in *Woman and her Doctor* as a

sort of porcelain figurine, and tried to make her look a bit like one, very glossy, so that the 'clinical gaze' of the doctor would have something to work on."[424] Unlike *Destroyed Room*, from three years before, which contained a topless dancing female figurine, here the real woman is present and is made to look like the doll. The male psychoanalyst and his patient are accompanied by the right side of an unidentifiable man standing to right of the image who appears to be dressed in a suit or service uniform. This may indicate the presence of some sort of institutional order, or class dynamic. The woman's ruffled white shirt, striped pants, and tights recall Picasso's many paintings of Harlequins in my mind, which is significant only in that it indicates Wall's wide familiarity with avant-garde art-historical precedents and willingness to quote them. As is the case with earlier works like *Destroyed Room* (1978), it is unclear how the image itself might be read by viewers unfamiliar with psychoanalytically inspired feminist discourse; in this case the male objectification and fetishization of woman within both the literal space of the doctor's office, and the theoretical space of the male gaze.[425]

In closing it is interesting to consider Wall's 1992 work *The Giant* (Fig. 4.2) from the perspective of the arguments presented here. This photograph has received less critical attention than many others Wall has made over the years. Although also a Cibachrome transparency, it is comparably small: 39 by 48 centimeters. The image shows an impossibly tall, naked older woman standing on the landing of a staircase of what appears to be a university library. She has white-grey hair pulled back from her face, wears no jewelry, and is seen holding a piece of paper in her right hand which is raised

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[424] Jeff Wall, "Arielle Pélenc in Correspondence with Jeff Wall," *Jeff Wall*, 13.

[425] Other works that might be analyzed from the perspective of how space might be theorized as gendered include *Stereo* (1980), *Diatribe* (1985), *The Quarrel* (1988), *The Well* (1989), and *The Stumbling Block* (1991), amongst others.

close to her face. Her body is also interesting because although her face, neck, abdomen, hands and legs show the wrinkles and sagging of someone of advanced age, her breasts remain strangely large, round and youthful. She looks to be about six times larger than the other library patrons, who are seen using the reading carrels and stacks. She is standing on the middle landing of a staircase that is at least four stories high, and because that makes her body at least two stories high, she is a giant. This improbable image is the result of digital manipulation; Wall has seamlessly merged several images into one, and controlled the lighting on the woman's body, so the composite image appears natural. What is obviously unnatural is her size and the fact that the other library-goers ignore her, or don't see her. Thus while she is "monumental" and "imaginary," as Jeff Wall describes her in the quotation above, I would suggest she is also ghostly in the context of the picture itself. The size of the image is also consciously unmonumental, compared to the large multi-foot scale of most of his other Cibachromes which consciously reference art-historical masterpieces made by Caravaggio, Manet, Velasquez, and others.[426] She is an apparition that we can see, but she cannot be seen by the people in the library.

What are we to make of this strange image, this ghostly monument of a naked older woman in a library? Jeff Wall has suggested in interviews that his use of older women in his photographs symbolizes freedom, but a freedom tinged with black humor:

> The Giant is a sort of imaginary monument, and that genre itself is connected with various branches of humour or comedy, for example, the Surrealists proposals for reconfiguring the familiar monuments of Paris.

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[426] As already noted on page 161-162, Wall has suggested that his *Picture for Woman* (1979) references Diego Velazquez' *Las Meninas* (1656) and Édouard Manet's *A Bar in the Folies-Bergère* (1883) and that his *Destroyed Room* (1978) references Marcel Duchamp's *Étant Donnès* (1946-1966) and Eugène Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827). Other such comparisons and references made by people other than Jeff Wall abound: for example, although not discussed here, Thierry de Duve has compared Wall's *The Arrest* (1989) to Michelangelo Caravaggio's *The Flagellation of Christ* (1607), and *The Drain* (1989) to Paul Cézanne's *The Bridge at Maincy, near Melun* (1879-80).

> They were usually done in the spirit of humour noir. I associate The Giant
> with two other [of my] pictures . . . in which the older women personify
> something intangible – freedom. . . .[427]

In his account, the woman in the library represents a kind of spectral freedom, and

because he also associates this with black humor, it seems to be a false freedom. But

freedom from what? Likely it is the alienated social position of most individuals living

within advanced capitalism in the context of a Marxist-inspired social art history.   Yet,

unlike Wall's claims that he is interested in representing "unchosen" or "unspecial"

people, this woman is clearly unique as a nude maternal giant (maternal because of her

ageless breasts) within a place of learning.[428]

The fact that she is situated in the library suggests another important interpretation

of this spectral monument, especially in the context of the dissertation and its discussion

of discourse formation within the avant-garde. She is the dominant figure within the

primary physical arena of learning and mastering discourse: the library. Although she

towers above the surrounding texts, she is also is in need of consultation with them, as

evidenced by the paper (perhaps containing call numbers) that she references in her hand.

Furthermore, her nakedness suggests physical vulnerability despite her size.

In an interview with Arielle Pélenc that briefly discusses this photograph amongst

others, Pélenc refers to *The Giant* as Wall's "first nude." Claiming that "the female nude

from the Renaissance to Manet to Picasso has been the site for aesthetic and libidinal

gaming with tradition, a site of transgression of its rules and laws," Pélenc questions

Wall's motivations in referencing this history. Wall responds, "I guess the nudes I've done

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[427] Jeff Wall, "Arielle Pélenc in Correspondence with Jeff Wall," *Jeff Wall*, 22.
[428] For Wall's use of the terms "unchosen" and "unspecial" see note 108 on page 56.

are not intended to be sites for any such gaming with authority. I see them as 'mild'

statements, marking a distance from any Philosophy of Desire."[429] Still, it is hard to

accept Wall's response to Pélenc as completely true, since his photograph must clearly

reference Duchamp's groundbreaking Cubist work *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912),

which caused a scandal at the New York Armory Exhibition in 1913. This connection

would not necessarily be clear on the basis of the artwork itself (one being a work of

early-twentieth-century dynamic cubism, one being a contemporary photograph), except

that Wall obviously studied the Dada movement at great length, a movement Duchamp is

associated with, and already referenced Duchamp's *Étant Donnés* (1946-1966) in his

Destroyed Room (1978).[430] Contrary to being a "mild statement," the older women in the

library represents Wall's active engagement with art-historical discourse, who controls it

or changes the direction of it (certainly Duchamp did this with works like *Nude*

Descending a Staircase and *Fountain* from 1917), and how the female body indeed

continues to act as a marker of such transgressions.

     As Pélenc noticed, *The Giant* is Wall's "first nude," or depiction of a naked

woman. I find the timing of this work's production interesting. In chapter three I

discussed the rising tide of female opposition to Wall and his peers' work, which seemed

to peak around 1991. Given that the production of Wall's Cibachromes require a fair

amount of planning and development (he constructs sets, hires actors, and photographs

different images that then are sutured together digitally) it is likely that the work was

being considered or planned near the same time or shortly after that when Carol

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[429] Ibid., 16. By "Philosophy of Desire" wall is responding to Pélenc's earlier suggestion that the beauty of
the nude is related to Freud's theory of psycho-sexual desire.
[430] See note 299, page 161.

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Williams, Sara Diamond and others were actively critiquing his powerful position in the Vancouver art establishment. From this point of view *The Giant* may be construed as a capitulation to feminist interests—that is, the photograph asserts the fact that Woman is a powerful constituent in the creation of discourse at least at that moment in time—or it may represent an ambivalent response to Wall's reckoning with feminist discourse and regional art history (such as Emily Carr's legacy) over the years. I suggest ambivalence because of the woman's simultaneous physical presence and absence in the image. In both cases, her placement in the library (in fact her haunting of it), a place no doubt often frequented by Wall himself, suggests a presence that both defines and limits the landscape(s) of artistic discourse accessible to Wall during his formative years as an artist. In this photograph she is given form and is more tangibly what she has always been; the invisible giant in the room.

Conclusion Figures

Figure 4.1   Jeff Wall, *A Woman and her Doctor*, 1980-81, Transparency in lightbox 100.5 x 155.5 cm., Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4.2   Jeff Wall, *The Giant*, 1992, Transparency in lightbox, 39 x 48 cm., Courtesy of the artist.

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