



## Chapter 14

# A Short History of Photography, 1900–2000

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Photography was an invention of the early nineteenth century. By 1900 photography was less than a century old, although in Canada, as elsewhere, it was already enmeshed in philosophical debates that would mark its development over the next hundred years and enlarge the photographic presence in art and communication.

Consider first the impact of the Kodak, the original roll film camera invented in 1888 by George Eastman, which launched the mass amateur photography market. Recording the rituals and high moments of Canadian family life, the snapshot could also be used to capture natural phenomena, the modern city, and visual poetics. Amateur associations and camera clubs formed around these enthusiasms. At the same time, amateurs dedicated to the art and craft of photography viewed mechanization and mass production as vulgarizing the medium and spoiling its chances for recognition as an art form. In the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and inspired by the avant-garde directions of the American Photo-Secession and the British Linked Ring, such photographic art circles as Toronto's Studio Club sought to raise the standards of photographic art in terms of aesthetic values and craft. In 1907, Canadian involvement in this international movement was marked by an exhibition of pictorialist photographs, organized by Sidney Carter (1880–1956) and held in the galleries of the Art Association of Montreal (now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).

Consider next the photographic document, well established for its utility and authenticity after some 75 years of application to portraiture, architecture, engineering, ethnography, archaeology, and industry. Arthur S. Goss (1881–1940) was a founding member of Toronto's Studio Club. His pictorialist work was recognized internationally, but he was far more prolific in his professional work for the City of Toronto: starkly realist images that reported on the health and welfare of the urban population, as well as the progress of public works. Photographic documents in the form of lantern slides, posters, booklets, and prints were also being commissioned by the Canadian government, private railways, and land companies to entice European farmers to migrate to the West. These photographs were composed to spark recognition and ease fears of the Canadian wilderness. They selectively depicted sun-drenched fields, bountiful crops, grazing livestock, and orderly stacks of wheat, as well as the conveniences of modern life: electricity, telephones, radio, and automobiles. The inhabitants were also portrayed as civilized Euro-Canadians, whether harvesting their fields with farm machinery or strolling the streets of Winnipeg.

Consider finally the photographic propaganda produced by the Canadian War Records Office, under the direction of financier Max Aitken, who in 1917 became Lord Beaverbrook. Understanding the psychological impact of seeing World War I soldiers in the trenches and under fire, he commissioned,

### Figure 14.1

John Vanderpant, *Corrugated Design*, c.1930–39  
gelatin silver print, 34.3 × 27.3 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

exhibited, distributed through newspapers, and circulated as postcards many photographs that were faked: scenes of soldiers going “over the top” (staged during training exercises and montaged with images of explosions or aircraft), and battlefield views elaborately conceived as composite prints involving several negatives and hand-colouring. While these photographs were received with respect and enthusiasm by a large public, soldiers immediately spotted them as fakes and called the next photographers they encountered to account. Thus questions of veracity and power in photojournalistic and documentary photography, which have figured so prominently in late twentieth-century art theory and practice, were already being rehearsed in 1917.

Family albums, views of sewer systems under construction, and government-sponsored propaganda are not normally considered works of art and their creators made no such claims. Indeed, different standards were applied to personal, professional, and artistic production. But over the course of the twentieth century these lines were blurred. Modernism elevated the straight documentary photograph to the realm of art. This continued in the activities of the photographic art market and ended with various critical postmodern and post-colonial projects of deconstruction and appropriation based on the material culture of personal and public archives. Reciprocal influences between different uses of photography shaped the twentieth-century history of the medium. This chapter keeps that conversation alive by examining regular encounters between public and private photographs—a distinction that artists and institutions have likewise conspired to break down.

## Pictorialism into Modernism

The first photographic art of the twentieth century was Pictorialism, whose North American vanguard, the Photo-Secession, was founded in New York in

1902. Exhibiting their work in international salons, the Canadian pictorialists were unified in their view of photography as a legitimate art form *if*, as pictorialist and critic Harold Mortimer Lamb (1872–1970) defined it for readers of the *Canadian Magazine* in 1912, the subject had been attempted with “artistic intention . . . without regard for its objective characteristics or interest.”<sup>1</sup> Stylistically, pictorial photography varied even within individual oeuvres. Platinum and carbon printing offered soft gradations and tonal variations deemed suitable for portraits, atmospheric landscapes, and nudes. For example, the delicate grey tones of the platinum paper used in Lamb’s portraits of children imply innocence and beauty. Sidney Carter achieves comparable effects in silver prints in which the overall soft focus suppresses detail. Pigmenting, in such processes as gum bichromate and bromoil printing, drew photography closer to the traditional media of painting, drawing, or printmaking, as can be seen in the amateur work of Albert Van (1881–1964), in contrast with his professional work as a press photographer for the Toronto *Telegram*.

The activities of John Vanderpant (1884–1939) exemplify the high ideals and practical strategies of the Canadian pictorialist movement. From his home in Vancouver, Vanderpant submitted his soft-focused, sepia-toned prints to international salons, winning numerous awards; his work toured in Europe and he corresponded with photographic artists and critics in Britain and the United States. At the same time he worked to define and advance Canadian cultural production. The Vanderpant Galleries hosted exhibitions, musical evenings, and meetings of Vancouver’s Poetry Society. Vanderpant lectured on photography, exhibited in the National Gallery of Canada’s first Salon of Photographic Art (1936), and championed the Group of Seven. His work of the 1930s bridges Pictorialism’s soft, atmospheric studies of patterned light, and modernism’s angles, curves, and tendency to abstraction (*Corrugated Design*, c.1930–39; Figure 14.1).<sup>2</sup> Similarly,

camera-workers such as Johan Helders (1888–1956), Clifford M. Johnston (1896–1951), and A. Brodie Whitelaw (1910–95) photographed urban streets and industrial buildings from dramatic vantage points, but lyrical patterns of light and shadow were their true inspiration. At the same time Hamilton native Margaret Watkins (1884–1969) studied in New York at the Clarence H. White School of Photography, where she ultimately taught, refining the photographic still life toward simple, rhythmic compositions, as applicable to art as to the growing field of photographic advertising. These suggestive images were appearing before a public well accustomed to the documentary function of the photograph; the fusion of purism and social content in a modernist documentary style would be the next stage.

Documentary photographs had been in use by government, science, industry, and the arts since photography was invented. While photographers' names may be lost, photographic documents of architectural and engineering works, factories, farmlands, commercial interiors, and vacation spots are richly informative about the social and economic transformation of Canada, while personal albums record the effects of these changes on individuals, families, and communities. The amateur photographer John Boyd (1865–1941) amassed more than 30,000 negatives and prints over 50 years of taking snapshots while travelling across North America for railroad business and personal pleasure. The early twentieth-century snapshot albums of Mattie Gunterman (1872–1945), photographer and camp cook, are rich with anecdotes about pioneer life in the BC Interior (Untitled [*Gunterman (on stove), with Rose and Anne Williams, Nettie L. Mine, Beaton, BC, 1902*] 1902; Figure 14.2). Geraldine Moodie (1854–1945) was an amateur photographer who in 1906 accompanied her husband on his northern assignment for the Hudson's Bay Company, making portraits that also documented the skin clothing of the Inuit. Spanning the years from 1942 to the early 1960s, the photographic albums of Peter Pitseolak (1902–73)

record the people of Cape Dorset in posed and candid snapshots, as well as scenes costumed and staged, to preserve Inuit ways. The family album of one Catherine W. Wagner, now held by the McCord Museum, captures the economic disparities of the Gaspé from 1928 to 1933: her charming snapshots of children, pets, and sports fishing are briefly interrupted by her brutally candid record of a charity mission to a fishing village nearby.

In the June 1937 issue of the *Canadian Magazine* (1893–1939), a small display advertisement, “Photos Wanted,” invites amateur photographers to contribute “clear photographs of events of timely significance.” This type of photograph had been appearing in the magazine for over three decades, with snapshots illustrating such essays as “A Canadian in China during the Late War” (June 1901) and “What Britain is Doing in West Africa” (June 1902). These photographs might be credited to the author, to a private collection, or eventually to a professional such as Edith S. Watson (1860–1943)—the tireless American traveller whose contributions to the *Canadian Magazine* and to a picture book, *Romantic Canada* (1922), inscribe her in Canadian history. The *Canadian Magazine* used, and discussed, photography of all types. In June 1937 it profiled press, commercial, and sports photographers Lou Turofsky (1892–1959) and Nat Turofsky (d.1956) in “They Shoot to Thrill.” Artistic photographs, some from the Canadian National Exhibition, were reproduced with the same attention as paintings and drawings. The magazine also ran clever and brash photographic advertising, with cartoon speech balloons pushing commercial messages. At the same time, the *Canadian Magazine* was steadily increasing its use of informational photography, to which it eventually dedicated a photogravure section. For example, the November 1937 issue carried a series of picture pages: “Conflict!” (carnage and destruction in Spain and China); “Poison Gas: Manufacture for Murder” (British production of gas masks); “Aftermath” (following wounded World War I veterans); and, for much needed comic relief, “Awkward Positions”



(twists on the human body), credited to John Steele, a British photographer who had a studio in Toronto. For the *Canadian Magazine's* readers, the antecedents to these photographic features—the building blocks of photographic literacy—were the various uses of photography during the teens and twenties.

Between the two world wars, with the international rise of illustrated newspapers and picture magazines, photographs that depicted events and social conditions beyond one's immediate experience reached the level of mass production as vehicles of information, entertainment, and persuasion. Images of hardship and struggle, documenting the effects of drought, exploitation, and widespread unemployment, illustrated the Depression. In the 1940s the *Montreal Standard* and the *Winnipeg New World* began to publish photo essays: series of black and white photographs arranged and captioned to tell a story. In English-speaking Canada during the 1950s the competing weekend magazine supplements were Toronto's *Star Weekly* and Montreal's *Weekend Magazine*. Francophone readers were served by *Perspectives* and *Perspectives-Dimanche*. These publications featured European-style reportage by such photographers as Henri Paul (French, active in Canada from the 1940s to the 1950s), Walter Curtin (1911–2007), Lutz Dille (1922–2008), Michel Lambeth (1923–77), and Kryn Taconis (1918–79). Yousuf Karsh (1908–2002), whose world-famous portrait studio was established in Ottawa in 1932, produced early work in the documentary genre, as did the globe-trotting portraitist and landscapist Roloff Beny (1924–84). The human interest story, compassionately shown and told, was a staple of photo-reportage, whether caught by Dille in the neurotic gestures of a couple on a New York City street, or patiently

drawn by Taconis from the daily routines of a Hutterite farmer.

Many of the photo stories published from the 1940s to the 1960s were generated by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), its propagandist mission guiding the activities of the Still Photography Division. Staff photographers such as Chris Lund (1923–83), George Hunter (b.1921), and Gar Lunney (b.1920) travelled across Canada, fulfilling assignments and refreshing the holdings of the still photography library. They were vastly outnumbered by such freelancers as Richard Harrington (1911–2005), Ted Grant (b.1929), and John de Visser (b.1930), who worked on contract or on spec. The work of this generation is characterized by its spontaneity and inventiveness—by the seeking of what were commonly known as *decisive moments*: frozen action, visual puns, close-ups, or unusual angles to spark the beholder's interest. Photo-reportage focuses on the typical and makes it look unusual. Photographers cultivated signature styles while maintaining the desired effects of naturalism, candour, and objectivity. The use of small- and medium-format cameras, while by no means universal, allowed photographers to work quietly, swiftly, and discreetly in available light, either catching their subjects unaware or putting them quickly at ease. Many photographic artists got their start in photo-reportage. A deep affinity with their subjects can be sensed in photo essays acquired by the NFB in the 1960s: haunting photographs of children by Michael Semak (b.1934), John Max (b.1936), and Tom Gibson (b.1930). While publishers' interests and political sensitivities exerted strong editorial control, ducking controversy and softening the edges of socio-political critique, commissioned photo essays were often catalysts for bodies of work that developed into exhibitions and books. French-born

**Figure 14.2**

Mattie Gunterman, Untitled (*Gunterman [on stove], with Rose and Anne Williams, Nettie L. Mine, Beaton, BC, 1902*), 1902 glass negative, 13 x 18 cm  
Vancouver Public Library



photojournalist Pierre Gaudard (b.1927) created two influential bodies of work on the springboards of assignments. *Les ouvriers* (1969–71) captured the exhaustion, boredom, and simmering rage of factory workers in the era politically known as the Just Society, and *Les prisons* (1975–77) was a stark portrayal of men and women incarcerated in Quebec and Ontario.

A photo essay rejected by a weak-kneed editor might yet see the light of day. Michel Lambeth's searing images of the impoverished parish of St. Nil, Quebec (*The Parish of St. Nil, County of Matane, Gaspé, Quebec*, 1965, Figure 14.3), commissioned in 1965 by the *Toronto Star Weekly* and declined for publication, were subsequently acquired by the NFB. Lambeth's sentimental portrait of a world-weary St. Nil child was included in the centennial publication *Call Them Canadians* (1968). A magisterial study of dilapidated houses in the north end of Saint John, New Brunswick, commissioned in 1966 from Ian MacEachern (b.1942) by the local urban development organization and judged unsuitable for use, was published the following year in *artscanada*—a remarkable breakout of straight documentary photography in the pages of an art magazine. In the heyday of photo-reportage the classification of a photograph as a document or a work of art was largely a function of context and was liable to shift.

As the picture magazines lost market share to television and began to fold, the ethical lines between objective reporting and subjective documentation were redrawn, shifting the more expressive work toward the experimental image-making that was emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. Emotional responses to their society and identification with the alienation of others guided some photographers to their subjects and resulted in expressive photographic treatments. Fascinated by the human circus and its consumerist spectacles,

Michel Saint-Jean (1937–2007) emerged from Quebec's Quiet Revolution with the incisive photographic series *Amérique québécoise* (c.1970). Not far away Ronald Labelle (b.1942) was producing an extended portrait of the motorcycle gang Satan's Choice (c.1968) in which he hid nothing of the confusions between violence and brotherhood, freedom and misogyny. Some photographers dropped all pretense of objectivity, turning to spiritual ideas of self-realization and expression for their inspiration. In the mid-1960s, John Max began the body of work that would culminate in the 1972 exhibition and book *Open Passport* (Figure 14.4). In a gestural, spontaneous style, and with careful sequencing, Max composed a long photographic poem of uninhibited encounters. For the viewer, *Open Passport* mirrors the intensity of closeness with another human being. A member of Max's circle, and pictured in his work, Judith Eglington (b.1945) was concurrently shooting for her dramatic installation of passion and disquietude: a still photographic happening titled *Earth Visions*. From 1969 to 1974 Sylvain P. Cousineau (b.1949) was accumulating images for his forensic study of trussed, scarred, and entrapped bodies, published as *Mona Nima* (1977). Much of this work is consensual portraiture—a kind of collaboration between photographer and subject—although candid portraiture may carry the same psychological freight. The facial expressions and body language of strangers, discreetly observed and closely framed, similarly marked the work of Michael Torosian (b.1952) in the early 1970s.

In the same period, more conventional approaches to photographic portraiture reflected a growing interest in Canadian identity and individual accomplishments, especially in the arts and letters. Professional photographers such as Walter Curtin, Michel Lambeth, Tess Boudreau

### Figure 14.3

Michel Lambeth, *St. Nil, Gaspé, Quebec, County of Matane*, 1965, printed 1978 by Michael Torosian  
gelatin silver print, 35.4 × 27.9 cm; image: 25.2 × 19 cm  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography



(1919–2007), André Le Coz (1929–98), John Reeves (b.1938), and Sam Tata (1911–2005) committed themselves to recording the faces of Canadian culture. Different photographic approaches frame these portraits. Tata's production features three quite distinct ways of working. In the 1940s, the end of the colonial era in Shanghai, he photographed from an insider's perspective, with intimacy and urgency. His later visits to India, the land of his forebears, were recorded through the eyes of a curious traveller, in the tradition of street photography and reportage. In both places, but primarily in Canada where he settled in 1956, Tata made informal portraits of writers, visual artists, and performers he admired. These environmental portraits were published in such news magazines as *Maclean's* and *Time*, reprinted in books, and exhibited in galleries as fine prints.

## Modernist Documents

The Western social documentary tradition, with its humanist philosophy, formalist values, and respect for photographic craft, has exerted a strong and enduring influence on Canadian photographic practice. From the early 1960s, collective portraits of Canadian communities were produced by documentary photographers, some working with view cameras and all striving for such modernist photographic ideals as precision, luminosity, and archival permanence to increase the beauty and historic value of their black and white prints. The work of Hungarian-born Gabor Szilasi (b.1928), made in such rural Quebec communities as Charlevoix, Beauce, Lotbinière, and Abitibi, exemplifies the transparent style and content of these projects. Individual portraits taken in private homes or artisans' workshops are combined with

views of the cultivated lands and built environments that surround them (*Dolbeau 1976, Lac Saint-Jean County, Quebec*, 1976; Figure 14.5).

A number of concurrent projects were rooted in the youth movement of the 1960s, and especially in the popular desire to get back to the land. The Depression-era work of American photographers commissioned by the Farm Security Administration of the Roosevelt presidency exerted a powerful influence. The Montreal-based Groupe d'action photographique (GAP; founded in 1971), which included photographers Claire Beaugrand-Champagne (b.1948), Michel Campeau (b.1948), Roger Charbonneau (b.1947), and Cedric Pearson (b.1949), spent the summer of 1972 living in their subject-community, the village of Disraeli, Quebec. The exhibition and publication produced by the group expresses their close identification with the farm families and factory workers, their attraction to tradition, and their aversion to progress—features of the work that were noted and debated at the time.

Mindful of urbanization and rural depopulation, documentary photographers have complemented the efforts of archaeologists, ethnographers, and folklorists by creating visual records of traditional ways, building types, material culture, and, most assiduously, the faces of disappearing communities. In Quebec Jean-Paul Morisset (1928–2008) worked under his father, art historian Gérard Morisset, on a photographic inventory of sacred and secular Quebec architecture, before turning to his own project of taking expressive photographs of buildings. British-born architecture historian John Flanders (b.1933) set out in the 1960s to record the rural architecture of Ontario in the fullness of its functions. Orest Semchishen (b.1932), a native of Alberta who was concerned about the gradual abandonment of rural Byzantine churches, began systematically to

### Figure 14.4

John Max, Untitled, from the series *Open Passport*, 1972  
gelatin silver print, 50.5 × 40.6 cm; image: 49.2 × 33.5 cm  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography



**Figure 14.5**

Gabor Szilasi, *Dolbeau 1976, Lac Saint-Jean County, Quebec, 1976*  
 gelatin silver print, 27.8 × 35.3 cm; image: 17.8 × 26.5 cm  
 Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

photograph these buildings in the 1960s, using a view camera to capture the scale, materials, and interior details of buildings on the Prairies and further afield. Their value as architectural records aside, Semchishen's photographs are distinguished by their restrained lucidity.

Preservationist projects have not focused exclusively on rural architecture, however. Advocates for liveable cities, such as Phyllis Lambert, founder of Heritage Montreal, and Toronto writer and urban activist Jane Jacobs, have raised Canadian consciousness about inner-city neighbourhoods, storefronts, and industrial monuments. In these contexts we find urban documentary projects by such practitioners as Clara Gutsche (b.1949), Edward

Hillel (b.1953), and David Miller (b.1949), who work on threatened areas of Montreal. In Winnipeg John Paskievich (b.1947) made a close photographic study of a corner store, combining environmental portraits and streetscapes to preserve a piece of community history, and translated this series into a film—*Ted Baryluk's Grocery* (Michael Mirus and Paskievich, NFB, 1982)—with Paskievich's first-person narration in the voice of Baryluk. For colour photographer Justin Wonnacott (b.1950) the decor of taverns and cheap hotels (for example, *A Bedroom with Cyan Wallpaper*, 1984–85) forms a visual puzzle, which is solved in the photographic series *Keep This Place* (1984–85). Alvin Comiter's (b.1948) architectural study *Landmarks: Historic*

*Buildings of Nova Scotia* (1994) represents the formal expression of preservationist concerns in carefully executed black and white photographs that are devoid of people and that minimize signs of the present.

Pamela Harris (b.1940), who came to Canada from the United States in 1967, founded her projects on social and political beliefs, photographing the people of Admiral's Cove and Trout River in Newfoundland (1972), Spence Bay in what was then the Northwest Territories (1972–73), her children and extended family (1975–80), the United Farm Workers of Watsonville, California (1977–82), immigrant women working as domestics (1983–84), and Canadian leaders of the feminist movement (1984–92). Robert Minden (b.1941), who began to photograph while studying sociology, framed his projects as encounters with individuals who had lived through extraordinary circumstances. His subjects include Japanese-Canadians who were interned during World War II and Doukhobor-Canadians whose utopian communities in Saskatchewan and British Columbia had likewise been displaced and persecuted by Canadian authorities. Consisting primarily of individual and group portraits, these projects have a sense of cohesion and connectedness that is symbolized by images of the landscape.

## The Lay of the Land

The place of landscape in the Canadian imagination can scarcely be overestimated. Unsurprisingly, trends in landscape photography during the latter half of the twentieth century are also solid indicators of tendencies in the medium as a whole, traversing modernist and postmodernist practice. The early to mid-1960s saw two major landscape trends, superficially separable in terms of machine and material and profoundly different in approach. The highly popular work of Freeman Patterson (b.1937) exemplifies a dramatic style of colour photography, his 35-mm colour transparencies

featuring brilliant foliage, sparkling lakes, and bucolic settlements. These images are the joy of publishers and camera clubs whose members are inspired by the natural beauty and resources of Canada. The black and white landscapes of Robert Bourdeau (b.1931) are photographs made in a completely different spirit. Working with a view camera, Bourdeau imbues his prints with the transcendental power of nature, using compositional balance, fine resolution, and a rich tonal range to immerse the spectator in quiet contemplation (*Cumbria, England*, NGC, 1975; Figure 14.6). Drawn both to details and to massive landforms, Bourdeau, who trained as an architect, has gone on to photograph Sri Lankan temples, disused nineteenth-century factories, and domestic still lifes, all unified by the artist's recognition of their photographic qualities.

Over the course of the 1970s, modernist purism prevailed over prettiness, though with significant variations. Retained from early modernism was the photographic notion of *equivalence*—images sequenced by formal or symbolic association to express, and influence, states of mind—but different definitions of the medium came into play. Contrast and grain are also photographic properties that heighten photography's emotional charge. Kan Azuma's (b.1946) *Erosion* series (1973) is informed by this recognition, which is shared by other Japanese-born artists, including Shin Sugino (b.1946) and Shun Sasabuchi (b.1951), whose black and white series are thematized as journeys. Working at the other end of the tonal scale, and in stark contrast with the full compositions of Bourdeau, is Hubert Hohn (b.1944). Active in the West in the 1970s as an artist, teacher, and curator, Hohn trains his 8" × 10" view camera on the limitless expanse of the Prairies, imaging an unknowable beauty: a restrained sublime. Hohn's untitled landscapes can be compared with Jeremy Taylor's (b.1938) *Austere Landscapes* (1981–82). Taken from the rocky shoreline of Lake Ontario, Taylor's *Balmy Beach, Toronto* (1981) is a study of unfathomable depth



**Figure 14.6**

Robert Bourdeau, *Cumbria, England*, 1975  
gelatin silver print, 28 × 35.4 cm; image: 26.6 × 34.5 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

and vaporous atmosphere—austerity rendered in an enriched scale of greys.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, photography’s institutional landscape also changed dramatically. The status of the medium was a major preoccupation, leading to its unprecedented specialization and institutionalization. Public photographic collections were either founded or reconfirmed in their missions: these included those of the National Gallery of Canada, the Public

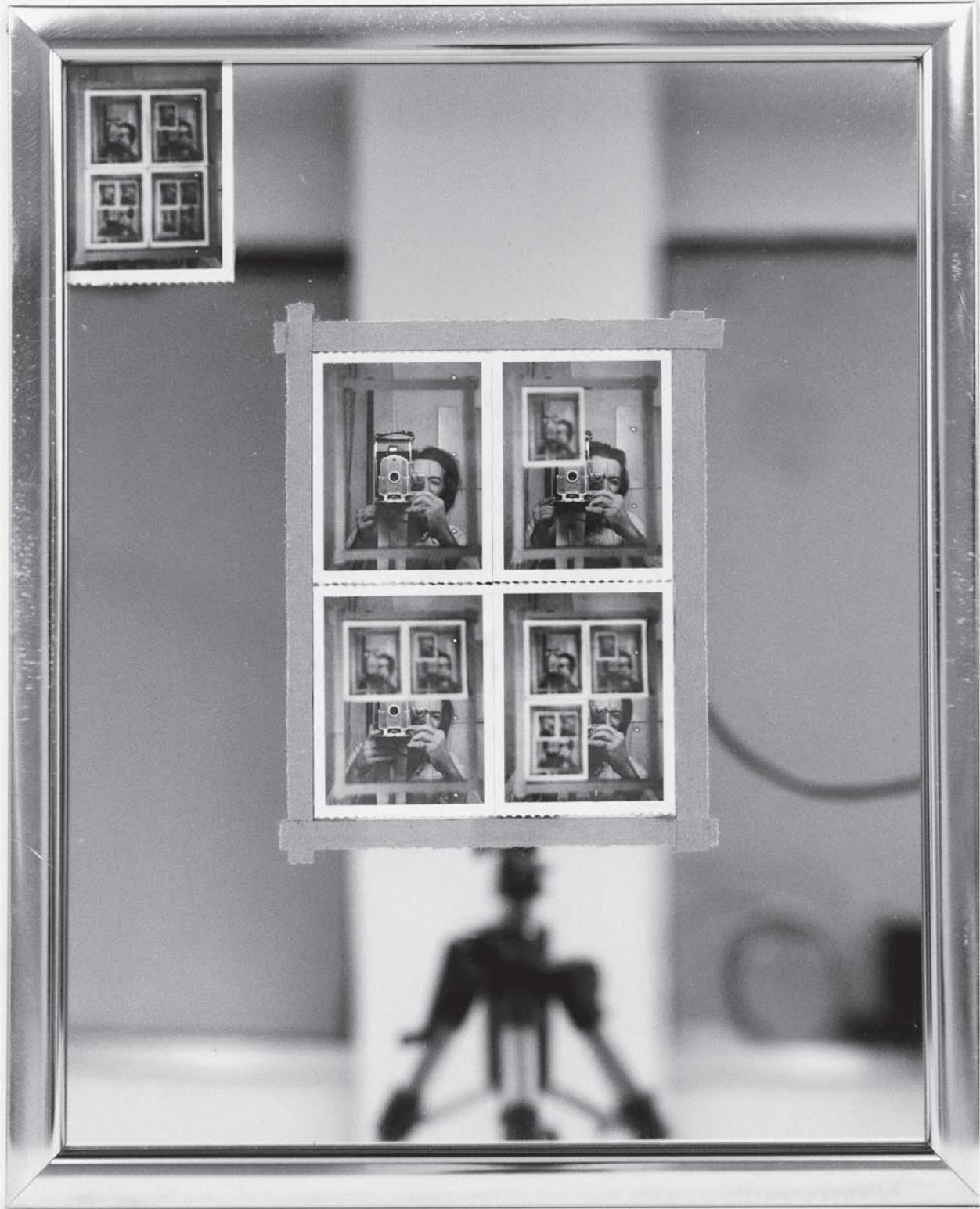
Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada), the NFB, and the Art Bank of the Canada Council. Pioneering collectives and artist-run centres included The Photographers Gallery (Saskatoon), Baldwin Street Gallery (Toronto), and Centaur Galleries (now Optica, in Montreal). The Edmonton Art Gallery (now the Art Gallery of Alberta), the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Banff Centre founded photographic collections during this period, while the Art Gallery of Ontario

and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal hosted, and occasionally organized, photographic exhibitions. Founded by photographers in 1967, the magazine *Foto Canada* survived for only one year, but it was followed in Toronto by *Impressions*, *Image Nation*, and *Impulse* for 1970s experimental work and in Montreal by *OVO* for social documentary photography. *Photo Communiqué*, founded in Toronto in the afterglow of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute groundbreaking “Canadian Perspectives—A Conference on Photography in Canada” (1979), sought to bridge the photographic genres and regional divides by disseminating images and ideas, including criticism, conservation, and arts advocacy. *Canadian Art* (1961) and *artscanada* (1974) published special issues on photography, while *Canadian Collector* and *Vie des Arts* helped to encourage broader interest. Other developments heralding the recognition of photography as an art form, while encouraging specialization, included the emancipation of the medium from design and printmaking in art departments of colleges and universities, and the emergence of an important centre for colour photography at Banff.

At the same time, interest in the nature of photography, as well as its potential as a tool, blurred the boundaries among photographic art, the traditional art forms of painting, sculpture, and printmaking, and such emerging media as film and video. Leading Canadian artists began to experiment with the medium, whether by incorporating photographs into their work or by using photographic technology to inform their practice. Michael Snow (b.1928) made his first photographic work, *Four to Five* (1962), as part of his *Walking Woman Works* series (1961–67; Figure 15.1) by taking the figure out of his Toronto studio and photographing it in the street. This 20-image photographic grid was followed by works incorporating photographic elements into sculpture and painted relief: *Atlantic* (1967, AGO), *Snow Storm, February 8, 1967* (1967, NGC), and *8 × 10* (1969). Attention to the nature of photography, in terms of mechanism and material, characterizes all

of these works and inscribes them into the history of modernism. Snow's magisterial statement of the photographic process, *Authorization* (1969, NGC; Figure 14.7), comprising five Polaroid prints, a mirror, and a taped rectangle, was acquired for the Canadian Art collection of the National Gallery and was included, along with other photographic works, in Snow's solo exhibition for the Venice Biennale in 1970. Snow's films also refer to photographic technology: *One Second in Montreal* (1969) is entirely based on still images, as is *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970). Both works draw attention to photography as an art of mechanical reproduction. In an artist's bookwork, *Michael Snow: A Survey* (1970), which served as the catalogue for a major exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Snow combined his family photographs with reproductions of his work.

Other uses of photography were appearing in the work of Canadian painters, sculptors, and printmakers. Jack Chambers's (1931–78) phenomenological concept of perceptual realism, the motor of his painting *401 Towards London, No. 1* (1968–69, AGO), indirectly uses a source photograph (three photographs, to be precise) to sharpen the memory of direct perception. Likewise, the photographic *feel* of filming his backyard daily for one year, with fixed aperture and unvarying position, characterizes the middle section of Chambers's film *Circle* (1969). Abstract painter Roy Kiyooka (1926–94; Figure 11.9) began to write poetry and make photographic works in the 1960s. His *StoneDGloves: Alms for Soft Palms* (1969–70), inspired by the discarded gloves of workers on the World Expo 70 site at Osaka, combines poetry and photography in an elegiac series that was acquired and widely circulated by the National Gallery of Canada. Incorporating photographic technology into sculpture, Michael de Courcy (b.1944) brought together the illusionism of landscape photography with the improvisational quality of building blocks, while Jack Dale (b.1928), exploiting the transparency of photosensitized glass and Plexiglas, fragmented



and “floated” a figure in space in his *Cubed Woman* (1970, CMCP). Playfully mixing references to Pop and Minimalism, printmaker Serge Tournant (b.1942) sets a photographic image of a hillside dotted with olive trees in a field of black Benday dots to create his offset print *Environnement transformé No. 1, Dotscape* (1975). The Lithography Workshop and the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) were catalysts for photographic projects by such faculty members as Garry Neill Kennedy (b.1935; Figure 16.6) and Bruce Parsons (b.1937), as well as such distinguished visitors as American poet and musician Emmett Williams. Williams’s bookwork *Six Variations upon a Spoerri Landscape* (1973)—a stratified record of six meals, each eaten upon a photographic “table cloth” record of the previous meal—inscribes NSCAD in the history of Fluxus, a global network of artists, composers, and designers, formed in the 1960s.

The international Mail Art movement of the 1960s involved collage and photomontage, as well as the newly invented photocopy machine, which enticed both established printmakers and emerging artists. Barbara Astman (b.1950), Doreen Lindsay (b.1934), and Nell Tenhaaf (b.1951) were among the pioneers, whether working directly by placing objects on the copier surface, by combining their own photographs with copied elements, or by using the machine to produce suites of prints. The copier’s instant results encouraged experimentation and fantasy. In Astman’s *Myra* (1977), a woman’s Grand Tour has been montaged from studio portraits and architectural views of European landmarks. Jennifer Dickson (b.1936), drawn to the medium’s delicate yet permanent colour as well as to the intimate scale of the print, created her mythic narrative of a return to Eden, *Il Paradiso Terrestre* (1979), as a numbered suite of photocopy prints.

Non-silver photographic techniques, such as cyanotype and gum bichromate, were revived during this period by such artists as Evergon (b.1946), Stephen Livick (b.1945), and Michael Schreier (b.1949), whose innovative work would continue to mine the potential of photographic technology. For a generation trained by painters, sculptors, printmakers, and craftspersons, yet seeking expressions of nonconformity, photography could be almost anything *except* a gelatin silver print. Alternatively, such a print might be disguised by sepia-toning and delicate hand-colouring, as in Nina Raginsky’s (b.1941) quirky encyclopedia of the citizenry of Victoria, British Columbia. Even Swiss-born photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank (b.1924), living from 1969 in Mabou, Cape Breton, set aside the sombre black and white materials of his monumental series and book *The Americans* (1959) to make intimate autobiographical collages from colour snapshots, contact sheets, and correspondence, including some landscapes overpainted by artist June Leaf (b.1929). American-born photographer David Heath (b.1931) published his wrenching black and white photographs of *A Dialogue with Solitude* in 1965. In the 1970s, having emigrated to Canada, he began to use the Polaroid SX-70 camera, organizing his spontaneous, intimate images into the narrative sequences of *Songs of Innocence* (1981). At the same time he was collecting anonymous photographs, which he eventually compiled into a multimedia presentation, *Le grand album ordinaire* (1973).

Meanwhile, the straight black and white photograph—photography as a simulacrum of the real world—seemed to gain visual power, especially when treated rigorously, almost mechanically. Arnaud Maggs (b.1926) trained as a graphic designer but turned to photography in the 1970s. He first borrowed the front and side views of the

#### Figure 14.7

Michael Snow, *Authorization*, 1969

instant silver prints (Polaroid 55) and adhesive tape on mirror in metal frame, 54.6 × 44.4 × 1.4 cm with frame  
National Gallery of Canada

mug shot, and later expanded his practice to make 48 views of the same human subjects, which he exhibited as grids. The work fascinated, disturbed, and exerted tremendous influence in art and magazine circles. The early black and white work of Lynne Cohen (b.1944), which also emerged in the 1970s, concentrated exclusively on interior spaces: homes, shops, social or sports clubs and other institutions. Taking these spaces as found, and treating them dispassionately, Cohen expanded her subject matter to observation rooms, target ranges, and spas: places whose associations with inspection and surveillance matched her intense technological scrutiny.

As photographic art entered museums and galleries, the photographic vernacular—ordinary pictures by ordinary people, as well as commercial and industrial photography—was beginning to be recognized by artists, theorists, historians, and curators as a visual language and a source of knowledge. Catalytic contributions include the recuperative archival research on professional women photographers—conducted in the 1970s by Laura Jones, Cheryl Lean, Jennifer McLean, and Diane Philips—and exhibition projects combining the work of artists and amateurs. Among the latter is A Photographic Project: Alberta 1980, organized by Douglas Clark and Linda Wedman. These projects, often spearheaded by practitioners—Clark (1952–99) was an inspired photographer of the found object—complemented the rise of interdisciplinary cultural studies focused on the photograph. In another example, Benjamin Buchloh and Robert Wilkie edited *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948–1968* (1983), a study of the work of Leslie Shedden (d.1986), a commercial photographer active in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. Their Marxist framing of the Shedden archive aroused considerable debate.

The collection and exhibition histories of photography resemble those of other media, and by the early 1980s were beginning to intersect with them. Rather more particular to photography is the book, and some photographers utilized this

medium as the primary vehicle of their work, whether published in mass-market or numbered editions. In 1998 Larry Towell (b.1953), a member of the prestigious international photographic agency Magnum, published *Then Palestine*, compiled from his coverage of the violence in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Such books are intended to underscore the photographer's implication in events: the photographer is the subject. In a more meditative vein, the photographic artist's book can cultivate intimate reception. The figure of the artist often enters the work, sometimes obliquely as a shadow or a reflection, sometimes more subtly in a formal insistence on photographic seeing. Photographic narrative is sometimes supplemented by allusive text. This form has been particularly important to such Quebec artists as Michel Campeau (*Les tremblements du coeur*, 1988, and *Éclipses et labyrinthes*, 1993); Richard Baillargeon (b.1949; *Comme des îles*, 1991); Michel Lamothe (b.1949; *Même les cigales tremblaient*, 2000); Serge Clément (b.1950; *Fragrant Light*, 2000); and Bertrand Carrière (b.1957; *Signes de jour*, 2002). To this list of books one might add Raymonde April's (b.1953) exhibition catalogue *Les fleuves invisibles* (1997, Musée d'art de Joliette), in which her enigmatic narrative sequence *L'arrivée des figurants* was reproduced in full.

## Land Claims

Paradoxically, even as modernism has enshrined photography as both a medium and a tool, fissures are appearing across the culture as part of the philosophical and formal expansion known as postmodernism. The paradigm shift from structuralism's ontological distinctions and clear dualities to poststructuralism's more porous, liminal zones soon manifested itself in photographic images, led by the critics and theorists through what has been called the linguistic turn. Considering photography as a language, artists and semiologists have

duly exploited its capacity to be indexical, iconic, and symbolic. Ideological shifts assign multiple, sometimes contradictory functions to photography, depending on the context. Practical issues also have their impact, as universities and art colleges expand, hiring artists as teachers, and a bullish art market welcomes the photographic image. Here again, approaches to the landscape are telling. The most literal photographic description of the landscape can be interpreted in political terms and placed on a footing with the products of conceptual critical practice.

The environmental movement fuelled interest in views of otherwise untouched wilderness, as well as in photographic surveys featuring signs of exhaustion, pollution, and erosion. Purist approaches came first, a path well trodden by the American Sierra Club. For example, John C. Walker's (b.1950) colour photographs of the Laurentians, printed as dye transfers for brilliance and permanence, exemplify the photographic presentation of nature's grandeur. In the 1970s the subject matter and techniques of nineteenth-century geological surveys were revived under the banner of New Topographics, but were used critically to evaluate the legacy of the nineteenth-century ideal of progress. Gary Wilson (b.1951) undertook his distinctly unromantic series *Views of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia* in the late 1970s, showing out-of-the-way places repeatedly denuded and scarred by the machinery of logging, mining, and transportation. In the 1980s Edward Burtynsky (b.1955) began to photograph railcuts, mines, and homesteads, gradually focusing on sites of such serious and spectacular environmental impact as refineries, quarries, oil fields, and recycling plants, depicted in large-scale colour prints. A different, more painful cry for life on the planet can be felt in Volker Seding's (1943–2007) *The Zoo Portfolio* (1989) in which the animals sit behind bars and in front of prettily painted landscapes designed to make us, not them, feel better.

The Social Landscape, a photographic movement advanced in the 1960s by the influential American teacher Nathan Lyons, elaborated the visual complexity and anonymous encounters of North American urban sprawl. Toronto painter Tom Gibson, who had developed this photographic approach independently, would eventually study with Lyons at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York, as did other Canadian artists, teachers, and curators. The Social Landscape is a thoroughly modernist approach and uses *social* not in terms of social conscience but rather to mean being attuned to the qualities of social space and their translation into photographic language. The movement is a logical extension of mid-century social realism, coloured by the Beat writers of the 1950s and 1960s and tickling the underbelly of the middle class. The photographer's studio becomes the street, or any other place where the flow of human interaction can be observed and photographically interrupted. The early street photography of Charles Gagnon (1934–2003), for example, can be related to the social landscape, which he gradually stripped to its bare essentials, heightening the tension in his black and white images through careful, formal juxtapositions. In 1971 Randy Saharuni (b.1947) made a psychological portrait of Montreal in a social landscape style of tense formal juxtaposition. In the late 1970s a renewed interest in colour entered the social landscape through the work of David McMillan (b.1945), whose full and audacious compositions carve the picture plane into patches of light and shadow, organic shapes, and architectural forms. Robert Burley (b.1957) synthesizes the dense construction, deep space, and near constant activity of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport into restrained colour compositions. Whether in black and white or colour, the vitality of the social landscape seems inexhaustible, and is often poured into foreign content, as in Douglas Curran's (b.1952) *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space* (1985), which documents

the American sites, saucers, and charismatic proponents of interplanetary communication. David Hlynsky's (b.1947) *Communist Store Windows* (1986–90) is a prescient study of the disappearance of Soviet-era Eastern European culture. Photographed over the course of a decade, Phil Bergerson's (b.1947) *Shards of America* (2004) is an edgy political commentary on the *fin de siècle* American empire.

Walking the streets and taking photographs—adopting the nineteenth-century role of the *flâneur*—is only a short step from adopting the role of another vintage persona, the photographer as traveller. This nineteenth-century way of working was revived in the late twentieth century with attitudes formed by critical cultural theory. Romantic yearnings are kept in check; the line between culture and nature is erased. Archaeological sites, dilapidated ruins, and architectural monuments are not treated simply as vestiges of the past to be recorded but as living theatres for the production of meaning in the moment. The symbolic constructions of popular culture also enter the frame. This phenomenon

can be seen in the work of Thaddeus Holownia (b.1949), whose first major photographic project upon moving to Sackville, New Brunswick, was to photograph the signs of Irving Oil—gas stations and refineries—on the landscape. Holownia's focus then shifted to documenting signs of European settlement in the region, culminating in *Dykelands* (1989), and his work has continued systematically to trace the histories of land use through the seasons and in different conditions (*Lightning Strike, Sackville, New Brunswick*, 1994; Figure 14.8).

Holownia's use of a panoramic camera to do this work is also noteworthy. A similar instrument has been employed by Geoffrey James (b.1942) to photograph Italian and French pleasure gardens: vestiges of aristocratic power, to be sure, but treated by James as places of calm and reflection, with multiple visual entry points into the experience. In the 1970s the panoramic view camera was embraced by a number of other artists who enjoyed its compatibility with human vision, as well as the distortions that arise from its translation of a 120° to 140° view onto a flat surface. Richard Holden (b.1946)



**Figure 14.8**

Thaddeus Holownia, *Lightning Strike, Sackville, New Brunswick*, 1994  
gelatin silver print, 20.1 × 45.4 cm; image: 15.8 × 41.3 cm  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

explored the wide rectangular shape using colour materials, surveying city streets as well as the topography of the Canadian north. Richard Baillargeon combined panoramic views of open spaces with text as a composite projection of solitude and yearning. At Banff he introduced the instrument to Ernie Kroeger (b.1954), who subsequently adopted a more portable version for views and self-portraits along the Great Divide in the Canadian Rockies. For spectators, the panoramic effect is a sensation of being surrounded by, and thereby being part of, the histories of place; cinema cultivates the same illusion. Borrowing this seamless effect just to shatter it, Brenda Pelkey (b.1950) cultivates apprehension or alienation in the spectator. Her assembled landscapes (*Dreams of Life and Death*, 1994; *Oblivion*, 1997) feature small-town settings and country roads photographed at night under artificial lights and injected with tragic life stories.

Land art, which emerged in North America in the 1960s in the form of site-specific interventions and temporary monuments, was photographically documented and even on occasion conceived exclusively for the camera. For Robin Mackenzie (1938–2004) and Bill Vazan (b.1933) photography evolved from an instrument of record to an art form. In Mackenzie's photographic memory work the camera is used to sweep the horizon, back and forth, creating series and grids. In Vazan's monumental pieces the horizon rotates on a human axis, compressing the globe onto a segmented photographic surface. The urban landscapes of Pierre Boogaerts (b.1946)—his syntheses of skies—are as much about process as they are about nature and culture. Taken with an amateur camera from a pedestrian's point of view and processed by a commercial lab, the images become the building blocks of a minimalist grid. Connected to land art, though more performance-based, are projects by Françoise Sullivan (b.1925; Figure 8.4), who

brought her concerns as a modernist dancer to her carefully mapped and photographically documented *Promenade from the Musée d'art contemporain to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts* (1970). Sullivan's black and white urban views are straight-ahead and matter-of-fact, while Boogaerts sends the mind's eye soaring into the blue. In both cases, the spectator is made conscious of the landscape as an embodied cultural construction. In 1979 Marlene Creates (b.1952) made the ephemeral nature of land art explicit by placing stones and paper where they would be swept away by the tides. Her subsequent autobiographical turn to works about memory and place in Newfoundland are closely connected to these early interventions in nature.

Conceptual art, with its emphasis on the mechanical, serial nature of photography, drained visual drama and mystery from the landscape, replacing romanticism with irony. Important centres of photo-conceptual art include Vancouver, Toronto, and Halifax, the first of these cities being actively engaged with the politics of regionalism and, by logical extension, notions of place. Photo-conceptual artist and theorist Ian Wallace (b.1943) has traced the West Coast movement, beginning in the mid-1960s with the documentation of idea art, site-specific works, taxonomies of objects, and language games, all set within the urban, suburban, or industrial landscape. In 1968 N.E. Thing Co. (1966–78; Figures 16.3 and 16.4)—the conceptual art engine of Iain Baxter (b.1936) and Ingrid Baxter (b.1938)—published the artists' book *Piles*, a photographic collection of found objects from Vancouver's industrial belt. Systematic description and specificity of place, time, and duration of production are the groundwork of photo-conceptualism as it emerged in the work of Michael de Courcy, Christos Dikeakos (b.1946), Rodney Graham (b.1949; Figure 19.1), and, transitionally, Jeff Wall (b.1946). In the late 1970s one conceptual artist adapted Duchampian irony to the found photograph: images routinely rejected by photo labs as failures because the taker's finger is

in the frame. Over six years Don Corman (b.1951) compiled and published these “bad” tourist shots, attributing them to *Digit* (1984). In 1994 Micah Lexier (b.1960) exhibited his *A Portrait of David*, a series of portraits of men by that name, from ages 1 to 75, systematically taken according to the artist’s instructions by Sheila Spence. A conflation of Social Landscape and Conceptualism merged in the mid-1990s production of Robin Collyer (b.1949), which featured altered photographs of the built environment, with all the words and logos digitally erased.

As photographic practice shifted to the more theorized positions of the 1980s and 1990s, new constructions were put on the landscape. Photography’s foundations in pictorial convention and language are addressed by Sylvie Readman (b.1958) as she appropriates nineteenth-century survey photographs and luminist paintings, recognizing the culturally determined patterns in her photographs of nature. Landscape as a pure product of the imagination is extended by Holly King (b.1957), Lucie Lefebvre (b.1956), Miklos Legrady (b.1951), and Bill Eakin (b.1952), who construct models of wild or barely settled places (grottoes, waterways, outcrops, desert oases, or rough-hewn cabins) to be photographed and enlarged into visually explorable spaces.

As photographic language came to be a focus of interest, so did the medium’s shaping of our consciousness of space and time. As in the nineteenth century, these ontological investigations are conducted in the natural world. Denis Farley (b.1956) returned to the origins of photography and to protracted spectatorial experience by reviving the camera obscura. The meticulous assemblages of Roberto Pellegrinuzzi (b.1958)—a monumental leaf or human hand made up of small black and white images held in place with specimen pins—enlarge spectatorial consciousness of the histories of living organisms. For Normand Rajotte (b.1952), a poetic response to nature involves different vantage points on the same, or similar, natural formations, and the resulting black and white pictures are presented in

groups as variations and musings. Arrangements of black and white images by Claude-Philippe Benoit (b.1953) align images of nature with vestiges of industry and culture, these visual semiotics effectively replicating the great conversation that gave birth to photography in the nineteenth century. In the late 1990s Michael Flomen (b.1952) completed *Rising*, a series consisting of photographs of snowflakes and ice crystals—pinpoints of brilliance in dark fields. At the same time, he was undertaking a body of cameraless photographs, exposing his homemade negatives by the light of fireflies.

Feminist artists, seeking alternatives to the mastering gaze and its conventions of beauty, reframe the landscape as a place of memory. Living with the knowledge of her terminal illness, Barbara Spohr (1955–87) embraced dailiness in her visual references to the snapshot and her textual references to the diary, and combined these elements in exuberant colour. Reviving the luminosity and lyrical designs of Pictorialism in black and white as well as in colour, Angela Grauerholz (b.1952) expresses memory as the patient accumulation of light-filled motifs, images carrying both private references and public knowledge. Marie-Jeanne Musiol (b.1950) likewise stresses the essential nature of photography as a language of light, imaging the emanations of plant specimens with electromagnetic photography. Her studies of a Nazi extermination camp, *Quand la terre retient (Auschwitz-Birkenau)* (1996), focus on the surrounding fields and forests as silent witnesses to the violence and tragedy.

Post-colonial practice shatters the illusion of landscape as an object of disinterested appreciation by raising issues of territory and ownership. Archival photographs reclaimed by First Nations artists Robert Houle (b.1947; Ojibwa/Saulteaux) and Edward Poitras (b.1953; Métis) function indexically as windows onto the past. Houle’s *Premises for Self Rule* (1994) consists of five diptychs. Each left panel is a loosely brushed colour field; each right panel reproduces an extract—a treaty, law, or clause from

the Canadian Constitution—from colonial and Canadian legal history that had been illegally set aside. Imposed on each text panel, blocking part of it and throwing a shadow onto it, is a photographic postcard that symbolizes the trafficking in First Nation peoples and their cultures. The painted panel gives expression to the tension between rights and wrongs. In a 1993 billboard project commissioned by the Mendel Art Gallery for its exhibition titled *The Post-Colonial Landscape*, Poitras (Figure 18.10) conflated an archival photograph of Aboriginal children sitting on a hillside overlooking the Lebret Indian Residential School near Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan (a familial site of memory), with a map of the Americas and an urgent ecological message.

In a related tactic, identity politics stakes territorial claims, connecting communities to sites of collective memory. Jeff Thomas (b.1956, Iroquois) walks North American city streets, conducting a form of urban archaeology by photographing signs of “Indian-ness.” These fragments of the past are brought into the present and sent into the future by the inclusion in the picture of Thomas’s son Bear. With increasing complexity, photographic landscape comes to be produced and interrogated as the visual history of ideologies governing land use and enjoyment. These readings are understood even when the landscape forms a background to the human subject, as in the work of Korean-born Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon (b.1960; Figure 4.8), the artist playing the tourist and laying claim to the beauty spots of Banff in *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991).

## Performing Bodies

The photographic self-portrait serves many functions in the late twentieth century, none of them strictly personal. Dissociation from the figured self was evident in the early 1960s’ first outpouring of performance art, which, like land art, generated much photographic material. These projects evolved from primary documents

of ephemeral public events into integral works that constructed and preserved artists’ alter egos. They include the Leopard Realty (begun 1970) of Dr Brute and Lady Brute, aka Eric Metcalfe (b.1940) and Kate Craig (1947–2002), and the 1974 Vancouver mayoralty race run by Mr. Peanut (Figure 16.1), aka Vincent Trasov (b.1947). Video and performance artist Glenn Lewis (b.1935), accompanied by photographer Taki Bluesinger (1943–2004), searched beyond Vancouver for the origins of paradise in *Bewilderness* (1978). Also the long-standing collaborative of AA Bronson (b.1946), Felix Partz (1945–94), and Jorge Zontal (1944–94) as General Idea launched elaborate plans for the *Miss General Idea Pageant* and *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion* as early as 1970. Parodying myths of genius, glamour, and fame, the multi-disciplinary work of General Idea includes important photographic elements: *FILE* (modelled on the American *LIFE* magazine); “showcards” outlining General Idea’s image-building strategies; and self-portraits with attributes of artistic success. Alternatively, the artist may choose to embody a nation, as did Barrie Jones (b.1950) in *Hockey Shots* (1974), posing on cultural sites around the world wearing a hockey sweater and mask and carrying a hockey stick.

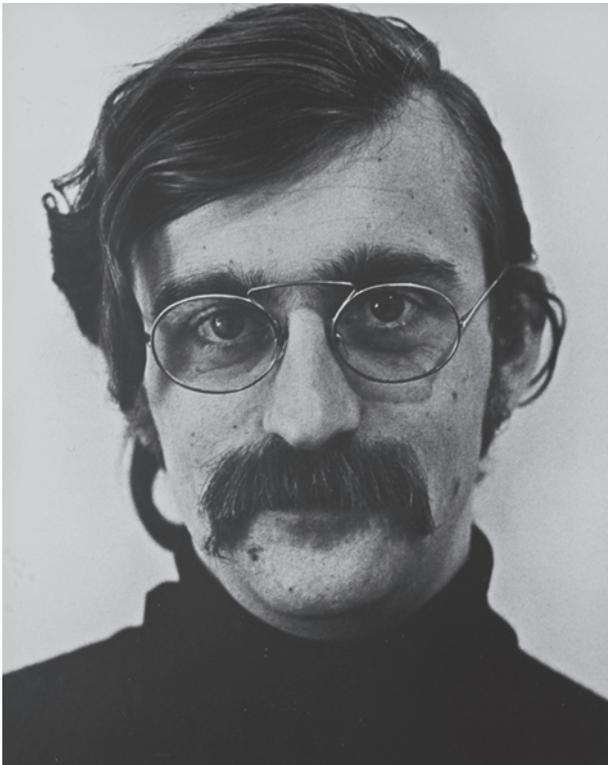
The opposing tendency is grounded in the personal, and is focused on representing the maker’s identity and body for political and sometimes therapeutic reasons. In the mid-1970s Sandra Semchuk (b.1948) initiated a cycle of self-portraits, each identified by place, month, and year. *Emma Lake, August 1977*, in which the artist stands in a culturally loaded, natural environment, is one formula. Semchuk also poses in living spaces and, filling the frame with her face, against a plain backdrop. In this work a sense of place and time has the notational function of a diary, plotting the moods expressed by Semchuk’s face. Reclaiming the female body as a vehicle of self-expression and identity construction, feminist self-portraiture took many directions,



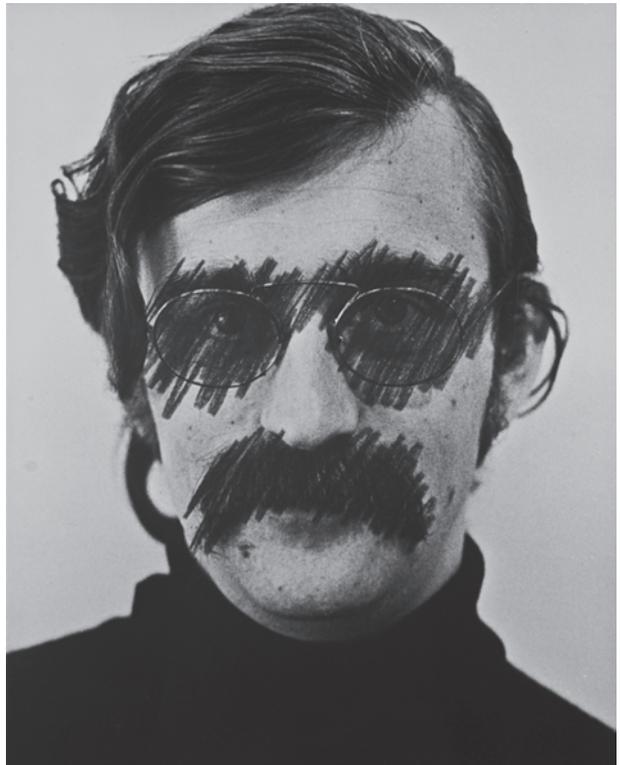
1/3 Sissy Lake as Gillis Gherbent Lake 74



2/3 Sissy Lake as Gillis Gherbent Lake 74



1/3 Sissy Lake as Gillis Gherbent Lake 74



2/3 Sissy Lake as Gillis Gherbent Lake 74

from the unflinching honesty displayed by Semchuk to works of the imagination. Modest, yet incalculable in terms of influence is a series of self-transformations produced in the early 1970s by Suzy Lake (b.1947). Frontal ID photos, increasingly manipulated, are presented in rows, tracking Lake's switch into another persona. The sharp point of the series is clear when, step by step, Lake remakes herself into a male artist or art dealer (*Suzy Lake as Gilles Gheerbrant*, 1974, CMCP; Figure 14.9).

With photography increasingly considered as a fiction, the mounting of elaborate *tableaux vivants* became an important tendency of the 1980s. The production values and scale of these works also began to grow as spectacle was re-imagined as spectatorial immersion. In the 1980s Evergon was using a large-scale Polaroid camera and a shallow theatrical box to stage homoerotic evocations of baroque paintings. Actors, costumers, and set decorators collaborated in these lush works, and Evergon, or his alter ego Celluloso Evergoni, is often featured, as in *The Deposition from the Cross* (1985, CMCP; Figure 14.10). The work complements rereadings of art history in other media, especially cinema, that seek out suppressed histories of sexuality. Staged photography was already established as a means of renewing art history through visual and critical revisions of modernism and modernity, with self-portraiture implicating the artist in this critique. Leading this movement was Jeff Wall, whose *Picture for Women* (1979, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), modelled on Edouard Manet's iconic painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–82), reconstructs its ambiguous positioning of subjects gazing and reflecting the gaze.

Elsewhere, the female body was being reclaimed by women artists. Humour and

poignancy characterize the narrative vignettes created by Raymonde April in the late 1970s. In one-person *tableaux vivants*, the artist strikes melodramatic poses, exposing her characters' romantic yearnings in poetic bursts of text. At the same time Sorel Cohen (b.1936) was appropriating nineteenth-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge's time-motion studies, applying his methods to the ritual of a woman's daily work. In subsequent projects, such as *Tablet* (1986), she evoked nineteenth-century French realist painter Gustave Courbet to change the dynamic between male artist and female model by commandeering both roles. In the twilight years of mechanical reproduction, illustrated mythologies and encyclopedias could be sources of information about the formation of the modern subject. These investigations yielded the intricate collages of Cheryl Sourkes (b.1945), first rendered in the early 1980s as black and white prints, and later in colour. Nicole Jolicoeur (b.1947) was concurrently opening the photographic archives of psychiatry, appropriating and reworking nineteenth-century medical photographs of female patients whose mental illnesses were diagnosed from signs erupting on their bodies. A rather literal, though transgendered, appropriation occurs in *Before the Camera* (1991), Chuck Samuels's (b.1956) re-enactments of canonical European and American modernist treatments of the female nude. More nuanced, and strangely compelling, are the 1989–94 nude self-portraits of Brian Piitz (b.1951) in which an anti-canonical male body is displayed in all its imperfections. Internationally, too, the body is a theme of photographic art practice. In 1990, at the Venice Biennale, Geneviève Cadieux (b.1955) captured this fascination by covering the Canadian

#### Figure 14.9

Suzy Lake, *Suzy Lake as Gilles Gheerbrant*, 1974  
gelatin silver print, 50.7 × 40.5 cm; image: 34.7 × 27 cm  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography



**Figure 14.10**

Evergon, *The Deposition from the Cross*, 1985

instant dye prints (Polaroid), 244.1 × 230 cm overall; image 1: 231 × 110.8 cm; image 2: 226.5 × 110.7 cm

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

pavilion with a photographic skin consisting of monumental images of the body in parts.

Photography thus engages with psychoanalytic theory, simultaneously permitting and critiquing the gaze. Extended portraits of models are records of performances, and of states of mind and body presented to the camera. In 1981 George Steeves (b.1943) undertook to document the various persona of Halifax-based performance artist Ellen Pierce. As their relationship evolved into a love affair, their collaboration shifted into extended portraiture (*Clasped Hands, 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, 1983, from *Pictures of Ellen*, 1981–84; Figure 14.11). Steeves would develop this genre through intense encounters with other models, notably Astrid Bruner (*Exile*, 1987–90), and in unsparing self-portraits. Eldon Garnet (b.1946) provokes visceral reactions with his suite of colour photographs, *Promise* (1993), in which protagonists struggle hopelessly to survive in nature, embracing as they sink into the mire. Memory and imagination intertwine in the surrealist imagery of Diana Thorneycroft (b.1956): a disturbing cycle of work that began in 1990 with references to family, violence, and invasive medical procedures, all acted out by the artist. Here again, memories may be fabrications rather than confessions; the self is the handiest, and hardest, model when the intention is to stage the surreal or the grotesque. The double self-portraits of Janieta Eyre (b.1966)—bizarre representations of identical twins or mothers and daughters—refer to the doubling of photography and to Freudian notions of the uncanny. In photographic treatments of social relations, using the self to play different types or emotions illustrates the malleability of identity, a modern condition that photography can be said to have encouraged. *Venus Inferred* (2000) by Laura Letinsky (b.1962) uses internal framing devices, and often the mirror, to show the splits within and between characters represented in the act, or aftermath, of making love. In *Infinite Stories* (1997–99),

Bettina Hoffmann (b.1964) subtly portrays the coded social interaction of women, playing all the characters herself.

Autobiographical motifs need not systematically include the image of the maker, although a sense of presence in absence is crucial. In *Staying Home* (1981–83), Michael Mitchell (b.1943) discovers his sons in the traces of their play. Coming home to a sleeping household, he makes colour still lifes of the remains of another day spent without him. Sunil Gupta (b.1950), an Indian-born, British-based Canadian photographer, returned to India in 1986 to make the photographic series *Exile*, representing the unrepresented Indian gay man—the invisible man he might have become had he not left India. Since the late 1970s the work of Marian Penner Bancroft (b.1947) has shifted from intimate documentation to reflexive explorations of the histories of her family as European emigrants and settlers on the West Coast. This project takes the form of such sculptural photographic works as *Transfigured Wood (Part Three): Family Tree* (1984) and *Mnemonic (the screen)* (1988), each subtly informed by semiotics and post-colonial theory.

Artists' reworkings of their own family photographs are both personal and generic; on the one hand they testify, or confess, to particular life histories, and on the other they narrate the artists' lives in true or false stories that cultivate affinity memories in strangers. Recollections of a Harlem girlhood are fused with the social landscape of Toronto in photo-etchings by June Clark (formerly June Clark-Greenberg, b.1941). Vid Ingelevics (b.1952) figures stories of his family's forced flight from Latvia in installations that combine photographs and furniture. Hamish Buchanan (b.1955) and Rosalie Favell (b.1958) appropriate photographs from popular media and combine them with family photographs to reflect the awakening of forbidden sexual desires. In a series of triptychs that includes *Five Hundred Year Itch* (1992, CMCP; Figure 14.12), Shelley Niro (b.1954,



**Figure 14.11**

George Steeves, *Clasped Hands, 40th Birthday*, 1983  
gelatin silver print, 27.7 × 35.3 cm; image: 20.9 × 20.9 cm  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

Iroquois/Onondaga) and her collaborators act out, and thereby demolish, a catalogue of gendered, social, and racial stereotypes. In 1999 Rafael Goldchain (b.1953) began creating a portrait gallery of his dispersed or murdered ancestors,

real and imagined, in a series titled *On Familial Ground*. Goldchain plays every role—man, woman, and child—in full costume and makeup, and then enhances the images digitally, aiming for a level of *near* perfection that challenges the spectator's faith



**Figure 14.12**

Shelley Niro, *Five Hundred Year Itch*, 1992

gelatin silver print heightened with paint; gelatin silver print; toned, gelatin silver print, in hand-drilled overmat, 56 × 94 cm

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

in the genre. Two photographic yarns by Henri Robideau (b.1946), however, make a mockery of the search for roots and the artistic aspirations that have been surveyed here. In his *Big Stories* (2001) a photographic poet's dreams are blighted and genius becomes a matter of survival, just as survival is a matter of luck.

## Critical Practice

Skepticism and irony are powerful engines of late modernist and postmodernist activity. Critical practice, attentive to the invisible forces of ideology,

concentrates on problems of representation and reception. Interrogating photography as an instrument used to anaesthetize subjects, suppress histories, and propagate self-serving myths, artists produce work that addresses the social and political structures of the art world. Appropriation is a common denominator of these practices. An insistence on contextualizing the image in terms of intent, process, and content requires sometimes copious amounts of text, as the modernist notion that a photograph can “speak for itself” is shouted down. Communication, linguistic, and psychoanalytic theories open images to new interpretations; a vast array of photographic

documents—drawn from the public and private collections of advertising, photojournalism, social documentary photography, cinema, and television—are integrated into contemporary works of art. Informed by developments in the social sciences, particularly anthropology and ethnography, the ethics of representing a human subject are hotly debated. Subjectivity, which was late modernism's replacement for objectivity, is itself replaced by reflexivity. At the same time the power of authorship is diminished, downgraded to a function. The very content and structure of these critical works turn them over to the spectator, whose reading must accommodate multiple versions, counter-currents, and unstable signs. These complexities are navigated by critics whose practices are at once rigorous and adventurous, some approaching criticism through fictional narrative. Finally, the economic bases of photography and photographic art begged to be investigated, especially as the market rose sharply in the 1980s and continued thereafter to smile on spectacular photographic work, sometimes called photo-based art.

Critical practice takes many forms through which two complementary approaches can be discerned. One is visually and textually copious, expressing the complex or conflicted nature of the content through rigorous and demanding presentation. In *The Family in the Context of Childrearing* (1983–84), for example, Susan McEachern (b.1951), inspired by her desire for parenthood, combines informal colour photographs of different parenting arrangements with excerpts from feminist theory and learned histories of the family. The other approach is effectively the reverse: a monolithic statement that is no less complex but closer in effect to history painting or billboard advertising. The work of David Buchan (1950–94) combines the qualities of these apposite genres in large-scale colour prints and transparencies that ironically emulate the seductions of visual and popular culture.

The division within critical practice is as much about predilection as it is about product, with considerable crossover even within individual artists' oeuvres.

Since the late 1970s Stan Denniston (b.1953) has been investigating the gulfs between official statements and persistent rumour, history and memory, and truth and fiction as these manifest themselves in communications media. His photographic installation of original and appropriated images, *Dealey Plaza/Recognition and Mnemonic* (1983, Museum London), builds on the conspiracy theories that arose from the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, casting doubt on lesser known events that had affected Denniston himself. In such multimedia works as *Meeting Nasser* (1985–86, Canada Council Art Bank) and *The Mukhabarat State or Zenobia's Wall* (1986), artist and writer Jamelie Hassan (b.1948) underscores the split between experience and history, whether by drawing on her own memories or by creating a fictional character whose hypnotic voice evokes the conditions of colonialism, militarism, surveillance, and censorship. In the 1980s, collages by Mark Lewis (b.1954) re-presented fragments of painting, advertising, and pornography, sometimes accompanied by wafting perfume, to criticize the tyranny of cultural conventions. Using photo-transfer techniques developed by Neo-dada and Pop artists of the 1950s and 1960s, two First Nations painters emerging in the 1980s, Carl Beam (1943–2005, Ojibwa; Figure 18.7) and Jane Ash Poitras (b.1951, Cree/Chipewyan), juxtaposed photographic images drawn from colonial archives, newspaper morgues, and private collections to represent the attempted erasure of the First Nations, and the preservation of their culture in alternative forms of knowledge.

Some critical attacks on late modernist photography have challenged the ethics of

production and spectatorship by exaggerating the form of modernist photography and challenging the boundaries of good taste. Beginning with *Reality and Motive in Documentary Photography* (1986), Donigan Cumming (b.1947) mounted an elaborate and absurd theatre of social documentary practice, recruiting models to play versions of themselves in fictitious circumstances. This visual deconstruction of documentary photography aspired to a more honest and nuanced representational model, which Cumming developed in *Pretty Ribbons* (1993) in collaboration with one of his subjects, Nettie Harris. Admitting fantasy and sensuality to the representation of an aging body, the project broke taboos and sparked public debate in North America and Europe.

Controversy is endemic to critical practice, whether local or global. Discarding the social documentary trope of mothers as Madonnas, Judith Crawley (b.1945) interlaced documentary photographs of mothers and children with the mothers' frank testimonials in *Giving Birth is Just the Beginning: Women Speak about Mothering* (1987). Photographs, interviews, and field notes by Robert Del Tredici (b.1938) comprise his *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* (1987), an exhaustive survey of nuclear power and arms industries—a work initiated in the aftermath of the 1979 nuclear accident at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania. Since the late 1970s the partnership of Carole Condé (b.1940) and Karl Beveridge (b.1945) has methodically addressed issues of social and political importance, beginning with histories of unionization and moving to enduring crises under the headings of labour, environment, health, social action, and global justice (Figure 16.2). Their collaborative process includes their subject communities in the development of staged scenarios, sometimes combined with archival photographs to flesh out the thoughts of the protagonists, as well

as invisible or forgotten histories. The equally invisible flip-side—institutional control of knowledge—has been brought out by Blake Fitzpatrick (b.1955), whose *Work with Artifacts* (1985) sifts through a science museum and whose *Uranium Landscapes* (1995) documents sites of radioactive contamination in the area of Port Hope, Ontario. In *Natural History* (1988–90), a museological installation of images, sound, and text, Robert Bean (b.1954) explored the display of artifacts in the construction of social histories of nature.

A more unified and spectacular approach to critical practice emerges in the work of West Coast photoconceptualists, led by Jeff Wall. Wall's realist and surrealist backlit transparencies encapsulate the seismic socio-economic eruptions of a modern city (Figure 13.5). Ian Wallace (b.1943) is likewise interested in the documentary effect, silkscreening what *appear* to be surreptitiously snapped photographs of street people into brilliantly painted colour fields for the extended series *Poverty* (1980–87). Two younger members of the Vancouver school, Ken Lum (b.1956) and Roy Arden (b.1957), create impressive photographic statements. Lum's staged photographs borrow from the overpowering scale and graphic punch of advertising to address issues of race and class. As an artist and curator, Arden has moved from the archival, photoconceptual work of his early career to making straight colour photographs that address what he has termed the *landscape of economy*, which he argues has arisen from the rapid transformation of Vancouver.

## The Death of Photography?

Digital technology was introduced in the late 1980s with the usual fanfare that technocratic societies accord to the new. The capture of



**Figure 14.13**

Alain Paiment, *Mapping Continuum (Bourse de Paris)*, 1994  
laminated cibachrome on plywood structure, 210 x 185 x 185 cm  
private collection

the amateur and professional markets was rapid; most commercial labs phased out their analog, or film-based, services, and much of the art world followed. Artists who were already manipulating their analog images continued to do so, but digitally. Appropriation from photographic archives and libraries

was likewise enabled. Many practitioners of straight photography simply switched for convenience, and the spectator was, as ever, left with the depictive photograph as an article of faith. Without the existence of a photographic negative, the evidentiary function of the medium was fatally compromised, although

skepticism—built up over a century of exposure to fakes and very loose facsimiles—made this somewhat less of a shock than it would otherwise have been. For such artists as John Massey (b.1950; Figure 15.8), who used photography as an image-making tool, digital technology was embraced, beginning with *The Jack Photographs* (1992–96). Here, an articulated figure, Jack (the miniature wooden mannequin employed by artists), comes to life as a Cyclops, a single searching eye. In *Learning to Count* (1996), Dyan Marie (b.1954) inserts incongruous elements into the natural world, producing images that show, for example, whirlwinds in the palm of a hand. *Myths about Beginnings/Ends* (1997) by Jon Baturin (b.1950) combines medical photographs with monstrously altered studies of the body as an expression of distrust of the ethics of medicine. In the architectural imagery of Alain Paiement (b.1960) the fracturing and reassembly of spatial representation begins to approach the complexity of the built environment. Paiement's fascination with optical phenomena and spatial mapping predated the digital revolution; his three-dimensional constructions of photographic images and wood began to appear in the late 1980s, but they were followed by similar projects that were digitally produced. The transition is expressed in the content of *Mapping Continuum (Bourse de Paris)* (1994, private collection; Figure 14.13), for which he recorded the trading floor of the Paris stock exchange—a space where digital technology was transforming work and social interaction.

The institutional environment is no less complex. Most artist-run centres specializing in photography have expanded their briefs to encompass the electronic image, including video; some have even changed their names. The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, opened as an affiliate of the

National Gallery of Canada in 1992, was programming multimedia works throughout its first decade. *Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal*, a biannual photographic festival launched in 1989, increasingly did the same. But if the photographic imagination—artistic, curatorial, or spectatorial—is unleashed by digital technology, there is no controlling its direction. For some artists the moment is right for photographic works that express sensuality and fantasy in terms of photographic materiality and instantaneity. The work of Andrea Szilasi (b.1964) is an imaginative exploitation of the nature of photography. She has worked at two kinds of assemblage: emphasizing the material by literally weaving two photographic images into one, and emphasizing photographic illusion by photographing the human figure, doubled by and melted into its mirror image. This single exposure is also a digital image. By 2000 the varieties of photographic experience promised at the last *fin de siècle* had manifested themselves in deed and word, through performance and inscription.

So photography as it has been considered in this short history is not dead. It continues to mark a point of intersection between documentation and expression, and therein between conscious and unconscious communication. At this point in cultural history, spectatorial experience—a combination of perception, imagination, and memory—conspires with the forces of artistic intention and institutional setting to create meaning. The importance of the photographic vernacular, the regional dialects and private messages of photographic experience, cannot be underestimated in such a context. Nor should we neglect the accomplishments of Canadian photographic artists whose works have engaged in national and global conversations.

## Notes

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- 1 Harold Mortimer Lamb, "Photography as a Means of Artistic Expression," *Canadian Magazine* 39, no. 1 (May–October 1912): 15.
- 2 Locations are indicated in the text only for unique photographic objects.

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