

Writing Sample: Excerpt taken from the PhD Dissertation in Art History and Criticism of Dr. Leah Modigliani, completed at Stony Brook University in May, 2010:

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

Abstract:

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.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iv
Acknowledgementsvi
Introduction	1
Outline of Chapters.....	14
I. Emily Carr and The Legacy of Commonwealth Modernism	21
Canadian Nationalism and The Group of Seven	22
Emily Carr: West Coast Modernism	36
Commonwealth Modernism, Homeland and the Home Culture Concept	52
Jeff Wall's Origins and "Notion of Context"	63
II. The Context and Theory of a "Defeated Landscape" and "Urban Wilderness"	75
Our Beautiful West Coast Thing	78
NETCO: Precursor to the Defeated Landscape	87
Robert Smithson in Vancouver	102
Articulating the Defeated Landscape	111
The Limits of the Defeated Landscape	129
III.1970s: The Feminist Challenge to Representation and the Gendered Spaces of the Counter Tradition	147
Feminist Theoretical and Visual Challenges to Modernist Representation	149
Jeff Wall's <i>Picture for Women</i> (1979) and <i>Destroyed Room</i> (1978)	158
Ian Wallace's <i>The Summer Script I and II</i> (1973-74), <i>Attack on Literature</i> (1975), and <i>Image/Text</i> (1979)	184
The Site(s) of Discourse: Landscape and Site-Specificity	198
Conclusion	216
Backlash: Naming a Majority	216
The Invisible Giant in the Room.....	234
Bibliography	243

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 "defeated landscape." By analyzing the existence of eroticized images of women within the defeated 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 r

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.

levance 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

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 Lefebvre and his classic text *The Production of Space*; David Harvey's work on the relationships between space, capital and neoliberal economics (also influenced by Lefebvre); 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

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 Horkheimer, 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

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

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

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

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

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

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 defeated 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 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 defeated 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 defeated 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 defeated 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

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.