

IN THE WOODS: PATHWAYS OF PERCEPTION

by

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Abstract

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Joint Program in Communication and Culture at Ryerson University and York University

In the Woods: Pathways of Perception is a companion piece to my MA project (a series of photographic collages of trees) which was presented as a solo exhibition at the I.M.A. Gallery in July 2012. This paper examines the disconnection between human beings and the natural environment. It argues that this disconnection is caused by the importance the Western culture accords rationality over other, more intuitive modes of perception and experience. My project aims to remedy this problem by targeting perception and reworking it through a more demanding of the audience approach in my compositions. The all-over composition of my photographic collages encourages the eyes to scan around the entire image. This scanning of the image, I strongly believe, disrupts the dominant mode of visual perception in the modern Western world, in which the figure is viewed as a distant isolated object that can be grasped immediately rather than engaged with and contemplated. I argue that this scanning attention encourages unconscious participation, allowing viewers to find their own connections and visual paths through the forest I have created. In this way the viewer is given space for contemplation and reflection; an experience that is often undervalued in our society. This paper asserts that by employing unconscious scanning attention, visual perception can be retrained, thereby destabilizing the dominant modes of thinking and experiencing. I argue that the unconscious modes of perception, intuition, and imagination play a key role in the re-connection to nature, for when we are unable to connect and empathize with the natural environment, our capacity to connect and empathize with others also diminishes. Therefore, the path towards a more ethically aware society is through the arts and the unconscious. This paper emphasizes that the desire to regard, contemplate, empathize, and love another living being, whether human or non-human, is the path towards a more peaceful, connected world.

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...By the way in which one looked at a thing, it was possible to bring about an intense feeling for and belief in its living reality. Such a way of looking brought a complete transfiguration of the common sense expedient view where objects, both people and things, existed mainly in terms of their usefulness; it brought a change to a world of living essences existing in their own right and offering a source of delight simply through the fact of being themselves.

*-Marion Milner
On Not Being Able to Paint, 1973*

Opening Remarks

In our society, logic and reason are valued over the intuitive, emotional experience of the world. It is through rational thought that our lived reality is transformed into abstract concepts, which detach us from our perceptual and emotional experiences of the world. Marion Milner explores this idea of detachment from the world in her 1957 book *On Not Being Able to Paint*.¹ She discovered while writing this book that her drawings “were intuitive rather than logical reflections about living, they were attempts to express the wholeness of certain attitudes and experiences which logic and science, by their very nature can never do; since logic is bound to abstract from whole experience and eliminate the totality of the particular and the personal” (Milner 1957: 123). The limits of logic and science are crucial to acknowledge because of the central position they play in shaping our day to day lives. But what are we leaving out when we ignore our intuitive, embodied experience?

The emphasis on rationality over intuition has led to a disconnection between human beings and the natural environment in the Western world.² This disconnect has devastating consequences for the natural world, as evident through factory farming, the destruction of the rain forest, species extinction, pollution, and numerous other environmental issues. The consequences for human beings are evident in climate change, resource depletion, and toxic air and water, all of which are linked to environmental abuses and have negative effects on the health of human beings. Another consequence is emotional isolation within ourselves and from each other, as well as the world around us. All of these consequences are linked together by disconnection, which continues to feed into itself through lack of empathy (the more disconnected we are the less empathetic we are, therefore creating more disconnection and so on). George Grant discusses these issues in terms of our relationship to technology in his 1986 essay “Thinking About Technology”. He states:

In the past human beings have been responsible for the destruction of all the members of

1 Marion Milner was a psychoanalyst, writer, and theorist. She was a painter and was actively engaged with drawing.

2 And increasingly in other parts of the world that have been affected by Modernity's thrust of progress on a global scale.

some other species; but today when we watch the osprey's glory in the ocean storm, there is not only awareness that this beauty may be passing away, because the eggs of the bird are being sterilized by our use of chemicals, but also that the source of life itself may become no longer a home of life. Our novelty lies in the fact that where Plato warned clearly against the dirtying of the waters, he did not face their pollution as a possibility in the immediate future. We are now faced with easily calculable crises (concerning population resources, pollution, etc.) which have been consequent upon the very drive to mastery itself. The political response to these interlocking emergencies has been a call for an even greater mobilization of technology, which illustrates the determining power of our technological representation of reality. More technology is needed to meet the emergencies which technology has produced. (Grant 1986: 15)

The drive to mastery over creation is moving “the source of life” away from the natural process of creation. The shift from “the source of life” as “the home of life” illustrates the desire for God-like power and control over the human body and every living being. The inclination to master all aspects of our existence narrows our focus to only purposeful action, therefore devaluing the inherent worth of other, non-purposeful pursuits. However, art has the ability to escape the clutches of this control by refusing to be mastered. Art is intuitive, unexpected, felt and experienced on many levels for incalculable reasons. A work of art is often found beautiful precisely because it refuses to conform to reason or rationality. In this way, I strongly believe, art can act as a gateway to our intuitive reality. For these reasons, both my project and this paper emphasize the importance of intuitive reality, which can be best accessed and reclaimed in our culture through the experience of art.

Grant highlights how the drive to technological mastery has led to the destruction of the natural environment. The idea that we are trying to use technology to fix the problems we created with technology illustrates how tied we are to technological innovation (the hegemonic ideology of

technological progress), despite its costs to the natural world. The drive towards mastery of ourselves and nature has severed an important connection. Beyond the practical and rational uses of nature for humans, there is a deep emotional connection that has been lost. This loss has hurt both parties; when we lose our ability to connect and empathize with the natural environment, it also diminishes our capacity to connect and empathize with others. Our humaneness is based on our ability to imagine a world beyond ourselves, one in which our actions affect the other beings with whom we share the planet.³ Our ability to respect otherness can be found in appreciating the beauty of the natural world. The desire to regard, contemplate, empathize, and love another living being, whether human or non-human, is the path towards a more peaceful, connected world.

I have chosen to express my desire for this shift through a series of photographic collages of trees. I am drawn to trees through my feelings of connection to their presence, beauty, stillness and movement, as well as the abstract forms that capture my imagination when I look at them. I am using the digital technology (my photographic camera) to capture images of trees and (the imaging software Adobe Photoshop) to manipulate these images into large-scale photo-collages. I am attempting to highlight the perceptual engagement, pleasure, and closeness we experience with the trees around us, paradoxically through technological means. This approach illustrates the struggle Grant expressed; using technology to undo problems that technology created. I believe that employing technology to engage our relationship to trees can remind us of our lived relation and intuitive connection to the natural environment. In Marshall McLuhan's 1973 lecture "Art as Survival in the Electric Age," he brings to the fore the idea that technological advances require artists to work with these new technologies in order integrate them into society, i.e. to prepare people (their sensorium) for coping with these technologies. He argues:

...[the] gap between man's natural equipment and his technology has gotten bigger and

³ Imagination and intuition are aligned with the unconscious. They also form the basis of ethics; one empathizes by being able to intuitively perceive the hidden aspects of the other and imagine oneself experiencing those emotions.

bigger. I suggest that the artist's role is to fill that gap by retuning and modifying the perceptual apparatus that enables us to survive in a rapidly developing environment. Art provides the training and perception, the tuning or updating of the senses during technological advance. (McLuhan 1973: 208)

It is not possible to avoid technological progress which is beyond our control. However, artists can find new ways to engage with it in order to survive in the newly created environment and to help people survive and cope with its potentially numbing effects. In other words, artists lead people into safety. (McLuhan's view on the role of the artist will be explored later on in this paper.) The way I am employing the new digital technology shows another way it can be engaged with and, also, the possibility of using technology in art making for higher goals than only pleasing objects for visual consumption. It is through using technology in a new way that I am attempting to “fill the gap” between humans and the natural environment and, ultimately, remind us of our responsibility towards it as living beings who cohabit this planet with other living beings.

The unconscious modes of perception, intuition, and imagination play a key role in this reconnection to nature. The all-over compositions I have created encourage the eye to move around and scan the entire image. These all-over compositions ultimately disrupt the dominant hierarchy of visual perception in the modern world, in which the figure is viewed as a distant isolated object that can be grasped immediately rather than engaged with and contemplated. This idea of quickly grasping an object speaks to our drive to take control and possession in the world by consuming objects instead of respecting things and beings as beyond our total apprehension. The unconscious “scanning attention,” a concept coined and described by Anton Ehrenzweig in his 1967 book *The Hidden Order of Art*, plays a key role in the experience of my images. I will discuss Ehrenzweig's concepts in more detail further on in this paper. The unconscious is the source of creative expression and poetic thinking, in other words, imagination, which helps bring into the foreground the limits of abstract reason. It also sheds

light on the consequences when too much value is accorded to the rational mode of thinking, namely a life in which rich sensory experience and imagination are cast as unnecessary and trivial. The reality of making and engaging with art is that of “seeing with one's own eyes, whether in painting or in living, seeing the truth of people and events and things needed an act of imagination; for the truth was never presented whole to one's senses at any particular moment, direct sensory experience was always fragmentary and had to be combined into a whole by the creative imagination” (Milner 14). It is the imagination that combines the fragments of reality into a whole, thus recognizing and apprehending a greater meaning (or “truth”) of art and life. Art offers the possibility to retrain our perception and thereby destabilize the dominant modes of thinking and experiencing. My images were made by means of imagination (my unconscious engagement and ordering of the composition) and they demand imagination from viewers when viewing them, for my compositions are abstractions that require viewers to creatively engage with them (to fill in the missing gaps or create links) to make sense (perceptual and cognitive) of these compositions. The meaning of the images is not “presented whole to one's senses,” but rather as fragments that encourage unconscious engagement, allowing viewers to find their own connection and visual path through the forest I have created. In this way the viewer is given the space for contemplation and reflection; an experience that is often undervalued in our society.

The Tree as a Metaphor

The tree has been the subject of many myths throughout human history and is often used as a metaphor for life, death, knowledge, or connection. We see these metaphors at play in the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge within Christianity, and the Tree of Yggdrasil within Norse mythology. The Tree of Life represents the interconnectedness of all living beings, linking it to the idea of creation. The Tree of Knowledge of the Good and Evil is the site of original sin committed by Eve when she gave Adam the apple to eat, which prompted their conscious awareness (of being nude) and, therefore, their

expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In Norse mythology, the Tree of Yggdrasil is “located at the centre of the universe and [is] uniting it”; it is therefore often called The World Tree (Lindow 319). It is viewed as a symbol of creation, death, new world, as well as the connection to the world of spirits (Lindow 322). There are many animals that are depicted as living in and around it, such as an eagle, squirrels, harts, and snakes (Lindow 320). A common theme running through these myths is the importance of the tree to human life, as well as it acting as a gateway to something greater than us. There clearly has been a need for a mythic connection to trees. But why do human beings have this need?

A tree is a large, encompassing mass of roots, leaves, textures, colours, and shapes. It is solidly rooted deep into the ground and yet reaches high up into the sky, moving in the wind. While the immensity and movement of trees can produce feelings of awe and terror, the deep-rooted stillness of trees gives the impression of stability and protection, as well as the feeling of being grounded. The experiences of both security and anxiety are evident in the myths about trees, such as the Tree of Life which connotes the power of creation and destruction. These myths use trees as anthropocentric metaphors relating to human existence, but what about the trees themselves? Trees are undeniably alive, independent of our need, desire, or use for them. How can we support a humanist connection to trees, while respecting their independent existence? Their majestic presence can remind us of the idea that human beings are among the smaller beings on this planet; the size of the trees dwarfs and humbles us. Also, the size of the trees draws attention to the amount of time that has passed in order for them to become so majestic. Thus they connect us to history by reminding us of centuries past, during which we, in the present day, were not around. Furthermore, by being physically larger and much older than us, trees can remind us of our place among other beings in the world (past and present), as coexisting with them rather than ruling over them. We are mortal beings and we share the world with many other living beings, which have as much right to exist as we do. Since the power is unbalanced in our favour,

it is our duty to protect other living beings from us for their own intrinsic value. By experiencing trees our appreciation for them can be nurtured and it can remind us of our connection and responsibility to the natural environment.

The Process of Seeing

The image compositions I created lack a visual centre, adopting the technique described by Clement Greenberg as “all-over painting,” which he coined to describe the work of Jackson Pollock. However, I am using this technique to create photographic compositions rather than paintings. Greenberg describes the “all-over” technique in visual composition as that which is “filled from edge to edge with evenly spaced motifs that repeated themselves uniformly like the elements in a wallpaper pattern and therefore seemed capable of repeating the picture beyond the frame into infinity” (Greenberg 217). My images are uniform because they are only of trees or elements of trees, and rather than removing them from the rectangular shape of the original photographic image, I use the entire image, including the rectangular frame; however, any repetition or pattern is created unconsciously. My compositions give the feeling of moving “beyond the frame,” not into infinity, but into a new visual environment that evokes the feeling of a forest. The environments I created lack the figure/ground division (where infinity recedes into the image), which allows them to move and expand into the lived space of the viewers. My compositions merge with and create new environments by transforming viewers' modes of visual perception, ultimately re-training their senses (a concept Marshall McLuhan wrote extensively about). In this way, my work is using Greenberg's “all-over” technique while incorporating contrasting elements that alter our conventional perceptual engagement.

For Marshall McLuhan, the role of the artist is to explore the boundaries of technology and to challenge the perceptual practices of the society, in which the artist finds him/herself. McLuhan states, “the job of the artist is to upset all the senses, and thus to provide new vision and new powers of

adjusting and relating to new situations” (1973: 211). This is especially relevant in the rapidly changing technological environments of our modern society. McLuhan argues that “all the warning signals of the new ground are present in the arts long before the hardware boys ever feel them. And so the arts are for survival purposes, and for navigation purposes and as such are indispensable even at the most homely and humble levels” (1973: 221). Since artists are able to sense the changes that new technology manifests in society long before the effects are understood, artists help update “our sensibility of awareness of perception” and “prevent us from becoming adjusted to our environments” by working with new technology, thus performing a valuable service for society. Artists are protecting people's senses from becoming numbed by the unexpected blows of new technology by slowly adjusting them to it through their art and by raising their awareness (sensory and cognitive) to constantly question the reality in which we find ourselves (McLuhan 1973: 216, 223). The all-over composition of my photographic collage disrupts the senses and draws attention to the new “sense ratios,” while simultaneously alerting people to what has atrophied or been diminished in their day to day life.⁴ Even though my work is visual, the collage composition brings it in close proximity to McLuhan's idea of acoustic space. He describes acoustic space as:

space that has no centre and no margin, unlike strictly visual space, which is an extension and intensification of the eye. Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses; whereas “rational” or pictorial space is uniform, sequential and continuous and creates a closed world with none of the rich resonance of the tribal echo land. (McLuhan 1995: 240)

While I am working within the limited margin of the frame, there is no centre of focus or consistent sequence of images, but rather a composition that is more varying and organic. McLuhan acknowledged the link between music and abstract art in that the “technique [of abstraction] is simply

⁴ McLuhan uses the term “sense ratio” to describe how each new technology/media sets up a new arrangement of senses or establishes a new ratio/proportion of engagement between the senses.

to pull out the visual connections...what you pull out in abstract art and in jazz and in symbolism is the connection” (1973: 217). My compositions rely on me having pulled out the majority of connections thereby creating compositions that are abstracted from reality. While the viewer is indeed seeing trees, the environment or image I created is not of one tree in particular or a specific forest that exists in real world and can be represented. However, while most of the visual connections I saw are evident in my compositions, I have also left room for viewers to make their own connections. In this way, my project brings McLuhan's theory into a new light, while confirming his perspective of the role of the artist.

The use of the all-over composition in my photographic collages leaves space for the unconscious mind to take in the entire image, as well as the details, all at once. By means of this compositional approach, which requires the viewer to ceaselessly scan the whole composition, the viewer is more likely to feel an intuitive connection to the nature depicted because the compositions elicit a similar experience of immersion (through ceaseless sensory engagement) that one would experience in a forest. According to Anton Ehrenzweig, the difference between unconscious scanning (scanning attention) and conscious differentiation (focused attention) is that unconscious scanning takes in the whole composition at once and conscious differentiation separates (differentiates) the figure from the ground. Furthermore, the unconscious scanning attention opens us to another (a different) mode of seeing: the syncretistic vision. He states:

syncretistic vision may appear empty of precise detail though it is in fact merely undifferentiated. Through this lack of differentiation it can accommodate a wide range of incompatible forms...nevertheless, syncretistic vision is highly sensitive to the smallest of cues and proves more efficient in identifying individual objects. It impresses us as empty, vague and generalized only because the narrowly focused surface consciousness cannot grasp its wider more comprehensive structure. Its precise concrete content has become inaccessible and “unconscious”. (Ehrenzweig 34)

In scanning an image with undifferentiating attention, the unconscious is capable of apprehending the complexity of the image as a whole. The unconscious is able to perceive the details and the whole simultaneously, therefore comprehending “a wide range of incompatible forms” that would seem chaotic to the conscious mind. Ehrenzweig believes that artists must oscillate between conscious and unconscious attention in order to comprehend all of the elements separately and as a whole, while working on their compositions. Both modes of attention feed into each other to create a work of art.

Ehrenzweig asserts that unconscious scanning attention has a hidden order that is beyond the grasp of the conscious focused attention, therefore allowing the viewer to apprehend the work of art intuitively, thus more deeply and vividly. It is important to question and explore what is being hidden from conscious attention, in our present society and at any point in time, because it can alert us to potential problems or areas of concern that need to be addressed. Art that encourages the unconscious modes of attention and perception train people, as McLuhan argued, to perceive those things which have been purposely hidden from plain (conscious) view, and more importantly, to grasp everything as a whole (actually seeing the hidden links and connections). Ehrenzweig insists that artists naturally engage the unconscious modes of perception and attention because these modes permit them to grasp the complexities of relationships between figure and ground in a way the conscious modes cannot:

In a work of art any element, however paltry, has to be firmly related to the total structure in a complex web of cross ties radiating across the entire picture plane. There is no decisive division between the gestalt or figure and mere background elements. The complexity of any work of art, however simple, far out-strips the power of conscious attention, which, with its pin-point focus, can attend to only one thing at a time. Only extreme undifferentiation of unconscious vision can scan these complexities. It can hold them in a single unfocused glance and treat figure and ground with equal impartiality.

(Ehrenzweig 35)

It is the unconscious that can take into account the elements or parts of the work while simultaneously taking into account the whole composition in a “single unfocused glance”. Ehrenzweig uses Paul Klee's idea of “two different kinds of attention practised by the artist” to demonstrate how this is possible.

(Ehrenzweig 36). He states:

[Klee] speaks of the endotopic (inside) area and the exotopic (outside) area of the picture plane. He says that the artist can either emphasize the boundary contrast produced by the bisection of the picture plane; in which case he will keep his attention on one (endotopic or exotopic) side of the line he draws; or else he can scatter his attention and watch the simultaneous shaping of inside and outside areas on either side of the line.

(Ehrenzweig 36)

This is illustrated by Ehrenzweig in his discussion of Edgar Rubin's double profiles (Figure 1). Rubin's portrait illustrates this concept because it “can be read as a profile turned right-then the left half turns solid and the area to the right into empty ground; or else it can be seen as a profile facing the other way-then the right side becomes solid and the left recedes” (Ehrenzweig 36). However, it is possible to see both at once while relying on scanning attention. The lack of differentiation (the conscious separation between figure and ground, subject and object, self and other) which accompanies scanning attention, is equally essential to the creation and viewing of my all-over compositions. My images connect to these unconscious modes of ordering and perceiving by prompting unconscious attention and syncretistic vision in both me and the viewers. My use of the all-over compositional technique allows for a connection with the subject matter of trees on a different and deeper level than the rational, conscious mode of encounter of everyday life. Using both the form and the content, an environment is created for the viewer to enter. It is my belief that the experience of viewing these compositions can make us aware of what we are missing and how distanced/estranged we have become from the natural environment by being constantly immersed in man-made environments.

One way of seeing the world is to impose an objective view that supports the rational mode of thinking. Another way is to allow our subjective experience to shape our perceptions. The reality is that both ways of viewing the world are present at once and they feed into each other to create a fuller picture of the world. However our culture undervalues and often fails to acknowledge the importance of the subjective experience, of unconscious modes of attention and ways of seeing, therefore creating an imbalance in our perception of reality. Milner describes this realization:

I thought I had learnt, in general, how to look on the world with an objective eye, how to use narrow focus of attention which shuts out the overtones and haloes of feeling and subjective seeing and keeps itself apart from what it looks at... I was being driven to recognize that scientific objectivity was only a partial aspect of one's relation to the world, and that both ways of looking were sterile without each other. In fact, one had to stand apart in order once more to come together again in a restored wholeness of perception. (1957: 84)

It is the combination of objective and subjective seeing, rational and intuitive modes of thinking, that form a meaningful perspective of the world. It is through the process of oscillating between conscious and unconscious attention that both modes of perception can be appreciated and, more importantly, can raise our awareness to another level.

When one mode of perception is valued over the other, the imbalance has negative consequences for both human and non-human life forms, as outlined in the introduction. This imbalance extends from the world of perception to the broader contexts of our existence (ethical and moral) for when the usefulness of another living being is held above its intrinsic worth, the ability for love and respect is diminished. As George Grant points out in his article "Faith and Multiversity" "any beautiful thing can be made into an object by us and for us and we can analyze it so that it will give us its reasons as an object. But if we confine our attention to anything as if it were simply an object, it

cannot be loved as beautiful” (1986: 40). The objectification of beauty is rooted in a desire to conquer its meaning and master its creation. This is especially true for beauty that we have not created; for beauty that occurs in the natural world. Grant argues that we have particular difficulty in:

partak[ing] in the beauty of the world because of the misery, the hardness, the sadness of so much of our lives, which is caused not only by the ugliness in ourselves, but by the very conditions of the non-human world. As has often been said, the very drive to technological science arose with the desire to overcome these vicissitudes. The key difficulty in receiving the beauty of the world these days is that such teaching is rooted in the act of looking at the world as it is, while the dominant science is rooted in the desire to change it. (1986: 50)

The ability to see “the world as it is” and acknowledge the beauty of it requires the release of reason and control as the primary means of relating to the world. Beauty is difficult to define, but it holds a specific quality that we can all know and feel on a subjective level. It cannot be calculated or forced, but rather occurs through attention, appreciation, and respect. In this way it is akin to love. You know it when you feel it, but there is a mystery surrounding the exact dimensions and circumstances in which love arises. There is a leap of faith into the unknown and unknowable, which John Keats describes as “negative capability,” and which is central in the creative process. Negative capability is “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Houghton 75-76).⁵ In many ways we have lost our ability to connect with and put our faith into anything we cannot fully understand; it requires risk and faith to venture into the unknown – into “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts.” Consequently, we have distanced ourselves from the experience of

⁵ Negative capability, as an approach in making my project, created a space for my unconscious to emerge. By not “reaching after fact and reason” I was able to feel my curiosity and joy when looking at trees and therefore connect to my desire to represent them. It was through this desire that I found a conventional way of capturing the trees (photographs) to create an unconventional composition (all-over photo-collages) which expressed my appreciation for their beauty.

love. Grant explains how this occurs:

What is first intended is that love is consent to the fact there is authentic otherness. We all start with needs, and with dependence on others to meet them. As we grow up, self-consciousness brings the tendency to make ourselves the centre, and with it the common sense understanding that the very needs of survival depend on our own efforts. These facts push us in the direction of egocentricity. When life becomes dominated by self-serving, the reality of otherness, in its own being, almost disappears for us.

(Grant 1986: 38)

When we allow our egocentricity to drive our existence it is difficult (if not impossible) to look beyond our own limited frame of focus and apprehend the “reality of otherness”. The capacity for love, and appreciation of beauty, can be fostered by valuing our subjective, intuitive perceptions of the world and through those perceptions perceive others and their own perceptions. My images highlight the beauty of trees through my personal appreciation for them and, more importantly, the formal composition of the images aids in engaging a more subjective experience in viewers, thus bringing them into closer proximity to the experience of the beautiful that Grant discussed. In this way, my project serves as a counter-point to the logical and objective mode of perception that is encouraged in our modern Western capitalist society.

The formal composition used in my photographic collages, which elicits a subjective response in viewers, thus enabling a perceptual shift, is effective because of the visual harmony present in my images. This visual harmony is evident in the images as a whole, as well as in the elements of trees that make up the compositions. It is this harmony, I believe, which can help bridge the gap between humanity and the natural environment. Gyorgy Doczi discusses the idea of the golden section in his 1981 book *The Power of Limits: Proportional Harmonies in Nature, Art and Architecture*. The golden section is “a uniquely reciprocal relationship between two unequal parts of a whole, in which the small

part stands in the same proportion to the large part as the large part stands to the whole” (Doczi 2). This golden section is discussed at length by Doczi, who describes it being present in natural forms like flowers and leaves as well as man-made objects such as decorated pottery and buildings. Human beings have been unconsciously recognizing this hidden pattern in nature and replicating it in art and architecture. By combining natural objects (leaves and trees) that already have a visual order within themselves into large-scale compositions I created a new visual order with its own harmony of contrasts. Doczi states that “the power of the golden section to create harmony arises from its unique capacity to unite the different parts of a whole so that each preserves its own identity, and yet blends into the greater pattern of a single whole” (Doczi 13). This is evident in my compositions where the parts (leaves or sections of trees) are combined into a new whole, while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of each element. In this way, my visual compositions unconsciously echo the natural forms I captured, creating visual harmony through contrasting elements. Therefore, the idea of echoing natural forms in art connects to Ehrenzweig's theory of the hidden order of art (the unconscious order of art). I believe that the ability to perceive an unconscious order in nature and in art has the potential to create a more united view of the world – one in which “everybody and everything is related, just as the diversities of these patterns are related” (Doczi 24). Doczi argues that “seeing the hidden and harmonious order built into body and mind as it is built into every flower and leaf, mirrored by the crafts, and echoed in music, one wonders at the origin of the disharmony and disorder that mars our civilization” (Doczi 28). An answer to Doczi's astonishment at the present state of our civilization can be found in Grant's argument that we have removed ourselves from nature and placed ourselves above it, as masters of nature through scientific thought and the ideology of technological progress. However, if we can see the patterns that unite human beings with nature, we have a greater chance of appreciating the natural environment: not as separate from us, as something that needs to be tamed and conquered, but by situating ourselves within it and relating to it as something to be respected and protected.

The Creative Process: Other Artists' and Mine

In Charlotte Cotton's book *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, she discusses works of art that deal with natural subject matter. The majority of the images described are straight-forward depictions of nature, e.g., Korean artist Boo Moon's *East China Sea*, which is an image of the water with dense clouds over top and a beam of sun's ray falling onto the ocean surface. Also, photographs by Jem Southam are discussed, such as his series *Painter's Pool*, which are images of dense woods often depicting tangles of branches and leaves without a clear focal point. While I am focusing on photographic collage instead of straight photography, an important element of my project is accurately described by Cotton as:

the idea that natural forces have an infinite momentum and are governable by no one.

This type of photographic strategy contemplates the unknowable and uncontrollable character of nature. Such images are consciously out of time, not reliant on the visual signs of contemporary economics, industry, or administration, or even on those of the past, but on signs that bring us into contact with profound and destabilizing concepts about our perception of the world. (Cotton 102-103)

My images of trees are “consciously out of time” in the sense that they have no visual links to the present moment. This isolation allows for the trees to exist in their own space and in their own right as living entities, outside of the context of the human world. This distance allows us to approach the images with fresh eyes, with a mixture of curiosity and confusion. Where do we fit into these images?⁶ The images are clearly depicting trees, but through a different viewpoint that challenges our perception. A unified point of view is replaced in my compositions by multiple views, which are not reducible to one perspective but emphasize heterogeneity, therefore difference (the true otherness). In other words,

⁶ Since there is no obvious human presence in the images besides the implied viewer (which does not have to be human), my compositions can speak to a post-apocalyptic time where human beings are gone and nature has taken over. But we can also see this today in abandoned industrial areas, for example, abandoned coal mines where trees have begun to grow again, displacing the human traces of industry.

the self is forced to disperse, just like the attention (scanning attention) in order to experience the whole. The compositions are spaces to enter—not the consciously knowable places. By being immersed in the experience of space created in these compositions we are taken out of our rapidly paced lives and given a chance to slow down and focus our attention elsewhere. This experience allows for the opportunity to step outside our ego-driven mode of being and contemplate another way of encountering the world.

There is a mixture of the familiar and the strange in both the final images and throughout the process of photographing these trees. In the image titled *Trunk* (figure 2), for example, the dramatic lighting creates intense shadows and highlights, which allow different textures to emerge that appear as strange and familiar. The bark of a tree (or trees) is represented as the main content of the image, as well as a shadow that resembles a branch across the centre of the composition. However, the texture is also evocative of craters, such as those found on the moon. This other-worldly quality emerges out of the content through the various ways the forms have been captured and arranged. Many of the images were shot in forests and parks that I know very well. The sense of novelty emerges by rediscovering these familiar trees upon a deeper level of inspection. I spent time with them; looking at them from every angle and discovering something new about them through this closer investigation. It was the seeing of something new in something old that was exciting to me and led me to capture the trees in a different way. For example, the image titled *Canopy* (figure 3) was the first image I composed and the catalyst for the entire project. I was walking through the woods on a fall day (something I have done countless times before) and I was looking up at the sky through the canopy of leaves. I started to see the spaces between the leaves connecting with each other to form a pattern, much like a river. While it was the colour of the leaves I was first attracted to, it was the negative space of the sky that highlighted the colours for me. I imagined how it could be connected into one large composition; this feeling guided me in how I captured these images (the sky blown out white) and how I combined them

together in Photoshop (the white spaces connected in a river-like pattern).

The frame of the camera together with the amplification and focus of the lens allow certain elements to be isolated and enhanced, making it an ideal tool for expression. As Susan Sontag describes in her book *On Photography* (1973), the camera uses a mechanical process that is independent of the artist, but at the same time it is not an objective, impartial observer. It is the photographer who chooses the subject matter, angle, exposure, and framing of the image. These choices are both personal and technical. The use of the camera has created new ways of seeing the world. The camera can simultaneously create connection and estrangement:

Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much further away. It offers, in one easy, habit-forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others – allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation. (Sontag 167)

The ability of the camera to make the exotic seem intimate and the familiar seem strange creates a unique tension that can be well utilized in visual composition. The mixture of the strange and familiar that underpins the abstraction in my visual compositions demands participation from viewers to make sense of the content, therefore drawing them into the image. Furthermore, the tension between realism and abstraction is exaggerated because instead of one single image, there are multiple images connected together, thus creating a unique visual environment. This tension allows the form and content to work together by disrupting the habits of perception. Instead of seeing the image and registering it as a tree, the composition forces viewers to look again. It is clearly a depiction of leaves or a tree, but it is a fragmented, seemingly chaotic, and unfamiliar representation. This forces viewers' senses to work harder to interpret the images. In this way the form of the images leads viewers into the content and then back to the form again in a cycle of perception, recognition, confusion, and reexamination that deepens the viewing experience.

This tension between realism and abstraction can be compared to a similar experience of tension suggested in Sigmund Freud's 1940 essay "The Uncanny," where he uses the terms "familiar" and "strange" to denote this tension. Freud discusses the complex conditions that allow the feeling of the uncanny to arise. He states that the uncanny "belong[s] to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other – the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden" (Freud 132). The tension arises when the known and the unknown meet. As previously stated, Sontag describes the ability of the camera to create a feeling of the uncanny through connection and alienation. Thus, my work allows the viewer to experience the uncanny through the images of trees that are familiar and yet appear strange. The strangeness arises out of the conflict of the conscious modes of thinking and seeing with unconscious apprehension and perception, as well as the tension between the representation and abstraction of trees. The experience of conflicting feelings arising out of one composition prompts the viewer to engage with the work with his/her gut, i.e., on an unconscious level. It is through oscillating between conscious and unconscious attention that viewers connect with what is perceived on a deeper level. Both states are necessary and happen rapidly; while creating images (by the artist) and also while viewing images (by the viewers). Milner discusses this in her book *An Experiment in Leisure*: "The image is a concentrated expression of the total psychic situation...The image is equally an expression of the unconscious as of the conscious situation of the moment. The interpretation of its meaning, therefore, can proceed exclusively neither from the unconscious nor from the conscious, but only from their reciprocal relation" (Milner 1937: 128). Therefore by marrying representation and abstraction, the conscious and unconscious modes of thinking and perceiving work together to make sense of the visual compositions. Through experiencing the familiar and unfamiliar, the known and unknown at seemingly the same time (the flipping between conscious and unconscious happens so quickly it can feel simultaneous) allows for a deeper and more meaningful engagement with the work.

The medium of photography, as I have outlined thus far, has the potential to create images that possess the uncanny quality that Freud describes. The camera allows certain elements to be isolated, mimicking what the eye sees. However, the tools of photography (the camera and photo editing software) and me as the maker transform perception by amplifying what the eye can see and freezing it in time for closer inspection. Through the very act of photographing it, a subject is made important. Therefore, by taking single images of trees or fragments of trees and combining them into a new composition, the parts as well as the whole become significant. The American photographer Carl Chiarenza takes ordinary objects such as “bottle caps, envelopes, cardboard, foil, random scraps of paper, and other readily available debris” and “plays around” with them “until something interesting forms” (Chiarenza 11). His collages are further manipulated in the dark room, where he often exaggerates the contrast through dodging and burning different areas of the image. This is evident in the image titled *West End, Boston (bat window) 1958* (figure 4) where the edges of the paper are highlighted, producing a 3D quality that separates the paper from the scrawled writing behind it. Chiarenza's “abstract photographs are of 'nothing' in terms of recognizable imagery, [yet] they overflow with tone, form, and texture, and thus meaning can be divined. Within 'nothing' boundless contemplation is possible” (Chiarenza 16). It is through the process of photographing these ordinary (discarded) objects and later, if necessary, manipulating the composition in the darkroom, that they become meaningful and beautiful.

Similar to Chiarenza's compositions, my compositions draw attention to the medium of photography itself; they are self-reflexive and in this way prevent the viewer from succumbing to the illusion of reality, but rather encourage the viewer to remain critically present while still in a state of aware contemplation. My images are like the collaged photographs of Carl Chiarenza, which N. Elizabeth Schlatter described as:

not about “seeing” in the straightforward sense, or even “seeing” through the camera

itself. Rather they are about “seeing” the photograph in front of you, which is a unique image created through the combination of unrelated objects – the collages Carl constructs – and the transformative process of photography. (qtd. in Chiarenza 12-13)

I see abstract forms in the trees as I am photographing them. However, the final compositions unfold through the process of moving the images around on the computer monitor and finding new visual connections by intuitively linking/bringing the images together. They start as fragments and are constructed into a new, unexpected whole. In this way, the process by which my compositions are formed resembles the process of seeing described by Ehrenzweig; the eye is taking in more information than can be processed consciously, by scanning the entire surface of the composition, therefore engaging the unconscious (imagination) to create a coherent whole out of the perceived fragments.

Influences and Inspirations

Artistic influence and inspiration are difficult to represent in a comprehensive way; there are many art movements and artists that have helped shape my work. I've chosen to focus on the artists that I connect with the most either through either the subject matter or technique.

A significant component of my work is the subject of the natural environment. For this reason I respond to the work of the Vancouver-based experimental filmmaker and installation artist Chris Welsby. He combines nature and technology in a collaborative relationship, by allowing natural processes such as wind, water, or the Earth's rotation to guide his processes as an artist. Welsby attempts to affect our perceptions of nature by using technology to expose elements we normally do not see or focus on. In many of his video installations and films, he is trying to create a contemplative space for viewers to reflect on their relationship to technology and nature. He states:

[My] viewers are encouraged to slow down, take back control of their own thoughts and perceptions; forget about the constraints of beginnings, middles, and ends, and enter

instead, a state of mind in which reverie and contemplation can play a creative role in the process of conscious thought. It is my hope that in such a space it may still be possible to consider ourselves and our technologies, not only in relation to the landscape, but also in relation to the larger more inclusive context of Nature. (Welsby 35)

I think it is important to use technology as a means to enhance our connection to nature, just as Welsby does in his work. The reality of our present society is that no one can escape technology, therefore artists must find ways of working with it that will ensure the continued connection between human beings and the natural environment. Like Welsby, I want my work to create a space for thought and reflection. It is through the digital technology (the camera and photo editing software) that I am able to create seamless compositions, which allow the viewer to enter and be immersed in a new perceptual environment. Thus this unique experience of “nature” in my compositions is only possible through technology, which links nature and technology in a collaborative relationship. This collaboration has the possibility to expand our ideas of nature and technology, and therefore, our connection to both. Interestingly, the visual webs of the trees in my photographic collages suggest yet another environment, the environment of information networks (webs) which surround us (invisibly) and are the products of electric and digital technologies.

I have also looked to the artist David Hockney, in particular his photographic collages and his interest in perception. He has created many photographic collages that incorporate several perspectives in an attempt to recreate the workings of human visual perception. He discusses the difference between painting and photography in terms of their construction of visual space:

It took me a while to realize that when you look through the camera you are not photographing what you see in real life – real life has no edges – yet it's the edges that give the photograph life...[A painter] accepts peripheral vision and includes it in the picture. It's possible in painting to present a vision that extends all the way around.

That's why for me painting is more interesting than photography. (Hockney 13)

In Hockney's image *Place Furstenberg, Paris, August 7,8,9, 1985 #1* (figure 5), he presents a street scene composed of individual photographs that vary in tone and size, which are placed back together, resulting in a composition that looks like an abstract painting with realistic details. The slight variances in perspective and density infuse the composition with a sense of visual movement, which calls attention to the edges of the individual photographs while simultaneously maintaining attention on the whole scene. The edges of the camera can limit the visual space for an artist, but it is possible to look beyond the edges imposed by the camera to create a more comprehensive view. My photographic collages are constructed like the paintings Hockney discusses, which are not limited by the frame of the camera. The medium of photography is essential to my work. It has allowed me to explore the visual expanse of trees through the detail it captures as realistic representation and through the abstraction I can create through photographic collage using photo editing software. Thus, like a painter I “present a vision that extends all the way around” in my photographic collages.

Another artist working with photographic collages that has informed my work is Jerry Uelsmann. He creates images that are black and white and are constructed in the darkroom with multiple photographic enlargers. His images evoke a combination of the “realism of photography and the fluidity of our dreams” (Shutterbug.com). I respond to the surrealist quality of Uelsmann's compositions and his seamless blending of multiple photographs to create a new reality. For example in the image *Untitled 1982* (figure 6), a house is merged with tree roots, producing the feeling that the house has grown from the earth. It appears to be vacant and decaying, as though the house is a living being that has been abandoned. Uelsmann's compositions are closely tied to Surrealism, especially to Surrealists like Salvador Dali and Max Ernst. My compositions are slightly different in that they push against representation towards abstraction rather than setting up strange situations or settings through the juxtaposition of various representational images. Also, whereas Surrealists were interested in

seamless juxtapositions in their collages, in my collages the seams serve a self-flexive function and unify my compositions. And while my images focus primarily on unsettling sense perception, those of the Surrealists, first and foremost, aimed at disturbing our logic and reason as well as our moral foundations.

While Uelsmann believes that his “creative process remains intrinsically linked to the alchemy of the darkroom” (Uelsmann 2), my work relies on digital technology. However, our creative approach is similar in that we rely on our intuitive sensibilities to interpret visual similarities in order to transform fragments of images into a new compositional whole. While Uelsmann works exclusively in black and white, colour is important in my work. I strongly believe the use of colour allows for a stronger sense of the realistic representation of trees, while also leaving room for the abstraction of forms to be linked through the similarity of colours. In this way, colour acts as a device that simultaneously anchors and enhances the whole composition. Also, both Uelsmann and I are dealing with the subject of trees; while he is placing the tree into a dreamlike environment involving other objects, I aim to create a new environment, while solely relying on the shapes and textures of the tree itself.

In my compositions, I abstract the forms I see in trees and it is through the technique of collage that I am able to express these forms, while following my unconscious promptings. The Surrealist artist Max Ernst worked with the collage technique and the subject matter of nature, while relying on chance and intuition to guide his spontaneous compositions. Ernst created the technique of frottage, through which he would obtain images by rubbing graphite or chalk on paper on top of objects such as wire mesh, leaves, and twine. He would often notice forms or figures emerge in the textures of natural objects, for example in the grain of the wooden floor, and would allow these perceptions to guide his artistic process. In his image titled *Forest and Sun* (1965) (figure 7), Ernst depicts three tree forms that resemble the texture of tree rings with a blue “sun” at the top of a black sky. This Surrealist image

illustrates how much Ernst was interested in the imaginative possibilities of landscapes and the hallucinatory powers of perception (Ernst 7). In the book *Beyond Painting*, Paul Eluard (a fellow Surrealist) describes the different elements and themes present in Ernst's artwork:

Throughout his entire work one finds the will to confound colours, forms, events, sensations, the futile and the mighty, the fugitive and the permanent, the ancient and the new, contemplation and action, men and objects, time and duration, the element and the whole, nights, dreams, and light. (Eluard qtd. in Motherwell 191)

There are many aspects of his work that call upon the connections between man and nature. Ernst created numerous works of trees and forests, allowing his unconscious to guide him to uncover/discover new forms in the natural environment, which he would express most often through collage, among other techniques. Ehrenzweig's idea of "scanning attention" is crucial to the process of trying to make connections from minimal clues assembled in abstract forms to create a representation of something that exists in the world. By using undifferentiated attention, the unconscious is able to bring forth the almost invisible threads to create meaning from seemingly chaotic forms. This form of attention is important when viewing Ernst's images since he sets up his compositions to engage active participation from the viewers who must find the missing links and discover new ones. Ernst described his technique of collage as "the cultivation of the effects of a systematic putting out of place" (Ernst 21). It is through employing this specific technique deliberately and consistently while allowing the elements to merge and emerge organically that a "systematic putting out of place" can occur. By allowing the conscious mind to control the structure of the work (setting up the compositional parameters and then consciously following through with them), the unconscious mind is free to form the connections of the content. Therefore by working together (the consciousness holds the frame and the unconscious shapes the content) a complex work of art can be created. Like Ernst, I have used the same technique (in his case collage, in mine photo-collage) to create different works about the similar

subject matter of trees. Collage can involve (but not always does) combinations of different media, such as paint, newspapers, text, photographs, textiles, etc., to create a new whole. I was guided by Max Ernst's definition of collage as:

an alchemy resulting from the unexpected meeting of two or more heterogeneous elements, those elements provoked either by a will which from a love of clairvoyance – is directed toward systematical confusion and disorder of all the senses (Rimbaud), or by hazard, or by a will favorable to hazard. (Ernst 28)

My project is conceptually linked to the idea of collage, as defined by Ernst, because of its emphasis on bringing together different elements that do not normally go together, thus risking the unexpected. However, I have used only photographs to create photo-collages, which are composites comprising numerous photographs that make a seamless print.⁷ The separate images of trees appear to go together at first glance, but the way they are combined together disrupts the continuity. I have used photo editing software to transform individual photographs of trees into a large photographic representation. I was attempting to bring together two opposing and seemingly contradictory approaches within each composition: first, I abstracted the tree by photographing parts of it; and, second, I composed it back into a seamless whole, thus returning to the realm of representation, but in a way that speaks to something beyond the tree. The “systematical confusion and disorder of all the senses” as outlined in Ernst's definition of collage links to McLuhan's discussion of the practical aspect of sensory engagement and disruption. My project aims to accomplish what Ernst indicated as being important to composition (“a systematic putting out of place” Ernst 21) and also what McLuhan indicated as the artist's role in society (to act as “warning signal” for “survival purposes”, and for “navigational purposes” to “prevent us from becoming adjusted to our environments” McLuhan 1973: 221; 223). By creating artworks that establish new “sense ratios” (ones that correspond with the newly established

⁷ Ernst made numerous collages using old woodcut prints, which he seamlessly stitched together. For example, his two graphic novels *La Femme 100 têtes* and *Une Semaine de Bonté*.

technological environment), the artist helps people adjust to new technology, thus preventing them from becoming numbed by it and encouraging them to remain critically aware of its effects.

The Importance of Connecting

When we allow ourselves to connect with another living being we are able to see that being in a different way. To do so we must approach the endeavour with curiosity, openness, and respect. The ability to see the other, whether human or non-human, is the pathway to connection. But what stands in the way of our connection with others? Are we able to truly meet another being? Henry David Thoreau discusses the experiences and revelations he had while living alone in the woods. In an excerpt from his 1854 book *Walden*, in the chapter “Where I Lived and What I Lived For,” he states:

Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant? We should live in all the ages of the world in an hour: ay, in all the worlds of the ages. History, Poetry, Mythology! - I know of no reading of another's experience so startling and informing as this would be. (Thoreau 9)

It is by looking through someone else's eyes that we would find the most revealing knowledge of the other. Unfortunately we are unable to do so in actuality, instead, we must use ways of communicating that require imagination on our part. It is important to encourage encountering, because, encounter creates the chance for empathy and understanding. Art is able to stimulate our curiosity about something outside of ourselves, and can encourage us to trust our intuitive and emotional experiences of the world. Art, therefore, can teach us and train our sensibility and awareness. As Thoreau states, “the intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things” (Thoreau 77). We must keep our rational mind in check by nurturing our curiosity and imagination in relation to the unknown, the other.

Theodore Roszak discusses the importance of connecting with the natural environment in his book *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (1992). Ecopsychology is the combination of ecology and psychology, which looks at human beings' relationship with the natural world and “seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment” (Roszak 320). The emphasis is on an emotional connection with nature, which will benefit both humans and the natural environment. Roszak argues that “we are being diminished by our destructive insensitivity in ways that cripple our ability to enjoy, grow, create. By becoming so aggressively and masterfully 'human,' we lose our essential humanity” (Roszak 70). Our drive to dominate and control nature has led to our alienation from it, as well as hindering our ability to connect with others, and consequently with that which ultimately makes us human. It is clear that “intuition, aesthetic sensibility, visionary powers have to be brought into play if nature is to be rightly understood” (Roszak 166). My images encourage perceptual engagement and connection with the intuitive dimension of ourselves. A shift towards valuing intuitive engagement is needed because:

what the Earth requires will have to make itself felt within us as if it were our own private desire. Facts and figures, reason and logic can show us the errors of our present ways; they can delineate the risks we run. But they cannot motivate, they cannot teach us a better way to live, a better way to want to live. That must be born from inside our own convictions. And that birth may have to be a painful one. (Roszak 47)

The motivation for change must come from our deep belief in the intrinsic worth of the natural environment. This can only be achieved if we are asked repeatedly and in different ways to encounter, regard, and attempt to understand the other living beings with which we share the planet. Deep ecology argues that “our environmental crisis is more than a random catalogue of mistakes, miscalculations, and false starts that can easily be made good with a bit more expertise in the right places. Nothing less than an altered sensibility is needed, a radically new standard of sanity that undercuts scientific rationality

and uproots the fundamental assumptions of industrial life” (Roszak 232). I believe the pathway towards this change lies in connecting to the unconscious; where intuition and feeling reside. As George Groddeck states:

what shapes our lives and nature is not simply the content of our conscious mind, but in much greater degree that of our unconscious. Between the two is a sieve, and above, in the consciousness, only the coarse material is kept back; the sand for the mortar of life falls into the depths of the id; above remains only the chaff, down below the good flour for the bread of life collects, down there in the unconscious. (qtd. in Roszak 289)

The importance of the unconscious cannot be overlooked or underestimated, especially in terms of creating and viewing art. Art permits us this connection in the most direct and vivid way, while also training us how to engage with it beyond the aesthetic experience. Our unconscious is the important link to our lived experience as one among many other living (human and non-human) beings on this planet by sensing, relating, and empathizing with the other. In this way, my project seeks to bridge the gap between the conscious and unconscious, valuing both for what they bring to our understanding of the world and focusing on the intuitive experience of nature in the form of art, thus creating a stronger connection to ourselves, others, and the natural environment.

Appendices

Journal Entries

Creative Blockage – October 2011:

- an important element to me is to enjoy taking the images...to enjoy the trees—discovering patterns, textures, colours or light—and wanting to capture that. And then recreate or re-imagine the experience in a new composition.
- I enjoy discovering things through my camera. Sometimes you think something will photograph well and it falls flat. Other times it looks dull in real life, but comes alive through the camera. You look into the viewfinder and it pops in a way you couldn't see without the frame.
- I enjoy finding that framed piece of a tree and then pushing the frame by putting it with another contained image. In that way it comes alive again for me—like seeing it in the frame the first time—but now it is the infringement of images onto each other that activates it. I am made aware of the frame, appreciate it, and realize its limitations. By having another image to jump to, it gives me space to see the context—move away from it and then come back. I see its relationship to the whole differently.
- There is something simple, elegant, and satisfying about a well-composed, single-frame image. I can get bored though – I get stuck on one element or it's too easy to know and remember.
- My collages challenge me. They stress me out. I can't look at them and be calm, satisfied. My eye needs to keep looking until it is tired. It's a different kind of satisfaction. It's visually exciting—I feel like my eye knows what to do unconsciously, so that I see that way—in fragments, parts, and then wholes.

Algonquin Park – March 2012:

- On the first night we went to Ragged Falls. I had my camera, but didn't think I would want to photograph – especially trees. I felt a sense of shock when I first saw the falls. I have been to Algonquin before and I have seen amazing natural wonders around the world. I have the feeling of being jaded – of not being impressed by much – of being able to anticipate what I will see

and feel. When I first saw the falls I felt it in my gut – the sheer force of it and the beauty – the snow, ice, and water. I had to take my camera out. I knew a photograph would never capture the experience of being there, but I couldn't bear not to try to capture it anyway. I needed a reminder outside of myself – a digital file – to let myself leave the experience behind. Otherwise there is a feeling of being transfixed by the enormity of it. A picture, however unsatisfactory, allows me to move on while holding onto it.

- The Spruce Bog was super snowy! The snow was very deep and there were not many tracks where people had walked. The trees were close. There were many interesting birds – a blue jay and a little funny chick-a-dee. Jack kept wanting to go back and I was worried that we weren't on the right path. I got some pictures of snow covered branches – it was hard to get into it though. I loved the density of branches – the lack of isolation possible while photographing. I could photograph a branch, but not without many branches behind it. The images would often come alive in the playback monitor. There was a surprising element of light that would peek through sometimes.
- Beaver Pond was my favourite. The trail was clearly marked and well trodden. I felt confident we would be OK doing the full loop. It was great to be alone. There was a mix of dense bush, rivers, and open lakes...hills, stairs, and winding paths. I didn't photograph as much. I really wanted to be in the experience as much as possible. Plus, it was cold and I wanted to keep up a brisk pace! Jack finally seemed more comfortable and was eager to start the trail. He did really well for a small dog. It was great to have him there. To have another presence, but one that doesn't speak and is attuned to the environment.

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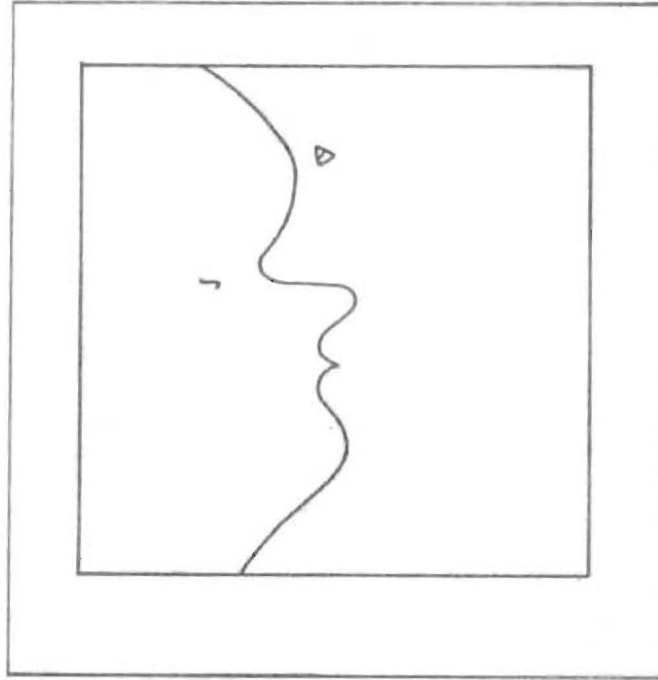
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Figures

1. Rubin's double profiles.



2. Trunk



3. Canopy



4. Carl Chiarenza - "West End, Boston (bat window) 1953"



5. David Hockney - "Place Furstenberg Paris, August 7,8,9, 1985 #1"



6. Jerry Uelsmann - "Untitled 1982"



7. Max Ernst - "Forest and Sun 1965"

