A/R/TOGRAPHY AS A METHOD OF AWE:
AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC INQUIRY OF THE CANADIAN NORTH

by

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A Thesis presented to Ryerson University and York University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the program of
Communication and Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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Declaration

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2018

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Communication and Culture

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Abstract

This thesis is a year-long inquiry on the Canadian North using the practice-based research method a/r/tography. This a/r/tographic research on the Canadian North follows the method's three modalities: *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*. It concludes by presenting the North as a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a/r/tography's ongoing development as a research methodology. I propose to expand the frames within which we conceptualize a/r/tography's *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*. The re-defining and re-organization of these three modalities opens a/r/tography to a wider range of creators to allow for even more boundary-breaking work. In addition, I draw out the possibilities of *Lures* as a hitherto unrecognized seventh conceptual practice embedded in a/r/tography. Moreover, I describe a/r/tographers as child-voyagers who are able to momentarily dispense with their perceptual frameworks and enter spaces that allow them to see the world anew. Most importantly, I re-conceptualize a/r/tography as a method of *awe*.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people without whom this thesis might not have been written, and to whom I am greatly indebted. I would first like to thank my head supervisor Dr. Monique Tschofen. Her uniquely intuitive advice and unwavering confidence in my own abilities fostered this academic endeavour. Her valuable guidance and continuous support gave me the courage to pursue more interdisciplinary and experimental forms of research. I would also like to show my gratitude to Don Snyder whose expertise in photography and the visual arts grounded my work, as well as Dr. Shannon Bell whose enthusiasm for innovative and experimental methods fueled my own excitement of the research. I am also immensely grateful to Sgt. Gregory Sutherland and Darcie Way of the RCMP, for without them my travels to the arctic would have not been made possible. The knowledge I gained from my time spent in Nunavut is imperative to this research, and so I am forever in their debt. Finally, I would like to thank the many Canadians who supported me throughout my cross-country road trip including Kelley Bates and Rebeca Ortiz. I am overwhelmed by the continuous acts of kindness I faced throughout my travels. Canadians from coast to coast to coast welcomed me into their homes, offered me food and water, and most importantly gave me their time. I hope this inquiry of the Canadian North gives new insight to the Canadian experience and that the research contributes to Canada's diverse and innovative academic landscape. This research is by and for Canadians.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother who always supported my academics, art, and adventures.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of a year-long a/r/tographic inquiry on the Canadian North. When I entered a Masters of Arts program at Ryerson University from a Bachelors of Fine Arts background in photography, I found the transition to be arduous. I observed that both artists and scholars have toolkits that allow them both to critically engage with the world around them with different materials, methods, and theoretical lenses. However, I observed that there seems to remain a divide in academia between the arts and the “serious” disciplines. It is clear to me that the polarization of the two realms is fruitless. The separating of disciplines in academia assumes that roles such as the artist, research, and teacher occupy different domains. It assumes these different ways of understanding and engaging with the world are unrelated and do not have the capacity to inform and build off one another. This is knowledge being mediated by the institution. There are negative consequences when practitioners stay within the comfort zones of their own work. A comfort zone is a mental map of what is expected and yet to come. Comfort zones are routines. They are spaces that are already predetermined and anticipated. When in a comfort zone, a person does not need to be fully engaged with the world around them. This is a phenomenon known as hedonic adaptation.¹ By staying in comfort zones, practitioners have already predetermined methods, thoughts, and outcomes.

One way to disrupt this institutionalized approach to knowledge and hedonic adaptation within academia is to blur the boundaries between disciplines and their methods. To reconcile the gaps between our inner artist, researcher, and teacher is to begin to enter spaces of boundless possibilities. As artists, researchers, and teachers it is critical to actively transcend our own perceptual parameters in search for a more brilliant world. These three realms must unite and celebrate their interconnectedness. They must spill over each other, fold on to each other, and get lost in each other. We must lose ourselves in our art-making, researching, and teaching, and reinvent what it means to participate in

these roles. To unite the roles of the artist, researcher, and teacher, is to become an (a/r/t)-ographer.

A/r/tographers allow art-making, researching, and teaching to precipitate dynamic exchange and create embodied meaningful awareness.

A/r/tography actively fights against hedonic adaptation. A/r/tographers are able to momentarily shed their perceptual frameworks and see the world as new. A/r/tography allows for more epistemological and ontological possibilities. A/r/tographic inquiry takes a/r/tographers outside of their comfort zones to ask *more* from research, *more* from art-making, *more* from teaching, and *more* from life. It is within these a/r/tographic spaces that contemporary art, research, and education has any chance of creating a new world full of wonder and *awe*. This thesis contributes to the development of a/r/tography as a research methodology showing how it can be used in an academic setting by example of my own research on the Canadian North and expands the frames within which we can understand a/r/tography's *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*.

Theoria

The *theoria* at the heart of this thesis involved scholarly research and writing. The springboard into my thesis were the paintings by the Group of Seven, a group of painters from 1920-33 whose works played a significant role in creating foundational ideas about Canada's northern wilderness. Scholarly research on the Group included debates around the hidden ideological meanings of their works. *How do the Canadian northern landscapes of the Group of Seven inform our understanding of Canada?* My research on the tradition of art about the Canadian North led me along ever-widening circles. Part way through the inquiry, it became clear that to better understand the Canadian North I would have to broaden my scope to include research on *place*. This is because the Canadian North connotes a plethora of ideas. *When we speak of the North are we speaking about the land itself? The*

representations of it? When we say “the North,” are we talking about an idea? A geographic location?

It is all of the above. Regardless of wherever or however we locate the North, it is a ultimately an important place of Canadian consciousness. Therefore, the possibilities of *place* will offer new insight and meaning to the Canadian North.

Place is a topic best theorized from an interdisciplinary framework. Tim Cresswell outlines what he believes to be the three approaches to place: the descriptive approach, the social constructionist approach, and the phenomenological approach.² The descriptive approach is only used by regional geographers. However, I engage with it via a thorough discussion of the *map* (a geographer's primary tool of communication), to show how descriptive approaches can hide ideological views. The social constructionist approach is used by critical cultural geographers, spatial theorists, and postmodern geographers. I focus on Doreen Massey, who conceptualizes place as a type of *throwntogetherness*. Her definitions of space and place offer new possibilities to the Canadian North. The phenomenological approach of Yi-Fu Tuan offers fundamental ideas of place and space that transcend cultural particularities. He tackles various topics relating to space and place such as: space and the body, spaciousness and crowding, mythic space, architecture, travel, and time and space.

After the year-long inquiry I found the places considered to be the epitome of the Canadian North, places such as Banff National Park, are not authentic places. Instead, they are manufactured places of consumerism. The North has been reduced to nothing more than a formula. It is an easily consumable visual idea rather than an authentic genuine experience. Not through *theoria* alone but through the use of it in conjunction with *praxis* and *poesis* did I ultimately conclude that the North is a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place. The theories presented by Marc Augé and Edward Relph on non-places and placelessness offer a critical lens to the Canadian North. I found their anti-place theories to be aligned with my own experiences of the Canadian North throughout my research.

Praxis

Theoria is not by itself sufficient enough research to understand the Canadian North. The North is not only theorized, it is phenomenologically grounded. The North is apart of the lived experience of many Canadians. It is a place to visit. It is a thing to look at and engage with. It is a way of knowing and being in the world. The North informs the way Canadians experience Canadian space. The lived phenomenological experience of the North is crucial to its complete understanding.

The *praxis* elements of my inquiry thus emerged from a cross-Canada road trip. Over the course of two months during the summer of 2017, I lived out of my car while travelling to all thirteen provinces and territories of Canada – excluding Nunavut to which I travelled by plane. During this trip, I wrote daily journal entries to use as field notes. I also took photographs, collected park pamphlets and post cards, and drew maps and illustrations. In every province and territory, I visited one national park and one major art gallery.

National parks are designated physical spaces in which one can visit the Canadian North. Summer camping trips and canoeing in national parks are a part of the Canadian *rites-de-passage*.³ These northern parks are considered to be so essential to the Canadian experience that for Canada's sesquicentennial year the federal government made all national parks free access. To fully understand the Canadian North it was important for me to visit these national parks. The national parks were chosen based on their proximity to the Trans-Canada Highway and the route we were taking. This was to limit the usage of gas and minimize the costs of research.

I chose to visit art galleries because of my personal introduction to the North through the paintings of the Group of Seven. I was curious to see if/how the Canadian North was being depicted within the gallery space, especially during Canada's 150 celebrations. *Would the Group of Seven be found in every major gallery? How would art depicting Canadian space differ from coast to coast?* Visiting art galleries across the country would also offer insight to other Canadian experiences and

understandings of the North. From visiting the galleries I learnt that the Canadian North is not ubiquitously present. There were hardly any references to the North in the East Coast and there was entirely no reference to the North in Nunavut. After visiting galleries from coast to coast to coast, it became clear that the North is a particular vision of Canada favoured in the southern and western parts of the country.

Poesis

Poesis is perhaps the most important method of the three modalities a/r/tographers use. *Poesis* allows for experimentation in ways that *theoria* and *praxis* cannot provide. *Poesis* can be self-reflective and/or collaborative. It is a way to recognize and challenge our own personal biases and perceptual frameworks. It is a chance to create meaning in direct and intuitive ways by asking *how* or *what if* questions. *What if I created an absurd activities list that included ways of interacting and engaging with the land that would never be found in the programming of national parks? How would the creation and execution of these absurd activities inform, challenge, or create new meanings of the North? Or, what does photography and the capturing of images reveal about my own thoughts and relationship with the North? What if I actively chose not to photograph my travels? How would that experience change my relationship with the North?* Ultimately, *poesis* is the opportunity to play and experiment with knowledge and create meaning.

My own process of art-making has never been married to any specific medium. Throughout this research, I engaged with *poesis* in ways that ranged from documentary photography to performative détournement. I consider *poesis* within the framework of a/r/tography to be engagement-through-creation. Sometimes the creations are methodical. For example, when I took photographs, I was *looking* at how I look and engage with the North. At other times the creations are experimental. For example, when I was doing performative work, experimenting with psychedelics, or creating

absurd thought-experiments, I was trying to alter my cognition and perception. I was *challenging* how I look and engage with the North.

As a photographer, my most prominent form of *poesis* naturally began with photography. To be a photographer is to have a particular way of seeing the world. It is a modality in itself. It is a literal lens in which one can look through and engage with the world. However, very early on in my a/r/tographic inquiry of the Canadian North, I realized that the nature of the photographic medium was not serving my a/r/tographic needs. A/r/tography is about re-engaging and re-learning with different modalities. It is being able to take a subject and treat it as an object. A/r/tography allows you to create, engage, and play with meaning. Specifically, I found that photographing the North was not changing my *engagement* with the North. The North is a fetishized visual formula. It has been simplified into consumable images. The North is rarely directly engaged with. I knew of the North years before I ever visited its national parks. I was taught of the North through images and the paintings by the Group of Seven. Whether it be through tourism advertisements, through paintings of the Group of Seven, or through the lens of a camera, the North is always visually consumed. At the time I was shooting with the Nikon D800, a digital SLR. I was able to click the shutter hundreds of times a minute. I could passively take images without any real engagement. Click-click, consume-consume. Whatever photographs I was capturing only perpetuated my previous thoughts and engagement with the North. I wanted to slow down the process and change my relationship with the images of the North.

Instead of consuming the North through my eyes, I wanted to physically touch, play, and engage with its images. As an attempt to re-engage with and re-learn the North, I wanted to make one of its images into an object. I began creating toys out of resin with the Lawren Harris painting *Lake and Mountains* (1928) as my subject. This was the moment in my research when the two streams of thought (a/r/tography, and Canadian North) collided. The series of resin toys I have created are apart of my inquiry on the North as well as my exploration of the a/r/tographic method. The toys cannot be

separated from either inquiry.

First, the toys became the core part of my research *poesis* for the North. Using resin to create the toys slowed down the pace of my engagement with the images. The resin I was using had a 24hr cure time. Instead of passively consuming images and having no real engagement, I was forced to look at and work with the same image over the course of many months. The toys allowed me to create, disassemble, and alter the Lawren Harris painting. The toys can also allow multiple people to create and engage with the painting. The painting can be communally created and communally torn apart. Second, the toys are how I conceptualize my relationship to knowledge in the methodology of a/r/tography. If you imagine knowledge (subject) as an object (resin toy), a/r/tography allows you to pull it apart, turn it upside down, disassemble it, reassemble it, blur boundaries, question and complicate it. It is a hands-on approach that allows you to meaning-make.

These moments of a/r/tographic *poesis* are wonderings that prompted wanderings within my research on the Canadian North. These many different moments of *poesis* are woven throughout this thesis. Specifically, the conceptualization and creation of the resin toys are woven throughout the thesis by narrating its stages of process.

Three Places of Pedagogy

To describe these three *places of pedagogy* – *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis* – as strictly delineated *places* would be misleading, because it would fail to show the exploratory nature of the research. Many streams of thought trickled into nothing but runoffs, going somewhere and ending nowhere. For example, the literature review includes only the clearly defined area of *place*. It does not reflect on the other explorations I undertook, looking at the Situationist Movement, art critics, the Beat Generation, psychedelic philosophers, Canadian art history, aesthetics, or phenomenology. It is by chance that place became the most prominent theoretical direction of the research. It is important for the reader to

understand that the research developed rhizomatically, in a non-linear fashion. To reflect this, this paper weaves evidence of the *praxis* and *poesis* aspects of the research in and around the *theoria* of the inquiry (the scholarly research). There are interludes of journal entries, information on artists, drawings, photographs, and an account of the process work of the resin toys. The purpose of these interludes is to momentarily disrupt the flow of the paper and redirect the reader's attention elsewhere in order to give an idea of how the a/r/tographic method unfolds in an unpredictable and simultaneous fashion. I also mean to allow the reader to make their own connections as they themselves weave in and out of the paper and engage with the text in their own rhizomatic non-linear fashion. It was important for me to ensure that not all of the possible connections between the elements of my research are presented. A/r/tographic research is better understood as providing critical explanations and/or interpretations. The reader will find many unanswered questions and loose ends. Think of these as lures that are inviting the reader to make connections of their own. With every new interpretation of the North that comes from this paper, the value of the a/r/tographic method becomes more apparent.

Ultimately, the paper is my own interpretation of the a/r/tographic method and its purpose is to contribute to the overall development of a/r/tography. This paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the a/r/tographic method. It describes a/r/tography's rhizomatic nature, process, knowledge, situations, and proposes the concept of “Lures” as an addition to the core conceptual practices outlined by Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay in their delineation of the method. The second chapter is the longest. It offers my own a/r/tographic research of the Canadian North. Part one introduces the inquiry by giving an overview of the year-long research and laying the groundwork for the Canadian North. Part two looks at the North through Cresswell's three approaches to place: the descriptive approach, the social constructionist approach, and the phenomenological approach. Part three focuses on theories of non-place and placelessness. The chapter closes by arguing the North is a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place and then positions the thesis' resin toys alongside these theories. In

chapter three, I return to reconsider the a/r/tographic method with new perspectives gleaned from my research on the North. I reconceptualize a/r/tography's three modalities: *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*. The paper concludes in this chapter by reconceptualizing a/r/tography as a method of *awe*.

CHAPTER 1. The A/r/tographic Method

*I am
(researching)
the process
of my own doing⁴*

Introduction to A/r/tography

A/r/tography is a fairly new and progressive “arts and education practice-based research methodology” that has been spearheaded by the work of Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay.⁵ To best understand the a/r/tographic method, it would be helpful to first break down its name and hyphenations. Rita Irwin conceptualizes a/r/tography as *métissage*, which she defines as a method of hyphenated relationships.⁶ Without favouring one over the other, a/r/tography embraces knowing (*theoria*), doing (*praxis*), and making (*poesis*) or, put another way, research, teaching, and art-making.⁷

Insofar as a/r/tography is a “methodology dedicated to acts of inquiry through the arts and writing,”⁸ the acronym a/r/t stands for the *in-between* roles to be played by the artist-researcher-teacher. Irwin's use of hyphens and slashes within the vocabulary of a/r/tography further suggest that a/r/tographers create and play with *new* knowledge within the bridges and gaps of the artist-researcher-teacher. It is a form of *métissage*, or “an act of interdisciplinarity.”⁹

The *In-between*

When speaking of a/r/tography it is impossible to avoid hyphenation, for a/r/tographic research lives in the *in-between*. The *in-between* can be seen as the interstitial spaces between the roles of the artist-researcher-teacher or as the contingent moments when these different modalities bump and knock

into one another. It can be seen in “the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time.”¹⁰ The *in-between* is a place where knowledge can be handled, played with, and questioned. It is a third space where meaning can be made, layered, or taken apart.

In a lecture on space and the universe, Alan Watts gives great insight to the idea of *in-between* spaces. For a moment, consider space in the point of view of objects:

“The eye is receptive to a certain spectrum of vibrations of light. And therefore, where such vibrations are not being transmitted the nerve ends are not stimulated and therefore don't report, and that failure to report is space. We call it darkness (where there is no visible light). But actually, there is nowhere in the universe where there is not some kind of vibration going on. So that if you had an instrument that responded to it, you would see that space is full of impulses.”¹¹

In this respect, a/r/tography is an instrument that illuminates spaces of possibility and meaning-making—not merely physical places—that act to disrupt, complicate, and displace meaning.¹²

Rhizomatic Research

Irwin, Springgay and others (Beer, Grauer, Xiong, Bickel) connect a/r/tography to Deleuze and Guattari's metaphorical theory of the *rhizome*. Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as a *plateau*: a “multiplicity connected to other multiplicities.”¹³ According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome cannot be reduced to “One” nor can it be reduced to the “multiple”; it must be thought in terms of dimensions.¹⁴ They describe the idea of a rhizome by comparing it to a tree. Unlike a tree which has a trunk at its centre and roots that grow out, a rhizome has neither a beginning nor end.¹⁵ Any part of a rhizome can connect to any other part. It has no edges, boundaries, or specific direction. The rhizome is an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” with no centrality.¹⁶ An example of a rhizome could be a map. Maps are “always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and [have] multiple

entryways and exits.”¹⁷ I believe their connection of the rhizome is essential to a/r/tography's conceptual framework. In my personal experience with a/r/tography, I found the overall nature of the research method to be playfully rhizomatic.

A/r/tographic Process

I also found the a/r/tographic process to be unpredictable and organic. Similar to the rhizome, there is no step-by-step instructions, centre, or one direction to the a/r/tographic method. I am inclined to say the process is *cyclical*, however that would suggest there is some kind of order within the method. Instead, I found that throughout the research I playfully jumped back and forth in a random fashion between *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*, sometimes experiencing them simultaneously. The direction of my movement between these three modalities was based on the unique circumstances of each moment throughout the research. Depending on the problem, knowledge, or experiences that unexpectedly emerged and presented themselves in the research, I would instinctively decide between *theoria*, *praxis*, and/or *poesis* (this argument will be further explained in my section on *Lures*.)

The a/r/tographic process as described by Irwin and Springgay is as an ongoing living inquiry. The rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography is highly progressive for within “contemporary educational discourse, *sites of learning* are re-imagined as *places in process* or *pedagogies of place* set within political, economic, cultural, ecological and social processes.”¹⁸ The a/r/tographic method continuously engages with different modalities in an ongoing process that acts to disrupt, complicate, and displace meaning.¹⁹ Meaning is in a constant state of becoming. It is always being layered, built up, dismantled, and torn down. Ultimately for a/r/tographers, research is about *process* and a/r/tography is theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication through ongoing living inquiry.²⁰

A/r/tographic Knowledge

I found within the a/r/tographic method, multiple modes of thinking and streams of thought trickle into one another. All of them go somewhere and end nowhere. The a/r/tographic method shows that all knowledge is interconnected and relational. Thus, my own a/r/tographic research on the Canadian North that is presented in this paper will demonstrate this play of knowledge, as different modalities inform, bump into, and interact with each other to draw out multiple understandings of a single topic.

A/r/tography as a Method of Situations

Irwin, Springgay and others (Beer, Grauer, Xiong, Bickel) have described a/r/tography as a methodology of situations.²¹ They write, “for a/r/tographers, situations are related to pedagogies of place through a commitment to disrupting binaries (e.g. private and public or neither) by complicating understandings as relational, singular and rhizomatic.”²² According to them, the situated practices of a/r/tography treat lived experience as fragmented, relational, and in constant flux.²³

I understand their idea of “situations” to be moments in a/r/tographic inquiry. As I argued earlier, the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography makes its process unpredictable. I see situations of a/r/tography to involve the unanticipated and unpredictable moments within research that “[unsettle perceptions] and [complicate] understandings.”²⁴

The a/r/tographic process produces situations (or moments) that place a/r/tographers into unanticipated circumstances and force them to face their underlying assumptions, beliefs, and biases. From this, a/r/tography is a method that intentionally alters perceptual apparatuses and forces a/r/tographers to reconfigure their mental models of the world. I would compare the situations of a/r/tography to the situations of the Situationist International Movement. The Situationists (SIs) were a group of avant-garde artists, theorists, and intellectuals from 1957-1972 who were concerned with the

capitalist consumer society. They wanted to break out of everyday routines by creating “situations” that allowed them to experience environments in new and alternative ways.²⁵ They encouraged the use of psychogeography as a way for people to explore their environment. The Situationists described psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”²⁶ Through acts of chance, play, *dérive*, and *détournement*, the SIs used psychogeography to alter their understanding of the environment and create new spaces of experience.²⁷ In this sense, the situations of a/r/tography and the situations of the Situationists are both processes that intentionally interrupt mental models of the world to play with meaning-making and complicate experience.

Conceptual Practices of A/r/tography

A/r/tography is still an evolving and fluid methodology. However, Irwin and Springgay note six conceptual practices, which they refer to as *renderings*, that are embedded into the process of a/r/tography. These renderings are reimagined and renegotiated with each new a/r/tographic endeavour. These are their renderings:

1. *Contiguity*

A/r/tographers are *contiguous*, meaning they are sensitive to the *in-between*. The contingent relationships between the artist-researcher-teacher, knowing-doing-making, practice-process-product, mind-body-spirit, and many more are important to the a/r/tographic method. Ideas within a/r/tography lay adjacent to one another. They can bump into and build on each other. They can layer themselves in contesting or complementary ways. For Irwin and

Springgay, the *in-between* is “an endless fold, or folds within folds, or as concepts linked together.”²⁸

2. *Living Inquiry*

A/r/tographers are continuously engaged with the world. Irwin and Springgay argue their method is one of *embodiment*.²⁹ A/r/tographic research is never completed. It is an ongoing living inquiry. A/r/tography is not designed to “answer, address or create a proposition that is advanced through an argument,” meaning its research does not have a thesis.³⁰ Instead, a/r/tography is better understood as providing critical explanations and/or interpretations. When a/r/tographic research is published or shared, it should be understood as a refined critical inquiry. These inquiries are not end results or final products, they are merely “experiences along the way.”³¹ A/r/tography does not look for ultimate truths or final conclusions. Rather, A/r/tography seeks the better questions.

3. *Metaphor/Metonymy*

Both metaphors and metonyms allow for new possibilities of meaning-making. As noted by Irwin and Springgay, metaphors with their “substitution of signifiers” and metonyms with their “displacement of subject/object relations” offer new relationships and opportunities for a/r/tographers to play with.³² These two tropes allow for meaning to be un/created, lost, or built.³³ They shift awareness and understanding, and create new openings for meaning.

4. *Openings*

A/r/tography is not concerned with answers. According to Irwin and Springgay, a/r/tographic research “opens conversations and relationships instead of informing others about what has been learned.”³⁴ They argue that the openings of a/r/tography are not “passive holes through which one can see easily.”³⁵ Instead, openings are better understood as cuts, tears, and

ruptures.³⁶ Openings are the spaces in which meanings can be layered, formed, built, and taken apart. They are spaces where meanings can coexist or be negotiated.

5. *Reverberations*

According to Irwin and Springgay, “reverberation refers to a dynamic movement, dramatic or subtle, that forces a/r/tographers to shift their understandings of phenomena.”³⁷

These movements are across stories, theories, texts, practices, disciplines, and spheres that either lead to a deeper meaning or a slippage of meaning.

6. *Excess*

The rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography leads the research anywhere and everywhere. It is unpredictable and playful. Springgay notes that during her research, some of the best conversations occurred at times when her video camera was buried deep in her bag. For Springgay, this raised the question *when is data?*³⁸ A/r/tographical research is an ongoing living inquiry, therefore its “data” can be anywhere at all times. Irwin and Springgay argue that a/r/tography deals with “the wasteful, the leftover, and the unseen, as well as the magnificent and the sublime.”³⁹ A/r/tographers accept the chaos of their research and see *excess* as useful.

Irwin and Springgay's list of the six renderings: *contiguity*, *living inquiry*, *openings*, *metaphor/metonymy*, *reverberations*, and *excess* help illuminate the qualities of a/r/tographic research. Through these renderings, research is living inquiry and theory is process. It is an exchange of knowledge that is reflexive, responsive and relational.⁴⁰ However, their six renderings hint towards but never fully arrive at the idea of subjectivity. It is important to acknowledge that the *contiguity*, *openings*, and *metaphor/metonymies* in a/r/tography are created, recognized, and then pursued by the a/r/tographers. Therefore, I propose to add a seventh rendering to Irwin and Springgay's list that I believe is embedded within the a/r/tographic method: *Lures*.

7. *Lures*

Richard Siegesmund in his essay *Dewey through A/r/tography* (2012), connects Dewey's aesthetics to the a/r/tographic method. He says that “Dewey observed that we learn as we are lured.”⁴¹ Lure is understood as desire. It is a subjective interest into whatever is being researched. Siegesmund sees lures as that which should lead all research. He argues that researchers must “actively harness the passion that drives [their] research” for this is the only “entryway that allows [them] to see the world anew.”⁴² Without desire in research one risks succumbing to schematic lenses, producing repetitive and stereotypical responses, and copying another's model.⁴³

I understand Siegesmund's lures to be embedded in a/r/tographic research. The rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography and the *excess* of its information allow for a/r/tographic research to take many forms. Although a/r/tographic research creates *situations* that force the a/r/tographer to face their own beliefs, it would be foolish to think that a/r/tographic research is without bias (or any type of research for that matter). The personal perspectives of the artist-researcher-teacher are inseparable from the research process.⁴⁴ The endless possibilities of a/r/tographic research ultimately emerge from the individual a/r/tographer. However, the lure represents much more than one's subjectivity in research.⁴⁵ They are the result of the active engagement with our subjective desires and personal curiosity. It is the act of following our lures to begin to ask the question *what if?* to find the *what might be*. By following our lures we can demolish traditional perceptual frameworks in order to create “broader, and hopefully fresh, understanding.”⁴⁶ Lures are the shiny objects within research that a/r/tographers are drawn to. Lures make research a playful critical engagement.

CHAPTER 2. A Living Inquiry of the Canadian North

Illustration 1: Map of Route ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

PART 1. Introduction to the Inquiry

This chapter offers an account of my own a/r/tographic research on the Canadian North that began in the autumn of 2016. The inquiry took place over the course of a year, beginning in a classroom in north Toronto and subsequently travelling across the country. My intention of this inquiry was to gain a deep understanding of what the Canadian North means in every capacity with every possibility. I was first introduced to the Canadian North through paintings of the Group of Seven. The Group of Seven was a group of painters from 1920-33 who became famous for their northern Canadian landscapes. Their paintings have played a significant role in creating foundational ideas about Canada's northern wilderness.⁴⁷ Since the 1960s, many artists have challenged the Group of Seven's vision of

Canada.⁴⁸ The Indigenous Group of Seven, The Baxters, Jeff Wall, David Thauberger, Shawna Dempsey, Christos Dikeakos, and Jin-me Yoon are to name a few. However, my understanding of the North was limited and went unquestioned for years. It wasn't until I came across Canadian cultural theorists that my understanding of the North evolved and with that evolution, I began my ongoing living inquiry and relationship with the Canadian North. This inquiry has taken me various places, led me to read many books, and forced me to ask a lot of questions. This inquiry has allowed me to scratch the surface of what the Canadian North could possibly mean and ultimately, it has allowed me to better understand my own Canadian experience.

My inquiry of the Canadian North was spearheaded by research questions. The first research question was innocently about Canadian art history: *Why is the Group of Seven Canadian art?* This question evolved, imploded, and multiplied. After a year of inquiry, the research had led itself somewhere entirely different. *Does the idea of the North have any social, political, or economic implications? How is the North experienced by Canadians? Where exactly is the Canadian North?* In Part 1 of this chapter, the reader will be guided by research questions.

Fortunately, a strong argument on Canadian space did emerge from the research: the North is a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place. However, in order to understand this argument and how my research arrived at such conclusion, the paper must first walk through the a/r/tographic process.

My Introduction to the North

My first introduction to the Canadian North happened in a suburban classroom somewhere in Brampton in the early 2000s. From the landscapes of the Group of Seven, I was shown what it meant to be in Canada. Throughout my early childhood, I found it common practice to be told that *who* we are as Canadians is about *where* we are as Canadians. It was Lawren Harris' *Lake and Mountains* (1928) painting that always seemed to surface to memory when I thought of Canada. Up until that point, I had

never travelled outside southern Ontario. However, my spatial awareness of Canada surpassed both Ottawa and Sudbury, the most eastern and western points I had visited at that time. To be in Canada was to be in the North.

My understanding of Canadian space was mediated through an image repertoire of mountains, forests, lakes, and the wilderness. The Group of Seven paintings were more than paint on cloth; they were apart of the very fabric of Canadian experience. Their landscapes followed me for years. Whether they were hung in the hallways of my public school or printed on coffee coasters in family cabins, their images were always quietly ubiquitous. It is clear that landscapes are ingrained into Canada's national psyche.⁴⁹

Toys Phase 1:

Lawren Harris Mountains

When I was young I always thought of Lawren Harris' *Lake and Mountains* (1928) when I spoke about Canadian landscape and so, I felt it was appropriate to return to that painting years later during my own research. During my inquiry on the North it became clear that the images of the North, the visual symbols of what the North represents, have become streamlined and reduced to a simple formula (forest + mountain + blue lake, and so on). It is made to be easily consumed and is nothing more than Canadian eye candy.

I realized that out of the Group of Seven, Lawren Harris is the painter most guilty of simplifying the northern landscapes. The majority of his paintings can be reduced to shapes of colour. It would be easy to cut his paintings apart like a puzzle, creating organic shapes of blues, browns, greens, and whites – this is especially true of his mountain paintings.

I began to wonder things like: *If I cut apart a Lawren Harris painting and*

rearrange the shapes of colour, would I still recognize the landscape? Would the essence of that place/painting still be there? These paintings of the North are iconic. What if I took these shapes of colour and rearranged them three dimensionally, would I learn something new of that place? Of that representation of space? How close (or far) are these representations to the actual landscapes? Do they have any genuine connection or are they completely manufactured? Could I communicate these paintings without the use of colour? Would those reproductions still connote the northern landscapes?

Illustration 2: Doodle of Harris Paintings
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Why the Group of Seven?

At the turn of the twentieth century, Canada was a young country struggling to establish itself as an autonomous nation. There was no national identity or unifying culture in which all Canadians shared. Furthermore, the threat of American culture was imminent. American content was seeping over Canadian borders, significantly affecting the growth of Canadian culture.⁵⁰ In order for Canada to

establish itself as an autonomous nation it would need to separate itself from their American neighbours as well as their former British colonial ties.

Canada managed to visually separate itself through the wilderness painting movement led by the Group of Seven.⁵¹ Up until that point, the prevailing landscape paintings of Canada were Eurocentric both in their content and style. Artists such as Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff treated painting as a form of documentary. Their landscapes were in the style of European realism and their paintings depicted European settlers interacting with Indigenous peoples. The Group of Seven decided to ignore these European conventions of landscape with the hope of producing something uniquely Canadian.⁵² Instead of depicting experiences of the European settlers, the Group of Seven depicted Canada as an empty wilderness landscape. Instead of following the traditional style of European realism, the Group decided to develop their own Canadian aesthetic, “homegrown, northern, and free of foreign influence.”⁵³ The paintings of the Group of Seven are stylized with bright colours and were aesthetically avant-garde.⁵⁴ John O'Brian coined the term *wildercentric* to describe their landscapes.⁵⁵ The new wildercentric aesthetic functioned as an “artistic language” and “vocabulary” for Canadian identity and helped to “signal [their] separateness” from European art, their American neighbours, and their “former colonial power.”⁵⁶

The Group of Seven and their vision of the Canadian landscape was supported by the National Gallery of Canada and private patrons who actively helped to promote and distribute their work across the country.⁵⁷ Joyce Zemans cites Dennis Reid and the importance he gives to the reproduction and distribution of the Group's work: “A whole generation of Canadians grew up following the Second World War learned of the Group almost entirely from reproductive silk-screen prints that seemed to hang in every school library, bank, and doctor's waiting room in the country.”⁵⁸ Reid is referring to the Sampson-Matthews project of 1942.⁵⁹ It was through national initiatives such as the Sampson-Matthews project that led to the domestication and normalization of the Group of Seven. Their

landscapes became engrained into national consciousness and made the North an important part of Canada's self-image.⁶⁰ Landscapes became the “heart” of Canada.⁶¹ Ultimately, the support, reproduction, and distribution of the Group's paintings positioned landscape as the center of Canadian culture and lead to the success of the Group's career.

The work of the Group of Seven helped Canadians imagine themselves as a nation. At the turn of the century, Canada lacked a national identity and culture. The Group of Seven provided images that allowed Canadians to imagine their own collectivity.⁶² Nationhood was found through northern landscapes. Landscapes became integral to a Canadian's self-image, and to how Canadians understood themselves.⁶³

Are the northern landscapes *natural*?

Douglas Cole attributes the Group's success to the “shared discovery of the northern wilderness.”⁶⁴ According to Cole, Canadians in general were already developing an appreciation for the wilderness as a form of recreational escape.⁶⁵ They were escaping the increasingly expanding urban environment and looking “to re-establish [their ties] to nature by escaping into wilderness areas.”⁶⁶ For Cole, the northern wilderness was simply a “fact and symbol of Canadian life.”⁶⁷ The Group was only responding to the natural values and tastes of the country.⁶⁸ Cole treats the Group's northern landscapes as though they are commonsense to the Canadian experience. He considers their vision of Canada to be authentic and true of the time. Cole's treatment of the Canadian northern landscape as a given “fact” to Canadian life doesn't open the possibility of any hidden implications or ideological influences. Ultimately, Cole sees the landscapes painted by the Group of Seven as natural, just as landscape paintings were understood to be natural by the European Romantics. However, the Group's northern vision of Canada was in the pursuit of nationhood and national culture, and there are many critical cultural theorists who would argue that their landscapes are not “natural” but are instead a means to

other ends.

Critical cultural theory offers an entirely different lens through which to see the Group's vision of Canada's North, attentive to its ideological construction. Jody Berland connects the popular vision of the Canadian north to Canada's trade industry of fish, fur, and lumber.⁶⁹ According to Berland, Canada's trade "came to dominate the economic, spatial, and administrative shape of Canada as a colonial nation."⁷⁰ Lynda Jessup connects the northern vision of Canada to the tourism industry. According to Jessup, the northern landscapes that the Group painted were "sensitive to tourist markets" and were no doubt "good cultural advertising" for companies such as the CNR and the CPR.⁷¹ Scott Watson argues the northern vision of Canada is informed by "the politics and finances of land use and exploitation."⁷² According to Watson, the Group neglected to paint "pictures of mines, railways, [and] even the boxcar they rode in."⁷³ This is because they were "determined to give a picture of the wilderness as a territory that was just opening up."⁷⁴ It was a place of resource extraction, a symbol for prosperity after the war. For Watson, the vision of the northern wilderness is clearly "intended for the middle-class of Toronto" who exploit these spaces for their resources.⁷⁵ Jonathan Bordo argues that the vision of the northern wilderness landscape is actually the erasure of aboriginal presence from landscape. According to Bordo, the "system of representation that we call 'wilderness'" is linked to the absence of aboriginal peoples.⁷⁶ For Bordo, the northern landscapes "have a sort of negative definition" because part of its articulation is that it is "devoid of human presence."⁷⁷ Crucial to the vision of the northern landscapes is the absence of human presence. Finally, John O'Brian connects the Group of Seven wildercentric landscapes to specific economic and social circumstances.⁷⁸ For O'Brian, the northern wilderness landscapes are "tied to capitalism" and "postcolonial extensions."⁷⁹ This is congruent to the arguments presented by Berland, Jessup, Watson, and Bordo. O'Brian argues that "ascribing psychic value to the myth of an unpossessed wilderness [reflects] the values of the dominant social classes of the time."⁸⁰ These theorists do not consider the northern vision of Canada to be natural.

What is the True North?

Rob Shields' idea of the True North space-myth synthesizes the arguments presented by the previous theorists. According to Shields, the northern landscapes of the Group of Seven are apart of Canada's national foundational myth: *The True North Strong and Free*.⁸¹ He says the myth of the Canadian True North is an imaginary geography that connotes a vision of “truth, purity, freedom, [and] power.”⁸² He argues this vision inevitably systematizes the treatment and use of the North.⁸³ The vision of the North depicted by the Group of Seven is “essentially non-threatening [and] accessible.”⁸⁴ The northern landscapes are open spaces, both empty of people and full of resources. Shields mentions that the North for many Canadians is seen as an uninhabited place that is meant for recreational use such as “ritualistic trips to summer cottages, fishing, hunting, and [canoeing].”⁸⁵ He argues that the True North is a space-myth that masks the Real North (reality). According to Shields, The Real North is stained with regional exploitation, enforced genocide, northern poverty (significantly, First Nations, Inuits, and Métis), and cultural hegemony.⁸⁶ Ultimately, Shields argues the True North space-myth is an ideological tool of capitalism.⁸⁷

From this, the Group of Seven paintings are also ideological tools of capitalism. Their paintings disguise both the exploitation of the land and the maltreatment of the Indigenous peoples by only depicting northern wilderness vistas. Economically, there are many reasons for promoting the northern landscapes of the Group of Seven: tourism translates directly into generated income and it geographically distributes that income throughout the country; Canada's most popular attractions are its national parks;⁸⁸ and Canada's economic industry is a natural resource industry.⁸⁹

According to these critical cultural theorists, the North represented in the landscapes of the Group of Seven is not a place; it is a capitalist ideology. Their northern landscapes are depicted as wilderness vistas that are free to conquer. They are also devoid of people, meaning there are no moral codes to be broken.

Artist Interlude

Artists Challenging the North

There have been many artists who have specifically challenged ideas of the Canadian North. Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan created the *Lesbian National Parks and Services* (1997) which is an ongoing art performance including a series of photographs, a published field guide handbook, and even a mockumentary of the two artists trying to become park Rangers. Their work is “calling into question prevalent notions of nature and normalcy.”⁹⁰ They challenge ideas of the North by recasting the Canadian wilderness through a lesbian perspective and by inserting “a lesbian presence into the [landscapes].”⁹¹

Jin-me Yoon is an artist from Seoul that lives and works in Vancouver. Her breakthrough work is *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991). It is a series of photographs in which she places herself in front of “iconically 'Canadian' settings such as the Rocky Mountains” in order to raise questions of “the intersections between identity and location.”⁹²

Another artist who specifically speaks of the Group of Seven and their notions of the North is Diana Thorneycroft. Her photographic series *Group of Seven Awkward Moments* (2007) depicts handcrafted dioramas that “illustrate a variety of scenes that are rooted in historical events, imaginary tales, and everyday life.”⁹³ The scenes are created with “dolls, toys, and other objects” and are usually comical and poking fun at ideas of the Canadian North.⁹⁴

The North is a Southerner's vision?

The nationhood and Canadian identity that is built upon the idea of the True North conceals the fact that the True North is an ideology strictly created for Southern profit. Shields reminds us that “what is being discussed, after all, is the *Southern image* of the North.”⁹⁵ It is extremely beneficial for Southerners and the Canadian federal government to have landscapes full of economic opportunity with no moral consequence. For Northerners, the True North is an extremely harmful ideology that affects their land, their culture, and their way of living.

Whether or not the Group of Seven members planned to have this “ideological edifice [...] erected in their name is debatable.”⁹⁶ I agree with Peter White when he says it would be an “act of decontextualization” to believe these artists were sympathetic to the North's ideology.⁹⁷ Art critic Robert Stacy agrees to this notion when he argues that the North ideology came “long before the Group” established themselves as cultural icons.⁹⁸ The Group of Seven and their paintings cannot take full responsibility of the North ideology. They played only a small role in its overall creation.

Cole Harris would argue it is the English-speaking southern Canadians who are to blame for this ideology, for they are the Canadians who “tend to explain themselves in terms of land and location.”⁹⁹ When I research the North or speak of the North, I recognize my position as a white English-speaking Canadian from the South. I cannot separate myself from this background. I realize that my inquiry on the Canadian North began as an inquiry of the Southerner's North. However, throughout my year-long inquiry the research was able to take me further than and away from the Southerner's North to places such as the city of Iqaluit and the hamlet of Pangnirtung, two communities located in Nunavut. It is places such as Iqaluit and Pangnirtung that I consider to be the Actual North, which I will further expand upon in Part 3, The Actual North.

For the most part, the Group of Seven paintings of the North only depict “a few limited areas of the Precambrian Shield in central and northern Ontario, in particular Algonquin Park, the north shore of

Lake Superior and Algoma.”¹⁰⁰ After my research, I find the connection of the Group of Seven to the Canadian North and ideas of the Canadian North in general to be humorous. If someone were to look at a map and circle the geographical locations of the places considered to be the North, they would realize their True North isn't very north at all, truly.

Illustration 3: Map of Many Norths ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

What do the critical cultural theorists offer?

Considering the Canadian North as/in ideology provides opportunity to pose new questions of the Canadian North. For example, one could take an Althusserian route and ask what Ideological State

Apparatuses¹⁰¹ help create the space-myth of the North (*the National Gallery of Canada perhaps?*).

During my time spent with the Canadian cultural theorists who address ideas of social, political, and economic circumstances, I began to notice a pattern of words that were associated by their *contiguity*.

- landscape
- Real North (Shields)
- True North (Shields)
- the North
- imaginary geography (Shields)
- place / space
- space-myth (Shields)
- mythic space (Yi-Fu Tuan)
- obliterated environment (Northrop Frye)

These are all spatial *metonyms*. All of the cultural theorists seemed to be speaking peripherally to the idea of place. All of them touch on the idea, but never actually delve into how the North may be better understood through theories of place. This list tears an *opening* into the Canadian North and offers new possibilities of meaning-making. It is important to ask *what* it is we are talking about when we gesture at the northern landscape.¹⁰² *Are we talking about the land itself? The representations of it?* When we say “the North,” *are we talking about an idea?* It is clear that even by its name, the North has to do with *place*. I began to add to the list of spatial metonyms. The idea of “place” was very alluring. I knew that research looking at place would offer new lenses to look at the Canadian North. I could play with possibilities of the North and begin to form new meanings.

PART 2. The Inquiry

What does Place and Space have to say about the North?

At this point in my research the Canadian North included: representations of the North, the paintings by the Group of Seven; ideas of the North, the concept of the North as an ideology; and finally geography, the physical locations of Canada's national parks. It was necessary to ask what place and space have to say about the North. It is clear that the North is as much about epistemology as it is about ontology.¹⁰³ The North is as much about a way of thinking as it is about material and physical locations. The North, wherever and whatever it may be, is a way of understanding. Even by its name, the North has to do with *place*, and – “place is a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world.”¹⁰⁴ There are many interrelated terms to place such as geography, landscape, and space. Each of these terms have multiple and contesting definitions¹⁰⁵ embedded in multiple disciplines.¹⁰⁶ An inquiry of the Canadian North must delve into the realm of place in order to understand the North's potential meanings and possibilities.

Before going on to the three approaches, it will be helpful to define place and space. There are some generally accepted definitions of the two terms. Generally, places are considered to be spaces endowed with meaning, they are “spaces which people have made meaningful.”¹⁰⁷ Places are not necessarily stationary. A ship is an example of a moving place.¹⁰⁸ Space, on the other hand, is a more abstract concept. Space is thought of as “outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes.”¹⁰⁹

Tim Cresswell in his book *Place: An Introduction* (2015), outlines three approaches in which place can be met. First, there is the *descriptive* approach. This is taken by regional geographers who study space as discrete places.¹¹⁰ This is the realm of maps, borders, and territory. Second, there is the *social constructionist* approach, used by theorists informed by Marxism, feminism, and

poststructuralism.¹¹¹ They treat place as having “complicated connections between place, meaning, and power.”¹¹² Third, there is the *phenomenological* approach. The phenomenological approach to place is concerned with its essence. It asks not what is *this* place or *that* place like, rather it asks what makes a place *a place*?¹¹³ To understand the full complexity of the role of the North within Canadian life it is necessary to research at all three levels.¹¹⁴

The theorists presented in this chapter will instead provide an equally important and complex playing field for both disciplines. It will show how both place and space can inform ideas of the North. Place and space cannot be reduced to any single theory. There is no one way to understand or define these terms. Place and space exist in a constellation of different interpretations and meanings. Each new definition and approach to place and space offer new possibilities for the North.

1. The Descriptive Approach

The descriptive approach is mainly used by regional geographers. Regional geographers have a very particular way of approaching space. Their knowledge of space and place seems to derive “exclusively from books, maps, arial photographs and structured field surveys.”¹¹⁵ To the regional geographer, space is something that we move across to get to places. Space is between places. There are many useful aspects of this approach to space, mostly deriving from the map. *What occasions would call for a map?*¹¹⁶ According to Yi-Fu Tuan, a theorist who will be further explored in the *Phenomenological Approach* section, it seems that “the most common occasion is the need to transmit efficiently geographical knowledge to another person.”¹¹⁷ Maps can show bodies of water, highway routes, landmarks, mountains, cities, climate zones, average rainfall distribution, national borders and so on. The descriptive approach to place and space taken by regional geographers is useful for geographic knowledge however, it is important to understand that maps are not merely representations of space.

To understand space through the lens of a regional geographer is to see space as a flat surface. According Doreen Massey, a theorist who will be further explored in the *Social Constructionist Approach* section, maps show space and place as static.¹¹⁸ They are not fluid nor are they in process.¹¹⁹ They are finished, completed locations with outlined boundaries and descriptive labels. Massey claims that maps neglect to acknowledge space and place's multiplicities, fractures, and dynamism.¹²⁰ It is important to understand that maps are not purely based on empirical knowledge. Instead, they are predominantly ideological. Maps are tools for social organization. They “are a particular form of ordering and organizing space.”¹²¹

I agree with Massey's critical assessment of maps. Throughout my research, it was clear that even the maps I was using to navigate myself from Toronto to Vancouver were informing my beliefs and understanding of those spaces and places. For example, to look at a map of Canada that shows ten provinces, three territories, and national parks within all of them, is to look at a very particular narrative of Canada. It is the narrative of the colonizer and the European settler. The map neglects to show narratives that were occurring in Canada before Europeans settled. Maps simultaneously show us and blind us. By using maps of Canada that include these arbitrary borders of provinces and territories I was being

Illustration 4: Map of Provincial Borders ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

shown a specific spatial organization. No doubt this spatial organization would greatly influence how I interacted, experienced, and treated Canada. When I think about the fact that borders are invisible lines arbitrarily drawn to divide up the ownership of land, the chosen route of my trip (one national park and gallery per province and territory) seems somewhat absurd.

Artist Interlude

Trevor Paglen and Experimental Geography

Trevor Paglen is an American artist who practices “experimental geography,” a term he coined in 2002.¹²² His work looks at technology, surveillance, and data collection. For example, Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* (2012) is a series of photographs depicting “classified military installations, mostly in the southwestern United States”.¹²³ They are places that cannot be seen by the public or the naked eye and are therefore photographed using “powerful telescope lenses.”¹²⁴ In general, Paglen is very adamant that geography as a subject is multidisciplinary and its boundaries are hard to define.¹²⁵ He argues that “when most people think about geography, they think about maps. Lots of maps. Maps with state capitals and national territories, maps showing mountains and rivers, forests and lakes, or maps showing population distributions and migration patterns.”¹²⁶ Paglen's work tackles these representations of landscape in the digital world. His work often focuses on classified or hidden places of geography.

Maps also inform us of particular social practices. They tell us where to drive, where to park, where to walk, what to see, and even *how* to see. Rob Shields brings up an interesting point about Canada's provinces and territories. He notes that Canada's “Northern Territories are prevented from attaining provincial status despite popular demand. The literal re-territorialisation of the North, the re-drawing of maps, would make the North suddenly *someone's*.”¹²⁷ He says that to label the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, or Nunavut as provinces would make them places instead of “empty space.”¹²⁸

Maps of Canada tell us to see the North as empty spaces and in turn, inform us what social practices are to be done there (ie. camping, canoeing, hiking and so on). Maps do not merely represent *space*, they represent specific *ideas of that space*. When it comes to representations of space “a map of geography is no more that geography – or that space – than a painting is of a pipe.”¹²⁹

July 7th, 2017, Vancouver

I have been collecting maps and park guides from every national park we visit. So far we have been to Riding Mountain National Park (MB), Grasslands National Park (SK), and Banff National Park (AB). All the maps show essentially the same thing. They all have a “Services” list indicating things like parking, campgrounds, washrooms, and information centers. And they either have a “Things To Do” or “Attractions” list indicating things like hiking trails, horse riding areas, ski trails, and swimming places. The part I find most entertaining are the “Good Look Out” or “Camera Friendly” spots, shown either by an icon of a tiny man holding binoculars or of a camera. Generally, the places they are referring to end up having high vantage points that look across spaces. They direct you to look at lakes, rivers, fields, forests, or mountains.

So far, there are a few things that have stood out throughout the trip:

1. Riding Mountain felt like an odd place to have a national park in Manitoba. The park looked nothing like the places we had seen while driving (for hours) throughout the province. All of the Manitoba I saw

until that point was flat, like the prairies. It was only until we got to the national park that we saw mountains and lakes. As we drove past the sign that read “Manitoba Attractions”, I asked Kelley “Why here? Why is there a national park here if it looks nothing like the province?”

2. The Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan was noticeably different than the other two parks. Riding Mountain and Banff had endless signs and promotional material directing tourists to the entrances. However, the entrance to Grasslands was just a small information hut next to a couple of wooden poles. If you drove too fast you could have missed it. The only way we were sure we had entered the national park was because the GPS map showed us leaving the grey coloured space and entering the green coloured space (all national parks on my GPS map were blocked out by the colour green).

(Later we found out that the wooden poles next to the info hut were there for bison to rub against. This was to prevent the bison from rubbing against and destroying the park's information huts. Who knew there were bison in Canada? This is not a National Park I had ever imagined.

3. The maps of the parks remind me of maps from theme parks. The Banff and Riding Mountain maps showed attractions, public services, information centres, hotels, shopping, restaurants, tennis courts, theatres and spas! Even further, the maps didn't include specific things such as “Park Rangers Only” spaces or areas of private residence.

There were many side roads that read “Do Not Enter,” I could not find these roads on the maps. These parks should be called National (theme) Parks. That would be a more appropriate way to understand these places.

2. The Social Constructionist Approach

Theorists who take a social constructionist approach to place understand place as being *socially constructed* and these constructions are always founded on acts of exclusion.¹³⁰ These theorists are informed by Marxism, feminism, and poststructuralism.¹³¹ They focus on place and how “issues of race, gender, sexuality, and a host of other social relations” inform the construction of places.¹³² They argue that places are “socially constructed in the contexts of unequal power relations.”¹³³ These places are not just products of social processes. They are tools that help create and maintain relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation.¹³⁴ These theorists see places as systems and structures. They are constructed by ideologies. There seem to be two general ways a social constructionist approach is used.

First, some theorists use a social constructionist approach to look at particular places in the world like Moncton or Montreal. This is common within critical cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, the Birmingham School, Benjamin Forest and Kay Anderson.¹³⁵ These theorists look at specific places to examine how their social construction is unique to their particular geographical, social, economic, and political circumstances. This approach can be compared to the Canadian cultural theorists (Berland, Bordo, Jessup, O'Brian, Shields, Watson) who specifically examine Canada and its unique social constructions.

Second, there are other theorists who use a social constructionist approach to look at the more broad discipline of space such as Edward Soja, Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey. These theorists see

space as being socially constructed but are instead concerned with general ideas of space that are not specific to locations like Moncton or Montreal.

Doreen Massey has by far one of the more progressive theories of space. In her book *for Space* (2012), Massey believes that space has not been given proper attention and the current theories surrounding space stifle its possibilities. She is in agreement with the general definition of place as being *meaningful space*, however she argues that space is not place's opposite, it is not *meaningless*.¹³⁶ Massey also has issues with the attention given to time over space. She notes that space is generally perceived as “a lesser dimension than time. The 'victory of space over time' is the representation over reality and the stabilization over life.”¹³⁷ For example, anthropological methods are made possible from the conceptual belief that space is able to conquer time by freezing it. Space is considered immobile. Massey wants to free space from the “constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestioningly so often been embedded (stasis; closure; representation) and to settle it among another set of ideas (heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness).”¹³⁸ Ultimately, in accordance with a social constructionist approach, Massey understands space to be socially constructed, however she argues that space is *always* under construction.¹³⁹

Artist Interlude

Land Art

There are many artists who see place and space as being socially constructed. The artists mentioned earlier (Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Jin-me Yoon, and Diana Thorneycroft) tackled the social constructions of the places and spaces of the Canadian North. Their motives were to challenge constructions and show their oppressive and exclusive nature. However, there

are other artists who focus on how people engage with, respond to, and experience space and landscapes.

Land art for many people is historically specific.¹⁴⁰ The term Land Art generally refers to very particular kind of art being produced in the late 1960s to early 1970s: American earthworks.¹⁴¹ American earthworks include a variety of artists working with different mediums, sites, scales, and conceptual focuses. You have artists such as Michael Heizer who is best known for his large-scale sculptural work. For example, one of his most famous works *Double Negative* (1969–70) is “a pair of massive cuts in facing cliff edges of an obscure mesa near Overton, Nevada, [that] was made by displacing 240,000 tons of rock.”¹⁴² Or artists such as James Turrell, who focus on light and space. Turrell's most famous work is the *Roden Crater*. The *Roden Crater* “is an unprecedented large-scale artwork” that is “created within a volcanic cinder cone” in the Painted Desert.¹⁴³ The crater is a “controlled environment for the experiencing and contemplation of light.”¹⁴⁴

There are many other land artists such as Nancy Holt, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson (Smithson's work and his ideas of 'site' and 'non-site' will be mentioned later on in this paper. He will connect the work of Land artists to the resin toys). These artists are all associated with the Land Art being created in America in the late 1960s to early 1970s.

Ben Tufnell argues that Land Art “is clearly not a movement – an 'ism' – with defined aims, clear membership, a manifesto.”¹⁴⁵ He argues that there are “Land artists” outside of America's earthworks.¹⁴⁶ He mentions European artists such as Richard Long, Giuseppe Penone, Hamish Fulton, David Nash, Christo and Jeanne- Claude, Herman de Vries, and Andy Goldsworthy. All of these artists “use art to enact or articulate a direct, non-pictorial engagement with landscape and nature, or to re-order our response to place, landscape or nature.”¹⁴⁷

Massey's Three Arguments of Space

Massey argues for three alternative approaches to space. First, that we recognize space as the product of interrelations, relations meaning practices. It cannot be assumed that entities or identities are static and complete, they are practiced and therefore always in process. This questions the authenticity of spatial identities and political geographies (places, nations and so on). She argues that spatial identities and political geographies must be reconceptualized in relational terms.¹⁴⁸ It is an anti-essentialist way of saying that there are no intrinsic qualities of any place or group of people. This is because they are not conceptualized separately and then related to each other, rather they are always in a constant process of becoming. For example, there is no fundamental Canadian or Torontonion quality because these spaces and people are constantly changing.

Second, Massey argues that we must understand space as a sphere. The sphere is not a “discrete multiplicity of inert *things*,” it is a sphere of practices and processes.¹⁴⁹ The sphere is not “an already inter-connected whole but an ongoing product of interconnections [...] Space is *always* being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished.”¹⁵⁰ What Massey is saying is that it is not *just* a matter of

acknowledging that there are multiple trajectories (narratives or experiences in the world). Rather, it is understanding that the multiple trajectories are always in a process of becoming: “There are always connections *yet to be* made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, or not, [and] potential links which may never be established.”¹⁵¹

Third, Massey argues that we must recognize space as always under construction.¹⁵² Since space is a sphere of processes and practices, it can never be a closed system. Massey notes how the “framework of Progress, of Development and of Modernization and the succession of modes of production elaborated within Marxism, all propose scenarios in which the general directions of history including the future, are known.”¹⁵³ To recognize space as always under construction is to reject these grand narratives and all of their assumptions of past histories and/or future events.

It is through these arguments that Massey can define place as an “ever-shifting constellation of trajectories,” to what she refers to as a *throwntogetherness*.¹⁵⁴ Space and place are always being negotiated. Cresswell argues that Massey's *throwntogetherness* of space frames place as an event.¹⁵⁵ He says that Massey's place is characterized by openness and is no longer seen as “a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic.”¹⁵⁶ There is no authenticity to place. It is always under construction, always being made, always being negotiated. When you are in a place, you are a part of its construction.

Massey on Travel

Massey's definitions of space and place can bring new ideas to travel. Massey asks “What is it to travel? How can we best think it in terms of space? Travelling across space? Is it?”¹⁵⁷ She has a point. Generally while travelling, space is experienced as a flat surface that we move across. This would be following the descriptive approach of the regional geographers. Massey argues that while travelling we are not just travelling across space, we are travelling across trajectories.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore,

“since space is product of social relations” we are also altering space and are participating in its continuous production.¹⁵⁹ While I was driving across the country, and visiting national parks and galleries I was participating in the construction of those places. To accept that spaces and places are constantly under negotiation, always changing, and forever becoming is to accept that “the [Toronto we] left just half an hour ago is not the [Toronto] of now.”¹⁶⁰

August 10th, 2017, Mauricie National Park, Québec

I was surprised to see a confederation narrative at Mauricie. Up until this point all of the “Know Our History” information signs at the entrances of national parks have focused on the Indigenous. The signs at Mauricie had profiles of Sir George-Étienne Cartier and Sir John A. MacDonald. It read “Parks Canada invites you to experience the inspiring places connected to Macdonald, where history comes alive.”

The signs in the west coast were much different. It wasn't so much about memorializing individual people as it was historicizing the Indigenous. I remember Lake Louise's information signs very well. On one side there was a little white boy with backpack looking out over Lake Louise and on the other side there was an old black and white photograph of Samson Beaver (Stoney First Nations) and his family. It will be interesting to see how the narratives shift focus as we drive to the east coast.

Massey on the Robbing of Histories

Massey's approach to space and place delegitimizes the work of ethnographers and

anthropologists. The ethnographer and anthropologist see history/time as the active and space as the passive.¹⁶¹ Their formulation of space as a static thing we move across ends up robbing others of their histories.¹⁶² The ethnographer and anthropologist “hold them still for [their] own purposes, while [they] do the moving.”¹⁶³

Nostalgia is another a culprit of this robbery. Nostalgia here is referring to nostalgia of space and place. It is the strong emotional connection to geographical places and things within those spaces. Massey argues that nostalgic voyages to place (such as going “back home”) “frequently means going 'back' in space and time.”¹⁶⁴ Space is always and forever under construction. It is not possible to *go back*, and to “think you can is to deprive others of their ongoing independent stories.”¹⁶⁵ Timelessness is a product of nostalgia. Massey points out that nature and the natural landscape are places that we escape to “to replenish our souls [while] contemplating the timelessness of mountains” and oceans.¹⁶⁶

Canada's national parks are treated as timeless places. They are places where people go to get away from the world and reconnect with nature and the wilderness. Unlike urban landscapes and concrete jungles, the national parks are seen as places that are pure and untouched. People don't look at nature and see a dynamically evolving and ever shifting place. Instead, they have a nostalgic relationship with national parks and view them as everlasting and timeless. Benedict Anderson argues against these nationally recognized untouched places of wilderness. He says that “truly 'untouched' wilderness cannot, by definition, be national. Such wildernesses predate human species, let alone nationalism, by eons.”¹⁶⁷ The nationalization of Canada's parks “requires their human naming and their mapped location within a web of political territories.”¹⁶⁸ These geographical imaginations (Massey), mythic spaces (Tuan), and imaginary landscapes (Shields) are all hegemonic. They are particular views of the world that formulate space as a static surface and rob people of their histories.

August 8th, 2017, The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

I was interested to see for the 150 celebrations how the National Gallery would go about presenting the Group of Seven. When it came to curatorial decisions, it is clear there was an attempt to challenge the images of the Group of Seven. In one room, the Group's paintings were paired with other painters' versions of landscape. There was also a large birch bark canoe in the centre of the room which acknowledged the presence of people, specifically Indigenous, within these landscapes.

However, in the Learning Centre there was an entire section dedicated to "Creating Your Own Canadian Landscape." On the front wall there was a projection of a forest (image changed every 10 minutes or so). In the middle of the room were a line of iPads set up with a painting/drawing program. On the back wall there was a "How To" guide to walk people through the steps of creating a landscape.

The "How To" guide spoke of scale, horizon lines, vanishing points, focal points, picture plane, and ended with a Tom Thompson painting (he was a painter very connected to the Group of Seven, however he was not a part of the official group). To me, the Learning Centre works against their successful curation in the gallery. This Learning Centre reinforces the idea that landscapes are central to Canada's image. Furthermore, the way they are teaching the guests to look at landscape is very limited and traditional. Its a Cartesian perspective. They are encouraging an Alberti's window of Canadian landscape.

When I looked at other iPads to see what the visitors were creating, not only did everyone's perspective and overall approach to the landscapes look similar, not one person included people within their paintings.

3. The Phenomenological Approach

Theorists who take the phenomenological approach to place and space are concerned with essence. They do not ask what *this* place or *that* place is like. Rather, they ask what makes a place *a place*?¹⁶⁹ Gaston Bachelard, Jeff Malpas, Robert Sack, Edward Casey, and Yi-Fu Tuan are a few theorists known for using the phenomenological approach to space and place. These theorists do not deny “that specific places are the products of society and culture;” they do however believe that place is much more than that.¹⁷⁰ These theorists look for fundamental ideas of space and place that transcend cultures and time. In a phenomenological approach, “ontological priority is given to the human.”¹⁷¹ These theorists do not focus on particular places like Toronto or a neighbourhood. Instead, they think of place in general terms by using thought experiments.¹⁷² In respect to the social constructionists, the phenomenological approach would understand social conflicts such as the regional exploitation, enforced genocide, and poverty in the North to be “simply an example of what is going on in all human life: a struggle over the very basis of human experience.”¹⁷³

Humanist geographer Yi-fu Tuan phenomenologically approaches ideas of space and place. In his book *Space and Place* (1997) Tuan is able to develop fundamental ideas of the two terms that transcend cultural particularities.¹⁷⁴ He attempts to “systematize human experiences of space and place.”¹⁷⁵ His book does not have a unifying thesis. Rather, he tackles various topics relating to space and place. The definitions he has for the two terms are the foundations his work is built on. For Tuan, place is security, attachment, and a concretion of value. It is a special type of object that cannot be

handled or carried away.¹⁷⁶ Space, on the other hand, is *freedom* that we long for, it is the ability to move.¹⁷⁷ Tuan uses these two definitions to guide the reader through many themes that contemplate space and place: space and the body, spaciousness and crowding, spaciousness and travel, spaciousness and knowledge, mythic space, architecture and space, and time and space. His observations are informed by the two ends of the experiential continuum, feeling (subjective knowledge) and thought (objective knowledge).¹⁷⁸ This is because according to Tuan, they are both equally important as ways of knowing.

Toys Phase 2:

2-dimensional to 3-dimensional

Somewhere on the west coast there was a gift store selling kitschy crystal geometric shapes with pictures of landscapes, northern animals, and Canadian flags etched inside. They were meant to be decorative pieces placed on mantles. They were shiny, plastic, and playful. I had seen them before in a Canadian gift shop on Yonge Street back in Toronto. I enjoyed how the crystals were, as the Group of Seven paintings, representations of northern space.

Illustration 5: Crystal Shapes
©Emily Pleasance, 2018

I found their three-dimensionality to be more compelling than the two-dimensional surfaces of images. This is because I could hold them in my hand, flip them upside down, look inside them, and stack them on top of each other. The tactility of the objects made the inquiry of the image more interactive and satisfying. I decided that this was the medium through which I would explore the Lawren Harris painting referred to earlier in this paper.

Tuan - Space and the Body

Tuan understands spatial organization to be deeply connected to the human body. Space and distance are always in reference to self. The words used to describe points within space are centered around the idea of a self. Tuan expands on this idea: “Distance is distance from self, *I* am always *here*, and what is here I call *this*. In contrast with the here where I am, *you* are *there* and *he* is *yonder*. What is yonder I call *that*.”¹⁷⁹ It is obvious that within Tuan's fundamental ideas of spatiality the *I*, the self, the human, is centrality. This vocabulary of space also informs our understanding of people. *Here* and *there* translates to *us* and *them*. It is a form of othering. When two people are intimate with each other, they have a *close* relationship and if two people feel disconnected, they are *distant*.¹⁸⁰ Tuan notes that “interpersonal intimacy and geographical distance”¹⁸¹ are very much connected.

This act of othering people who are geographically distant is quite common. Currently there is extreme civil war in the middle east, a socioeconomic and political crisis in Venezuela, and mass shootings in America. Statuses on Facebook, articles from the web, and news reports all have empathetic headlines such as “We Pray For Them.” *Them*, not us. They are there (wherever that is), and we are here (in Canada). However, this act of othering is done within Canadian borders as well. The suicide rates or the housing crisis facing many Indigenous communities is astonishing. But they are *northern* communities. They are *there* and we are *here*, and here is fine. It is curious that as Canadians our national motto is “True North Strong and Free,” but as soon as the North has *someone* in it, *they* are *there* (in the North) and *we* are *here* (in the South).

Tuan - Spaciousness and Crowding

Tuan defines space as openness, the ability to move, and freedom. Freedom always implies space. For example, the idea of weekend getaways is to get away from *here* and go *there*. According to Tuan, freedom is “the ability to transcend the present condition” and the “elementary power to

move.”¹⁸² What can restrict freedom or deprive us of space? Tuan argues that people rather than things are more likely to deprive us of space.¹⁸³ This follows Rob Shields' theory of the True North and its tendency to erase people from the north. The True North is a place of escape, a place to go on vacation. The Latin origin of the word vacation is *vacāre*, to be empty.¹⁸⁴ Canadians go up north for summer vacation to get away from people and spend their time in what they believe to be empty spaces. The Canadian North is thought to be devoid of people. It is an open vista of wilderness that connotes freedom to the average Southerner. Whether it be physical or psychological crowding, humans want space from other humans.

July 2nd, 2017, Bow Glacier Lake, Icefields Parkway

We left Lake Louise this morning and have spent the afternoon swimming at Bow Glacier. Both places look about the same: mountains, trees, and a gorgeously blue lake. Kelley and I set camp at a small beach area off to the side. We could not wait to do a polar bear dip (not many shower opportunities when you live out of your car). There was another girl reading her book near us who stopped to laugh when I came scream-laughing out of the water. Cold but refreshing. We were glad to have found this place after Lake Louise.

Louise was absolutely crowded. Hundreds of people were covering the shore of the lake, it was like walking through Canada's Wonderland in the summer. In every photograph I have ever seen of this Lake, the crowds were never in the picture. I watched as people lined up to take photographs. They were climbing on rocks, standing in water, anything to get the other people

out of the frame of their shot. I decided to start taking photos of them instead. One brother and sister posed with sunglasses and snap backs. Another guy in a Toronto Raptors jersey flashed the hand sign Drake always shows (The6?).

I decided to challenge myself and not take the classic photograph of the lake. I would only photograph the people visiting. Whenever the lake is photographed the crowds of tourists are never in the image. The image of Lake Louise (blue water and two mountains that lead to a valley in the middle) is world famous. That image is ingrained into my memory.

When we got to the lake it reminded me of the first time I saw the Mona Lisa in person. I had to push through crowds of people to see something that I have studied for years. I couldn't tell if I was being introduced for the first time, or if I was meeting an old friend. Lake Louise has been photographed to death. The challenge to not photograph it was painful but necessary. I had realized that all of the photographs I had taken until that point in my trip were devoid of people. I was just as guilty as the crowds at Lake Louise. We have all been taught to look at landscape this way.

Illustration 6: Lake Louise ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

Tuan - Spaciousness and Travel

For Tuan, there are two types of travellers – the active and the passive – and they both have very different experiences of space. Tuan argues that the active traveller, who moves themselves through space by bike, car, or small aircraft “conquers space but does not nullify its sensible size; on the contrary, space continues to open out for them.”¹⁸⁵ He says the “act of moving, space and its attributes are directly experienced.”¹⁸⁶ It is the tools and machines the active traveller uses that allow them to directly experience space. The active travellers move themselves through space and this act of moving gives them a sense of freedom.

Then there are the passive travellers. Tuan says these are the people who move by jetliners and trains.¹⁸⁷ They are not so much travellers as they are passengers. Tuan says these travellers do not have any control over the machine that is moving them and “cannot feel it as an extension of their organic powers” in the way an active traveller does.¹⁸⁸ Passive travellers move across space very quickly, they “stay safely belted in their seats” and are “transported passively from point to point.”¹⁸⁹ In this sense,

the passive travellers conquer space through fast travel time.

I agree with Tuan's notions of the active and passive traveller. I have been to Vancouver twice; once I travelled by plane and the other by car. During my first trip to Vancouver, I did not directly experience space. There was a moment I briefly saw the Rocky Mountains through the clouds, but my general experience was eating airline food and watching Seinfeld episodes off my laptop. If the mountains below me were only simulated images my experience of them would still be the same. When I landed in Vancouver I could point to where I was on a map. I could even google how many miles I had travelled. But for me, the space between Toronto and Vancouver was only a concept. It was something I could not directly experience.

My experience when I travelled to Vancouver by car was entirely different. To get myself there I had to fill a machine with liquid, press down on a pedal with my foot to move forward, and turn a wheel to steer myself and my machine in the proper direction. I could feel the ground I was moving across through the tires of the car. I could touch, smell, and see all of the towns, fields, and mountains I was passing by. I was directly experiencing space through my senses and gaining empirical knowledge of these spaces. It is clear that Tuan is arguing the active traveller has *a posteriori* knowledge of space while the passive traveller can only have *a priori* knowledge of space.

Toys Phase 3:

Working With Resin

First, in order to create my own 3-dimensional shapes, I needed to make molds of the shapes from the gift store. I bought various shapes including pyramids, octagon-like domes, and small and large cubes. I made molds of each shape using a silicon molding kit.

Second, I needed to choose a material that would be appropriate to pour and make casts from these molds. The material would need to be crystal clear so that I could paint the Lawren Harris painting inside

Illustration 7: Process to Cubes ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

the shapes. The material would need to be compatible with materials like paint and other objects and it would need to be safe to use in the vicinity of my home. I wanted whatever material I chose to be shiny, plastic, and playful.

I wanted it to scream consumerism and touch-ability. The material I chose to cast my shapes was a two-part epoxy resin.

After much trial and error, I finally managed to create 4 successful molds of the crystal shapes. At this point, I made the decision to only use cubes. This is because the cubes allowed for more freedom of use with the resin and gave me more control over the final product.

Tuan - Spaciousness and Knowledge

Tuan acknowledges that a person's idea of spaciousness can be influenced by many things. First, he argues that spaciousness is influenced by physical environment.¹⁹⁰ He says that if a group of people have only ever lived on an island that is three miles long they may wonder “whether any land exists from which the sound of ocean waves cannot be heard.”¹⁹¹ Then Tuan speaks of China as an extreme and contrasting example. He says, since China stretches over an entire continent “its people

have learned to envisage vast distances and to think of them in dread, for they can mean separation of friends and lovers.”¹⁹² The physical environments of the two geographic locations drastically influence a person's sense of spaciousness in contrasting ways.

Second, Tuan argues a person's feeling of spaciousness is also influenced by their cultural experience. North Americans envisage open space as prosperity. The “plains in the West are a symbol of opportunity and freedom.”¹⁹³ However space can have a negative side. The “root meaning of the word 'bad' is 'open.'”¹⁹⁴ Openness can mean exposed and vulnerable. Unlike the North Americans, Russian peasants would see boundless space as connoting despair, not as prosperity.¹⁹⁵ Tuan's example of the North Americans and Russian peasants show how spaciousness is influenced by cultural particularities. Finally, Tuan argues that spaciousness always relies on contrast.¹⁹⁶ The grass yard outside seems spacious when compared to the living room just as the field past the yard's fence seems spacious when compared to the yard. *How might Canadians experience their national parks compared to tourists from other countries? How might national parks be built in ways that use contrast to create a sense of spaciousness?*

Tuan shows that there are many geographical and cultural variables that inform a person's sense of spaciousness. This makes it difficult to formulate any general rules on spaciousness. However, Tuan argues that space is an important biological and psychological need of all human beings.¹⁹⁷ Because of this, space “is a resource that yields wealth and power when properly exploited.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, despite geographic or cultural particularities informing one's sense of spaciousness, it is important to ask *who is in control of space?* Or put another way, *who is in control of freedom?*

August 5th, somewhere on the outskirts of Iqaluit, Nunavut.

I just came back from Pangnirtung yesterday. Pang is the most northern point I have ever travelled to and it was an amazing experience. I

have never encountered a more remote community. I was sent there with little instructions. All I was told was that I was getting on this plane at this time and that there may or may not be an RCMP officer waiting there to help me get to the hotel (there was no officer).

I got off the plane and had not a clue what to do. Pangnirtung is located in a valley of mountains so there are always clouds in the sky. I had no aerial view when flying into the airport and did not know where I was within the community. The telecommunications company Rogers does not have a tower in Pang, so I was also without cell phone service. I wish I had brought a map.

Everyone (all of the 12 other people on the plane) had left the airport. Luckily one man stayed behind. He said "You don't know where you are do you?" I replied "Is it that obvious?" and he said "Well, you are a white person in Pangnirtung. That is not very common. The only place you would be headed to is Auyuittuq Lodge. Follow me."

His name was Markus and he ended up being Canada's leading polar bear research biologist. He has spent the last twenty years tracking polar bear migrations across Nunavut and was in Pangnirtung that day to meet his new research team. They were about to start their next expedition.

I spent the afternoon with Markus and he told me many stories, too many to write. However, there is one part from his stories that stood out. Something I found to be embarrassingly interesting. He kept mentioning "his cabins" (the places he would stay while on expedition). I asked him something

along the lines of “where are your cabins?” And he gave a puzzled look.

That's when I realized what (as a Southerner) I was actually asking. I was asking: “What is the name of the place where your cabins are built?” or

“How did you come across owning these cabins?”

I realized that I have never experienced space that isn't controlled, labelled, and monitored by the federal government. These cabins are in no-man's land. Meaning, these places are not labeled on any maps.

Even the most remote parts of Ontario are somewhere - someone owns that land, the land has a name, and the land has a border. Land outside the communities in Nunavut is quite different. It is not monitored by the government. In the eyes of the government there is nothing there. And so, if someone was so inclined, they could build cabins of their own without any legal obligations or purchasing of land.

I am currently sitting on a rock about a twenty five minute hike from the outskirts of Iqaluit. I am perplexed. I cannot tell if I am somewhere or nowhere. I could maybe point to a general area on a map, but I know of no other means to explain where it is that I am.

I am here, but where is that? I am not sure. The only thing I know is that it is exhilarating.

Tuan - Mythic Space

According to Tuan, there are two principal kinds of mythical space. One mythic space is a “fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space.”¹⁹⁹

The other mythic space, that of the True North, is a “spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities.”²⁰⁰ Mythic spaces are intellectually constructed and these constructions can be extremely elaborate.²⁰¹ Tuan argues that mythic space thrives in the absence of knowledge, for there will always be areas that are hazily known, or entirely unknown.²⁰² Tuan argues that mythic spaces allow people to understand “man's place in nature.”²⁰³ He says these spaces operate within a constellation of knowledge and are not easily verified or proven false.²⁰⁴ Tuan would argue that it isn't a question of whether or not the True North actually exists. He would say that the True North is assumed to exist and *must* exist because it is an important “[element] in a complex systems of beliefs.”²⁰⁵ To discard the idea of the True North would threaten “a whole way of looking at the world.”²⁰⁶

Tuan - Architecture and Space

Tuan argues that architectural space (human made space) “teaches.”²⁰⁷ He says architectural space is a tool for social organization.²⁰⁸ For Tuan, architectural space is able to communicate how people “ought to behave” and “[clarify] social roles and relations” within that space.²⁰⁹ Architecture is a key element to “comprehending reality,” everything from a “planned city, a monument, or even a simple dwelling can be a symbol of the cosmos.”²¹⁰ However, even without architectural form, people always have rudimentary knowledge that allows them to “sense the difference between interior and exterior, closed and open, darkness and light, private and public.”²¹¹

June 28th, 2017, Riding Mountain National Park

This is our first national park of the road trip! Because we got here at 8pm last night all of the offices were closed and we could not buy a camp

ground. We decided to drive as far as we could into the park and stay at a camp site that would hopefully not be patrolled until the late morning (that way, we could leave early and avoid fines).

The next morning we went to go see if it was possible to sign up for a camp site. We found out that to sign up for a site they take all information: credit card#, identification, car make and plates. We would be on their profile.

I've noticed we don't really have any control over where we can go within the park. Don't get me wrong, the park is very large, but the places we can go and how we can experience those spaces are limited.

When we first enter the park we have to drive down a very long isolated road just to get to the main entrance. It seems deliberate to have the main entrance so far from the border of the park. It is as though they want us to forget about the outside world. Forget that there is a town with bars, people, cars, and houses just around the bend.

The park is constructed in a way that doesn't offer actual freedom. The roads lead to specific places and the deep ditches along each side of the road prevent us from exploring on our own. The trails guide us to walk specific routes and the signs tell us where we should not walk. The docks in the water tell us where to swim and the ropes in the water tell us how far we can swim. I guess it's off in to the (controlled) wilderness we go!

Tuan - Time and Space

Tuan argues there are certain spatial concepts that suggest temporal ideas. For example, he says

“distance, unlike length, is not a purely spatial concept; it implies time.”²¹² Tuan notes how events that happen in distant places can only be known *here* once time has passed.²¹³ Therefore according to Tuan, distance “belongs to the objective realm, [but] it does so within limits.”²¹⁴ Distance belongs both to the objective and subjective realms. Tuan connects the spatial concept of distance to the temporal concept of timelessness. He argues that vacationers travel to remote resorts, luxury getaways, and places like Disneyland because they are “removed from the burdens of time.”²¹⁵ Tuan says these places are constructed in a way that removes secular time (which imposes constraints), and are instead distant and timeless.²¹⁶ For Tuan, distant spaces exist in a “borderland between objective and subjective, and are instead [mythic space].”²¹⁷

Tuan's themes of spaciousness, the body, crowding, travel, knowledge, mythic space, architecture, and time are fundamental concepts. They can be used to understand specific spaces and places such as Canada's national parks. They are also useful to understand what sentiments of space and place may be unique to Canadians and what ideas are universal.

Conclusion: Cresswell's Three Approaches

These have been Cresswell's three approaches to place. The descriptive, the social constructionist, and the phenomenological approach each have their own unique abilities to understand and contemplate place. Each approach has constructive and useful ways of understanding place and each has its limits.

The descriptive approach to place is useful for communicating knowledge that is directly linked to geographic areas. It can show geographic knowledge such as the location of a coffee shop or even an ocean. However, the descriptive approach has its shortcomings. The descriptive approach to place cannot address the ideological systems hidden in geographic organization. Bordering and labeling areas are modes of social organization that can be oppressive and exploitative.

The social constructionist approach to place makes visible the oppression and exploitation the descriptive approach misses. Social constructionists are able to see how class, gender, and race inform and exist within particular places. When maps are used as a tool by social constructionists, showing for example the population distribution of various racial minorities overlaid by the quality of public health services in those areas, their maps can illuminate social inequalities. However, the social constructionist approach also has its own shortcomings. Being concerned with issues of class, gender, and race may prevent a social constructionist from being able to arrive at any fundamental ideas of place that transcend cultural particularities.

The phenomenological approach to place offers fundamental ideas that transcend cultural particularities. Theorists who take a phenomenological approach to place can consider broad concepts such as crowding or spaciousness. They can offer knowledge that can be applied to different geographic areas. However, as Cresswell points out, the phenomenological approach to place would “have nothing to say about the process of gentrification” or any other social issue.²¹⁸

Using only one approach is not sufficient in itself to understand the possibilities that place has to offer. By using the descriptive, social constructionist, and phenomenological approach to place, theories can be layered and meaning can be played with. By actively engaging with multiple modalities to look at place, multiple understandings are arrived at.

PART 3. Closing the Inquiry – No-Place Like Home

Intro to Non-Place and Placelessness

Earlier I suggested that even by its name, the North has to do with *place*. Over the course of the two month road trip, I visited many national parks. Prior to the trip I was aware the parks in the east coast, due to their natural geographic environment, would not reflect the Canadian North image.

However, what I did not expect was the national parks in the west to be incredibly more theatrical and commercially driven. Banff National Park was the most extreme of examples. As the summer went on, the term National (theme) Park became a running joke between myself and my travelling companion. Banff National Park did not feel like any of the places described by Massy or Tuan. In fact, Banff reminded me of Disneyland or the Truman show. Everything felt simulated. The northern landscapes and images of Banff are some of the most iconic in Canada. They are seen as authentic and real images that represent important places of our country. Yet, the park felt like a manufactured Canadian Dream Land. I decided that although the North may be about *place*, the ultimate True North destination (Banff) is actually no place at all. Using theories presented by Marc Augé and Edward Relph, the following final section in this chapter will argue that the North is a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place.

To investigate the phenomenon of place without paying attention to its parallel phenomenon of placelessness or non-place would be to miss out on an important part of the construction of the North in Canada.²¹⁹ Place has been described as security, attachment, a concretion of value, space endowed with meaning, an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories, and a *throwntogetherness*. What then, can be said of its opposite? Marc Augé's writes of non-places and Edward Relph writes of placelessness. The similarities between the phenomenon both Augé and Relph describe and what I experienced at Banff National Park are unrivaled.

Non-Places

According to Marc Augé, place is “relational, historical and concerned with identity” and therefore, “space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.”²²⁰ He says that non-places are empirical spaces of “circulation, consumption and communication.”²²¹ More specifically, Augé identifies the space of the traveller as the archetype of

non-places.²²² He argues that non-places are destinations in which the individual traveller “feels them self to be a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle.”²²³ They are blind to the spectacle in front of them. In fact, Augé says the spectator becomes his own spectacle.²²⁴ The gaze of the spectacle is deflected and reversed by things such as tourist leaflets. The leaflets offer “the would-be traveller” his own image, the “anticipated image” of places he can go or things he can do.²²⁵ The traveller is not having an authentic experience with the space around him. This definition seems to touch on some of the same notes as Tuan's passive traveller. Both seem to speak of a traveller not having direct or authentic experience with the space around them.

The space of a non-place is never directly experienced. First, Augé notes that the space in a non-place is always mediated by text and image. He says the texts and images offer “instructions for use” that inform the traveller how to move and interact within the spaces.²²⁶ For example, road signs, maps, and tourist guides establish “the traffic conditions of space.”²²⁷ Along the highway there are tourist signs that give information pertaining to the distant landscapes. The signs will have factual information such as types of landforms or wildlife found in the landscapes. In these moments, the traveller “[derives] what pleasure he can form the mere knowledge of [the landscape's] proximity” but not the actual landscape itself.²²⁸ They tell the traveller where to go and what to do. The travellers are not supposed to interact with the space around them; they are only supposed to interact with text.²²⁹

Second, Augé notes the landscapes in non-places are always at a distance. He says travellers pass by the landscapes in non-places, only to catch “partial glimpses, [or] a series of 'snapshots' [that are] piled hurriedly into [their] memory.”²³⁰ He argues that these snapshots will inevitably be presented to their friends and family when they return home.²³¹ They are not directly experiencing the landscapes, they are only capturing images to prove to others that they were there.

Finally, Augé argues that non-places can be identified by contractuality. He says a user in a non-place is always under contractual relations.²³² The purchase of a ticket, a card at a toll booth, or

required identification are all signs that a contract exists.²³³

Placelessness

Non-Places have many of the qualities of placelessness. Edward Relph talks of placelessness as being a socially convenient inauthentic attitude toward place.²³⁴ He says it is an attitude that is an “uncritically accepted stereotype, an intellectual or aesthetic fashion that can be adopted without real involvement.”²³⁵ The inauthentic experiences of placelessness are always “casual, superficial, and partial.”²³⁶

Relph argues this inauthentic attitude to place, which he calls placelessness, “is nowhere more clearly expressed than in tourism.”²³⁷ He says within tourism, the act of travelling and the means by which one travels are “more important than the places visited.”²³⁸ He argues the purpose of this kind of travel is to *collect* places.²³⁹ He says it is “travel for social ends rather than experience.”²⁴⁰ These travellers do not want direct authentic experiences and so, they travel in a fashion that insulates them from the outside world. Relph brings attention to how the motorized campers or modified Volkswagen vans that tourists bring have “multirooms, tents and trailers equipped with television [and] showers.”²⁴¹ He argues these mobile homes act to insulate them “against the strangeness of new and different places.”²⁴²

Augé’s non-places are geographic places and Relph’s placelessness is an attitude. Both non-places and placelessness result in the absence of direct authentic experiences with space.

July 7th, 2017, 9:15am, morning after the B.C wildfires

Last night Kelley and I left Vancouver to start our 3-4 day drive to Whitehorse. Around 9pm, somewhere on the Thompson River, our Trans-

Canada route was cut short. At Spences Bridge we were told that we could no longer drive north because wild fires had just broken out. We headed east looking for the next possible northern route. The next opportunity was in a town called Merritt.

As we drove in, Merritt seemed to be a larger town. We could see the light of many houses in the mountains around us. We found another route to go north but were again stopped by the local police. We acted as though we were locals to B.C and said we were headed to William's Lake (this is because an article I read just 3 hours prior said William's Lake was under no threat from the wildfires). Instead of letting us pass, the officer laughed and said "William's Lake is up in flames! Just like it is here." That's when we realized, what we thought to be light from houses was actually light from wildfires. We kept driving.

Around us the mountains were engulfed in flames and the sky was full of smoke. It was terrifying and it reminded me of Mordor from Lord of the Rings. We eventually found a road that headed north and asked another officer if we could take that route. He said, "there are undocumented wildfires that way but we can't focus on those right now. We are concerned with the ones here that are burning down this community. Take this route but drive as far as you can until you don't see any smoke, and then drive further." Kelley and I drove as far as we could that night. We don't know where we pulled over and slept. There was nothing around us and no cellphone service.

What stayed with me most from that night was not the wildfires, but the

people pulled off on the side of the road taking photographs of the flames. Some people even had tripods! I couldn't believe it. I was disgusted. That night 140 wildfires broke out and 3,600 people were immediately evacuated. As of now, towns are still being evacuated and the province has been declared to be in a state of emergency. I don't understand why people needed to take those photographs. There are hundreds of photographs on the internet to show what wildfires look like. To them it was a spectacle to watch these forests be burnt down. For the people driving through it was an experience to collect. Those photos were taken so that they could show their friends and family at home that "they were there and they saw this happen." But to the people who lived in those communities it was a tragedy. I refused to pull over and take out my camera.

* The 2017 B.C wildfires that started on July 6th destroyed 1.2 million hectares of forest that season, displacing 65,000 British Columbians from their homes. "The 2017 wildfire season also saw the longest state of emergency in the province's history, lasting a total of 10 weeks."²⁴³ The fire near William's Lake became the largest fire ever recorded in B.C's history. The fire "was roughly the size of Prince Edward Island."²⁴⁴

Finally, Relph argues that placelessness can be a product of *disneyfication*. He says that "the products of 'disneyfication' are absurd, synthetic places made up of surrealistic combination of history, myth, reality and fantasy and have little relationship with their particular geographical setting."²⁴⁵ Places of disneyfication are fantasy pseudo-places. He says they are always worlds without violence or politics.²⁴⁶ They are places in which everyone who works there smiles and is always enjoyably nice.²⁴⁷ The products of disneyfication (these pseudo-places of tourism), are places tourists travel to escape reality. They are places that "provide *guaranteed* excitement, amusement, or interest."²⁴⁸

Artist Interlude

Robert Smithson's 'Site' and 'Non-Site'

The fundamental concepts driving my a/r/tographic inquiry of the North and the creation of the resin toys are reminiscent of the work by Robert Smithson. Smithson is most famously recognized for producing large earthworks such as the *Spiral Jetty* (1972). The *Spiral Jetty* is a 1,500 foot long and 15 foot wide counterclockwise spiral of black basalt rock “located at Rozel Point peninsula on the northeastern shore of Great Salt Lake.”²⁴⁹ The remote location of the *Spiral Jetty* is very inaccessible. Smithson's work is famously understood through his binary concept of the 'site' and 'non-site,' the real and non-real. The 'site' of the *Spiral Jetty* is not directly experienced (by many), and so the Jetty is made accessible through writing.²⁵⁰

Smithson wrote the essay *The Spiral Jetty* (1972) in correspondence to the 'site' of the earthwork. This textual component of his work relocated the “place of production with the reader” of the text.²⁵¹ The essay has a combination of “photography, documentary and film-making.”²⁵² The purpose of Smithson's earthworks are to draw attention to the production of art and relocate it else where. The construction of the *Spiral Jetty* is not the hundreds of black basalt rocks that were moved and placed in the Great Salt Lake, the construction of the Jetty is instead *textual*.²⁵³ The *Spiral Jetty* is dematerialized by text of the essay. “This is not to say, however, that the text is a cancellation of the object, the two should be considered in relation.”²⁵⁴ What Smithson is challenging through his

earthworks is “the relationship between language and space,” and the
“relationship between production and reception.”²⁵⁵

While Marc Augé and Edward Relph's non-places and placelessness are about empirical spaces and attitude, Smithson's 'non-site' is not a space, it is a representation. It is a “hoax” of the real thing (the 'site').²⁵⁶ The non-sites produced by Smithson vary from “small floor-standing sculptures” to textual practice.²⁵⁷ 'Non-sites' play on the absence of the 'site'.²⁵⁸ Maps are an example of a textual representation alluding to an un-seeable 'site.' The map is a reoccurring theme in Smithson's writing.²⁵⁹ Maps operate through their corresponding absent 'site,' they are representations of a real thing.²⁶⁰ “Representation, for Smithson, is defined by this shifting play of absence and figures heavily in his hoax-dichotomy of ‘site’ and ‘non-site.’”²⁶¹ It is through the absence of 'site' and the play of mediated representation that Smithson challenges the relationship between production and reception, and language and space.

To read the essay of *The Spiral Jetty* is “to be involved in an act of production.”²⁶² Aside from the few who have managed to visit the 'site' of the *Spiral Jetty*, the *Spiral Jetty* only exists through the images and text produced by Smithson. The textual practice of Smithson's work “[opens] up the question of textuality and the mediation of space. [He is] attempting to occupy the space between production and reception as a space which is not fixed but is instead a shifting representational process.”²⁶³

Banff National (theme) Park

The tourism non-places described by Augé and the attitude of placelessness and products of disneyfication described by Relph accurately describe my experiences (or lack thereof) at Banff National Park. Similar to non-places, tourists in the town of Banff are always a part of a spectacle. They are in a Canadian Dream Land where authentic wilderness experience is simulated. The tourists in the town of Banff do not directly experience the mountains or surrounding landscapes, they are always at a distance. Instead, they take photographs and look through binoculars while reading tourists pamphlets of park activities. According to Jessie, a young fellow who works at one of the hotels, “the majority of visitors spend their entire stay within the town” only ever leaving on day excursions or guided tours.²⁶⁴

There is no need for them to actually leave the comfort of this Canadian Dream Land and go out into the wilderness, they are already there! The signage throughout the town uses a green and brown colour scheme, the buildings have lodge-like architecture, and the streets are named after northern animals (Fox St., Wolf St., Beaver St., Otter St., Deer St., Grizzly St.). The town is built to simulate a northern wilderness. Just in case for a moment the tourists have forgotten where they are, there are thousands of shirts, mugs, magnets, snow globes, stuffed animals, bottle openers, floor mats, key chains, hats, socks, posters, phone cases, and coasters they can buy with “Banff” or “Canadian North” written across it. Everything in the town tends to look back on itself, never referencing the outside world.

Banff is a product of *disneyfication*. It is a pseudo-place that functions similarly to fantasy theme parks. The Banff National (theme) Park is a secured, monitored, and regulated place that is always free of any type of violence or politics. The park is portrayed as a wilderness haven that is eco-friendly and nature-conscious. It is a happy and good place where tourists can authentically experience

nature. There are information centres and tour guide booths, the landscaping is well kept, and the streets are maintained. Even the garbage cans are extremely clean! I would not be surprised if pine scented perfume was being sprayed into the air while a soundtrack of chirping birds and bristling trees played in the background. It is a northern playground in which Canadians can dabble in the wilderness during the day only to return back to the safety of their luxury spas, restaurants, shopping centres, and hotels by night. Banff is not “historical” or “concerned with identity,” everyone in the town is either a worker or a visitor. Banff is a commercial enterprise, a profit machine, a fantasy dream land that manufactures and specializes in authentic wilderness experiences.

July 5th, 2017, Kitsilano Beach, Vancouver

As per the “when in Rome” mentality, we ended up taking Psilocybin on a beach in Vancouver, also known as magic mushrooms. The mountains and colours around the bay were beautiful, obviously. As much as I tried to relax and take a break from research, my mind wandered back to the North. The sand around us, the wood of the log, and the fabric of the blanket we were laying on were incredibly detailed. Each little woven thread beneath me looked like an entire world. As I looked up from the blanket towards the mountain in the distance, I had a quite different experience. The mountains from afar all became one with each other. The mountains were reduced to shapes and forms of colour. No matter how hard I tried, the mountains were simply beautiful, simple being the key word. I realized that the only relationship I had with those mountains was through my gaze. I could not understand the full complexity of those spaces.

Just days earlier in Banff, I had a very different relationship with a

mountain. Jessica, a friend whom I met through graduate school, took Kelley and me on a hike. As we made our way to the top of the mountain, Jessica spoke of the “gendering” of land. He said that all the activities people do in the park are masculine, they are about conquering. We hike the mountain, we climb the rocks, and we ride the rapids. There was even a hiking contest that day and the winners received a beer stein (or something to do with alcohol, I can't remember exactly).

Back then I agreed with Jessica about the gendering of land. However, while on the beach I realized that the hike at least offered me a deeper understanding and relationship with the mountain. That specific mountain in Banff is more than a shape of colour, more than an image. It has trees and dirt, a winding pathway, and a flat rock on the top to sit on. The mountain I was looking at from that beach was still a shape, and it would stay like that unless I actively went to that space and had a direct experience.

I questioned the gendering of my own experiences of spaces in the national parks and whether or not I too was “conquering.” I composed an imaginary day schedule (like the schedules found on notice boards in national parks of “Things to Do”), and tried to imagine plausible activities that would change the way we interact with land, activities that tourists would most likely find absurd.

Illustration 8: Absurd Parks Programming ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

Banff and Baudrillard

In the moments when tourists manage to leave the town of Banff and head out into the rest of the park, the town functions in a way that resembles Baudrillard's Disneyland. Baudrillard argues that "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that *is* Disneyland. [Or rather,] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real."²⁶⁵

The town of Banff functions like Baudrillard's Disneyland in that the presence of the town makes the rest of the park appear to be untouched wilderness. This is similar to Tuan's idea of spaciousness through contrast. However, the outer areas are still a part of the Banff park experience. For the tourists who actually leave the town via camper, car, or van they are still herded to controlled locations by highways and road signage. There are suggested lookout points and designated camp grounds. They are still monitored and surveilled throughout their stay. National Park Rangers drive the roads of the park

frequently and their presence goes almost entirely unnoticed. Banff National (theme) Park is a simulated wilderness experience. Its northern landscapes of mountains, forests, and lakes are hardly ever directly experienced. When tourists manage to leave the town to attempt a direct experience with its spaces, it is always within a controlled and surveilled environment.

There is a strong sense of placelessness within Banff National (theme) Park. The mountains, forests, and lakes within Banff are primarily consumed as images. These images are either consumed through the gaze of the visitor or collected by the lens of their camera. It is an inauthentic attitude towards place. They are not having any direct and authentic experiences. Lake Louise is a perfect example of this inauthentic experience of space. Lake Louise consists of hundreds of tourists capturing the same image of mountains and blue water. No one interacts with the space nor with each other. If the mountains and lake were simply images printed on backdrops, their experiences would go completely unchanged. The tourists are collecting places through images rather than experiencing them directly.

The Formula of the North

The mountains, forests, and blue lake landscapes of Banff have become the cut-and-paste formula for the general idea of the Canadian North. Throughout my road trip, I collected numerous postcards of “Canada.” Every post card that wasn't showing a particular regional area (example the prairie fields or the east coast shores) depicted Canada as mountain-forest-lake, or mountain-animal-forest, or blue-lake-beaver-forest, or lake-canoe-forest, and so on. The image of the Canadian North has been simplified and made easier to consume and collect. I even saw a pizza advertisement in a bus stop that read “Made in Canada,” with an image of a blue lake and forest as the background. It was as if the pizza was baked in the Canadian wilderness itself. Apparently, blue lake with forest is a direct visual translation of Canada. The North has become a fetishized visual formula.

Toys Phase 4:

Resin Cubes

At this point, I had successfully made clear resin cubes. The cubes were shiny and plastic. The Lawren Harris painting was still on my mind. I was figuring out how I could insert the painting into the cube to make the painting 3-dimensional and interactive.

Toy #1 I began by taking the image of the painting into Photoshop CS5 and cutting it apart as though it were a puzzle. Once I had cut the painting into shapes of colour, I moved the shapes of colour arbitrarily onto different Layers in Photoshop. (Layer 1 = parts of the sky and clouds, Layer 2 = shadows of the water, Layer 3 = part of the mountain, Layer 4 snow from the mountain and parts of the sky, and so on...)

When you looked at all of the Layers together in Photoshop it created the entire image of the painting. However, when you looked at each Layer separately, they appeared to be random shapes of colour. You could see how the painting was constructed by these shapes of colour.

I translated these Photoshop Layers into the resin cubes. I'd start by pouring one layer of resin into the mold (approx. 5mm), and wait for it to dry. Then I'd choose one of the Photoshop Layers, and paint it onto the resin.

Next, I would pour a second layer of resin (approx. 5mm) and wait for it to dry. Then I would paint another Layer from the Photoshop document. I

repeated this process until I had painted every Layer from the Photoshop document onto their own layers of resin.

The final cubes were beautiful eye-candy. They were reminiscent of kitschy Canadian consumerism. They were fun plastic objects that could be handled and engaged with. When you looked at the cube through one of its faces you could see all the layers of the resin had composed an image. When you looked through the other faces of the cube the layers of colour separated and the painting came apart.

Illustration 9: Toy #1 Sketch and Photos ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

The Lawren Harris painting in the resin cube could now be held. It could be looked at upside down, it would be turned around, and it could be looked through. I was able to engage with the painting in new ways.

National Parks and Galleries

The national parks that visually reflect ideas of the North are extremely commercialized spaces. The national parks that do not visually reflect ideas of the North (such as the Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan or any of the parks in the east coast), are not extremely commercialized spaces. They do not feel like a simulated theme parks. Of course, there are still information booths and tour guides.

However, they do not have shopping centres, spas, restaurants, or luxury hotels. It is interesting that the national parks in the territories that *do* visually reflect ideas of the North (for example Kluane National Park (YT) or Pangnirtung National Park (NU)), are also not commercialized. Ironically, I would argue this is because these parks are *too* far North for the average traveller to get to.

As for the paintings by the Group of Seven that depict northern landscapes, the level of commercialization of national parks in each province reflects the level of representation the Group had within that province's gallery spaces. The further I travelled west, the more paintings I saw of the Group of Seven. The further I travelled east, the fewer paintings I saw of the Group of Seven. As for the Yukon and Northwest territories, there were absolutely no paintings of the Group of Seven. However, there were landscapes paintings by other artists that were clearly influenced by the Group's work. Finally, as for Nunavut there were no Group of Seven paintings at all. In fact, many people I spoke to in Nunavut had never heard of the Group of Seven.

The North

The North is a non-place, placeless, a pseudo-place. The North is more of an idea or a fetishized visual formula than it is an actual place. Not only has the North been simplified into a consumable formula that is generically elusive, but the geographic locations that are considered to be the epitome of the Canadian North (ie. Banff) are not places at all. Instead they are non-places, pseudo-places, or simulated northern wilderness spaces that provide inauthentic attitudes towards place and manufacture non-genuine experiences. Furthermore, after I travelled to the territories and experienced places such as Nunavut, it became clear that what southern Canadians think of as the North, is not really north at all. Rather, it is in the *middle*? As Peter White pointed out earlier, the Group of Seven paintings of the North only depict “a few limited areas of the Precambrian Shield in central and

northern Ontario, in particular Algonquin Park, the north shore of Lake Superior and Algoma.²⁶⁶ It would be absurd to say that Banff National Park or the landscapes of the Group of Seven are the Canadian North, because what would everything geographically above those places be called? *More North? North-North? The Actual North?*

The Actual North

Throughout my journey, Nunavut offered the counterpoint to Banff's placelessness. After travelling to Nunavut there is no other place in Canada that I would consider to be The North. The communities, lifestyle, and overall environment of Nunavut are like no other in Canada. Nunavut is what I consider to be the Actual North.

The Actual North is nothing like the Canadian North. There are no forests because the climate makes it impossible for trees to grow. There are no shopping centres only single grocery stores with food and essentials. And there are no National (theme) Parks, only real places with actual untouched wilderness. Thanks to Tuan and his theories on Space and the Body, I understand that the Canadian North is only called *North* because it is north of the people who labelled it. However, the labeling of these geographic locations as North erases the Actual North from the map. The Actual North and its communities, the places and people in Nunavut, are not even considered north. Instead, by default they are considered to be nowhere or they are not considered at all. As it has been made most clear by Shields, the erasure of people from place is an oppressive act. It is an erasure of people from geographic maps as well as consciousness.

Toys Phase 5:

From Cubes to Toys

The cubes accomplished exactly what I wanted. They were very playful, and tactile. Everyone gave the cubes to would knock them together, flip them over, look inside them. They were Canadiana eye-candy. They looked just like

Illustration 10: Toy #2 Process Drawing
©Emily Pleasance, 2018

the kitschy Canadian North decorations found in tourist gift shops. The cubes were plastic and shiny, and were successfully communicating Canadian consumerism.

However, I realized that when interacting with the cubes, people could only partially play with the painting. The cubes were like children's blocks. They could stack the cubes on top of each other. They could knock them down and turn them upside down. But no matter what they

Illustration 11: Toy #2 Photo of Layers
©Emily Pleasance, 2018

did, the image was still stuck as-is inside the cube. I needed to make other resin toys that would allow the painting to be altered, created, and played with.

Toy #2 I decided to re-create the cubes. This time I would make the layers detachable and stackable. To create the image, layers would need to be stacked

on top of each other. People could now create the Harris painting in their own way. They could choose what to include and what not to include. They could change the orientation of each layer. The painting could literally fall apart.

Toy #3 People really liked playing with the layers of the stackable cubes. They were like little tile chips. I wanted to create a resin toy that would allow the painting to be communally

created. Placing the chips on a table and rearranging them reminded me of puzzles. I liked the idea of puzzles because they are a slower paced game.

Usually puzzles are played with over a period of time.

They are left on a table, touched, and then left for

Illustration 12: Toy #3 Photo of Puzzle ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

someone else. I thought if I created a puzzle with the resin, the painting could then be communally made and engaged with.

I created a 4 x 4 foot magnetic puzzle. The puzzle is composed of 256 resin squares taken from the stackable toy. The piece gives people the opportunity to decide whether or not they wish to take apart the iconic Harris painting. They can choose to actively deconstruct an iconic image of Canada, or they can choose to keep it as-is.

#WeTheNorth

It is incredibly important for southern Canadians to recognize the fabrication that is the Canadian North. It is important that they begin to truly understand and internalize the fictitiousness of the North and realize it is a manufactured visual commodity. I am not condemning recreational activities in national parks, nor the enjoyment of Group of Seven paintings. I am urging southern Canadians to re-engage with and re-learn one of Canada's most fundamental ideas of home. For example, there is the hashtag #WeTheNorth that has become apart of southern Canada's lexicon. Even through hashtags southern Canadians identify themselves with the North. Rather than protesting something as trivial as #WeTheNorth, it would be more constructive to begin to question *who* is the “We” and *where* is the “North.” It will be in these moment that Canadians will realize this place that we so often refer to as home (the North), is really no place at all.

The North's 'Non-Sites' (Resin Toys)

The North is not directly engaged with by Canadians. It is understood through an image repertoire of mountains, lakes, and forests. Since I was young I was aware of the Canadian North without ever having been there. My only experiences of the North were mediated through text, images, and paintings. Until I visited the national parks (the 'sites'), the North only existed as a 'non-site', and for many Canadians it will forever remain a 'non-site'. I recognize the northern landscape paintings and any other form of representation of the North such as postcards, photographs, and tourist snow globes to be 'non-sites'. It is this production, reception, and mediation of the North that I am most curious about. This curiosity ultimately lead to the creation of the resin toys.

The North, as Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, is most often experienced through its 'non-sites' than it is its 'sites'. The North is primarily experienced through images, therefore how we engage with these

images is important. The resin toys relocate the North's place of production. When people play with the resin toys, they are involved in the production of the North. The toys allow people to build, create, challenge, disassemble, and play with the images of the North. The resin toys force people to directly engaged with the images. By relocating its production, people can create and play with the North's meaning.

The aesthetic choices of the resin toys are strategic. The resin toys are shiny, plastic, and playfully tactile. They are beautiful objects of Canadian eye candy. The toys have kitsch-like qualities that resemble the tourist paraphernalia found in gift shops across the country. These aesthetic choices speak to the consumerist nature of the North. It touches on the fetishization of the North's imagery and how the North itself has been reduced to easily consumable icons.

After creating the series of resin toys, I realized the toys in no way speak to any real 'sites.' Yes, the North is more of a visual formula than it is an actual place. However, we must remember that whether or not we experience the North directly, the North does have a real 'site'. The consumerism of the North can overshadow the North's real geographic locations. There is often a disconnect between the North and its 'site.' Therefore, in order to reground or re-site the North, I created a group of soil resin cubes. The soil originated from the territory of Nunavut, specifically Iqaluit. The cubes were made by mixing soil into the resin mixture. These dirt cubes are organic and visually opposite to the other shiny plastic toys. They are a stark reminder that there are real geographic 'sites' of the North. There are the 'sites' of the True North (national parks), and there are 'sites' of the Actual North (Nunavut). Without acknowledging the real geographic locations of the North, their agency and importance is stripped away. Whether it be the manufactured consumerism found in national parks or the communities of hamlets found in Nunavut, both are equally important in understanding the Canadian experience.

CHAPTER 3. Re-Thinking A/r/tography

PART 1. A/r/tography and its Modalities

*Hear now this,
O foolish people,
and without understanding;
which have eyes, and see not;
which have ears, and hear not:*²⁶⁷

Revisiting the Method

What is it to be an a/r/tographer? An inquiry that began with a Group of Seven painting led its researcher to Canadian cultural theorists, critical geographers, phenomenology, and theory of place. It led me on a two month road trip across the country where I collected maps, postcards, park pamphlets and photographs. It showed me mountains and wildfires, the arctic and the east coast, flocks of tourists and isolated communities. It prompted me take photographs, draw maps, and write absurd activities. It forced me to experience, interact, learn, and create with the North through multiple modalities.

A/r/tography, Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay suggest, is a method of embodiment. It is learning through *contiguity*, *living inquiry*, *metaphors* and *metonyms*, *openings*, *reverberations*, *excess*, and *lures*. There are no edges or directions, there is no up or down, and centrality is only the *self* which is questioned and complicated. The a/r/tographic process is unpredictable and organic. It produces situations that force a/r/tographers to face their underlying assumptions, beliefs, and biases. Ultimately for a/r/tographers, research is about *process* and a/r/tography is theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication through living inquiry.

Reframing *Theoria*, *Praxis*, and *Poesis*

Irwin translates *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis* to research, teaching, and art-making.²⁶⁸ I agree that an a/r/tographer plays the role of the artist-researcher-teacher. However, I do not think these roles are the counterparts of *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*. Through my own a/r/tographic research, I have come to understand a/r/tography and its *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis* in a different way. I want to propose a reframing that will allow the a/r/tographic method to be adopted by a wider range of creators, not only by the people who identify as artists, researchers, or teachers.

***Theoria* Revisited**

Theoria within the framework of a/r/tography would be better understood as the engagement-with-the-already-known. An a/r/tographic inquiry is always looking at *something*. Whatever that *something* is, someone has already to some capacity inquired about it. Therefore, a/r/tographers must familiarize themselves with the already-known so that they can contribute to whatever field they position themselves in. They can begin conversation with their own a/r/tographic work. This can be seen in the survey of scholarly approaches to space, place, non-place and placelessness I offered above.

However, the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography leads its inquiries to many other places as well. The a/r/tographic approach to *theoria* can be broadened so as to encourage a/r/tographers to make connections between their inquiry and philosophical movements, genres within literature and art, historical periods, material culture, and so on. I argue that *theoria* should simply allow a/r/tographers to understand how their inquiry is positioned within larger contexts.

***Praxis* Revisited**

Praxis allows a/r/tographers to actively participate with their inquiry. This can be understood as ethnographic-like research. However, *praxis* in a/r/tography is not confined to the ethnography's

research design or methods. *Praxis* within the framework of a/r/tography would be better understood as engagement-with-place. An a/r/tographic inquiry is always looking at *something*. This *something*, to some capacity, exists within a place. The place of the inquiry is decided by the a/r/tographer. There is no one definition of place. For example, place could mean real geographic location or even a digital realm. Within my own research, I decided the places important to my inquiry of the North were the national parks and galleries. However, an a/r/tographic inquiry of the social networking site Habbo Hotel might make its a/r/tographer engage with the physical place of the Sulake Corporation (the company that owns Habbo Hotel), or with the online (digital) place of Habbo Hotel. *Praxis*, as with all modalities in a/r/tography, is rhizomatic and unpredictable.

Poesis Revisited

Irwin understands poesis within a/r/tography to be art-making.²⁶⁹ However, *poesis* within the framework of a/r/tography would be better understood as engagement-through-creation. My research *poesis* was the drawing of maps, the taking of photographs, the writing of absurd activities (which I then attempted), and the creation of my resin toys. I understand why Irwin may consider *poesis* to be art-making; however, I think the term art-making prevents people who don't identify as artists from considering themselves to be a/r/tographers. If *poesis* is instead understood as engagement-through-creation, a/r/tography becomes accessible to all creators. The a/r/tographic method could be adapted by culinary artists, architects, writers, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, fashion designers, video game developers, and brew masters. Even scientists could use the a/r/tographic method. Their *poesis* could be translated as inventions. The definition of creation is “the act of making, inventing, or producing.”²⁷⁰ To create something is to “to bring [it] into existence.”²⁷¹ *Poesis* is the moment the a/r/tographer creates their own new modality. Through creation and experimentation, the a/r/tographer is able to look at their subject through a new lens. *Poesis* allows a/r/tographers to play with meaning and create new

understandings. Furthermore, *poesis* can be collaborative. *Poesis* is an opportunity for meaning to be communally created.

Knowledge in *theoria* comes from others; knowledge in *praxis* comes from self; and knowledge from *poesis* comes from experimentation and creation. A/r/tography is a holistic method that allows a/r/tographers to embody and complicate knowledge. A/r/tographers must continuously engage with all three modalities in order to layer, complicate, challenge, and play with meaning.

The importance of continuously engaging in these different modalities became quite clear to me early on in my research. During the beginning of my road trip I was reading Rob Shields' theory of the True North. Shields was saying the True North hides regional exploitation, enforced genocide, northern poverty, and cultural hegemony. I headed into the first national park of the trip with skepticism and negative feelings towards northern recreational activities. Camping, canoeing, and the overall enjoyment of these national parks seemed to be a Southerner's privilege that was wrong and exploitative.

However, while I was in the park I spent time photographing the camp grounds and RV areas. As a photographer, I am used to using my camera and photography as tools to start conversation with strangers. At one point, I was invited over by a Portuguese family. The grandmother and parents were immigrants from Portugal and their children were first and second generation Canadians. They gave me lemonade, cheese, and crackers, and let me hold their baby. The grandmother did not speak much English and so she sat quietly enjoying the shade while I spoke with the family. Most of my conversations were with the parents. They told me that when they were brought over as children, their families used summer camping trips as a way to connect with Canada, their new home. Their summer trips to national parks became a tradition and helped their family transition and integrate into a new life. It allowed them to connect with a new place.

The experiences of the Portuguese family were not found in the writings of Shields. By going on the road trip and engaging with *praxis*, my *theoria* knowledge from Shields and the other cultural theorists was challenged and at moments rejected. There is no one truth in a/r/tography. The experiences and opinions of the Portuguese family are just as valid and integral to understanding the Canadian North as Shields' True North ideology.

Illustration 13: Portuguese Family ©Emily Pleasance, 2018

PART 2. A Responsibility to *Awe*

We Astronomers

We astronomers are nomads,
Merchants, circus people,
All the earth our tent.

We are industrious.
We breed enthusiasms,
Honour our responsibility to awe.

But the universe has moved a long way off.
Sometimes, I confess,
Starlight seems too sharp,

And like the moon
I bend my face to the ground,
To the small patch where each foot falls,

Before it falls,
And I forget to ask questions,
And only count things.²⁷²

A/r/tography Seeks Better Questions

I must insist here, quite passionately, on one thing: A/r/tography is not a destructive method, it is not hostile to traditional disciplines and it is not working for the dissolution of the sciences.²⁷³ It is an alternative embodied understanding. The Canadian North cannot be reduced to one theory or truth and

it cannot be contained within the parameters of a research paper. This is not unique to the Canadian North, it is true of any subject that is met a/r/tographically.

The a/r/tographic method uses multiple modalities to layer, complicate, challenge, and play with meaning. To be an a/r/tographer on an inquiry is to take a subject and look at it through the lens of a kaleidoscope, showing all the possibilities of what *might be*. A/r/tographers are able to treat their *subjects* of inquiry as *objects*. They pull apart, turn upside down, disassemble, reassemble, slip, flip, turn and layer meaning. What is most impressive about the a/r/tographic method is the distances it takes the researcher. Not geographic distance (I drove 22,000 kms that summer), but distance in terms of epistemological and ontological possibilities. Ultimately, a/r/tographers are not concerned with final answers. Rather, they are interested in seeking better questions.

A/r/tography as Moments of Being Lost

The a/r/tographic method is rhizomatic and unpredictable. It places a/r/tographers in unanticipated situations, uses multiple modalities, and lives in *in-between* interstitial spaces. The a/r/tographic method is unlike other traditional research disciplines, in that it does not follow strict frameworks or templates.

All of these characteristics give a/r/tographers the unique ability to enter moments of being lost. The path of the a/r/tographer is unknown. Each a/r/tographic inquiry will unfold differently than the next. As Irwin and Springgay note, a/r/tographers deal with the *excess*.²⁷⁴ This means the range of a/r/tographic possibilities can take a/r/tographers anywhere and everywhere. Inevitably, a/r/tographers will have moments in their research of being lost. Rebecca Solnit describes being lost as a state of mind.²⁷⁵ She says lost has only two meanings: the familiar falling away or the unfamiliar appearing.²⁷⁶ By rejecting traditional frameworks and research methods, a/r/tographers are able to momentarily get rid of their perceptual apparatuses and *lose* themselves in the here-and-now, in places where they have

no mental model or reference to anything other than what is right in front of them. Solnit says that “sometimes gaining and losing are more intimately related than we like to think.”²⁷⁷ By actively trying to lose our predetermined mental maps or perceptual frameworks, we are able to gain new insight and new knowledge. Solnit sees children as having the quality of being lost. It is children, not adults, who are able to get “on their hands and knees, [and engage] with what [is] immediately before them.”²⁷⁸

The Child Voyager's Ability to Forget

It is in these moments of being lost, a/r/tographers become what Alan Harrington calls uncompromising child-voyagers.²⁷⁹ He says that child-voyagers are incapable of accepting “life as it is.”²⁸⁰ Instead, they remain open to visions and are able to retain a child's-eye-view of the world to see all the possibilities of *what might be*.²⁸¹ Friedrich Nietzsche connects the child to the idea of forgetfulness. The power to forget is much like the idea of getting lost. For Nietzsche, children are always blissfully blind and are not familiar with the phrase “it was.”²⁸² They have already forgotten what has happened moments before. Because of this, children are always in a kind of state of lostness. Nietzsche believes that children are able to see in ways that adults cannot. He says that adults “fail to see something which is yet seen by the child, [they fail] to hear something which is yet heard by the child; this something is exactly the most important: because [they do] not understand this, [their] understanding is more childish than the child and simpler than simplicity.”²⁸³ The child's horizon is open and endless, the horizon of an adult is “closed and whole.”²⁸⁴ This power of forgetting is important to Nietzsche. Forgetting allows horizons to expand and new knowledge to be found. Although it is impossible to live a life without memories, if we do not actively find ways to forget it will be “quite impossible to *live* at all.”²⁸⁵

Michael Pollan understands Nietzsche's power of forgetting to be a “kind of radical editing or blocking out of consciousness everything that doesn't serve the present purpose.”²⁸⁶ For Pollan, it “is a

kind of transcendence – a mental state of complete and utter absorption” to the here-and-now.²⁸⁷

Forgetting is a state of “losing oneself in the moment.”²⁸⁸ Here, being lost and forgetting are just two different terms of the same idea. It is a matter of entering a state of consciousness where we are able to shed our perceptual lenses and gain a child's-eye-view of the world. Pollan argues that instead of being engaged with the here-and-now people generally jump to conclusions.²⁸⁹ He says its a form of laziness and “impatience with lived life.”²⁹⁰ This laziness and jumping to conclusions comes from having memory. The adult mind has a library of “already-been-theres and seen-thats.”²⁹¹ Like Nietzsche, Pollan finds value in the ability to forget. Forgetting allows us to “temporarily shelve out inherited ways of looking and see things as if for the first time.”²⁹²

Solnit, Harrington, Nietzsche, and Pollan all connect the ability to get lost or forget with the child. Children are in states of consciousness that allow them to see the world as new. Adults have the burden of memory. The consequence of memory is the inability to engage with the here-and-now. The educated mind is unable to see all the possibilities of *what might be*. We must “imagine consciousness as a kind of lens through which we perceive the world.”²⁹³ In order to change our perceptual lenses of the world, we need to shift into different states of consciousness such as being lost, or forgetting. It is in these states that we are able to momentarily retain a child's-eye-view of the world and acquire new knowledge. Fortunately, the a/r/tographic method brings many moments of lost to its a/r/tographers. A/r/tographers are able to become child-voyagers and lose their predetermined mental maps and perceptual frameworks. Another term for these spaces of lost is *wonder*. A/r/tography is a method that allows its a/r/tographers to wonder and wander.

A/r/tography and Hedonic Adaptation

Performance philosopher Jason Silva argues that human beings have a problem with mental habits. Once a human being “[creates] a comfort zone, [they] rarely step outside of that comfort zone

[and] the consequence of that is a phenomenon known as hedonic adaptation.”²⁹⁴ He describes hedonic adaptation as the “over stimulation to the same kind of thing. [It is] the same stimuli again and again and again, [which] renders said stimuli as invisible.”²⁹⁵ Because our brains create these mental maps we “no longer have to be engaged.”²⁹⁶ This can be found in academia. Our ability to see knowledge is mediated by the institution. There are institutionalized schematic outlines of ways to go about research and writing, and of ways to examine and view the world. These frameworks and templates limit the possibilities of understanding and can induce premeditated outcomes. Silva believes that to fight hedonic adaptation we must actively strive to be in spaces of wonder. He cites the book *The Wondering Brain* (2003) by Kelley Bulkeley which says “one of the ways to elicit wonder is to scramble the self temporarily so that the world can seep in.”²⁹⁷ Silva says that instead of dispensing with the here-and-now and accepting “life as it is” we must become Harrington's “uncompromising child-voyageur and retain a child's eye view of *what might be*.”²⁹⁸ A/r/tography is not about the answers, it is about seeking the better questions.

A/r/tography is a method that actively fights against hedonic adaptation. By not following strict frameworks or templates, the a/r/tographer is able to momentarily forget their mental maps and become lost. They become the uncompromising child-voyagers that have no perceptual lenses mediating the world they are seeing. It is in these spaces of wonder, that a/r/tographers can have direct, unmediated, un-compromised engagement with their research.

A/r/tography as a Method of *Awe*

I close my thoughts on a/r/tography with a reconceptualization of the method itself – a/r/tography as a method of *awe*. According to Silva, *awe* is engagement, it is “radiant ecstasy.” He says, instead of “being unaffected by the here-and-now [we are] “absolutely ravished emotionally by it.”²⁹⁹ It is “direct energy exploding on our nerve endings.”³⁰⁰ I see moments of *awe* as direct,

unmediated, un-compromised engagement. When we are in *awe* we are astonished, inspired, mouths opened, and stupefied. It is the “aha!” moments in a/r/tographic research. It is the moments where connections are made and the rhizomatic web of knowledge connects and grows. *Awe* is a moment of cognitive growth. Silva says it is moments of *awe* “that [expand] our perceptual parameters beyond all previous limits” and force us to “reconfigure our mental models of the world in order to assimilate the beauty” of that new knowledge. Whether that be in the form of mathematical equations, scientific inventions, architectural masterpieces, poetic lyrics, musical symphonies, or academic research, “we fit the universe through our brains and it comes out as nothing less than poetry.” A/r/tography creates spaces of wonder and endless possibility. As artists, research, teachers, or any other creators, it is our duty to actively “strive to enter these spaces, for these are the only spaces that have ever lead to visions that have transformed the world.”³⁰¹

Closing Thoughts on the North and A/r/tography

As we arrive at the end of this a/r/tographic journey it is important to remember that a/r/tography is an *ongoing* living inquiry. The inquiry of the Canadian North is not/cannot be over. As taken from Massey's notions of space, the North is in process, it is always in a constant state of becoming. The North I visited that summer is not the North of now. There is still much needed engagement and a/r/tographic research to be done. Maps must be re-drawn, paintings must be re-framed, park activities must be re-programmed, the North must be re-made. It does not matter whether or not the North remains prominently experienced through its images. What matters is that our interaction with the North becomes direct, embodied, and critically engaged with.

When it comes to identity, Canadians have strong sentiments toward their land. I do not see this relationship changing any time soon, nor does it need to. Whether it be the sandy beaches in Prince

Edward Island, the grassy plains in Saskatchewan, or the tundra in Nunavut, Canadians can keep looking out onto their landscapes with reverence. They can keep embarking on rites-de-passage canoeing trips and summer camping. Finally, they can keep going out on Kerouacian road trips to see the Trans-Canada highway.

While taking part in these activities Canadians must look past the horizons of their landscapes and ask for *more*. By using the a/r/tographic method Canadians can begin to challenge their notions of Canadian space. They can begin to layer, complicate, and create new meaning and relationships with their land. Ultimately, the a/r/tographic method will open up new spaces and possibilities for what is thought to be the Canadian experience.

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