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Mysterious Geographies:
The *Scaped* Spaces of Eleanor Bond,
Janet Cardiff and Brenda Pelkey

Avery Larose

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

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ABSTRACT

Mysterious Geographies:
The *Scapes* of Eleanor Bond,
Brenda Pelkey and Janet Cardiff

Avery Larose

This thesis explores how the works of Eleanor Bond, Brenda Pelkey and Janet Cardiff emphasize the inseparability of represented space from human perception, and the crucial role played by such physical and cultural concerns as the body, memories, stories and dreams in the shaping of spaces. Their works refer, therefore, not simply to physical spaces, but to conditions or states of space, often determined by layers of metaphorical significance which these artists bring to light. It is these ephemeral transformations and psychic interventions which irrevocably alter our environments that constitute the *scape*, a concept which captures this building up of a network of human responses to one's environment which in turn change the way it is perceived and lived. In their insistence upon the impact of the elusive and metaphorical, these works constitute a decided intervention in the tradition of Canadian landscape art while remaining firmly embedded in discussions of space, situation and environment. By subverting hegemonic modes of spatial representation, Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff construct their own visual assertions of what spaces were, can, or could be. The creation of *scapes* becomes part of a process for re-shaping both perceived and lived space, collapsing binaries such as self and other, public and private, nature and culture, and reality and fiction, in order to encompass the range of concrete and metaphorical attempts to shape the spaces we inhabit.

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Although my memories of writing this thesis invariably involve long hours of isolation in front of the computer or among stacks of books, it was not this hermitic lifestyle, but rather the seemingly more peripheral elements of discussions with family and friends which sparked the thoughts and ideas contained within.

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INTRODUCTION

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.¹

- Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

*I have often walked down this street before;
But the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before.
All at once am I several stories high.
Knowing I'm on the street where you live.*

*Are there lilac trees in the heart of town?
Can you hear a lark in any other part of town?
Does enchantment pour out of every door,
No, it's just on the street where you live.²*

-Alan Lerner, Frederick Loewe, "On the Street Where you Live"

How is it that a walk we take everyday changes each time; that a house we pass on our way to work, a telephone booth on our corner, the city itself, has the capacity to transform, if not its physical structure, then the way it is perceived by its inhabitants? In terms of meaning making, the environments humans create for themselves are endlessly mutable. Even, and sometimes especially, the most banal elements of our surroundings become repositories of memories and dreams, as we invest our everyday landscapes with our own histories and desires. It is not simply a case of the environment reflecting the moods or attitudes of those who occupy it, but involves also a gradual accrual of

1

Simon Schama, "Introduction," *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1995), 6, 7.

2

Alan Lerner and Frederick Loewe, "On the Street Where you Live,"
<<http://www.lyricsfreak.com/n/nat-king-cole/98075.html>>. April 2nd, 2005.

meaning, built up over decades of both physical and psychic transmutation. The grass in parks is worn thin by desire lines, grocery stores borrow the soaring ceilings of an old train station, a meandering street traces the edge of a long filled-in river. But perhaps even more poignant are those changes which are not seen by many but felt by individuals: the way the atmosphere of a street changes when your boyfriend breaks up with you on the corner, or how a regular apartment block suddenly appears menacing after a murder occurs there. As the walker herself changes, so too does the space in which she walks.³

The three artists I explore in this thesis not only concern themselves with excavating the layers of memory and desire deposited at certain sites, but show us what our everyday environments could become if these ephemeral forces were made the arbiters of space, rather than dismissed as whims and fancies. Eleanor Bond (b.1948) is a painter of fantastic landscapes; her massive, unstretched canvasses (often reaching close to two and a half metres high by four metres long) overwhelm the viewer with bird's eye views of futuristic structures and vibrant, Day-Glo cities. Here, I am particularly interested in her series *Social Centres* (1993), *Cosmoville* (1995) and *Some Cities* (1997-98). Focussing her lens on more mundane scenes, the large Ilfochrome prints of Brenda Pelkey's (b.1950) series *...dreams of life and death* (1994) feature such suburban staples as a telephone booth, a graveyard and an electricity pole. Each image is accompanied by

3

Please note that throughout this thesis, the words space, environment, and surroundings are, for the most part, used interchangeably. They are loosely meant to signify the geographical area in which one is situated.

a smaller text panel which tells a story or recounts a memory loosely associated with the represented site, printed on a blown-up element of the scene itself. Finally, I will be exploring Janet Cardiff's audio walk entitled *Conspiracy Theory* (2002) which takes place in the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art and the adjacent Place Desjardins.⁴ Immersing the viewer in an individual visual and aural environment, this experience is unlike any stroll through the museum or jaunt through the shopping mall. All of these works reveal the possibilities inherent in our everyday landscapes by re-inscribing them with stories, memories and dreams.

Evidently, these works have a great deal to do with space as perceived by an imaginary viewer, and yet they can hardly be subsumed under the conventional category of landscape. Traditionally, in Canada at least, the term brings to mind wide vistas of unpopulated wilderness, in which the human elements are either subdued by the magnificence of the scenery, or altogether absent. Early examples of this trend are the paintings of Lucius O'Brien and Thomas Davies, which dramatically overshadow the marks of human passage with sublime natural elements (figs. 1,2). This trend was further reinforced by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, with works like *The Jack Pine* (1916-17) (fig. 3) and *Clouds, Lake Superior* (c. 1923) (fig. 4). What is not altogether

4

Cardiff's audio walks involve wearing headphones, and in this case, watching the monitor of a small hand-held video camera, while tracing a path previously devised by the artist. The participant is directed by the artist's voice through the headphones, and is simultaneously presented with innumerable layers of sound, which shape the way in which the environment is perceived. The camera usually reflects our surroundings but filmed at a different time, allowing us glimpses into the past of another. Further, as we walk through the space, the artist tells us shreds of stories and memories which guide our interpretation. See fig. 46 for clarification.

obvious, however, is that no matter how empty a landscape might seem, it is always shaped by those perceiving it; as historian Simon Schama writes, “Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product.”⁵ While every depiction of space inherently emphasizes the presence of its human maker, this connection is often overshadowed by other concerns, such as the attempt to root the notion of Canadian identity in the idea of the empty wilderness and primordial north.

Since the 1960s, however, many Canadian artists have avidly disputed these traditions, mucking about in the virgin snow, and making landscape art into a viable medium for questioning the relationship between nature and culture, self and other, urban and rural. Issues such as technology, psychology and colonialism all find a place in the work of these artists, firmly anchored to the land, and yet troubling the pristine views offered by earlier painters and photographers. By refashioning the notion of landscape into a forum for raising environmental, cultural and psychic concerns, Canadian art during the latter half of the twentieth century challenges the very definition of this term. Before turning to the specific interventions of the artists investigated in this thesis, it is crucial to flesh out the movements which both set the stage for and respond to the mysterious geographies created by Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff.

Rather than being diametrically opposed to nature, several artists have illustrated how technological developments can become integral to our understanding and

⁵Schama, 9.

representation of the landscape, thus troubling the division between organic and machine. The impact of mechanization on both human life and the environments we inhabit is explored, without making recourse to the tired maxim that any technological interference with nature must be destructive. Instead, these artists explore how scientific developments open up new ways of seeing and understanding the land in which we dwell.

Employing experimental film techniques and constructing a camera which could move independently in countless different ways, Michael Snow explored the relationship between technology and landscape in his film *La Région centrale* (1970-71) (fig. 5). In this work, the mediation of a mechanical eye becomes explicit, as the audience is offered tilting, spinning, upside-down views of a northern landscape, completely obliterating the uninterrupted horizon line of traditional landscape paintings. Vanishing point perspective, to which most western viewers have become accustomed, is disrupted, replaced by a new “planetary perspective” as the camera orbits the space.⁶

Industrial landscapes have not gone unnoticed by Canadian artists either, as mines, quarries, logged forests and dumps are transformed into scenes which invite both environmental critique and aesthetic contemplation. Perhaps most successful at conflating these seemingly paradoxical positions is Edward Burtynsky (b. 1955), in his photographs of uranium and nickel tailings in Sudbury, innumerable cubes of compressed

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Bill Simon, “A Completely Open Space: Michael Snow’s *La Région centrale*,” *Millenium Film Journal*, 4/5 (Summer / Fall 1979): 100.

tin cans in Hamilton or railcuts in British Columbia (figs. 6, 7, 8). Landscape is once again framed as human product, not only shaped by overly-enthusiastic resource extraction, but by the aesthetic interventions of the artist, which transform that which would be utterly shocking to even the most jaded environmentalist into the shockingly beautiful.

Artist couple Ingrid and Iain Baxter collaborated on various landscape-oriented projects from 1966-78, marketing them as products of their company, the N. E. Thing Co. (NETCO). Taking a humorous approach and employing such devices as mirrors, cameras and billboards, NETCO's works opened up the various metaphorical compartments into which the land had been divided (aesthetic, corporate, political) and in so doing, revealed the constructed nature of the landscape as "a product of human interests."⁷ The artifice of traditional landscape art is brought to the fore in works like *1/4 Mile Landscape* (1968) (fig. 9), created by placing three roadside signs along a highway in California: *You Will Soon Pass By a 1/4 Mile N. E. Thing Company Landscape, Start Viewing* and *Stop Viewing*. Perhaps most relevant to this thesis were those projects which took place during the winter, such as *One Mile Ski Track* (1968) (fig. 10) and *P-Line Straight* (1968) (fig. 11) in which snow became a medium for artistic expression, drawn in, painted, and peed on, thus disrupting the notion of an empty northern expanse devoid of human markings.

7

Nancy Shaw, "Siting the Banal: The Expanded Landscapes of the N. E. Thing Co.," *You Are Now in the Middle of an N. E. Thing Co. Landscape* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 25.

Inscribing the landscape with historical and cultural references is another strategy employed to reveal the active shaping of one's surroundings. Past events, whether actually experienced or merely read about, television shows and movies, stories, and even mind-altering substances have the power to forever alter one's perception of a given place. The artists briefly discussed below maintain that every landscape is mediated by innumerable memories, ideas, and histories - not merely our own, but all those to which we have access due to our situation in a western postmodernist society. The gap between culture and nature becomes difficult to maintain as the distinction between a landscape and the events or ideas which shape it dissolves.

Making the layers of memory which inform our perception of landscape visible, Jeff Wall's (b. 1946) elaborately staged photographs, mounted as lightboxes, blur the boundaries between a supposedly timeless nature and the historical events for which it traditionally acts as a backdrop. Not only are the spaces he photographs replete with signs of human occupation and people themselves, but the artist also references centuries of artistic production, staging his landscapes to channel the likes of Manet, Delacroix and Hokusai. Foregoing the grand natural spaces depicted by these artists, Wall highlights those bits of leftover landscape which occupy a liminal area between urban and rural: the triangle of grass in the middle of an intersection, the vacant lot littered with detritus, the undeveloped edges of new housing projects (see figs. 12 and 13). These easily-forgotten spaces become engaged in a dialogue with history, as Wall frames them as the arena in

which culture is maintained.⁸

Also engaging with visual culture, albeit of an entirely different order and era, are Peter Doig's paintings, perhaps, of all the works explored in this thesis, those most closely aligned with the traditional landscape. However, it is this very similarity which renders their differences startlingly apparent. As in Wall's photographs, nature is elevated from pleasant backdrop to active narrative component; the division between inside and out is rendered porous, as what appear to be the visions of a mind in the thrall of some hallucinogenic drug are projected onto the landscape.⁹ Populated by ghostly figures, historical personages and the occasional garden gnome, his works often feature blurred edges and intensely hot colours, engaging the viewer's senses and confusing their optical sensibilities (see figs.14, 15, 16). Borrowing his chosen scenes from recent horror movies as well as alluding to the Group of Seven, the landscape in Doig's pieces is a palimpsest of cultural references, taking on a decidedly human cast.

Perhaps one of the most effective ways of undermining the construct of the empty wilderness is to explore how landscape is implicated in the idea of both personal and national identity. Whether emphasizing the political or the psychological, several artists have explored the relationship between landscape and the self: that which might initially have seemed to be completely dehumanized becomes a tool for examining one's social or

⁸

Robert Linsley, "The Storyteller," *Jeff Wall: The Storyteller* (Frankfurt: Museum for Moderne Kunst, 1992): 33.

⁹

Johanne Sloan, "Hallucinating Landscape, Canadian-Style," *Peter Doig* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2001), 10.

psychic positioning. The outside world begins to reflect inner conditions and tendencies. No longer an absolute, wilderness becomes responsive to the moods and wishes of its inhabitants, taking on the form of refuge, political arena, or repository of memory.

The active shaping, or *scaping*, of the land to conform to ideas of self and country, or to undermine these notions, is made explicit in the works of Joyce Wieland (1931-98). Placing herself in opposition, albeit a gentle and very playful one, to Tom Thomson and Group of Seven, her works emphasize the degree to which nature is a product of human values and desires. In works such as *Nature Mixes* (1963) (fig. 17), she alluded to the parallels between the human reproductive system and sexual organs and those of plants, thus highlighting the biological closeness of people and the natural world they inhabit. Later on, anxiety for this natural world spurred the creation of *Water Quilt* (1970-71) (figs. 18, 19), a piece composed of sixty-four fabric panels, each embroidered with a delicate northern wildflower; each panel can be folded back to reveal an excerpt of a book highlighting the precarious situation of Canada's fresh water. Perhaps most ambitious was her installation at the National Gallery to commemorate Canada's centennial, entitled *True Patriot Love* (1970). The many works which composed the exhibition underscored the presence of ties which bind identity and the land, and the political and cultural issues which shape the ways in which this land is perceived.

More recently, the focus has shifted from the national to the local, as several contemporary artists defy the notion of the empty Canadian wilderness to reveal individual experiences of and personal investment in the landscape. Marlene Creates' (b. 1952) project, *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories* (1987) took

place in Newfoundland, where she spoke to residents about specific places which were important to them. Some drew maps of the area, highlighting those features of the space which they felt to be most meaningful, and explaining why. Creates then visited these sites and photographed them, or gathered natural memorabilia, such as clippings of grass or piles of pebbles. These fragments were then displayed together in the gallery along with photographs of the individuals to whom she had spoken (fig. 20). By bringing a map, story, image and souvenir of the site together, Creates constructs an understanding of the self and the landscape as intertwined, in which both terms are constantly shifting and changing. There is not so much a negotiation between them as a fusion: the land cannot be comprehended apart from human involvement and interpretation.

The refashioning of landscape into dwelling place is enacted in the various cocoons, pouches and sleeping bags made by Liz Magor (b. 1948). By creating habitats and living spaces out of sculptures referencing natural materials, such as the sleeping bags stuffed into bronze cedar logs for *Hollow* (1998-99) and *Burrow* (1999) (figs. 21, 22), she explores the romantic escape from civilization into the woods.¹⁰ At the same time, the impossibility of actually inhabiting any of these structures reveals the fairy-tale nature of this desire, emphasizing the artifice of the uninhabited wilderness. One can never truly escape humanity by hiding in nature, as nature itself is a human construction.

Also personally involved but more political in reception are works by Jin-Me Yoon (b. 1960) and Rebecca Belmore (b. 1960). Born in Korea and emigrating to Canada

¹⁰Nancy Tousley, "Interview: Liz Magor," *Canadian Art* (Spring 2000): 73-74.

in 1968, Yoon's work explores the tension between the notion of Canadian identity as linked with a mythical wilderness depicted by Anglo-Canadians, and its large immigrant population, whose experiences are largely absent from traditional historical accounts. In her piece, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) (fig. 23), Yoon photographed people of Korean descent standing in front of paintings by Emily Carr and Lawren Harris; she then arranged the individual portraits into two large grids. The viewer is confronted with the task of negotiating the sitter's face and the obscured but still recognizable painting behind, framing landscape as both individually meaningful, ethnically informed and politically motivated.

Exploring analogous themes, Belmore raises questions of identity and cultural appropriation. One of her most resonant installations, *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother* (1991-92) (fig. 24) was composed of a beautifully fashioned wooden megaphone, originally installed in the mountains near Banff. Here, participants were invited to address the earth directly, entering into a loving relationship with the landscape, rather than viewing nature as entirely divorced from cultural meaning. Belmore also disrupts the stereotype whereby aboriginal people exist in symbiotic understanding with the land, rendering the possibility of communication accessible to all.

Continuing in this vein, Bond's paintings, Pelkey's photographs, and Cardiff's audio-walks make the relationship between the seer (artist and viewer) and the scene (whether painted, photographed or walked) overt: we cannot imagine these spaces deprived of the psychic and emotional inscriptions of their makers and viewers. Engaging with such themes as environmentalism, memory, and pop culture in relation to

the landscape, the art works I examine in this thesis are firmly situated within this broader art historical context of expanding the possibilities of the landscape genre, of exploring what it means to truly inhabit the space we occupy. The untouched vistas of the Group of Seven, the limitless tracts of pure wilderness, are abandoned in favour of spaces replete with political motivation and emotional engagement, which make their connections with makers and viewers palpable.

Interestingly, the word 'landscape' itself originally shared this reference to the cultural, signifying not a pristine view of nature, but an environment which was shaped by human occupation and alteration. While the first syllable, *land*, generally referred to a territory with rigidly defined boundaries, often a section of plowed farm land, it is the second syllable, *scape*, which particularly interests me for the purposes of this thesis. There has been much fruitful discussion of this term, particularly by the phenomenologist Edward S. Casey, and landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn, both of whom emphasize the process of a human shaping of the land, whether physically (by building houses, for example), or imaginatively (such as designating a specific site as sacred). Rooted in the Danish *skabe* and German *schaffen*, *scape* refers to the act of shaping, as well as alluding to an association or partnership; in the case of landscape, one might posit this relationship as existing between human beings and the land they occupy.¹¹ Moreover, it refers to a

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Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 16.

gathering of similar objects, revealing their organization into a loosely-defined system.¹²

John Brinckerhoff Jackson cites a particularly fascinating instance of usage in the tenth century, when the term *waterscape* described a system of pipes, drains and aqueducts, the imposition of a rather sophisticated human-made structure onto a natural surface.¹³

Further, Casey draws attention to the etymological ties between *scape* and ‘scoop’, emphasizing the capacity of landscape to cut out and sculpt, to become a container for meaning.¹⁴

Bringing these varied definitions together, *scape* can be thought to signify the condition of a collection of public spaces which reveal the marks of human modification, organized for a communal purpose or use and overlaid with metaphorical significance. It is a state of between-ness, alluding to a space between nature and culture, between that which is given to us and that which is needed or desired. Unlike ‘environment’ or ‘space’, *scape*, as Spirn describes it, “connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and the aesthetic, the embeddedness [sic] in culture....landscape is loud with dialogues, with storylines that connect a place and its dwellers.”¹⁵ Further, according to

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For definitions and etymology of the word landscape see Schama, 10; Spirn, 16; Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 272-73; John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “The Word Itself,” *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 1-8; and Evan Morris, “Landscape,” <<http://www.word-detective.com/back-d.html#landscape>>

¹³Jackson, 7.

¹⁴Casey, *Representing*, 272.

¹⁵Spirn, 17.

Casey, a landscape is always *a priori* represented - there is no such thing as unrepresented landscape - and that in being so, over and over again in the case of some landscapes, a place acquires “the truth of its own being.”¹⁶ Beyond the constraints of time and space, the act of *scaping* allows the viewer to infuse the space he or she inhabits with memory and meaning, thus making the space we inhabit our own.

This particular definition seems especially applicable to the types of spaces depicted in the art works explored in this thesis, environments composed of both natural and built elements which have evidently been organized into a system of visual signs by the artist, and purportedly having a public function in that they are intended to serve a given community. The pieces I investigate not only emphasize the inseparability of represented space from human perception, but highlight the active shaping of the environment by its inhabitants, its organization into a *scape*. Further, although some works, such as Bond’s paintings, refer to a concrete, physical shaping of the environment, these artists are more interested in the capacity to mould space in a metaphorical sense. They take into account not only those transformations which can be perceived by the eye, but those which shape the land in a more elusive way, capturing those psychic interventions which irrevocably alter our environments. Thus, every work takes as its point of departure an ordinary space - a city, a pasture, a museum - and reveals the degree to which it has been rendered extraordinary by the memories, desires and dreams which have adhered to it.

¹⁶Casey, *Representing*, 271.

I have employed the term *scape* to describe the particular conjunction of physical space with a more ephemeral layer of significance which characterizes the work of these artists. While it takes into account a perhaps elusive state or condition, it does not lose sight of the fact of the land, whether this be a natural setting or an overcrowded city, making it particularly useful to scholars of contemporary Canadian art. As outlined above, the artists explored in this thesis represent only a fraction of those currently working in Canada who continue to engage with the history of landscape art while subverting this tradition in myriad ways. The land, and by extension, space, remain key preoccupations for our country's contemporary artists, and yet they produce work far removed from the wilderness framed by the Group of Seven and often have little claim to the label of landscape, at least in its strictest sense. Working within this generation of Canadian artists, Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff constitute a crucial intervention in this tradition through their insistence upon the decidedly emotional and cultural significance of even the emptiest of spaces, an often imaginary but no less suggestive layer which I have termed the *scape*. This concept offers the possibility to speak of space as represented in art works without constantly making recourse to the often outdated and inappropriate description of landscape. After reading numerous reviews and more academic publications concerning their work, it became clear to me that this particular intersection of artistic and geographic concerns, so prevalent in the work of these artists, remained relatively untouched. By bringing issues often confined to the disciplines of feminist geography and urban studies, such as the body's relationship to space, fictional realities, and imaginary environments, to bear on the works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff,

I hope to suggest new ways of speaking about spaces, situations and environments within an art historical context.

Their emphasis on the transformation of everyday environments into mysterious and magical situations for the viewer is what initially drew me to these artists, and led me to investigate the particular qualities of this manoeuvre. Though each works in a different medium, Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff share a preoccupation with breaching the barriers between nature and culture, self and other, fiction and reality, and past, present and future. Each of their works constitutes a decisive intervention in modernist notions of space as separate and absolute, revealing how both the body and psychic or emotional currents play a role in producing the spaces we inhabit. By bringing these artists together, it is my aim not only to reveal how their works engage with the specific themes I will be exploring, but to allow certain elements to be brought out which would remain neglected if examined in isolation. Thus, Bond's whimsical architecture will shed light on Pelkey's illuminated telephone booths, while Cardiff's unnerving museum can make us think differently about both. This is why I have opted for thematic chapters as opposed to investigating each artist separately: despite their glaring visual and experiential differences, it is their respective explorations of the layers of meaning which accrue to and forever change specific sites with which I have sought to engage, and which can only be fully developed by placing them side by side.

Ostensibly, the *scape* can refer to any variety of states or conditions of space, as long as they emphasize the collective human element in the act of making or shaping. As concerns the art works to be explored here, I am interested in this notion as a means of

shedding light upon the construction of a space which is not simply physical but metaphorical as well: the building up of a network of human responses to one's environment which in turn change the way it is perceived and lived. In addition to being thought of in terms of physical space, then, the *scape* could also be considered a type of situation and environment. These terms will resurface in each chapter, as they serve to describe the particular conjunction of concrete geographic location and metaphorical or emotional significance which I will be exploring. If they are not traditional *landscapes* then what kind of *scapes* might they be? For the purposes of this thesis, I have isolated three specific ways, three particular *scapes*, in which the spaces represented by these artists overtly reflect a human presence in the act of shaping or organizing. These themes will serve to structure my thesis, as I devote a chapter to the investigation of each one: *bodyscape*, *storyscape*, and *dreamscape*.

Although its role in the making of our environments might seem overwhelmingly obvious, one often tends to dismiss the physical body as inconsequential. In traditional landscape art especially, the view is constructed to conform to the gaze of a disembodied eye. Here, Caspar David Friedrich constitutes one of several significant exceptions, in that he effectively interrupts the unimpeded gaze of the viewer by inserting the entire body of a surrogate observer in the centre of the picture plane (fig. 25). Our corporeal form and capacity for sense perception determine our ability not only to perceive and understand the spaces around us, but to alter and modify them. In this respect, architecture is perhaps that aspect of the landscape which most fervently echoes the form and movement of our bodies, but two-dimensional art can also involve the viewer

viscerally. Although none of the works I explore in this thesis actually incorporate a conventional human form in the sense that Friedrich does, they underscore the role of the body in the construction of one's surroundings, arraying fleshly allusions throughout the spaces they create. It is through their mutual insistence upon the inseparability of corporeality and space that these works become *bodyscapes*, environments which cannot be extracted from the human form responsible for shaping them.

Perhaps most unusual about these works is their emphasis on narrative. Each artist employs either written or spoken stories to convey the significance of the worlds they have framed for their viewers. While they share an engagement with text, each articulates this interest in a different way: Bond qualifies her pieces with absurdly long titles, Pelkey employs what appear to be fragmented memories on a separate text panel, and Cardiff whispers remnants of detective stories and *film noir* narratives into your ear. In their juxtaposition of spaces which at least allude to the real with blatantly fanciful text, these works maintain a precarious balance between reality and fiction, actual and imaginary. Perhaps most importantly, the introduction of narrative explodes their significance from the spatial to the temporal, creating a fictional time line which both reaches into the past and extends into the future. The emphasis on narrative, and therefore on time, shifts the emphasis from physical space to the creation of a situation to be explored by the viewer, reinforcing the inseparability of text and image. These works reveal the impossibility of isolating the present from what has occurred and what is to come; it is a situation in which times and stories bleed into each other, peeling back the layers to reveal a *storyscape*.

My last chapter has as its topic a more ephemeral and perhaps more elusive phenomenon, but one which nevertheless plays a decisive role in the environments constructed by these artists: the dream. Closely linked to the future and to unconscious desires, the works explored expand the possibilities of the dream in connection to built spaces, reconfiguring it as a tool for re-imagining one's surroundings. While certainly situating their works and the viewer's reception of them in the here and now, these artists part the clouds between the world of dreams and that of waking life, allowing the former to determine the shape of the latter. Moving beyond both physical space and situation, the dream has the capacity to create entire sensory environments, immersing the viewer in a world where the rules which govern reality cease to hold sway. Whether they refer to reverie explicitly, or merely allude to its influence, these works delve into the potential of hidden desires, constructing *dreamscapes*, environments in which the psychic potential of the unconscious is allowed free reign.

While each thematic section will consist, for the most part, in developing my observations of these works, I conclude each chapter by grounding my conclusions in contemporary theory. Some of the ideas with which I engage include Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of becoming and their understanding of the body as fluctuating and fluid, the notion of a poetic geography of the city conceived by Michel de Certeau which explores the relationship between stories and space, and finally, Deleuze's particular understanding of desire as a constructive force. Further, due to their playful exposition of the potentialities of everyday spaces, the influence of the writings and projects of the Situationists will be prevalent throughout, threading its way into every

chapter. However, while these theorists enable me to expand upon my observations and to situate them in a larger world of ideas, my intention in writing this thesis has been to remain close to the works themselves and to anchor every theory in their specific visual and textual elements.

In choosing to discuss the thinkers mentioned above, one inevitably comes up against the question of individual agency and its significance in shaping our everyday environments. Deleuze explores the endless mutability of the body through becoming, as well as the possibilities unleashed upon the world by unimpeded desire; De Certeau reaffirms the power of underground stories to transform the spatial and lived reality of the city; finally, the Situationists construct absurd and dream-like situations which breach the barrier between the reality of a given space and our capacity to project our memories and fantasies upon it. Each theorist examines the potential of the individual (even if the individual herself is radically reconfigured) to reveal the capacity for change in the most banal environments and, in so doing, to irrevocably transform these spaces.

This notion of individual agency is crucial to my thesis, as I attempt to re-frame these works both as spatial interventions themselves, and as incitements to viewers to intervene in the construction of their own spaces. By revealing the transformative power of the body, narrative, and dreams on everyday environments, these works encourage us to re-imagine our own surroundings and to realize our significant role in their making. But how can paintings, photographs and audio walks, representations of space, affect that which we ourselves occupy? What is the relationship between these depictions and our lived experience?

Perhaps this is one of the reasons Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space has been so widely employed: it is an attempt to unify formerly disparate and isolated spaces into a single spatial code, allowing the conceived, perceived and lived aspects of space to intersect.¹⁷ In sum, it is not only a way to make sense of the various spaces we inhabit, but to empower the individual to intervene in and shape these spaces. The unitary code allows us to conceive of space in such a way that its hegemonic modes of representation, as a site of capitalist production and consumption for example, collide with our own spatial practices. Because space is continually being produced, there are constant opportunities for change and resistance to emerge. Even the most controlled and regulated spaces must subordinate themselves to lived experience, and thus leave themselves open to disruption and subversion: "in addition to being a means of production [space] is also a means of control, and hence, of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it."¹⁸

Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff each intervene in hegemonic modes of spatial representation by colliding them with their own visual assertions of what spaces were, can or could be. They reveal their own capacity for individual agency by exposing the layers of bodily memory, fragmented stories and ephemeral dreams which cling to the bricks of even the most mundane structure, and haunt the dingiest alleyways. Although their transformation of these environments remains solely on an artistic level, one cannot

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Henri Lefebvre, "Plan of the Present Work," *The Production of Space*, transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 40.

¹⁸Lefebvre, 26.

pretend that the viewer is left unchanged by these metaphorical interventions. Space, in Lefebvre's paradigm, is not simply that which can be measured geographically, but also encapsulates that which can only be measured with the mind: memories, dreams and desires. Even the theorist's category of abstract space, that which gives itself over almost completely to capitalist relations of production and consumption, is still vulnerable to resistance on the part of individual spatial interventions. In its capacity for paving over dissent and difference with the same grey asphalt, for drowning out peripheral voices by means of its constant, but barely perceptible, noise of traffic and industry, abstract space is the site of control and power. However, at the same time, it is fraught with internal contradictions, which create the conditions both for the destruction of abstract space and the building of new spatial relationships. The result is a new space, a "differential space", which fosters the production of difference and allows for a unification of that which had previously been fragmented through abstract space: "It will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge."¹⁹ Thus, we might think not only in terms of space, but of the creation of situations and environments which take these metaphorical considerations, such as the body, storytelling and dreams, into account.

In this framework, then, the creation of *scapes* becomes part of a process for re-shaping both perceived and lived space, inseparable as these two facets are. By infiltrating the abstract spaces of city, suburb and museum with their own spatial practices, both

¹⁹Lefebvre, 52.

physically and metaphorically, these works become examples of artistic “differential spaces”, unifying elements of space and lived experience which are generally kept apart. They become a means of collapsing public and private, allowing that which is thought or conceived, whether it be a sewer system or a skyscraper made of cotton candy, to intersect with everyday, collective space. Analogously, these works reveal the potential lying dormant in public spaces by projecting upon them the products of a private, interior world: Bond’s landscapes reveal a concern for women and the elderly, Pelkey dredges up disturbing memories and Cardiff seduces and haunts, probing the psychic possibilities of our unconscious. If we extend the notion of the *scape* to encompass not only concrete, but imaginative or metaphorical human interventions in a given space, it becomes a key concept for negotiating the relationship between individual agency and the creation of collective, public environments. In collapsing such binaries as the public and the private, nature and culture, reality and fiction, self and other, the *scapes* these works present to us bleed beyond their artistic borders into the space of the viewer. By eliding the distance between the perceived and the lived, they reveal that no space, no matter how banal, is ever completely empty: as *scapists* we have the capacity to shape our spaces in order to allow them to resonate with our own memories, desires, and dreams.

CHAPTER ONE: BODYSCAPE

Spaces are not only perceived, but *felt*. Some may be comforting and reassuring to us, a bedroom, for example, or a park we visited as a child, while others fill us with anxiety. In many cases, this has little to do with physical geography or appearance, those aspects of space seen with our eyes. Rather, it is a spatial knowledge apprehended by and contained within the body, understanding based on movement and touch. If the scape describes the state of a given environment, part of this condition will be made up of corporeal observations and manifestations, an aspect of our surroundings which is too often ignored. Space, after all, is not simply apprehended and recorded, it is inhabited; our physical presence changes the spaces we occupy, and is in turn changed by them.

Feminist geographers were among the first to reject the universal, abstract and disembodied subject and *his* ability to separate himself (emotionally, psychically, even physically) from the surrounding environment in order to study it in an objective fashion.¹ In this modernist paradigm, space is something outside oneself, which can be studied, mapped and known by the closed, independent subject. By contrast, feminist geography asserts the impossibility of the existence of such a subject: we are always situated in our

¹ See Liz Bondi, "Gender and geography: crossing boundaries," *Progress in Human Geography* 17, no. 2 (1993): 241-46 and "Gender symbols and urban landscapes," *Progress in Human Geography* 16, no. 2 (1992): 157-70; Linda McDowell, "Spatializing Feminism: Geographic Perspectives," Kathleen Kirby, "Re-Mapping Subjectivity," and Heidi J. Nast and Audrey Kobayashi, "Re-Corporealizing Vision," all in *BodySpace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 1996), 28-44, 45-55, 75-93; Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

body, with all its corporeal privileges and limitations, and therefore all knowledge we acquire about the world stems from our particular location. We are positioned culturally, geographically, sexually, ethnically. Space no longer exists as an undifferentiated whole surrounding the subject; instead, we both produce and are produced by space. The boundaries which were previously thought to encapsulate the self as an entity independent of its particular surroundings become porous and fluid as we become aware of the extent to which we are determined by our spatial environment and, in turn, how we, by our actions and interventions, shape this environment.

In the same vein, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari expand upon the dissolution of the barriers between self, other, and environment in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Conceiving of the body in terms of a loose assemblage of particles, as opposed to a complete and unified object, they open the physical form to interpretation and change. Endlessly mutable, and defined not in terms of shape or size but patterns of movement, the body acquires the capacity to merge with and absorb the affects of other bodies, to 'become.' It is in this process of 'becoming,' over and over again, that the boundaries of the body become porous and fluid, revealing the possibility of engaging with all different types of life, even that which we had previously dismissed as dead or inanimate. Categories such as self, other, organic, machine, become meaningless, as does the maintenance of the separation between the body and the space it inhabits.

But how does the body articulate itself in representations of space? Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff offer clues as to how space as interpreted and understood via the body can be visually depicted. Unlike traditional landscape art which attempts to obliterate the signs

of human passage on the landscape in order to celebrate untouched nature, the works of these artists are rife with references to the body. However, this physicality is not necessarily represented in a straightforward manner - as none of these works feature actual bodies as we know them - but articulates itself in the liminal areas where lines between subject and setting blur, as corporeal presence becomes etched within the scape in various ways.

One might wonder how landscapes completely and eerily devoid of human inhabitants can be said to concern themselves with corporeality. However, the worlds created by Eleanor Bond are rife with references to the body, as the land begins to mimic the forms and functions of its invisible human inhabitants. Sometimes, and most particularly in her *Social Centres* series, they are playfully explicit, as in *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area* (1991) (fig. 26). Not only is the lake unmistakably womb-shaped, but two slim fallopian rivers meander from its upper corners to twin ovarian pools, one on each side of the painting. A determined sperm-like speed boat, giant egg shape and squiggly snaking waterslide in the bottom left hand corner complete this rendering of the landscape as an active female reproductive system, as nature itself echoes that part of the anatomy which is of utmost concern to the function of the fertility centre constructed on the shore. Anatomical references abound in *Central Park at Spiral Lake Offers Many Forms of Health Care* (1991) (fig. 27), as many of the body parts which might be treated at the Central Park emerge in the landscape: a head-shaped island is the most obvious, but there is also a hand-print of sand on a hill, low-lying structures in the valley which have the appearance

of gently parted lips, and a lake which enthusiastically leaps and reaches upwards.

Finally, there is the giant hand-shaped lake, complete with “eye-land” and playful, candy-coloured nails extending from each fingertip in *Wisdom Lake is the Site of the Elders’ Park and Communications Centre* (1991) (fig. 28).²

There is definitely something tongue-in-cheek about these overt visual cues, yet they also speak to the age-old tendency to see the landscape in anthropomorphic terms. From the earliest attempts at mapmaking, humanity has sought to find correlations between the vast geography spread before it, and the body: rivers become veins, or in this case, fallopian tubes, mountains become breasts, or immense heads: “the mental locus of the world image is the body image.”³ Bond envisions what might happen if this desire were to leap off the two-dimensional surface of the map, and be articulated within the actual topography of the landscape. By tapping into the anthropomorphizing currents in our geographical history, she makes the metaphorical connection between human anatomy and topography concrete and axiomatic.

This blurring of the balance between the human body and the surroundings it inhabits, brings me to the question of the connections which exist between built structure and “natural” environment, inciting speculation as to where the line between culture and

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Robert Enright, “The Comfort of Edges: Working the Calm Bewilderment,” *Border Crossings*, 15, no. 1 (February 1996): 15.

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Howard F. Stein, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*, ed. Howard F. Stein and William G. Niederland (Norman : University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), xxii.

nature can be drawn when they exist in such symbiosis. Of course, as paintings, Bond's landscapes are undeniably human constructions. However, traditional landscape painting has, to a great extent, attempted to obliterate this fact by straining to appear as windows onto an ideal outdoor view, a phenomenon made tangible by René Magritte in his painting, *La Condition humaine* (1933) (fig. 29).⁴ The viewer peers through the transparent pane onto a scene of tranquillity or sublimity, undisturbed by human passage. This dynamic is complicated in Bond's works, as culture and nature become impossibly intertwined, leading the viewer to wonder: what is built and what is "natural"? Can such a notion even exist in a time of artificial lakes and islands made of landfill? A more interesting strategy is to reverse the classic human/active, nature/passive dichotomy - perhaps it is not a case of human beings digging, carving, moulding the earth to reproduce it in our image, but of the earth gradually changing shape to answer this primal need. Instead of a landscape hostile to the intrusions of culture, nature gracefully adapts herself to welcome health care facilities, elders' parks and fertility centres. Or perhaps the answer lies somewhere between the two: neither humanity acting upon nature, nor nature adapting herself to humanity, but of the two mutating, changing, in tandem. This is not to suggest a happy partnership or cooperation between these two agents: Bond's works clearly allude to an unstable environment, where our detrimental actions have begun to affect not only lakes and trees but humanity itself, hence the need for massive fertility and health care complexes. Rather, these landscapes muddy the dichotomies and binaries which structure relationships between nature and culture. Both the environment and its

⁴Schama, 12.

inhabitants seem to have begun a process of rehabilitation, following some unspecified disaster not far in the past. It is a process which implicates both parties to such a degree that neither can ever exist without the other, and by bringing this idea to the fore, Bond's works hint that this will always be the case, even in the most futuristic and technologically-advanced society. As we look down upon nature in these paintings, we see our hands waving, reaching out, an eye staring right back at us.

In the *Cosmoville* and *Some Cities* series, however, Bond's references to the body are much more tacit, visually intimated rather than openly declared. This delicate hinting is, oddly enough, spread clearly across most of her works, as it has much to do with the particular way in which she handles her paints, giving not only her natural landscapes, but her buildings and structures, the appearance of having been moulded from some soft, fleshy substance.⁵ In *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (1997) (fig. 30) the pulpy pinks and bruise-like purples suggest the rawness of exposed flesh. The rounded shape of the central structure, complete with gaping mouth or eye and gibbous Adam's apple, looks more like a growth than any kind of architecture: "the city itself has become a gooey blob, as much predatory amoeba as gastric, squishy habitat."⁶ Even the spiralling building to the left seems soft and pliable, not quite as rigid and stable as it should be, teetering in a Tower of Pisa-like precariousness. Once again, the boundary between natural and artificial, organic and technological, begins to bleed as steel and

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Johanne Sloan, "Painting the City, Painting Mutability," *Eleanor Bond* (Montreal: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 41.

⁶Henry Lehmann, "Not a soul around," *The Montreal Gazette*, (4 July 1998).

stone are replaced by flesh-like material; instead of offering shelter to a single body, this skin envelops a multitude of them within a single structure. Analogously, the body, ordinarily situated inside the architectural environment, now serves as building material and is moved to the outside, to the surface of the painting, to spread its corporeality across the landscape. The relationship between the body and architecture is reconfigured, in much the same way as that between nature and culture: just as a fertility centre exists in symbiosis with a womb-shaped lake, the only opportunity for cozy living is to inhabit a building made of flesh and blood.

Those colours which recall the interior of the body are perhaps even more present in *On the Maasvlakte Extension, Rotterdam Establishes a Satellite Colony Which Functions as a Prosthetic Eye and Arm, Enclosing the International Activity of Europoort within the Sight and Embrace of the City* (1995) (fig. 31). This landscape looks as if it would be more likely situated in a large intestine than anywhere on the surface of the planet, due to the vivid pinks, purples and magentas, as well as its moist, spongy appearance. Here, the overt anthropomorphic references are not as easily found in the shape of the landscape, but in the title of the work. A colony becomes a prosthetic limb, the city is able to see, reach out and embrace. Once again, the distance between the land and the body is elided, as the former takes on the qualities of the latter, borrowing its anatomy and capacity for sense perception. The landscape becomes suffused with corporeality, endowed both with its sensual texture and capacity for human responses, wrapping the port in its arms and keeping watch over it. The relationship suggested between the city and Europoort is not one of control and surveillance, as might be

assumed due to the cyborg-esque implications of the prosthetic eye and arm, but of love and desire, echoed by the hot pink heart in the top right of the painting: “that heart is laid bare, hovering flat and vulnerable like a livid inland lake, surrounded by the idea and the realization of *extension*, extension as *desire*.”⁷ Here, the landscape has been artificially equipped with the human anatomical mechanisms associated with love: arms to hold, an eye to fix with an admiring gaze, and of course, a beating heart. If we carry the landscape as body metaphor even further, and imagine the canvas facing us, the viewer, we see that the heart is located approximately where it would be were it in fact another human being: near the centre, just off to the left.

In Bond’s works, the spaces we might usually believe to be impassive and anonymous take on the physical characteristics and abilities of the human body, thus eliding the gap between the subject and the space he or she occupies or inhabits. Nature and culture are no longer clear binaries, but interpenetrate each other, weaving themselves into a tight mesh where it is impossible to tell where the one begins and the other ends. Nature is no longer a neutral plane onto which humans project their desires: rather, in echoing human forms, nature reveals her own capacity for desire and change, waving and winking at us as we stare down at ourselves.

In much the same way as Bond’s landscapes, the body in Brenda Pelkey’s series of photographs, *...dreams of life and death* (1994), may seem elusive at first. We are initially confronted by what appear to be a number of unpopulated, mundane landscapes,

⁷Gary Michael Dault, “bondville,” *Canadian Art*, 13, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 91.

generally highlighting a specific aspect of the suburban or rural landscape. Despite a few signs of human existence (a telephone booth, a house, an electricity pole), they do not, at first glance, appear to be about the body at all. That is, until we begin to read the text which accompanies each image, and are enveloped in a world of dreams and memories, in which the body plays a crucial role as interpreter of the space and the medium through which the world is experienced. In contrast to the rather unremarkable scenes she chooses to photograph, the melodramatic texts push the body to extremes of happiness and sorrow, ecstasy and torment. Whether being seared by electricity or broken by a fall from a tree, the body in Brenda Pelkey's work is made conspicuous by its vulnerability. In almost every story or memory which accompanies the eerie photographs, someone is maimed, beaten or ravaged by disease. In *field* (figs. 32, 33) a small girl with leukemia is plagued by sores all over her body; *telephone booth* (figs. 34, 35) relates the suicide of a close friend, who borrowed a gun from his cousin to accomplish the act; perhaps most vivid is the pain experienced in *pole* (figs. 36, 37), in which we are told that "All summer we imagined we could still smell the burned flesh." Every work in the series foregrounds the mortality of the human body, emphasizing the ease with which it can be bruised, cut open, eaten away by cancer.

Recurring throughout is the notion that emotional and physical pain are never far apart: attacks on the body seem inevitably to be accompanied by an assault on love and happiness. The barriers we are accustomed to erect between the state of the body and that of the mind are breached, as Pelkey alludes to the coherence of the two. This relationship is perhaps most strikingly illustrated in *grave yard* (figs. 38, 39), in which emotional

agony is felt in the flesh: when the woman's lover confesses to her that he is married, the metaphorical wound cuts just as deeply as any physical affliction, as the narrator tells us "It was a long time before my skin grew back."

Full of sights, sounds and smells, the memories associated with these landscapes emphasizes the role of the body and sense perception in our attempts to understand the spaces in which we find ourselves.⁸ *pole's* (figs. 36, 37) jolting narrative captures not only the idea of the seared flesh itself, but its unmistakable scent, as it emphasizes the olfactory memories of those who lived in the vicinity of the incident. The grating calls of seagulls in *water* (figs. 40, 41) mask a man's calls for help. Perhaps most vivid is the aural memory suggested in *telephone booth* (figs. 34, 35), in which we are told that the man, now dead, "loved to honk his horn when driving by telephone booths. He told me that the person could be talking to someone in Ontario and that his truck horn would be heard in Toronto." Here, the blare of the honking horn rises above the constraints of time, space and even death, to sound painfully in the present. While events cannot be relived exactly as they occurred, individual sense perceptions, such as the smell of burning flesh, the honk of a specific truck horn, can recur in the present and act as triggers for specific memories. These memories of the senses speak to the impossibility of comprehending our environment by means of the mind alone: even in retrospect, the body is unmistakably present, our eyes, ears and skin providing the information from

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Observed in Nancy Yakimoski, "Creating Feminist Subjectivities and Spectatorship in Brenda Francis Pelkey's *Dreams of life and death*" (Diss. University of Victoria, 2001), 8.

which memories are made and the space understood.

But what exactly is the relationship between the bodies described in the text and the images of empty landscape: we have no assurance, after all, that these sites have any correlation to the memories described on the panels. Visually, they are connected by the background on which the text is superimposed, a blown-up detail of the larger photograph, which seems to suggest that these sensory recollections become inscribed onto the space. It was my experience, in looking at these works, that once I had read the narrative, the scene itself somehow seemed *alive*: after having learned of Whiskey Willie's fall in *tree* (figs. 42, 43), every grasping branch and shuddering leaf seemed pregnant with malevolent intentions. The waves in *water* (figs. 40, 41) become ominous and threatening; we can imagine the screams that must have resounded from the house in *yard* (figs. 44, 45). Certainly this has a great deal to do with the viewer's own imagination and experiences, but in much the same way as Bond's paintings take on the colours, shapes and textures of flesh, so do Pelkey's landscapes assume morphologically human qualities through their connection to bodily memories. The telephone booth, the pole, the tombstone - all these objects begin to look more and more like human bodies, to stand in for those who are not actually depicted: "the landscape here signals the obscuring and re-emergence of past emotions and the revelation of a desiring body in the present."⁹

In her discussion of two later series of Pelkey's, entitled *Memento Mori* and

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Dan Ring, "Memento Mori," *Landscape '96: Placing Site/ Siting Place* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1996), 8.

Oblivion, Ingrid Jenkner observes that Pelkey's outdoor landscapes become interiorized by means of her "rhythmic montage structure and resulting spectacular distortion of space", which allows the elements of the natural landscape to "acquire corporeal presence."¹⁰ Although the images in ...*dreams of life and death* do not employ either of these visual strategies, they also become interiorized, due to their resemblance to stage sets. With the exception of *field* (figs. 32, 33) and *water* (figs. 40, 41), every photograph in the series is lit up by a giant floodlight, which results in the centre of the image becoming so brightly lit that even natural objects appear artificial, while the edges and background fade into darkness. Instead of the uniform cover of darkness or the steady umbrellas of light provided by street lamps, in Pelkey's photographs a few objects become startlingly apparent, while others are lost to the impenetrable blackness. Our inability to perceive anything outside of the stark foreground leads to a flattening of the space: we have no sense of depth, of the landscape extending into the distance. Even *telephone booth* (figs. 34, 35), in which we can spot the lights of a car in the background, fades into darkness and abruptly returns our gaze to the booth, shining like a pinnacle in the centre of the image. Simultaneously disrupting our gaze, by being at the centre of the image and so starkly lit that it outshines everything around it, and becoming our surrogate in the image, the telephone booth replaces the bodies we read about in the narrative. This idea is reinforced by the glossy surface of the Ilfochrome print, so that we see ourselves reflected in the image.

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Ingrid Jenkner, "Haunts," *Brenda Pelkey: Haunts* (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 2001), 31.

In a similar vein, Jonathan Bordo, in his discussion of the wilderness as unpicturable condition, argues that the solitary trees present in several Group of Seven paintings (see fig. 3) function as witnesses to an unnameable incident: “Trauma colloquially understood as ‘an event without a witness’ finds in *the* wilderness a symbolic scaffolding, which actualizes landscape as a *mise-en-scène* for obliteration and the memoryless...”¹¹ Since all signs of human presence are erased in images of the wilderness, the witness figure of the solitary tree becomes a “stand-in,” a “phantom,” of the absent event and its human actors.¹² Analogously, the tree, pole, and yard, all the central elements in Pelkey’s photographs, stand in for absent bodies, inhabiting a space which becomes less about natural landscape and more about a flattened, interiorized stage set on which to imaginatively act out these dramas of the body. Objects are no longer simply signs or triggers, but imaginatively take on the corporeal identities of those who are present only through the ghostly medium of their dreams and memories.

In ...*dreams of life and death*, space and body come to exist in a reciprocal relationship in which each contributes to the significance of the other: space is meaningless without the memories of the flesh inscribed there, while the body not only needs space to inhabit and experience with the senses, but must invest this space with personal memories in order to create an environment which answers its emotional needs. Life does not take place on some objective plane, but in rich, memory-laden and sensory-

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Jonathan Bordo, “Picture and Witness at the Site of Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no.2 (Winter 2000): 244.

¹²Ibid.

infused settings, apprehended through and with the body. In turn, Pelkey's eerie environments and the objects inhabiting them take on a corporeal presence, as they stand in for absent bodies.

It is not every work which whispers in your ear, follows the rhythm of your footsteps and raises the hairs on the back of your neck, but these experiences are key to Janet Cardiff's audio walks. Evidently, the corporeality in Cardiff's work is very different from that of Bond or Pelkey, as instead of a being presented with an image pregnant with references to the body, the viewer is abruptly confronted by his or her own body, as well as many other very real bodies which occupy the same space. At the same time, more bodies occupy the screen of the camera, though absent from one's surroundings. In the effort to negotiate between the actual space occupied and the imaginary world of the narrative and the screen, *Conspiracy Theory* offers the viewer two very different types of corporeal sensitivity.

On the one hand, the viewer cannot help but feel extremely conscious of his or her body when participating in an audio walk: from the moment the headphones are placed over the ears, one become acutely aware of how sounds of the real world, previously taken for granted, are suddenly muffled, while that which is heard on the recording seems almost intrusive in its stark clarity. Breathing, footsteps, the squeak of hinges - sounds one tends to unconsciously screen from aural apprehension are no longer filtered out and become shockingly acute. Once the camera is slipped into the palm, the viewer's arm soon becomes uncomfortable, almost painful, with the weight of the camera stretched out

awkwardly. It takes practice to smoothly negotiate the space, placed off-balance by the unfamiliar position of the body. It is a struggle to fulfill the demands of the narrator, who asks the participant to climb stairs, open doors, and wander through crowded spaces, deprived of one arm and the complete use of eyes and ears. Places walked through without thinking many times before suddenly become veritable obstacle courses, so much so that the narrator warns the viewer to be careful and grasp the handrail when descending a flight of stairs. Even when walking on a flat surface, there is a struggle to match one's stride to that heard in the headphones, an attempt, at the narrator's request, to echo the sound of her footsteps, to force one's feet to move with hers.

The sensation is that of having suddenly sprouted several prosthetic limbs: because the viewer must depend upon the camera and the headphones for directions and guidance, they are more than simple technological equipment, becoming instead extensions of one's own body, providing the information required to negotiate the space. According to Cardiff, the walker "become[s] a bit of a cyborg", as he or she attempts to apprehend the world via the electronic devices strapped to the body, to match his or her footsteps with those heard on the recording.¹³ I felt a simultaneous and paradoxical awareness of and distancing from myself: I was intensely aware of my body because it felt so alien to me, merging not only with my new prosthetic "limbs" but with the being who seemed to inhabit them through the artist's voice and footsteps. Perhaps the ease with which one accepts the imposition of headphones and camera onto our bodies has less to do with the alleged facility with which people of our time adapt to technology, than

¹³Corinna Ghaznavi, "Making Sound Tracks," *Art Press*, 269 (June 2001): 51.

with the very human seduction of Cardiff's presence, conveyed through these devices. They allow access not to the clean world of computer chips and CDs, but to a realm of indrawn breaths, occasional coughs, and the click of heels on tile. Paradoxically, these cyborg-like additions have the effect of making the participant more, not less, aware of corporeality, while at the same time negating the sense of self as a separate identity. To participate in one of Cardiff's walks is not to simply hear her and follow her directions, it is to merge with her, to mimic her footsteps and hear her voice in the depths of one's brain, much as one hears his or her own.¹⁴

By contrast, as soon as one gets used to the idea of giving up a modernist notion of proper identity, Cardiff takes an existentialist turn, positioning the walker as alone in the crowd. To wander around the museum equipped with headphones and camera is one thing, but to enter the Place des Arts concourse, as Cardiff instructs the viewer to do, filled with people eating lunch, shopping or simply passing through is quite another. Very few of these people have ever heard of an audio walk, never mind seen someone actually doing one, and they stare curiously and completely openly, wearing large headphones and holding a camera aloft. Not one to usually notice the glances of others, my personal reaction was to feel extremely vulnerable and on display, almost embarrassed. Complete with all the technological accoutrements, I became intensely aware of the effect of my odd physical appearance on passersby, and felt startlingly visible. Further, the erratic path on which the walk takes you seems to contradict the

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Murray Whyte, "Put on the Headphones but Don't Trust Your Ears," *The New York Times* (14 October 2001).

patterns of movement of nearly everyone else using the space: while they trace a straight line to a specific destination, Cardiff leads you on in a rather roundabout way, pausing here and there, sitting down on a bench. Not only do you look different from everyone else, you move and walk differently, and are evidently doing something more interesting than the single-minded trek from door to store and back. This sense of isolation is reinforced by the world available to the walker through the headphones and on screen: he or she alone, of all the people occupying this space, have access to this tiny parallel universe and, perhaps most importantly, to the voice which brings it to life.

Cardiff plays with the walker's subjectivity, constantly oscillating between a loss and subsequent re-assumption of a sense of self. She speaks with such intimacy that one begins to forget that he or she is a separate body, trapped in the present. Just as suddenly, one is brought abruptly back to earth and into the body: at one point during the walk, the narrator directs the walker into a parking garage. In the summer time, this portion of the walk would not particularly stand out, but I participated in the walk in late October and, having left my coat in the museum, shivered as I stood in the freezing garage. No matter how compelling and irresistible the narrative at this point, the viewer becomes keenly aware of the difference in temperature and is abruptly brought back to the demands made by the flesh for warmth and comfort. Cardiff's walks become an exercise of our capacity, described by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "to disembody and re-embody at will, to experiment with individualism."¹⁵ As the viewer merges in and out of many selves,

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Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "An Intimate Distance Riddled with Gaps: The Art of Janet Cardiff," *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures*

guided by Cardiff's soothing voice and his or her new cyborg limbs, corporeality becomes less a state of being than a conscious act, the startling apprehension of the physical body occupying the space, its agility and suppleness as well as its weakness and vulnerability.

In addition to fostering an awareness of the body, the audio walks frame the way in which the surrounding people are seen, calmly oblivious to their participation in the narrative. Reminiscent of a detective story, or film noir, the narrative of *Conspiracy Theory* is full of secrets, intrigues and threatening situations. The previously benign space is suddenly permeated by a sense of dread and anticipation, as the narrative suggests that the security guards and reception desk clerks may not be as innocuous as they seem. As the narrator called my attention to a security guard standing around the corner, I felt goosebumps rise on my skin as I perceived him out of the corner of my eye, seemingly lurking there in wait. Much like Pelkey's photographs, the vulnerability of the human body is suddenly rendered painfully clear, although in Cardiff's work, the threat is directed at the viewer's own being, as if the evil intentions on screen could somehow bleed into reality. This renders the heightened sense of visibility, mentioned above, even more acute, as the words of the narrator and the actions of those in the walker's world suddenly work in tandem: one is being watched, the story constantly reminds the viewer, as do the stares of everyone passed by while wearing these strange technological trappings. Further, many participants have drawn attention to the odd coincidences that seem endemic to Cardiff's walks: the narrator might describe a lime green car parked across the street, for instance, and the viewer gazes in that direction only to discover that

this is indeed the case.

These types of moments, whether engineered or chance, where the actual and the virtual worlds eerily correspond, are the times in Cardiff's walks where the role of the body in the interpretation of space is made most apparent. An entire world, different and yet uncannily parallel to our own, plays itself out on the camera, filled with bodies which have no direct correspondents in our own world, and yet the viewer knows them to be real bodies, that they must continue to exist somewhere. Moreover, one perceives that they must have been here at one time, in order to be captured on film. In *Conspiracy Theory*, the participant is asked to follow a woman who rushes ahead on screen. Of course, looking beyond the camera, she is not really there, but this makes the viewer's attempts to catch up with her no less frantic. But why this feeling of urgency, when one is so accustomed to seeing events on screen over which they have no control, and which seem to have no immediate bearing on everyday life? I believe it is safe to assume that most participants are accustomed to knowing about things that have happened thousands of kilometres away, and have very little trouble negotiating the divide between the body and the events occurring outside of it. While media such as the television and telephone tend to collapse or elide spaces, an audio walk insists upon the primacy of our physical surroundings in determining the state or condition of the body.

Cardiff seems to have harnessed the power of sound to affect the body and the space it inhabits, to force it to spring to action, regardless of whether one's logic asserts that this is all make believe. In conversation with Atom Egoyan, Cardiff suggests that the body acts as a bridge between the real and virtual worlds: "I do think that unconsciously

the walking pieces are a strange attempt to join our separate worlds through a mediated one, to create a symbiotic relationship between the participant and my voice and body.”¹⁶

If the viewer is able to apprehend Cardiff’s virtual world, to the point of reacting to its sounds, images and stories as to those of his or her own, it is because the body becomes the medium through which the gap between the two is negotiated. When one feels the hair on the back of our necks rise at the sight of two men in suits approaching, or steps back from a car screeching to a halt, all on a screen about four centimetres high, it becomes evident that the viewer has succumbed to Cardiff’s manipulation of sound, and through sound, of the body and the physical space of the museum. Passively, the viewer gives in, allowing her to use the body in whatever mission she seems to urgently require it for, while in return, she grants access to her world, not only through eyes and ears, but with one’s entire body.

I have described ways in which all of these artists emphasize the role of the body in the interpretation and production of space. Not only does it determine our ability to apprehend our surroundings, but it permeates and changes the site by virtue of occupying it. As such, these works suggest a psychogeographical understanding of space, a notion developed by the Situationists in Paris during the 50s and 60s, and made tangible by their many projects and activities. Psychogeography underscores the notion that space is not a neutral emptiness but is in fact permeated by ambiances which have a distinct effect upon

¹⁶Atom Egoyan, “Janet Cardiff,” *Bomb* 79 (Spring 2002): 65.

the emotions and behaviour of those who occupy it.¹⁷ Particularly interested in urban environments, the Situationists argued that space could be manipulated in such a way as to create various zones of ambiance which would stimulate the imaginations and senses of passersby. Rather than a bland, modern cityscape, they visualized “buildings charged with evocative power, symbolic edifices representing desires, forces and events past, present and to come.”¹⁸ More recent interpretations of psychogeography shift their emphasis to the body as key in our understanding of the environment, the medium through which we interpret our surroundings: “[Psychogeography] offer[s] a theoretical framework within which the relationship between the image and experience of growing up in the human body, and the construction and perception of spatial meanings are explored.”¹⁹ By combining these definitions, we come a little closer to discovering how these artists bring body and space together in order to create a bodyscape.

Perhaps most attractive in the Situationists’ notion of psychogeography is the agency granted the individual in his or her explorations of the urban realm. The *dérive* especially, a kind of aimless wandering through various psychogeographical atmospheres, in search of different sensations and experiences, foregrounds the active, conscious

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Ken Knabb, ed. “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation,” *Situationist International Anthology*, transl. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: The Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 45.

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Ivan Chtcheglov, “Formulary for a New Urbanism,” *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and transl. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: The Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 3.

¹⁹Stein, *Maps*, xvii.

interpretation and appreciation of different types of spaces. Moreover, the notion that space can be manipulated in order to change its atmosphere or ambiance transforms the passive stroll through the city streets into an activity of construction and re-assemblage. At the root of their urban experiments was the notion that social change could be achieved by means of the subversive actions of individuals, such as the refusal to obey the capitalist demands for a productive use of space; hence the aimless meandering of the *dérive*.

Putting a different spin, and one with fewer revolutionary implications, on the notion of psychogeography, Howard F. Stein suggests that this concept is less about wandering in urban space and appreciating its various ambiances, than our inability to clearly separate the outside world from our selves. The gendered body governs our understanding of the world around us, and determines how we use and negotiate spaces: “Psychogeography is the study of how issues, experiences, and processes that result from growing up in a male or female body become symbolized and played out in the wider social and natural worlds, which serve as ‘screens’ for these inner dramas.”²⁰ The body becomes the filter through which all space is apprehended, as well as the source for the imagination through which we interpret the world. Certain maps and place-names, every case where geography is represented in an anthropomorphic fashion, reveal our tendency to read our environment with the body.

Taken together, these perspectives offer a delicate balance between individual agency and corporeal reality. We may be able to actively transform the space around us,

²⁰Stein, *Maps*, xvii.

but this effort will always stem from our existence in a human body. Even our wildest visions of what a space might become are always predicated upon how our body would inhabit this space, how we would move through it, how it would *feel*. The works explored above also negotiate this balance. In Bond's case, the lines between body and landscape have become irrevocably blurred; the building of fertility centres and parks for the elderly suggests that human agency plays an important role, but even these structures owe their existence to the demands made by the body, either barren or aging. The earth itself is no longer an entity separate from human beings, but has taken on the characteristics of corporeality, the texture and shapes of flesh. As the landscape shifts from blandly neutral to ominous and threatening in Pelkey's photographs, we realize the extent to which the narratives of individuals affect our interpretation of the scape represented. Personal memories and dreams elevate mundane landscape to a new level of meaning; however, once again, these narratives are invariably predicated on the experiences of the body, and its conspicuous vulnerability. Cardiff's audio walks are perhaps most analogous to the ideas of the Situationists, particularly the *dérive*: her works actively transform our everyday urban surroundings into a realm lifted from the pages of detective novels and film noir, constructing dark and eerie situations out of the most ordinary places and events. At the same time, the exciting sensations of the audio walk are felt in the body; it is the agent Cardiff depends upon for their success, the canvas upon which she paints her various sounds and images. As much as these works are about our capacity to transform the space around us, they also function on the premise that corporeality is the medium through which all desire for change must be exercised.

Further, they reinforce the notion that our apprehension and understanding of space is based upon our situation inside a male or female body, which determines how we read the world around us. These artists' attempts to create meaningful visual analogues of this experience result in the creation of bodyscapes.

However, neither Bond, Pelkey, nor Cardiff situates the body in space as we are accustomed to seeing it. They play instead with a different type of corporeality, in which the body is fluid and cannot finally be pinned down. Initially, this fluidity may suggest itself to the viewer as absence: certainly, in Bond's and Pelkey's work there are no actual bodies to speak of, while Cardiff's overly intimate narrator constantly evades us, a disembodied voice floating through the headphones. How does one reconcile the gap between presence and absence, between corporeality actualized and implied?

These works are rife with references to the body, and yet it is not an enclosed, monadic body, tracing a clear and separate path through the surrounding space. Instead, we find a physicality which has spilled out of its container and pervades the landscape, drenching it in sense-memories and fleshly allusions. It has become impossible to separate human substance and form from the surrounding space. From Bond's hand-shaped lakes and organic architecture, to Pelkey's electricity pole still rank with the smell of burnt flesh, to Cardiff's uncanny ability to make the hairs on the back of our necks rise in delicious fear at the prospect of entering a parking garage, all these works fuse body and space, gently easing away the skin which simultaneously envelops and isolates us from our surroundings, thus arraying the body throughout the landscape.

This interpenetration of space and body is described by Frederic Jameson as a

symptom of the occupation of postmodern space. No longer is the subject permitted free and easy passage through his surroundings, navigating the environment with confidence; instead, it is a space which encroaches, drowns, confuses and penetrates. According to Kathleen Kirby in her feminist critique of Jameson's experience, there is an "erasure of lines which had previously kept separate phenomena and objects apart.... The postmodern subject, like the postmodern landscape it occupies in a relation of mutual reinforcement, has lost its traditional form of closed interiority encapsulated in a boundary."²¹ In Jameson's estimation, this disorienting situation is to be avoided at all costs, yet these artists seem to celebrate and play with this breach of borders, the end of encapsulation.

The notion of the scape represents such an interpenetration, dismissing the possibility of shutting oneself out of one's surroundings in order to explore the results of the fusion of body and space, creating, in effect, a bodyscape. Bond's landscapes, drenched in the symbols and textures of flesh, Pelkey's haunted telephone booths and trees, and Cardiff's manipulation of the body through sound, all suggest what such a bodyscape might look like. It is not simply a case of the body actively occupying his or her environment, but of permeating it, becoming a part of space to the point where he or she is inseparable from it. The monadic body is absent in these works because it has been absorbed by the landscape, and has in turn saturated this landscape with corporeality, turning it into a bodyscape.

As the polar opposite of Jameson's monadic capsule is the notion of physicality explored by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, which flies in the face of modernist

²¹Kirby, 51.

notions of individuality, personality, and the sanctity and wholeness of the human body. I explore this new, mutable body in order to clarify how I understand these works to be engaging with corporeality, rather than with individual, whole bodies. Their arcane terminology can at times be difficult to follow, but it is employed to convey a radically different conception of being. It is a system of thought which rejects the idea of a core subjectivity, that is to say, a true self which lies at the heart (or in the soul, or mind, or wherever it is thought to be situated) of the person, unchanging and constant no matter the outwardly manifested physical and social changes which might affect him or her. Instead, the Deleuzian “molecular” body maintains itself in a state of flux, not a solid gestalt, but loose gathering of particles, capable of re-organizing and transforming themselves at will:

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*; in other words, the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude).²²

This affirmation of the body as endlessly fluid, divorced from the limits of its materiality,

undersers the barriers previously erected between self and other, Man and Nature, organic and artificial. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the molecular body’s capacity to

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Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...,” *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 260.

engage with other bodies, absorbing their various affects. These transformations are “becomings”: not a simple mimicry or imitation of the other, but an assimilation of certain aspects of their patterns of movement and rest, their “intensive affects”, in order to “become”, not the other, but something completely different. The goal is not the end result of this act of “becoming”, but the process, the ability to maintain this active state, to continue to “become” *ad infinitum*. We are no longer an individual, a self, but a gathering of multiplicities; not separated from our world by our envelope of skin, but bound up within it: “In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities....A fibre stretches from human to animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fibre is a Universe fibre.”²³

When the human body is defined not according to its physical shape or function, but instead as relations of longitude and latitude (relations of movement and rest, the capacity to affect and be affected), ideas of animate and inanimate, alive and dead, begin to lose their power to categorize our world. In short, this new understanding of being encompasses not only bodies as we are accustomed to think of them, but everything in the universe. Deleuze and Guattari offer the example of a man becoming a rat, which has very little to do with imitation and identification, but with assuming the thoughts and affects of the other:

The rat and the man are in no way the same thing, but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer that of words, in a matter that is

²³Deleuze, “Becoming-Intense,” 249.

no longer that of forms, in an affectability that is no longer that of subjects.²⁴

“Becoming” is situated in this encounter, it is always in between.²⁵

These ideas shed light upon the blurring of boundaries between self and other, nature and culture, organic and machine that the pieces explored above begin to breach. They suggest an answer to the common question posed by all these works: Where does the body end and space begin? Everywhere and nowhere might be the best response. Thinking of the world and the self in terms of multiple “becomings”, of an infinite series of encounters between animate and inanimate, natural and artificial, helps us to unravel the thread which binds space and body in the works of these artists. It suggests how a Nature previously conceived as *tabula rasa* for the stylus of Man can itself “become” human in Bond’s paintings, actively assimilating our affects, transforming itself into something which is neither purely natural nor artificial, but somewhere in between. In Pelkey’s case, we see how features of everyday landscapes can stand in for human bodies, due to a transfer of traumatic affect from the latter to the former - an electricity pole “becomes” an electrocuted body; the encounter between landscape and personal memory results in the transformation of both. The participant’s ability to merge with the electronic devices and with the disembodied presence of Cardiff herself is also accounted for in the notion of “becoming”, as our sense of self-contained subjectivity is sundered by our adoption of prosthetic technological devices and the voice of an intimate stranger whispering in the depths of our brain.

²⁴Deleuze, “Becoming-Intense,” 258.

²⁵Deleuze, “Becoming-Intense,” 293.

The works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff explored in this chapter challenges a traditional way of thinking about the body and its relationship to the surrounding space. Rather than a whole, individual, monadic body, the fleshly abode of the self, a singular subjectivity, these artists create bodyscapes: environments in which the body and space have become more than intertwined - they have merged into each other, and both are irrevocably transformed as a result. The sanctified limits of the human form are violated by space, which is in turn permeated by this new model of corporeality, capable of arraying itself across and throughout its surroundings. More than an active occupation of space, physically or imaginatively transforming it in order to create a psychogeographical environment which responds to emotion and desire, these works suggest a radical re-vision of the self and its relationship to nature, technology and other beings, both organic and artificial. From Bond's lakes "becoming" wombs, to Pelkey's emotional telephone booths, and the transformation of a museum into the underbelly of a secret lair in Cardiff's *Conspiracy Theory*, the scapes in the works of these artists are neither passive nor neutral. Rather, they assimilate certain "affects" of the human being - the texture of our flesh, the pain of a traumatic memories, our capacity for fear and excitement - and thus "become" something completely different: neither human, nor landscape, but bodyscape.

CHAPTER TWO: STORYSCAPE

From utopic futuristic tales, to personal confessions, to the fictional tropes of a detective novel, the works I explore in this thesis engage with many different types of narrative. Going beyond the simple title, Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff press this textual device into service in order to imbue the worlds they create with a pronounced temporal dimension. As visual artists, space is the most obvious tool at their disposal, to be created and manipulated. However, these works suggest that experimentation with the spatial is no longer enough: time is an equally meaningful element in the worlds they produce. Each artist creates a situation for the viewer in which the meaning of a site is determined not only in the present, but by the myriad events of the past and its potential for the future. Space serves as the ground upon which various times collide, providing an arena for the viewer to negotiate between the various temporalities at work. In much the same way as the body acts as the filter through which space is apprehended and understood in the previous chapter, the narrative in these works adds an overtly subjective layer to our interpretation of the space. The scape is no longer an empty field, but is composed of stories and memories dredged up from the depths of the unconscious or floating off the pages of mass culture: melodrama, science fiction, detective novels, romances. However, these popular forms are not present in their original, unadulterated state, but are filtered through the particular lens of the artist, taking on new shapes and significations.

There is something of the postmodern novel or film in Bond's run-on titles, Pelkey's confessional monologues and Cardiff's fractured fictions. Perhaps their most obvious similarity to this genre is their open-ended quality, their reliance upon the

contingent, the loose, the incomplete. In contrast to the contained, self-referential poetics of modernist narrative, the texts these artists append to their images have neither a clear beginning or ending and is constantly looking outside of itself, introducing motifs borrowed from both high and low culture. There is an interest in the particular, the accidental, the seemingly superfluous detail, as opposed to the eternal, the infallible and absolute. Further, unlike the series of perfectly frozen moments which constitute the modernist novel, time in the narratives created by these artists constantly flows - there is a sense in which it both reaches back into the past and extends into the future.¹ While the temporal dimension of the former might be likened to flipping through a handful of photographs, one by one, that of the latter is more analogous to the experience of watching a film, in which time is more fluid, each moment melting into the next to the point where they are indistinguishable from each other. Indeed, these narratives disorient us in the same manner that walking into the middle of a film might: we get the sense that we have somehow missed something important, and that, as a result, the true plot constantly evades us. Further, we are never quite sure who the narrator, or narrators, might be, and whose interpretation we should trust, if any. Instead of a clear instant of presentness, closed and complete, with a beginning and an end, the narrative of these pieces suggests the existence of a larger fictional world, populated by many voices, engaging with multiple pasts, and choosing from a variety of futures.

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See Steven Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature," *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 103-131.

This profusion of fractured narratives is also explored by Michel de Certeau insofar as they serve to create and animate our everyday surroundings. Rather than official party lines and grand communal schemes, de Certeau celebrates the power of the underground stories, the tales of those who walk and inhabit the space; these fictions are the ultimate arbiters of the space, and have the capacity to intervene in and change patterns of living and ways of doing. Further, the individual nature of such stories grants each person the agency to determine what he or she will make of the space they are in.

The long, descriptive titles of Eleanor Bond's paintings often verge on the comical and the absurd. The viewer realizes that he or she is reading a description of the landscape depicted, the function of the various structures and buildings, and yet at the same time, the titles often seem to be in direct contradiction to our assumptions about the world in which we live. Take, for instance, *Displaced Farmers Set up Cappuccino Bars on Lake of the Woods* (fig. 47). Here, Bond transports the urban, metropolitan phenomena of the cappuccino bar into a decidedly rural environment. It is difficult to picture a farmer going from driving a tractor to whipping up frappuccinos, and one can only guess who his or her customers might be - fishermen on Lake of the Woods? Another example, *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade* (1989) (fig. 48), confuses our presuppositions about the appearance and function of a parking garage: not only are the cars in the interior of the parkade replaced by residential trailers, but the exterior of the spiralling structure is covered with greenery, pine trees, and simulated cliffs. This theme of disjunction and surprise continues throughout Bond's *Social Centres* series, as the narrative brings people from traditionally separate spheres of

life and elements from different types of landscapes together in imaginative combinations. Further, the particular relationship between text and image, the connection between absurd architecture and cityscapes and the narratives describing them, must be investigated.

These puzzling juxtapositions of people and places are framed as solutions to various environmental, economic or social problems. It is not only the displaced farmers who find themselves the beneficiaries of these radical proposals, as almost every painting profiles a group in need of help of some kind. Bond's narrative contains the ideas of a different, parallel world, presented as solutions to the troubles plaguing our own. It is a world which effortlessly weaves together different people and places in order to arrive at a fantastically irrational answer to a very real problem. Interestingly, these solutions often seem to present themselves in the form of a structure or complex of some kind: not only the cappuccino bars on the lake, but the Elder's Communication Centre at Wisdom Lake (fig. 28) and the suburban concert park where music students and rock fans congregate around a giant effigy of Roy Orbison (fig. 49). As a result, absurd as the narrative might be, it always pivots on a central structure. Interestingly, in the cases where this structure is not overtly anthropomorphic, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is often reminiscent of the architecture we know from history and fable. Take, for example, the recurring Tower of Babel motif, which is present both in *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade* (fig. 48) and *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (fig. 10), or the natural, open-air theatre of *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concert Park* (1989) (fig. 49), not unlike that of

the ancient Greeks at Epidaurus (fig. 50). The structures to which the narrative refers represent an oscillation between past, present and future, juxtaposing architecture belonging to the actual or mythological past of the earth's most ancient civilizations with the science fiction forms of the future.

In terms of situating these works in a temporal framework, this juxtaposition complicates matters greatly, interrupting the smooth flow of the narrative of architectural history in order to bring its most distant poles side-by-side. One is reminded of science fictions movies, such as *Planet of the Apes* (released 1968), where the Statue of Liberty thrusts her flame through the sands of what was presumed to be a distant planet. Despite the present tense of the narrative, the landscape with which the viewer is presented is that of a future time, associated with an earth that has already seen many disasters afflict its surface. We see the remnants of buildings we recognize, both from our present urban centres and from the mists of ancient narratives, but, although still in use in Bond's paintings, they seem somehow old, crumbling, verging on ruins. This is less the result of the artist including actual evidence of decaying architecture than the painterly style in which they are executed, making them appear frail, unstable, slowly vanishing. The open air theatre in *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concert Park* (fig. 49) is blurry, as if the surrounding vegetation is slowly encroaching, the concrete stairways running up the centre of the theatre crumbling apart and fading into the slope. Often, these structures are wreathed in mist or smoke, as if being swallowed up. In *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (fig. 30), the spiralling structure is rendered vulnerable not only by the precarious angle at which it leans, but also the way in

which its edges seem to fade on the left hand side, particularly at the top where it is engulfed by a thick white cloud. The urban landscape in the background of *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade* (fig. 48) is also blanketed by a grey smog which appears to be gradually spreading throughout the city, a fog devouring the buildings beneath. In many of Bond's paintings, tiny structures, often reminiscent of trailers, are scattered throughout the landscape and constantly seem on the verge of disappearing completely, their edges bleeding into the surrounding atmosphere.

Not only the fading nature of the architecture, but the colours Bond employs suggest that these are scenes from an old earth, containing the ruins of our present, along with the signs of a civilization attempting to revitalize itself in a later age. The hot pinks, shadowy purples and glaring yellows and whites of *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (fig. 30) are the colours of an apocalyptic sky, the colours of explosions, fireworks, of a final, spectacular sunset on a decaying civilization. Their artificiality brings to mind an atmosphere filled with toxic gases, harmful to breathe, but creating the most vibrant effects with light and colour. This infection has spread to the water in *On the Maasvlakte Extension, Rotterdam Establishes a Satellite Colony Which Functions as a Prosthetic Eye and Arm, Enclosing the International Activity of Europoort within the Sight and Embrace of the City* (fig. 31), changing the sea and the boggy land from blue and green to brightest magenta and deep violet. However beautiful they may appear, these landscapes are hardly the picture of natural health, their outlandish hues bringing to mind the colourful swirls of gas in a puddle, or the vivid streaks of mine tailings.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *Elevated Living in a Community-Built Neighbourhood* (1998) (fig. 51), a bleak urban landscape of cold blue-grays and steely black, enriched by a few points of red, perhaps indicating neon lights. Although seeming to belong more to our present, due to the familiar skyscrapers with their reflective facades studded with rows of identical windows, the complete absence of greenery and the suffocating closeness and darkness of the buildings suggest the cities of *Blade Runner* (released 1982), or the planet-wide metropolis of Gotham. All memory of open spaces and green expanses seems obliterated.

However, there are green spaces in Eleanor Bond's works, and many of them. Whether they are any more comforting than her poisonous, apocalyptic landscapes, or her congested cities is debatable, however. The earth itself seems tired, its sparse grass a thin coating on a rocky skeleton. Often, the colour of green used lacks vibrancy, suggesting the depleted, fading vegetation of late summer rather than the new, tender shoots of spring. In landscapes such as *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concert Park* (fig. 49) and *Off-Road Cyclists and Road Racers Share Park Facilities with Time Historians* (1990) (fig. 52), the grass is so thin as to disappear in large patches, revealing gashes of red rock beneath, gaping like wounds in the green expanse. Although perhaps more natural, the colours used in these landscapes are still somewhat menacing, as dark greens disappear into shadow and streaks of red bleed down the hillsides.

This may seem to be an unnecessary foray into architecture and colour, when narrative is my focus in this section; however, these are the visual cues in the painting which allow the viewer to situate the landscape in time. Leaving aside the titles for just a

little longer, we might surmise that we are looking at an uneasy time in the earth's existence, evidently taking place sometime in the not-too-distant future, judging from recognizable signs, such as architectural styles of the past and present day, and effigies of twentieth-century rock stars, appearing in the water like a god of the sea. The fading, precarious appearance of this architecture, combined with the threatening or toxic colours of the "natural" landscape suggest that the earth depicted is far from healthy, that it has wandered far from the path of organic development. However fascinating the viewer might find these landscapes to observe, they are hardly places we would want to inhabit; not only do they seem unearthly and strange, but they are often frightening or menacing.

Why, then, is the narrative so upbeat and optimistic? And why, when the scene is so obviously situated in the future, are the titles written in the present tense? Despite their obvious correlation, in that the narrative describes the nature of the scene represented, there seems to be a gaping disjunction between text and image. Perhaps the most glaring disparity between title and painting is in *Elevated Living in a Community-Built Neighbourhood* (fig. 51). It is difficult to imagine any kind of cohesive community in the dark maze of undifferentiated skyscrapers. And yet, the title assures us that this is a neighbourhood built by a community, although the only imaginable community which could subsist in this environment would be one composed entirely of office workers with no desire to escape their concrete bunkers. Similarly, in *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (fig. 30), what we are told is cozy living for a large population seems more like a claustrophobic shelter in a suffocating pod, situated in a crumbling, apocalyptic urban landscape; the notion of anyone feeling cozy in this city is baffling.

This disjunction between optimistic narrative and disturbing landscape is not exclusive to Bond's urban subject matter. As discussed above, those scenes which appear more natural are not necessarily reassuring, partly due to the nature of the activities which take place there. Although *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area* (fig. 26) presents a cheery scenario of different groups coming to each other's aid to mutual satisfaction, one is led to ask why such a centre is necessary. What disaster has occurred that women can no longer conceive without artificial intervention, to the extent that public subsidy is needed? *The Women's Park at Fish Lake Provides Hostels, Hotels and Housing* (1990) (fig. 53) tells a similar story, as the rib-like structure evidently serves to protect women from the perils facing them in the outside world; as idyllic as this sanctuary might appear, it acquires a darker side when we begin to ask why such a facility exists, and who or what these women are sheltering themselves from. Despite the veneer of optimism, there is always a dark underbelly to these works, surfacing in the gap between narrative and image: "her future fictions are narratives in search of a happy ending but...the visual storyteller is too intelligent to pass over the darker and more troubling aspects of her invented industrial scenarios."²

Preventing the viewer from accepting either scene or narrative at face value, the gap between text and image opens Bond's landscapes to questioning, particularly in terms of temporality. While the paintings themselves seem to refer to an uneasy future, the problems addressed by these sci-fi scenarios are those of our present, as the titles

²Enright, 16.

themselves suggest: displaced farmers, battered women, and abandoned elderly people. The disjunction gives the viewer pause, leads him or her to question exactly where in time these paintings are situated and, by extension, where they situate us. Perhaps a clue can be found in an earlier series, entitled *Work Station*, of which *Displaced Farmers Set up Cappuccino Bars on Lake of the Woods* (1988) (fig. 47) is a part: it is a series which brings the types of problems confronted in *Social Centres* much closer to home, situating them in specific Canadian locations. They are less futuristic in style and content, depicting typical industrial buildings, but pairing them with the most unusual functions and events. Interestingly, in this series which seems much closer to our present day reality, we find the most specific reference to the passage of time in any of Bond's titles: *Later, Some Industrial Refugees Form Communal Settlements in a Logged Valley in B.C.* (1987) (fig. 54) This indication of a time frame stands out, partly due its ambiguity (later than what? we might ask). It only has meaning in relation to whatever event preceded it, which would allow the viewer to ascertain exactly when, and perhaps why, the refugees formed the communal settlements. But of course, Bond does not provide us with this information, only with the ambiguous word, "later", which could situate this scenario any time in the past or future. Even more confusing, however, is the present tense of the rest of the title, which seems to undermine the initial "later" by situating the event not after something, but right now. Her titles have the urgency and matter-of-fact tone of a breaking news report, while the images undermine this pressing quality by virtue of their evident and often whimsical futurity. These works hang in an uneasy balance between present and future, seemingly oscillating between the two, collapsing time into an eternal

“later.” The viewer is left poised on the brink, apprehending the various problems afflicting the world, and yet unable to reconcile them with the radical solutions proposed by these works.

Bond’s paintings, however, are far from reducing the viewer to a sense of powerlessness. Rather, they offer a glimpse of a possible future, although the unsettling question of “later” remains unresolved, open to interpretation. Just as we might feel relieved to find ourselves in our own familiar, present-day surroundings after coming to the end of a science fiction movie, when one steps away from these paintings one is liberated from suffocating cityscapes and candy-coloured air and water. At the same time, their menacing beauty continues to beguile, we continue to wonder about the uncanny connection between her world and our own, so close and yet so far apart. With the precarious situation of the signs of our present day, fading architecture, Bond’s works remind us that “now” is constantly slipping into “later”: the viewer straddles the gap between text and narrative, confronted by the problems of a fleeting present, and poised on the edge of an uncertain future.

To an even greater extent than with Bond’s paintings, the text accompanying Brenda Pelkey’s photographs of empty landscapes conditions the way in which we interpret the image. Unlike Bond, the narrative is no longer a description of the event or architecture we observe but, freed from its traditional explanatory role, has a much more mysterious relationship to the photograph. The words themselves are printed on small panels situated just below and towards the right hand side of each photograph. Spatially,

the text is therefore separate from image, and yet the two are connected as well, since the background of each panel consists of a blown-up detail of the corresponding photograph. Further, gallery visitors are accustomed to reading such angled panels for information concerning the image or object they generally purport to describe. What the viewer finds instead, however, is a far cry from the typical artist's name (and possibly nationality and birth year), title of the work, date and medium: rather than purely factual material, he or she is confronted with intimate, painful memories. While we might see an object in a different light given the traditional tidbits of information, they do not *necessarily* colour our interpretation or understanding. By contrast, Pelkey's photographs of empty, eerie landscapes are completely transformed by this infusion of personal and subjective material. The mundane becomes the fantastic, the everyday, magical and mysterious.

Before examining the nature of the texts themselves, I am interested in exploring the relationship between text and image, as it departs so dramatically from the usually straightforward nature of this connection. Not only do these narratives provide us with a subjective lens through which to view the photograph, but they also, much like Bond's run-on titles, grant the image an existence in time. Also like the paintings above, this temporal situation is never a clear correspondence, never a case of narrative clearly describing what is happening here and now in the image. Rather, as personal recollections, they weave in and out of different times and places, rendering the connection with the image tenuous and confusing. In the *yard* text panel (fig. 45) we read:

I never knew that he beat her./ She wept in my kitchen./ She was away./ I looked

after the children. He came home drinking. We all got into the truck and drove for hours in the night to the homes of strangers./ I can only remember clearly the next day.

Like wandering in someone's subconscious, the reader is presented with a complex web of times, peoples and places, but the entire story remains elusive, seemingly surfacing in the form of glimpses or flashbacks. In the photograph (fig. 44), we see a simple house with white siding and a short tree in front. Several rusty-looking cars occupy the front yard, and there is some kind of outbuilding to the right. A leaf-strewn driveway, which is really nothing more than a bare patch in the grass, worn away under the weight of rolling tires, leads up to the front door. This halo of rather pathetic landscape is contained in the glare of a spotlight; past the clunker on the left and the shed on the right, everything falls into darkness. The light's source seems to be situated near the bottom edge of the driveway, and has the oblique angle and raking quality of car headlights. The viewer begins to draw conclusions from text and image, as if piecing together clues: might this be one of the homes of strangers visited in the night? Perhaps the light is that emanating from the headlights of the truck.

No matter how many ideas might occur to the viewer, however, any form of clear correspondence between text and image remains closed to us. As tempting as it might be to propose a direct correlation between the two, Pelkey, in a description of her creative process which eventually led to this series, denies that such an immediate relationship exists. After spending three days writing down these unsettled memories, she began to "jot down notes about visual images which, although not specifically the sites of these

memories, reminded [her] of these events.”³ For the viewer, however, the space between text and image is perhaps not so simply negotiated, since the two are presented to us simultaneously, rather than one leading, either logically or viscerally, to the other. Instead, he or she must oscillate back and forth between photograph and narrative, attempting to flesh out their mutual sparseness by bringing them together. Neither, after all, offers the viewer much in terms of information: the photographs are, for the most part, devoid of telling details, the memories bereft of certain crucial events. Despite the confessional tone of these narratives, we get the feeling that the artist is holding back more than she is revealing. The reality of these works is such that we will never be in a position to unlock, once and for all, the secrets behind the dark windows of the house in *yard* (fig. 44) which, as frustrating as it may be, is their ultimate attraction.

However, while any kind of search for the true story remains fruitless, the works come into their own when we abandon this modernist quest and open them up to their “metonymic potential,” a phrase coined by W. F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence.⁴ In other words, what is interesting here is not the reconstruction of a narrative which somehow exists *behind* text and image, some underlying truth, but an exploration of what lies *between* them. Both text and image can be interpreted as attributes or adjuncts, not

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Dan Ring, “Mnemonic Obsession: Recent Photographs by Brenda Pelkey,” *Blackflash*, 11, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 12.

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W. F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence, “The New Vernacular and the Secret Victorian Aesthetic: A Rhetoric of Overt Falsification,” *Photographic Encounters: The Edges and Edginess of Reading Prose Pictures* (Edmonton and Kamloops: University of Alberta Press, and Kamloops Art Gallery, 2000), 141.

necessarily of a larger whole, but of each other: they exist in a relationship of juxtaposition or adjacency, rather than of part to whole. As a result, the work itself remains completely open-ended, as the viewer constantly oscillates between words and image, each component simultaneously teasing him or her with the promise of information, and then suddenly pulling back into darkness.

In these works, the emphasis is not so much on discovering meaning as enjoying the process of its creation, as the viewer attempts to piece together text and image while supplementing each with his or her own memories and imaginings. On the one hand, the stories are left vague enough that almost everyone will have a similar tale to relate it to, while on the other, the seemingly insignificant, odd details lend each memory an acute specificity. *grave yard* (figs. 38, 39) tells the familiar story of a woman discovering that her lover is married, and that he has no intention of abandoning his wife for her. After decades of soap operas and melodramatic novels, this turn of events seems more like a narrative cliché than an actual relationship between two people. In the next breath, however, Pelkey includes the rather out-of-place memory of him teaching her how to witch for water. Suddenly, the text drops from the skies of timeless, vague absolutes and is grounded in the accidental and specific. We cannot dismiss the memory as a cultural fabrication given this tender and very idiosyncratic detail, but nor can we deny its belonging to the world of raw sentimentality found in so-called “women’s entertainment.”⁵ The text constantly negotiates these two extremes; while the latter ushers in a sense of closure (we have all been told innumerable times in books and films

⁵Jenkner, 30.

how such affairs end up), the former introduces a quality of open-endedness, of personal agency taking over from formulaic plot. While the story ends up the way we suspected it would, the inclusion of the accidental and idiosyncratic prevents the viewer from simply assimilating the memory as yet another page in the moralistic saga about not sleeping with married men. Instead, Pelkey's texts allow us to restore the narrator's individuality and capacity for agency. She allows us a glimpse of that which Martha Langford describes as "the full spectrum of ordinary, and clearly happier, possibilities, the *what-ifs* that make the final outcome so cruel."⁶ Pelkey reminds us that all our lives are made up of such a series of possibilities, that each memory is the product of a meeting of cultural codes with events and people who are purely accidental.

Returning to the relationship between text and image, an analogous movement takes place. No longer are we confronted with an encounter between timeless narrative structure and idiosyncratic personal detail, but between the undeniable physical presence of the landscape in the photograph and the interior, psychological nature of the memory related in the text. In the same way that certain aspects of the narrative are left vague enough to belong to anyone, the locations which act as their backdrop are equally bereft of specific signifiers of place. Empty pastures, electricity poles and the spreading branches of a tree - all are typical sights in the North American landscape, whether suburban or rural. If we look closely, there are some indications of specific locations - the Sasktel telephone booth (in fig. 34), for instance, or the barely decipherable writing on

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Martha Langford, "Landscapes of Immanence: The Photographs of Brenda Pelkey," *Border Crossings*, 17, no. 4 (1998): 54.

the tombstones (in fig. 38) - but even in these cases, the scene conforms to a more general idea of *types* of spaces. For most North American viewers, at least, there is an easy familiarity with these scenes and locations, situated as they are in a landscape between the densely urban and the empty wilderness. Even the most markedly rural photograph of the series, *field* (figs. 32, 33), includes signs of human intervention in the form of a bit of fence and a birdhouse, not to mention the existence of the pasture itself. As locations, they are completely unremarkable, and for this reason, they foster a feeling of recognition and intimacy.

Given this familiarity, what is it that grants these images their quality of mystery and eerie uneasiness? Certainly the dramatic floodlighting has a great deal to do with the creation of a feeling of anticipation, as such a device is so often employed in theatrical performances. However, even those images which are not so starkly lit, such as *field* (figs. 32, 33), photographed during the day, or *water* (figs. 40, 41), more uniformly lit, are imbued with this sense of the uncanny. The emptiness of the landscape contributes to this feeling: all the signs of human habitation are present, and yet no people are visible. Instead, as discussed in the previous chapter, physical bodies are replaced by stories and memories pregnant with references to corporeality. However, more than any of these individual pictorial elements, it is in the relationship between text and image that the meaning and feeling of the work is constructed. Once the text has been read, it is impossible to see the landscape in any way but through the subjective lens it creates. No matter how flimsy the connection between scene and memory, the narrative embeds itself within the space, rustling through the leaves of *tree* (figs. 42, 43), ebbing and falling with

the waves in *water* (figs. 40, 41), thus creating a “psychic landscape.”⁷ Pelkey’s scenes are made up as much of words and thoughts as physical shapes and forms, and neither can be prised away from the other once the viewer has come into contact with them both. It is not simply a case of a memory superimposing itself as a separate layer upon the physical, which can be simply scratched off and replaced with another; rather, it is inscribed into the very fabric of the landscape. Visually, this phenomenon is illustrated on the text panel, by the inscription of text on a blown-up element from the photograph. But the true act of inscription occurs in the mind of the viewer, as the memories of another become inextricably woven not only into the physical landscape, but into the fabric of the viewer’s own mind.

Even more than the familiarity of text and landscape, the use of the first person in these narratives allows the reader to slip into the thoughts of another as if they were his or her own. I, we, my, me: in the act of reading and looking, one becomes implicated in the memory itself, we are able to imagine ourselves acting out these recognizable narratives. Like any story told in the first person, these memories have an immediacy to the reader, as they are able to insert themselves into the first person pronouns of the text, to more easily elide the distance between printed word and the self. This involvement of the viewer is also echoed within the photograph in two ways. First, the absence of any significant players to act the memory out. We are presented with a space which, if not the actual scene of the crime, so to speak, is nevertheless positioned as the location in which the memory has embedded itself. However, none of the people who figure in the

⁷Jenkner, 26.

narrative are present, allowing us to imagine ourselves as the actors in the drama. This illusion is sustained by a second visual characteristic, the glossy, reflective surface of the Ilfochrome print. Staring at these empty landscapes, their only inhabitants appear to be ourselves.

If we are implicated in these memories, we might be tempted to wonder at our role in these disjointed narratives, which ushers in the question of agency. What is the I, the me, doing in these texts? Filled as they are with pain and anguish, these memories foreground the question of responsibility, of blame and culpability. In every narrative, we wonder what could have been done to prevent the tragic outcome, and in so doing, re-evaluate the actions taken and choices made by this I that is so close to our own. In *telephone booth* (figs. 34, 35) we wonder at our capacity for ignoring some very obvious cries for help on the part of the suicidal friend: “He borrowed a gun from his cousin/.... When we had dated briefly he told me he would not live beyond thirty. I thought perhaps he had been too influenced by ‘the movies.’” Even in cases where the I has been more circumspect and is evidently distanced from the tragedy taking place, there is an element of guilt involved. While the narrator evidently could have nothing to do with the young girl’s leukemia in *field* (figs. 32, 33), the inclusion of the first memory fragment, “We stood watching as a stallion in the pasture mounted mare./ A man stopped to pick us up,” suggests something else, despite its apparent irrelevance to the rest of the narrative. This initial recollection, after all, is what triggers the rest of the memory. Perhaps it is the embarrassment of being caught in the act of watching something sexual, especially by someone so consumed by suffering. Confronted with one’s own guilt at watching this

bestial act, the dying girl seems painfully innocent in contrast; the inevitable question suggests itself - why her and not me? Rather than a direct implication in the death or endangering of another's life, the viewer is here subject to that more ephemeral, furtive type of guilt which seems to settle upon us when faced with the contrast between our own happiness and the undeserved agony of another. Search as we might for the guilty party, we are faced at every turn with our own reflection.

Feelings of guilt when confronted by certain memories invite a degree of psychic censorship: to spare ourselves the trauma of facing our own culpability, we reconstruct the memory in such a way as to shift the blame and minimize our role in the tragedy. Hence the narrative of *telephone booth* (figs. 34, 35) begins with "No one knew why he killed himself" despite the many warning signs later described, and the narrator of *yard* (figs. 44, 45) assures us from the start that "I never knew that he beat her." In each case, innocent ignorance takes the place of guilt at the prospect of having known what was going to happen, but not having done anything to prevent it.

These questions arise with even more urgency in the text for *water* (figs. 40, 41):

I said it wasn't calls for help only the sound of seagulls overhead./ I can still see the man covered in seaweed emerge from the water, walking with eyes shocked open, passing within inches of us./ I had heard only the sound of the seagulls./ In the distance, an empty boat made endless circles.

In this memory, although not explicitly expressed, the viewer's guilt at not having intervened in the rescue of a drowning man rises to the surface. With the repetition of her insistence that she had heard only seagulls, it is as if the narrator is attempting not only to convince the reader, but to reassure herself that this is all she heard. She begins by

simply telling us what she said to her companion, but in the third line she reinforces that this is not only what she said, but what actually happened. The vision of the man appearing suddenly on the shore, he whose cries for help she had not heard, jolts her out of the memory and into the present moment, causing her to repeat, from the distance of the passing of time, "I had heard only the sound of the seagulls." The introduction of "had" into the phrase adds a quality of retrospection to the memory: we are made aware that the narrator is looking back, re-examining the event, and consciously or unconsciously evaluating her own behaviour. Once again, the reader becomes aware of this gentle shifting of the blame away from oneself, the psychic disavowal of guilt.

By virtue of several narrative devices, therefore, these memories and psychic landscapes become entwined in our own minds: we are no longer able to hold them at a safe distance from ourselves, but become emotionally and viscerally implicated: not only by the use of the first person and a reflective surface, but by our capacity to apprehend the guilt gradually eating away at the veracity of the memory itself. Such mechanisms elide the distance between text and viewer, between the I on the panel and the I standing in front of it. In so doing, we begin to imagine what actions could have been taken, what might have been done, in order to prevent such tragic outcomes. The open-endedness and indeterminacy that characterizes the entire series, a product of the oscillation between the mutually mysterious texts and images, also poses the question of agency, as the viewer struggles to reconstruct what lies between fragmented memory and largely empty photograph. In each case, we are situated as the sole inhabitants of these psychic landscapes, left wondering at our own role in these past events and at our capacity to

recreate them through memory.

To an even greater degree than either Bond or Pelkey's works, Janet Cardiff's *Conspiracy Theory* plays with the notion of temporal linearity and the infallibility of the narrator. To begin with, the viewer must negotiate three different realities: the actual world he or she inhabits, that shown on the screen of the video camera, and the imaginary realm described by Cardiff through narration. Initially, it might seem to the viewer that the film and narration provide a fictional overlay onto reality, a story or memory to bring life to rather mundane surroundings, but in fact the dynamics of the work are not so straightforward. While reality does indeed acquire a certain magical quality while one is experiencing the work, it is also true that the fictional becomes, with every step, more real. The gap between text and image which has characterized all the works I have explored thus far is sustained in *Conspiracy Theory*, except that one is presented with multiple pictures, all of them moving, and innumerable texts. Cardiff's voice is a guide through these manifold worlds, but the question recurs again and again as the walk is experienced: can she be trusted? Not only is the viewer compelled to wonder about the narrator's position in the story she weaves, but one questions her psychological stability and mental sanity. All of these elements combine to disorient and destabilise the participant, who is pushed towards the loss of the capacity to distinguish fiction from reality, self from other and past from present. The memories and dreams of the narrator intertwine with one's own, different times and places merge into each other, and the viewer must somehow find a way of negotiating a way through the mire of people,

spaces, and events, which each make a bid for reality.

The temporal and visual disjunction which characterizes the experience of *Conspiracy Theory* creeps up on the viewer. Initially, all seems simple and coherent, as that which is seen on the screen corresponds to the outside world. There is a slight reversal of the usual situation in terms of camera control, since instead of the viewer moving the camera and the screen reflecting that which is filmed, the screen provides the direction in which one must move: as it pans across the room, the participant moves the camera along with it. It is a case of playing along, since the same recording will continue to be shown, regardless of where we aim the viewfinder. At first, everything matches, as one pans past a painting, the couches in the room, a staircase. But, when a young girl begins to climb these stairs on the screen, there is no corresponding figure in reality. She holds up a photograph of a dead man, and already the viewer is confronted with a mess of temporal realities: that which he or she occupies - the present, the recorded image, which is evidently the past and yet positions itself as present for the viewer, and that of the black-and-white photograph, clearly a record of a past event. The addition of the latter into the equation also creates a bewildering spiral of an image within an image within...an image? Cardiff urges the viewer to doubt his or her senses and the reality which seemed so certain only a few moments before: one's world is tipped towards becoming just as artificial and arbitrary as that on the screen.

Once the viewer succumbs to Cardiff's world, allows his or her grasp on reality to fade away, every narrative involved in the experience of *Conspiracy Theory* becomes equally viable: the story of the participant, on an audio walk through a museum, seems no

less real or fictional than the fragmented murder-mystery we are listening to. In an interview, the artist describes this sense of dislocation in time and space: "I think that [the confusion of what is memory and what is our present] is fundamental to the way I think about the world. Sometimes I just don't feel like I'm in reality. I feel like I'm remembering.... You just can't scrape away the layers to get to the real thing."⁸ In *Conspiracy Theory*, this odd sensation becomes the essence of the work, but expands a thousandfold as text upon text and image upon image create a labyrinthine temporal space.

Other layers introduce themselves into the story as what appear to be video segments spliced into the body of the recording. While there is an awareness throughout the walk that one is watching the events of another time, the world on screen remains connected to the viewer by a common location. Even though the museum might look different in the video recording, one is certain that it is the same place currently occupied, just presented at a different time. Later on, however, as the viewer walks through the Place Desjardins, he or she is suddenly confronted with scenes which evidently take place far from the museum. A recording of the mall suddenly becomes a starlit path in the woods, animated by the sounds of rustling grass, crickets chirping, and footsteps crunching on gravel. Interestingly, even though there has been a complete change in terms of location, the echoing footsteps of the narrator remain at the same pace,

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Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Conversations," *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures-Miller* (New York: P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre, 2002), 35.

so that the walker continues to follow her through this altered landscape. The illusion of walking in the woods is complete, as even her breathing changes to accommodate the more arduous terrain. By layering this more natural, night time space onto that of the bustling, fluorescent-lit Place Desjardins, the audio walk is spatially disorienting, collapsing two very different spaces.

When confronted with this sudden change of scenery, my initial reaction was a startled sense of abandonment, as if my companion had abruptly departed for this other reality and left me adrift in the mall. I stopped for a moment, to decide whether I was supposed to keep going without the guidance of the recording, but kept walking when I heard the reliable footsteps. A few seconds later, the image on the screen faded back into the mall and I felt relieved, protected under Cardiff's guiding wing once more. Shortly after, we are instructed to sit on a bench, and another spliced video segment presents itself to us: we see a man drowning another man in a lake at night, repeatedly dunking his head in and out of the water. It becomes evident that the previous starlit walk was not simply a pleasant wilderness interlude and is in fact linked with this more sinister event. However, the narrator never clarifies how these glimpses of yet another reality might relate to the viewer's own or to that presented on the screen; one is left to imagine how this storyline, if in fact a term with such an emphasis on linearity can be applied here, and the more constant narrative taking place in the museum, relate to each other.

The video segments are spliced in abruptly but cleanly - one moment the mall is visible, the next the gravel path in the light of a bobbing flashlight. They arrive with the suddenness of an involuntary flashback, when something in the present triggers the

memory of a past event which is then psychically revisited. The same questions of suppression of guilt and trauma associated with Pelkey's narrator arise as the viewer begins to consider the drowning of the man. Is this a repressed memory which is suddenly and hauntingly returning, unbidden? But this is evidently a fragment of someone else's recollections, just as the young girl's photograph belonged to the past of another. In the previous chapter, I explored how Cardiff's body merges with our own, that the physical boundaries between self and other blur as we assume a cyborg identity. In an analogous way, memories no longer remain the psychic property of an individual but can pass freely from one mind to the next. The participant experiences the memories of another as if they were his or her own, as the narrator's past is presented as belonging to the viewer. As Aruna D'Souza describes it, "we are neither alone nor connected, but rather exist somewhere between the two, constantly caught up in someone else's story."⁹ However, it is not a simple case of negotiating one person's story, but the many other stories this, in turn, leads to, creating a complex web of narrative. Further, this is a web which hangs in wispy tatters, as if having been brushed out of the way. These strands might have connected at one time, but now they are hopelessly tangled and torn, as the viewer is presented with only pieces of these tales. If one is indeed wandering in someone else's memory, it is that of either a victim of trauma who is subjecting his or her recollections to severe repression and censorship, or that of an amnesiac. "I'm not sure why I'm here," the voice wonders as we wander through the mall, "I feel like I've forgotten something important."

⁹Aruna D'Souza, "A World of Sound," *Art in America* 90 (April 2002): 161.

Yet another layer to the narrative presents itself when the doors to a parking garage are opened and an envelope is found at “our” feet. A man’s hand (interestingly, not the woman’s hand we would expect due to the gender of the speaking voice) reaches into the frame to pick it up, whereupon he rips it open to reveal a video cassette which is then inserted into the imaginary camera he is holding, paralleled, of course, by our real one. As if the cassette had been put into the camera, the “play” signal comes on, and the viewer becomes aware that he or she is no longer watching the same recording as before, but this newly discovered one. It has all the thrill of James Bond finding the enemy’s microfiche containing the plans for a secret weapon. In retrospect, however, when one begins to think about the multiple stories being layered one upon the other, recording upon recording, the feeling is that of bewilderment and disorientation.

Evidently, the plot at the root of *Conspiracy Theory* is never intended to come to light; rather, like conspiracy theories themselves, one is left to wonder just what exactly happened, and where the truth lies. In much the same way as Bond and Pelkey, there is a purposefully maintained quality of open-endedness, of mystery and oscillation between multiple places and temporalities. The public space of the museum throws off its institutional veil and becomes a blank space upon which these stories are projected. Since these narratives are so fragmentary, the viewer must step in to fill in the blanks. This is why the merging of memories is not simply a one-way street of Cardiff’s fabricated recollections infiltrating our minds, but an intermingling of the participant’s desires, expectations and memories with those suggested by her narration. As much as one is tempted to give in to the artist’s guidance, the viewer is on the receiving end of the

tangle of memory threads, which he or she can choose to weave together with their own imaginings. It is the walker who projects these fantasies onto the museum space and thus transforms it. One's mind becomes the medium through which fiction traverses into reality, and vice versa.

The agency of the viewer also comes into play as the viewer gradually begins to question the reliability of the narrator. This issue was mentioned above, in terms of the fragmented recollections of the narrator being those of a trauma victim or an amnesiac, and as the walk progresses, there is a creeping sense that one's trust in the guiding voice might be deeply misplaced. On the surface, the nature of the stories themselves encourage this malaise, as it becomes increasingly obvious that the narrator has become embroiled in extremely questionable, and even illicit, activities. However, there is an even more deeply-rooted anxiety as to the mental state of the narrator, which leads to questions regarding the rational capabilities of the viewer's own mind.

Throughout the walk, the participant is, at the voice's incitement, constantly on the lookout for security guards, cameras, men following close behind. These elements combine to create a certain degree of paranoia. Two men walk up the stairs of the museum on the screen, and Cardiff wonders what they are carrying in their suitcases; as the viewer follows a woman dressed in tan, she murmurs, "I didn't know they were following behind me like this, shooting me with a camera." Of course, the inevitable questions occur: What is she so afraid of? Why is she being followed? What does she know that I do not? Clues present themselves throughout the walk, but they are disconnected, adding more to the general atmosphere of mystery than contributing to the

solution of the riddle. What initially seems relatively innocent becomes increasingly sordid, as scenes of drowning give way to an attempted drive-by shooting in the parking garage, the potential victim a singer we had seen earlier in the piece. The walk is cinematic in terms of narrative structure: the story begins relatively calmly and gradually builds in violence and panic, reaching its climax with the startling firing of the gun and then a replay of the scene in slow-motion. However, unlike a Hollywood film, the whole story is never revealed, and most importantly, the narrator, whose integrity and intentions have fallen into doubt, is never redeemed. It is never clear whether she is a victim of the plot, or plays a more nefarious role. Certainly the memory of the drowning seems to suggest the latter, even though the viewer watches from a distance and is not actually committing the act. Further, the narrator evidently knows more than she is letting on: “You would think they could figure it out, they’re in there with their cameras watching every inch of this building.” One watches and is evidently being watched, but is never shown anything which determines the narrator’s guilt or innocence once and for all. The position is that of an observer, albeit a mobile one, and the more deeply embroiled the participant becomes in the fragmented plot, the more one begins to doubt both his or her and the voice’s mutual positioning as *innocent* bystander. “Trust me,” a male voice whispers throughout the walk, but how can one trust what one does not know?

The notion of trust goes even further, beyond the narrator’s involvement in the superficial detective story plot and reaching into the depths of her psyche. As the walk progresses, the viewer begins to doubt not the integrity of her character, but that of her mind. Questions as to the infallibility of memory, the rationality of the conscious mind

and the power and lure of the unconscious begin to arise with more urgency as the narrative becomes increasingly tangled and violent, and as the narrator reveals more of herself. Evidently, Cardiff is very interested in certain neurological and psychological phenomena, such as *déjà vu*, ESP and telepathy, references to which occur throughout her walks. She seems to know a great deal about these types of brain activity, and it begs the question of the degree to which they serve to construct the reality perceived by the viewer.

The feeling of *déjà vu* has often been posited in popular culture as a brain glitch, which is exactly how the narrator describes it to us: it is a result of our mind processing information too quickly, she tells us, which gives us the feeling of having had such an experience before. Science fiction movies, such as *The Matrix* (released 1999), are rife with descriptions of such phenomena. They add an air of mystery and the occult to the ordinary functioning of the brain, and introduce an element of doubt into our faith in rationality and the predominance of the conscious mind. The fact that Cardiff explains it in scientific terms does not undermine its illusory power, nor does it drive away the nagging feeling that one has had this identical experience in a previous time. Further, as a narrative device, *déjà vu* has the effect of introducing a richly layered temporal landscape: it transports the feelings and experiences of a past time abruptly into the present. In terms of Cardiff's narrative, it reinforces the assumption that someone has been here before, illustrated by the existence of the video recording. It also introduces a degree of doubt in terms of the rationality of the narrator. Afflicted by such brain glitches, the viewer wonders if he or she should be placed in the power of a guide who is

momentarily perturbed by glimpses of the past, who cannot keep her memories from suddenly rising to the surface.

There are several other signs which seem indicative of an unstable or overactive mental state. At one point, the participant stands looking over the edge of a balcony of the museum onto the restaurant below. On screen, it is filled with people eating and talking, apparently innocently, until Cardiff mentions, "The phone should ring." A moment later, one man's cell phone does go off, and he answers it, speaking quickly and urgently. Is the narrator gifted with telekinesis, or perhaps clairvoyant? Not only is she frequently revisited by memories of the past, she is able to look into the future.

Inhabiting Cardiff's mind in the audio walk often feels like a glimpse into a schizoid reality. Not only is one confronted with her memories and voice invading the mind, but the narrative is interspersed with the voices of others, and sounds from places both figuratively and geographically distant. Most persistent is a male voice, presumably that of George Bures-Miller, who whispers short phrases which echo in the depths of the brain: "Trust me." The quality of binaural recording is such that the voice seems to emerge from the core of the viewer, as if it were not an exterior stimulus but an inner voice. The viewer's mental space becomes filled with such inner voices, as well as scenes from a past which does not belong him or her, which are in turn projected onto the physical space inhabited. The drowning scene, in particular, resonates as someone else's memory implanting itself in the mind. However, there is a quality of inauthenticity to the scene itself: it seems fake and rehearsed, the two men stiff and unnatural, the drowning man not struggling at all but actually hanging on to the other man's arm as if

wanting to get dunked into the water. The whole scene has the makeshift, patchwork quality of a recollection which has later been re-imagined, supplemented with additional information. Once again we are led to wonder at the psychological condition of our narrator, subjected as she is to fits of *déjà vu*, premonitions, a tenuous grasp of reality and fabricated flashbacks. The lack of temporal linearity reinforces this suspicion. According to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in her discussion of this recurring phenomenon in Cardiff's work, "consensus on temporality is requisite for the maintenance of social order in modern urban life, while disjunctures between lived time and the standardized time of clocks and calendars tend to accompany various forms of psychopathology."¹⁰ While the conclusion that our narrator is psychopathic is indeed excessive, it is nevertheless clear that whether due to her involvement in the mysterious plot alluded to by the narrative, or to the tangle of neurological disorders that seem to distort her perception, she is not a steadfast, dependable guide of the museum space, and it therefore becomes difficult to place one's trust in her entirely.

It may initially seem strange to insist on the significance of the agency of the viewer in a work such as Cardiff's, which seems to elicit a surrendering of control. The participant must, in order for the piece to actually work, listen to her voice and obey her directions. On the other hand, the work relies a great deal on the viewer's imaginative capacity, one's willingness to suspend disbelief in order to accept the projection of obviously fictive plots and memories into reality. Further, the weaving in and out of different times and places is hardly encouragement to simply sit back and enjoy the show;

¹⁰Christov-Bakargiev, "An Intimate Distance," 25.

rather, the viewer's task becomes the untangling of twisting storylines, the filling in of gaps with his or her own memories and imaginings, merging them with those provided by Cardiff. Finally, the narrator's cluttered and disturbed mental space, her ultimate unreliability in terms of rationality, incites the viewer to question that which he or she is seeing and hearing. Jumbled narratives and shady narrators position the viewer as the negotiator of space and time in the work, navigating among multiple stories being told, and the many voices whispering in our innermost ear.

Disjunctions in time and place, gaps between text and narrative, and fallible narrators come together to position the viewer as a key agent in the production of the scape. In his exploration of the city, Michel de Certeau elaborates upon the many connections which exist between words and the spaces they describe, and how the city dweller is active in the fabrication of the meanings of the space he or she inhabits. The planned fact of the city is overwritten with stories and memories of those who make their lives in its streets and buildings, narratives which affect not only the way in which the city is understood, but how people move about within it. Many of de Certeau's theories concerning the relationship between the places we occupy and the stories we tell ourselves about these spaces shed light upon the narratives employed by Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff, with their emphasis on how texts, spoken, written or imagined, shape our environments, creating storyscapes.

The types of stories which de Certeau sees as capable of inventing or transforming spaces are not those told by city planners, architects or the heritage industry. Rather, he

terms them ‘superstitions’, perhaps in order to emphasize their idiosyncratic, even provincial, quality. These are not official stories, but the tales told by everyday people to make their space more intimate, distinctive or interesting; they constitute a poetic geography which superimposes itself upon the orderly city.¹¹ While the planned city works to close off spaces, to design and designate, the city of superstitions opens up, allows for play; these stories “permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces.”¹² They transform the urban fact - a grid of streets, industrial, commercial and residential zones - into a living, breathing city, its inhabitants actively producing a mythology of their urban dwelling place.

In much the same way, the artists I explore take banal landscapes and inscribe them with dreams for the future, stories of the present and memories of the past. Each artist, though exploring the possibilities of a fluid temporal framework, concentrates her efforts on one particular time. Bond’s whimsical solutions to the world’s problems, with their sci-fi aesthetic and allusions to a fading present belong to the category of future fictions. The delving into memory, into recollections beginning to dim with the passage of time, position Pelkey’s works in a world of the past. Finally, through her exploration of contemporary novels, film and technology, Cardiff’s audio walks are situated firmly in the moment, particularly due to their illusion of “presentness”. Although the viewer is aware that the recording must have been created in the past, there is an immediacy to this

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Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 106.

¹²Ibid.

medium as the viewer is compelled to participate in the creation of the now. Taken together, these artists provide a richly detailed meditation on the potential of the mundane landscape not only to become fantastic, but to enunciate its existence in time. The creation of narratives, or superstitions, about one's environment, whether belonging to the past, as memories, the present, as stories or urban legends, or the future, as dreams, hopes or fears, is what transforms a blank, empty space into a storyscape, a magical place which accepts the projections of the wildest imagination.

Yet, as much as each artist's works belong to a specific time, as far as the viewer is concerned, they all exert a particular power in the present moment. There is definitely an escapist flavour to all of these pieces, a temptation to lose oneself in the narratives of past, present and future, and yet, by means of textual devices employed by these artists, there is a constant pull back to the present moment. The use of multiple storylines is one such device, as the viewer must actively negotiate his or her way through the web of dangling threads. There is also an active experimentation with temporality, as different times collapse into one another, compelling the viewer to position him or herself within a disjunctive temporal framework. Finally, we are confronted with narrators who hardly seem to be reliable guides or witnesses, obliging us to assume responsibility for our own conceptual navigation of the fictional space. The combined effect of these elements is a reinforcement of the viewer's agency in the creation of space through the negotiation of narrative.

De Certeau explores the transition from stories told about a place to an active intervention in space. The act of walking and the practice of storytelling become

analogous. In each case we are presented with a variety of possible routes, whether physical or metaphorical, and must choose our own path among them: “everyday, [stories] traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.”¹³ This process is echoed in each artist’s procedure for making the work, as the barrier between memory, story or dream and physical location began to blur. Each artist is confronted by the reality of her surroundings, and transforms them into storyscapes via an infusion of narrative. Bond, working in Winnipeg, transports the exotic into the prairies: “My work doesn’t have horizons or fields. But they are Manitoba landscapes in that they’re not Manitoba landscapes; they’re about other places being brought *here*.”¹⁴ Becoming engrossed in her memories, Pelkey began to take note of physical landscapes which reminded her of these past events.¹⁵ Cardiff, meanwhile, makes several walking tours of the site and becomes inspired by certain aspects, as actively explored space becomes fodder for the fabrication of fragmented stories.

The combined spatial and narrative agency of each artist translates itself into the work and thus affects the viewer’s perception of his or her own space. Rather than just seeing a represented space, we are compelled to *act* it by unravelling story lines, times and the narrators’ intentions. Coming away from these pieces, we are made aware of the possibilities offered by our own environments, of the potential of that which we had

¹³De Certeau, 115.

¹⁴Enright, 11.

¹⁵Ring, “Mnemonic Obsession,” 12.

previously regarded as empty and banal to become our own storyscapes. In their narrative inscription of the scape, these works reveal the hidden tales that lie in the orderly streets of a planned city, the illuminated capsule of a telephone booth, and the sterile hallways of an art museum. In so doing, they remind us of the capacity for magic, memory and dreams that lies dormant in every banal space.

CHAPTER THREE: DREAMSCAPE

The city and the dream have long been associated with one another. From Hollywood to Istanbul, virtually every city has been called a “city of dreams” at some point in time, no matter how incongruent the description might seem. What is it about urban spaces that bring to mind nocturnal fantasies, that allows wisps of reverie to cling to everyday streets and buildings? And is it only cities that can be compared to dreams in this way, or any human habitation or architectural endeavour? Perhaps the connection arises from the hope that we might one day be able to construct a city in which our wildest dreams become reality, in which the bland grid is enlivened by the strange, the beautiful and the bizarre.

Certainly this is what the Situationists envisioned in their creation of maps and psychogeographical situations, their attempts to reveal a mystical world hiding behind the shadow of the ordinary. Perhaps the most poetic member of the group in his descriptions of urban space, Ivan Chtcheglov glorified de Chirico’s uncanny architecture and longed for a city which reflected the desires of its inhabitants. Cities were spaces haunted by dreams of the past:

you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a *closed* landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting* angles, certain *receding* perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors.¹

According to Chtcheglov, there are certain visual and architectural elements of the

¹Chtcheglov, 1.

everyday urban realm that allow us to momentarily lift the veil of the practical and the planned to reveal a city of desires and dreams. It is a world parallel to our own, and yet more often than not concealed from us, not only by urban planners who would obliterate all signs of the disorderly past to make way for the clean and the new, but by our own refusal or inability to transform the city into a projection of our own memories, fantasies and reveries.

A city of dreams might not, when we consider our own bizarre and irrational nighttime visions, seem like the most favourable place to live. However, dreams, so closely linked with desire, are the stages upon which we perceive our deepest, darkest wishes being fulfilled. In his exhaustive exploration of the dream-work, Freud argued that even those dreams that seem to be the realization of our worst fears are in fact elaborate screens erected by our conscious mind to protect us from our own desires.² There are, therefore, two sides to the dream: the superficial vision, sometimes painful, often bizarre, usually containing traces of recent events and encounters, and the latent content, always, according to Freud, showing us the fulfilment of a wish. Although I will later challenge Freud's notion of the dream and desire, the connection between the two is crucial to my investigation of the spaces constructed by these artists.

Whether they mention dreams explicitly, as in the case of Pelkey and Cardiff, or are merely reminiscent of the nocturnal visions of the subconscious, like Bond's surreal canvasses, the artists I examine in this thesis explore the potential of the dreamscape as a

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Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, transl. and ed. Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, Inc., 1983), 223.

means of creating a space capable of reflecting emotion and desire. All three artists take ordinary spaces and transform them into the stuff of dreams and nightmares, revealing the psychic possibilities of concert parks, telephone booths and museum parking garages. By introducing the dream as both visual and narrative device, these works tap into a psychological realm, revealing the permeability of the barrier between reality and imagination, concrete and ephemeral, the worlds of waking and dreaming.

In many ways, Eleanor Bond's paintings reflect the ideas of the Situationists, especially in terms of exploring the psychological possibilities of the cityscape. If Chtcheglov was searching for an urban space which reflected the magic of fairy tales and the psychic potency of surrealism, he would have found it in the bizarre, mystical world created by Bond. Visually, the spaces she constructs are too fantastic to belong to any real life city, yet nor are they completely divorced from actuality. Like the Situationists' new urbanism and like dreams themselves, Bond's cities contain elements of both the mythical and the ordinary, with the former emerging from and almost concealing the latter. In her paintings of Rotterdam for instance, the viewer is confronted by what appear to be completely fabricated landscapes, plucked from the artist's most romantic imaginings.³ However, for those who know or inhabit this city, the spaces depicted by Bond, though chimerical, are undoubtedly specific Rotterdam sites which "any Rotterdammer would recognize."⁴ The bones of the space are actual places, but the flesh is built up of dreams and architectural fantasies.

³The *Cosmoville* series of 1995; see figs. 31 and 55.

⁴Dault, 91.

Like dreams, Bond's scenes are constructed from fragments of the world we know. Not only the *Cosmoville* series, but every painting, contains references either to specific sites which might be familiar to some viewers, or to aspects of our culture, such as the floating Roy Orbison in *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concern Park* (fig. 49). However, these references are always slightly tweaked, somehow "off", which transplants them from the realm of the everyday into the territory of dreams. The parking garage in *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade* (fig. 48) will be immediately familiar to anyone who has negotiated the spiralling confusion of one of these structures, and yet it is made strange to us by its dizzying height, the presence of trailers instead of cars, and a wilderness park on its roof. These works provide us with a glimpse of a landscape we know or have at least heard and seen pictures of, whether Vancouver, Rotterdam or Lake of the Woods, but as if distorted in the reveries of another. An identical dynamic is often at work in dreams. Persons and places known to us appear in completely different guises: a place we know to be our home in the dream has nothing in common with its equivalent in waking life. Rooms are not where they should be, or we discover hidden places we never imagined could exist in this space we thought we knew so well. We recognize our mother, our sister, our boss, but clothed within a body which bears no resemblance to that which we love or loathe in actuality.

Not only are these sites rendered bizarre or distorted, but they are rife with the types of symbols which fill the pages of dream dictionaries: a lotus flower, egg and crescent moon in *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the*

Waterslide Area (fig. 26), the guitar in *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concern Park* (fig. 49), the head, hand and human form in *Central Park at Spiral Lake Offers Many Forms of Heath Care* (fig. 27). It is easy to create a link between these symbols and the theme of the painting. The familiar shapes of former, for example, are clearly linked with femininity and the reproductive cycle, hence their presence in a landscape constructed for the very purpose of increasing fertility. However, rather than the groundless type of symbolism we associate with dreaming, in which seemingly nonsensical signs are linked by a loose and often irrational narrative, these emblems are embedded within the architecture and are the shapes of specific buildings or structures situated in the landscape. Instead of recreating an abstract meaning from these shapes, Bond reveals the symbolic power of architecture, its possibility for infinite permutation. Much like the Situationists, her paintings elaborate upon the potential of the built environment when the dream world is allowed free reign in its transformation.

A dream architecture, in Bond's world, is not simply whimsical or impossibly bizarre, it is a place in which every fragment of the landscape unites itself to a specific story or purpose. Structures in the form of an egg and a lotus flower, on opposite shores of a vagina-shaped lake seem absurd, until we discover that they are all a part of a centre for fertility; every aspect of the landscape echoes this function. Analogously, strange presences and objects in dreams are, according to Freud, simply a part of the overarching but usually concealed narrative of wish-fulfilment. That which strikes us as most out of place is often the element upon which the entire element of desire hinges, as our conscious mind struggles to conceal it behind a facade of nonsense. In Bond's scenes,

desire is conveyed via the absurd shapes of both the “natural” and the built landscape, which come together to tell a story of human wishes being fulfilled by a fanciful architecture. Dreams are the tool and dreamscapes the result in Bond’s attempts to “explore what the city is, as well as what it could be, and what one would want it to become.”⁵

The narrative of desire and wish-fulfilment revealed by the symbolic architecture in these paintings is echoed in the text which accompanies each work. As explored in the previous chapter, the titles almost always suggest a radical solution to a very real problem, bringing incongruent elements together in order to answer the needs of various groups of people, described by Johanne Sloan as “imaginary communities parodying familiar forms of wish-fulfillment.”⁶ Various desires are implicitly posited and seemingly satisfied: athletes and nature-lovers find a common ground in *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade* (fig. 48), the aged find a home in *Wisdom Lake is the Site of the Elders’ Park and Communications Centre* (fig. 28), and unemployed agricultural workers discover their true vocation in *Displaced Farmers Set up Cappuccino Bars on Lake of the Woods* (fig. 47).

That element which often seems most strange to the viewer, such as the spiralling parking garage, or the hand-shaped lake, is the architectural crystallization of the active

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Petra Rigby Watson, “Imaginary Displacement and the Facts of Metaphor,” *Eleanor Bond: Quick Aging Pivoting City* (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2000), 5.

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Johanne Sloan, “Eleanor Bond’s *Social Centres*: Natural Sights and Millennial Landscapes,” *Social Centres: Eleanor Bond* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 43.

work of the community's collective desire. Freud often explained illogical elements of the dream as examples of condensation, in which the multiplicity of desires are collapsed into a single, but particularly fecund, symbol. Analogously, the architectural emblems of Bond's paintings, as in the dream-work itself, are condensations of the community's wishes: multiple longings are compressed into a single structure or landscape. Much like the dream, which condenses incongruent peoples and places in order to articulate certain wishes, these scenes bring together off-road cyclists and time historians (fig. 52), living underground and the possibility of "abundant daily sunshine" (fig.55), to fulfill the desires of once-disparate communities. In Bond's paintings, these desires are never quelled, but become the motivation for the construction of a fantastic architecture to respond to these multiple wishes, previously unattainable yet now fulfilled by this condensation of motley elements into a unified landscape.

In both dreams and these fantastic scenes, there is an underlying current of desires demanding to be satisfied, no matter how strange or absurd the surface may appear. If dreams function as an architecture of desire, being the structures upon which subconscious wants and needs are articulated, in these surreal worlds, architecture itself is rendered dream-like in order to articulate a specific desire. In other words, the built landscape takes the place of the dream as the field or screen upon which desires are projected, condensing multiple wishes into a rich and fertile space which echoes the innumerable longings of its disparate inhabitants. Unlike the screen involved in Freud's notion of screen memories however, in which an apparently innocent, usually childhood, recollection is substituted for a more reprehensible, repressed event, these landscapes

need not be the unconscious result of long-buried trauma or repressed desires.⁷ Rather, they can function as a productive, experimental plane for active and deliberate wish-fulfilment.

Also closely linked with dreams and desire is the futuristic focus of Bond's works. As elucidated in the previous chapter, however, no matter how sci-fi these scenes appear, they are narratively positioned in the present tense, and thus maintain an uneasy balance between the *now* and the *later*. Interestingly, this is a balance also negotiated by the dream. In the mind of the dreamer, nocturnal reveries invariably take place in the present, often shocking or frightening in their startling immediacy. However, from the earliest times, dreams have been also been associated with the future through divination: Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's fantasies (Genesis 41: 17-36) is the most commonly cited instance, but even logical Aristotle could not completely dismiss the prophetic potential of some dreams.⁸ Yet another example is the common adage of the young woman placing a piece of wedding cake beneath her pillow in order to dream of her future husband. Even in Freud's time, a number of dream dictionaries of questionable reliability already existed, supposedly serving to unlock the secret meaning of the dream and its

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See Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories," *Early Psycho-Analytical Publications / The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. III (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psychoanalysis, 1953-74), 301-22, and "Childhood Memories and Screen Memories," *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life / The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 62-73.

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Aristotle, "De Divinatione per Somnum: Chapter One," *Parva Naturalia*, transl. J. I. Beare and G. R. T. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 462b - 463a.

capacity for the revelation of things to come.

My aim in elaborating upon the link between dreams and divination is certainly not to decide whether dreams have a prophetic power, nor do I plan to engage in any kind of dream interpretation in relation to Bond's paintings. Rather, I am interested in the timeless and often latent connection between the dream and the future, and feel that it can shed light upon the particular temporal and imaginative dynamic at work in these pieces. The appeal of dream divination is that by knowing the future we might take steps to encourage or prevent certain outcomes of destined events. By being able to anticipate the coming seven years of plenty followed by seven years of poor harvests, Pharaoh was able to forestall widespread famine. As such, even though the future itself might be irrevocably determined, our capacity to act within this given framework is left up to us. In other words, what we choose to do *now* affects what happens *later*; regardless of the events the future holds, we remain independent agents, deciding what is to be done within the structure of the future provided to us.

In an analogous way, Bond's land and cityscapes have the appearance of glimpses of the future. As in dream divination, there is a temptation to decode in order to render them legible and understandable, perhaps even leading to their eventual construction. This notion is posited by Cliff Eyland when he asks, "Like the pyramids, Bond's futuristic social centres could be built, so why don't we build them?"⁹ And yet to do so would be to undermine the capacity for agency active in all these works. These are not

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Cliff Eyland, "Architexture: The Paintings of Eleanor Bond," *Border Crossings* 19, no. 4 (November 2000): 70.

literal architectural proposals, after all, but works of art. As such, they demand not the direct decoding or reading of the surface, but a rigorous questioning and examination, thus opening them up to a variety of possibilities. Much as they might be about the future, they are interpreted by the viewer in the present, who is then left to his or her own devices in terms of how to act, if at all.

And yet, although these works are about agency, it is, like the dream, an agency which functions within a set of irrevocably fixed boundaries. The Pharaoh, although he did exercise a degree of agency, was forced to operate within the agricultural constraints of the coming fourteen years. Similarly, Bond's radical and often precarious architectural "solutions" are examples of a creative independence at work within a world overflowing with very real and persistent problems. Her glimpses of the future are hardly utopian, for they negotiate a world where the troubles which afflict us in the here and now continue to determine the possibilities of everyday life. It is a world created to answer the needs and desires of battered women, the lonely elderly, the sick and the disenfranchised, who instead of being ignored, have come to determine the parameters in which Bond's architectural imagination functions. Her works reflect the endlessly mutable quality of space and architecture, but at the same time reveal that the landscape of pain and problems which are the impetus for the creation of these scenes may not be so easily altered.

These landscapes, like dreams themselves, lie somewhere between reality and fiction, present and future, fixity and mutability. Bond's architectural fantasies are not intended as building proposals, but reveal the capacity for individual agency with which

each of us is equipped to meet the inevitable problems of the future; as Anne Brydon writes, “[i]dentity is thus generated as the self relentlessly seeks to place itself within the boundaries of its own material experience. Thus, cumulative knowledge of space shapes who people think they are and what they think the world to be.”¹⁰ At every turn, Bond’s works remind us of the possibility of thinking, and then painting, a world into existence. However, this is not an aimless imagining or purposeless fantasy, for each space is transformed according to the specific wishes of its inhabitants. Desire becomes an active force in the transformation of the landscape, just as desire is the reason for and provides the structure of our dreams. It is interesting to note that while this architecture of desire addresses the problems posited in these works, they do not at any time suggest themselves as permanent or even plausible solutions - they are temporary, fanciful, impossible answers to various forms of actual suffering. What they do reveal, in a manner uncannily similar to the dream, are the unsatisfied but very real wishes lying at the root of these constructions, however concealed behind a nonsensical or whimsical architectural facade. If desire is the ultimate arbiter of the landscape in Bond’s world, she also reminds us that only through active agency can our world begin to echo the hopes, dreams and wishes of its inhabitants.

One of the most frequent and confusing occurrences in dreams is the mismatched quality of objects and emotions. We often find ourselves nonchalant about something

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Anne Brydon, “Notes Toward Situating Social Centres,” *Social Centres: Eleanor Bond* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 49.

which should horrify us and, in turn, are petrified of the trivial and ridiculous. A similar transfer occurs in Brenda Pelkey's series, *...dreams of life and death*, as the mundane is rendered shocking and the earth-shattering, merely ordinary. Staring at the eerily-lighted photographs, and reading the disjointed, disturbing text, it becomes difficult to separate past from present, self from other, and perhaps most vividly, dream from reality. These banal suburban vistas of power-lines, fenced-in yards, abandoned pastures, are oddly permeated by emotion and affect, and we, the viewers, are privy to what appear to be the most secret thoughts of another. Once again, the connection between dreaming and desire comes to the fore, as Pelkey permits us a glimpse of the deepest wishes concealed by the most ordinary landscapes.

Despite being familiar to the point of becoming a cultural cliché, the capacity of the unconscious to divulge the psychic "truth" can still be troubling to those of us who rely, on a day-to-day basis, upon our conscious mind. The idea that we are not even aware of our deepest desires and instincts, swarming in some dark cesspool in the recesses of our psyche, is disturbing when we have grown accustomed to thinking, according to our humanistic habit, that we know ourselves. Yet, our dreams are a persistent reminder that perhaps we are not as well acquainted with the workings of our mind as we might have hoped. Even the simplest, most nonsensical reverie can strike us by virtue of its complete irrationality, while those epic dreams, after which we awake, exhausted, as if having undergone a journey of emotional and physical trials during the night, remain with us long after we have thrown off the blankets and planted our feet firmly on the cold floor. Dreams, then, provide a sort of bridge, precarious though it may

be, between the unconscious mind and its alter ego in waking life.

This encounter between the inner and the outer world is made visible in Pelkey's photographs, as disquieting text meets ordinary landscape. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a world familiar to most North American viewers, consisting of rather unremarkable scenes which could be seen in virtually every Canadian suburb or on its outskirts. However, by turning a flood light upon them and photographing them at night, Pelkey has transplanted them from the typical and the everyday into the unearthly and uncanny. Neighbourhood trees, telephone booths and power lines take on a ghostly aura, and become disturbing features of the landscape rather than the ordinary objects we know them to be. The stark lighting grants them not only importance, but a degree of presence, as discussed in chapter one - they are centre stage, more like actors themselves than backdrops. We are therefore somewhat prepared for the injection of emotion the text provides, which further removes this landscape from banality into the realm of deepest suffering and concealed desires. Interestingly, in this merging of private thoughts with public reality, those prominent features of the latter, the water, the house, the tombstone, become repositories of the emotion and affect which permeates the text.

A similar transfer occurs in dreams, as mentioned above, when the ordinary and banal elicit a powerful emotional response, while that which would affect us in waking life is simply laughed at or ignored. Freud terms this mismatched quality displacement, when the "ideational contents have undergone displacements and substitutions, while the affects have remained unchanged."¹¹ This phenomenon is yet another defensive

¹¹Freud, 434.

mechanism on the part of the conscious mind, clothing those desires which provoke the deepest emotions in a costume of the banal or silly. However, being aware of the nature of this censorship, we can interpret the dream correctly by allowing the feelings we experience to guide us, rather than the surface content. Given their dreamscape quality, it therefore comes as no surprise that the affect which permeates each text is displaced onto the photographed landscape. Despite the fact that the scene itself often has very little to do with the content of the text, it becomes endowed with significance via this emotional transfer. As such, these works operate according to the same dynamic as the dream, in which everyday objects serve to conceal one's deepest desires from oneself, and yet remain pregnant with the affect these desires inspire. Seemingly meaningless features of the landscape provide the link between the censorship of the rational, waking mind, and the mysterious truths of the unconscious, struggling to reach the surface.

Of course, I am not attempting to claim that the texts which accompany Pelkey's photographs are products of her unconscious mind - the very nature of this concept is that it is *a priori* unknowable and irrevocably hidden from us. However, there is a directness to these texts in their matter-of-fact, straightforward way, the unimpeded delivery of one for whom no barriers exist between inner thought and written or spoken language. The disjointedness of the texts brings to mind the words of someone in an altered state of mind, hypnotized into a trance or lost in a dream state.¹² Further, the artist's description of writing these narratives brings to mind the frenzied condition of one

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Ryan Arnott, "Flash Fiction: Brenda Pelkey: '...dreams of life and death,'" *Blackflash* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 8.

attempting to rid herself of long-buried trauma: “I spent the next three days in a daze, recalling a particular sensation, and with this sensation would come a flood of memories all of which had to do with very disruptive kinds of things, rupture points that won’t reconcile.”¹³ As such, they have the illusion of granting the viewer complete access to the dark psychic passageways of the speaker, when in fact we have no assurance whatsoever that we are getting the whole story.

Throughout her works are hints that the viewer is in fact reading a doctored version of the events described, rather than being granted unimpeded access. In the previous chapter, I discussed the quality of retrospection and re-evaluation present in *water* (figs. 40, 41), which reveals a degree of censorship. A similar process is at work in *yard* (figs. 44, 45), emphasizing the role of dreams in the construction of our memories. The story itself has the unreal, horrific quality of a nightmare: “I looked after the children. He came home drinking. We all got into the truck and drove for hours in the night to the homes of strangers.” While one possible reading might be that the narrator and the children escaped from the drunk father by seeking refuge at the homes of neighbours, there is no reason to assume that “we all got into the truck” excludes him. In this case, we might wonder at the lack of control the narrator seems to have over her actions, consenting to accompany this drunken, abusive man on his night-time rampage through the town, putting both herself and her friend’s children at risk. If he threatened her, or if she had no choice but to get in the truck with him, she does not make it explicit. She seems to be acting in the bizarre, illogical way we would expect from a dream, not from

¹³Ring, “Mnemonic,” 12.

waking life. The nightmarish quality of the events is reinforced by the narrator's closing sentence: "I can only remember clearly the next day." This avowal suggests the transformation of the cloudy, mess of events which occurred the night before into an orderly narrative, in much the same way as we grant dreams a veil of linear clarity when we retell them the next morning. Pelkey speaks of this process as having a healing effect: "I think that there is some sense of reassurance for me in the making of this work in that any memory turned into narrative tends to impose order and direction."¹⁴ And yet, in this transplantation of dream-like events into a tidier format which can withstand the probing light of day, might we not also be losing something?

In the process of remembering our dreams the next morning, our rational mind imposes its own evaluation of the events, as we edit, revise and fill in gaps. The act of smoothing the tangled fibres of the dream into a single thread might be healing or reassuring, but it has very little to do with reproducing the immediacy of the dream-events. They are doubly distanced from us, as we must rely on the often treacherous path provided by memory to once again access the content of the dream. Disjointed sentences, after all, can be the result of someone speaking in a dream state, but they can also reveal the hesitating pace of someone unwilling to disclose the actual events, or the struggle of memory attempting to recall what actually occurred. From the distance of "the next day," we have already lost the capacity to gain access to the nocturnal activities of the unconscious mind, just as Pelkey's narrator has sacrificed the messy, immediate quality of these events in favour of a narrative. The very present quality of this text is illusory,

¹⁴Ring, "Mnemonic," 12.

for it is a guise of rational simplicity and clarity to conceal the discordant confusion of this waking nightmare.

The role of remembering in the transplantation of the dream into waking life brings to the fore the relationship between the dream and the memory. Evidently, this is a connection the artist herself is interested in, referring to and presenting the texts as memories, while titling her series ...*dreams of life and death*. The nocturnal quality of the majority of these scenes reinforce their relationship to the dream world, as does the previously discussed process of displacement. Both memories and dreams are difficult to discuss due to their unreliability, memories because we are so often prone to forgetfulness and fabrication, dreams because they are so easily dismissed as nonsensical and generally fade in potency once we ease ourselves back into the rhythms of waking life. Further, they are invariably and unabashedly subjective. It is often difficult to discern between the two, especially when dealing with a memory long past, or a particularly powerful dream: Did I dream this, or did it actually happen? Occasionally, the two might merge, especially if we dream about an event which occurred in reality, which then becomes difficult, if not impossible, to extract from its re-enactment in the dream. Perhaps most interestingly, both the dream and the memory are subject to the censorship imposed by our rational faculties. While the desires of the dream undergo various condensations and displacements, memories of particularly traumatic events are often suppressed altogether. In short, neither tends to have much to offer in the way of objective “truth”, but they can tell us a great deal about the inner workings of our selves, the most deeply buried suffering and desire.

Attempts to classify these texts once and for all as either dreams or memories will be constantly frustrated, as Pelkey gives us clues for both sides. What is perhaps more interesting is to consider them as existing somewhere between the two, occupying that very foggy and subjective territory of the fabricated memory and startlingly real dream. Pelkey's quotation suggests that these texts began their lives as memories, but through the various transformations to which they have been subjected as they grew from hastily scrawled notes to works of art, they have been refashioned, in her very titling, as dreams. Of all the works in this series, *tree* (figs. 42, 43) is perhaps the one which seems to belong most to the world of dreams.¹⁵ Beginning with the words, "in my dream of life...", the artist seems to be ushering us into her private world of reverie, populated by such characters as Whiskey Willie, who has the unfortunate accident of falling out of a tree - or does he? In the next sentence, we are presented with two other possibilities for his demise: "The official cause of death was pneumonia, we all knew he had died of cirrhosis of the liver." These reasons seem much more plausible, not to mention less dramatic, and therefore more likely to belong to the world of waking life. Yet the clear distinction between the two is complicated by the scene the artist chooses to photograph: a glorious, ghostly tree, spreading its white, grasping limbs across the expanse of the image. Why, if Whiskey Willie was actually killed by cirrhosis of the liver, does the tree act as the trigger for the memory of his death? Evidently, in this particular memory, the dream has taken

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The entire text reads, "...in my dream of life, Whiskey Willie falls out of a tree and dies./ He was found on the floor of his living-room by my brother-in-law./ The official cause of death was pneumonia but we all knew he had died of cirrhosis of the liver./ Uncle bill had telephoned all that fall and called me his princess. I had been repulsed."

precedence over the actual event. The matter-of-fact banality of everyday life is eclipsed by the emotional potency of the unconscious fantasy.

If we return briefly to the *raison d'être* of dreams, that is to say, to show us the realization of our most sought-after desires, it may initially seem odd to discuss Pelkey's series within this context. After all, they tend to exhibit some of our worst fears, rather than illustrating the fulfilment of our wishes. At the same time, it is crucial to keep in mind that the painful content which does arise in dreams is, according to Freud, merely a disguise for that which we most fervently desire. In an analogous fashion, these works also function as disguises, whether through displacement, the unreliability of memory, or the censorship imposed by the rational mind in the transformation of event into narrative. However, what kind of desire might be lurking behind these tragic stories of suffering and death? In every image, there is some feature of the landscape which acts as a trigger for the unfolding of a memory or dream tainted by a relentless loneliness: a telephone booth brings to mind the suicide of a beloved friend; a fence in a pasture, a young girl with leukemia; a tombstone, the end of an affair with a married man (figs. 34, 35; 32, 33; 38, 39). Behind each of these narrative veils lies the desire for a landscape which might compensate for this loneliness by echoing the narrator's own emotional loss, a fusion of the exterior, public world with the private psychic landscape of dreams and memories. These everyday objects are not only triggers for repressed narrated recollections, but for a repressed desire for a space which speaks to the condition of being alone in the world.

The banality of the landscapes is such that it is possible to equate them with one's own surroundings, allowing the viewer to discover his or her own capacity for

transforming previously empty territory into a dreamscape infused with affect. By borrowing the dream-processes of displacement and concealed wish-fulfilment, Pelkey reveals that creating a potent space has little to do with its physical transformation: all we have to do is to see it in a different light, exposing its connection to our own buried memories and dreams.

Dreams have the capacity to transport us to completely different realms, enveloping us in a world of fantastic or frightening sounds, sights and smells. Often, upon waking, it is difficult to believe that we have actually been asleep in our bed all night, when the dream seems so vivid and real. Long after we have thrown aside the blankets, the dream remains with us, sometimes following us throughout the day and changing our perception of our everyday surroundings. Perhaps it is the persistence of the desire that lies below the surface, but some dreams simply refuse to disappear. In many ways, experiencing one of Cardiff's audio walks is akin to succumbing to the virtual world created by the dream. One is absorbed into a parallel dimension of sensual stimuli, which functions according to a fragmented narrative, jumping from one reality to the next. Once again, the viewer is faced with people and places which have the allure of the familiar but are somehow different. Even the body feels like an alien creature, as the participant becomes intensely aware of the seemingly newfound power of the senses. In the artificial environment created by Cardiff, in much the same way as that created by the unconscious mind every night, space and time become fluid, allowing glimpses of a world which somehow seems more real than that re-entered upon removing the

headphones.

Dreams do not enter subtly into *Conspiracy Theory*, but are the narrative reason for its coming into being. The strangeness of Cardiff's opening sentences is not immediately striking: "Last night I dreamt that I killed a man. It was in a hotel room. A single swift act that disappeared as quickly as it had come. I couldn't stop the feeling of guilt about doing it. Even as my eyes opened to the morning light it was still with me." The ensuing story is loosely based on this initial feeling of guilt, which follows the narrator throughout the walk, despite its having originated in a dream. The viewer looks out a museum window at a hotel across the street, and the camera grants the eyes a supernatural power to see into one of the rooms where a woman stands. One watches her on the screen and wonders whether this is the scene of the crime, this woman the murderer - but wasn't it only a dream? As the walk progresses, various clues are presented - a photograph, an eight millimetre video cassette, glimpses of a man being drowned - each one irresistibly linked to this initial dream murder. It is the only plausible reason why the viewer is being watched, why people are supposedly following behind. The narrative suggests that the barrier between the worlds of dreaming and waking is porous, and that acts committed in the former can have repercussions in the latter. What the dream inspires is, after all, not solely the feeling of guilt: it is the impetus for the entire walk, supposedly occurring in the "real" world.

One of the requirements for an audio walk to really work is the relinquishing of control on the part of the viewer. Ever since the downfall of traditional vanishing point perspective, artists have experimented with the status of a viewer who is no longer

positioned at the centre of their painted universe. *Conspiracy Theory* takes this capacity for disorientation to the next level, enveloping its participants in a space not of their own making, and destabilising the senses. Although all the action revolves around the viewer, he or she has very little power to determine the sounds heard, the sights seen, the journey travelled. As Aruna D'Souza describes it, "to experience the art is to be placed at the centre of sometimes menacing and always fragmented narratives where you are strangely ineffectual: you cannot determine their outcome, they move on despite you."¹⁶ The space of the museum, which offers the illusion of security and familiarity, is forever altered by the new paths the audio walk compels us to trace. The viewer must succumb to the power of Cardiff's guiding voice, to the artificial world conveyed via the headphones and screen in order to experience the work and be absorbed into this parallel dimension, similar to his or her own, but different. Perhaps this is why, according to Kitty Scott, "the experience of taking an audio walk is like dreaming another's dreams": one is enveloped in a world infused with affect, trapped in a narrative over which there is no control.¹⁷

Certainly this is one of the most disturbing things about dreaming. While pleasant reveries instantly evaporate upon our becoming conscious of them, nightmares often entwine us in snares, refusing to relinquish their hold on our sleeping mind. There is a thrill of excitement involved in an audio walk, which has to do with consciously relinquishing control, rather than having it arise unwillingly in sleep. This ceding of power is rendered even more potent by the fact that the viewer is wandering in another's

¹⁶D'Souza, 161.

¹⁷Kitty Scott cited in Christov-Bakargiev, "An Intimate Distance," 24.

dreams, rather than his or her own. One is therefore meddling in a landscape of desire which belongs to someone else, probing the memories and fantasies of another.

However, the dream-territory is not wholly unfamiliar. *Conspiracy Theory* presents with a physical geography many viewers will recognize, in the form of the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art and the Place Desjardins. During the course of the walk, these places become increasingly strange as one explores areas not usually wandered by museum visitors. The narrative reinforces the sense of dislocation, as it is revealed that these sites are somehow involved in a threatening web of surveillance, secrets, and murder. Further, the viewer might recognize several employees of the museum acting in the film - familiar faces playing roles completely alien to the smiling reception desk clerk from whom tickets were purchased, or the security guard passed on the stairs. This combination of elements, of the familiar suddenly becoming the uncanny, allows one to recognize the dream-process itself, even if it is at work in the mind of another.

Despite the undeniably active state of the body and mind when participating in an audio walk, there are also many aspects of the experience which might be described as passive. This has to do with the aforementioned relinquishing of control, but there are several specific ways in which Cardiff lulls her walker into this state of acceptance. Playing with a willingness to succumb to the charms of the virtual world created by technology, one is obliged to wear headphones and carry a camera, facilitating the absorption of the viewer into a parallel space of artificially-generated sights and sounds. In much the same way as one would react to watching a movie or listening to a portable CD player, these devices subdue the watcher or listener into a forgetfulness of

the outside world. Further, the particular genres the narrative borrows from - detective stories, film noir, science fiction - are those which demand that their audience suspend disbelief in order to follow the action. Associated with a desire for escapism, they hold the promise of transporting the viewer to far-off places if only he or she will let reality temporarily fall into oblivion. The quality of Cardiff's voice is another pacifier: deadpan, calm even when confronting particularly anxious situations, it is the tone one might imagine would be used by a hypnotist. It might also be described as seductive, bringing to mind yet another situation in which one is susceptible to the power of another.

However, the passivity of the situation created by Cardiff is hardly somnolent; rather, it is a state of constant stimulation and excitement. By negotiating a balance between a passive relinquishing of control and an extremely active mental and physical state of psychic and bodily movement, the audio walk comes very close to the particular active/passive dynamic of the dream. To watch a sleeping person is to be confronted with the very image of passivity, lying in a state of complete vulnerability. Further, the tendency to dismiss dreams condemns them to impotence, to the status of inept fantasies of the dormant mind. However, if one understands dreams to be the turbulent wrestling of buried desire with the censorship of the conscious mind, the dream is no longer the collection of empty visions it might appear to be. Instead, it is transformed into the veritable battleground of the unconscious with the rational, where the dreamer's deepest passions come to light.

One of the ways in which the dream might be construed as particularly active is in its power to render new planes of existence accessible. Not only the spaces around, but

the people who participate in the dream are laid bare. As discussed in the previous chapters, *Conspiracy Theory* grants the illusion of merging into the body and mind of another, allowing the possibility of temporarily and partially losing track of the self. One's body becomes alien, and the mind begins to think thoughts planted there by an outside source. Beyond cyborg technologies, however, Cardiff is also interested in the power of this much more elemental phenomenon. Without stretching things too far, one might call the dream the original virtual reality, for it has the capacity to open up new and fantastic vistas, allowing the viewer to imagine things far beyond his or her comforting circle. Interestingly, devices which make use of virtual reality technology, such as video games, often fall back upon dreams in order to explain the participant's presence in this altered field of existence. Cardiff harnesses this capacity not only for a metaphorical transportation from one world (the viewer's reality) to another (the reality of *Conspiracy Theory*) but for temporal wandering between past and present.

This merging of disparate spaces and times in the dream is illustrated by one particular event during the walk. It takes place in the main hall of the museum, as the participant stands in the centre of a large, open space, not far from the reception desk and the entrance. Cardiff says that an orphanage used to stand here, describing the worn wooden floors and the rows of beds. "One little boy opens his eyes," she recounts, "awakened by a dream of us standing here watching him." Much like the nightmare of having killed a man in a hotel room, this tangle of reality and the dreamworld is difficult for the viewer to negotiate. This little boy's dream reaches far beyond the limits of the world one might imagine for him, stretching into the future and allowing him a vision of

people (the viewer) not yet born. Adding to the confusion is the walker's newfound power to somehow see into the dreams of those dreaming him or her.

In this web of watching and dreaming, one is granted the supernatural power to penetrate the veils which separate past, present and future, as well as to gain access to the psychic landscapes of others. However, these visions are inextricably linked to what is happening at in the present moment. Knowing that one's presence in the museum has been anticipated in a dream enhances the urgency and sense of purpose with which the narrative is infused, and makes participation in the audio walk seem predestined. This segment ends with a male voice (George Bures-Miller) breathing in the participant's ear: "Wake up" he whispers urgently, as if one had been sleeping, bringing the viewer abruptly back to the time and place at hand. However, it is a world not unchanged by the knowledge acquired in this dream-like interlude. The ghost of the orphanage, fictional though it may be, haunts the present incarnation of the museum and changes the nature of the space itself.

"Where do we go when we remember?" Cardiff wonders, during the walk. "Is it the same place as when we dream?" Much like Pelkey's photographs, audio walks play with the porous nature of memory and dreaming, positing them as metaphorical sites to be visited. When Bures-Miller urges the viewer to wake up, he is calling them back from this place, as if one had temporarily absented him or herself from the conscious mind. The murder in the hotel room and the night time vision of the boy in the orphanage are presented as dreams, but have consequences in the here and now associated with memories, with events that have actually occurred. The audio walk itself, in an analogous

fashion, feels like a dream while it is experienced, due to the simultaneously enveloping and fragmented environment it creates, but is recalled afterwards as a memory. The importance accorded to dreams in Cardiff's narrative puts them on equal footing with the more trusted memory and allows them the capacity to effect changes in waking life that we automatically associate with the latter. Both processes, after all, are particularly vulnerable to falling into the pit of forgetfulness, another place Cardiff frequently visits, as elucidated in the previous chapter.

Freud spoke of forgetfulness as yet another barrier erected by the conscious mind in order to protect us from our desires. The result is fragmented dreams, those segments which would prove to be most revealing having been deleted.¹⁸ The disorienting quality of the audio walk is perhaps that which is most reminiscent of the dream: large sections of the narrative seem to be missing, as if those episodes which would cast light on the situation in which the viewer finds him or herself had been excised. Interestingly, however, this is where the agency of the individual viewer comes in. Just as one would struggle to reconstruct the entire substance of the dream, so the participant attempts to fill the gaps of Cardiff's seemingly forgotten narrative with his or her own imaginative material. Freud argues that supplying these suppressed elements is necessary to the correct interpretation of the dream, as they provide the most direct path to understanding the wishes of our unconscious mind.¹⁹ Analogously, by supplementing the repressed elements in Cardiff's piece with one's own imaginings, the viewer inserts his or her own

¹⁸Freud, 470.

¹⁹Freud, 475.

desires into the body of the work and the space itself. Bringing individual thoughts and stories to bear on *Conspiracy Theory* completes the experience by making the audio walk and, by extension, the physical and metaphorical space in which it takes place, one's own.

Perhaps most compelling about the audio walk in terms of dreaming, is the inability to "Wake up," no matter how fervently the male narrator urges. Even after it comes to an abrupt end, one continues to feel the effects of having wandered so deeply into the dreamscape of another. Throughout the walk, the barrier between the worlds of waking and dreaming is rendered increasingly pervious, until by the very end, it has all but disintegrated. The viewer can no longer simply "wake up" to the bland reality of the museum; rather, the experience of the walk continues to shape the space long after the headphones have been removed. Not only has the dreamworld into which Cardiff has initiated her walker somehow leaked into the waking world, but reality has subsequently become less real. Both the audio walk and the dream undermine one's trust in reality as they reveal the ease with which not only images, but entire worlds of sensual stimuli can be generated within the mind. The landscape Cardiff creates for her viewers is, by her own admission, "just electronic pulses of light." In a similar vein, Freud equates our capacity for mental visualization in dreams with the view through a telescope:

"Everything that can become an object of internal perception is *virtual*, like the image in the telescope produced by the crossing of light rays."²⁰ In both cases, the visions imagined, sleeping or waking, are equated with optical instruments, a camera and a

²⁰Freud, 541.

telescope, which supposedly show an enhanced form of reality. The exterior world of people, places and objects is reduced to an ephemeral veil of light bouncing off one's retina, every bit as virtual as those fragmented films which play in one's head every night.

At every twist in *Conspiracy Theory*, Cardiff reinforces the link between events which occur in dreams and those of everyday waking life. Whether the walk refers to specific real life consequences of dreams, such as a nightmare feeling of guilt which begins to pervade reality, or borrows their fragmented structure in order to encourage the viewer to project his or her own desires onto the space, dreams become a palpable force in the construction of one's surroundings. By allowing the dream world and so-called reality to merge with each other, Cardiff creates a scape which is endlessly manipulable, limited only by the desires which serve as the motivating force behind its construction. *Conspiracy Theory* reveals the power of dreams to shape one's present-day existence, and creates a temporary world in which the viewer's own wishes can be unleashed upon physical space.

Throughout my exploration of these artists' experimentations with the meaning and significance of the dream, I have employed Freud's analysis of the dream as scenarios in which wishes, albeit concealed ones, are fulfilled. I have found this to be a particularly fruitful avenue for examining the works above, positing as it does the capacity for desire hidden within the structure of the dream/work itself, in these cases a desire for a more subjectively motivated and emotionally resonant space. However, it is in Freud's understanding of desire itself that problems arise in terms of employing this framework to

shed light upon the works of these artists. By contrasting Freud's notion of wish-fulfilment with Gilles Deleuze's positing of desire as active, revolutionary force, I hope to illustrate how these works situate desire as a crucial element in the transformation of one's scape.

In the classic psychoanalytic paradigm, desire is motivated by lack - without this initial absence there is no reason to desire anything. We therefore only wish for that which we do not or cannot have. Of course some desires can be easily and harmlessly satiated, but once they have been satisfied they no longer exist. Many wishes, however, have their source in the unconscious, such as those we glimpse through the dream. Much like the unconscious itself, these desires must not be realized in waking life as they would destabilize the smooth functioning of civilization. A boy's oedipal desire for his mother, for example, cannot be fulfilled without seriously compromising those ideals by which western society tends to live. Desired objects are thus situated outside the body, separate from ourselves, and are characterized by distance and unattainability.

Evidently, if we employ this concept of desire in relation to the works explored above we are faced with a very problematic situation, for in them I have sought to demonstrate the ways in which desire is not a secret unconscious longing to be repressed, but a dynamic tool for re-imagining the world around us. Whether it is channelled into architecture, as is the case with Bond's surreal dreamscapes, concealed behind Pelkey's banal landscapes and memories of suffering, or dwells in the gaps of a fractured world created by Cardiff, desire becomes an active force in determining the shape of the spaces we inhabit. It is to be cultivated when it appears, rather than being thrust violently back

into the depths of the unconscious from whence it came.

We find just such an active, constructive definition of desire in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Positioning themselves at the furthest point in the spectrum from Freud, Deleuze, along with Felix Guattari, vehemently critiques the beliefs and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis.²¹ Of course, this thinker had very different ideals in mind than Freud, yearning for the very social upheaval the latter feared would arise should the desires of the unconscious be given free reign. Deleuze troubles the very notion of the unconscious, arguing that it is, much like space itself, constantly being produced rather than a collection of hereditary instincts and urges: “The unconscious is a substance to be manufactured, to get flowing - a social and political space to be conquered.”²² This suggests that desire is neither inherent nor harmful, but individually determined. Psychoanalysis robs desire of its revolutionary potency by absorbing it into the larger category of deviance, when it should be cultivated as an active tool for destroying habit and re-affirming possibility and potentiality.

As discussed in the first chapter, Deleuze and Guattari re-conceived the body as a loose collection of molecules, simultaneously undermining the humanist notion of the Self and the Individual, and granting us the power to “become”, to experience the affects

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See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977), and Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, “Dead Psychoanalysis: Analyse,” *Dialogues II*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

²²Deleuze, *Dialogues*, 78.

of and merge with other beings. In this paradigm, the very purpose of being is to establish connections with other bodies, to experiment with infinite modes of “becoming” in order to ensure that one remains in an eternal state of flux. The alternative, they argue, is a calcification into a petrified state, living according to the rules of suppression and habit. Desire is the force that renders these connections possible, no longer reduced to an inner, private preoccupation, but an active process of transformation of the world around us. It is what enables us to envision realities never previously considered, to imagine ways of being completely divorced from our present form of existence. Of course, lack still exists, but it calls attention to the presence, the positivity of desire, rather than desire acting as a troubling reminder of persistent absence.²³

Interestingly, Deleuze retains Freud’s notion of wish-fulfilment as the basis for desire, but re-imagines these wishes as being constantly produced rather than embedded in the depths of our unconscious. Further, the production of these wishes is based on the everyday surroundings in which we find ourselves, and our desire for changes to this schema. The process of desire takes place on what Deleuze calls the plane of consistency: it is the stratum upon which individuality succumbs to “becoming”, upon which wishes are conceived and constructed.²⁴ What this means is that “[d]esire is therefore not internal to a subject, any more than it tends toward an object: it is strictly

²³Deleuze, *Dialogues*, 91.

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Brian Massumi, *A user’s guide to capitalism and schizophrenia: deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 84.

immanent to a plane which it does not pre-exist, to a plane which must be constructed, where particles are emitted and fluxes combine.”²⁵

The surrealistic scapes imagined and realized by Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff represent the creation of such planes of consistence, scapes infused with a revolutionary desire for change and transformation. Further, this force cannot be located in an individual consciousness but is a product of a merging of maker, work and viewer. The artist is not simply adding her own subjective interpretation to the space depicted, but initiates a flow of desire which is apprehended by the viewer, changing forever the scape inhabited. Spaces drop their veil of permanence and molarity, revealing their capacity to “become” something completely different by means of the desire which plays freely upon them. So Rotterdam becomes a futuristic fantasy of colour and light, and Roy Orbison is resurrected in the waters of a Concert Park; power lines trigger the smell of burned flesh, and Whiskey Willie dies in a nightmare fall from a tree; museums are threatening temples of surveillance crawling with secret agents. The keystone of all these works is an active desire for transformation embedded in the spaces themselves by the artist, then not only apprehended by, but awoken in, the viewer. This in turn instigates the production of even more wishes as the viewer becomes acquainted with the possibilities of the space.

Throughout this chapter I have returned frequently to the notion of individual agency, a concept with which I feel these works are preoccupied. By borrowing elements from the dream, such as fragmentation, displaced affect, and a futuristic emphasis, these artists downplay the dominance of our current reality and awaken the viewer to the

²⁵Deleuze, *Dialogues*, 89.

possibility of participating in the active creation of his or her surroundings. But what happens to individual agency in a Deleuzian world where the individual as we know it no longer exists? In fact, Deleuze does not do away completely with the notion of individuality, he is merely opposed to that humanistic concept of the self in which one's physical and psychic boundaries are firmly delineated, a detached brain navigating the world from the protective sheath of the body. In this condition, we are forever isolated within ourselves, irrevocably separated from the world we inhabit and those around us. By contrast, Deleuze posits the notion of the supple individual, the product of encounters between other subject positions and his or her own. Instead of the individual as finished product, one is constantly in process, his or her particles never quite calcifying into a sedimented structure. The result is not a decreased capacity for agency, but the possibility of imagining and enacting forms of agency never before conceived: "It has tapped the creative turbulence of its pool of virtuality. It is capable of free action...Indeterminacy has arisen out of determinacy, freedom out of the constraint of law."²⁶ Through encounters with others, we expand our capacity to "become" almost infinitely, transforming not only ourselves, but the world we inhabit.

Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff make use of several elements of the dream in their works, tapping into its virtually timeless significance as the screen upon which desires of the past, present and future are enacted. While borrowing the Freudian notion of dreams as elaborate plays which simultaneously illustrate and disguise the fulfilment of wishes,

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Brian Massumi, *A user's guide to capitalism and schizophrenia: deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 63.

these works posit desire not as a lack to be either satisfied or repressed, but as a constructive force, transforming our ordinary, everyday surroundings into the mythical and bizarre. The limits of both the body and reality are rendered porous, as the once inner world of emotion, affect and desire invades the exterior, public territory of cities and suburbs, even penetrating to the deepest corridors of the museum. While the fantastic visions of our dreams become realizable, the steadfast permanence of the outside world is reduced to a criss-crossing of light rays in our mind's eye. Notions of progress, efficiency and order cease to regulate the transformation of the space in these works, as desire takes over, producing new scapes, new ways of being. Although they temporarily envelop the viewer in a dreamscape, these works simultaneously awaken us to the potentiality embedded in our own ordinary environments. We come away from them as we might throw off the covers in the morning, our vision of the world profoundly altered. As self bleeds into other, imagination into reality, and dreaming into waking, desire becomes the motive force in the construction of our dreamscapes, allowing us to create a space which reverberates with the echoes of wishes being fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, Canadian landscape art has been motivated by the feeling of being surrounded by a terrible and beautiful but empty wilderness. Returning to where we began, with the paintings of Thomas Davies and the Group of Seven, the recurring visual phenomenon of tiny human figures either being swallowed up by the surrounding landscape, or absent from it altogether, reinforces the overwhelming size and grandeur of nature in this young, and still largely unsettled, country. Several theorists, such as Northrop Frye and Gaile MacGregor, have discussed the prevalence of themes of isolated communities battling against the unforgiving climate and lonely vastness in Canadian literature, and our traditional landscape art is no exception.¹ The works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff, however, represent a crucial intervention in this trend, through their combined insistence on individual agency and the transformational power, both physical and metaphorical, of the scape.

When I began researching the artists explored in this thesis, I was struck by the fact that they were all based in the Prairies, one in each province respectively: Bond in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Pelkey in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Cardiff in Lethbridge, Alberta. At first I dismissed this discovery as simple coincidence; but then, preoccupied as I was by discussions of space and scapes, I began to wonder about the experience of

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See Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada," *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), 220-221, and Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

living in the Prairies, and how it might affect the art one would be inclined to make.

With the exception of the North, the Prairies are undoubtedly considered to be the emptiest of North American landscapes. Photographs and paintings, as well as literary descriptions of these spaces, seem inevitably to emphasize the endless flat plains rippling into the distance, only to be met by the equally fathomless sky. Houses, farms, and streets seem minuscule, as all human constructions are dwarfed by this overwhelming expanse, captured in works such as Janet Mitchell's *Threshing Crew Quarters* (1948) (fig. 56) and Illingworth Kerr's *Prairie Skies* (1973) (fig.57). With their vicious winds, bitter winters, and susceptibility to droughts, the Prairies are often conceptualized as a particularly hostile and lonely place to live, in a country renowned for its unwelcoming and foreboding climate and landscape. As described by writer Wallace Stegner, the prairie is a land "notable primarily for its weather, which is violent and prolonged; its emptiness, which is almost frighteningly total; and its wind, which blows all the time in a way to stiffen your hair and rattle the eyes in your head."² Early visitors to this landscape, explorers and surveyors, arranged bleached buffalo bones in significant shapes, an attempt to create "landmarks in a region that seemed - at least to Europeans - to be without them."³

Alien as it was to settlers, artists initially found it difficult to depict the Prairies, to

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Cited in Robert Thacker, "Introduction: The Great Fact Was the Land Itself," *The Great Prairie Fact and the Literary Imagination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 1.

³Thacker, 2.

be pictorially faithful to the endless horizon and interminable flatness, captured in the photographs of early surveyors such as Humphrey Lloyd Hime (figs. 58, 59). As a result, they often retreated to those areas of the provinces which offered rolling hills, such as Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley, or focussed on rivers or wildflowers.⁴ The tendency to romanticize and idealize, to coerce the Canadian landscape to conform to European ideals of the picturesque, persisted in the Prairies long after the Group of Seven had made these principles obsolete in the rest of the country, illustrated in works by Augustus Kenderdine (1870-1947) (fig. 60) and James Henderson (1871-1951) (fig. 61). Gradually, with the spread of Impressionism and the popularity of *plein air* painting, artists like Charles W. Jefferys (1869-1951) (fig. 62) and Robert Hurley (1894-1980) (fig. 63) began to capture the stark brightness of Prairie light, and the particular qualities of its vegetation. The latter, though labelling the landscape "an abomination of desolation," was one of the first artists to integrate the now familiar iconography of the plains into his paintings - "a flat, empty foreground backed by a town silhouetted against an expansive sky."⁵

Interestingly, experimentation with this pictorial schema continued throughout the twentieth century, existing alongside other movements such as abstract expressionism, for which artists of the area, such as Otto Rogers (b. 1935) (fig. 64) and Douglas Morton (b.

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Ronald Rees, "Itinerant Artists," *Images of the Prairie* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1979), n.p.

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Ronald Rees, "A Native Vision," *Images of the Prairie* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1979), n.p.

1926) (fig. 65), were renowned.⁶ Several art historians have postulated that the Prairie landscape was especially suited to being depicted in an abstract style, stripped down, as it were, to the bare essentials of land and sky.⁷ These seemingly antipodal pictorial sensibilities could in fact be regarded as complementary. Nor has the insistence on the vast emptiness and isolation of the Prairie faded with the advent of postmodernism: works by Ken Christopher (b. 1942) (fig. 66), Terry Fenton (b. 1940) (fig. 67) and John McKee (b. 1941) (fig. 68) attest to the endurance of this visual and literary framework.

Of course, the notion of Canada being an empty wilderness is largely mythical, fabricated to benefit everyone from the first colonizers, desirous to erase the presence of First Nations people and their marks of ownership from the land, to the environmentally-destructive hydro-electric, logging, and mining corporations at work today. Our culture persistently reflects this legendary emptiness. The Group of Seven in particular by, as Paul Walton writes, “fashioning heroic or transcendental images” of unpopulated, “natural” landscapes, created an “art expressing the national and spiritual aspirations of a culture based on resource extraction.”⁸

And yet, nowhere in the works of Bond, Pelkey or Cardiff - artists inhabiting this

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For more information on abstract expressionist artists working in the Prairies, as well as a general survey of Prairie art in the latter half of the twentieth century, see Christopher Varley, *Winnipeg West: Painting and Sculpture in Western Canada, 1945-1970* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1983).

⁷Rees, “A Native Vision,” n.p.

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Paul Walton, “The Group of Seven and Northern Development,” *RACAR* 17, no. 2 (1990): 176.

most vacant of landscapes - can we find tracts of untouched wilderness. At every turn, one is confronted with fertility centres, homes for the aged, telephone booths, pastures, bustling museums and shopping plazas. By crowding the spaces with which they engage with signs of human presence, the works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff refuse to maintain the myth of empty landscape. Nor are they alone among their contemporaries: maintaining what Joan Borsa terms a “prairie base” in their work, artists such as Aganetha Dyck and Jeff Funnell borrow the Plains’ history and traditional ways of life in order to experiment with postmodernist principles, such as deconstructing and questioning master narratives, in a way that reflects their particular experiences growing up in this landscape.⁹ Dyck’s piece, *The Large Cupboard* (1983-84) (fig. 69) takes its inspiration from the frenzy of canning and preserving that would take place every fall in the homes of settlers, but instead of jams and chutneys, the viewer is presented with such delicacies as picked buttons and other domestic objects. The piece becomes a comment on the perceived frivolousness of women’s labour and the anachronistic nature of the practice of preserving in our present capitalist condition, where virtually everything is readily available, regardless of the season. Also engaging with Prairie events, Funnell re-interprets the Red River Rebellion (1869) in a comic-like style with *The Riel Series* (1983-85) (fig. 70). Here, the viewer is incited to “go beyond the myths and facts that surround Riel” in order to re-assess this tragic episode.¹⁰ This new generation of Prairie

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Joan Borsa, “Introduction,” *Another Prairies* (Toronto: The Art Gallery at Harbourfront, 1986), 3.

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Joan Borsa, “Jeff Funnell,” *Another Prairies* (Toronto: The Art Gallery at Harbourfront,

artists, brought together in Borsa's exhibition, *Another Prairies* (1986), in which Bond was also included, provide a counterpoint to the vacant wilderness refrain, allowing us to hear the voices of those who inhabit this space and insist upon its being actively shaped by human actions.

On a deeper level, however, these works intervene in this myth by eroding the barrier between nature and culture, revealing that even the most banal and seemingly vacant of spaces is shaped by layers of human occupation, both physical and metaphorical. These layers constitute the scape, that elusive quality of meaning and significance which clings to our surroundings, changing the way in which they are perceived and lived. From Bond's farmer-run cappuccino bars clinging to the edges of islands, to Pelkey's ghostly tree, and Cardiff's threatening parking garage, these works make the subjective shaping of one's surroundings tangible, and insist upon the metaphorical fullness of the space, crowded with bodies, stories and dreams.

Another facet of the myth of emptiness is the land's imperviousness to change and human intervention. A field left unplowed is gradually encroached upon and finally swallowed up by forest, while abandoned wooden shacks succumb to the levelling powers of wind, rain and pests. Having lived in the Prairies, the artists themselves could not have escaped hearing stories of dust invading and burying entire households during periods like the infamous Dust Bowl of the 1930s, an experience perhaps best captured by Sinclair Ross:

It's been nearly dark today with dust. Everything's gritty, making you shiver and

1986), 10.

setting your teeth on edge. There's a crunch on the floor like sugar when you walk. We keep the doors and windows closed and still it works in everywhere....The air is so dry and choking with it that every few minutes a kind of panic seizes you, and you have the impulse to thrash out against it with your hands.¹¹

Nature becomes a hostile force, eradicating the marks of human inhabitation. However, much like the myth of vacant wilderness, this idea is largely disproved by the current list of environmental disasters, rendering the human presence in the world in which we live all too palpable.

Whether by exploring the multiple permutations of corporeality afforded by the act of "becoming", the significance of stories and narrative in the creation of a poetic geography, or the use of dreams as a tool for re-imagining one's surroundings, the works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff reinforce the ability to shape and mould environments. Desire, re-conceptualized as an active, constructive force, becomes the key determinant in the creation of scapes, and takes multiple forms: to help the abandoned and disenfranchised, as in Bond's fantastic complexes, to inhabit an emotionally resonant space which echoes our memories and dreams, like Pelkey's eerie suburban scenes, or to escape into an uncanny world of science fiction and *film noir*, such as that created by Cardiff. Having moved beyond the limits of the idea of the isolated, empty Canadian Prairie, Bond, Pelkey, and Cardiff's works, careers and imaginations have assumed a global perspective. Their *scapes* represent not the vacant wilderness of traditional

¹¹Ross, 62.

literature and painting, but is informed by an internationalism, a recognition of numerous spaces and cultures, the intersection of a multiplicity of texts and ideas.

As much as these pieces are about creating worlds, however, they are, as art works, more of a commentary on our own. And this is perhaps where their emphasis on individual agency in the construction of *scaped* spaces is most keenly apprehended. While looking at these works again and again during the course of my research and writing, I began to notice that they all made use of a form of screen. Bond's detailed landscapes, rather than offering themselves up for minute dissection when examined closely, dissolve into a colourful haze (see fig. 71). As a child, I remember approaching a television screen in order to examine certain details, only to find that the screen was in fact a confusion of pixels; my experience with Bond's work was similar, only with paint replacing pixels. In Pelkey's photographs, the screen is more easily perceived, coming close to a theatrical scrim, as each photograph is divided into two or three sections, each slightly shifted so that it does not correlate with that adjacent to it. This visual manoeuvre disrupts the illusion of depth and returns the viewer's eye to the surface of the image. Finally, *Conspiracy Theory* makes use of an actual camera screen, layering the space we inhabit with a filmed reality. An entire world is reduced to a tiny membrane held in our palm. In each case, the viewer comes up against this screen and is abruptly confronted with the status of these worlds as representations, as works of art. In so doing, one becomes aware of the artist's own agency in the manipulation of these spaces and, by extension, his or her own capacity to reveal the frightening, the mystical, and the magical hiding behind the veil of the everyday.

In an analogous fashion, scapes also constitute a kind of screen upon which we project our longings for the world we inhabit: whether concrete or of the imagination, scapes disavow the emptiness and indifference of our environments. Much like the artists explored in this thesis, scapes allow us the opportunity to exercise agency, to allow our own desires free reign, in the shaping of our environments. Eroding the boundary between the perceived and the lived, imagination and reality, interior and exterior, private and public, the seer and the scene, the scape, as elucidated by and revealed in the works of Bond, Pelkey and Cardiff, allows us to make, if only in an ephemeral way, the world our own.

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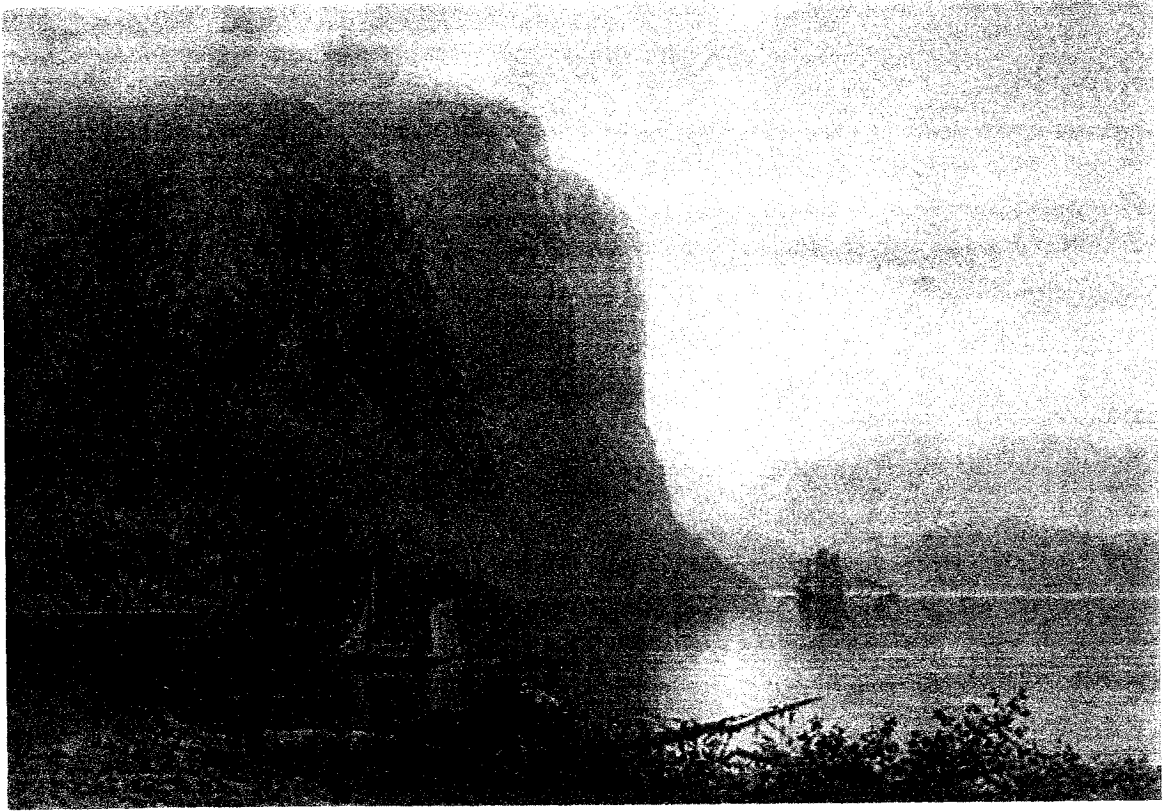


Fig. 1 Lucius O'Brien, *Sunrise on the Saguenay*, 1880

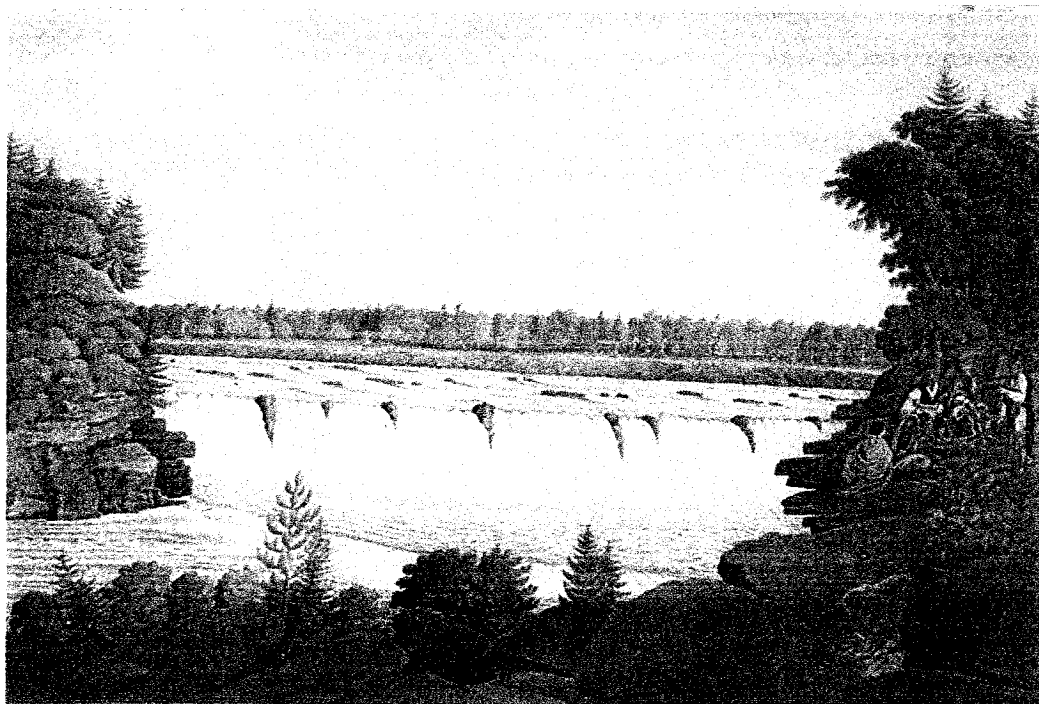


Fig. 2 Thomas Davies, *View of the Great Falls on the Ottawa River, Lower Canada, 1791*

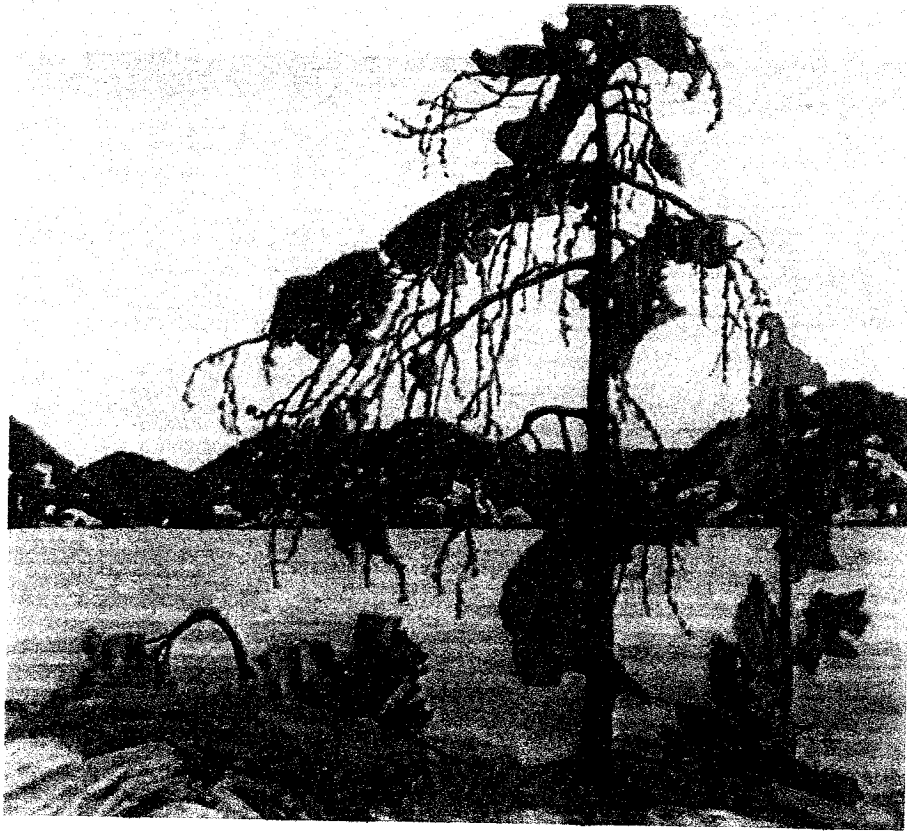


Fig. 3 Tom Thomson, *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17



Fig. 4 Lawren Harris, *Clouds, Lake Superior*, c.1923



Fig. 5 Michael Snow, *La Région Centrale* (production photo), 1971



Fig. 6 Edward Burtynsky, *Railcuts #1, C. N. Track, Skihist Provincial Park, British Columbia, 1985*



Fig. 7 Edward Burtynsky, *Nickel Tailings #31, Sudbury, Ontario* (left panel), 1996



Fig. 8 Edward Burtynsky, *Densified Tin Cans #2*, Hamilton, Ontario, 1999

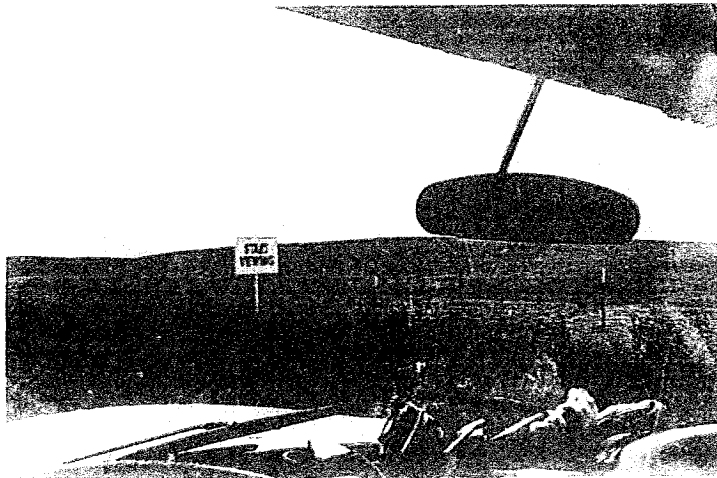
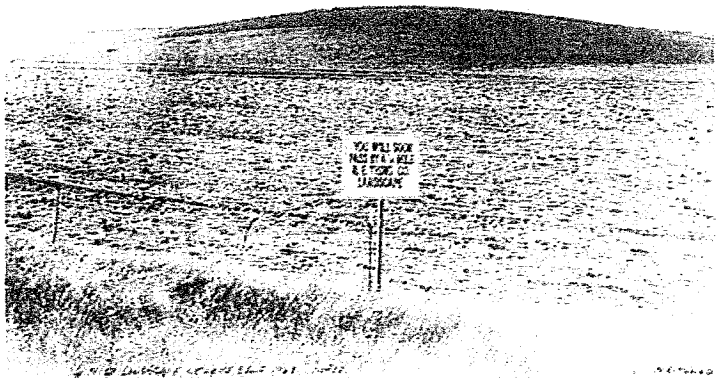


Fig. 9 N. E. Thing Co., *1/4 Mile Landscape*, 1968



Fig. 10 N. E. Thing Co., *One Mile Ski Line Track*, 1968



Fig. 11 N. E. Thing Co., *P-Line Straight*, 1968

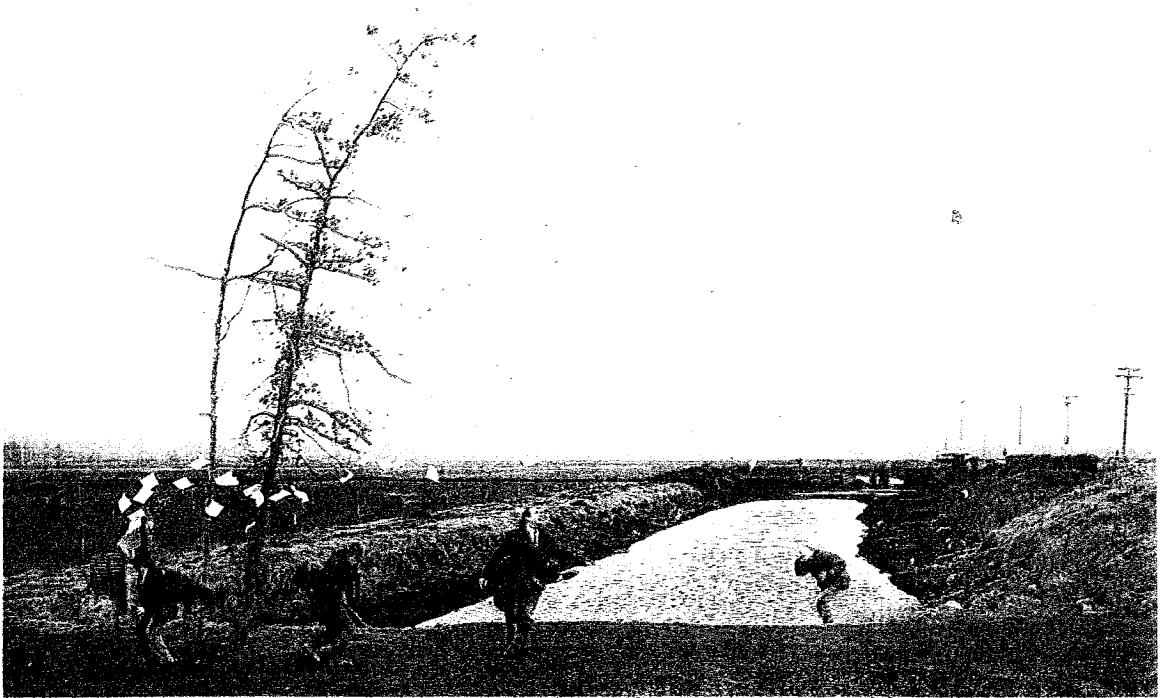


Fig. 12 Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, 1993

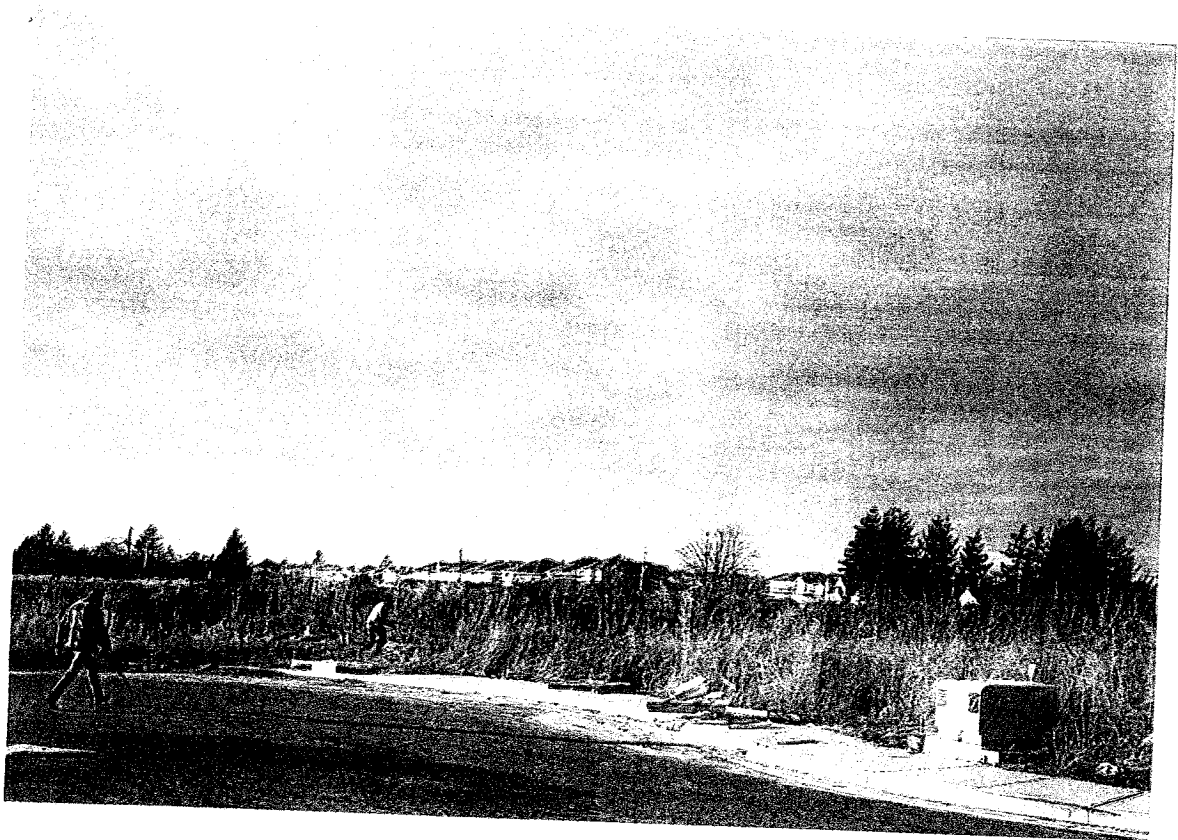


Fig. 13 Jeff Wall, *A Hunting Scene*, 1994

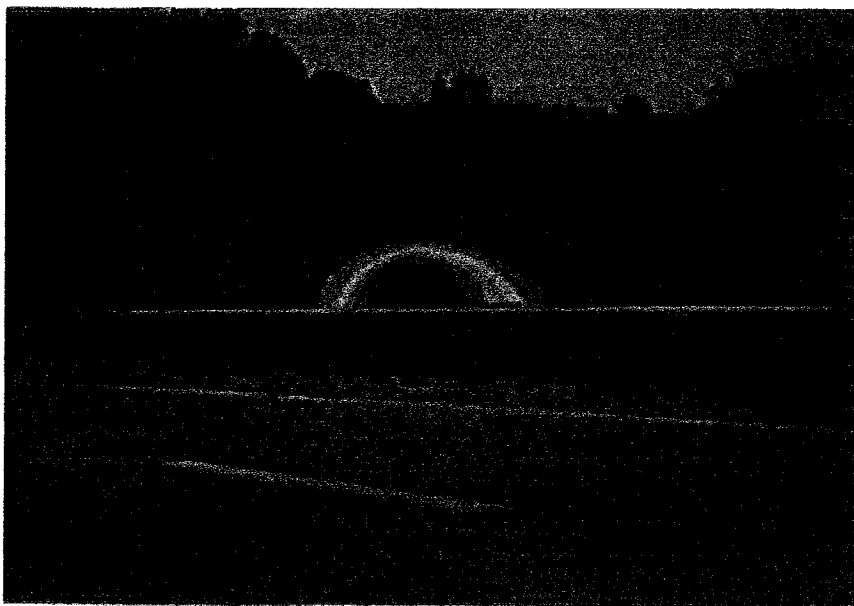


Fig.14 Peter Doig, *Country Rock*, 2001

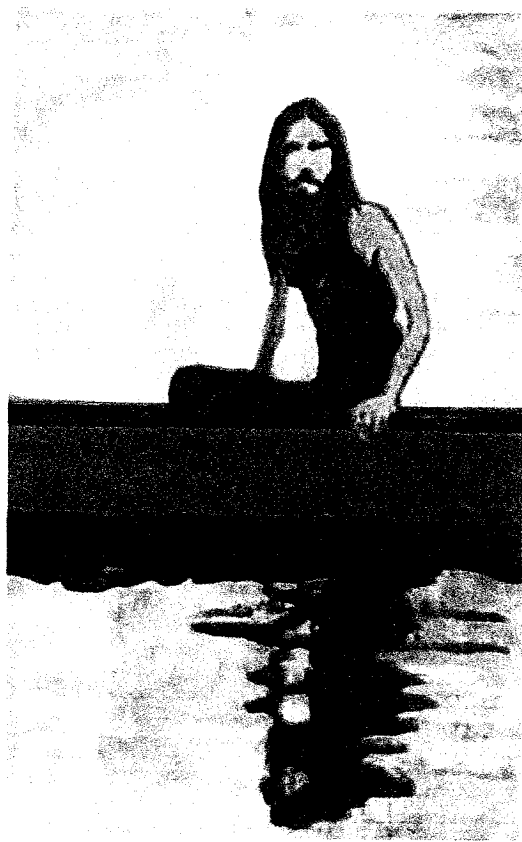


Fig. 15 Peter Doig, *100 Years Ago*, 2001



Fig. 16 Peter Doig, *Big Sur*, 2001



Fig. 17 Joyce Wieland, *Nature Mixes*, 1963

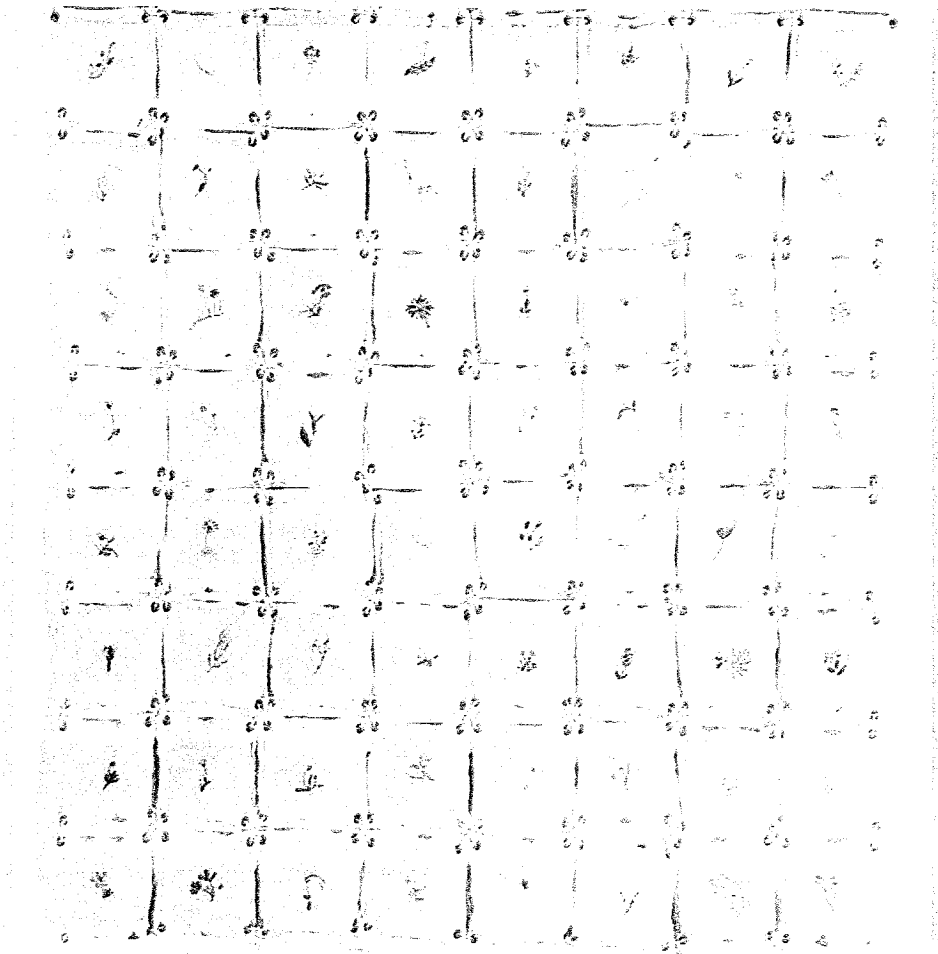


Fig. 18 Joyce Wieland, *The Water Quilt*, 1970-71

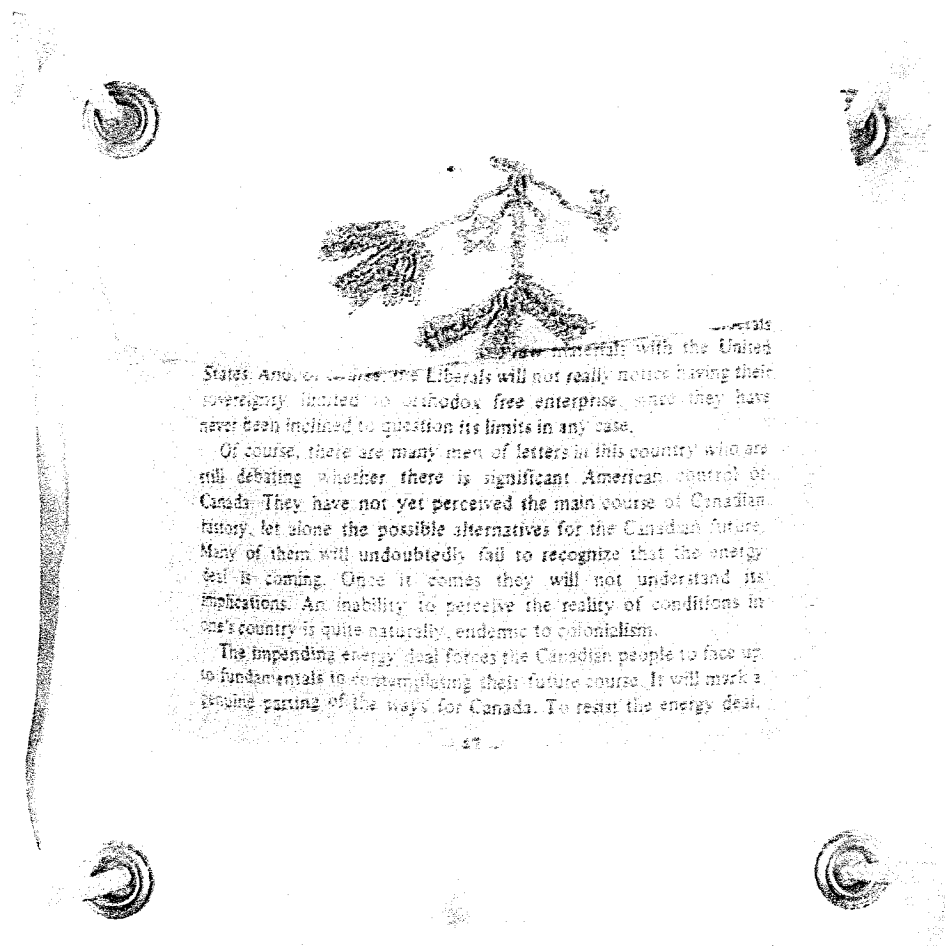


Fig. 19 Joyce Wieland, *The Water Quilt* (detail), 1970-71

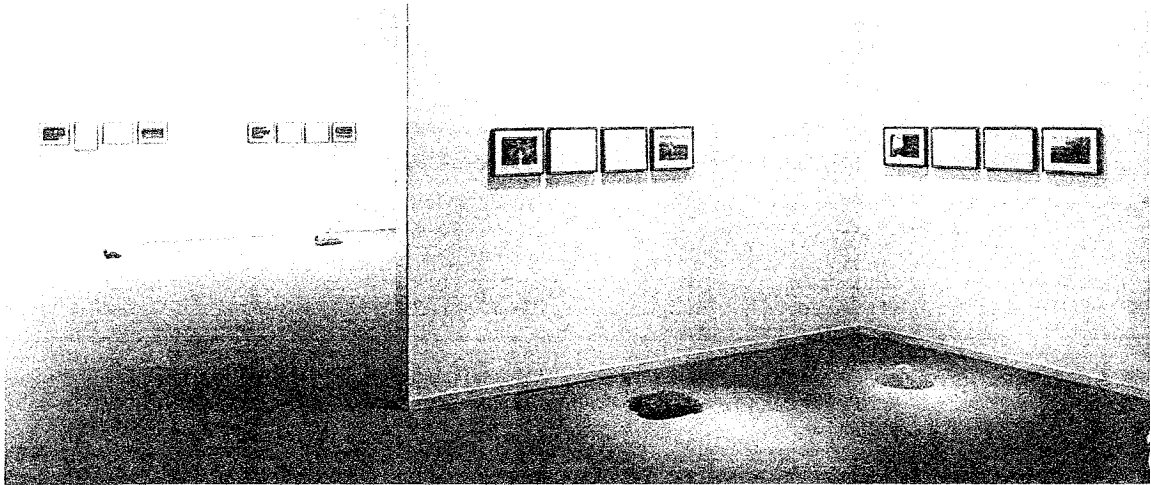


Fig. 20 Marlene Creates, *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories* (installation view), 1988

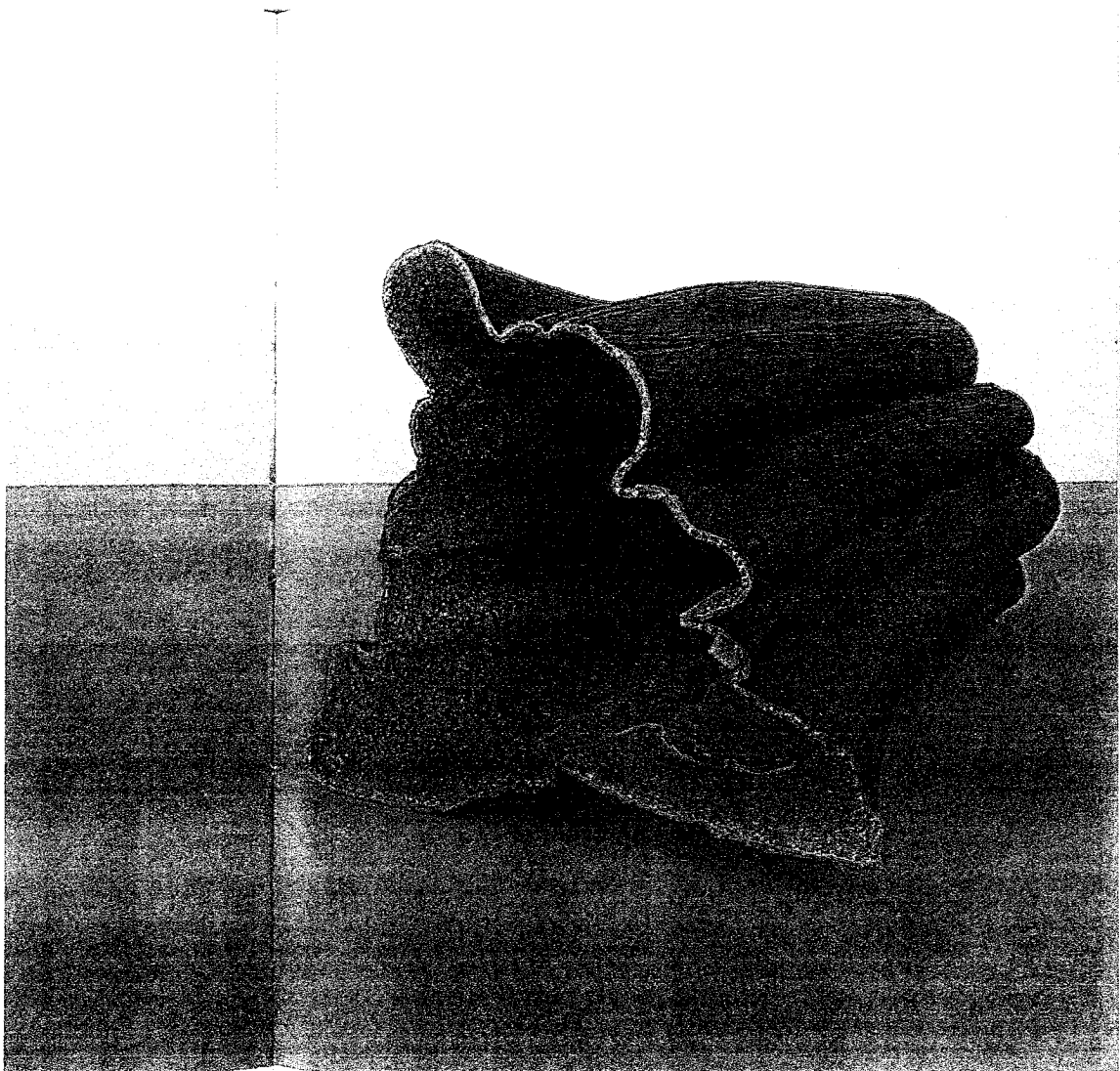


Fig. 21 Liz Magor, *Hollow*, 1998-99

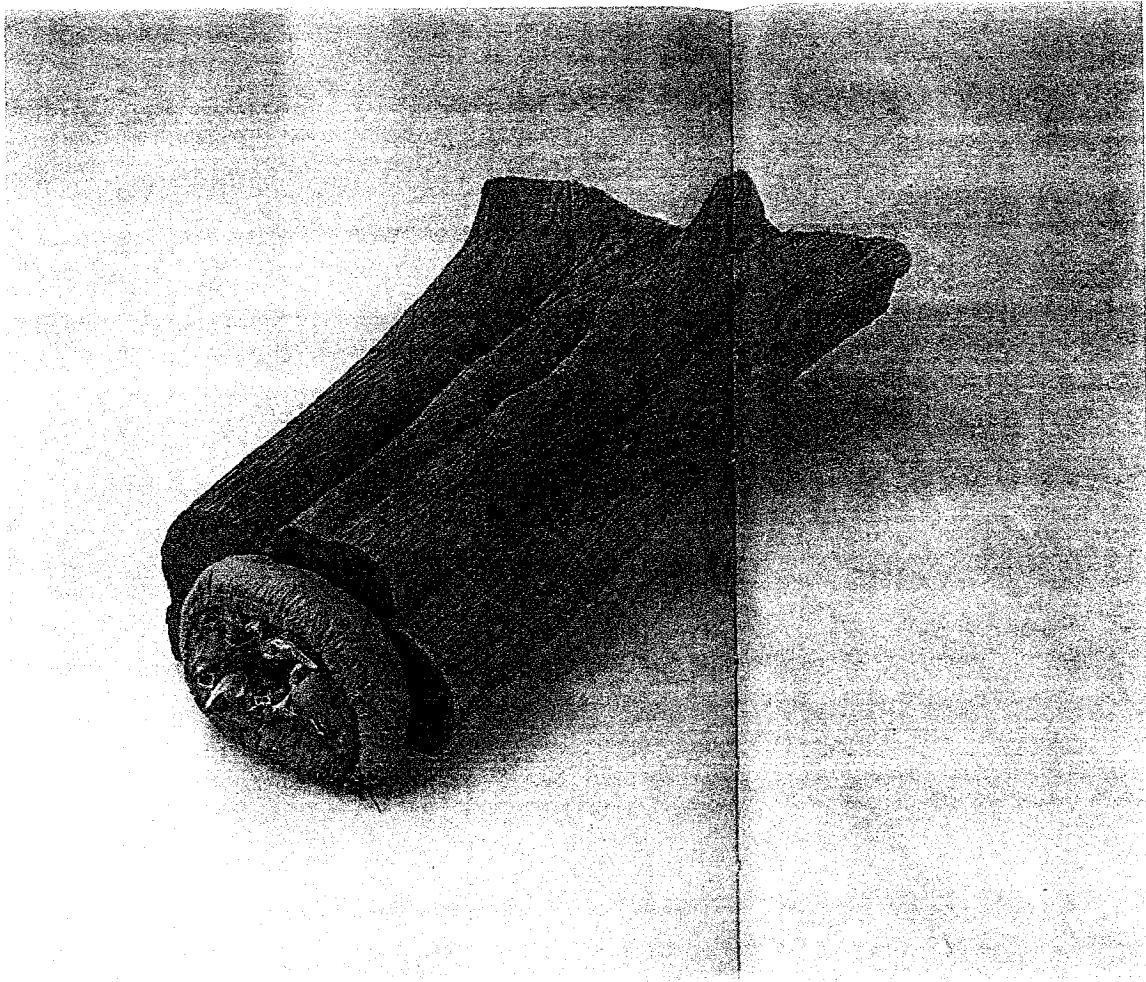


Fig. 22 Liz Magor, *Burrow*, 1999



Fig. 23 Jin-Me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (detail), 1996



Fig. 24 Rebecca Belmore, *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother* (installation view), 1991-92



Fig. 25 Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818



Fig. 26 Eleanor Bond, *The Centre for Fertility and Ecology is Subsidized by Visitors to the Waterslide Area*, 1991



Fig. 27 Eleanor Bond, *Central Park at Spiral Lake Offers Many Forms of Heath Care*, 1991



Fig. 28 Eleanor Bond, *Wisdom Lake is the Site of the Elders'*
Park and Communications Centre, 1991



Fig. 29 René Magritte, *La Condition humaine*, 1933



Fig. 30 Eleanor Bond, *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population*, 1997



Fig. 31 Eleanor Bond. *On the Maasvlakte Extension, Rotterdam Establishes a Satellite Colony Which Functions as a Prosthetic Eye and Arm, Enclosing the International Activity of Europoort within the Sight and Embrace of the City*, 1995

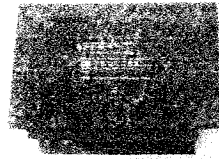


Fig. 32 Brenda Pelkey, *field*, 1994



Fig. 33 Brenda Pelkey, *field text panel*, 1994

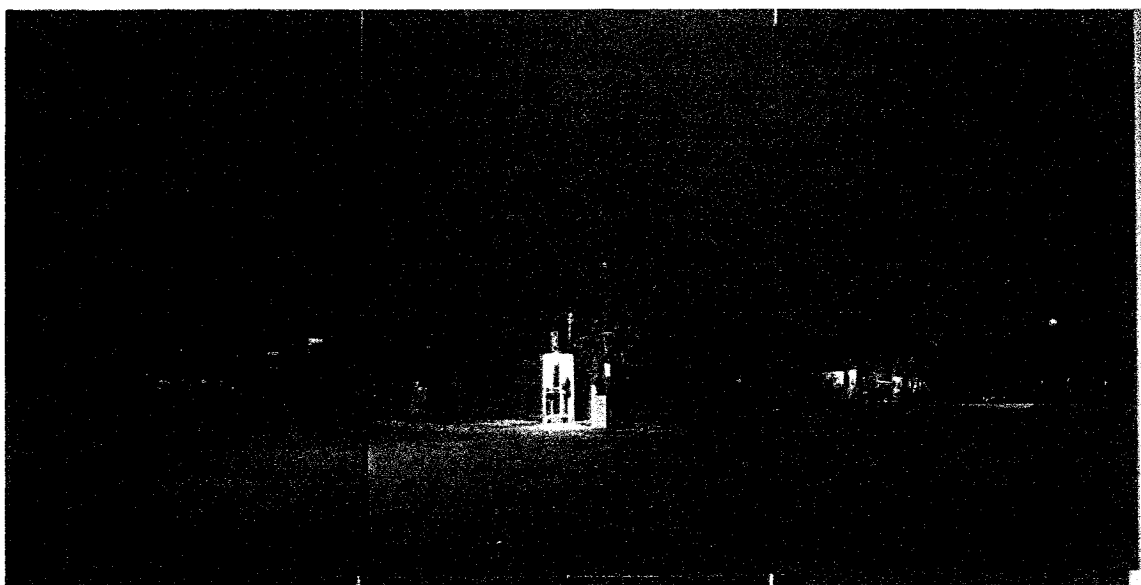


Fig. 34 Brenda Pelkey, *telephone booth*, 1994

No one knew why he killed himself. He was engaged to be married and just built a house.

He borrowed a gun from his cousin.

Two weeks previously he had invited me in to see his new house. I had admired the kitchen taps and seen the bedroom where he later died.

When we had dated briefly he told me that he would not live beyond thirty. I thought perhaps he had been too influenced by "the movies".

He loved to honk his horn when driving by telephone booths. He told me that the person could be talking to someone in Ontario and that then his truck horn would be heard in Toronto.

Fig. 35 Brenda Pelkey, *telephone booth text panel*, 1994

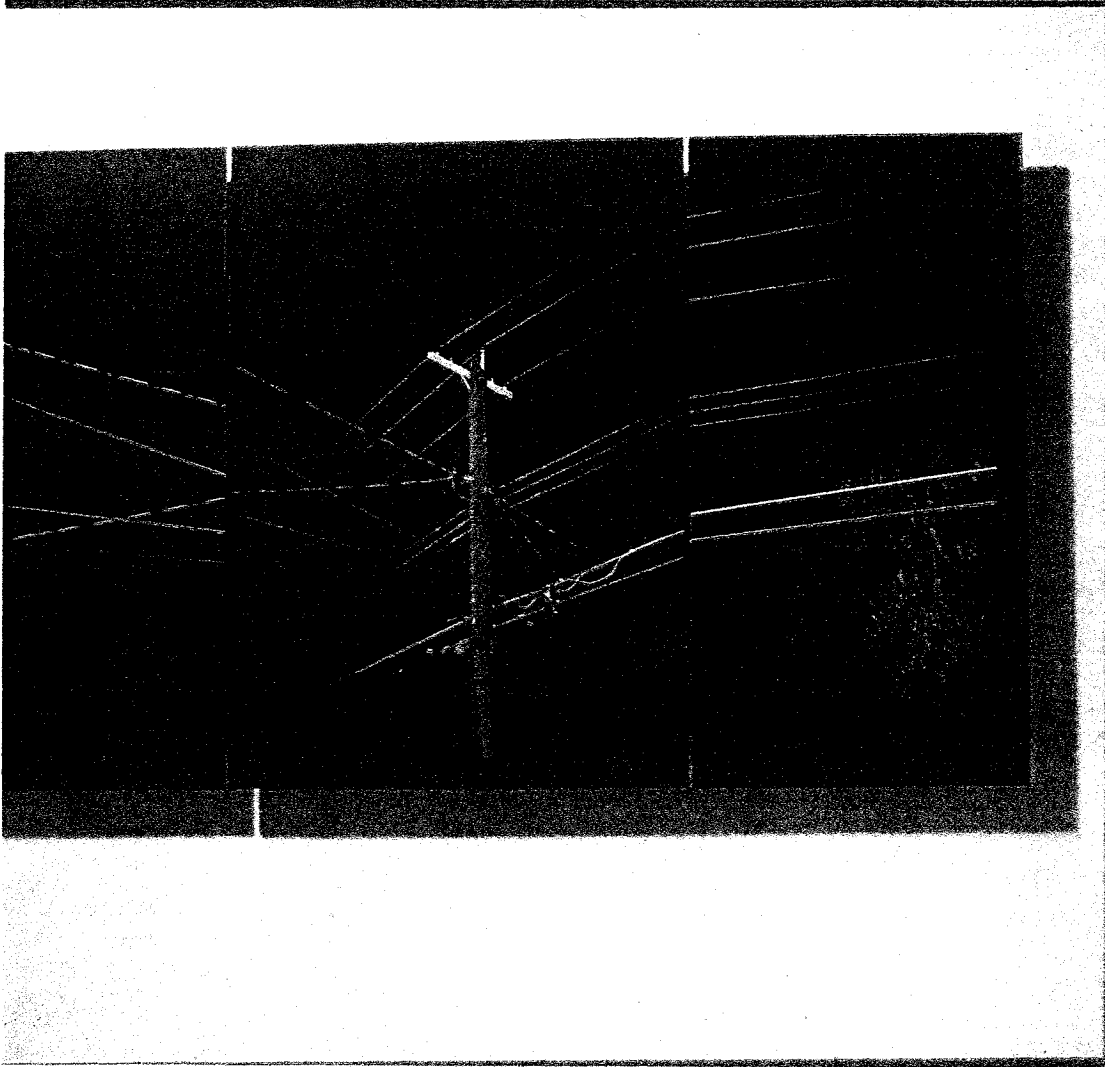


Fig. 36 Brenda Pelkey, *pole*, 1994

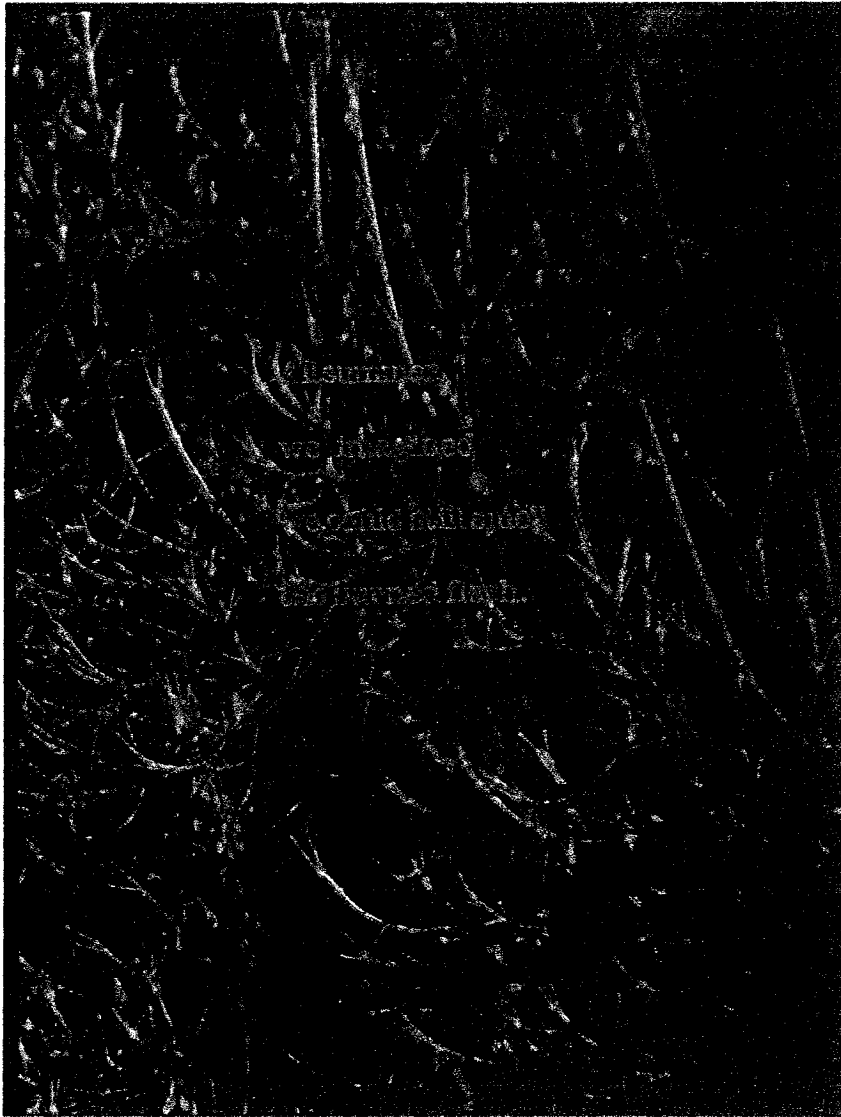


Fig. 37 Brenda Pelkey, *pole text panel*, 1994

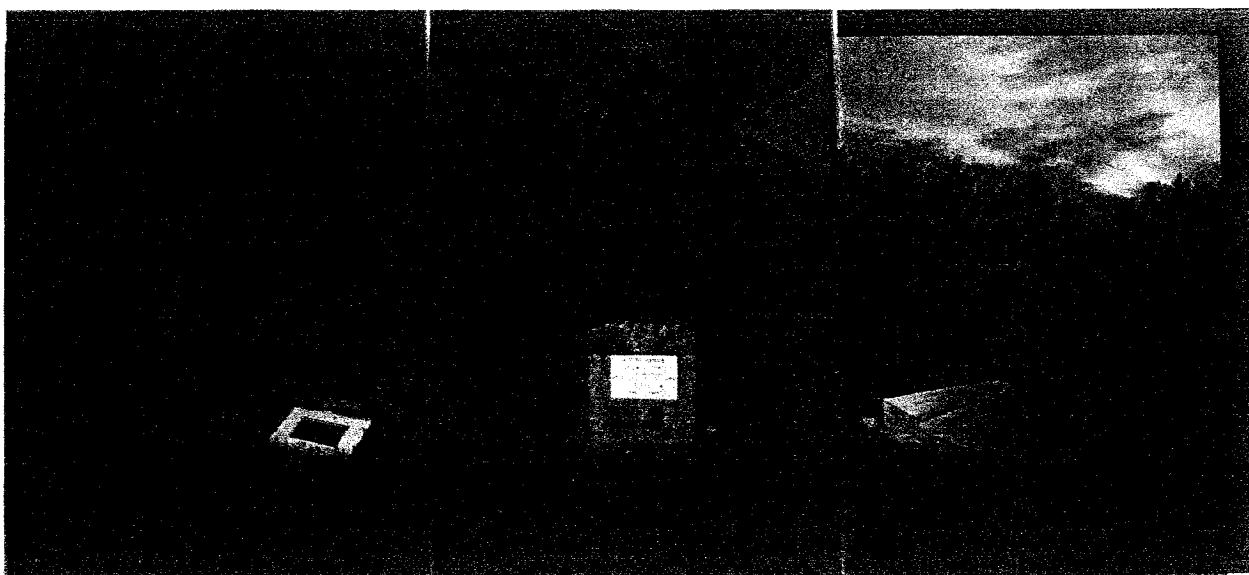


Fig. 38 Brenda Pelkey, *grave yard*, 1994

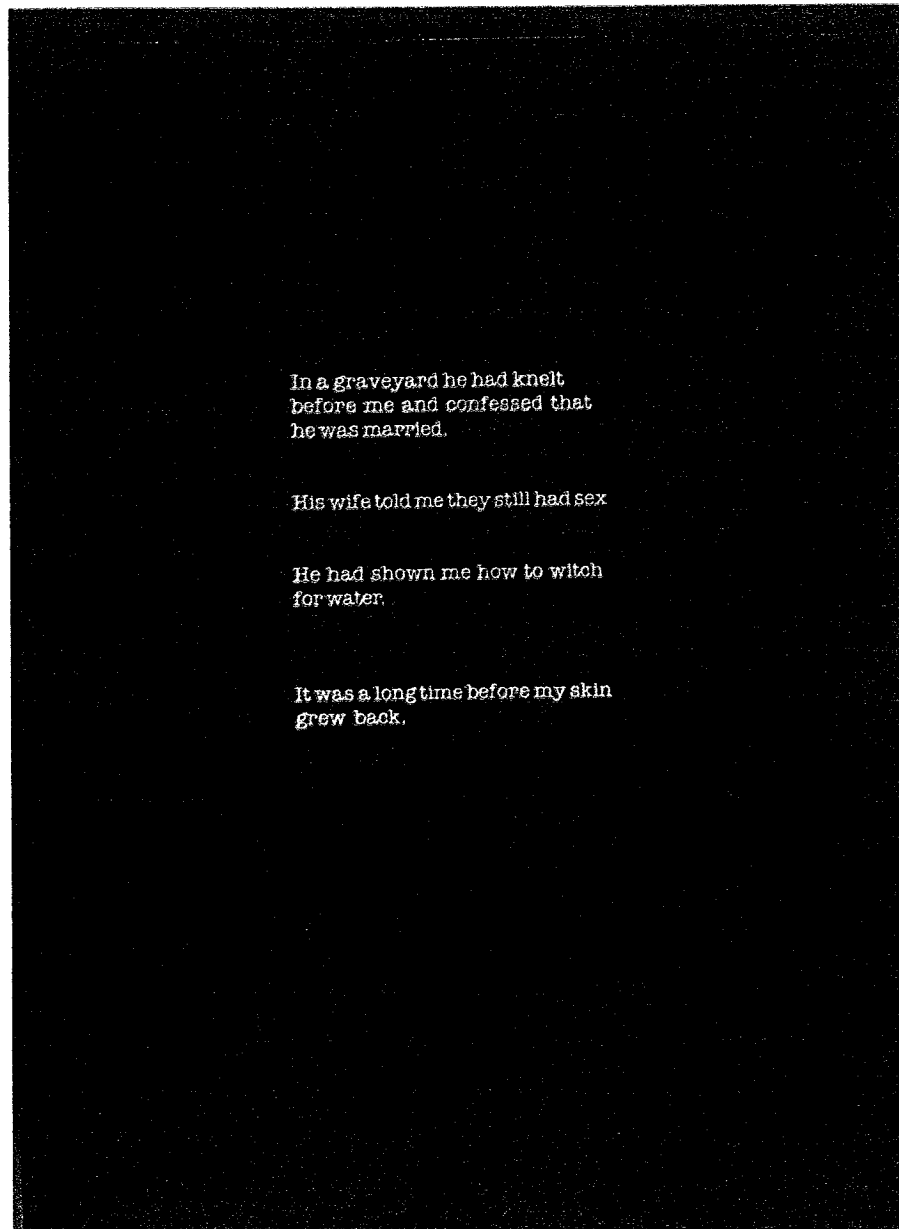


Fig. 39 Brenda Pelkey, *grave yard text panel*, 1994

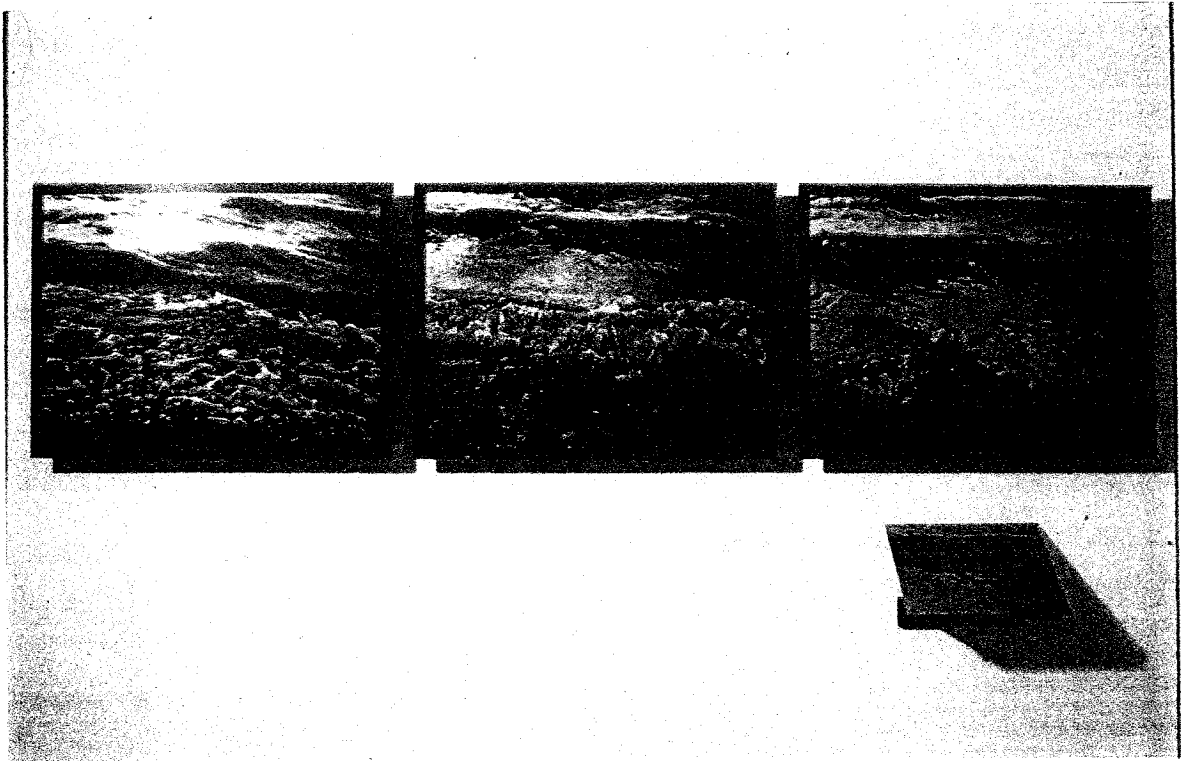


Fig. 40 Brenda Pelkey, *water*, 1994

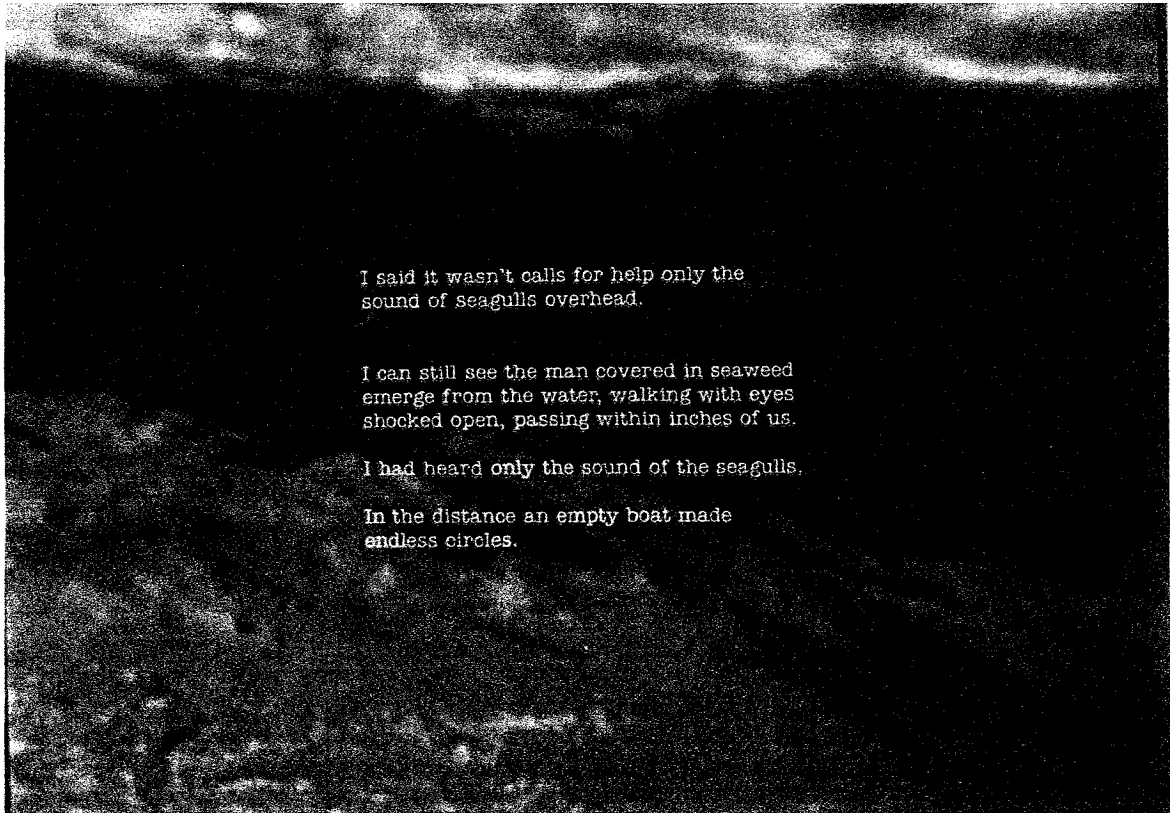


Fig. 41 Brenda Pelkey, *water text panel*, 1994

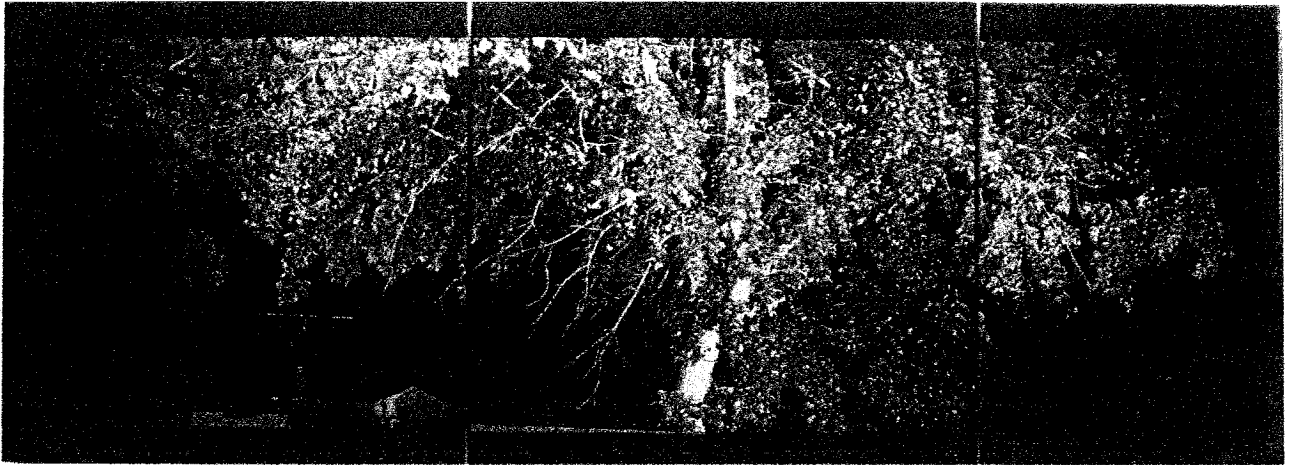


Fig. 42 Brenda Pelkey, *tree*, 1994

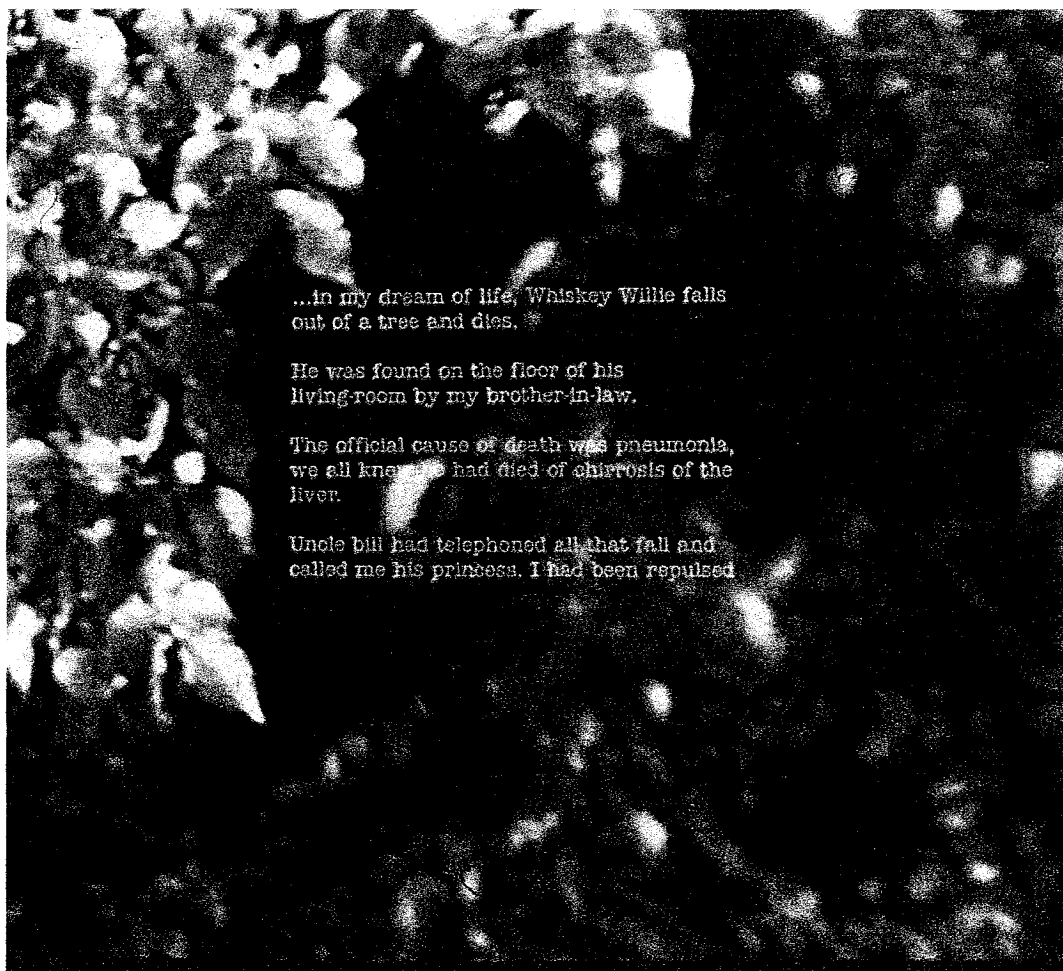


Fig. 43 Brenda Pelkey, *tree text panel*, 1994



Fig. 44 Brenda Pelkey, *yard*, 1994

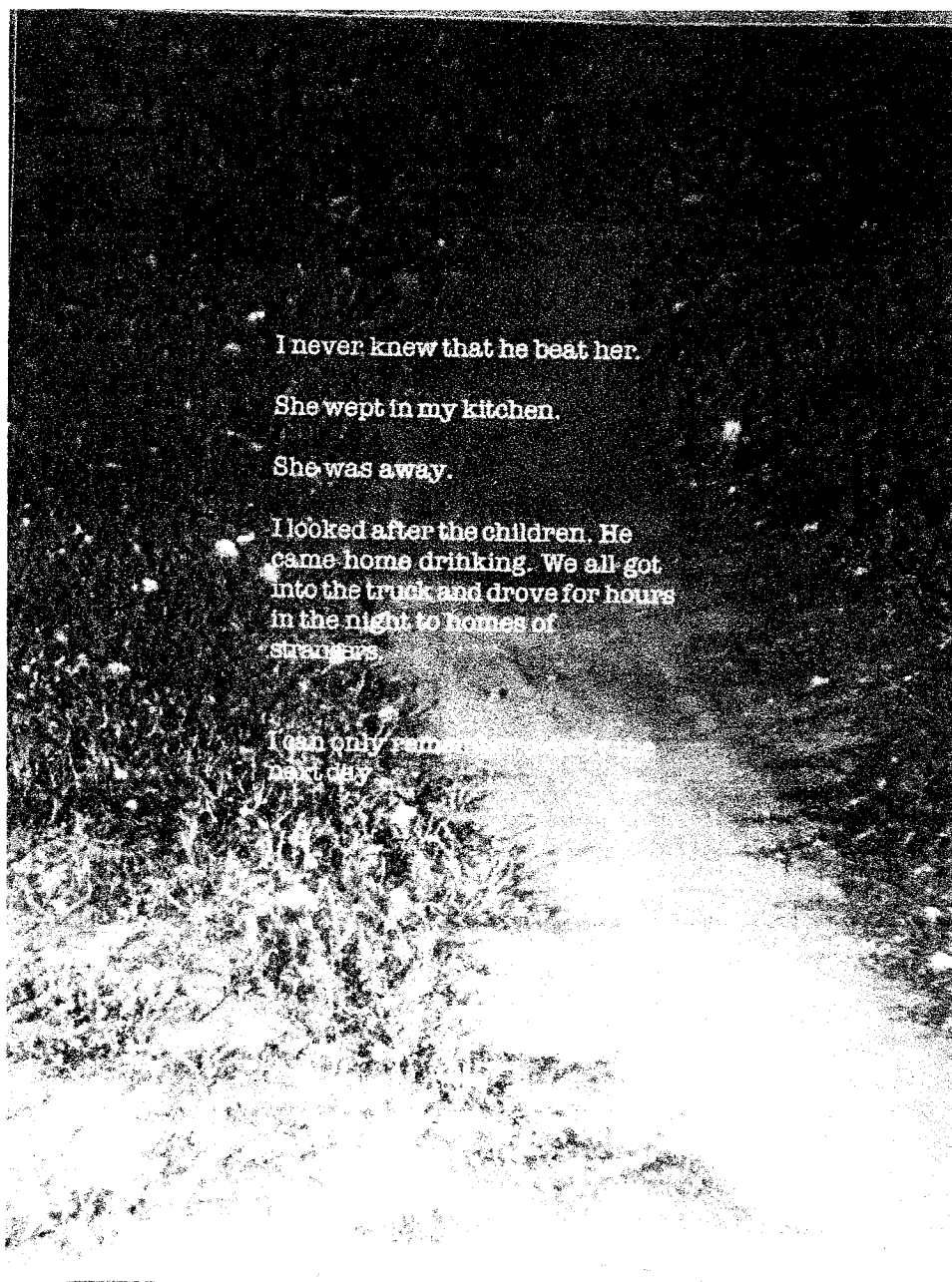


Fig. 45 Brenda Pelkey, *yard text panel*, 1994



Fig. 46 Janet Cardiff, *In Real Time*, 1999



Fig. 47 Eleanor Bond, *Displaced Farmers Set up Cappuccino Bars on Lake of the Woods*, 1988

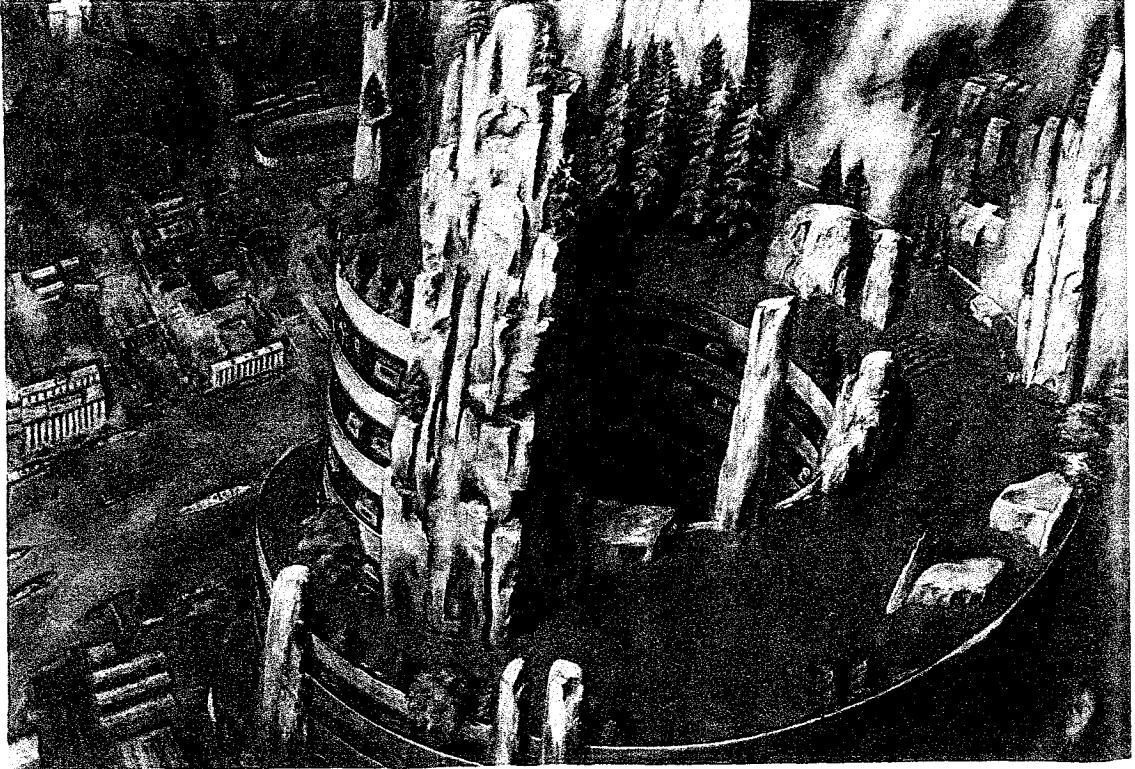


Fig. 48 Eleanor Bond, *Rock Climbers Meet with Naturalists on the Residential Parkade*, 1989

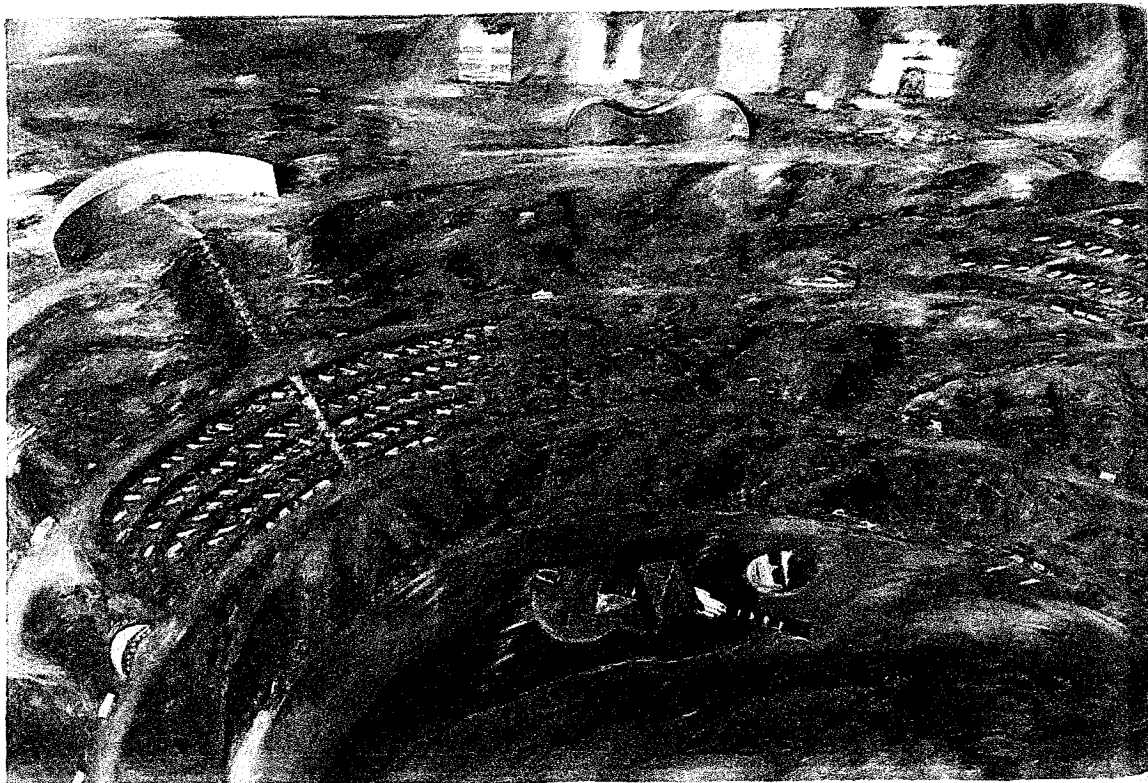


Fig. 49 Eleanor Bond, *Rock Fans and Music Students Gather at the Suburban Concert Park, 1989*

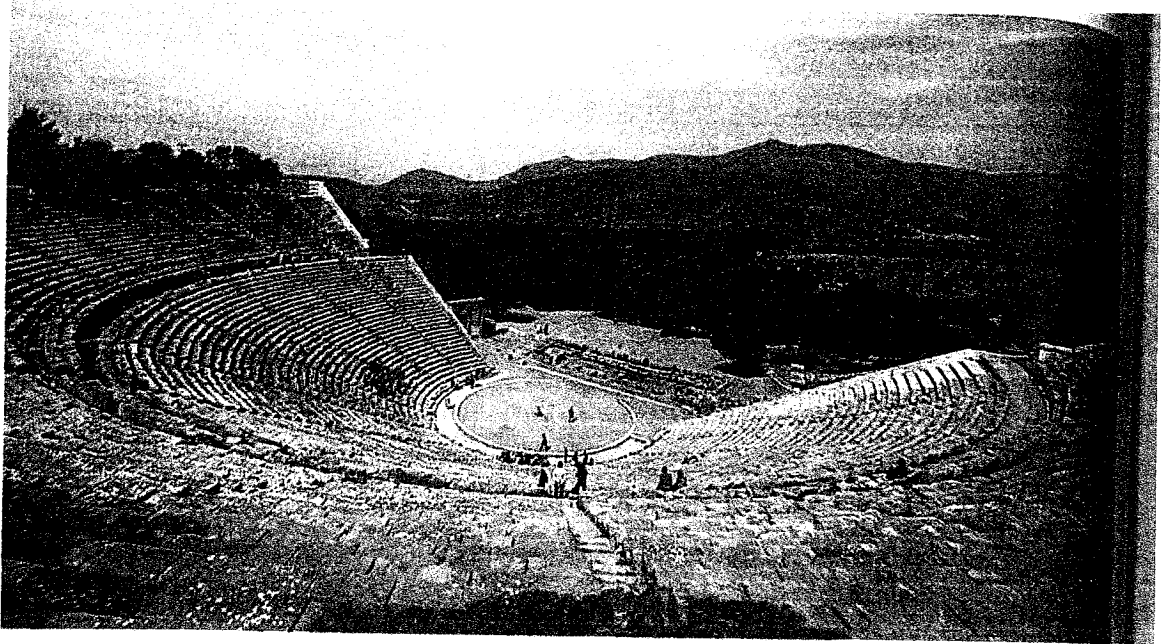


Fig. 50 Theatre, Epidauros, c. 350 B.C.



Fig. 51 Eleanor Bond, *Elevated Living in a Community-Built Neighbourhood*, 1998

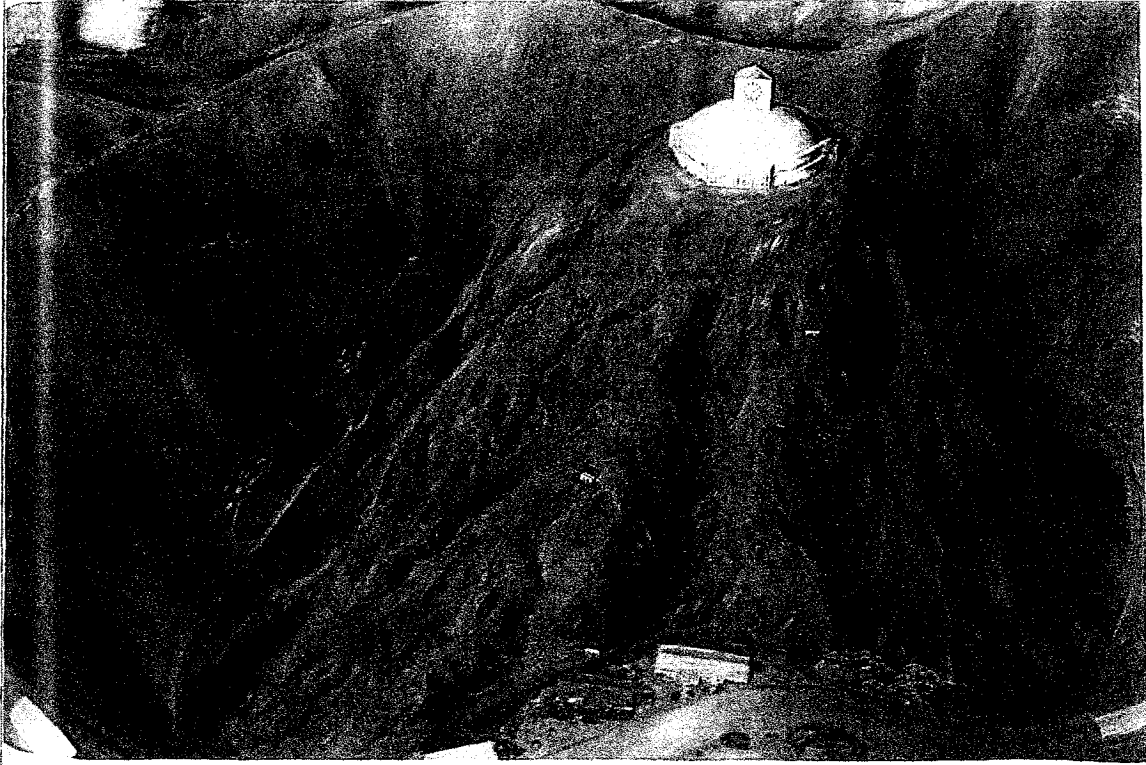


Fig. 52 Eleanor Bond, *Off-Road Cyclists and Road Racers Share Park Facilities with Time Historians*, 1990

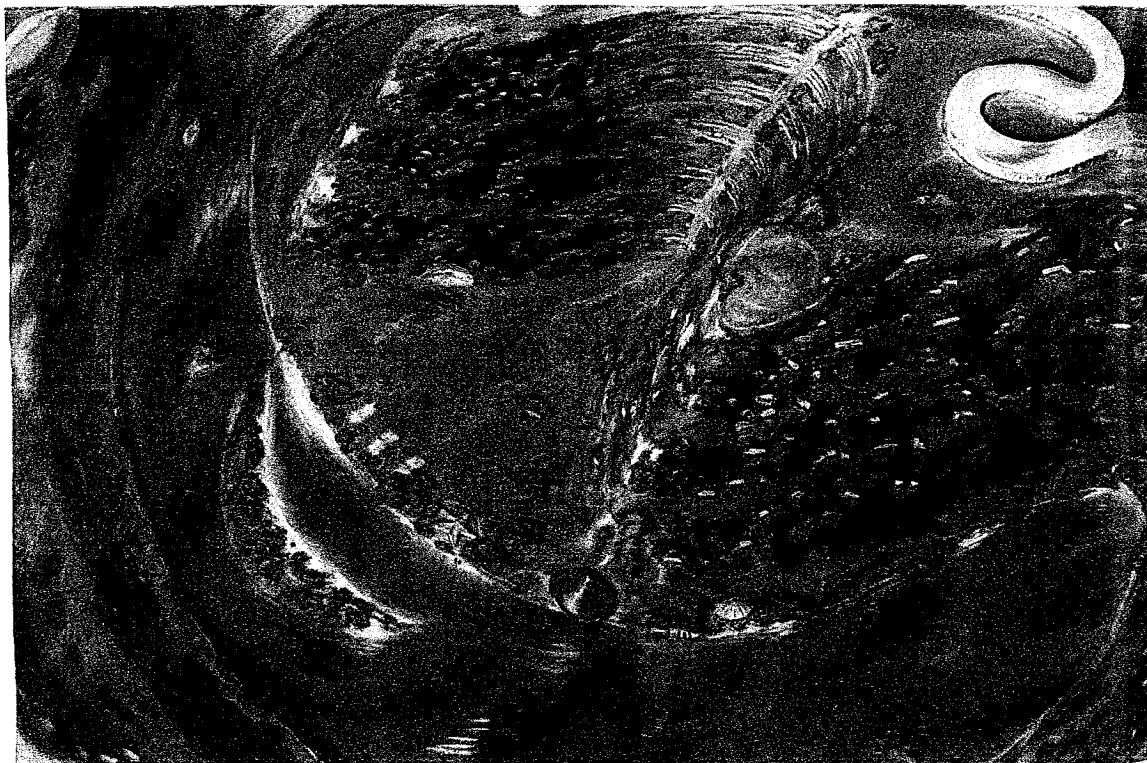


Fig. 53 Eleanor Bond, *The Women's Park at Fish Lake Provides Hostels, Hotels and Housing*, 1990



Fig. 54 Eleanor Bond, *Later, Some Industrial Refugees Form Communal Settlements in a Logged Valley in B.C., 1987*

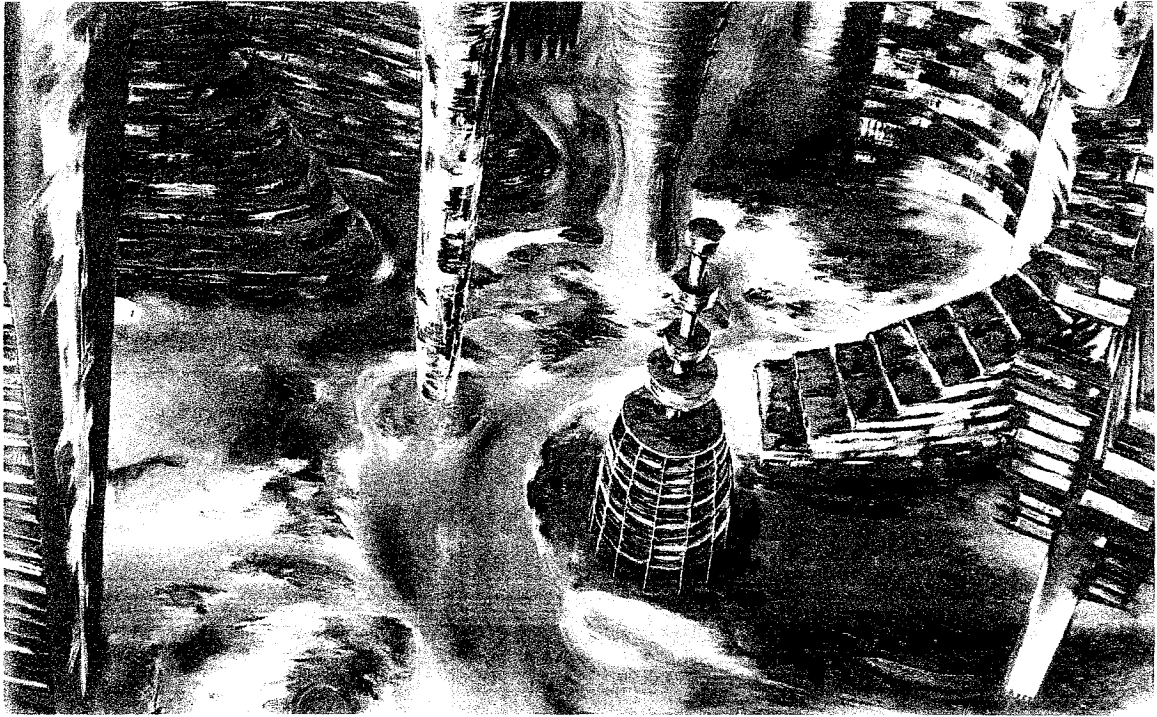


Fig. 55 Eleanor Bond, *Rotterdam Pioneers New Technologies for the Subterranean Eco-Suburb, an Environment with Clean Air, Clean Water and Abundant Daily Sunshine*, 1995



Fig. 56 Janet Mitchell, *Threshing Crew Quarters*, 1948

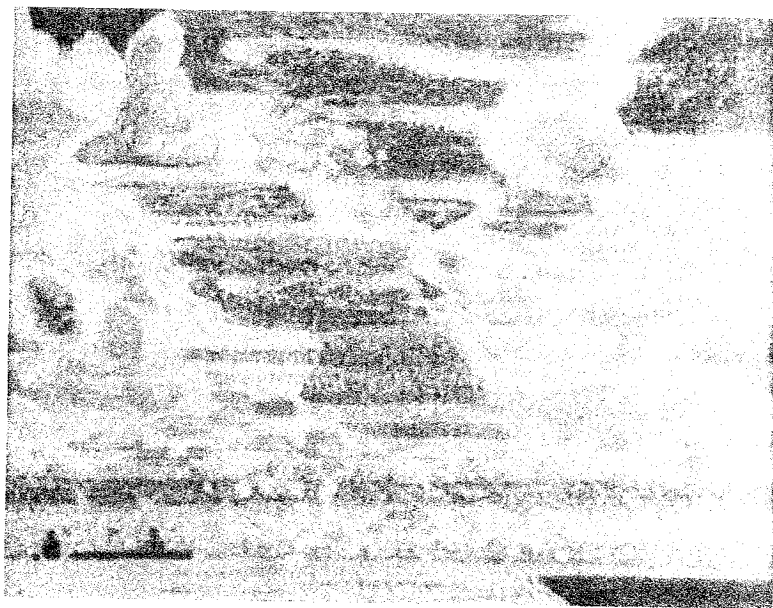


Fig. 57 Illingworth Kerr, *Prairie Skies*, 1973

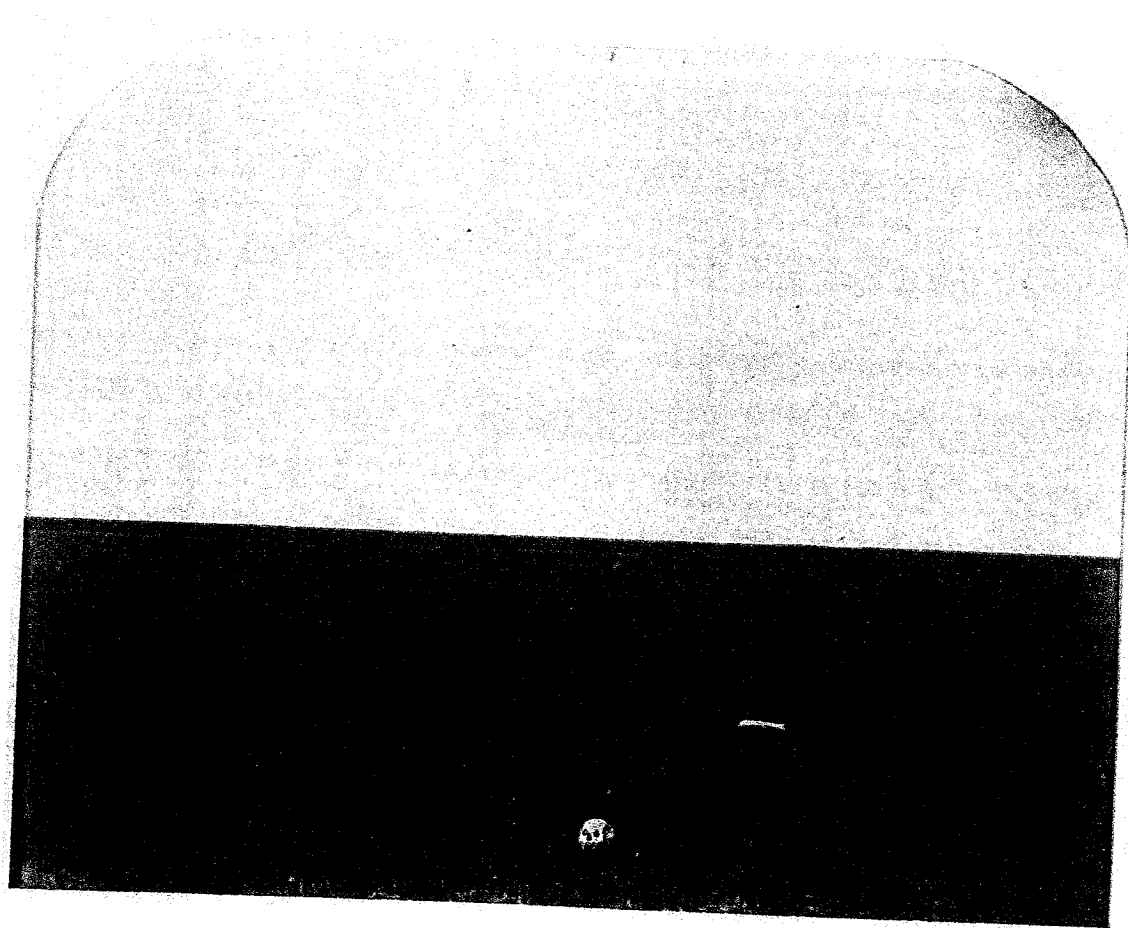


Fig. 58 Humphrey Lloyd Hime, *Prairie – Looking South*, 1858

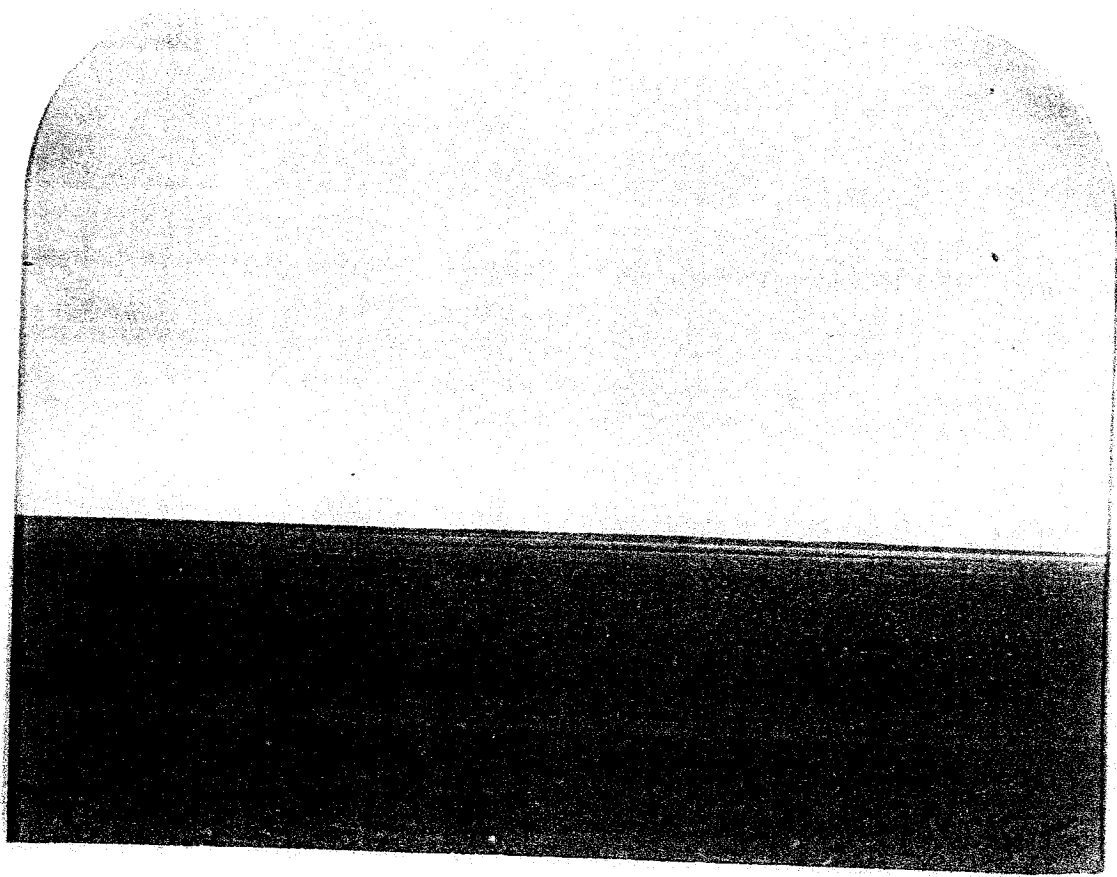


Fig. 59 Humphrey Lloyd Hime, *The Prairie on the Banks of the Red River – Looking West*, 1858

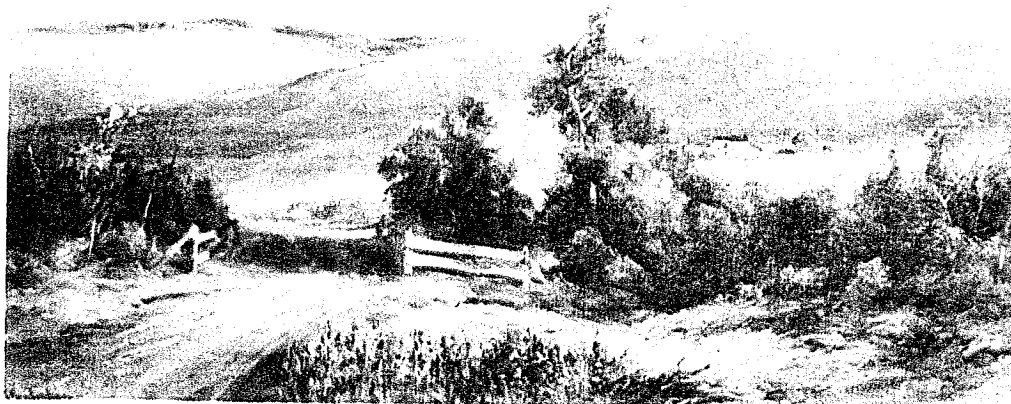


Fig. 60 Augustus Kenderdine, *The Road in the Valley*, c. 1935

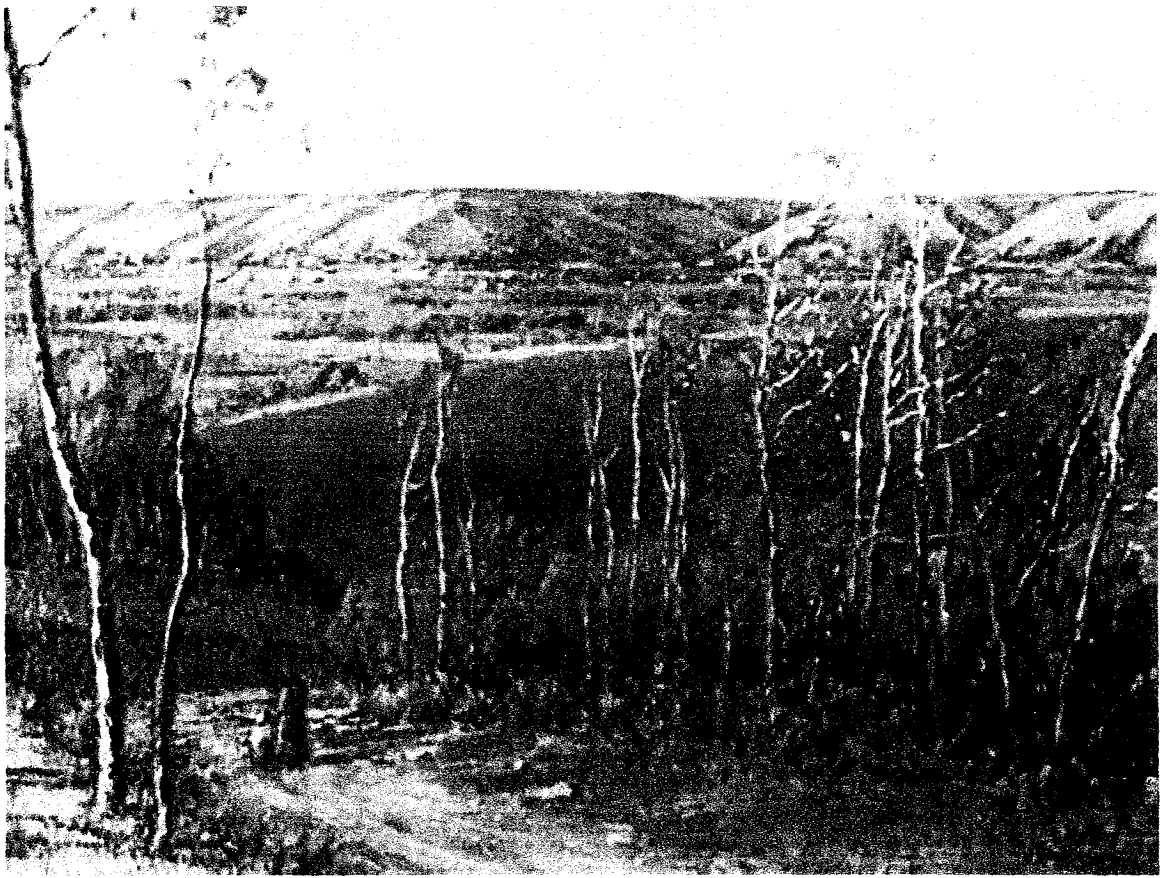


Fig. 61 James Henderson, *Road to the Lake*, c. 1932-35



Fig. 62 Charles W. Jefferys, *A Prairie Sunset*, 1915

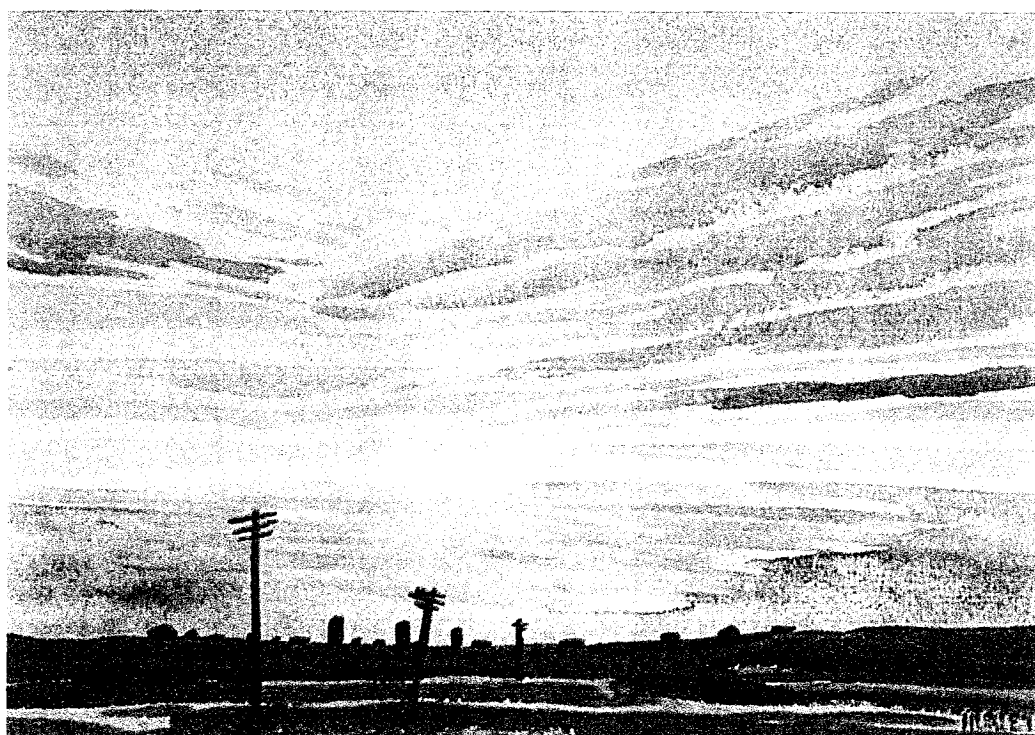


Fig. 63 Robert Hurley, *Untitled*, n.d.

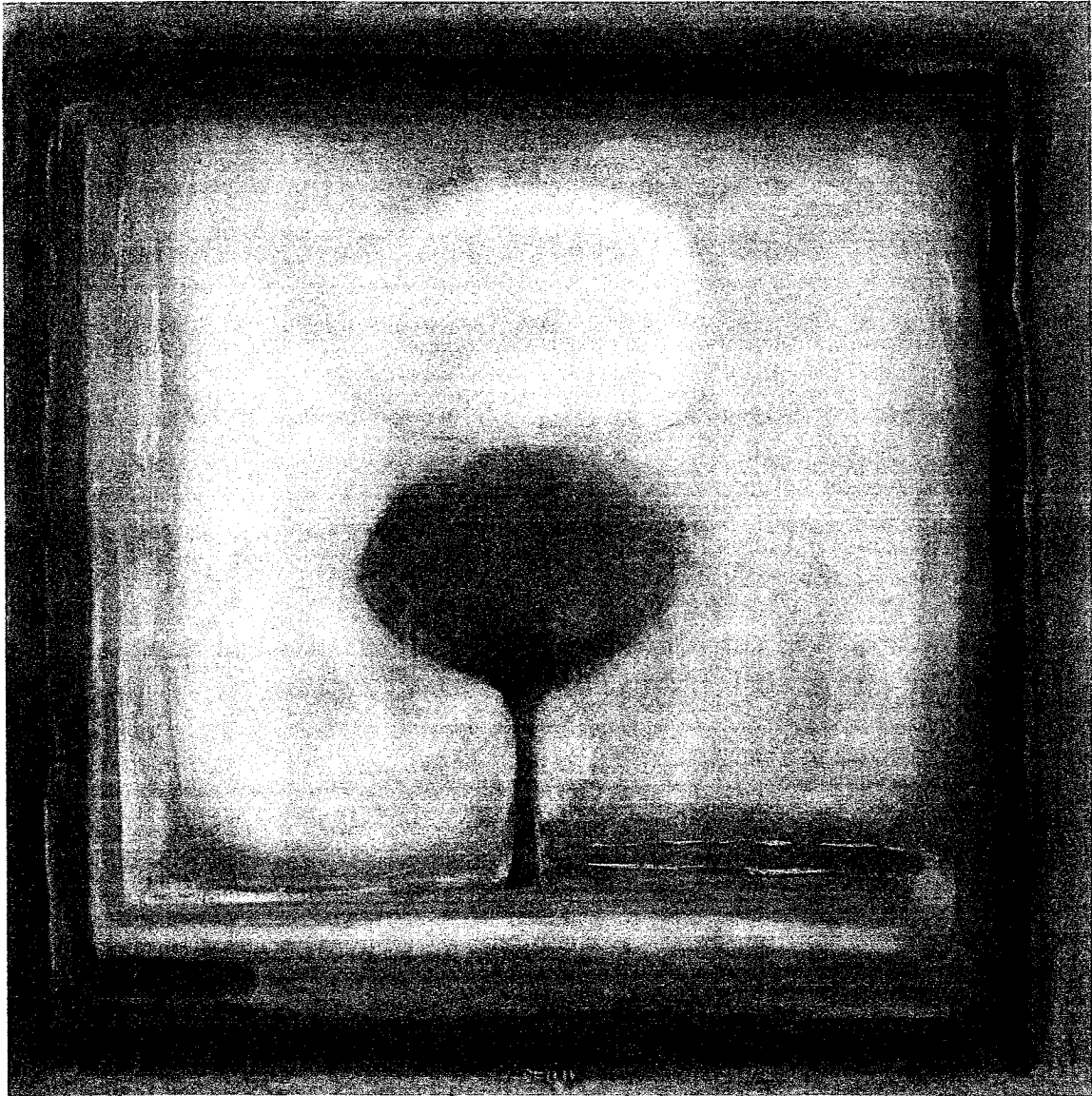


Fig. 64 Otto Rogers, *Sunset Stillness*, 1966

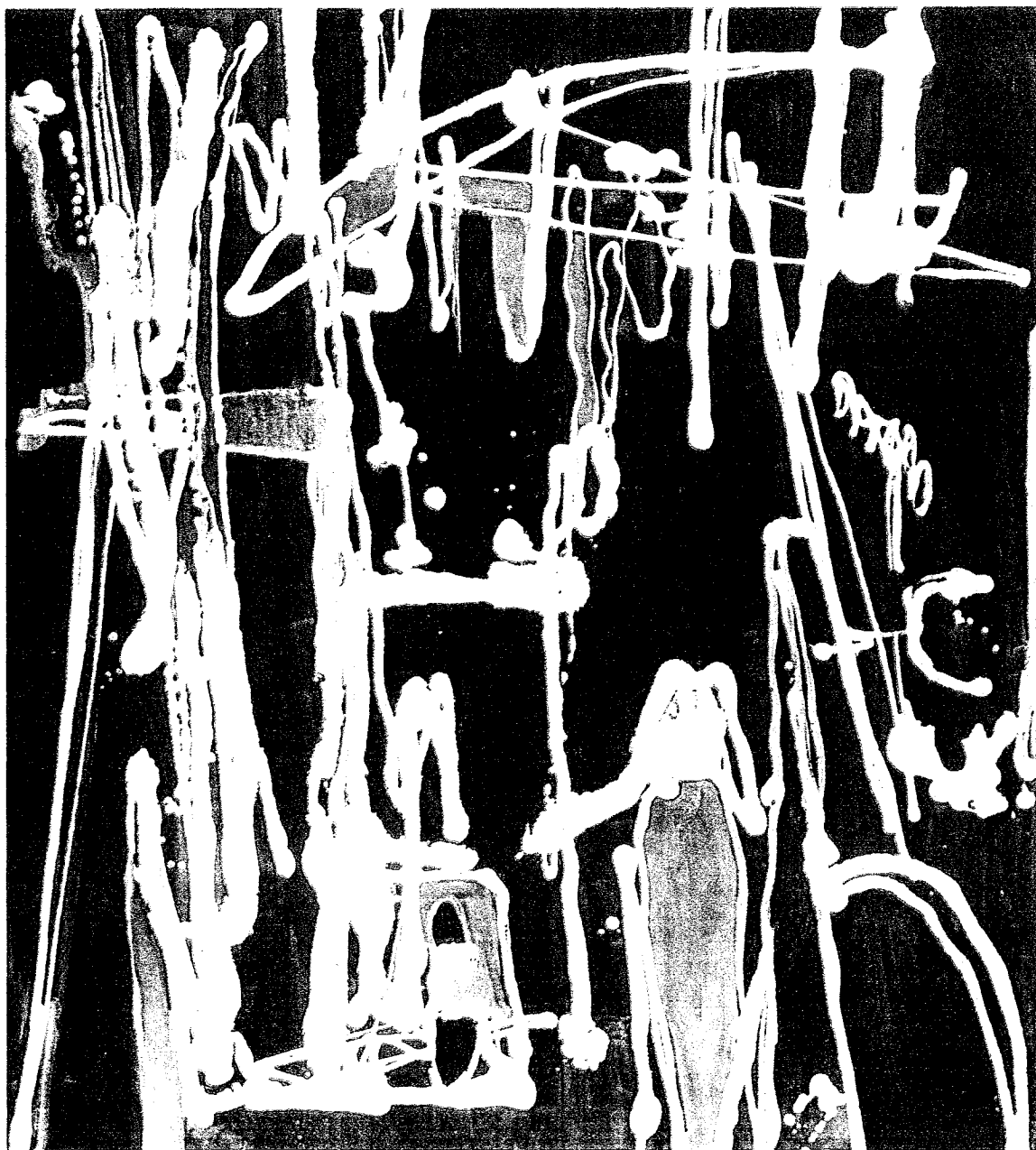


Fig. 65 Douglas Morton, *Green Night*, 1961

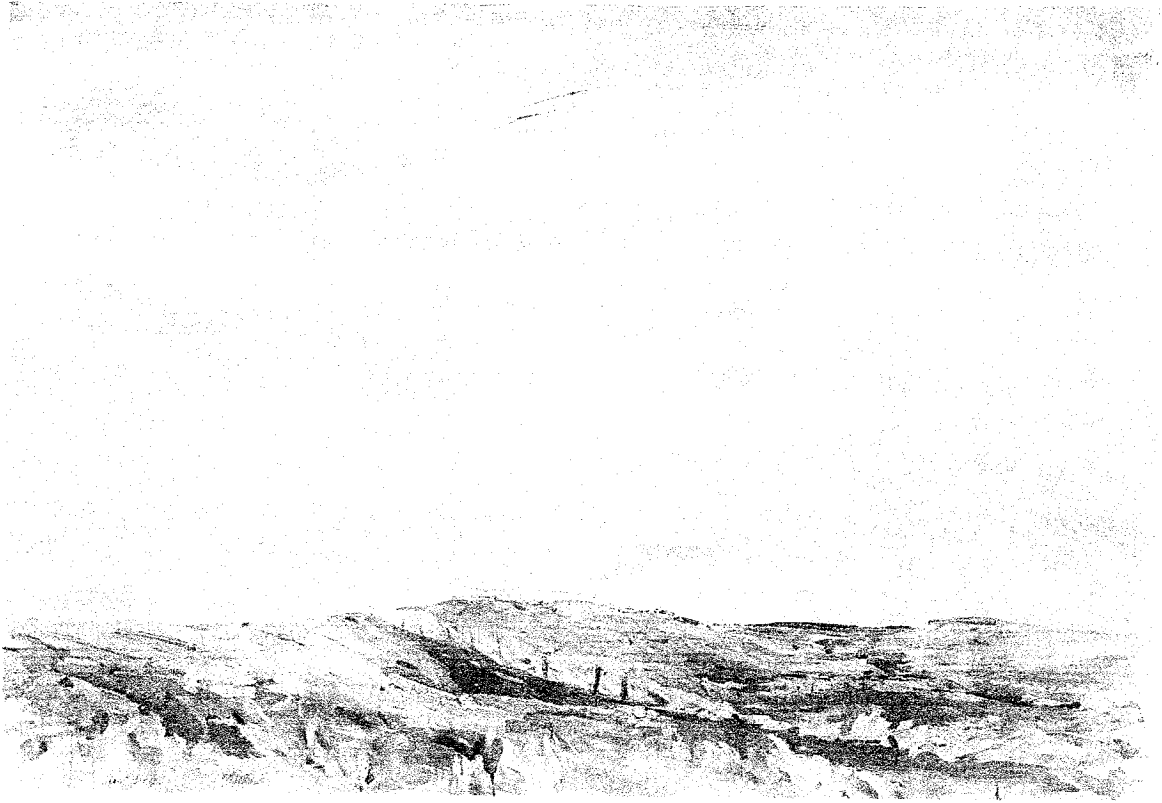


Fig. 66 Ken Christopher, *Sandy Land*, 1980

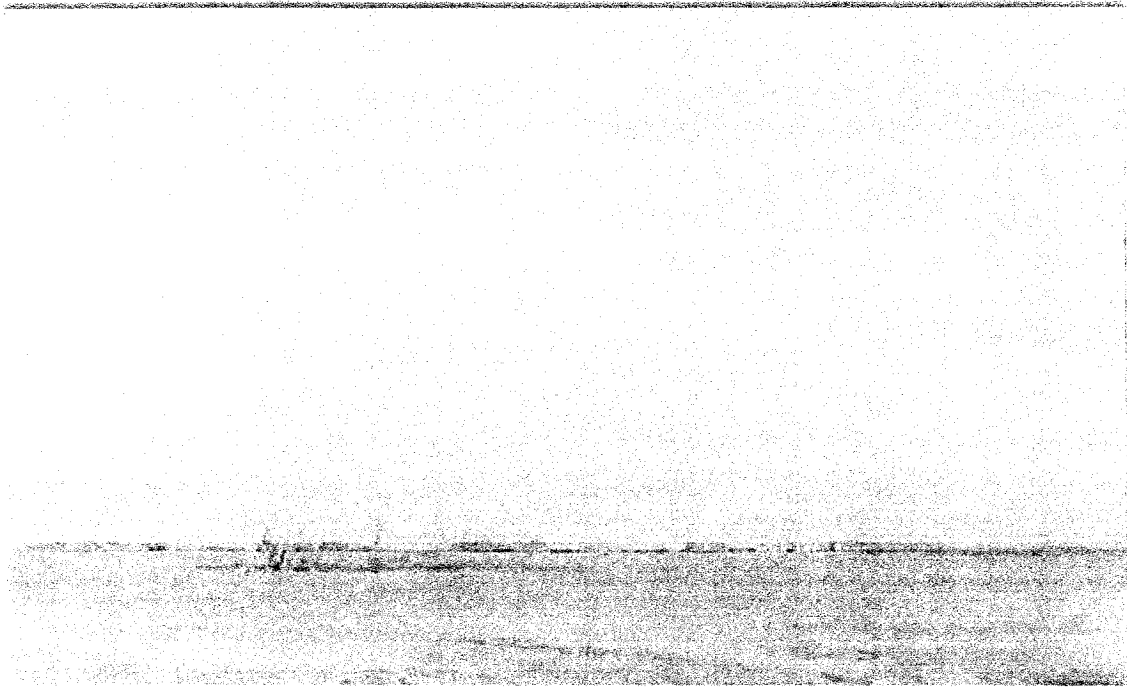


Fig. 67 Terry Fenton, *Bill's Barn*, 2005

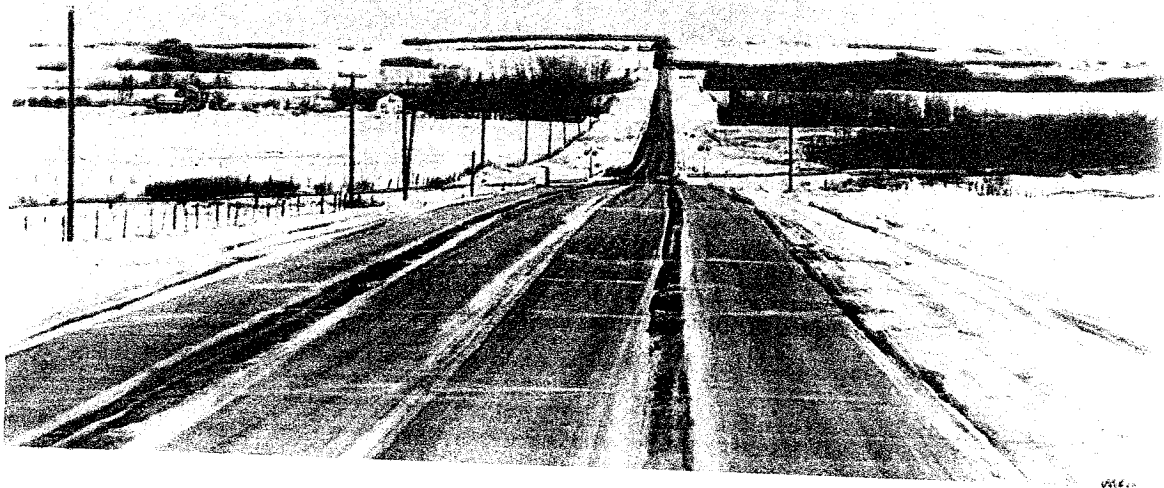


Fig. 68 John McKee, *Soft Grey Day with Red Barn*, 1980

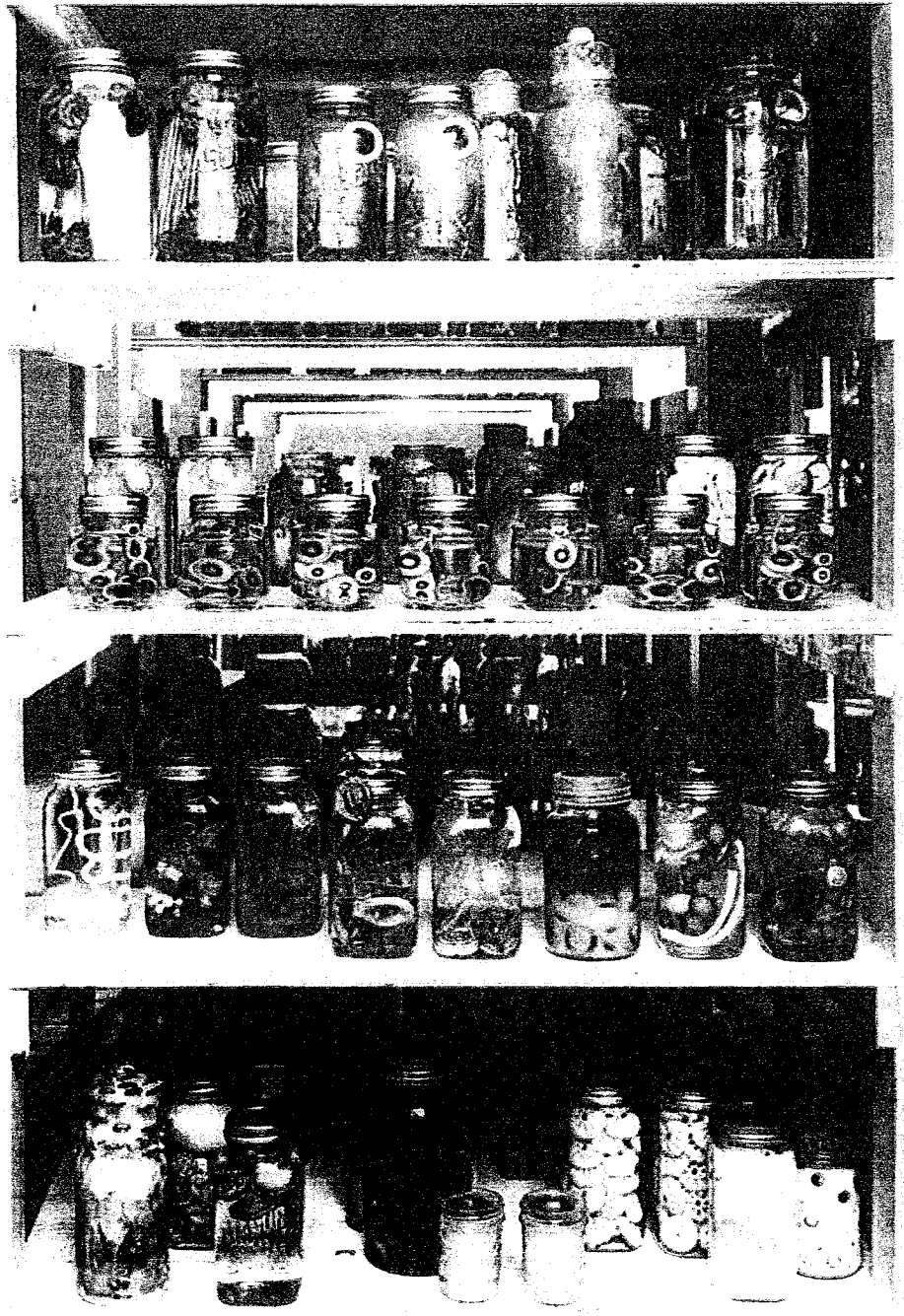


Fig. 69 Aganetha Dyck, *The Large Cupboard*, 1983-84



Fig. 70 Jeff Funnell, *The Riel Series* (detail), 1983-85



Fig. 71 Eleanor Bond, detail of *Shared Space in the Underground City*, 1997