

**CINEMATIC PHOTOGRAPHY,
THEATRICALITY, SPECTACLE:
THE ART OF JEFF WALL**

by

Sharla Sava
B.A., University of Toronto 1992
M.A., University of British Columbia 1996

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the
School of Communication

© Sharla Sava 2005

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2005

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

NAME

Sharla Sava

DEGREE

PhD

TITLE OF DISSERTATION:

Cinematic Photography, Theatricality,
Spectacle: The Art of Jeff Wall

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

CHAIR:

Dr. Robert Anderson

Dr. Richard Gruneau
Senior Supervisor
Professor, School of Communication

Dr. Zoe Druick
Supervisor
Assistant Professor, School of Communication

Dr. Jerry Zaslove
Supervisor
Professor Emeritus, Humanities

Dr. Jeff Derksen
Internal Examiner
Assistant Professor, Department of English

Dr. Will Straw
External Examiner
Associate Professor,
Department of Art History and Communications
Studies, McGill University

DATE:

Nov. 18/2005



SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY library

DECLARATION OF PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENCE

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection, and, without changing the content, to translate the thesis/project or extended essays, if technically possible, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation of the digital work.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, BC, Canada

Simon Fraser University



Ethics Approval

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics for the research described in this work, or has conducted the research as a member of a project or course approved by the Ethics Office.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed at the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for ethics approval and letter of approval is filed with the Office of Research Ethics. Inquiries may be directed to that Office.

Bennett Library
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC, Canada

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines developments in the field of art photography through a close examination of the work of Vancouver-based artist, Jeff Wall. It is concerned in particular with the development of 'cinematic photography', a practice which draws together the conventions of theatre and image in the creation of a pictorial tableau. This practice attests to the inherent tensions of the post-68 era with regard to the legacy of modernism, the onset of post-modernism and the fading viability of the avant-garde imagination.

The critical reception of Jeff Wall's art rightly emphasizes the heritage of sixties vanguardism rather than the established tradition of modernist art photography. This dissertation demonstrates the way in which Wall's 'post-medium' return to pictorialism is also intended to work against sixties experimentalism, and, in particular, against the iconoclasm of Conceptual Art. It reviews the means by which the artist's position builds from cultural Marxism, the historical avant-garde, and from that trajectory of critical postmodernism which championed theatricality.

Central to this study is the claim that older practices of representation, such as theatre and drama, play a crucial role in shaping the art photography of the post-68 era, and Jeff Wall's work in particular. While dominant interpretations of Jeff Wall's art have explained the rejection of sixties experimentalism as a strategic return to the 'painting of modern life', I argue that the discourse of theatricality which dates from the sixties and seventies, both *pro* and *con*, is a more productive means by which to understand the widespread return to narrative pictorialism which has occurred in contemporary art.

Following ideas developed by Michael Fried, T.J. Clark and others, this dissertation connects the emergent discourse of theatricality as it occurs in the art world with social theories which address the increasingly spectacular forces of consumer society, finally returning to the formative role played by Enlightenment

debates about the value of modernity as a culture of representation. Aesthetic experience is offered to the contemporary spectator as the site of an ongoing contest between the critical force of negation and the formidable appearance of progress.

Wall, Jeff, 1946 - Criticism and interpretation; Photography, artistic; Modernism (art); Vancouver - British Columbia; Visual culture

*For my parents, who taught me how to ask
And for my brother, who taught me how to see*

This heaven gives me migraine.

- The Gang of Four. "Natural's not in it."
Entertainment! EMI, 1979.
(as quoted by T.J. Clark, in response to B. Buchloh. 1995)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the years of support and guidance provided by my Supervisory Committee: Rick Gruneau, Zoë Druick, and Jerry Zaslove.

My understanding has been helped enormously by the many formal and occasional conversations that I have had with those involved in the Vancouver art world. I would like to thank the people who generously made themselves available for interviews, particularly Serge Guilbaut, Ken Lum, and Ian Wallace.

This project would not have been possible without the ongoing wisdom and comfort offered by family and friends. Thanks to my family, and to Grant Arnold, Camilla Berry, Colin Griffiths, Steve Harris, Antonia Hirsch, Fen Huang, Fiona Jeffries, Robyn Laba, Robert Linsley, Melanie O'Brian, Greig de Peuter, Sebastian Touza, and Bill Wood.

I am grateful for the commitment, expertise and care taken by Frances Fournier and Richard Dancy at the SFU Archives; as well as by Monique Cloutier, Lucie Menkveld, Neena Shahani and Denyse Zenner in the SFU School of Communication.

I gratefully acknowledge that portions of this project were funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and by Fellowships made available through Simon Fraser University.

Thanks to the individuals and institutions that granted copyright permission and made images available for this dissertation: ADAGP/SODRAC, Bob Birtch, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Courtauld Institute, George Eastman House, Iain Baxter, Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall Studio, Ken Lum, Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery at UBC, Rodney Graham Studio, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museo Nacio del Prado and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Finally, I owe a special thanks to my husband Andrew Klobucar for all his patience, love and insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	v
Quotation.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Introduction A Critical Beauty.....	1
Chapter One Photoconceptual Art.....	15
Chapter Two Counter-Tradition in Vancouver Art.....	56
Chapter Three The Relevance of the Avant-Garde.....	91
Chapter Four Cinematic Photography.....	136
Chapter Five The Historical Matrix of the Spectacle.....	175
Chapter Six Elephants and Termites.....	214
Figures	252
Works Cited.....	282

List of Figures

- Figure 1 N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter).....253
Art is All Over
1971
offset lithography
44 x 44 cm
Photo credit: Rob Bos
Collection Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery,
University of British Columbia
Used by permission
- Figure 2 N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter).....254
Ruins
1968
cibachrome transparency, light box
40.6 x 50.8 x 12.7 cm
Courtesy of Iain Baxter
- Figure 3 Jeff Wall.....255
Landscape Manual (detail)
1969-70
excerpt: page 34
newsprint publication
published by the Fine Arts Gallery, UBC 1970
26 x 19.5 cm x 56 pages
Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
- Figure 4 Ian Wallace.....256
La Melancolie de la Rue
1973
hand-coloured silver gelatin prints
119 x 515 cm
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, VAG 86.18 a-c
Courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery

Figure 5	Ian Wallace.....257 <i>Lookout</i> 1979 hand-coloured silver gelatin prints 48' diameter Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, VAG 86.19 a-1 Courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery
Figure 6	UJ3RK5.....258 LP record cover L to R: Colin Griffiths, Jeff Wall, David Wisdom, Rodney Graham, Kitty Byrne, Danice MacLeod, Frank Ramirez, Ian Wallace. Cover art by UJ3RK5 1980 Quintessence Records, Vancouver Courtesy Rodney Graham Studio
Figure 7	Rodney Graham.....259 <i>Ponderosa Pine, Princeton, B.C.</i> 1991 C-print 225 x 180 cm Courtesy Rodney Graham Studio
Figure 8	Jeff Wall.....260 <i>The Jewish Cemetery</i> 1980 transparency in lightbox 62 x 229 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 9	Jeff Wall.....261 <i>The Holocaust Memorial in the Jewish Cemetery</i> 1987 transparency in lightbox 119 x 216 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 10	Jeff Wall.....262 <i>The Pine on the Corner</i> 1990 transparency in lightbox 119 x 149 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio

Figure 11	Jeff Wall.....	263
	<i>A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947</i>	
	1990	
	transparency in lightbox	
	229 x 352 cm	
	Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio	
Figure 12	Daniel Buren.....	264
	<i>Untitled</i>	
	1968	
	photo document	
	dimensions unknown	
	© Estate of Daniel Buren / ADAGP (Paris) / SODRAC (Montreal)	
	Used by permission	
Figure 13	Jeff Wall.....	265
	<i>Milk</i>	
	1984	
	transparency in lightbox	
	187 x 229 cm	
	Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio	
Figure 14	Jeff Wall.....	266
	<i>Mimic</i>	
	1982	
	transparency in lightbox	
	198 x 229 cm	
	Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio	
Figure 15	Ken Lum.....	267
	<i>Youth Portraits</i> (detail)	
	1985	
	photo-offset lithographs on newsprint	
	7.8 x 5.4 cm each	
	Courtesy of Ken Lum	
Figure 16	Jeff Wall.....	268
	<i>Young Workers</i> (detail)	
	1978-83	
	transparencies in lightboxes	
	8 parts, 102 x 102 cm each	
	Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio	

Figure 17	Ken Lum.....269 <i>Mounties and Indians</i> 1989 chromogenic photograph, vinyl letters, plexiglas 204 x 124 cm Courtesy of Ken Lum
Figure 18	Rodney Graham.....270 <i>Fantasia for Four Hands</i> 2002 two chromogenic photographs 256 x 195 cm each Courtesy Rodney Graham Studio
Figure 19	Jeff Wall.....271 <i>The Destroyed Room</i> 1978 transparency in lightbox 159 x 234 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 20	Jeff Wall.....272 <i>Movie Audience</i> (detail) 1979 transparency in lightbox 7 parts, 102 x 102 cm each Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 21	Jeff Wall.....273 <i>Double Self-Portrait</i> 1979 transparency in lightbox 172 x 229 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 22	Jeff Wall.....274 <i>Picture for Women</i> 1979 transparency in lightbox 163 x 229 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio

Figure 23	Jeff Wall.....275 <i>Bad Goods</i> 1984 transparency in lightbox 229 x 347 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 24	Jeff Wall.....276 <i>Insomnia</i> 1994 transparency in light box 173 x 214 cm Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio
Figure 25	Francisco de Goya y Lucientes.....277 ‘The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters’ from the series <i>Los Caprichos</i> , #43. First edition, 1799. Etching and aquatint. 21.5 x 15 cm Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art 18.64 (43) Used by permission
Figure 26	Francisco de Goya y Lucientes.....278 ‘Frontispiece to a set of Dreams’, Second Version 1797 pen and brown ink, over a slight chalk sketch 24.8 x 17.2 cm Courtesy Museo Nacional del Prado
Figure 27	O.G. Rejlander.....279 <i>Two Ways of Life</i> 1858 gelatin silver print 41.0 x 79.0 cm Courtesy George Eastman House
Figure 28	Edouard Manet.....280 <i>A Bar at the Folies-Bergère</i> 1881-82 oil painting 96 x 130 cm Collection The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London Used by permission

Figure 29 Jeff Wall.....281
 The Giant
 1992
 transparency in lightbox
 39 x 48 cm
 Courtesy Jeff Wall Studio

Introduction

A Critical Beauty

"Theatricality and deception are powerful agents..."
- Ducard (Liam Neeson) in *Batman Begins*

This dissertation uses the art of Jeff Wall as the means by which to study recent advances in the field of art photography. I am concerned in particular with the development of 'cinematic photography', a practice which draws together the conventions of theatre and image in the creation of a pictorial tableau. A critical response to the widespread 'dematerialization' of the art object, recent photo-based practices engage the legacy of 1960's conceptual art movements in Europe and North America. In the period around 1968 practices in the visual arts underwent a transformation which should be seen as an index of the volatile times. Artists in many parts of the world began to experiment with artistic forms that worked in direct opposition to the traditional art object. Painting and sculpture, identified with the elitist and out-dated role of art in society, were abandoned in favour of concepts, live performance or experiments with new media technologies.

Artists wishing to engage with the everyday life of consumer culture discovered a renewed potential in the medium of photography. Cinematic, narrative photography is one among many critical photo-based practices that finds its heritage in this dynamic period of experimentalism. I argue that the premises of cinematic photography reflect the inherent tensions of the era with

regard to the legacy of modernism, the onset of post-modernism and the fading viability of the avant-garde imagination.

While other artists interested in establishing a new kind of art photography have openly explored various techniques and formats, since 1977 Vancouver artist Jeff Wall has consistently relied on a recognizable format: that of the large scale, back-lit, cibachrome transparency which is commonly associated with billboard advertising. His work attests to a refusal of modernist abstraction, returning to a more conventional pictorialism in order to develop visual narratives about modern life. Wall has also been exceptionally articulate in his ability to theorize and to historicize the aims of late modernism as he sees them.

Rather than providing a retrospective survey of Wall's art, I am more concerned with identifying the values, conventions and practices that constitute an emerging artistic position. I have not organized the dissertation according to a strict chronology. Instead, I examine the development of ideas and art practice over a span of about twenty-five years. I have organized the material around several general categories – photo-conceptualism, counter-tradition, avant-garde, cinematic photography, tableaux, and modernist historiography – which I think best elucidate the artistic aims and concerns relevant to this formative period.

The development of Wall's production takes place in Vancouver, Canada. While this dissertation is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of local art history, it does make some reference to other Vancouver artists, such as Ian Wallace, Ken Lum, and Rodney Graham, whose own artistic work developed in close proximity to Jeff Wall. These four artists are the earliest practitioners of

what has come to be known, in recent years, as 'The Vancouver School.' By identifying some points of consonance between Wall and his contemporaries I mean to situate particular artworks amidst the prevailing ideas and debates about art characteristic of a certain milieu. This is not meant to suggest that the meaning of art is fully constituted by the social relations of a particular community, but rather to show how the ideas and politics circulating at a given time give rise to certain artistic positions. In the case of 'The Vancouver School,' art practices were not isolated by a particular locale but were, rather, constantly and conscientiously situated within the currents of the international art scene. Vancouver artists, connected rather than isolated, were able to make productive use of the shifting geopolitics of a globalized market economy, capitalizing on the transition from the historical singularity of the modern metropolis (i.e. London, Paris, New York) to the dispersed networks which comprise a new form of transnational urbanism (i.e. Los Angeles, Vancouver, Dusseldorf).

Coming of age during the 1960s, progressive artists were eager to discover a means of radicalizing artistic practice. While the context for art production in Vancouver was restricted by a lack of gallery and institutional support, it did provide the means by which to foster a rigorous intellectual culture. Jeff Wall's development was supported by the small, sophisticated cultural elite which has, for many decades, sustained a vital fabric of bohemian, radical and cosmopolitan values in Vancouver. His art shows an ongoing curiosity with the generic conventions of modern life and literature, constantly revisiting figures such as Marx, Baudelaire and Freud. I look at the way in which Wall's production was shaped by the context of his university education; by a conversancy with

literary and cultural knowledge, and by the ongoing dynamics of political protest and counter-culture. Leftist politics were drawn into the dialogue of an exhausted modernist discourse as a potential means of revitalizing contemporary art. Jeff Wall's Master's thesis (U.B.C. 1970), for instance, relies on Marxist notions of reification and alienation as the interpretive framework for explaining the radical intentions of Berlin dada. My analysis closes around the aesthetic shifts in Wall's work that take place during the early 1990s. Although my account is limited to the era between 1967 and 1994, the ideas which emerged remain an active force in contemporary art.

In preparing to write this dissertation I have made use of various types of research including the close reading and study of various works of art;¹ primary research involving archival study, location scouting, and interviews;² and a literature review encompassing scholarship on Jeff Wall, Vancouver social and

¹ Much of my 'close reading' has, predictably, been restricted to the artwork as it appears in various print reproductions. In addition, however, there have also been a number of occasions in which the art itself has been available to see. Relevant exhibitions such as *Jeff Wall* (Schaulager Basel 2005), *Lee Friedlander* (Museum of Modern Art, New York 2005), *Thomas Demand* (Museum of Modern Art 2005), *Rodney Graham* (Vancouver Art Gallery 2004), *Judy Radul* (Power Plant Gallery, Toronto 2004), *Goya, Keaton and Kentridge* (Vancouver Art Gallery 2004), *Christian Marclay* (Seattle Art Museum 2004), *Robert Smithson in Vancouver* (Vancouver Art Gallery 2003), *Dan Graham* (Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver 2003), *Thomas Struth* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2003), *Manet/Velazquez* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2003), *Made in California* (LACMA Los Angeles, 2001), *Walker Evans* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000), *Bank of Montreal Corporate Collection* (Toronto, ongoing) as well as numerous smaller gallery exhibitions in Vancouver and elsewhere, have been extremely helpful in this regard.

² I have drawn from archival sources provided by Simon Fraser University, the Vancouver Public Library, the Pacific Cinematheque, the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre Library and Holocaust Education Centre, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Belkin Gallery at UBC, as well as the individual archives of Serge Guilbaut and Ian Wallace. In order to try to understand the range of artistic decisions at work in the construction of Wall's Vancouver landscapes, I did various site visits. Considering Wall's pictures against the particular social character of the sites themselves, with respect to works including *Eviction Struggle*, *Coastal Motifs*, *Steves Farm*, *Old Prison*, *Thinker*, *Storyteller*, *Jewish Cemetery* and *View from an Apartment* taught me a great deal about the kinds of authorial decisions the artist exercises in the process of constructing his pictures. The other ground of primary research were the formal interviews with Ian Wallace, Serge Guilbaut and Ken Lum, conducted during 2003 and 2004.

cultural history as well as readings in method, art history and social theory.³ I would like to emphasize that the task of contextual interpretation reveals certain truths about the work of art while also remaining irrelevant to its most valuable aspect. In this sense, my analysis is grounded in the belief that art offers a kind of particular knowledge, while history – including the context of art's production and reception – affords a necessary theoretical counter-point to the aesthetic knowledge gleaned from a particular artwork. Coming to terms with these kinds of artistic tensions is not merely of local or community interest; it is the means by which to examine the larger range of imagined possibilities and closures that govern the international culture of late modernism.

The methodology that I rely on in this dissertation has its roots in the social history of art. I developed this approach to the material through my own association with art history, a result of the teaching and writing of some of the field's most dedicated practitioners, in particular Serge Guilbaut and T.J. Clark.⁴ The social art history approach, which draws upon a Marxist interpretation of culture as the basis for its analysis of art objects, entered academic circles during the 1960s.⁵ While the discipline of art history is conventionally comprised of analysing art using the twin practices of formal analysis and historical placement, social art history attempts to further interpret the work of art in terms of ideology. The methodological challenge here arises from the fact that modern art offers no

³ See *Sources Cited*.

⁴ I completed my M.A. degree in art history under the supervision of Serge Guilbaut at UBC. T.J. Clark, who teaches at UC Berkeley, was a member of my examining committee during the period when I was completing my PhD comprehensive exam requirements in 2000-2001.

⁵ T.J. Clark's books, *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *The Image of the People*, written during the 1960s and published in 1973, are influential examples of social art history approach. "On the Social History of Art" is the title of the first chapter of Clark's *Image of the People*. For an overview of recent methodological developments in art history, including that of Clark, see Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction*.

predictable or readymade correspondence between an artistic style and the predominant social attitudes that are concurrent with it. As a result, social art history approaches the relationship between 'art' and 'social structure' not as universal or unchanging but as contextually and historically determined. Social art history, like other forms of "cultural Marxism," relies on situating particular symbolic forms within their socio-historical context, interpreting their meaning through formal analysis, and synthesizing this interpretation in a way that accounts for the ideological constraints imposed by capitalism.⁶ When practiced in a careless or vulgar manner, social art history forgets the unique function of the aesthetic object in the world and sees it wholly determined, or silenced, by its external social context. Figuring the place of aesthetics within the constitution of modernity has been used as a means of addressing this problematic. In this respect the method of social art history furthers the kind of cultural analysis established by figures associated with the Frankfurt School. In this approach modern culture is read in terms of how commodity production, with its unending pressure of rationalization, stands in dialectical tension against the unique value offered by aesthetic experience. One of the reasons why I selected the art of Jeff Wall as a focus of study was because, as with social art history, the work lends itself to an understanding of art's precarious value in a culture which favours other more glamorous, and productive, pursuits. This writing is an attempt to address the critical engagement with capitalist modernity as it is set forth by Clark, Wall and others, theoretically, aesthetically and historically.

⁶ This approach is also found in the field of communications. See for instance John Thompson's *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 1990.

One of the other avenues which has been important in my approach here has been the thinking of the American art historian and critic, Michael Fried. Fried's early opposition to the experimental, theatrical aesthetics of the sixties has provided an enormously productive site of resistance, and has become a landmark in the field. At the same time, the patient and systematic interpretation of art which Fried has worked out across several decades provides an exemplary model for considering the historical evolution of pictorial conventions in modernism. As I state further along in this study, one of my ongoing concerns is to find a form of writing which draws upon the established methods of both T.J. Clark and Michael Fried.

In this study I rely on a method which, in addition to art history, also draws on communications theory. This approach developed as I came to understand that art during the period of late modernism, of which Wall's art is just one example, is deeply and irrevocably intertwined with the visual spectacle of late capitalism. As such, the modern tension between 'high' art and 'mass' culture no longer provides a tenable analytical framework. Although I may wish to do so, I cannot easily declare that Jeff Wall's work belongs to a realm that forms the dialectical 'other' to capitalism, which, in my understanding, has become the reading of modernism suggested by the social art history approach.

During the past few decades, advancing techniques in market research have ensured that the realm of inner life, our most intimate dreams and desires, have been circumscribed by the logic of promotional culture. Developments in art, since at least the 1960s, attest to this changing social reality. What I have found, however, is that the premises of cinematic photography cannot be adequately

accounted for by describing the means by which they depart from modernism, conceptual art and art-photography. In other words, art history can be used to describe the encroachment of visual culture into modernism, but it cannot explain how this came to be so.

What lies outside the conventions of traditional art history, and what I draw on 'communication theory' to provide, is an understanding of the ideological function of images within late capitalism. Although as social subjects we may experience it as such, I don't believe that visual culture is a homogenous or unified constellation. Possible regimes of representation constantly compete for a viewer's attention, visual art among them. I don't mean this as a concession to a reading of visual culture as a practice of apolitical relativism, because I believe that some regimes are more influential than others, and that each of them carries identifiable ideological messages. Although visual art circulates freely, its social meaning remains attached, in an important way, to the institutions of the modern museum and gallery. Drawing out the ideological function of any given regime of representation demands a process of careful observation and thorough critical analysis. In order to engage with this theoretical framework, I rely on the concept of the spectacle as it was originally theorized by the French Situationist Guy Debord and subsequently developed by scholars including T.J. Clark, Judith Williamson, Robert Goldman, Douglas Kellner and Steven Best.

Central to this study is my understanding that older practices of representation, such as theatre and drama, play a central role in shaping the art photography of the post-'68 era, and Jeff Wall's work in particular. The discourse of theatricality which emerged from the sixties, both *pro* and *con*, has become the

means by which to understand the widespread return to narrative pictorialism which has occurred in contemporary art. I try to connect the emergent discourse of theatricality as it occurs in the art world to the expansion of the society of the spectacle as it is theorized by Guy Debord. Notably, I show some of the ways in which the ideas and values that emerge during recent decades are rooted in longstanding tensions between Enlightenment claims to universal history and the romantic defense of individual expression which takes as its foundation the authenticity of the modern self. I discuss theatre, theatricality and spectacle in historical terms because these issues derive from Enlightenment debates about the value of modernity as a culture of representation.

Chapter One considers the departure from modernism as it occurs in Vancouver, through a discussion of various experimental practices which have come to be known as 'photoconceptualism'. Photoconceptualism is tied to the rebellious anti-modernism of the sixties neo-avant-garde, and in particular to the iconoclasm and Leftist political imagination of the conceptual art movement. Reacting against the discourse of modernism, these artists turned to photography as a viable, and primary, site of image making. In the chapter I discuss the evolution and context of Jeff Wall's art, locating a growing interest in cinematic photography as early as his photo-conceptualist project, *The Landscape Manual* (1969-70).

By looking at the increasing importance of technologies of vision, which have allowed the landscape to become a site for 'location scouting,' it is possible to understand the continuity between photoconceptualism and the pictorial tableau. What becomes apparent, during the course of Chapter Two, is that

theatricality, a persistent strategy in the artistic production of Jeff Wall and his colleagues since the late 1960s, has fundamentally and irreversibly transformed the traditions and conventions of British Columbia landscape art. Throughout the chapter I return to the genre of landscape art, which, since it is a 'framing device' for vision, has long been attached to the conventions of both theatre and cinema. I am interested in the way in which Wall's Vancouver landscapes participate in a larger attempt to re-examine the tenets of modernism from within the format of photography. I argue that while photography is inherently theatrical, it need not be placed outside of the pictorial conventions established by modernism. The growth of the film production industry in British Columbia, *Hollywood North*, provides a potential frame of reference for considering the parallel rise of cinematic photography.

Chapter Three examines the relevance of the historical avant-garde through a close reading of some of Jeff Wall's published writings. One of the most important issues in need of further consideration today is not that Jeff Wall makes pictures, but that alongside his practice he also develops a version of modern art history that legitimates the artistic and political decisions which support a return to the picture. These writings make it evident that Wall's return to figuration and pictorialism is intended to work against the political strategies typical of sixties experimentalism, and, in particular, against the iconoclasm of Conceptual Art, which dissolved the art object in order to avoid the art system and its relentless commodification. During the course of this review of Wall's writings, it becomes apparent that the incendiary ingredient in Wall's return to the picture is its defiant rejection of the neo-avant-garde.

In addition to Wall's own writings, I also consider the artist's choice of the dramatic tableau as the appropriate means of spectatorial address, and its heritage in the avant-garde. Wall's embrace of narrative photography is informed by debates about the strategies of the historical avant-garde, in particular the critical realism of Georg Lukacs. I discuss the way in which the artist's reliance on generic social types employs a shared visual language that is intended to engage objective reality. In Wall's pictures the social type -- be it a drug dealer, artist's model or impoverished mother-- functions not as an individual, but as an element within the construct of the picture.

In Chapter Four I look at the role played by cinema in the formation of Wall's dramatic pictorialism. This chapter considers the degree to which Wall demonstrates an investment in the theatrical potential of the picture, and how this investment can be said to relate to the contemporary society of spectacle which surrounds us. I consider the heritage of theatrical strategies in the production of early cinema as a means of offering some historical background to Wall's fundamentally cinematic photographs. I also examine the historical context of Wall's development as an artist, discussing the relevance of his own forays into the film industry. Throughout the chapter I aim to show that Wall's art is embedded in a form of cultural politics which takes a great deal from both the historical avant-garde and from the kind of ideology critique which was established by post-structural theory and the kind of 'postmodern' art discourse which championed theatricality.

Chapter Five provides a theoretical background for some of the current literature on Jeff Wall. The reception of Wall's art has often been concerned with

positioning the artist's photo-based pictures within the tradition of modern painting. In some accounts Wall's art stands in as an original solution to a certain range of problems that are characteristic of late modernism, and I am concerned with addressing the constitution and basis of these claims. My intention is not only to add context and expand the terrain of what is known about the artist, but also to use my analysis as an opportunity to synthesize and address the existing reception of Wall's art. In order to position current controversies surrounding the use of the tableau in contemporary pictorial photography, I return to the writings of Rousseau and Diderot to examine Enlightenment debates about the cultural value of theatrical performance.

Chapter Six returns to the problem of historiography as a means of coming to grips with a suitable approach for writing about art beyond modernism. I review the longstanding encounter between T.J. Clark and Michael Fried over the definition of modernism. While it is possible, and even necessary, to locate these authors as having engendered divergent scholarly traditions, the ways in which the work of these two historians meet and overlap is a complex weave of mutual influence and critical tension which cannot be easily summarized. I rely on their respective interpretations of Manet as a framework for interpreting some of Jeff Wall's pictures. In this chapter I suggest that Wall's contemporary pictures can be thought of as a cipher of the longstanding, and still unresolved, struggle between these divergent and highly influential interpretations of modern art.

One of my ongoing concerns is to investigate the aesthetic premises of contemporary pictorial photography. This is a contentious gesture, not least because the widespread return to aesthetics during the past decade has been

interpreted as a conservative defense of beauty against the radical politics of the anti-aesthetic. Given the history of Jeff Wall's art with the 'anti-aesthetic' moment of conceptualism, it would appear problematic to argue on the side of beauty. My account draws upon various materials – from the historical discussion of aesthetics within modernity, the implications of 'being on location' in the landscape, and the ideological function of representation in the constitution of public life – in order to explain why this is necessary. While I am concerned with investigating aesthetic experience, I do not propose this return in order to ensure that Jeff Wall's pictures can be properly severed from their radical origins.

It may appear that a return to aesthetics within academia has come about just as the conditions of late modernity have made the question of the aesthetic seem old-fashioned and unnecessary. The encroachment of capitalist logic into everyday life, into the realm of our dreams and desires, suggests that the former function of art has been completely absorbed. This is because the current organization of promotional culture relies on an ongoing process of aestheticization to a degree that seems to have removed the need for art as a separate space of aesthetic experience. We, as social subjects, are being drastically refashioned by a global spectacular logic whose successful expansion is predicated on absorbing and reconstituting the particularities of identity and place. Questions hover insistently even as this pixellated dreamworld whispers constant reassurance: Are "art" images any different from all the other images? Can the museum be said to offer anything but redundancy, fashion or private retreat? Doesn't the fact that the artists themselves are as likely to be inspired by

film directors such as Hitchcock or Lynch as they are by artists such as Pollock or Tatlin exonerate this new constellation?

I am arguing that the cinematic mode in photography posits a type of aesthetic that retains a level of critical, political intent. This kind of engagement can be productively related to the historical genre of realism in painting, film and street photography, and it can be relied upon to show us something critical about the place in which it is produced. Jeff Wall's images of modern life are often rich in allusion and suggestiveness, but their narrative and didactic qualities refuse easy legibility. This is a matter to do with beauty, and with the strategies necessary to preserve aesthetic validity within the density of spectacular culture. I argue that Wall's art allows for an experience of the image that is qualitatively different from what corporate logic has to offer. To dismiss Wall's work as empty of critique on the grounds that it is concerned with beauty is to misunderstand the political domain that it strives to apprehend.

Chapter One

Photoconceptual Art

“And, in every situation in every country you have that - a centre that thinks that they own the place, and that nobody else can do it. But Jeff [Wall] understood that he could manipulate the discourse from here, from Vancouver, to show them that from here you can think about modernity just as well.”

- Serge Guilbaut (personal interview)

One of the central problems in writing about contemporary art has to do with the reception of modernism; or, rather, with how a particular narrative about the history of art is called upon to address and legitimate the means by which the art of today differs from that of the past. In the case of contemporary Canadian artists living and working on the edge of the Pacific coast, it is tempting to suppose that modernist controversies are too remote, both historically and geographically, to supply a relevant interpretive framework. Throughout the twentieth century the colonial culture of the west coast, relatively distant from the institutional structures designed to uphold the established cultural traditions of Europe, created a climate in which alternative, anarchist, and counter-traditional values were able to flourish. A sense of being removed from the centre of national interest has been typical of west coast culture in both the United States and in Canada. In artistic terms, it could be said that personal expression has been less governed by the anxiety of influence. With respect to Vancouver, the interwoven evolution of modernization and modernism has been both sudden and late, relatively speaking. It is only in recent decades that Vancouver artists have

gained sufficient international prominence to have made an impact on the debates taking place in the world of contemporary art.

The foundation of 'American art,' that is, of modernism in the United States is, in itself, relatively recent. It is commonly associated with the immediate post-war era, with Jackson Pollock and the rise of Abstract Expressionism in New York.¹ Pollock's paintings are recognized as a form of abstract, gestural expression intended to convey the heroic struggle of primal, unconscious forces against the repressive structures of modern society. Pollock's paintings, as with those of the New York School in general, rely on increased scale and colour to translate the isolated subjectivity of the individual into an epic form capable of functioning within, and against, the burgeoning realm of consumer culture. Serge Guilbaut's 1983 book, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, provides a critical analysis of the complex transition of commercial, ideological, and economic interests which brought the centre of culture from Paris to New York in the aftermath of the second world war.

During the first decades of the twentieth century European modernism had become available to North American audiences through a variety of channels, not least of which as a result of major exhibitions such as the 1913 'Armory Show' in New York. In other words, it took a number of years, as well as a particular climate, for American artists to establish cultural forms capable of contending with the aesthetic challenges raised by European modernism. The victorious confidence of liberal democratic culture which gained strength following the

¹ This is the narrative entrenched by books such as Dore Ashton's *The New York School - A Cultural Reckoning*, first published in 1973.

defeat of fascism provided the conditions necessary to give rise to a national discourse of modernism in the United States.

By the end of the war the American art critic Clement Greenberg had become established as the most formidable and consistent defender of the new American painting. His criticism would develop into a progressive model of aesthetics, an affirmative version of modernism appealing to the climate of post-war reconstruction. "He is the one who, in a sense, redeems the modernist legacy for post-war memory" (Buchloh 2003:324). Michael Fried, who was initially brought into the milieu of New York School modernism through Greenberg, continues today to work as an art critic and historian, and is rightly associated with this progressive model of modernist aesthetics. I believe that both Greenberg and Fried have played an important role in shaping the voice of contemporary art in Vancouver.

In this chapter I examine the formative context of Jeff Wall's art, locating a growing interest in cinematic photography as early as his photo-conceptualist project, *The Landscape Manual* (1969-70). I am interested in the ways that Wall's art, and in particular his Vancouver landscapes, participate in a larger attempt to re-examine the tenets of modernism from within the format of photography. While I am concerned with the inherently theatrical nature of photography, I also aim to trace the means by which it functions in relation to the pictorial conventions established by modernism.

In recent years Greenberg's writings have been framed as a program of stylistic and formal innovations in painting that has left art's constitutive relations

to society insufficiently accounted for.² This reading of Greenberg, as “exemplary of formalist modernism,” has been the dominant one, often resting on generalizations based on Greenberg’s later work, particularly his essay ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960-65). Even accounts that are sympathetic to Greenberg have reinforced this perception. Critics are uncomfortable with the voice of ‘pure modernism’ which relies on a descriptive, empirical objectivity that can only pretend to be ideologically neutral (Bois 2003:324). Thomas Crow comments that “the later Greenberg has thereby come to obscure the earlier and more vital thinker, his eventual modernist triumphalism pushing aside the initial logic of his criticism and the particular urgency that prompted it” (Crow 1981: 9). What has become apparent is that the impact of Greenberg’s formalism, by equating the modernist legacy of the twentieth century with abstract painting alone, has served to marginalize the parallel contributions made by avant-garde formations including dada, surrealism, Russian constructivism and Soviet productivism as well as the diversity of media - photography, applied design, collage, text, and ‘found’ objects - which they employed.

Alongside Greenberg, the other person to whom we are indebted for the theorization of post-war modernism is the German writer Theodor Adorno. Adorno’s account of modernism, as advanced in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, refuses any discourse of formalist purity. Modernism, in Adorno’s understanding, was never fully autonomous; rather it was crucially related to modernity and the technological dynamo which gave rise to mass culture. His writings suggest that the constitutive features of post-war modernism must be seen to include the

² See *Modernism in Dispute* (1993) and Peter Osborne “Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory” (1989).

trauma of the Holocaust, the destruction of the organized left, and the increasing significance of consumer culture. By way of suggesting that the two were in fact mutually determined, Adorno argued that modernism and popular culture should be examined in relation to each other, since “both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up” (as quoted in Rose, 118).

Although their approaches differ, it is nevertheless necessary to acknowledge the similarity of concern between Greenberg and Adorno, most evidently in the way that they understand modernism as the critical opposition provided by the aesthetic against the degrading and destructive effects of modernity. Both are sympathetic to modern art’s increasing autonomy and to the internal necessity of its formalist and stylistic concerns. Both critics see modernism as a response to the encroachment of compromised forms that had been introduced to culture by the processes of commodification and mass communication. In contradistinction to Greenberg’s progressive model, Adorno’s contribution to this discourse is to have retained the value of the negative as an approach to cultural critique: “What would happiness be that was not measured by the immeasurable grief at what is? For the world is deeply ailing” (Adorno, *MM* 200).

Contemporary art encounters the reception of modernist discourse, including the writings of Greenberg and Adorno, but also the moment of its erosion. Rather than striving to demonstrate competence within a singular medium, such as painting, in recent decades artists have begun to explore the potential offered by a diversity of artistic media. It was during the radicalized era of the sixties that artists started to look beyond the purely formal concerns of

painting and recover the diversity of strategies initially employed by the historical avant-garde. Vanguardist attempts at innovation inspired artists to experiment with the aesthetics of performance, process, text, concept, installation and site-specific environments. It is during this period that many conceptually-based artists (notably Ed Ruscha and Dan Graham) also turn to photography to investigate its potential for artistic production. This *crisis of the medium*, what has come to be known as 'the post-medium condition,' speaks of a period dominated by a diversity of artistic experimentation. It is the harbinger of our contemporary moment and, depending on your vantage point, it inaugurates either a welcome stage of liberatory artistic freedom or the reigning chaos of profound aesthetic confusion (Foster, *Art since* 534).

The aesthetic controversies with which this dissertation is concerned belong to the period of the 'post-medium condition.' Artists in Vancouver make use of photography, but their formative aesthetic emerges from conceptual art and its interrogation of modernism. In 1990 the Vancouver artist, critic and teacher Ian Wallace published an essay entitled 'Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver,' which accounts for the history of Vancouver art from the mid-sixties to the late eighties in terms of the continuous development of a movement which he refers to as "photoconceptual art."³ The essay is, in an important sense, an attempt by Wallace to address the conditions of artistic production which governed not only his own art, but also those of his students, including Jeff Wall and Rodney Graham. According to Wallace, photoconceptual art, while

³ Ian Wallace. "Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver" *Thirteen Essays on Photography*. Martha Langford, Ed. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, 1990:93-116.

identifiable in the work of a few individual artists, was a result of the encounter between late modernist ideas and the dominant features of the modern city, including the media culture that it supports (Wallace 1990:94). The movement comes out of modernism, Wallace says, but embraces the heterogeneity and marginality of postmodernism. It cannot be identified stylistically, but rather in terms of the method and genealogy that it shares with 'conceptual art.' Although the term 'conceptual art' is hopelessly vague, it serves to indicate that paradigmatic shift in artistic sensibility which emerged as one aspect of the sixties avant-garde. There are several features characteristic of conceptual art that continue on into photo-conceptualism including, Wallace argues, "an emphasis on concept or subject matter over medium"; "a basis in language"; a critical approach to the spectacle; an international discourse; and a grounding in academia (Wallace 1990:95). He argues that one of the benefits of conceptual art has been its restructuring of regional art production, a redrawing of the power relations which have historically separated periphery from centre.

The first stage in Wallace's history of photoconceptualism lies between 1965 and 1970, and is characterized by the initial use of photography in conceptual art. At this stage photography was used to document ideas and sites, and as a tool for the investigation of the landscape. Wallace argues that the work of Iain and Ingrid Baxter, known as the 'N.E. Thing Co.' (NETCO), played a formative role. Wallace cites, in particular, the importance of NETCO's 1968 photographic portfolio, *Piles*, which identifies typologies in the industrial landscape as "a form of homage to the beauty of the banal" (Wallace 1990:97). At this stage the ideal of photoconceptualism was based on the value of mirroring

everyday reality. It was based on the belief that the photograph, as a self-consciously created document, could create value. Above all, however “this work marked a distinctive shift in the mood and function of the artwork, from an inner-directed to an outer-directed activity” (Wallace 1990:98).

The formative stage of photoconceptualism in Vancouver was also established with two art exhibitions, which took place in 1969 and 1970. One was *The Photo Show* (1969) curated by local artist Chris Dikeakos, and the other was *955,000* (1970), curated by the American critic Lucy Lippard. *955,000* (named after the city’s population), hosted by the Vancouver Art Gallery, was set up at the gallery and on-site around Vancouver.⁴ “These exhibitions were comprehensive and advanced even for the time and consolidated the significance of photoconceptual strategies for Vancouver artists who were formulating original approaches to mainstream developments but from a regional point of view” (Wallace 1990:97).

Jeff Wall participated in both the *Photo Show* and *955,000* exhibitions. Wall contributed *Shooting a photo every time I blink as I walk the street* to the *Photo Show*, a photographic work and essay that involved drawing an analogy between the shooting of the photographer and the shooting of a gun.⁵ His contribution to Lippard’s show, titled *Area Analysis* (1968-1969), was a conceptual landscape piece involving procedural instructions for the removal (and eventual replacement) of square patches of grass from a predetermined

⁴ For a review of the exhibition, see Ted Lindberg “955,000 - An Exhibition organized by Lucy Lippard” *artscanada* (June 1970) 50.

⁵ For a review of the exhibition, see Charlotte Townsend “Vancouver Photo Show” *artscanada* (June 1970) 49.

area of land.⁶ During this period Wall also produced a significant photoconceptual work, called *Landscape Manual*, which was exhibited in an independent exhibition, *Four Artists*, on UBC campus. The Manual consists of snapshots taken touring the suburbs of Vancouver, accompanied by a commentary reflecting on this process. This low-tech publication, just over 50 pages in length and published in an edition of 400, parodies the format of a scientific manual, combining commentary about the generic features of suburban living with localized imagery. The Manual is based on precedents established by American conceptualists Dan Graham and Robert Smithson.

Wallace's essay is by no means exceptional in emphasizing the formative role played by photoconceptualism in the work of Jeff Wall and other Vancouver artists. This association has routinely been made by critics and commentators for at least two decades. Wall himself has emphasized the historical importance of conceptual art: "What conceptual art did, I think, was give young artists a way out of a romantic concept of the artist into an undefined, and maybe even undefinable, concept of the artist, which was open to respond to things that were happening in the real world..." (*An Evening Forum* 1990:12).

There are numerous other examples which show how pervasive the terminology of 'photo/conceptualism' has become both within and outside of local circles. I will cite just a few: In a 1996 article, Judith Mastai draws attention to ideological differences co-existing within the Vancouver art community. Local artist Gregg Simpson, Mastai reports, argued (in an editorial to the *Vancouver*

⁶ It seems that *Area Analysis* was not physically built. In an unpublished essay written in 1972 Wall explains that it "would have been 'documented' in the classic conceptual art manner but I decided not to carry it out." Wall 'Data' (1972) 4.

Sun) that “Vancouver has wrongly been portrayed as a major centre only for conceptual and photo-based art instead of what we should really be known for: a regional art, spiritual in nature and mainly landscape-based.”⁷ National Gallery of Canada curator Kitty Scott, in the 2002 exhibition catalogue accompanying ‘Ken Lum Works with Photography’, discusses the vitality of the Vancouver art scene. She comments that “Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace, a.k.a. the *Ecole de Vancouver*- often referred to as ‘the Vancouver photoconceptualists’ - are among the most established” artists in the city (Scott, 15). Another typical example, taken from an article in *Canadian Art* (Winter 2004) explains: “[Ian] Wallace was mentored by Iain Baxter (of N.E. Thing Company) and went on to teach Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Stan Douglas, Ken Lum, Roy Arden and Arni Haraldsson. This esteemed group rose to international prominence in the 1980s, forever linking Vancouver with photoconceptualism” (Campbell 60-65). The examples I cite here demonstrate that the contemporary art world has come to associate Vancouver with a particular kind of art, and the terminology in current usage is ‘the Vancouver School’ or, alternatively, ‘photo-conceptualism’.

During the late 1960s Iain Baxter made an important contribution to the formation of photoconceptualism. As has already been suggested, Baxter played the role of teacher, mentor and role model for the circulation of experimental, avant-gardist art ideas. Between 1966 and 1978 Iain Baxter worked collaboratively with Ingrid Baxter (to whom he was married at that time), under

⁷ Mastai “Conceptual Bogeyman - Art and Media in the City by the Sea” *C Spr.* 1996:21-25.

the assumed corporate identity of the "N.E. Thing Company Limited" (NETCO).⁸ By considering some of the ambitions and strategies implicit in a few of the NETCO projects, my intention here is to review the process by which art, particularly in its failed utopian aspect, lays bare a field of unresolvable social contradictions.

In many respects NETCO was a witty identification on behalf of these artists with the emergent rhetoric of the information society. This can be seen, for example, in their *Information Document, #10. 1-8*, from 1971, which includes a button imprinted with the phrase 'ART is all over' attached to a standardized layout sheet. [Figure 1] The work is important, incorporating, as it does, strategies central to all of NETCO's production. Stamped 'information' in the upper left corner and evidently one of an indefinite series authored by a company (not an individual artist), this *art* is distinctly impersonal and unexpressive. Adjacent text on the layout sheet includes the history and address of the company (founded in Vancouver in 1966) as well as the 'Companies Act' announcing the formal incorporation of NETCO in 1969. Adopting a generic and visually unremarkable format, the N.E. Thing Co. mimics the bureaucratic form of a highly administrated society. There is a concerted attempt to depart from the production of art, referring instead to 'Visual Sensitivity Information' (VSI), which is "said to denote more appropriately the meaning of the traditional words 'art'

⁸ Iain Baxter was visible to young artists in his capacity as a university instructor at UBC and SFU. In reference to the NE Thing Co. production, however, I intend to constantly imply the contributions made by Ingrid Baxter. In that my concerns include Iain Baxter's function as a teacher, I recognize that there is a slightly uncomfortable elision of her collaborative presence. For various reasons, and perhaps predictably so, this has been a persistent problem in the scholarship of NETCO and is addressed by Nancy Shaw in "Siting the Banal: the Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co." (1993) 32-36.

and 'fine art' or 'visual art' ". The NETCO claim -- 'art is all over' -- holds both closure and possibility, declaring the end of what is conventionally understood as art -- that bourgeois tradition of creating precious objects for museum display -- while also announcing the means of transforming *the whole world* into art. The implication of this document is that *information* has become the practice that has displaced *art*. In this act, and in its production as a whole, it seems that the N.E. Thing Co. is willing to grant a determining force to the technological structure and the form of knowledge which it produces. In its most obvious reading, this production operates as a product and sign of the 'information revolution', what Nick Witheford calls a doctrine, imbued with the idea that "the techno-scientific knowledge crystalized in computers, telecommunications, and biotechnologies is now unleashing an ongoing and irresistable transformation of civilization" (Witheford 15). As the imaginative production of the N.E. Thing Co. is fundamentally attached to the post-war development of an information-based economic order, it is constructive to draw on the notion of the postmodern. I am thinking in particular of that aspect of postmodernity which David Harvey speaks about in terms of time-space compression: "As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological interdependencies," writes Harvey, "and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds" (Harvey 240).

In other projects NETCO makes explicit use of new communications technologies. In an 'information sheet' identified as "Telex and Telecopier

Projects" from 1969, for example, four photographs document the N.E. Thing Co. at work using this equipment. An explanatory note at the bottom of the information sheet reads "using telex and telecopier as a means of producing works of art. Works were created using the interconnectedness and transmission concepts of these communication media" (*Report*). In that the intention of the art is processual rather than object-based the distinction between form and content, one might say between medium and message, is kept indeterminate. In this instance the historical documentation, because it does not indicate precisely what was being transmitted, negates its own value and, as such, is evidently useless.

In another project series, "Trans VSI", from 1969-1970, the existing documentation conveys, to some extent, the content of NETCO's repeated communication transmissions (*Trans VSI*). In this project an ongoing exchange of 'visual sensitivity information' was set up between the N.E. Thing Co. headquarters in North Vancouver and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax. NETCO was invited to initiate propositions and members of the art college were encouraged to undertake them and subsequently submit documentation back to NETCO via telex, telecopier or telephone. One of the propositions conveys the sense of humour and absurdity characteristic of NETCO initiatives, asking participants to "paint the top of a tree brown and the trunk green." Activities such as "Trans VSI" act on the compression of space and time, identifying and reinforcing a conceptual link between artists that were geographically, spatially, isolated. Artworks such as their 'General Map of Canada' are conceptual initiatives, appropriating the infrastructure of a highly

industrialized society toward creative ends; making the space between Halifax and Vancouver all but disappear.

In "Trans VSI #12", a continuation of the telex and telecopier projects, a telex was sent from NETCO to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In this instance a 4.5 inch square saying **SKY** was transmitted. The humour resides in the impossibility of this communication, as one can't, of course, transmit the environment via telex. In spite of its textual, bureaucratic and technologized form, I take this as a piece of landscape art. In a 1969 review, critic Lucy Lippard explores other NETCO 'landscapes'; projects such as *Moss Cuts* (in which moss was removed from a fallen tree at one inch intervals), which involve direct interventions in the rural or suburban landscape. These interventions exist, Lippard argues, "not as objects or volumes to be reckoned with as separate entities, but as devices for the redefinition or refocusing of the setting in which they are placed" (Lippard 1969, 3). At other moments, NETCO also exploits the ability of visual technologies to document the landscape. They are among the first in Vancouver to explore the back-lit cibachrome photograph as a format for documentary-style landscape art, as for example in their *Ruins* (1968). [Figure 2]

The work of NETCO, and of photoconceptualist practices in general, attests to a shift occurring in the artistic representation of the landscape. This shift is identifiable as a turn toward the theatrical or cinematic potential of the environment, and, as we will see, it has fundamentally and irreversibly transformed the traditions and conventions of British Columbia landscape art. The change in sensibility, such as we see demonstrated in the work of NETCO, was recognized by Vancouver writer, Dennis Wheeler. Wheeler's observations

appeared in a 1970 article in *Artscanada* magazine which discussed an exhibition of work by young Vancouver artists at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery (Wheeler 50-51). The *Four Artists* exhibition included Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual*, Ian Wallace's *Look Magazine* paste up, Tom Burrows' fiberglass paintings and Duane Lunden's installation, *The Locator*. Wheeler's article, one of the few serious reviews of early photoconceptualism, plays an important role in establishing the terms of the Vancouver discourse.⁹

Wheeler is cognizant of a shift toward landscape, and a certain kind of landscape, at work in this exhibition: "One's obvious initial reaction to the show is that there is a new sense of landscape, a sudden heat for the mundane suburban city stretching horizontally across the map of America" (Wheeler 50). This new landscape is not transformed to become appealing or palatable, but is instead documented without sentiment, on its own terms. Wheeler recognizes that these works document the features of modernisation, and that the urban landscape that they depict is not particular in its identification of place. He sees no evidence, for instance, of a particular sense of identification with the 'west coast' as locale; there is no reference to the cultural flow active between Vancouver and Los Angeles, or the decentralised network of urbanism that they share. Wheeler frames the works in the exhibition with reference to "the dialectic between specific place and a generalized or 'non-site' which allows a peculiar access or historical comprehension of ideas through 'things'" (Wheeler 51). In this form of production, the urban periphery becomes a legitimate subject. "Those things of interest in a

⁹ Wheeler's importance to Vancouver art has yet to be properly accounted for. I should mention here that Wheeler and Wall, both graduate students at UBC, were friends. (See Wall in Figgis, 2004.)

landscape... become located at the periphery... the scattered, crumbling edges take on a new and commensurate intensity" (51). Wall's *Landscape Manual*, because of its detailed and systematic documentation of experience, is interpreted by Wheeler as a refusal of modernism's urban monumentality.

Writing in the eighties, Ian Wallace recognizes that for Jeff Wall the site of battle is the image: "The point of convergence of these forces, the socio-political, the technical and the expressive, marks within the image the site of this discourse" (*Transparencies 2*). This interest, however, can be traced back to Wall's introduction of photography into his experiments with 'conceptual art.' Wallace argues that the most important work Wall produced during his 'conceptual' period was the *Landscape Manual* (*Transparencies 4*). It was included in the 1970 *Information Show* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; a hallmark exhibition of conceptual art. What Wall adds to the conceptual art movement as a whole is significant. In Wallace's view, his work is not concerned primarily with structure, as is the case with much sixties conceptualism, but rather with drama, narrative and cinema.

In a 1991 essay, "Discovering the Defeated Landscape," Scott Watson looks at art in Vancouver between 1965 and 1970, studying those artists whose work has begun to represent urban space as a "defeated landscape" concerned with typology and abstraction, including NETCO, Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall and Chris Dikeakos (Watson *Defeated* 247-265). In the late 1960s both Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall were making monochrome paintings and minimalist sculptures. By 1969, however, both artists had become more interested in photography. Wallace produced a work which involved the appropriation of mass

media imagery, entitled *Magazine Piece*, and Wall began his *Landscape Manual*. “Both artists became more intently interested in photography, not as high-art medium or humanist social document, but as the recording device most appropriate to the construction of an index or semiotic of the urban environment, which in turn could be used to contest the images of the dominant culture” (251). Watson points to the quick spread of the photoconceptual imagination in Vancouver. “By the time of the *Photo Show* and *BC Almanac* in 1970, conceptualism in Vancouver had become photo based. Indexes and image banks proliferated, pitting an entropic egalitarianism against the administered categories in a not-yet-classless society” (259).

Watson and others draw attention to the work which provided an influential model for this type of production. In particular, the young Vancouverites became interested in the work of American artists Dan Graham and Robert Smithson. Establishing contact with these artists was significant in building the photoconceptualist discourse, and I will return to a discussion of Graham and Smithson a little further on. As Watson confirms, Jeff Wall’s “major work” of the late 60s was *Landscape Manual*, and it “owed much to Graham and Smithson” (254). For Watson, the proposition of the *Landscape Manual* is “initially straightforward; a car is driven through a suburban region and a roll of film is shot at random from the vantage of the car. The pictures are ‘natural’, arbitrary and artless” (255).

Watson, following Wall, Wallace and Wheeler, draws attention to one of the defining characteristics of Wall’s approach to the landscape, which is the impulse to represent what is banal, general and without singularity. This

'featureless' landscape appears in the *Manual*, and continues on into Wall's return to the picture, where the city is represented without identifiable monuments or landmarks. "In the featureless, Wall found a way of contrasting the evidence of a built environment of seemingly endless interchangeability and instability with the 'natural environment'" (256). Watson pursues Wall as witness to the limits of modernity, its standardized, alienating, overly rationalised structure. He understands the continuity that is intended between modernism and modernisation, and points to the limits of painting: "Abstraction in a monochrome on the wall became an analogue of the abstraction of entrepreneurial capitalism as it chewed up wilderness, farms and city blocks to create a new 'wilderness' in which nothing could be located for very long before it was replaced" (256).

Systematic analysis, the observation and record of conscious experience, provided another model for these young artists since it seemed to hold the possibility of going beyond modernist abstraction. It transferred the locus of meaning from the interior of the artist to the featureless exterior of the landscape. Although at first glance it may have looked like a straight-forward document of a suburban driving experience, Wall's *Manual* is a circuitous project that relies on the blurring of art and life typical of sixties avant-gardism. As Watson notes, "*Landscape Manual* became a very complex work when Wall introduced into the initial proposition the notion that any description or re-creation of the car trip would also be included in the realisation of the work. Thus the work has no limit and leaks promiscuously into life" (256). Watson aims to show that Wall's *Manual* is marked by the hope that some kind of social truth, impossible to find in language, will be recognized through the process of empirical analysis. There is a

contradiction in the work in that it is both inspired and limited by what this analysis can provide. On the one hand Wall argues that the Manual is more valuable than the countless driving experiences that he has had, because it provides a structure for the study of 'reality' and 'experience.' On the other hand Wall also admits that language cannot possibly do justice to life or conscious experience, which implies that his Manual will be at best some kind of document or trace. "It is the lack of symmetry or identity,' he [Wall] wrote, 'between language and the world, between interior and exterior reality that leads to the world's pathology'" (Wall, as quoted in Watson, 257). This is a valuable insight, and is another demonstration of the continuity of interest between sixties photo-conceptualism and eighties pictorialism. It is supposedly through the process of systematizing, indexing and cataloguing the components of the world that the featureless landscape can be interpreted. Since this cataloguing of the totality is impossible to realize, however, art production will inhabit the locus of impossibility. Wall's own strategy is that that the "micro-point" in the *Manual* or the "micro-gesture" in the picture will bring a more detailed sense of reality to consciousness (Watson 1991).

Art practices relying on photography and conceptualism during the 1960s were often influenced by, or took after, bureaucratic, academic and scientific writing models. This has been discussed in relation to the work of NETCO and their informational mode of communication. A reliance on system and typology is one of the foundational claims of photoconceptualism as it developed in Vancouver. The work of American artist Dan Graham also followed this kind of model, but with a more rigorous and critical vantage point. As stated earlier, he

has been an important influence to artists in Vancouver, and his 1966 project, *Homes for America*, was particularly influential. This project reinterpreted minimalism, and its concern with primary structures, in relation to the social landscape. The type of photography that Graham relied on provided a model that was not “expressionistic, sentimentalized or picturesque” (Wallace 2003, 9). The factual form of the photo-document was consistent with both minimal and conceptual art, and also more politicized because it did not derive its content exclusively from the concerns of the art world. Jeff Wall came into contact with Dan Graham in Halifax in the early 1970s, while both were working at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). NSCAD Press published a book of Graham’s work in 1979. Over the years, Graham and Wall have continued a productive exchange, writing reviews of one another’s work as well as collaborating together.¹⁰

At the invitation of Wallace and Wall, Dan Graham was invited to Vancouver during the late 1970s as a guest of SFU, ECIAD and UBC, to work as a visiting artist. In this way he established a long-term presence for Vancouver artists. “For Jeff Wall and a number of other Vancouver artists (myself included), having come to contemporary art with an education more in art history and theory than studio training per se,” Wallace comments, “this concept of ‘praxis’ or the merging of theory and practice, essential to Graham’s outlook, has allowed for the viability of a self-reflexive practice that could be played out in the work itself”

¹⁰ See Dan Graham “The Destroyed Room of Jeff Wall” [1979] in David Campany *Art and Photography*. London: Phaidon, 2003:240-241; Jeff Wall. *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991; Jeff Wall “A Guide to the Children’s Pavilion (a collaborative project with Dan Graham, extract) in Jeff Wall Phaidon 2nd Edition 1999: 102; Jeff Wall “Introduction: Partially Reflective Mirror Writing” in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on his Art*. MIT Press, 1999.

(Wallace 2003, 11). This was a useful position in Vancouver, Wallace says, in the face of the “prevailing anti-intellectual and often conformist attitudes of the regional art scene and late modernist art in general” (Wallace 2003, 11).

Robert Smithson, whose art and ideas were also held in high esteem in Vancouver, is of interest here as his work followed the logic of the avant-garde developing from minimalism and conceptual art and extended its scope to incorporate a basis in the natural environment. Smithson’s work was valuable at the time because it demonstrated both a willingness to engage with modernist aesthetics and a rigorous investigation of the industrialised landscape. During an extended trip to Vancouver in 1969-1970, Smithson was involved in the creation of two earthworks - *Glue Pour* and *Island of Broken Glass* - which relied on inserting industrially manufactured products into natural environments and allowing time to bear witness to the process of entropy. The *Island of Broken Glass* project entailed dumping one hundred tons of tinted glass onto a small island off the Vancouver coast and allowing the natural movement at the shoreline to gradually erode the glass.¹¹

Smithson’s work made a substantial impression on the Vancouver art scene, including Wall, Wallace and Dikeakos. He developed a productive exchange with writer Dennis Wheeler, whose review of the *Four Artists* exhibition was informed by Smithson’s ideas.¹² By situating the products of human culture

¹¹ This project is described in Blake Stimson, “An Art and Its Public - A Public and Its Art: Robert Smithson versus the Environmentalists” *Collapse 2*, December 1996; 126-137 and in the exhibition catalogue *Robert Smithson in Vancouver: a Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation*. Vancouver Art Gallery, 2004.

¹² For more on this, see “Four Conversations between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson (1969-1970)” in *Robert Smithson The Collected Writings*. Ed. Jack Flam. UC Press, 1996: 196-233.

directly into the environs of nature Smithson had relied on the process of entropy as a force capable of diminishing the grand, humanist ambitions of his culture. His projects were meant to show that from the perspective of geological time, human life occurred on a scale of relatively small significance. Smithson conceived of his sites, even their destructive potential, as an extension of natural processes, commenting at one point in relation to *Island of Broken Glass* "Yeah, well, in nature you can fall off cliffs, and you can drown in the water, and you can fall in a volcano... I mean the fact that somebody will swim out there and impale himself on that glass is not my fault."¹³ Smithson's ability to envision his earthworks as appropriately situated in the surrounding ecosystem was not a vision shared by environmental activists, and his proposed *Island of Broken Glass* was to provoke a public controversy. Members of a local environmental group, SPEC (Society for Pollution and Environmental Control),¹⁴ for instance, considered Smithson's ecological project a potential threat to wildlife. As a result, permission was eventually rescinded by the Canadian government, preventing the project from ever being realized. Smithson's spectacular and ambitious earthworks, by positing an engagement with the terms of the human domination of nature through an extension of the same logic - as compared to a counter-logic of refusal or strategic opposition - are exemplary of the contradictory avant-gardist imagination circa 1970.

Vancouver artist Chris Dikeakos explains that one of the ways Smithson was important as a role model for local artists has to do with his use of

¹³ Robert Smithson, "Four Conversations ...", 216. See also Robert Smithson, "Rejoinder to Environmental Critics" *Collapse 2*: 122.

¹⁴ SPEC is currently (i.e. 2005) known as the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation.

photography (Dikeakos *Glue Pour*). Smithson's work often involved a photographic 'scanning' of the environment; the camera used as an instrument for indexing and scanning reality. In Vancouver this 'scanning' practice was taken up in relation to a critical study of urbanism. "The intent was to use photography to represent a kind of 'featureless expanse' of a new modern and changing metropolis, the site of entrepreneurial speculation," Dikeakos writes, continuing "also the dead-end industrial sites of the boom-and-bust cycles of resource dependent economies, and the urban sprawl of the modern city into traditional agricultural reserves" (*Glue Pour* 47). This intention is evident in Ian Wallace's *Pan Am Scan*, Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual*, and Dikeakos' *Instant Photo Information*. This 'scanning' method was a means of maintaining an openness and indeterminacy with respect to the urban and suburban environment. Dikeakos comments, "To participate in the scanning methodology one had to be both observant, open, and, at the same time, disinterested" (*Glue Pour* 42). Jeff Wall talks about this in terms of the impartiality required to maintain the 'dignity,' not of the person portrayed, but rather of the photograph itself. This is a position which admits to skepticism about the humanist aims of art. Speaking of Walker Evans' photos from the 1930s, Wall suggests that photography should refrain from resolute moralism: "By distancing himself from the neediness he had to confront, the desperate poverty of the sharecroppers, in the process of confronting it, he radicalized the documentary style or idea, and made it more complicated than it had been." (*Dignity* 19)

There is another historical arena informing the kinds of experiments with landscape photography that Wall and others were engaged in during this period.

In art circles, active interest in the concept of a 'social landscape' surfaced during the 1960s. In 1966, American photographer Nathan Lyons drew together a group of photo-based artists, including Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander, for an exhibition entitled 'Toward a Social Landscape.' This exhibition was held at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. In the short catalogue which accompanied the exhibition, it is clear that that historical period is still unaccustomed to a type of practice that seeks to draw together elements of snapshot documentary photography with the formalist aims of conventional visual art. Lyons relies on the notion of 'social landscape' as a means of showing that photography can be both an art form and a thought-provoking commentary on social life. This moves expectations about landscape art away from the notion of pristine wilderness and into a definition more inclusive of human social life. Reflecting on the subsequent popularity of the 'social landscape' in a 1997 interview, Lyons talks about the value of vernacular photography: "There is no question that the kind of physical landscape I am attracted to as a photographer is one in which people have interacted with, or left some kind of trace. This landscape resembles an archaeological dig discovering signs that challenge me for their wealth of meanings" (150).

Almost a decade after the *Social Landscape* show, in 1975, the Eastman House hosted an exhibition organized by William Jenkins called *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*. There is a shared sensibility between 'social landscape' and 'new topographics,' which has to do with the ongoing curiosity about documenting the built environment. Topography, which implies a description of place, establishes the intentions behind the type of

photography shown in the *New Topographics* exhibition. These photographers are concerned with observation and documentation, rather than judgment or opinion. One of the starting points for this style is the work of Ed Ruscha, and the books of photographs he began publishing in the early 1960s. The photos, like those of Ruscha, Jenkins argues, have been “stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion” (Jenkins, 5). In this kind of work there is an overarching appearance of deadpan neutrality, regardless of subject matter. The photos exhibit a ‘passive’ role in their framing, which indicates very little interference on the part of the artist. Similar to Ruscha, these artists represent landscape as a built environment rather than an unpopulated wilderness.

Nature does not appear to us free of cultural encoding. The conventions that are applied, by cultural beliefs, values, and research, are what shapes our understanding of nature. For my purposes here, I am using the term nature to refer to the incommensurable totality of what is ‘out there,’ in itself, the natural order of things. By contrast, I use the term landscape to refer to the process of representation - concept, map, image - through which we conceptualize, or imagine, what is ‘out there.’ There are competing forms of landscape, vying for our fidelity: national, vernacular, local etc.. What I would like to do is try to establish what might be meant by the ‘theatrical landscape’. As my discussion so far attests, landscape art presents itself as one of the primary sites of activity and contestation for artists working on the west coast during this period. Their increasing reliance on photo-based practices forms the basis of a critical

commentary on the spectacularization of the natural world. The reasons for their interest in a new typology of nature have to do with the predominance and pervasiveness of the regionalist painting tradition at the time. That is to say, the engagement with the landscape that occurs in the post-68 era is grounded in a critical and deconstructive set of values.

In the Renaissance there was a popular phrase, the world stage, *theatrum mundi*, which can be understood as a defining intersection between art and nature. It turns the world into a stage, and gives earth a means by which it is staged so as to become a visual space meant to be seen. A scene. So there is already a longstanding historical connection, as indicated by *theatrum mundi*, between landscape and theatre, which turns the world into representation. “Landscape, then, was the framing, or staging, of geography” (Chaudhuri 15). Indeed, the term *landscape* itself is said to have first entered the English language during the 16th century, and was initially used to refer not to nature, but to landscape paintings.

In its historical form, as painting, landscape art privileged visuality. When landscape artists turned to photography, during the 19th century, this emphasis would only intensify. Whether painted or photographed, landscape is based on the idea that the natural world can be reproduced, and contained within an image through the scientific discovery of the mechanics of perspective, which tricks the willing human eye into seeing depth on a flat surface. The organization of landscape into the framework offered by perspective reinforced the values and beliefs of modern science, whose foundations are built on the conviction that humans are capable of objectively observing and measuring nature; that is, that

the human observer is distinct from the material world. This goes back to the philosophical premises of Descartes, whose mechanistic model of science allowed for the development of perspective. The perspectival regime imposed on the genre of landscape art presupposes that the spectator spectates from a particular location in relation to the artwork. It demands that the spectator inhabit a fixed position, since the coherence of the picture relies on this relation. This relation, between spectator and landscape, is also one of distance.

The photoconceptualist genre is predicated on a certain degree of mobility. The observation of the landscape, its identification as a featureless zone, such as we see in Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual*, is framed through the car window. This is a strategy which aims to destabilize the secure seat of viewing, the immobility of the fixed perspectival gaze. This way of seeing inevitably inspires cultural assumptions about the mobility of the 'open highway,' the freedom offered by the automobile as the connector which unites dispersed and decentralized suburban sprawl. The way in which the Vancouver photoconceptualists drew from existing myths about the vitality and freedom of being 'on the road' has been discussed by Robert Linsley, who observes that "movement creates narrative, and movement as the master chronotope links the different genres that may appear within a single work both temporally and spatially" (Linsley ms. 93).¹⁵

It was through the example provided by artists such as Robert Smithson that the young Vancouver scene learned this view of the landscape. In essays such as *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, published in *Artforum*

¹⁵ I am grateful to Robert Linsley for making his unpublished manuscript, "Art in British Columbia Draft 2003" available to me.

in 1967 and thus readily available, Smithson showed that the view of a landscape, brought into human awareness, belonged to an expanded literary, scientific and creative consciousness. "I was impressed by the *Passaic* piece" Wall comments in 1972, continuing "I think Kosuth was right in saying that Smithson's articles were his 'art' as much if not more than the pieces they were 'about'" (Wall, *Data* 5).

Linsley observes that Smithson treated the landscape itself as a text and he recognizes that the work produced by Lunden, Dikeakos and Wall took after Smithson in this regard. They roamed through suburbs, taking notes and snapshots, rather than retreating to a cabin in the woods (Linsley, *Landscape* 200). Described in this way, it becomes possible to understand that photoconceptual practice also carries an affiliation with modern cosmopolitan life as it is imagined by Baudelaire in relation to 19th century Paris. The old model of the 'flâneur,' roaming through the streets of Paris, enraptured by the emergent spectacle of consumption, is adapted by photoconceptualism to the environment of the late twentieth century. Instead of the flâneur, the 'moto-flâneur' (Linsley *Landscape* 201). Before turning during the eighties to cibachrome photography to become 'the painter of modern life,' then, Jeff Wall takes a turn as a flâneur, letting his consciousness drift idly through the streets of modernity. Linsley claims that in taking on the adventures of the moto-flâneur these artists were approximating the Situationists; practicing a suburban *dérive* (*Landscape* 201).

In a later section of Linsley's history, in the midst of an analysis of one of Jeff Wall's 1980's pictures, a point is made about Wall's work attempting to bring subjectivity into the objective environment. Linsley notices that in Wall's aesthetic

paradigm “the artist’s own narrative and the ready-made elements of the environment can’t be distinguished” (Linsley ms. 122). This recalls Smithson’s idea about seeing the landscape as a text, and, by implication, human agency as the interpreter of that text.¹⁶ Linsley continues, “This is like location shooting in the cinema, but its theoretical basis is the notion that the world is a hieroglyph that can be ‘read,’ and that this reading is dependent on the artist’s critical intervention in some important way” (Linsley ms. 122).

Although Linsley does not address this point specifically, it is possible to see that this approach to the city goes back as far as Wall’s *Landscape Manual*, that theatricality is implicit in the development of photoconceptualism. The freedom and mobility of driving or riding in a car presents a form of experience different from what one finds while viewing a modern painting. Although not in itself a form of art, there is something to be learned and seen from the industrial landscape as it appears at a distance, framed by the car window. In the late sixties, being *on the road* was picked up by artists and critics as a way of coming to terms with contemporaneous debates about the end of modernism and the autonomous art object.

Photoconceptual experiments with landscape refute the opticality and flatness which Greenbergian modernism had privileged in the realm of visual art. They contribute to the arena of critical scrutiny which has slowly eroded the discursive claims of modernism. Michael Fried, one of Greenberg’s young protégés, made an unwitting contribution to this critical scrutiny when he attacked

¹⁶ For a longer account of Linsley’s take on Smithson, see Robert Linsley “Mirror Travel in the Yucatan: Robert Smithson, Michael Fried, and the new critical drama” *Res Magazine* 37. Spring 2000:7-30.

what he saw as an increasingly pervasive 'theatricality' evident in contemporary art. It is worth considering the anti-theatrical argument advanced in Fried's article, 'Art and Objecthood' (first published in *Artforum* in June 1967) since it has routinely been acknowledged as iconic; a summation of visual modernism which marked the balancing point between modernism and postmodernism (Meyer 85).

In 'Art and Objecthood' Fried relies on the notion of 'theatricality' to mount an impassioned attack on that strain of contemporary art which he calls 'literalist'. Defending the artistic conventions of modernism as 'art', Fried points to the emerging tendency of 'objecthood', which, he complains, "amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre, and theatre is now the negation of art" (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 153). Rather than allowing space in which the art viewer can contemplate the modernist painting, 'literalist' art gets in the way of the beholder because it is "basically a theatrical effect or quality - a kind of *stage* presence" (155). In 'literalist' art a reflexive exchange is established between the viewer and the object. This establishes new grounds for the field of vision, because, as Anne Wagner points out, "the self of the viewer is now both objectified and made cognate to the sculptural object through the agency of sight" (Wagner 14). Blurring the distinction between art and viewer, the gallery space is turned into a situation in which 'objecthood' is established. Fried's concept of 'objecthood' draws on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. "For Fried," James Meyer comments, "'theatre' implied an improper phenomenological relation between the viewer and the work... the theatrical work intruded directly into his or her existence [i.e. that of the spectator]" (Meyer 71).

In 'Art and Objecthood' Fried argues that modernist painting has been increasingly concerned with the attempt to "*defeat or suspend theatre*" (160, italics Fried). His claim is that "theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting ... but with art as such...." (163).¹⁷ What is at stake in the modernist project, for Fried, is the notion of artistic quality, or value. His distinction implies that the artist has an *ethical* responsibility to continue addressing the concerns of modernism. Literalist art, what is known today as Minimalism, resists the modernist impulse toward transcendence and remains entirely too close to everyday life to preserve artistic, or aesthetic, value. It is bereft of the conviction that comes from working inside of the modernist tradition.

Michael Fried was thinking about Minimalist artists such as Robert Morris, who displayed large, geometric solids that could not easily be differentiated as 'art' from their immediate environment. Fried saw these sculptures as 'objects' taking up gallery space with an assertive physical presence that was completed only by the gaze of the spectator. In this way, rather than providing a means of absorption through which the viewer could be liberated from self-awareness (as modernist art had done), their very presence as objects became a reminder to spectators of their own physicality. This problem was further dramatized by artists who went even further to dissolve the boundaries between 'art' and everyday, sensual experience. Experiments in land or environmental art, such as those of Robert Smithson, had no means of sustaining the integrity of a single artistic discipline and, as such, they "represented the apotheosis of all that the Modernist

¹⁷ Fried goes on to elaborate this war, arguing that "*The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre*" (163); that "*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre*" (164) and, finally, that "*The concepts of quality and value ... are meaningful ... only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre*" (164).

critic Michael Fried, with his warnings of art's surrender to 'theatricality,' had feared" (Hopkins 172).

Fried, in wanting art to compel conviction, participates in an idealizing view of art that consciously rejects the contingencies of the sensuous world. He argues for the specificity of the medium and the value of the aesthetic, which transcend the particularities and contradictions of everyday existence. The minimalists, by contrast, wanted to re-establish a framework in which art was more directly engaged with the physical effects of urbanism and mass production. Fried's position seemed to hold to a form of conservative humanism against a rising tide of artistic experimentation. As James Meyer has discussed, his position shows the influence of Stanley Cavell; a mentor and friend of Fried's at Harvard whose work was also informed by an ethical investigation of modernism. Cavell's work defends modernism, as against avant-gardism, arguing that the modernist has "faith in the medium and its internal history" (Meyer 74). Those who are to be dismissed are the ones that break from art tradition entirely, the avant-gardists who dismiss the tradition of artistic autonomy. According to Cavell, then, "modernism's moral motive was its fealty to the medium's integrity; it 'kept faith' with tradition" (Meyer 74). As Fried himself has remarked, it is possible to see that his argument remains consistent with Cavell: "Between Cavell's work and my own there exists a community of concept and purpose which will be apparent to anyone reading us both" (Fried, *Absorption* 182).

Fried's 1967 'Art and Objecthood' article also helps to come to terms with the artistic turn toward being *on the road*. Fried addresses this issue with reference to the American sculptor Tony Smith. In an earlier interview with the

critic, Smith had mentioned taking a recent car ride on the New Jersey Turnpike while it was still under construction. Driving through this artificial landscape was a revealing experience for him, Smith explains in the interview, because it changed his ideas about art, and the limits of aesthetic sensation. Smith was stimulated by the experience of the car ride; it provided him with a new sense of his environment, something different from what art could provide: "The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way to frame it, you just have to experience it" (Smith 760).

Smith's comments are taken up by Fried as a means of warning his readers about the problem of literalist art, which presents an ideology of experience at the expense of the art object itself. And the experience, he says, is inherently - not to mention problematically - theatrical: "Smith's account of his experience on the turnpike," Fried says, "bears witness to theatre's profound hostility to the arts and discloses, precisely in the absence of the object and in what takes its place, what might be called the theatricality of objecthood" (*Art and* 160). Fried, consistent with Smith, recognizes that the ride on the freeway is distinct from art. Where the problem lies is that Smith prioritizes the value of 'experience,' and comes to the conclusion that it diminishes or even negates the experience of modernist painting. Smith replaces the art object with a situation, and reveals the inherently theatrical character of the literalist position. Fried will say that he is *subjected* to the mobility, rush and perspective of the freeway ride, rather than given sufficient distance and autonomy. "What Smith's remarks seem

to suggest is that the more effective - meaning effective *as theatre* - a setting is made, the more superfluous the works themselves become" (160).

Earlier on I mentioned that experiments in land or environmental art, such as those of Robert Smithson, had no means of sustaining the integrity of a single artistic discipline and, as such, they "represented the apotheosis of all that the Modernist critic Michael Fried, with his warnings of art's surrender to 'theatricality,' had feared" (Hopkins 172). The tension between these two positions, Fried and Smithson, helps to show the evolution of photoconceptualist thought. Robert Smithson's own derisive antagonism toward Fried is apparent in a letter to the editor of *Artforum*, in which Smithson mounts an attack on Fried's 'Art and Objecthood' article which is at once scathing, witty and outrageous (Smithson, *Editor* 38). Smithson recognizes in Fried a fear of eternity and endlessness couched as an attack on theatricality. "The terrors of infinity are taking over the mind of Michael Fried. Corrupt appearances of endlessness worse than any known Evil" (*Editor* 38). For Smithson these kinds of polarities are re-united at a conceptual level. He comments at one point, "every war is a battle with reflections. What Michael Fried attacks is what he is" (*Editor* 38). The logic of his approach attempts to draw the antagonism between artist and critic into a larger framework of shared contextual experience.

In a later article Smithson returns to Tony Smith's ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike (Smithson, *Sedimentation* 82-91). In talking about experience, Smithson says, Tony Smith was valuing sensation and differentiating it from the finished work of art. This, according to Smithson, was rather different than simply being 'anti-art.' Smithson argues that Smith "is describing the state of

his mind in the 'primary process' of making contact with matter" (*Sedimentation* 84). He introduces Smith's car ride by way of differentiating between the artist, who is capable of appreciating 'limitlessness,' and the critic, who clings to organizational differentiation. "Most critics," Smithson says, "cannot endure the suspension of *boundaries* between ... the self and the non-self." It soon becomes obvious that the critic he has in mind is Michael Fried: "Michael Fried's shock at Smith's experiences shows that the critic's sense of limit cannot risk the rhythm of dedifferentiation that swings between 'oceanic' fragmentation and strong determinants" (*Sedimentation* 84).

Smithson wants to defend another order of experience, and he sees in the artist a specialized ability to map it; to create art as a guide or *manual* that points toward primary experience. He says "The artist who is physically engulfed tries to give evidence of this experience through a limited (mapped) revision of the original unbounded state" (*Sedimentation* 84). Smithson's association of the artist with the 'truth' of experience draws on the romantic hope that the artist is a shaman or genius, endowed with a spiritual connection to primal experience that has been removed from every other modern person in the world, including the critic. The schema organizing the photoconceptual aesthetic is thus one that relies on art as the self-conscious revision (mapping) of the wealth of consciousness that is part of ordinary life. Contra Fried, Smithson defies the medium specificity of modernist painting and travels restlessly across the social landscape, in all its endlessness and complexity.

The content of art as an interchange between primary and second-order experience, such as Smithson proposes, is a premise constantly rehearsed

throughout Wall's *Landscape Manual*. [Figure 3] As various commentators have observed, it is marked by its engagement with the ideas about conceptual photography that Smithson and others had been developing concurrently. Given the framework of this sort of art-thinking, one is given to wonder what the intended or imagined relationship is between the *Landscape Manual* and its viewer. The artist has offered an important clue in the title of the art work, a *Manual*, thus encouraging the viewer to take up this photo-text as a guide containing instructions for 'using,' 'viewing' or 'inhabiting' the landscape. That is, this type of artwork seems to want an active viewer; its vitality, you could say, depends on the contribution of thought and insight carried to it by its reader. Through directly recorded phenomenological experience, the ideal viewer (reader) can re-unite body and space. Theatricality is the mode relied upon to displace the rarefied and transcendent autonomy of modernist aesthetics. If not activated in this way, then the artwork itself remains perpetually inert, a newsprint booklet whose content remains hidden between unopened covers.

And what kind of 'guide' is it that is available, once the viewer has taken up the offer, and agreed to be involved by opening up the booklet and starting to flip through its pages? Possible activities abound. For instance: "Maybe you could take a motor trip of your own to California, Oregon, Toronto or somewhere with all the colour slides and film *taken in advance?*" (LM, 15) Flipping through these pages, it is quickly evident that the language printed inside the *Landscape Manual* is patently absurd. Its disorganized stream of consciousness cannot be summarized or counted upon to provide a practical guide or critical analysis of 'landscape' or any other subject. It is a 'manual' humorously predicated on its

own inutility; constituted by the evasion of standard interpretive commentary. It wants to refute meaning. For example: "The experience in car rides A & B was one of infinitely expanded attention, an extremely precise kind of awareness, a total lack of the need for the attachment of any kind of 'Meaning' to the rides, the images, the sequences, the connections between all these components" (LM, 6). A booklet equal in length, filled with blank pages and accompanied by a pencil, would offer a more practical opportunity for a viewer to *get involved* with the landscape.

The photos in Wall's *Manual* lack evidence of finesse or artistic care. Page after page, the landscape that they depict is uniformly featureless and unremarkable. They reflect a haphazard quality; portions of the car routinely block the view of the landscape and there is no apparent attempt at compositional balance, framing or dramatic organization. That is to say that these photos must be seen as a reliable expression of 'anti-aesthetic' art. The apparent typology of the photos in the *Manual*, their applicability, is meant to appear random but is in fact carefully chosen by the artist. The topography and climate of the region are not revealed with distinction, but instead appear as background elements. It remains for a resident or visitor of Vancouver to appreciate the effort and skill involved in creating these images of this city, since it is a city whose natural beauty, including mountains and ocean views, are uniquely difficult to miss. Such a viewer can understand the degree of intentionality that has framed these apparently random snapshots. The *Manual* relies on these snapshots, these artless images, to document the feeling of urban space and contribute a

kind of critical awareness which is not available in the typical post-card version of the city.

As the viewer (reader) inches along, the text reveals an obsessive interest in the phenomenological experience of the body as it exists on location. For example: "The object of exercises in real-time functional awareness such as this one is to make the participant fully aware on all levels - *including* the conscious, limited and rational - that the basis of his existence is the greater or lesser awareness of this relationship" (LM 7-8). The artist is in his landscape, experimenting with a form of language that attempts to convey the minute and diverse details of a particular location. This is the quality of attention that a viewer in an art gallery might invest in an artwork: *What am I really seeing? What kind of materials is this made out of? How was this thing constructed?* We can imagine the artist looking at the landscape in this way, as a gallery viewer might look at a work of art. For example: "Stopped at an A&W hamburger drive-in, I noticed that the mirror was registering a fragment of a thick white line painted on the coarse black pavement" (LM 12).

In all these ways the *Manual* works in opposition to the tradition of landscape art, which aims to transport the viewer to a state of exalted or sublime consciousness through the contemplation of distant lands. Its goal is, rather, one of striving to invert that field of social relations which routinely prohibit the spread of aesthetic pleasure beyond the predictable confines of the fine art gallery. The brilliance, wit and tedium contained in the photo-conceptual aesthetic aims at rupturing the safe and predictable function which the landscape is given within the normal experience of everyday life. Consistent with these premises, Wall's

Manual posits the experience of the everyday landscape, rather than any single artwork in a gallery, as the primary site of sanctioned aesthetic pleasure.

Thus we can see that the *Landscape Manual* fits readily within the realm of intentions which govern the creation of conceptual art, or avant-gardism, of the post-68 era. It cannot be understood outside of this framework since it so carefully and ambitiously fails as text, photo or book. The value that I want to extract is the impulse toward theatricality that it continuously inspires and demonstrates. This impulse occurs most significantly in the strategy that I have already pointed out, which is the way that the art-work is governed by a desire to animate its viewer. Clearly, the *Landscape Manual* is not modernist; it works against the idea of the autonomous work of art, resists evaluation according to conventional standards of beauty, and cannot be discussed in terms of a single medium, such as painting. Its affinity, you might say, lies with Smithson rather than Fried.

Theatricality describes the type of landscape that is created by Wall; the way that it is a stage or backdrop rather than a site whose particularity is seen to offer intrinsic value. This is apparent from the outset of the *Manual*, as for example, when the artist declares on the opening page that “[t]he ‘regions’ which make up the content of the ongoing system are of little importance in and for themselves” (LM 1). The particularity of the landscape is abstracted to the level of generic typology. Further along in the text, the landscape again turns into a backdrop: “Yet, it was very clear that what was being charted was not the physical environment itself - at least, it was not only that. What was being charted was my *attention* regarding the streets, the corners, the white pavement lines...”

etc. (LM 8). Certainly, it is not the *Manual* that has transformed the landscape into a defeatured zone or ensured that its inhabitants are estranged and alienated from the 'spirit' of the land. It is not accountable any more than Tony Smith could be held accountable for the rush and thrill inspired by the New Jersey Turnpike.

The *Manual* attests to a process brought on by the forces of development and modernisation. Within this paradigm, every site is a stage-set, every car window a new opportunity to transform land into speculation. Wall's interpretation of the landscape is populated by social relations that begin with the subjective consciousness of the perceiver and extend outwards to include the world. But how is this sociality witnessed, recorded, mapped? Even in its language, above and beyond the photos themselves, the *Landscape Manual* is deeply concerned with the creation and production of the visual image. The text is littered with references to movie cameras, photographs, slides and projectors; with cinematic descriptions of the landscape and absurdist movie treatments. The language is not about vision so much as it is about the technology of vision; the representation of the visual landscape. As for example: "On the seat beside the driver a slide projector throws images of the passing landscape against the side window, on the dashboard, on the padded ceiling inside the car, or into the rear-view mirror. Interspersed with these landscapes might be images of meals eaten in restaurants, sex acts carried out in cars similar or identical to this one, etc." (LM 23).

This discussion attests to the way in which Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual* conforms to the photoconceptual imagination of the late sixties. Wall's own account of this period, while acknowledging the formative place of

photoconceptualism, locates its critical claims around the idea of a Vancouver 'counter-tradition.' 'Counter-tradition' is a term which bears examination for a number of reasons. As I aim to show in the following chapter, I think that Wall employs the counter-tradition as a rhetorical displacement of the radical aims of sixties conceptualism. It is also the term through which the artist offers, most directly, a narrative account of British Columbia's art history, as well as his own place within it.

In retrospect, it has become apparent that the point at which Wall's 'counter-tradition' enters into public discussion, that is, in a 1990 lecture about Ken Lum, is also the historical moment when the marginalized 'counter-tradition' begins to establish itself as the new *modus operandi* in Vancouver. It was after 1990 that the 'counter-tradition' would become firmly entrenched as the dominant 'tradition.' Chapter Two traces the emergence of the Vancouver counter/tradition as both a product of, and a reaction against, the political aims of photoconceptualism.

Chapter Two

Counter-Tradition in Vancouver Art

Well art is shit and paintings's not it
Strange perspective from where I sit
Scratchy lines traced on the ground
Hairy trees hanging upside down

I'm a locator baby ...

'The Locator' by the UJ3RK5¹

Chapter One explored some of the ways in which the photo-conceptual experiments characteristic of artistic practice in Vancouver emerge in response to the perceived limits of Greenbergian modernism, contributing to the historical development of the 'post-medium condition'. In this chapter I focus on the transition from the aims and concerns of photoconceptualism to those of the artistic 'counter-tradition' in Vancouver. Alongside a study of representative artworks, I examine some of the texts, written by Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Robert Linsley, which have best articulated the aims and intentions of this counter-tradition.

One of the ways I have found to paraphrase the movement between photo-conceptualism and counter-tradition is by reflecting on the double appearance of the *Locator* in Vancouver's cultural scene. In the first instance it appears as a photo-conceptual artwork, produced by local artist Duane Lunden,

¹ The UJ3RK5 released one LP; a self-titled album recorded in Vancouver in 1979 and distributed on the Quintessence label in 1980. The songs on the album are: *The Anglican*, *The Locator*, *Eisenhower & the Hippies*, and *Booty Dread*.

and displayed in a 1970 exhibition. In the second instance the *Locator* appears as part of the 1979 repertoire of the Vancouver art band, the UJ3RK5 ('you-jerks'), whose members include Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Rodney Graham among others. In the previous chapter I mentioned the 1970 *Four Artists* exhibition (i.e. Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Tom Burrows, Duane Lunden) as a characteristic example of photoconceptual art. Lunden's *Locator*, one of the works in this exhibition, appropriated a mapping device from an atlas of Croydon as a frame of reference which could be used to identify potential earthworks in and around Vancouver. The work represents a serious aesthetic engagement with the geographical study of the urban landscape, similar to that of Robert Smithson.

The later appearance of the *Locator* echoes Lunden's radicalized aims, bringing them into another situation. Wall's vocals tell you to "check in your manual if you get confused ... my little gizmo set you right real quick... I'm a locator baby...." In both instances the artists are concerned with identifying, determining, or 'locating' the environment in which they are situated. When Lunden's *Locator* is recovered by the UJ3RK5 in 1979 however, the analysis is played back outside the gallery, in a format intended to address an audience who has come to expect the tenor of anti-establishment contestation as one among many forms of simulation and entertainment which comprise their cultural landscape.

Photo-conceptualism is thus a distinct yet formative aspect of the counter-tradition. It is part of a wider shift in the artistic imagination of the time, which moves from an ethos of 'genius loci' (spirit of place) to one of being 'on location.' That is to say, the evolution of artistic sensibility which occurs during this time has

to do with how artists come to know, and further, to represent, the place that they inhabit. The local enters into a phase of reconsideration, owing to the many forces of cultural modernization that are felt from the 1960s on. Rather than looking to the natural wilderness as a source of immanent knowledge, artists turn to the city, establishing a sense of the local through the contingent and contradicted representations of transnational urban culture.

With respect to Vancouver, the phase of artistic development which moves from photo-conceptualism to counter-tradition can be understood as a process of incorporating the adversarial spirit of the bohemian west coast and knowingly repositioning it inside the familiar codes of the spectacular image. For Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall, as for many others of this period, it is the increasing pressure of the culture industry that made the singular task of painting appear impossible, and it is this pressure that remains the justification behind their increasingly fervent embrace of photography and film. Through a process of careful photographic engineering, the particularities of place, as seen in their work, become staged episodes in the ongoing drama of a disenchanted modernity.

I take the term 'counter-tradition' from "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art - A Deeper Background for Ken Lum's Work," a public lecture presented by Jeff Wall in Rotterdam in 1990. Towards the end of the lecture (published the following year) Wall describes the beginnings of the counter-tradition. He says: "In my essay in the catalogue for [Ken] Lum's show, I claimed that [Rodney Graham's] 'Illuminated Ravine', along with Lum's furniture sculptures, first presented in 1978 and 1979, were the indicators of a new

direction in the art discourse of Vancouver a counter-tradition, long in preparation, surfaced.”² Wall thus dates the emergence of the counter-tradition to “1978 or 1979”, an historical moment that coincides with his own return to the pictorial after various experiments with language and a variety of media formats.

According to Wall’s lecture then, the decade prior to 1978 is not part of the counter-tradition; it is the formative period leading up to its emergence. This periodization is not inconsequential; it is significant because it leaves open the question of how photoconceptualism, which dates back to the 1960s, relates to Wall’s idea of the ‘counter-tradition.’ Configuring the transition from the iconoclastic conceptualist experiments of the sixties to the ‘restoration’ of the pictorial in the seventies remains highly fraught. This is because the transition carries an implicit claim about the shifting socio-political function of art in a society which must contend with the onslaught of postmodernity and its fanatical reproduction of the image.

Artistic practices developing during the 1970s attest to an increasing interest in the dramatic and narrative possibilities offered by the lessons of the cinematic gaze. In Chapter One I outlined a few of the ways in which Wall’s *Landscape Manual* moves in the direction of cinema. It may even be possible to suppose that photo-conceptualism, by virtue of its concern with a critique of representation, played a crucial role in inspiring Wall’s curiosity about the various aspects of cinematic production.

Alongside the *Landscape Manual*, another early photo-conceptual work by Wall -- *Cine-Text (Excerpt)*, produced in Vancouver and London in 1971 -- also

² “Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art - A Deeper Background for Ken Lum’s Work.” Witte de With, 1991:80; abbreviated here as CT.

confirms Wall's increasing interest in cinema. The *Cine-Text* is a document with two columns of text which has photos inserted at various points.³ The text on the left side is a sequence which reads like a film treatment, describing the interior of a factory filled with crew men at work. The text on the right side is a transcription of the proposed 'audio' accompaniment, a thought-piece about artistic labour. A single page of this art-work appeared in Lippard's *Six Years*, an important compilation of conceptual art events and documents from that era. In the excerpt which appears in *Six Years* this column 'concludes' (or, more precisely, is cut off) with the comment "the landscape is the portrait of a critical terrain, it is its physical reality and its metaphor. At sites in this landscape are constructed events which are vast and pure as senseless..." (Wall, as quoted in Lippard 1973, 214). Once again, then, text and photos are used as a site for staging conceptual explorations about the limits and possibilities of visual representation.

Ian Wallace took photos to accompany Wall's 'cine-text,' and in a short essay he reflects on their growing interest in a theatrical landscape at that time: "But by 1970 the sense of 'location' in its specificity and 'tabula rasa' led us to sense a kind of future 'movement'. These locations seemed to act as a stage or backdrop to some sort of dramatic action This was the potential, if forbidden, direction of our work" (*Film in Progress* n.p.). At the time this aesthetic direction had been 'forbidden' by the discourse of Greenbergian modernism, which argued for the separation of visual art from dramatic content in the name of greater self-reflexive value. As Lucy Soutter explains, "Greenberg's own position on photography was dismissive; he only wrote one extended piece on photography -

³ The version of the *Cine-text* that I am referring to here is from the Ian Wallace Archives.

a scathing review of a 1946 Edward Weston exhibition” (Soutter 1999). In that review Greenberg had summarized his attitude by stating that "Photography is the most transparent of the art mediums devised or discovered by man. It is probably for this reason that it proves so difficult to make the photograph transcend its almost inevitable function as document, and act as a work of art as well” (Greenberg as quoted in Soutter).

Photo-conceptualism, because it relied on the photograph as a kind of pure material document, was consistent with modernism in that it, too, was grounded in a skepticism regarding the literary, allegorical or narrative aspects of visual representation. It is unsurprising, then, that artists such as Wallace and Wall would hesitate before imagining the turn from photoconceptualism to the dramatic picture: “At the time it seemed that exploring the dramatic possibilities would be a gauche and picturesque debilitation of the high art values we sought. These inhibitions kept us from working in film earlier...” (Wallace *Film in Progress* 1974) By 1973 however, experimentation with the concerns of photo-conceptualism had led the artists away from documentary-type photography and into the potential offered by the cinema.

In 1973 Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Rodney Graham went on to collaborate together to make a narrative film: “It wasn’t until 1973, by which time the full sense of previous achievements had become internalized, that we felt a filmic expression of the narrative potential in the ‘locations’ was not only possible but necessary” (Wallace 1974). Further on in the report Wallace mentions his own involvement with the film project: “When Jeff Wall returned from London in June 1973 we began working toward the film, and this was our starting point. However,

we had to go beyond mere documentation of the 'spaces of alienation'. We felt it necessary to embody these meanings in a fully creative and 'fictional' work" (Wallace 1974). Reflecting on their collaboration years later, in 2003, Ian Wallace comments "Jeff was a very dominant dog on that one, he really had to have it his way. Jeff and Rodney and I met probably daily for a couple of months... working out what it was going to be about, on the script" (interview 14 Oct. 2003). Although their film was eventually completed, the artists decided not to release or show it publicly.⁴ Wallace explains "Some disagreements came up between all of us. I just felt that the quality of that film conceptually just wasn't up to scratch. Some of the images were quite strong and arresting, but it wasn't enough to carry a film. I think Jeff in the end felt that way too" (Wallace interview). While their aesthetic development thus evidently incorporates the cinema, all three artists stopped short of moving out of the world of visual art into that of the film industry. Rather, as we will see, the parameters of visual art would expand to incorporate the potential of narrative film.

During the same period as he participated in the collaborative film project, Ian Wallace also produced a large scale photo-based artwork called *La Melancolie de la Rue* (1973). [Figure 4] This is Wallace's first large-scale, hand-coloured photo-mural and it remains the most poignant example of an artistic imagination deeply engaged in transforming the ideals of bohemia into content for high art. *La Melancolie* is a photographic triptych which contrasts three

⁴ Wallace has indicated that this film remains in his archive and has not been publicly viewed (personal interview). Jeff Wall has not acknowledged this film as part of his artistic oeuvre. The standard chronology of Rodney Graham's work states: "Graham, Wallace, and Wall receive funding from the Canada Council for the Arts toward the production of a film. Inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), the film is intended as a 'structuralist take on Hitchcock' with a female kleptomaniac as the central character" (Arnold. *A Little Thought*, 183).

conflicting modes of sociality through contrasting images of architecture. On the left side is a snapshot of the inaugural ceremony of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, standing in as a prime example of the institutions of bourgeois culture. In the centre of the picture a suburban development is newly built on land that has been clear-cut. On the road in the foreground of the photo, a family scouts the new development in their Volkswagen bug. On the far right side of the picture, a photo documents a bohemian squat in the form of a flimsy shack constructed at the edge of the ocean.

Chris Dikeakos discusses *Melancolie* as an important transitional work in Wallace's development, because it signifies a departure from conceptualism and a move toward the literary potential of art. (Dikeakos, *Wallace* 10) "Wallace's interest in the symbolic critique of the urban image and his interest in semiotics" Dikeakos writes, "provides a structure for an interpretation of the three conflicting images in *La Melancolie de la Rue*" (10). Here we see institutional, corporate architecture, domestic/suburban architecture, and the marginalized squatter shack.

Jeff Wall argues for the significance of this artwork as a landmark on the road between photoconceptualism and the counter-tradition. In his account, it belongs to the radicalism of the seventies avant-garde. In an essay published in 1988, Wall interprets Ian Wallace's art according to what he sees as the two antithetical aspects of this radicalism, painting and photography.⁵ Painting is associated with the monochrome and negation; with artists such as Robert Ryman, Niele Toroni, Brice Marden, while photography is associated with

⁵ Jeff Wall "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome in the Work of Ian Wallace 1967 - 1982".

documentary, political content, with artists such as Hans Haacke, Chris Burden and Allan Sekula. These two traditions appear antithetical but both seemed to offer possibilities for the recovery of the aims of the avant-garde.

The period around 1968 is marked by a resurgence of belief that vanguardist culture can be recovered, and for Wall the art of Ian Wallace demonstrates this hope. It does so by positing a reconciliation of these two tendencies. What is brought together in Wallace is a solidarity between the autonomy of the aesthetic and the polemical, politicized agenda of productivism. As Wall argues in the essay, it was commonly understood in the early 1970s that the bond between these tendencies was their critical stance against the culture industry, and the institutionalisation of modernism. The inherently productivist and documentary nature of photography had made photography appealing to vanguardism since the 1920s. Throughout the century, abstract, monochromatic painting had come to represent the refusal of the spectacularizing forces of the culture industry and of the image produced through mechanical reproduction. Modernist painting can be said to reduce the pictorial function in order to become radically differentiated from the spectacle produced by the mass media.

Wall draws attention to the historical pattern of Wallace's production, which begins with painted monochromes in the late 1960s and then turns to photo-based formats between 1970 and 1982. In 1982, Wallace returns to the monochrome. Wall is interested in the 'media phase' that Wallace goes through during the 1970s. *Melancolie de la Rue*, both photograph and painting, is one of the characteristic works of the period, and Wall argues that it is the work "which

most closely approaches the norms of radical photoconceptualism” (Wall ‘Melancolie’ 67).

Melancolie plays with the decisions that one makes about living in, or away, from the city. It positions suburbanization against bohemia, contrasting two characteristic kinds of domestic architecture. The ‘bohemian’ photo on the right side of the picture, which was taken on the Dollarton mudflats, references the history of the west coast counterculture. Wallace himself visited there, occupying the cabin of artist Tom Burrows, and earlier on this region had also been home to Malcolm Lowry. For Wallace, the ideals of bohemia, as lived and expressed by figures such as Baudelaire or Kerouac, remain important: “*On the Road* is a book I read every three to four years,” Wallace comments (Wallace interview). He sees the bohemian as the crossing of class boundaries, “as the working class artist, poet, aspiring to the imaginary free state of the aristocrat” (Wallace, 17 Oct. 2003). This is an ethos in which life which is dedicated, with the fullest commitment, to the expression of an art counter to petty materialism or repressive bourgeois conventions.

For Wall, *Melancolie* also represents the emerging logic of the counter-tradition, which moves from a lyrical and expressive response to the natural world toward the built environment of the city. In his *Counter-Tradition* essay, Wall emphasizes the work’s significance, explaining that “[t]his work really starts whatever new tradition one might claim exists in Vancouver, one which wishes to remake the image of the city” (77). Photography is used to address the landscape not as the natural beauty of the forest but of the suburban settlement for which the forest has been razed. Wall explains that “Wallace’s work takes the

lyrical, pastoral tradition as its basic target. It emphasizes the conflicts involved in the making of a city, and outlines a kind of urban geography which has affinities with various trends of critical urbanism of the 60s and 70s” (77).

What is unique about the Vancouver counter-tradition is the way in which conceptual art was put to use. In other places, Wall says, it becomes the basis of deconstruction; in Vancouver conceptualism inspires a return to modern pictorial forms. In this way the Vancouver counter-tradition, Wall says, would come to emphasize “the potential of images as forms with a legitimate truth-content” (77). The Vancouver counter-tradition will return to modern pictorialism, to “the modes in which formal experimentation was combined with a program of critical realism, a kind of painting of modern life, carried out in a dialectically removed relationship to painting by means of its replacement with photography” (77). This is a well-rehearsed argument, one which is consistent with some of the critical essays written in support of Jeff Wall’s mature work.⁶ In this case the argument is used to position the Vancouver counter-tradition as the next logical step in a continuous tradition of modern pictorial form. It also indicates that the counter-tradition is a conscious return to the older problematics of landscape art after the iconoclasm of photoconceptual art; it signifies a willingness to explore the fixed perspectival regime which was established during the Renaissance.

Wall’s version of regional art history is constructed according to binary logic; the colonial period of settlement, and the artistic conventions established during that time, are identified as part of the inherited ‘tradition’ with which Wall and his contemporaries must contend. This tradition, exemplified by the work of

⁶ See Chapter Five for a review of recent critical debates about Jeff Wall’s art.

figures such as Emily Carr and Jack Shadbolt, is that of the lyrical landscape, which draws on aspects of romanticism, particularly in its relation to nature. Wall builds his account of 'tradition' on the work of Robert Linsley, who began, around 1990, to write about the social history of regional landscape art in British Columbia. Linsley was a student of Wall, and was associated with the Vancouver School, as both artist and writer, during the eighties. To be clear, however, it is Wall and not Linsley who frames the art history of the B.C. region in terms of a polarity between tradition and counter-tradition; and this is a distinction to which I will shortly return.

In a 1991 essay Linsley provides a brief overview of regional art history, starting with the paintings of Emily Carr.⁷ He explains that the topographic landscape tradition established by military surveyors during the late 19th century was shattered by the modernism of Emily Carr, which explores the unity of feeling through images of nature. In Carr's work there is no actual union of nature, but rather "fantasies of such a union, and as such they acquire their character as protests against an increasingly cold and denatured world" (Linsley 1991, 230). Her paintings become a subjective reflection on the rampant industrialism of colonial settlement on the west coast during the first decades of the twentieth century. Carr's work draws from the romantic critique of modernity in that it is an expressionistic form of social protest against the principle of utility established by colonial culture. As commentators have observed, it also involves a sublimated eroticism, a "generalized sexual energy" (Linsley 1991, 231).

⁷ Robert Linsley. "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia" *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*. Ed. Stan Douglas. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991:225-245. This essay was originally presented in a lecture series.

The most significant aspect of Carr's work is her identification of native culture. The presence of native life in the pictures conflicts with dominant ideology, which imagined an unpopulated landscape ready for colonial settlement. Linsley argues that Carr's painting is shaped by her historical era, both by the myth of the 'noble savage' and by the idea that native culture was dying out (Linsley 1991, 232). According to Linsley, Carr maintains two utopian motifs: that the settlement of land has yet to be finalized, and that nature and culture can be reconciled. These two themes are ongoing in B.C. landscape and as such Carr achieves her historical importance as "the highest reflection reached in the developing phase of the BC economy" (Linsley 1991, 232). Carr's colonial context draws attention to the exploitation of the environment, "a moral crisis to be overcome by total commitment to her subjectivity, a crisis later spiritualized out of existence by art historians" (Linsley 1991, 243).

In the tradition of regional painting, the art of Jack Shadbolt is an influential successor to that of Emily Carr. His paintings are exemplary of the period of lyrical painterly abstraction which flourishes in the post-war era. Shadbolt's later work followed Emily Carr, returning to the landscape of British Columbia to reflect on the existential catastrophe signaled by the human destruction of the environment. Shadbolt's paintings rely on motifs taken from nature, such as trees or butterflies, as symbols of existential destruction and potential transformation. This expressionist style has become known as 'inner' or 'lyrical' landscape.⁸ Shadbolt's sense of artistic creativity was deeply intertwined with the way that he inhabited the west coast landscape. For Shadbolt, Vancouver remained distant

⁸ See Scott Watson. *Jack Shadbolt*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.

from established metropolitan centres, a city still touched by the mystery of the wilderness. He identified himself and his work with a sense of place; as he commented in 1986, "I want to be in on the future of Vancouver. I want to be a Vancouver artist first, to belong to Vancouver as ... Michelangelo to Florence" (Shadbolt 1986, 41).

The First Nations play a role in the landscape as it is depicted by both Carr and Jack Shadbolt. In their paintings there is a mythologized association between native and land, a product of conflicting colonial attitudes toward nature and land settlement. "As long as native people continue to walk and talk and make their claim to the land they will be, for whites [sic], at once a witness to their guilt and a hope of redemption" (Linsley 1991, 237). Both environmental and native groups enforce this romanticized idea that First Peoples have a special closeness to the land and, according to Linsley, this is how the notion of 'the spirit of place' or *genius loci* is mobilized and becomes visible under modern conditions. In art history, the accepted interpretation of painters such as Carr and Shadbolt confirms that the appearance of native motifs in art evokes and confirms 'genius loci'. From the vantage point of a social art history interested in the ideological function of art, this interpretation is problematic. Linsley, for instance, argues that these kinds of paintings evoke and then bury deeply conflictual relations to nature, which continue on today in the form of unresolved land claims. "The more art concerns itself exclusively with raw nature, with the wilderness, the less it really tells us about the landscape" (Linsley 1991, 229).

While recognizing its empathetic response to environmental devastation, Linsley discounts this kind of work on political grounds, arguing that it uses art to

provide an ideological mask which perpetuates images of the beauty and inexhaustibility of nature (234). The 'wilderness' has all but disappeared, he points out; it has been integrated into the industrialized landscape through a park system which manages it for the purposes of tourism and recreation. By the late 1980s Shadbolt's paintings reflect this sense of anxious climax, an approaching finality. The environment has been devastated, and in turn so has the artistic tradition that represented it. "But this Arcadian holocaust is also a traumatic shock for landscape painting, for how can it continue under these conditions?" (Linsley 1991, 236)

In order to understand the apparent 'end' of the lyrical landscape tradition in the B.C. region, it is necessary to return to the 1960s, the period in which the modes of regional art production were drastically transformed. While these transformations in art are not reducible to a single mode of production, they can be seen to inaugurate a new 'post-medium' sensibility that is tied up with the politics of the counter-culture. Artists of the time turned to new modes of production including pop art, minimalist painting and sculpture, experimental media art, and variations of conceptualism that include environmental art and photography. It has often been noted that the climate of art production in Vancouver during this period was characterized by a pervasive sense of utopian possibility.⁹ Indeed, the archives are filled with reviews and journalistic commentaries which lend force to just such a characterization. The utopian

⁹ Andrea Anderson "Tom Burrow's 'Sculpture of Concrete, Sculpture of Dreams' or, looking for the utopian in the everyday" U.B.C. M.A. thesis, 1997; Sharla Sava "As if the Oceans were Lemonade: the performative vision of Robert Filliou and the Western Front" U.B.C. M.A. thesis, 1996.

imagination of this period, sometimes thought of as the 'neo-avant-garde', was radically oriented toward the transformation of everyday life.

One of the Vancouver formations fueled by such optimism was the Intermedia Society (1967-1972), similar in spirit to the American group EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology).¹⁰ The possibility of re-orienting technology toward humanistic and creative ends, in particular emergent communication media such as television and fax machines, played an important role in Intermedia. It is not difficult to see the work of NETCO in this context. A newspaper headline of the time, referring to a federal grant of \$40,000 awarded to Intermedia, reads "City Visualized as Media Capital - Vancouver: communications capital of the world. This is the dream of a group of local artists, educators, writers, engineers and architects."¹¹ Another review, a year later, summed up the situation proclaiming that "the formation of Intermedia was a bold and visionary move. There is no doubt now that it has proved its worth and begun to reveal its unbounded scope for the future. It has put this city in the vanguard of a new era of human activity and aspiration."¹²

While riding the wave of media and telecommunication experiments, the press often emphasized the dynamism of the art scene itself. In 1967 Philip Leider - then editor of *Artforum* - referring to Vancouver artists such as Roy Kiyooka, Iain Baxter, Gary Lee Nova and Michael Morris, commented "Wherever a group of artists as talented as the ones discussed above are gathered, there is a 'scene'" (Leider 1967). A year later Barry Lord concluded a brief survey of the

¹⁰ For an overview of Intermedia, see Catherine Rebecca Fairbairn "A Short Trip on Spaceship Earth: Intermedia Society, 1967-1972" U.B.C. M.A. thesis, 1991.

¹¹ *Vancouver Sun*. 15 Apr. 1967.

¹² Norman Wilson. *The Province*. 8 Dec. 1968.

art scene in Vancouver by saying “[T]he extent of new gallery activities, the potential of Intermedia and the quality of work now being done by the growing number of younger artists all suggest that Vancouver is at last emerging as a focus of vital growth in contemporary Canadian art” (Lord 119). That same year a writer for the *Toronto Star* began his review of Michael Morris’ work by saying “Right now, Vancouver is *the* scene in Canada for painting, sculpture, light shows, environments. It’s not happening in Toronto and it’s not happening in Montreal. It *is* happening in Vancouver” (Rockman 63). Tony Emery, director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, explained in a 1968 issue of *Art International*, “[t]o put it in a nutshell, Vancouver seems at the moment to have a virtual monopoly of the young talent in the country” (Emery 38). Emery speculated that the Vancouver scene had flourished because, unlike other Canadian cities, its aesthetic influences were culled from places as distant from one another as Los Angeles, London and New York. Enthusiasm about the Vancouver scene had climaxed around 1970. A review that year in *Art in America* is prefaced with a comment by one critic which says “I had read about the energetic art scene in Vancouver, and a number of critics from New York and London had told me that there were some lively and adventurous artists working there. Nevertheless, on my recent visit to Vancouver, I was amazed at the amount and the quality of esthetic experimentation to be found in a city that always seemed quite remote and that is no larger than Cincinnati.”¹³

Jeff Wall was still a student at U.B.C. during the late sixties, and his early art production reflects the context of this ‘expanded arts’ scene. This scene is one

¹³ Peter Selz with Alvin Balkind “Vancouver: Scene and Unscene” *Art in America* 50/1, January 1970; 122.

of the means by which to interpret his *Landscape Manual*, both in terms of its commitment to process (rather than object) and in terms of its technologized theatricality. In later years, however, Wall would be clear to distance his work from the technological imagination of the Intermedia sensibility. By 1991, when he was involved in actively constructing this period of Vancouver's history, Wall's work was well on its way to becoming established according to terms which remain aesthetically and politically distant from the neo-avant-garde of the sixties. Wall develops the notion of 'counter-tradition' to serve this purpose; for as much as the concept is intended as a refusal of the tradition of previous generations of lyrical modernism such as Carr and Shadbolt, it is also intended to refute the political imagination of the neo-avant-garde. In the *Counter-Tradition* essay Wall argues that the dynamic period of experimentation that took place in the late sixties, while representing a break from certain beaux-arts conventions, does not signal the end of the romantic tradition. This is because, Wall argues, the lyrical-romantic tradition informs all the art which, in the 1970s and 80s, is attached to environmentalism and ecology. For Wall, these experiments are bound to tradition and remain too caught up in "the romanticism of nature and the Native". (Wall, CT 75)

It is important to understand that in Vancouver the technological utopianism envisioned by the artists involved in and around Intermedia often functioned within the realm of a broad ecological imagination. Rather than perpetuating or extenuating the familiar dichotomy between 'technology' and 'nature,' the advent of postindustrial systems and telecommunications technology were seen by artists as bringing them together; a means of reconciling the

unfortunate consequences that industrialization had brought about. This paradoxical logic is well-expressed in one article from the 1970 *“Ecology and Art Issue”* of *artscanada*. Beginning with a dramatic description of the “ecological revolution” taking place as a result of human technological growth, the author, drawing on theories from Buckminster Fuller, goes on to describe the crucial contribution of art.¹⁴ Making reference to artists including Intermedia, Iain Baxter, Gary Lee Nova, Robert Smithson and John Cage, the author explains that “[r]ecent trends in ecological art, systems esthetics, and controlled real-time information environments have brought the frontier of art into concert with the sciences.” He continues, saying, “[a]rtistic activity during the last five years, known variously as land art, earthworks, conceptual art, process art, environmental art, has been characterized, however tentatively, by a common concern with interacting ecologies, whether social, biological or geosocial” (Youngblood 43).

Reliance on this type of ecological discourse suggests that the intermedial art scene of the time, while widely known for its utopian embrace of technology, had a decidedly countercultural orientation, encompassing an awareness of the social and environmental impact of technologies governed by modern industrial organization. While massive waves of protest swept across Europe and North America during the 1960s, the 1970s saw a subsequent embrace of subculture and alternative lifestyle movements, fostered in no small part by the apparent failure of ‘60s strategies and by the visible retrenchment of the status quo. In Vancouver, situated at the edge of the Pacific ocean along a coastal mountain

¹⁴ Gene Youngblood “World Game: the artist as ecologist” *artscanada* 27:4 (Aug. 1970) 42-48.

range, the question of political and artistic alternatives to mainstream culture were frequently shaped by the imposing presence of the natural environment.

Ian Wallace was teaching at U.B.C. in 1968, where he was familiarizing students with these new currents in art. Jeff Wall explains the transmission of ideas, the exchange of teacher and student which was to establish the foundation of the Vancouver School: "I was one of those students; a couple of years later, Rodney Graham was another." Wall goes on, explaining that "Wallace was, alongside Iain Baxter of the NE Thing Co, one of the principal publicizers and protagonists of these contestatory aesthetics, aesthetics which implied a decisive break with beaux-arts attitudes" (Wall, CT 76). Wall explains that it was this profusion of media art practice that created the framework for the kind of conceptual photography that Wallace and others, including himself, were doing.

Although originating in conceptual photography, the counter-tradition is also a departure; a turn away from experimental landscape practices, such as the N.E. Thing Co., that had attempted to invent multiple viewing positions in order to refute the limitations of single point perspective. The counter-tradition will gradually be seduced by the singular mechanical eye. For Jeff Wall, it is the art of Ian Wallace that represents the first legitimate turn away from the lyrical tradition. For his use of irony and aloofness, Ian Wallace is "perhaps the ultimate counter-shamanistic artist in the history of B.C. art" (Wall, CT 75). In Wall's account of history, "Wallace's paintings are the clearest mark of an anti-lyrical sensibility of that moment, and I think it can be said that the streams of tradition and counter-tradition in Vancouver divide with the appearance of his work" (Wall, CT 76).

For Wall the counter-tradition signals a break from the romantic orthodoxy of the lyrical landscape. As I pointed out earlier on, this 'break' is not associated with the sixties but is, rather, located in the late 1970s. It is when, Wall explains, "Ken Lum enters the picture, and does so in close connection with artists like myself, Wallace and Rodney Graham, people who had consistently opposed the local orthodoxy and looked for methods outside it" (Wall, CT 78). In this account we can see that all the radicalism of the sixties has receded to the background; it is granted the status of gestation. Wall argues that what is *new* in Vancouver can be identified as that group of artists who have been "rigorously alienated from the whole idea about the image of nature and the city which dominated - and continues to dominate - Vancouver culture" (Wall, CT 79). This group of artists has defined another approach to nature, one that eclipses the lyrical inner landscape tradition that has dominated since the 1950s. Wall goes on to say that this reworked image of nature is best illustrated by the work of Ian Wallace; especially *Melancolie de la Rue* (1973) and *Lookout* (1979).

Lookout is a large photo-mural; a panoramic view, 48' long, of figures set in a typically west coast landscape. [Figure 5] People are scattered across a grassy promontory that looks out over the open ocean, while in the distance a dense line of forest populates the horizon. Wallace photographed this image with a large format camera, a 4x5, so as to provide sufficient data for its scale, which is almost life size. Like *Melancolie*, the picture is both photo and painting; a composite of photos originally shot in black and white, subsequently hand-coloured by the artist.

In terms of its reliance on natural motifs, *Lookout* participates in the conventions of regional landscape painting, bringing to mind the historical example of artists such as Emily Carr or Jack Shadbolt. Like Carr and Shadbolt, it participates in the myths of west coast living. *Lookout* is an island landscape; that of Helliwell Park on Hornby Island, one of the small islands populating the channel between Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia. Hornby Island, like many of the coastal Gulf Islands, is a symbol of bohemian ideals. Since the 1960s, these islands have attracted a population interested in dropping out of hyper-modern city life. As Wallace was aware, Hornby Island evokes the mythos of the counter-culture: ecological sensitivity, arts and crafts, and lifestyles that run counter to the imperatives of rationalisation and instrumental thinking. Here we have the *spirit of place* evoked twice over, in the history of the site and the genre of landscape art.

Wallace employs a number of formal strategies, however, so as to remain at a critical distance from romanticizing the landscape. In his picture, nature becomes spectacle. This is accomplished by the way that the figures in the landscape have been positioned. Through a contrived and artificial arrangement, they enforce the act of 'looking out' at nature. In fact, the landscape is empty; the people that appear in *Lookout* have been photographed in the studio and 'dropped in' to the picture. The groupings have been carefully 'blocked,' in the manner of the stage. Through pose and gesture, their organisation evokes the history of landscape painting; Titian, Poussin, Bellini, Manet.

There is a striking degree of sociality in this landscape, for as much as it is about nature, it is also a drama of social relations. This is not a question of a

documentary recording, since the people in *Lookout* are not identified in the manner of traditional portraiture. The identity of social relations that Wallace's picture evokes has more to do with the generic social type, who, operating at a remove from nature, inhabits the gestures and poses encoded by society. These are groupings that suggest 'the good life': picnics, leisure, flirtation and dialogue. A woman leans back, invitingly, on the grass while a man gazes at her from a distance; another man stands alone, lost in private reverie.

The picture is resistant to natural beauty in several ways. The figures in the landscape don't quite fit. Their unreality, their fiction, is confirmed not only by their studied poses, but also by the way that the light falls, by the evidence of collage which remains around their contours. Even the panorama of the land is discontinuous, broken in several parts. As we can see, there is intention in this awkwardness. Wallace is relying on the technique of collage to impart a level of critical viewing, to prevent the viewer from being absorbed into the drama of the picture. He doesn't want to create a seamless, monumental picture. That is to say, the work is highly theatrical. The title, *Lookout*, is thus imbued with a double meaning. 'Looking' encompasses the relation of the figure to the landscape, but also, of the spectator to the picture.¹⁵ Art and nature both, detached from naturalism and made visible in the realm of spectacle.

Something further should be said about the figures, which, while inhabiting the role of anonymous social types, are not hired actors. As was common at that time in Vancouver, Wallace relied on the help of friends and colleagues to pose for his pictures. Thus we can see Rodney Graham, Jeff Wall, Kitty Byrne, Colin

¹⁵ This is discussed by William Wood. "The Patient Wait: Ian Wallace" *Vanguard* (Sept. 1988) 10-15.

Griffiths and Wallace himself, among the figures in the landscape. At the time *Lookout* was staged these five 'actors' were also active members of the alternative art-school band, the UJ3RK5. [Figure 6] Their self-titled LP, photographed by Jeff Wall at Ian Wallace's studio, has the band appearing in the same self-conscious and contrived style as *Lookout*. As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, one of the UJ3RK5 songs, *The Locator*, references Duane Lunden's contribution to the 1969 *Four Artists* show, calling up memories from the early photo-conceptual days.¹⁶ In this way it is possible to see *Lookout* as a glimpse of shared terrain, the confident display of the social coterie which will enable the discourse of the Vancouver School counter-tradition to come into being during this period. The intimacy of the relationships between these figures, however, as with the nature of each individual character, lives beyond the realm of what can be represented. A third possible level of meaning in the title, then; *Lookout!* as an exhortation to the future.

In his Counter-Tradition essay, Jeff Wall argues that *Lookout* is "one of the most significant works of Canadian landscape" (CT 79). Wall is interested in how Wallace has evoked the hippie lifestyle of west coast living in a critical way. The means by which Wallace ensures a distance between figure and ground is through formal technique: "Wallace collaged figures photographed in his studio onto the sections of the landscape, creating a kind of *experimental pastoral*... It is a monumental image of a kind of neurotic way of being out in the countryside" (CT 79).

¹⁶ The reference is historical; by 1979 Duane Lunden had left the art scene. He does not appear in *Lookout* or play in the UJ3RK5.

The transformation of the regional landscape tradition is also evident in the art of Rodney Graham, whose work often confronts the difficulties inherent in the representation of nature. This is evident in such works as *75 Polaroids* (1976), *Illuminated Ravine* (1979), *Two Generators* (1984) and the many photographs of trees that relate to *Camera Obscura* (1979). In these works Graham presses nature into situations where it appears sublimely dominated by technologies of vision and illumination. *75 Polaroids*, Graham's first photographic work, was first displayed in 1976 as an unbroken frieze arranged against blackened gallery walls in Vancouver's Pender Gallery, which was run by Willard Holmes and Kitty Byrne (Arnold, 183). Graham explains that:

The 75 photographs were the final residue of several hundred 'experiments' involving the night-time observation of nature undertaken with the aid of a Polaroid 180 camera. The experiments, performed in conditions of total darkness in forests, parks, and other wooded areas, centred around the contemplation of two simultaneous processes: the fading away of the negative retinal after-image caused by the intense flash of light which brought the objects and sites before my vision for the first time, *and* the coming into being of the positive photographic image eventually fixed on the polaroid film." (Appendix 1: 100)

Here the environment is subject to the experience, eclipse, and representation of vision. Wall interprets the work as an important step toward establishing the regional 'counter-tradition': "I don't think there could be a work which is more perfectly negative in relation to the lyrical landscape tradition. ... It reinvents the

tradition, cutting away all the complacent pipe-dreams about inner landscape” (CT 79).

Graham continues to explore this staging of nature through planned ‘lighting events.’ Several years later he does a piece called *Illuminated Ravine*, which has been described as follows: “On the evenings of 1-3 August [1979], Graham stages *Illuminated Ravine* on Burnaby Mountain near the SFU campus. To encounter the work, viewers must walk down a forested path to the verge of a ravine. Diesel-powered lighting units, similar to those used in logging camps, are positioned to illuminate the ravine from high up in the surrounding trees” (Arnold 184). The work was made available for two hours each night. “During this time the light throbs perceptibly with fluctuations in electric power, and the intense din of the generator restricts the possibility of conversation with other viewers” (Arnold 184). In this work Graham relies on a staged event to temporarily transform a natural site into an exemplary kind of landscape art. Since there is no art object at all, the value of the work relies on the willing participation of the spectator. Standing within the immediate vicinity of the work, the viewer is estranged from the forest through the intense brightness and noise of the equipment, which has converted the environment into a dramatic stage. Edging away from the immediate site of Graham’s mechanical illumination, however, one can imagine that the darkness of the forest invites the possibility of friendlier territory, a path which might lead to nature as a site of mystery or absorption.

In a 1988 essay about Rodney Graham’s work, Jeff Wall conceives of *Illuminated Ravine* as a work of “nature theatre” (Wall, *Into the Forest* 21). In his description Wall emphasizes that the level of noise made by *Illuminated Ravine* is

evocative of industry, and the way light is used distances us from nature.

“Illuminated Ravine created an agitated, transient model of our real relation to parklands and nature reserves: it recognized them as stage-sets, isolated objects of alienated contemplation” (22). Wall also positions the work in the romantic tradition, explaining that “the work built upon its audience’s growing awareness of environmental abuse to make perceptible the neurotic aestheticism inherent in the contemplation of special parts of nature dissociated from the labouring totality.” (22)

Five years later, in *Two Generators* (1984), Graham devises a form of ‘lighting event’ in which the spectator remains confined to an exclusively cinematic representation of nature. *Two Generators* is a four minute film which shows a river illuminated by two lighting systems powered by generators. The length of the film was determined by Graham based on “the length of one roll of motion picture film.” (Graham 1994:100) Graham “initially considers presenting the film as a loop in a gallery setting, but, at the suggestion of [Ian] Wallace, concludes that the work should be presented in a cinema” (Arnold 185). The procedure for screening the work, Arnold explains, “requires the projectionist to dim the theatre lights, project the film until it runs through the projector and xenon light fills the screen, turn on the room lights, rewind the film, dim the room lights, and repeat the process for a predetermined period of time” (Arnold 185). The illumination of nature is brought indoors.

Further along in his 1988 essay, Wall argues that *Two Generators*, as another work of ‘nature theatre,’ conveys a much greater negativity than *Illuminated Ravine*: “The film closes off direct contact with the outdoors, and

places its audience firmly back inside the cinema-machine” (22). He goes on to explain that in doing so, the work “reconstitutes the Faustian myth of the cinematic ‘culture of spectacle,’ in which only the intrepid filmmakers adventure to remote locations, while the audience consumes the adventure-product in the somnolent monumentality of their cineplexes” (22). Because the experience is so ridiculously brief, however, and because it enacts the whole theatre of the cinematic apparatus, it is not purely spectacular but rather serves as a model emphasizing the separation of nature from the city. Wall concludes that “[t]he mechanistic, Foucaultian side of Graham’s work, exemplified by *Two Generators*, turns around this principle of de-individuation, which makes perceptible the hostility of city dwellers to the natural world in which they no longer recognize themselves” (23). This is a kind of reading reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer, who have discussed modernity as a necessary process of disenchantment from nature.¹⁷

It is possible to see, by now, that Rodney Graham’s work attests to a longstanding interest in nature, and the human relationship to the landscape. One of his motifs has been the tree, both standing alone and in the forest. [Figure 7] Graham explains, “I was interested in this idea of isolated trees, which are hard to find in British Columbia where you’ve just got forests of trees. I was thinking of it as an iconic image, something you would see in a text book illustrating the idea of

¹⁷ I am thinking in particular of their discussion of ‘mana’ in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Mana is a “gloomy and indistinct religious principle” associated with “the earliest known stages of humanity” as well as early Greek religion (14). It refers to the belief that “everything unknown and alien is primary and undifferentiated: that which transcends the confines of experience; whatever in things is more than their previously known reality. What the primitive experiences in this regard is not a spiritual as compared to a material substance, but the intricacy of the Natural in contrast to the individual” (15).

an image in general, showing the mechanism of the optics of the eye.” (Graham, 1994:100) Photographed with a field camera, Graham’s tree ‘portraits’ are displayed upside down in the gallery, as a gesture of deterritorialisation and a reminder that the technology of vision involves the reversal of the upside down image as it appears on the retina or the camera lens.

In the tradition of Canadian landscape painting, the solitary tree stands as a sign of nature that has been transformed by the pressures of resource-based economy. It is therefore an emblem of heroic, individual survival as well as potential nostalgia for what has been lost. In his essay on Graham, Wall draws attention to the fighting and protests over clear-cuts that have lately characterized the environmental movement. In this account, the solitary tree stands as a living contradiction; it is potential money for the capitalist and a 'living totem' for the citizen-ecologist (*Into the Forest* 19). There is a fundamental and irreconcilable tension between 'the culture of ecological protest' and the capitalist producers of commodities. The ecologists rehearse the critical voice of "Romantic progressivism" when they remind us that the domination of nature which champions the 'cold logic' of capital will have negative consequences. The single tree situated in an urban environment becomes an emblem of this unresolved tension. Wall suggests that the pre-planned city tree serves the interest of capital more than nature since it has been removed from the land and come to stand in as an ideological tool, a "phantom harmony" (*Into the Forest* 20).

It is worth emphasizing that the critical edge evident in Wall’s 1980s large format pictures, what might be called his investment in the aims of the avant-garde, emerges from his schooling in sixties conceptualism. Wall’s work,

including his notion of the counter-tradition, reflects conceptualism's understanding that both dominant culture and its antagonists have been fashioned by capitalist modernity. That is also to say that Wall's work rejects the claim advanced by mainstream postmodernism, in which the pluralism characteristic of the 'post-medium condition' is interpreted as the means by which the constraining conditions imposed by modernity have somehow been overcome. Wall's art does not celebrate the choice of artistic styles available in the post-medium art world as an indication of freedom so much as it repeatedly reminds its viewers that the forces of capitalist modernity continue to determine social conditions.

With this framework in mind, I'd like to consider how the theatricalized landscape of the counter-tradition continues into the pictorial practices that Wall became known for during the 1980s. *The Jewish Cemetery*, a back-lit cibachrome photograph made by Jeff Wall in 1980, and *The Holocaust Memorial in the Jewish Cemetery*, made by the artist in 1987, belong to the 'mature' phase of the counter-tradition, sitting securely within the conventions established by Wall's return to the picture from 1977 forward. [Figures 8,9] These pictures turn to landscape as an opportunity for storytelling; the picture as a site of dramatic narrative.

In the earlier picture of the cemetery the Jewish tradition of burying the dead, of leaving the body intact to wait for the salvation of the Messiah, is laid out before our eyes. There is a kind of ritual sadness present in the cemetery, as we imagine those who come here to visit the loved ones that death has taken away. We are invited to empathize with the loss that tombstones unavoidably

symbolize. In the second picture this narrative of the cemetery is complicated by the presence of a memorial, because it stands in as the *absence* of such traditions. The memorial reminds its visitors of those millions of people deprived of religious burial traditions, and of the magnitude of indignities that they endured at the end of their lives.¹⁸

In both of these cemetery pictures it is the presence of trees that predominates. While appearing on a scale that diminishes both grave and memorial, these cultivated, urban trees are not a shield from modernity but, rather, its mortal emblem. This is because, as Wall argues with respect to the art of Rodney Graham, their ecosystem is artificially maintained, severed from the wilderness that they are nevertheless intended to represent. The landscape in the cemetery pictures is situated within the dynamics of industry at work on the Fraser River and its shores. The Fraser Port Authority, which governs trade and shipping along the lower Fraser River, is Canada's second largest port. Beyond the stand of trees that border the cemetery, we can see indications of this transportation corridor, through which millions of tonnes of cargo - vehicles, forestry, fishing and mining products - are brought and sent into the global market every year. The Alex Fraser Bridge, which spans the Annacis Industrial Estate, opened during Expo in 1986 and was celebrated, for a time, as the world's longest bridge. In Wall's image the Alex Fraser Bridge becomes a significant detail in a distant landscape; a modest visual counter-point to the Holocaust Memorial.

¹⁸ I have discussed these pictures in greater detail elsewhere; see Sava "Jeff Wall: Regarding the Jewish Cemetery."

As alluring as these landscapes are, we can see that Wall is not trying to make the kind of art which forms a pleasant respite from the suffering and brutality of human existence. The troubling contradictions of modernity appear persistently in all of Jeff Wall's photography, and the Jewish cemetery pieces are no exception. These pictures belong more generally to his 'Vancouver landscapes,' alongside other works from the 1980s such as *The Bridge* (1980) *The Old Prison* (1987) or *Coastal Motifs* (1989). All of these landscapes work with the modern relation between nature and culture, employing strategies that emphasize both the dominant presence of nature in the city, and the naturalized effects of modernization upon the environment.

In 1990, with *The Pine on the Corner*, Wall takes on the motif of the solitary tree, so familiar to the tradition of Canadian landscape painting. [Figure 10] In Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the single tree becomes the means by which to talk about the onset of modernity. The human fear that we have about the unknown, such as nature, is the basis of our expression in both myth or science. "It is not the soul which is transposed to nature, as psychologism would have it; *mana*, the moving spirit, is no projection, but the echo of the real supremacy of nature..." (A&H 15). Nature forms the basis for separating and identifying what is animate from what is not, and for asserting the difference between subject and object: "When the tree is no longer approached merely as tree, but as evidence for an Other, as the location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that something is itself and at one and the same time something other than itself, identical and not identical" (A&H 15). This, the authors suppose, is the basis of both sympathy and mimesis. In

photography, the tree can thus function as a sign of the separation between self and other, contemporary culture and unending nature. Where Graham inverted the tree as a way of reminding us of its appearance as representation, Wall restores the tree to its naturalized status as monumental lawn ornament, an icon estranged from the forest to which it once belonged.

In this chapter I have argued that theatricality has been a persistent strategy in the artistic production of Jeff Wall and his colleagues since the late 1960s. These theatricalized modes have fundamentally and irreversibly transformed the traditions and conventions of British Columbia landscape art. Through an understanding of the increasing importance of the technologies of vision which have allowed the landscape to become a site for 'location scouting', it is possible to understand the continuity between photoconceptualism and the return to the picture. The genre of landscape art, since it is a 'framing device' for vision, has always been attached to the conventions of theatre. This is also apparent in cinema.

Through the regional 'film production location industry' the approach to landscape which develops from conceptual photography - a social landscape in which sites are chosen as a means of displaying generic features of modernity - has also become a significant part of the economic infrastructure of this province. The film production industry has grown to such an extent during recent decades that the province is known as *Hollywood North*. As Mike Gasher discusses in his book on the growth of the British Columbia film industry, marketing strategies promise that BC film locations can look like 'Anywhere, USA'. This is confirmed by the marketing in a BC Film Commission locations brochure, which asks: "What

do New York, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, turn-of-the-century Boston, Detroit, London and San Francisco all have in common? Answer: We've been stand-ins for all of them, right here in versatile British Columbia" (as quoted in Gasher, 113).

Jeff Wall's post-conceptual turn to life-scale, pictorial photography is a reaction to the surplus of images in a culture of spectacle. The image is the dominant language of storytelling today and Wall aims to make a difference from within this language of images. In this way Wall moves against the transcendent autonomy of art and *toward* the theatricality of the dominant spectacle. In spite of these continuities, however, there is also the need to recognize the means by which Wall's return to the picture is enacted as a strategic rejection of theatricality as it was conceived of, and employed by, the genre of photo-conceptualism. Wall's celebrated 'return' to the picture is thus also a *reversal* of strategy; a move that should rightly be understood as a move *away* from Robert Smithson (theatricality) and *toward* Michael Fried (modernism). Although it would take Fried many years to recognize that this was the case, Wall's return to the picture participates in a larger attempt to re-examine the tenets of modernism from within the format of photography. That is to say, photography might be inherently theatrical, but it is not *necessarily* anti-modernist.

One of the central claims of modernism, at least as it was argued for in the visual arts by Greenberg and Fried, was that content must reflect form; that the project must be self-reflexive. Wall will operate on the assumption, then, that in order to be 'true to itself' as a medium, the photograph must engage with its own documentary function; that is, with the narrative reality that it necessarily evokes.

That is, it must necessarily transgress disciplinary autonomy. In order to understand the evolution of this logic it is necessary to return to modernist debates about the relevance of realism in the project of the avant-garde, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Three

The Relevance of the Avant-Garde

“At that time there was a momentum to what I really think now is an ultra left view, of artistic activity. ... Even at that time I remember thinking, this is really ultra-left. I was really influenced by it.”

- Jeff Wall (interview transcript, Guilbaut Archives, 1989)

During the 1960s, various political movements - anti-racist, anti-imperialist, feminist - brought a new sensitivity into view around the globe. Part of the agenda of these New Social Movements was to remake Marxism, drawing on various sources of inspiration while avoiding the Stalinism of the USSR. Recognizing that the proletariat was no longer the revolutionary subject, these New Social Movements mobilized various strategic vantage points from which they could launch radical critique into a socio-economic climate of relative affluence and stability (Young, 1977). Central to the discussion was an awareness of the new shape of politics in light of the expansion of mass media and pop culture forms which were transforming culture all around the globe.

The writers that have been influential in renewing Marxist theory to account for these new cultural forms, that is, for the impact of a full-blown consumer society, are frequently associated with the Frankfurt School and the Situationist International. In the post-war era the Frankfurt School and its affiliates, in particular, Herbert Marcuse in California, had a significant impact on Marxist ideas circulating in the United States and in Canada. Marcuse's book, *One Dimensional Man* (1964), met the needs of a public that was looking for a

different kind of critique of media culture. During the 1960s key texts from German Critical Theory began to appear in English translation alongside Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man*, including Adorno's *Prisms* (1967), Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968), and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972), influencing the political imagination of the era. English language translations of texts by affiliates of the Situationist International, most famously Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (v.o. 1967, Eng. tr. 1970), taught a generation of disaffiliated workers and students about the politics of spectatorship.

The question of modernism, and the means by which art and politics could be said to relate, was one of the central aspects of the new leftist analysis of culture. During the sixties and seventies published translations allowed an English-speaking audience to learn about forms of political modernism which had been suppressed by the hegemony of Greenbergian modernism. In the realm of art the questioning and subsequent waning of Greenberg's influence would gradually lead the way toward Theodor Adorno, as critics and historians attempted to recover the careful political imagination that is invested in his aesthetic theory. During this time English translations, in journals such as *Screen* and *New Left Review*, also introduced the works of Bertolt Brecht, providing a model of political engagement that could be integrated with emerging theories of representation inaugurated by semiotic and psychoanalytic theory. Through various techniques of 'distancing' or 'alienation,' Brechtian theatre demonstrated a kind of political modernism that introduced spectators to art as a form of production (Pollock 1988).

In the conservative setting of post-war education, the new left offered an appealing kind of cultural analysis, radicalizing the university campus.¹ In Vancouver, many of the artists associated with the counter-tradition - Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, and Rodney Graham - were university students during the sixties and early seventies. Their schooling in aesthetics was informed by these modernist controversies, most importantly the debates over realism.² Given these circumstances, there is an evident need to consider the influence of critical theory on Jeff Wall's thinking; to reflect on how his art looks back to the historical avant-garde and its critical interpretation. During Wall's formative period, in the '68 era, there are numerous indications of this presence. As early as his M.A. thesis on Berlin Dada (1970), for example, Wall draws explicitly on Marcuse's critique of bourgeois culture.

During the 1980s these matters will become more complicated. That is to say that it doesn't take long before the radical optimism of the sixties has worn off. By 1980 vanguardism has turned definitively into postmodernism, while at the same time postmodernism has made critical art - or, the imagination of a certain *kind* of art - appear impossible. I am following the position set forth by the 1981 *Vancouver Conference on Modernism*, attended by Wall and other local artists, in which the introductory presentation by Serge Guilbaut condemns the political impotence of post-modernism: "Through a concerted effort to break the formalist straitjacket of late modernism, the post-modernist phenomenon has also crushed

¹ Jeff Wall talks about the radicalisation of university campuses in his 1990 essay on Ken Lum, mentioning Warren Tallman, Fred Stockholder and Ed Hundert specifically. It is also evident that SFU professors including Robin Blaser, Jerry Zaslove, and Anthony Wilden, who were known to these artists, played a part in the expansion of traditional humanities curricula. (Wall, *Four Essays* 33)

² For more on realist debates see Jameson et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*, New Left Books 1977.

its living, critical core. The rejection of modernism as elitist has opened the doors to populism, and in so doing has blunted much of what could be political and/or trenchant in the practice of certain contemporary artists.” He continues, “Under the cover of irony, post-modernism has revived something which has been repressed for years, and deservedly so, to a great extent at least: a gigantic operation of reductionism and banalization” (xiii).

The move from formalism to populism that is mentioned in this passage by Guilbaut parallels the spread of ‘theatricality’ which Michael Fried had been so critical of in 1967. Embracing the tenets of theatricality during the sixties, subsequent decades of art production had re-oriented the meaning of the art object toward the subjectivity of the spectator. In the context of this dynamic and highly conflicted ‘post-medium’ situation, feminist theory, through concepts such as the ‘male gaze’, was taken up and became established as a sophisticated critical platform for analysis. Integrally tied to this historical moment, Jeff Wall’s early work also attests to an awareness of the spectator, repeatedly alluding to the complex exchange between art and its audience. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine Wall’s choice of the *dramatic tableau* as the appropriate means of spectatorial address, and its heritage in the avant-garde.

Since 1977 Wall’s awareness of the spectator has, for the most part, taken the form of the back-lit cibachrome picture, as for instance in his 1990 work, *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947*. [Figure 11] In this picture we see a living room filled with young children watching the performance of a ventriloquist and her puppet, gathered together in what we might take to be the final moment of apparent innocence before the dawn of the televisual age. There

is a clever allegory at work here, a parallel between the ventriloquist speaking for, interpolating, the inanimate puppet, and the spectacle which inhabits the lifeless bodies of its enraptured spectators. In spite of this ostensibly happy occasion, the children in Wall's picture appear disturbingly possessed by the drama before them. Through the organisation of details - the ill-fitting costume of the puppet, the rigid blocking and posing of the kids, etc. - the entire scene is permeated with a sinister atmosphere. It is as though the children are willing and happy to forgo their own vitality in order to become passive spectators. Through the sheer strength of their collective, unwavering gaze the children are engendering technological advance, firmly demanding the advent of television. The audience that can be seen inside the picture has become the 'dummy,' while the regime of the spectacle remains its apparent master.

I have talked about the politics of landscape which inform the Vancouver counter-tradition. In this chapter I turn my study of the theatrical image away from the landscape and toward the representation of everyday life. Since Wall's pictures are predominantly about showing one or more people caught up in a dramatic event, understanding his art necessarily involves some consideration of the figurative traditions in modern art. Any form of visual art which involves the representation of people is a highly fraught endeavour, since it draws the picture into a longstanding historical conflict between the critical aims of modernism and the social aims of realism. In order to understand what is at stake in Wall's reliance on the figurative tradition, I think it will be productive to review some of the historical controversies over the vexing relation of aesthetics to politics.

One of the most important issues in need of further consideration today is not that Jeff Wall makes pictures, but that alongside this practice he also develops a version of modern art history that legitimates the artistic and political decisions which support a return to the picture. Furthermore, this art history is used by everyone that writes with any seriousness about Wall's work, and my own writing here has been no exception. This is what was meant by the question asked to the British art historian Fred Orton in the fall of 2003, when he came to Vancouver to present a paper on Jeff Wall's *Ventriloquist* picture.³ After presenting his talk, someone from the audience asked Orton if he was not, in fact, re-iterating the premise of the picture, by becoming the spokesperson, or puppet, for Jeff Wall himself. Orton was accused of merely reiterating what Wall had already argued, with great critical insight and eloquence, about the means by which to interpret his own artwork. While this is not the moment to examine the credibility of the charge against Orton, I want to emphasize that Wall's use of language plays a significant, if under-recognized, role in his success as an artist and his entry into the canon of modern art history.

During the radicalized sixties language is part of Wall's creative practice, as we have seen with the photoconceptualist *Landscape Manual*. Later on the language is removed from the creative endeavour per se and used 'outside the frame', as a theoretical and historical buttress. Wall publishes lengthy, ambitious texts that examine the art made by his friends. These include essays on Dan

³ Fred Orton's presentation in Vancouver was based on a published essay: Lisa Joyce and Fred Orton. "Always Elsewhere: An Introduction to the Art of Jeff Wall (A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947)" in *Jeff Wall Photographs* MUMOK exh. cat. 2003: 8-33. Orton's presentation took place under the auspices of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, UBC, and took place on UBC campus, November 12, 2003.

Graham (1984), Ian Wallace (1988), Ken Lum (1990), Rodney Graham (1988) and Roy Arden (1993). These essays serve as the means by which Wall articulates and defends his version of contemporary art, and the history which supports it. Artist Allan Sekula, a contemporary of Wall whose formation can also be traced back to the critical revaluation of photography in the sixties, says that Wall's strategies are typical of contemporary art criticism. The way in which a story is 'self-authored' has come to play an important factor in the reception of contemporary art. Sekula is deeply critical of Wall, pointing out that "Wall's work, in particular, has the immense appeal in the current climate of appearing to be unencumbered by the annoying textual residues of conceptualism, but the text actually operates, Oz-like, from behind the curtain, as it continues to do for most contemporary art" (Sekula 2003: 41).

Wall's critical writing offers a convincing and persuasive account, and one that is all the more interesting in the way that it silences and distorts its opponents, the way that it makes the picture seem like the only viable route for critical art in the era of postmodernism.⁴ One of the ways that Wall does this is through his strategic reading of Frankfurt School writers such as Theodor Adorno. This can be seen in a number of writings by, or about, Wall, and I have chosen two that I will examine in greater detail. The first text I look at is by Wall himself; the draft of an article about the artist Dan Graham, originally written in 1981 and published in 1991. The second is an essay by the German theorist Peter Bürger, written for a 2003 exhibition of Jeff Wall in Vienna. I rely on Bürger's essay here

⁴ See Jeff Wall "Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art" (1995). This is the essay singled out by Sekula (2003) as a distortion of photography's history.

because it is unambiguously intended to reinforce the line of interpretation which Wall, himself, had already established.

In the first essay, called “A Draft for ‘Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel” [1981], Jeff Wall uses the writings of Benjamin Buchloh as a model intended to represent how the critical thinking of 1960s conceptualism has gone wrong.⁵ Buchloh represents a stance in support of the ‘dematerialized era’ of conceptualism in the sixties. His support also extends to encompass the work of ‘post-conceptual’ artists including Dan Graham, Daniel Buren and Michael Asher. These artists represent a significant critical direction in contemporary art, a functionalist project which has its heritage in modernism. The functionalist impulse which was evident in modern industrial design and architecture during the 1920s - ‘form follows function!’ - positioned reductionism and purism as an ideological critique of retrograde eclecticism and kitsch. Buchloh’s argument is informed by the critical theory approach of the Frankfurt School, which posits negation in the face of capitalism and what is perceived as the total domination of society.

What Buchloh sees in conceptual and post-conceptual art is a critical reflection on the totalizing power of the spectacle. Buchloh does not see any reason to return to ‘the picture,’ because he argues that art needs to have a critical function and in order to do this it must recover ‘functional’ engagement with social space. During the seventies Buchloh therefore continues to uphold the ideals of 1960s, and does not see the ‘dematerialisation’ of the art object as a

⁵ “A Draft for ‘Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel” [1981] in Jeff Wall *Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991: 87-115. This was the original version of Wall’s essay on Dan Graham (final version published in 1985) but because it did not deal with Dan Graham’s work, it was “put aside as a false start” (85). Wall adds that his criticisms of Buchloh are meant “in an atmosphere of respect and admiration” (85).

dead end. Wall, by contrast, legitimates the return to the picture by suggesting that the period of dematerialization in art has reached its logical conclusion.

In Wall's view Buchloh's position is a problematic continuation of the Frankfurt School. It imagines a social world dominated by the totalizing power of the Culture Industry, while also lamenting the viability of the Left as a political alternative. Buchloh's answer to these circumstances is to restore art to a functional state in a newly liberated social order. For this he will draw upon the historical movements of Functionalism and the Readymade (Wall, 'Draft' 88). Buchloh stakes out his position by referencing conceptualism in his reading of contemporary art. He is trying to establish a functionalist post-conceptualism. Jeff Wall, as an artist, has by this point (i.e. in 1981) consciously departed from conceptualism, and he must rely on an argument which aims to show where Buchloh has gone wrong in order to support the logic of his own return to the picture. Compared to Buchloh, it seems that Wall and the 1980s Vancouver School should rightly be understood not as *inheritors* so much as *adversaries* of conceptualism.

Buchloh returns to Walter Benjamin and his idea that the aestheticisation of political life is a symbol of totalitarian rule. But Benjamin, Wall says, is limited and problematic. To support his judgment, Wall quotes the closing line from Benjamin's 'Mechanical Reproduction' essay: "Communism responds by politicizing art," and concludes that it "says nothing" ('Draft' 90). It is a "vacant generality" and an "excessively inadequate final sentence" ('Draft' 91). Wall explains this by saying that Benjamin fails to reveal that the Communism of the Popular Front is what made the workers' movement ineffective. The Communist

position was taken over by the Fascists. Finally then, for Wall, Benjamin's vagueness is symptomatic of Communism's silence as it witnessed how politics became spectacle through the organization of the mass media. Wall reminds us that by 1939 Revolutionary Marxism had disappeared into silence, and this is when the model of the Culture Industry, as a new kind of critical discourse, was developed. Critical Theory represents what comes out of the belief that Communism is no longer a visible alternative, and no hope of revolutionary transformation appears on the horizon.

Wall goes on to suggest that Buchloh must have a hard time staying with Adorno, since Adorno is such a defeatist. Following Adorno's logic, Buchloh argues that the best contemporary art will show the dilemma of art's situation while also being functional and activist in resolving or breaking through the situation. This is what he sees conceptualism as working towards. It does this by using language against the image. This critical position recognizes the complicity of art and academic institution, and of the mass media, inside the system of the Culture Industry. Conceptualism targets the business of art, the mechanisms by which it is produced and displayed, and points to this social and political condition as amounting to a crisis, in that all modern traditions are liquidated (Wall, 'Draft' 98).

In order to show how art was overtaken by the Culture Industry, Buchloh argues that conceptualism has a heritage in the historical avant-garde. During the 1920s, Marcel Duchamp appropriated the objects of mass-production - the urinal, the bicycle wheel - into the context of high art, inventing a 'Readymade' which collapsed the established conventions of artistic autonomy. In the Soviet Union,

Alexander Rodchenko's 'productivist' laboratory research had redirected art production toward functional utility in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution. Buchloh shows that these earlier efforts, connected to the great revolutionary upheaval of the twentieth century, are formative background for Conceptualism.

Wall, by contrast, argues against the revolutionary heritage of Conceptualism. For him the historical advent of the Readymade signifies the increased availability of commodities; a condition that was to make socialism appear undesirable and apparently unnecessary ('Draft' 105). Conceptualism's mimicry of the 'non-art' Readymade is thus based on the conviction that the commodity form is here to stay. It is against art in the tradition of the 1920s and 30s, while being anti-expressive and knowingly inadequate. What constituted its initial radicalism was its assault on 'art', but because it could not invent 'new social content' it fell prey to purism ('Draft' 107). Whereas in the 1920s and 30s artists moved toward the working class movement, Wall contends that in the 1960s they moved apart from one another. The return of Conceptual Art to the Readymade is therefore, for Wall, closer to aestheticism than it is to the militant rebuilding of society dreamed of in 1920s Productivism.

Post/conceptualism, of the sort that Buchloh champions, turns to the technologies of the mass media in an attempt to overcome formalism and re-engage urban reality as a site of domination and possible liberation. It rejects both the affirmativeness of pop art and the romantic negativity of minimalism. The conceptualist response to minimalism, in Wall's account, is 'anti-object'. Wall echoes the logic of Michael Fried's *Art and Objecthood* essay here, arguing that

the 'objecthood' of 60s art was rejected by Conceptual Art because it subjected the gallery viewer to "a theatrical effect", thereby duplicating the effect of the spectacle in general. Conceptual Art 'dematerialized' in order to get away from repeating the theatre of social domination. The conceptualists saw this elimination of the object as a means by which to eliminate the transformation of the art object into a commodity-form.

For Wall and others, however, conceptualism is fatally naïve. The result of these strategies is a reification of critical language which is inevitably absorbed into the market system. It is possible to argue that Conceptualists are not 'politically progressive' so much as defeatist, in that their work declares sympathy and awareness of political struggle while at the same time offering forms of incommunicability and emptiness rather than productive participation. This painful contradiction is what is expressed in the form of art. As a form, it repeatedly *enacts* an eclipse of social content.

Adorno's concept of negation, the 'self-conscious' dissolution of the aesthetic in the face of the Culture Industry, is applied to conceptualism by Buchloh. Wall repeats his criticism of Buchloh, and also of Adorno, on the grounds of this defeatism: "For all its trappings of the Productivist 'redesigning of reality', this act is centred on the gesture of consciously willed abnegation, self-cancellation and defeatism which Adorno concluded was the essential condition of art in a situation of advancing barbarism" ('Draft' 109). Wall concludes that Buchloh uses activism as "an outer shield or mask," while his position ultimately results in an "imperious defeatism" ('Draft' 109).

It is Buchloh's defeatism, according to Wall, that leads him to champion an artist such as Daniel Buren, and to support the radical hopes of 1968. Daniel Buren, a French post-war artist, relies on a standardized motif of vertical stripes, which he inserts into various environments. Removing abstraction from the art gallery, and situating it into various public spaces, Buren's work demonstrates an affinity with the politics of May '68 in Paris and with the Situationists. [Figure 12] Buchloh intends for Buren to be a spark for revolt, but for Wall his art is too 'blank' to be so. It erases the knowledge and identity that inform the social forces of history. Wall identifies these 'guerrilla' tactics with the contestatory politics of 1968, and the vision of total revolution that is visible in Debord and others: "This voluntarism has a long history (that of anarchism) and its strategies of counter-spectacle, sacrifice and terror have been articulated consistently from Bakunin to Guy Debord" ('Draft' 110). Destined to aggravate but never to accomplish its aims, for Wall this 'end of modernism' is a pyrrhic victory.

This essay is valuable as a demonstration of the logic used by Wall in justifying his rejection of the primacy of language given within conceptual art, and through which he explains the return to pictorialism. In this sense, it is a crucial text for expressing Wall's views on the legacy of 1968 radicalism. This text identifies the site of an earlier era, where Jeff Wall (and others) were making choices about what to do, as artists, in the face of a society increasingly dominated by spectacular forms of communication. For Wall the Culture Industry thesis, a stance that is seen as typical of Adorno and later of Buchloh, means that modern art is nothing but the expression of defeatism.

While this may engage with their disillusionment about the organized left, I believe that Wall's 1981 reading of the Culture Industry thesis hides the utopian possibilities of art as a form of radical negation. Adorno's thinking warrants dismissals of defeatism, but only from the vantage point of his recognition that the proletariat is incapable of realising a more just and equitable society.⁶ From the vantage point of art, Adorno admits to utopian elements. By expressing the mediated relation between form and content, art offers a realm of sensuous particularity that is not otherwise available in a society dominated by the force of instrumental reason.⁷ Not by showing us what *is*, but by *being* what is not, can aesthetic experience reach beyond such domination. Adorno comments, "Suffering conceptualised remains mute and inconsequential, as is obvious in post-Hitler Germany." (*Aesthetic* 19)

From this vantage point it seems clear that Wall's own production is implicated by the defeatism which he attributes to Buchloh. The 'Draft' essay reads as an attempt by the artist to revise the history of his own encounter with photoconceptualism; to suffocate the unrealised potential of the *Landscape Manual* and the *Cine-Text*. What remains is to establish the direction that Wall's work would take, as well as the motivations and consequences of this decision.

Many of the issues addressed by Wall's 1981 'Draft' resurface much later, in a 2003 article, written by Peter Bürger about the art of Jeff Wall (*On a Critique* 158-179). Bürger contextualizes Wall's work by returning to his own longstanding

⁶ Fredric Jameson discusses this in his book on Adorno, with reference to the context of the sixties: "In the age of wars and national liberation, Adorno's sense of Apocalypse seemed very retrogressive indeed, focused as it was on the moment of Auschwitz, and obsessed with the doom and baleful enchantment of a 'total system'...." (Jameson, 1990: 5)

⁷ I am following Jay Bernstein's reading of Adorno here (Bernstein, *The Fate of Art* 1992).

interest in the fate of the twentieth century avant-garde. Bürger draws upon the underlying argument of his earlier book, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, which claimed that while the historical avant-garde signified an authentic, if incomplete, transgression of the institutional conventions of bourgeois art forms, the 'neo-avant-garde' experiments of the sixties were not similarly transgressive.⁸ Bürger made this claim on the grounds that the art institutions of the post-war era found the neo-avant-garde experiments readily adaptable to circulation and exhibition display.

In his article on Wall, Bürger explains that the European avant-garde virtually disappeared in the years following World War II. This is because Europeans had to repress the trauma of the war, and return to normal life after the years of Nazism. In art this mindset inspired the moderate abstraction of *Art Informel*. During this period the historical avant-garde, such as Surrealism, was dismissed as political quietism and deemed irresponsible. It was not until the relative prosperity of the 1960s that the radical questioning of society could return and some of the repressed continuities, such as with COBRA and the Situationists, could be further developed.

Bürger examines the difference of the reception of Duchamp's Readymades in Europe as compared to the United States. This is important because of Duchamp's role as an icon of the historical avant-garde, and because of the vitality of his ideas about the Readymade in the imagination of the neo-avant-garde. Bürger argues that because the United States had no movements comparable to French Surrealism or Russian Futurism, the Americans took

⁸ Peter Bürger. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minnesota UP, 1984. English translation of the German book, *Theorie der Avantgarde* [1974].

Duchamp's work to be an introduction of new, industrial materials rather than a radical deconstruction of the institution of art (Bürger 2003, 161). This was the means by which Duchamp's work was emptied of its political message. Bürger suggests that this mindset was inherited by the American Minimalists of the 1960s; those 'literalists' that Fried had criticized as overly theatrical. In so doing, Bürger rejects the idea that Minimalism had anything to do with the legitimate aspirations of the avant-garde, that is, with the desire to destroy the bourgeois institutions of art through a radicalization of the conventions of form. Minimal art breaks from the western tradition of visual art in many ways, including breaking away from the rectangular format of the picture frame, and not signing or leaving personal marks on the work. These are innovations in the work of art which continue to make meaning only within the museum. Because of this, Bürger argues, Minimalism is a movement toward the simplification of form that is more closely allied with Clement Greenberg's modernist formalism than with the history of the avant-garde. Bürger's line of thinking fails to account for the theatrical impulse inaugurated by the Minimalists, or, more importantly, its perceived transgressiveness.

In order to attack the logic of the neo-avant-garde, Bürger's essay on Wall then turns specifically to the work of French artist Daniel Buren. Buren's affinity with the neo-avant-garde has been apparent since 1967, when he first withdrew his paintings from an art exhibition and posted signs and information dismissing the practice of painting as 'irrelevant aestheticism'. Bürger reviews this event, which involved Buren, and other artists (Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni) at the *Salon de la Jeune Peinture* in Paris. The critics celebrated this gesture as a

revival of the avant-garde, but Bürger argues against these claims, since there is evidence indicating that the artists elicited, and were given, support for this initiative by the exhibition organizers themselves. Thus, Bürger says, their 'radical gesture' was simply a strategy to attract public attention.

Likewise, Bürger is skeptical of the vanguardism of the vertical stripe paintings that Buren has affixed on the street and outside galleries since the late 1960s. Critics have routinely cited Buren's gesture as a rejection of the premises of art and a symbol of the neo-avant-garde. Buren is allied with minimalist art, participating in the discourse of reduction as a critical project. As with minimalist works, his remain unsigned. Bürger says Buren is merely developing a brand for himself, where the consumer of art identifies this 'logo' with Buren, the artist. It is simply a system of clever self-promotion, which has no political significance. His patterns, separated from the point of view of the public, from the institutional critique he writes about and declares, are merely decorative. Only elite connoisseurs can recognize the critique, making it ineffective and insidious (Bürger 2003, 169).

By contrast, the historical avant-garde was a form of genuine institutional critique. This is the case since, for example, Duchamp's Readymades are a provocation more than a work of art. Bürger says that the neo-avant-garde artist, recognizing this, is presented with a dilemma: they must reconcile the impulse to break with institutional art at the same time as finding a place for themselves as important artists. The result? The work of art becomes the material through which this rupture is addressed. This is how Bürger explains the difference between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde. Whereas the earlier formations

were genuinely concerned with revolutionizing everyday life and of returning to it a degree of creativity, Buren and the neo-avant-garde mount an institutional critique that is fundamentally restricted to art and its display.

Bürger then turns his attention to the writing of Benjamin Buchloh. Buchloh has championed the neo-avant-garde by diminishing the political resonance of the historical avant-garde, Bürger argues, and by disregarding the fact that the historical circumstances are completely different in each era. It is necessary to recognize that the goals of the historical one did not work out as planned, because the accompanying social changes to which they were attached did not work out. This is why the aspirations of the neo-avant-garde and of May '68 represent a political naivety. "One cannot help feeling that at any price, Buchloh wants to cling to the idea, that, even at the end of the twentieth century, it is still possible to identify the kind of art that is most advanced aesthetically, and politically revolutionary to boot" (169).

Bürger argues that, because it is now shown in museums, we can no longer look at art in terms of its relationship to social revolution, in the manner which was established in relation to the historical avant-garde. In the current context we must understand that because the institutions of art were not destroyed by the historical avant-garde the question of aesthetic value still remains. Even with respect to conceptual art, "we are still dealing with objects after all." That is to say, the old question of aesthetic value has not been overcome, so, as Bürger comments, "there is no way around judging them" (Bürger 2003, 170). With respect to the neo-avant-garde the idea of a rupture with art can still be applied, although the degree of its radicality must be questioned.

What occurred is that art absorbed the radical into practice: “The avant-gardes transferred the idea of the revolution onto art” (171).

Bürger explains that Jeff Wall enters the art world recognizing the rupture represented by the neo-avant-garde, but rather than playing into it, that is, by claiming that the rupture is irreversible, he establishes a conciliatory position. He does this by seeking continuity with previous art. The neo-avant-garde, which has by now become an *institution of transgression*, celebrates irreversible rupture because it signals a return to authenticity and immediacy. This can be seen in relation to radical thought in general, and what constitutes a means of positive social transformation. Bürger turns to law, the basis of civil society, to argue that neo-avant-garde artists naively refuse the constraints of the modern legal subject and embrace the logic of the festival, a kind of anarchism, all the while failing to understand the necessity of mediation and intermediaries as the basis of social organization. “My understanding of what Wall said is that the problem of avant-gardist radicality resides in the fact that it emphatically adopts one polarity while categorically rejecting the other. ... The underlying dream is one of immediacy, one that refuses to accept that existence in society depends on intermediaries” (Bürger 2003, 172).

In Bürger’s account, Jeff Wall responds to the institution of transgression by directly engaging with the taboos that it has erected. Wall shows the absurdity of the institution of transgression, and reverses its direction by returning to practices which have been dismissed, such as figuration and pictorialism. Wall does not simply suggest that ‘anything goes,’ but rather attempts to work through the problems and to produce work that is thoughtfully post-avant-garde.

Wall, Bürger argues, goes beyond the essentially conceptualist strategies of Dan Graham, and of minimal and conceptual art in general, because he recognizes in them a dead end. Many of the conventional ways of understanding art in the European tradition are thus once again available to Wall. Bürger defends Wall's stance, arguing that this return to tradition is not reactionary because it is guided by a rejection of the potentials and limits of the avant-garde. Wall recognizes the failure of the neo-avant-garde, and productively moves on. "Whereas the neo-avant-garde refuses to recognize that, thus getting all tangled in aporias, Wall faces the situation when he writes that the incompleteness of the process of social transformation in art is the transcendental reason why all existing pictorial categories are maintained in painting" (175).

In a 1996 essay called "Who's afraid of the neo-avant-garde?" Hal Foster works against the direction of thought established by theorists such as Peter Bürger by making an argument for the contemporary relevance of 'avant-garde' practices and thought. Foster points out that numerous critiques, in recent years, have dismissed avant-gardism as problematically tied to the Enlightenment project; perpetuating an ideology of progress alongside presumptions of originality, elitism and exclusivity. Furthermore, its critical edge is said to have been fully appropriated by the Culture Industry (Foster 5). Foster defends the avant-garde, however, as "a crucial co-articulation of artistic and political forms"(5). Also he says "a revaluation of a canon is as significant as its expansion and disruption" (8).

Foster builds his case for the viability of the avant-garde by examining the concept of the 'neo-avant-garde' as theorized by Peter Bürger. The central

problem that Foster identifies with Bürger's argument, and in this respect I agree, is that "it is a dismissal of the postwar avant-garde as merely 'neo', as so much repetition in bad faith that cancels the prewar critique of the institution of art" (Foster 8). One of the problems with this argument, Foster says, is that it assumes that the first round was "fully significant and historically effective" in the first place, which of course it was not. Foster goes on to talk about the evolution into meaning of an art object or movement: "Did Duchamp *appear* as Duchamp? ... Did *Les Femmes d'Alger* of Picasso emerge as the crux of modernist painting that it is now taken to be? Obviously not.... The status of Duchamp as well as *Les Femmes d'Alger* is a retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings..." (Foster 8).

Bürger's argument is said to rely on an evolutionary model of bourgeois art. In the first stage, that of 18th century Enlightenment aesthetics, the autonomy of art is proclaimed as an ideal. In the second stage, that of 19th century modernism, *l'art pour l'art* takes precedence over autonomy, leading to an aestheticist withdrawal from society at large. In the third stage, that of the 20th century, this aestheticist withdrawal comes under attack from the historical avant-garde. According to this schema, the art of the sixties is pulled into an identity as the repetition of the historical avant-garde. As such, this anti-aesthetic becomes merely artistic and the transgressive becomes institutionalised. Foster suggests that Bürger's evolutionary schema is limited. In response to Bürger, he insists that the story of the neo-avant-garde doesn't end here (i.e. with neo-avant-garde as art, again). Part of what occurs in the 'return' of the 1960s is in fact a critique of the older bohemian artist as well as the institutionality of the avant-garde.

Bürger does not recognize the ambitious art of his own time, thus “he can only see the neo-avant-garde as futile and degenerate in romantic relation to the historical avant-garde” (Foster 11). He posits the heroic past versus the failed present.

While for Bürger the historical avant-garde (dada, surrealist, constructivist) also failed, it failed “heroically” rather than farcically, cynically or opportunistically. Bürger’s historicism is an insufficient theoretical model. The narrative of failure posed by Bürger results in a meaningless pluralism, failing to address the new ways in which aesthetic experience has been engaged by the neo-avant-garde. Foster asks: “Rather than cancel the project of the historical avant-garde, might the neo-avant-garde comprehend it for the first time?” (Foster15)

As Foster’s account suggests, the critical struggle over the definition, and fate, of the neo-avant-garde has been going on for some time. This embattled terrain is evident in the critical reception of Jeff Wall’s work. It is particularly evident in terms of the longstanding critical confrontation between critics Peter Bürger and Benjamin Buchloh. Bürger’s essay about Jeff Wall, like Wall’s ‘Draft’ essay about Dan Graham, rely on a critical engagement with what they perceive as Buchloh’s problematic defense of the neo-avant-garde. And, as I discuss in a later chapter, there is also the matter of Buchloh’s own criticism of the art of Jeff Wall. Given the long history of exchange, it is not surprising to discover that Buchloh wrote a review of Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* which anticipates some of the limitations addressed by Foster’s account. Buchloh, like Foster, is critical, and a brief sketch of his review will help to further establish the limitations of Bürger’s trajectory (Buchloh 1984: 19-21).

In his 1984 article, Buchloh begins by admitting that he is sympathetic to Bürger's attempt to summarize the aims and intentions of the 20th century visual arts avant-garde. Buchloh - in 1984 - notes that this had not yet been done. (Bürger's book, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published in 1974 in German, didn't appear in English translation until 1984.) While sympathetic to the intention, Buchloh is not, however, satisfied with the result, and he makes a series of criticisms. He begins by stressing that Bürger's ideas rely on a vague and overly general discussion of art; his account lacks the details and particulars which would arise through a close material reading of artwork. He goes on to explain that the book is not a *theory* so much as a *short essay* which attempts to consolidate the diverse intentions of the avant-garde into a single imperative. Bürger is terribly reductive in claiming that all the gestures of the avant-garde can be represented by the will to dismantle the institution of art, and the false autonomy which separates it from the praxis of life.

Unsurprisingly, it is Bürger's conviction regarding the failure of the neo-avant-garde that Buchloh finds particularly unconvincing. Buchloh suggests that Bürger was not aware that his own study, written during the heyday of 1968, was paralleled by art practices which also analysed art and the institutionalisation of aesthetic discourse. Buchloh mentions, for instance, the art of Daniel Buren. Bürger's interpretation, he says, stems from academic contempt for contemporary practice, and in so doing it ends up betraying its own academic premises.

Buchloh is critical of Bürger's method, which builds from Marx's critique of ideology. He finds that the tradition of Marxist scholarship has not adequately

addressed the social function of art. Typical interpretations are based on the nineteenth century idea that art has no function in a profit-based societal order. He says most social historians of art, including Marcuse and Bürger, hold to a “profoundly deficient” notion of art as a form of pure ideology. Buchloh’s problem with Bürger is his claim to objectivity. “When aesthetic knowledge is assigned to the realm of ideology, the critical subject (the academic, the historian) produces knowledge that supposedly looks into the aesthetic abyss from a position of scientific objectivity” (21). By contrast, he says, Althusser’s 1969 essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” and Julia Kristeva’s 1974 book, *The Revolution of Poetic Language*, represent more successful critical engagements with the problem of art and ideology because they incorporate theories of subjectivity.

Bürger concludes that since the historical avant garde failed to dismantle the institution of art, all practices subsequent to them are equally valid (or invalid). The failure of the avant-garde does not destroy the institution of art, it destroys the validity of positing aesthetic norms. Buchloh responds to this, the book’s conclusion, by criticizing its credibility; for him it represents a form of ‘aesthetic passivism’ that has become the core of the worst kind of postmodernism. Bürger’s argument fails to address the diverse strategies that have always been taking place under the rubric of the avant garde, ranging from conservative to radical. It is politically dangerous to gloss over these differentiations. Buchloh says it’s not fair to give up and concede defeat just because one round failed to accomplish what it set out to. Nor is it an adequate definition of avant-garde: “It seems more viable to define avant-garde practice as a continually renewed

struggle over the definition of cultural meaning, the discovery and representation of new audiences, and the development of new strategies to counteract and develop resistance against the tendency of the ideological apparatuses of the Culture Industry to occupy and to control all practices and spaces of representation” (21).

By this point it has become clear that the incendiary ingredient in Jeff Wall’s return to the picture is its defiant rejection of the neo-avant-garde. The refusal of the neo-avant-garde, as the ‘institution of transgression’ outlined in this chapter, redoubles the argument rehearsed in Chapter Two, in which art with ecological or counter-cultural affinities was dismissed as a form of naïve romanticism. Wall’s position thus represents a strategic distance from the type of artist who would advance a brand – perhaps *any* brand – of vulgar, functionalist, revolutionary politics in the name of art.

Clint Burnham’s 1996 article on Jeff Wall traces the ways in which Wall’s emphasis on the pictorial, what I think of as the ‘dramatic interior’ of the work, has made his conservative backlash against the progressivism of the neo-avant-garde come across as cultural sophistication (Burnham 1996). Burnham points to a quote by Wall in order to emphasize the way in which the artist must mis-read Marx in order to serve his artistic purposes. In a 1993 interview Wall suggested that “The idea that the commodity status of art prevents people from taking it seriously and developing profound relations with it is another sacred cow of the progressive consensus. We take land seriously and it is a commodity...” (Wall, *Interview with Lewis* 58). Burnham speaks from the position of a critic who, unlike Peter Bürger, has not relinquished the possibility of a viable contemporary

vanguardism. Contesting the assumptions implicit in Wall's remark, Burnham points out what Wall appears to miss, which is that *land* need not be a commodity; that it might be better inhabited as a *commons*. As with his foregone conclusions about the value of land, Wall refuses to discuss how his own 'critical' pictures have been implicated by the process of art's commodification. Obscuring the material context of production, including community and locale, as Wall's art does, is the means by which the work of art refuses material conditions and contributes to its own mystification. For Burnham, Wall's work is devoid of progressive thinking by virtue of its refusal to accept the neo-avant-garde imagination.

If we are to suppose that, outside the discourse of the neo-avant-garde, Wall nevertheless represents a kind of 'critical' rather than wholly 'affirmative' project, how are we to further establish its premises?⁹ It is necessary to emphasize that Wall has not disavowed the notion of vanguardism altogether. This can be said, in any case, with respect to his position during the 1980s; as for instance in a widely cited interview from 1985, in which Wall calls upon the notion of 'counter-tradition': "I mentioned that I thought there is a 'counter-tradition' within modernity. This counter-tradition is what I identify as 'avant-garde'" (Wall, *Typology, Luminescence...* 103). Further on in the interview Wall continues, saying "The counter-tradition I'm interested in is not just an art movement, it is a whole political culture. And because its politics are based on the material possibility of change, art plays a prominent role in it" (104). This comment gives some insight into the contentiousness of Wall's claims to a Vancouver 'counter-

⁹ I am thinking of the distinction suggested by Marcuse's classic essay, "The Affirmative Character of Culture" (1937).

tradition,' (or, more precisely, those neo-avant-gardists that have been excluded from Wall's vision) as outlined in the previous chapter. Wall is attempting to advocate a position which acknowledges the necessity of art as a social institution that has some degree of independence. The social function of art, in contemporary terms, rests on the question of art's perceived distance from, or integration within, the spectacular forms of the Culture Industry.

Wall's notion of counter-tradition can be understood as an ongoing encounter with the mechanics of representation. In his 1998 book on realism in twentieth century photography, John Roberts talks about Jeff Wall's work as a form of 'conceptualised realism' (Roberts 1998: 184-199). He positions Wall in terms of post-war realist photography, in Britain and the U.S., which, while historically aligned with the Left, became increasingly separated from the organized politics of the worker's movement.

Roberts is concerned with tracing the increasing divide between working class culture and realist representation. He outlines the path by which vanguard photography made its way into the art world in order to find and establish a viable social function. As modernism was institutionalized in the 1950s in the States, he explains, photography was increasingly associated with a purely 'documentary' function. The expansion of the communications industry during the 1960s meant that the ideological function of the image was increasingly regulated and policed. Radicals pushed out of political practices turned to the art world to find a welcome degree of autonomy. Conceptual Art (ca. 1967-1975) is one of the artistic formations which emerged from this radicalisation. Recognizing and responding to the new conditions of the capitalist spectacle, artists informed by

conceptualism made use of photography to re-align its avant-gardist aims with that of the art object. The critical engagement with the documentary mode explored by artists including Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler is one of the outcomes of this encounter.

As we have already seen, learning from the limitations of conceptualism, Jeff Wall comes to understand that art is propped up by both consumerist ideology and bureaucratic institutions. In the face of these conditions, he returns to a form of realism in the belief that it provides a space for public dialogue. In Roberts' account Wall's art recalls an historical concern for realist, popular forms of representation. "Realism, then, for Wall, is less a matter of aesthetics in any narrow sense than a recognition of the deep historical connection between representation and the possibility of a public, not just a professional, culture for art" (187). Roberts argues that Wall presents strategies that provide a form of collective and social knowledge that can be utilized by the spectator. This is because the artist relies on creating pictures based on generic typologies; on the use of settings, bodily gestures and social experiences which are widely familiar and recognizable. He dramatizes social moments which address the violence and ruptures which are a familiar part of modern life.

Roberts' argument for seeing Wall as a 'conceptual realist' brings to mind some of the historical issues around 'realism' debated by members of the Frankfurt School earlier in the twentieth century. In claiming that there is some value to recovering their discussion of realism in art, I am following up on comments made by Jeff Wall some time ago. As he explained in a 1989 interview, during a formative period of his life, the artist took a great deal from the

critical writings of the New Left. He says that the radicalism of the late sixties “is absolutely central to my work and to others,” going on to explain that the sensibility of that era “had a lot to do with the New Left, the writings of the Frankfurt School and the Weimar School being translated into English” (Guilbaut Archives, 1989 interview tr.). Wall goes on to talk about the importance of figures like Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Herbert Marcuse: “Benjamin was really the first one translated; I had come across it in *New Left Review*, about 1970; ‘The Author as Producer’, which was one of the most sacrosanct texts of the period. And that led to reading Brecht, and people were reading Marcuse on the west coast, and that led into the rest of the Frankfurt School.” The radicalism of this period lasted until the early 1970s. Wall continues, “I had talked to Allan Sekula, and he was into Marcuse ... and it was a very rich time and I think historically it is only just now being looked at. ... An amazing series of syntheses were fragmentarily happening up until about 1973.” (Guilbaut Archives 1989:3,4)

It is valuable to note the degree of enthusiasm which Wall awards to the direction of thought established by these Western Marxists, which he clearly perceives as a form of radicalism capable of inspiring artistic production. Wall talks about this as the influence of the ‘ultra-left’: “At that time there was a momentum to what I really think now is an ultra left view, of artistic activity. ... Even at that time I remember thinking, this is really ultra-left. I was really influenced by it.” He goes on to suggest that Marxism also informed his interest in photography: “It was political decisions that people were making, but they weren’t just political decisions people make in the normal or surface sense. They had to

do with how you imagined being an artist... For me it was crystallized down through photography” (Guilbaut Archives 1989, 4).

The transgressions against the institutions of art inaugurated by sixties conceptualism carried the Marxist project of ideology critique into the postmodern era. After some experimentation with this critique - i.e. with photoconceptualism - Wall recognizes that the critique of ideology need not be iconophobic; that is, it need not push the critique of representation to the limit of complete refusal. It is at this point that the debates around realism become increasingly important to his work.

As the critique of representation became more stringent and pervasive during the 1970s, the kinds of issues that were brought up between Benjamin, Bloch, Adorno and Lukacs with respect to the question of ‘realism’ receded from visibility. In the same 1989 interview, Wall goes on to talk about the importance of Georg Lukacs, who championed the pedagogical value of the image. Wall is interested in Lukacs’ framing of critical realism, and, in particular, his work on the use of the social type in art. Lukacs, informed by the philosophy of aesthetics, is of interest to Wall because of his understanding that “the notion of the typical, the notion of the represented figure, the notion of the represented gesture, the notion of the represented generic construction, are all absolutely at the centre.”

(Guilbaut Archives 1989) In this 1989 interview, Wall finds an ally in Lukacs’ position, as against figures including Adorno and Benjamin, who, with their defense of the avant-garde, would jeopardize the long history, and current viability, of a realist project.

In his overview of the debates and exchanges between Frankfurt School members, Fredric Jameson asks the reader to consider the place of realism in the history of aesthetics. It is not as easy to place as other genres - those of comedy, tragedy, lyric, epic or drama, for instance. This is because realism is engaged with an understanding of reality from which it does not claim to be entirely autonomous. "A new value, contemporaneous with the secularization of the world under capitalism, the ideal of realism presupposes a form of aesthetic experience which yet lays claims to a binding relationship to the real itself" Jameson says, continuing "that is to say, to those realms of knowledge and praxis which had traditionally been differentiated from the realm of the aesthetic, with its disinterested judgments and its constitution as sheer appearance." (Jameson 1977, 198) Realism has both aesthetic and cognitive properties; if you go too far in favour of the cognitive you deny the fictional aspect. If you go too far toward the aesthetic you transform realism into appearance. Realism, he reminds us, is the opposite of modernism; it is the "historical counter-part" and "dialectical mirror-image" of modernism (Jameson 198).

In the post-war climate of late capitalism, neither modernism nor realism seem entirely appropriate to the cultural situation. This is why, during the post-68 era, figuration has re-emerged in art. Jameson calls attention to painting in particular, to the movements of hyperrealism and photorealism, which, Jameson argues, are not about reality so much as they are about its representation in art (Jameson 1977, 211). This is a return to the modern, from an unexpected vantage point. Although he does not mention photography, and 'photorealism' lacks much of the critical reflexivity of the post-conceptual practices which inform

artists such as Jeff Wall, Jameson's comment is still apropos. This is because it positions 'realism' as the means by which 'modernism' itself might be renewed in a postmodern era. This is one of the ways in which we might be able to come to terms with Jeff Wall's apparent interest in Lukacsian realism. "Under these circumstances," Jameson says, "the function of a new realism would be clear; to resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent that category of totality which ... can alone project structural relations between classes as well as class struggles in other countries, in what has increasingly become a world system" (213).

By way of addressing what is at stake in the realist debate it will be useful to look at some of the central arguments in Lukacs' book on realism, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*,¹⁰ as well as Adorno's scathing review of that book. Although their positions on realism are vastly different, it is important to begin by acknowledging that Lukacs and Adorno share a similar intellectual background. Before they parted ways in 1933, both had worked to establish a viable theory of Marxism in the west. Because they rely on a form of Marxism which has its heritage in Hegelian dialectics, both Adorno and Lukacs rely on the notion of totality, and go on to develop complex theories of culture. As scholars often remark, Adorno's thinking was clearly influenced by two of Lukacs' earlier works; *History and Class Consciousness*, and *The Theory of the Novel*. The early Lukacs offered Adorno a theory of reification, extending Marx's notion of commodity fetishism and Weber's theory of modern society in order to describe a process of increasing rationalization. This theory can be seen in Adorno's writings

¹⁰ The German edition was published in 1957, and the first English edition in 1962.

on music during the 1930s, where reification is applied to the structure and context of avant-garde music.

In his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukacs had argued that, in an age constituted by alienation, the novel is the most suitable form. He outlines the historical condition of the aesthetic form of the novel, providing a rationale for its fragmentary, non-organic structure within the context of modernity. For Lukacs the novel is essentially different from the ancient Greek epic, which conveys a homogenous and coherent totality. In modernity, alienation and reification prevent social practice from guaranteeing meaning. The novel form comes into being in response to these conditions, to recognize the unfulfilled need for social totality. In modern conditions it is the abstract form of the novel that best suggests the rounded totality of the epic form. This abstract form, however, does not fully bridge the gap which stands between art and empirical reality. Through its structure, the novel creates a complete, non-organic composition which fulfills the necessity of its historical moment. The fragmented parts of the novel are assimilated into a coherent whole at both cognitive and aesthetic levels. Through an understanding of the function of the novel, which relies on a narrator to thematize the bridge between interior and exterior world, the novel becomes a self-conscious, limited, contingent, expression of totality. It does not, cannot, under the alienated conditions of late capitalism, achieve the organic totality of the epic. It can, however, perform a useful function as a transitional genre in a social world organized around the separation of subject and reality.

In Adorno's own writings Lukacs' theory about the modern novel is pushed toward a more radical understanding of modernism. For Adorno the concept of

artistic autonomy is crucial, and modernism is predicated on the separation of aesthetics from the socio-political realm. Because society is organized by reifying forces, Adorno argues that the notion of 'totality' must be read exclusively in relation to the autonomous sphere of art. If art strives to belong within the totality of the social system, as the mature Lukacs wants it to do, it will cancel its aesthetic distance, serving as a form of reconciliation with the forces that it wishes to critique. These are the grounds on which Adorno and Lukacs differ; about how art mediates social reality. In his 1958 review of the *Realism* book, Adorno will reaffirm his belief that the relationship between art and reality must remain one of opposition. For Adorno it is this antithesis which makes it impossible to treat content in the way that Lukacs does, as being immediately related to social reality. From Adorno's point of view, it is not possible to simply skip over the aesthetic in order to get at the analytical core of an artwork.

Lukacs' later book, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, relies on the premise that while modernism has been in decline since the failed revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century, forms of realism - bourgeois or critical realism, socialist realism - continue to offer a promising potential for the future of society. One of the distinctions Lukacs relies on in order to establish his comparison between 'decadent' modernism and 'healthy' realism is made in relation to the idea of 'potential'. Modernist literature, he argues in the book, negates history by confining the hero to his own personal experience. This personal history is transformed by the modernist author into a revelation of the human condition. In modernism this potentiality is subjective and cannot determine development, it stays abstract. "But in life potentiality can, of course, become reality," Lukacs

says, "Situations arise in which a man is confronted with a choice; and in the act of choice a man's character may reveal itself in a light that surprises even himself"(Lukacs 22). Lukacs is talking about dramatic literature, which allows this potentiality to be narrativized. These are the kinds of decisions that determine the course of a life. It is up to the artist to convey the conditions which allow for this kind of choice.

He goes on to explain that abstract potential is subjective, while concrete potential is comprised of a dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and the objective reality. In literature this relies on the observation and description of an actual and identifiable world. Through a clear distinction between subjectivity and reality the author can show the character's potentiality. This, Lukacs says, is how the artist will describe and locate concrete potentiality in the face of an infinity of abstraction. Further along in his argument, Lukacs explains that critical realism operates according to the conviction that reality is defined through a shared social basis or set of norms. "But literature must have a concept of the normal if it is to 'place' distortion correctly; that is to say, to see it *as* distortion"(Lukacs 33). You can't make distortion into a normal part of life. The realist writer is critically detached, whereas in modernist literature the distortion of pure subjectivity comes to stand in for reality itself.

At each historical moment of society, Lukacs argues that it is possible to identify how the contradictions between the individual and society are being worked out. This is what he refers to as a 'typology.' The typology "displays the contradictions within society and within the individual in the context of a dialectical unity." He continues, saying, "Here, individuals embodying violent and

extraordinary passions are still within the range of a socially normal typology (Shakespeare, Balzac, Stendhal). For, in this literature, the average man is simply a dimmer reflection of the contradictions always existing in man and society; eccentricity is a socially-conditioned distortion" (Lukacs 31). In modernist literature the neurotic becomes a social type which will shed light on the perversity and idiocy which has become a familiar part of life in capitalist conditions. In order to conform to the tenets of critical realism, these characters will also reveal the social character of protest that underlies their seemingly neurotic behaviour.

Lukacs draws attention to the importance of typology in art, saying that the "real criterion of literary achievement" is the ability of the artist to create enduring human types. This ability is based on an ideology committed to social development. The significance and universality of the typology relies on believing that history is based on dynamic movement. Critical realists strive to understand the unity of an historical period which belies seeming contradictions. He says Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy all accomplished this. The realist writer will be able to locate the specific problems of an historical moment. He explains that "a typology can only be of lasting significance if the writer has depicted the central or peripheral significance, the comic or tragic characteristics of his types, in such a way that subsequent developments confirm his portrait of the age" (Lukacs 57). Lukacs emphasizes that typologies are based on the understanding that exceeds the variety of day-to-day events and reportage. The successful artist abstracts from their understanding of the contemporary scene.

In his 1958 review, "Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukacs' *Realism in Our Time*" Adorno accuses Lukacs of relying on a simplistic and reductive notion of modernism.¹¹ For Adorno, Lukacs' claim to realism is forfeited by his anti-modernism, because it betrays the inaccuracy of his understanding of mediation. Lukacs' understanding fails to properly consider how the work of art relates to objective reality. This means that he problematically champions either socialist or critical realism, and all else is dismissed as decadent.

Adorno understands that Lukacs' assessment of modernism rests on his problematic distinction between concrete and abstract potentiality. The problem can be explained, Adorno says, by looking at Lukacs' failure to adequately distinguish realms of mediation. Lukacs looks to the content or subject matter of literature as a source of realism, without sufficiently examining literary technique. However, Adorno says, it is only through examining how technique is used that the subject matter can be rightly examined. Adorno turns to the concept of autonomy to explain the limitations of Lukacsian realism. "Art exists within reality, has its function in it, and is also inherently mediated with reality in many ways," Adorno comments. "But nevertheless, as art, by its very concept it stands in an antithetical relationship to the status quo" (Adorno 1958, 224). Adorno continues, further on in the passage, to explain that the artist has to offer images which do not duplicate nature. "Only thereby is the aesthetic constituted; only thereby and not by gazing at mere immediacy, does art become knowledge, does it, that is, do

¹¹ Theodor Adorno. "Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukacs' *Realism in Our Time*" [1958 - see Notes to Lit, xv] in *Theodor Adorno. Notes to Literature*. Tr. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. NY: Columbia UP, 1991: 216-240. also published as Theodor Adorno. "Reconciliation under Duress" in *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: NLB, 1977:151-177.

justice to a reality that conceals its own essence and suppresses what the essence expresses for the sake of a merely classificatory order of things” (Adorno 1958, 224).

This opens the door for a discussion of modernism as negation. Lukacs is both ‘philistine’ and ‘ideological’ in his attack on modernism: “In analogy to a current philosophical expression, we might speak of ‘aesthetic difference’ from existence: only by virtue of this difference, and not by denying it, does the work of art become both work of art and correct consciousness. A theory of art that refuses to acknowledge this is philistine and ideological at the same time” (Adorno 1958, 225). Adorno argues that realism brings together the subjective intentions of the artist with the objective features of reality gathered through scientific knowledge. Following this logic, it is wrong to assert that art merely reflects reality. Rather, art reveals what is veiled in empirical form. “Art does not provide knowledge of reality by reflecting it photographically or ‘from a particular perspective’ but by revealing whatever is veiled by the empirical form assumed by reality, and this is possible only by virtue of art’s own autonomous status” (162).

Adorno goes on to suggest that official optimism has blinded Lukacs. The postulate of Lukacs’ aesthetics is that there is no breach between subject and object; that a reconciliation between the two has been achieved. It is only on these grounds that Lukacs can make the argument that art acts as a ‘reflection’ of reality. The problem, however, as Adorno says, is that “all this rests on the assumption that the reconciliation has been accomplished, that all is well with society, that the individual has come into his own and feels at home in the world”

(176). Adorno refuses this optimistic reading of the social world, on either side of the 'iron curtain'.

Lukacs' dismisses modernism on the grounds that it fails to differentiate the distortion of the artwork from objective reality, which is thought to offer sufficient forces to mobilize that work against angst and ontological isolation. Adorno says, "The official optimism implied in the notion of counter-forces and trends compels Lukacs to do away with the Hegelian proposition that the negation of the negation - the 'distortion of the distortion' /is the positive." (Adorno 1958, 168) This is attached for Adorno to the fact that Lukacs evades adequate consideration of the dialectical tension that exists between reality and art. Lukacs depends on human progress, in "the ultimate rationality, meaningfulness of the world and man's ability to penetrate its secrets," which, Adorno says, is "asking rather a lot" (172). Finally, Adorno says, referring to Lukacs' mature affiliation with orthodox East-bloc Marxism, Lukacsian realism cannot be separated from the politics of socialist realism. Lukacs acts as though he is free, but he is trapped: "[I]t is impossible to rid oneself of the feeling that here is a man who is desperately tugging at his chains, imagining all the while that their clanking heralds the onward march of the world-spirit" (175). By legitimating socialist realism he in fact affirms the dictatorship of the Soviet Union.

Jeff Wall's programme of 'conceptual realism' attempts to establish a form of realism which is viable under 'postmodern' conditions. As Wall himself has admitted, this kind of project participates in the ideology of modern progress. (Wall, "My Photographic Production" 1989: 249-150) It does so by engaging with the history of photography, and with its possibilities in the present. As mentioned

earlier on, John Roberts has argued that Wall's art is both a product of, and a response to, the political crisis of realist photography. Historically, photography was marginalised by a modernist discourse aiming to go beyond the mere appearance of things. The roots of modern culture attest to this. Over many decades the critique of representation is what became known as modernism, while photography, perceived as having a purely mimetic function, was marginalized and ignored as 'merely' documentary. Therefore, Roberts argues, it is the very *absence* from modernism which best tells the history of photography and its 'realist' function.

What Roberts draws attention to is the way in which Wall relies on, and transforms, older realist conventions. As the artist himself has admitted, his photographs have an affinity with some of the strategies that Lukacs defends as a progressive form of critical realism. The affinity with Lukacsian realism might be seen, in particular, in Wall's reliance on generic typology, the non-organic 'novelistic' unity of the artwork, and an aesthetic which remains grounded in objective reality. This aesthetic position, as confirmed by the 1981 Kammerspiel essay, also implies a refusal of Adorno's aesthetic theory - including negation, autonomy and apparent 'defeatism.'

Typology emphasizes the means by which the interpretation of art is determined through convention, rather than free and unrestricted. Another way to understand the inherent limits of representation can be understood through Bakhtin's concept of genre.¹² In this account genre is understood as the location of collective meaning, where dialogue takes place. 'Genre' is related to the idea

¹² Several reviewers have considered Wall's work through reference to Bakhtin. See for example Jerry Zaslove, "Faking Nature" (1990) and Robert Linsley, "Image Literatures" (1992).

of the 'generic,' and by considering the generic it is possible to understand the impulse to work with social types and characters rather than subjectivity and individual expression. Wall is invested in the notion of genre as a common language, and a means by which to represent objective reality. Following Bakhtin, he says of genre: "It is the foundation of the guarantee of objectivity, the basis of the 'truth content' of representations" (Wall in Schwander 1994:126). In comments such as this one, Wall demonstrates his belief in the ability to communicate to a general audience, acknowledging his hope in the social type as a form of shared visual language.

Wall's adherence to generic typology can be identified, most distinctly, in the pictures made during the 1980s. For example, Wall's picture of a man, temporarily overcome by the recollection of a situation that moves him to fury, who viciously slams his drinking carton in *Milk* (1984) [Figure 13]; or the picture of a mother, strolling through an undeveloped yard in the suburbs while carrying her young child, deeply engrossed in a dialogue with a girlfriend in *Diatrobe* (1985); or that of a working class Caucasian man makes a racist gesture toward an Asian man, while walking along the sidewalk in *Mimic* (1982). [Figure 14] These are compositions developed to convey typical moments whose interpretation relies on the dramatic structure of social meaning. As viewers, we search for the motives which, stemming from the interior world of the subject, have become embodied as recognizable physical gestures. And, too, we look to the exterior world portrayed in the picture, to see what role these gestures will play in the constitution of the public world. As Wall explains, "It is the meanings of the typology of pictures which makes their significations possible and objective" (Wall

Typology, Luminescence... 98). The other features of Lukacsian realism, beyond generic typology, are also apparent in these pictures. In each case, the picture, composed of actors set up on location, is an artificial construction of fragments which appears as a dramatic, 'novelistic' unity. And, lastly, the camera, with its indexical relationship to the real, inevitably confirms in the picture an element of objective reality.

Reliance on typology also informs other artists associated with the Vancouver School, including Ian Wallace, Ken Lum and Rodney Graham. Although detailed examination of how this strategy is used by artists other than Wall exceeds the limits of my study here, it remains a matter worthy of future investigation. The process of staging is evident in the work of Ian Wallace as early as 1977, in allegorical pictures such as *The Calling* or *The Studio*. In these works Wallace offers a photographic restaging of canonical art history paintings, relying on his artistic colleagues, including Rodney Graham and Jeff Wall, to pose as dramatic subjects.¹³ In a 1978 review of these works, David MacWilliam comments "As an artist Wallace functions like an art director for a high fashion magazine. But rather than being restricted to the promotion of a product, he is solely concerned with the enigmatic architecture of the human gesture" (MacWilliam 17). This reading, which might just as readily be applied to Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) or *The Storyteller* (1986), confirms Wallace's attempt to establish the picture as a site of cultural education. Wallace, in 1976, like Jeff Wall a few years later, relies on figuration originating in the typologies of modern art to serve as the basis of a scenario with contemporary relevance.

¹³ Ian Wallace and Rodney Graham appear in *The Calling*, Jeff Wall and Rodney Graham appear in *The Studio* (MacWilliam).

Ken Lum's interest in the structure and value of social types is evident in his ongoing engagement with portraiture. He has explored issues of identity and spectatorship from many vantage points in series' such as *Portrait Logos* and *Youth Portraits*.¹⁴ As Lum commented in 1988, "I am interested in typology because it is used so commonly and forcefully by media and media sources, and as a means of communication" (Lum in Sans, 1988:92). Lum had been a student of Wall's at SFU, during the seventies. During the 1980s, Lum's work can be seen in terms of an ongoing exchange with Jeff Wall's work.¹⁵ One example of this exchange is evident in his counter-monumental series from 1985, *Youth Portraits*, in which Lum filled an art gallery with small, newsprint 'portraits' of unidentified young people. [Figure 15] Lum's *Youth Portraits* looks back, with a critical eye, on Wall's intentionally monumental series of anonymous portraits, *Young Workers* (1978-1983). [Figure 16] Influenced by the kinds of politics that artists including Lum were advancing, Wall had also looked backed, with a critical eye, on his own *Young Workers*. In 1983, five years after completing the original version, Wall had revised the series to be more inclusive of racial diversity.¹⁶ Closer than Wall to the progressive politics of postmodernism, Lum's work shows on ongoing commitment to critiquing the ideological domination exerted by mass media in its subordination, stereotyping, and marginalising of various social groups. He does this by creating 'portraits' of recognizable, but anonymous social types. Lum's witty critique of popular racialized stereotypes is expressed in photo-based works such as his 1989 *Mounties and Indians*. [Figure 17]

¹⁴ These projects are outlined in Kitty Scott's essay "Ken Lum works with Photography" 2002:12-29.

¹⁵ See Ian Wallace "Ken Lum: Image and Alter-Image" *Vanguard* Winter 1986:23-25.

¹⁶ Interview with Ian Wallace (October 17, 2003):15.

Rodney Graham's use of the social type is most readily visible in the film-based projects which he began in 1994. In these films, Graham relies on himself to act out various character types, appearing, in works such as *Vexation Island* (1997), *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (1999), *City Self/Country Self* (2000), *A Reverie Interrupted by the Police* (2003) as pirate, cowboy, dandy/pauper, and prisoner/guard.¹⁷ In 2002 Graham produced *Fantasia for Four Hands*, a large scale photo-based work in which Graham appears, four times, seated at a piano. This work deals with the problem of self-representation in portraiture. As Graham explained, "I resolved to do a double self-portrait in the manner of Jeff Wall... Then it occurred to me to add novelty to the work by doubling it again..." (Graham as quoted in Arnold *A Little Thought* 195). [Figure 18]

In the generic picture that Wall creates there are figures but very few conventional portraits; people are not identified by their names but rather by their gestures and their physiognomy. In this way it becomes clear that it is the generic social type, rather than the personal and historical aspects of an individual, that comprise the aspect of identity that is at issue here. When the person portrayed in a picture is shown engaged in a particular activity, as compared to looking at the viewer, he or she functions typologically, because the function of the person in the scene must be interpreted as a presence which is essentially pictorial. When the picture is identified as a portrait, by contrast, and the person is represented *for* the viewer, the image of the person becomes linked to the social identity of the person outside of the picture. The gaze becomes an imaginary link between figure and spectator.

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of these projects, see Darian Leader "The System of Rodney Graham's Costume Trilogy" in Rodney Graham. Whitechapel et al:35-56.

In Wall's work, then, the social type functions not as an individual, but as an element within the construct of a picture. The dramatic content in each picture is constructed by the appearance of one or more persons somehow ambiguously caught up, either in the midst of a gesture or lost in thought. Wall says, "This typology is a material means, it's a material part of the process of making pictures, not just an arbitrary intellectualization. All of my pictures are made like this" (Wall *Typology, Luminescence...* 98). Through this dramatic construct, aspects of subjectivity and inwardness are continuously suggested, but never explained.

Because the social subjects portrayed in the work are not portraits so much as they are hired actors, Wall's use of typology approximates a theatrical and cinematic mode. But they are actors deprived of the ability to speak; actors frozen in arrested motion. The differing conventions which govern the representation of the figure in visual art such as this are deeply entangled inside the notion of theatricality which has been theorized by Michael Fried and others. The degree to which the picture represents figures that seem to 'reach' outside of the frame, performing specifically for the gaze of the spectator, as compared to a pictorial composition in which the figures go on about their business while the spectator 'peers in' at a distance, is a question of art's autonomy. This is the subject of the following chapter, and it will be examined through a consideration of Jeff Wall's argument for the dramatic interior of the picture.

Chapter Four

Cinematic Photography

"I like to think that serious art is not at all exclusive, but it is not for everyone; it's for anyone."

- Jeff Wall in conversation with Mike Figgis, 2004.

Referring to the state of contemporary art discourse, British art historian John Roberts argues that the greatest theoretical lack of the past three decades has been the concept of autonomy, which has largely been dismissed as a modernist hangover (Roberts *Autonomy*). Until the demise of modernism during the 1960s, art was understood to function in opposition to popular culture. In recent decades it has become apparent that art cannot withstand assimilation into the forces which comprise pop culture, and has joined a wide an undifferentiated field of 'cultural practice'. In spite of these circumstances the concept of autonomy, because it refers to the social relations which organize the basis of capitalist society, continues to be relevant today. Autonomy, following Roberts, refers to "those practices of formal and cognitive self-criticism which art must undertake in order for it to produce and reproduce its conditions of emergence and possibility" (*Autonomy* 26). The means by which art constantly encounters this assimilation into popular culture is the ongoing dilemma of modern art.

Arguments about the advent of postmodernism made by influential New Left writers such as, for instance, Perry Andersen and Fredric Jameson, have

diminished the viability of autonomy as a framework for talking about contemporary art. This is because their claims about the postmodern have not adequately differentiated the historical avant-garde of the 1920s and 30s, which was informed by revolutionary vanguardism, from the ongoing project of the avant-garde, which, Roberts says, is best explained through the concept of negation. Through their reliance on postmodernism, such authors have conceded defeat in the face of commodity culture, and have discounted the possibility of art's autonomous stance. This has resulted in a theoretical impasse when it comes to thinking about aesthetic experience. Roberts argues that the end of art's autonomy is "a techno-postmodernist myth" (*Autonomy* 27). The relationship of art to technology has been wholly misconstrued by the postmodern argument, and this has resulted in the claim that autonomy has been destroyed by the current folding of the art object into the world of technological mediation.

In order to salvage the concept of autonomy, Roberts turns to the work of art historian T.J. Clark. Through Clark's sense of art's possibilities, which have been directed toward modernism, Roberts asserts that contemporary art must follow through on the political project which once determined the basis of high art. For Clark, modernism represents a defense of artistic autonomy whose wish for transcendence is disabused through the necessity of form. For Roberts, this claim is taken up as a means of supporting postmodern cultural practice. Art's ruthless materialism has to emerge from the alienated ground of mass culture. Where Clark has made the argument that the freedom of autonomy is historical, Roberts contends that it continues today, in different and renewed forms. He

develops a perspective which is helpful in coming to terms with eighties art photography.

In an interview from 1989, Wall makes a comment that provides some insight into his intentions with respect to the use of creating monumental tableaux. Wall wants the picture to stage dramatic, meaningful, moments: "To build an emotional world inside the picture, as a drama with meaning, and I hope that is utterly clear, what I'm doing" (Guilbaut Archives 40). The artist argues that the value of the work is deeply attached to its content, to the drama that has been composed within the picture. He continues, in the same interview:

What I'm really curious about though, with this work [*Diatrobe*] or any other, is whether the content of the drama and its composition as a picture, legitimates it In other words I think that the dramatic interior of the work, and its artistic interior, is a legitimate position to hold today. That is the question, not whether it is a good picture or not (Guilbaut Archives 40).

But what exactly is 'drama' in relation to an image? Clearly, the practice of visual drama falls backward as well as sideways, to appropriate the system of encoded signs, gestures and poses which derive from the historical conventions of the image established by modern art history, cinema, advertising and television. This is partly a question of realism, which was discussed in the previous chapter. But to stage a visual drama is also to accept the viability of the tableau, to adopt a format which draws the conventions of theatre into the picture. As a form of art with some claim to autonomy, the motive which is asserted from within the tableau is either a deconstructive critique of the dominant, spectacularized images in which it is immersed or it is a productive return to

conventions of public address which rely on visual motifs as a means of storytelling. In either case, what we are trying to figure out is how to establish the perceived function of the tableau in relation to the spectator who, herself, is immersed in the world of the modern spectacle.

In order to come to terms with art's function within the spectacle of consumer society, or, in other words, in order to understand how Jeff Wall's work functions as a promise of artistic autonomy, it will be necessary to recover some of the critical controversies over mediation which were taking place around the time when Wall decided to make his return to pictorial photography. This includes revisiting the nineteenth century project of 'the painting of modern life' in general, and the art of Edouard Manet, in particular. Manet has clearly been important to Wall, as is evident from his own critical writing as well as from direct allusions made to Manet's paintings in at least two of his own cibachrome pictures.¹ In 1979, Wall made *Picture for Women*, based on Manet's painting, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere* (1881-82), and in 1986 he returned directly to Manet in his picture *The Storyteller*, based on the painting *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-63).

Some of the questions related to Wall's use of the tableau can properly be addressed through a consideration of recent developments in historiography, developments which have had a measurable impact on the context of Wall's production. Manet, as the foundational figure of modern painting, has been an active site of analysis for both T.J. Clark and Michael Fried. In 1984 T.J. Clark published a book entitled *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*; and in 1996 Fried published *Manet's Modernism or, The Face*

¹ Jeff Wall. "Unity and Fragmentation in Manet" (1984).

of Painting in the 1860s. In Chapter Six I will return to these issues, arguing that Wall's contemporary pictures can be thought of as a cipher of the longstanding, and still unresolved, struggle between these divergent and highly influential interpretations of modern art. Before turning to these matters, however, I want to consider some of the predominant controversies of the post-68 era, during which time Wall begins to produce his pictures.

The discussion of typology outlined in the previous chapter was intended to reinforce the understanding that Wall's work admits to a certain degree of faith in representation. This faith is suggested by the theoretical premises which guide the artist's production, and confirmed in the photography itself. In his pictures, however, Wall's attempt to address public culture is also marked by a refusal to continue working within an older, more established tradition of painting or documentary photography. That is to say, the faith in representation demonstrated by this type of art is not given without abandon, but, rather, admits to a process of self-imposed mediation.

The form of mediation demonstrated in Wall's art is abrasively familiar to its audience. This is because it relies on the same form of 'realism' which, operating at a distance from the real, is constantly employed by the images which circulate in the realm of promotional culture. Wall's art relies on the same apparatus of staged social types which capitalism relies on to reinforce dominant ideology.² Instead of attempting to 'document' objective reality with the camera, his art represents 'dramatic interiors.' Given that the artist admits to an affinity

² I am thinking about the argument made by Michael Schudson on 'capitalist realism.' See "Chapter 7: Advertising as Capitalist Realism" in his book *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion*, 1986:209-233.

with the critical stance of modernism, it is puzzling to see that his art so directly mimics the visual language of the spectacle. Modernist painting, in its critical opposition to popular culture, was governed by an ongoing refusal to concede to the emphatic mimesis employed by mass media formats.

The social function of the image used in advertising also relies on dramatic scenes displayed in large format, back-lit, photographs. In contemporary advertising the image is constructed with the aim of mobilizing the unconscious realms of desire and wish fulfillment in the spectator, in order to identify these dreamworlds with a particular brand of commodity. In this way, regardless of how successful it is, the dramatic interior of the advertising image is always bound to operate within its established social function, which is to serve the market of promotional culture. Wall's 'dramatic interior', by contrast, has a less readily identifiable purpose. Its function is sheltered and constrained by the social institution of art. In spite of their institutionalised difference in function, however, it remains clear that the contemporary relevance, and appeal, of Wall's pictures has to do with their close resemblance to the dominant visual language of the spectacle.

There are a number of texts, written during the ascension of postmodernism in the late seventies and early eighties, which address the beginnings of Wall's return to the picture through reference to the activity of spectatorship. It was by engaging in the mechanics of spectatorship that the critical distance from the dominant representations of the spectacle, such as those employed by advertisers, was thought to be possible. This position is sometimes referred to as 'screen theory' because the Marxist, psycho-analytic

approach to ideology critique was most forcefully articulated during the 1970s through the British film journal, *Screen*.³ The earliest application of this paradigm of screen theory to Jeff Wall's art was written by the artist himself, in an essay entitled 'To the Spectator' (1979). This was Wall's premiere address to his public.

Understanding the significance of screen theory in the formation of Wall's work adds another dimension to the 1990 *Ventriloquist* picture which was discussed in the previous chapter. The role of the spectator is central to the interpretation of this picture, relying on drama as a means by which to stake out some autonomy from the totalizing force of the spectacle. In order to understand this strategy it is necessary to reflect on the *doubling* of spectatorship that Wall has built into the picture. While the children may be *represented* as passive recipients of the spectacle, that is, the primary level of spectatorship, we, as the *actual* spectators of this scenario, in the secondary level of spectatorship, are assumed to have a degree of critical agency. This agency comes about because the picture provides a framework through which to consider the dilemma posed by spectatorship. We are gazing at the children's gaze.

Wall's 1977 decision to return to pictorial photography belongs to the emergent context of the post-medium condition; sitting securely within concurrent debates about the ideological function of images both within and outside of the art world. Some of these debates surface in a 1979 issue of *October* magazine,

3 Screen theory is, in itself, a complex topic of discussion. It is one of the sites which scholars have taken on in order to debate the fate of the political in the face of post-structural theory. For a materialist critique of the idealist and ahistorical elements of *Screen* theory, see for instance Chuck Kleinhans "A ventriloquist psychoanalysis" *Jump Cut*, no. 9, 1975, pp. 30-32; and *Post-Theory: reconstructing film studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

which included an essay on 'pictures' by critic Douglas Crimp. This essay was written in relation to an exhibition, *Pictures*, that Crimp had curated in 1977, which displayed the work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith. The opening line of Crimp's article attests to the ongoing relevance of Michael Fried's 1967 distinction between 'art' and 'objecthood', stating: "And indeed, over the past decade we have witnessed a radical break with that modernist tradition, effected precisely by a preoccupation with the 'theatrical,'" Crimp states (76). Artists had turned away from painting and begun to explore the possibilities offered by televisual formats. Crimp positions this as explicitly *postmodern* art on the grounds that it relies on materials as diverse as photography, film, performance, painting, sculpture and drawing. This explosion had thrown open the ontological status of art. For Crimp, unlike Fried, this postmodern situation is not a cause for serious concern: "What remain are just so many aesthetic activities, but judging from their current vitality we need no longer regret or wish to reclaim, as Fried did then, the shattered integrity of modernist painting or sculpture" (76).

Michael Fried had identified the theatricality of art in its location between media, as well as through its reliance on temporality. He had resisted art's continued 'presence' across time, wanting the work to be available, all at once, to a viewer. The work of the seventies, by contrast, has continually relied on settings in which the art and the spectator encounter one another for a duration of time, in a constructed situation. Crimp argues, by contrast, "An art whose strategies are thus grounded in the literal temporality and presence of theatre has

been the crucial formulating experience for a group of artists currently beginning to exhibit in New York” (77).

Crimp’s account is noteworthy for attesting to the way in which theatricality would come to be used and interpreted during the 1970s and 80s. Theatricality was not a condition particular to minimalist sculpture alone; it was, rather, something that could bleed into, and reconstitute, all of the modes and formats employed by contemporary art. What is most important for the purposes of this writing is to emphasize that theatricality also implicates the creation of pictures. While Fried’s *Art and Objecthood* article did not expressly address art photography, Crimp is clearly aware that the construction of the pictorial cannot be excluded from the concerns of theatricality. Referring to the photo-based artwork in the *Pictures* show, he says “the extent to which this experience [of theatricality] fully pervades their work is not, however, immediately apparent, for its theatrical dimensions have been transformed and, quite unexpectedly, reinvested in the pictorial image” (77). These artists make use of situation and duration to create “a tableau whose presence and temporality are utterly psychologized; performance becomes just one of a number of ways of ‘staging’ a picture” (77).

The aim here is to establish the means by which Jeff Wall’s work can be positioned within the discourse of theatricality that Fried, Crimp and others develop during this period. While Wall’s art presents characteristics which clearly participate in the move to theatricality outlined above, his position in the discourse is not a simple one to locate. In order to do this, it will be necessary to more fully contextualize the rationale supporting Wall’s attempts to restore the

painting of modern life, as a photographer. By way of accomplishing this aim, it will be productive to outline the return to the pictorial as it has been discussed, during recent decades, with reference to the field of art photography.

Photography, because of its inherently instrumental function as a technology of vision, was not originally recognized as a suitable medium within the institutional complex of high art. Even when used creatively by artists, one of the central differences between photography and other artistic media has been the degree of credibility that it affords. Spectators *believe* in the credibility of photographs much more than they believe in the credibility of marble or bronze sculpture, etching, or oil painting. The photograph has always functioned as an iconic (as compared to an indexical or symbolic) sign, inherently predicated on a relationship of resemblance between its form as representation and the reality that it depicts. Significantly, it turns the conventions of Renaissance perspective into a visual machine, offering a technological confirmation of the rationalization of sight that extends longstanding and deeply conventional historical procedures. The means by which the discourse of art photography was established during the twentieth century was thus as an affirmation of objectivity (Newhall). Consistent with the tenets of modernism, for most of the twentieth century art photography championed the objectivity of the photograph, whether 'straight' or 'documentary,' and this approach remained predominant until the 1960s. The scientific rationale of modern progress drove the art photograph toward greater purity and simplicity of form (Hirsch 213-266). While the purists in the medium have accepted this constraint, others found the need to innovate. In the radicalized climate of the sixties the legacy of modernist photography, as it had been established in the

United States by figures such as Beaumont Newhall, did not appeal to a generation of artists who were unwilling to be confined by the progressive logic demanded by a singular medium.

Writing in *Artforum* in 1976, the critic A.D. Coleman draws attention to what he calls a newly emergent 'directorial mode' in art photography. "It would be difficult to compile a complete list of those working in this mode at this time," he says, but "there are a great many, and the number is increasing rapidly" (257). He mentions Les Krimms, Duane Michals, Lee Friedlander, Lucas Samaras, Irina Ionesco, Ed Ruscha, William Wegman, Robert Cumming and Bruce Nauman, among others (257). The philosophical relationship that photography has with the real can, Coleman suggests, be looked at as a continuum. At one extreme is the *documentary mode*, which remains committed to maintaining credibility. This mode tries to establish a relationship based on faith, where the photograph confirms the 'truth' that is communicated between photographer and viewer. The mid-point on Coleman's continuum is *responsive photography*, which allows for the expression of the sensibility of the photographer. While contingency, chance, and personal choice are understood as elements shaping the photograph, the 'reality' beyond the lens of the camera remains untouched. The event or situation taking place, whether personal or external, exists in the real world of the photographer.

The third of Coleman's modes, posed opposite that of documentary, is the *directorial mode*. In this mode "the photographer consciously and intentionally *creates* events for the express purpose of making images thereof" (250). Photographers may do this by intervening in a particular real-life situation; by

staging dramatic tableaux explicitly for the camera; or by arranging objects or still life subjects in the studio. In this mode the iconic resemblance that is natural to the technical function of the photograph is turned against itself. “There is an inherent ambiguity at work in such images, for even though what they purport to describe as ‘slices of life’ would not have occurred except for the photographer’s instigation, nonetheless those events ... did actually take place, as the photographs demonstrate” (251).

The directorial mode, although it has not been sufficiently organized as a genre, is a recognizable practice in the history of photography. It can be distinguished from other modes of photography by virtue of its stance with respect to the real. Earlier in the article Coleman observes that “[p]hotography appears to be nothing more than concretized seeing, and seeing is believing” (249). Taking the directorial mode into account, Coleman returns to reconsider his earlier phrase, ‘seeing is believing’, commenting that “things are not always as they seem” (252). This conceptual twist will recur further on, because it alludes to the way in which the theatre of representation figures the possibilities of human agency.

Coleman’s insights into the emergence of the directorial mode in art photography confirm that Jeff Wall’s art belongs to a much wider turn toward pictorial narrativity. Arriving at the time it does, Wall’s art seems to move productively within the critical controversies of the period. Several early reviews, written by contemporary artists, curators and critics, attest to the significance of Wall’s work during that time. They mobilize a discourse of spectacle and spectatorship in order to position Wall as an artist who is as concerned with the

(postmodern) critique of representation as he is with the (modern) creation of the picture.

This line of argument is evident, for instance, in an early review by the artist Dan Graham. (Graham 1979) Graham's article, a review focussing on Jeff Wall's picture, *The Destroyed Room* (1978), champions the critical intentions motivating the artist's work. Wall's art demonstrates a critique of representation, within the framework of Graham's review, through his reliance on stage sets. The prefabricated staging used to construct the image is apparent in the setting itself; neither door nor window offer a means by which to exit the *Destroyed Room*. [Figure 19] This is the means by which the artificiality of the picture, its inherently constructed nature as a representation, is high-lighted. "It makes apparent, by revealing the stage set located within a studio door, that the image is a reproduced contrivance - a fake" (Graham, 1979: 241).

Graham points out that the art-work, a back-lit cibachrome photo, is displayed in a storefront window.⁴ He does this in order to emphasize the means by which Wall's pictures, and art in general, are not fully autonomous from the economic infrastructure and realm of signification which govern the circulation of commodities. Although situated in the realm of the art gallery, the storefront display of *Destroyed Room* also engaged with the culture of the street, and the practice of window-shopping. As with the commodity, Wall's artwork creates a *lack* in the consumer, and promises to gratify it through the act of consumption. Wall's work knowingly engages with the pleasure of looking. Moreover, through

⁴ Graham is referring to the first exhibition of *The Destroyed Room*, at the Nova Gallery. The Nova Gallery, run by Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft, was in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood. See *Real Pictures* exh. cat. Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005.

the representation of destruction, it knowingly admits to the violence of possession implied in both voyeuristic fantasy and commodity purchase.

Graham's review relies on the scholarship of Laura Mulvey as a means of interpreting the subject matter of the picture. Mulvey's highly influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which had appeared in *Screen* magazine in 1975, relied on psychoanalysis to argue that women in film were routinely positioned as objects of a 'male gaze'. Wall's picture depicts the tattered remains of a girl's bedroom in which the clothes, jewellery and mattress can be seen in violent disarray. Although there are no people in the picture, the room tells a story of an event just past, and is suggestive of female objectification and its counter-part in male violence.⁵ In this way Wall's picture alludes to the operation of sexual difference in the cinematic image. Graham applies Mulvey's theory to Wall's picture, arguing that it knowingly participates in a range of conventions that invite the male spectator to find erotic pleasure in gazing at the woman on screen, turning her into the passive object of his gaze. The means by which the picture attempts to critically circumscribe the male gaze, rather than to simply repeat it, is to have removed the image of woman from the picture itself.

During the initial years of his reliance on pictorial form, Jeff Wall created a number of artworks which, as with *The Destroyed Room*, attempt to address the mechanisms of the spectatorial gaze. The issue of spectatorship -- of looking, as of being seen - informs some of the earliest pictures, including *Movie Audience* (1979), *Double Self Portrait* (1979), *Picture for Women* (1979) and *Bad Goods*

⁵ Art historian Bill Wood has observed that Wall's image bears an uncanny resemblance to the 'destroyed room' scene in Alan Pakula's 1971 paranoid thriller, *Klute* (personal correspondence, June 2003).

(1984). [Figures 20,21,22,23] It is for this reason that early reviewers tend to discuss Wall's art as a form of ideology critique by way of a consideration of spectatorship. As with Graham's 1979 review, a 1982 review by American art critic Donald Kuspit also stresses that, although Wall's art looks like a conventional return to narrative, it is in fact governed by a concern with the meaning and impact of the institutionalised gaze: "The sense that all looking is ideological," Kuspit remarks, "pervades Wall's work, making its subject matter less imperative than its methods." He continues, referencing those works which address the gaze, "Thus, Wall's production of visibility is actually a critique of visibility" (Kuspit 52).

For Kuspit *The Destroyed Room*, *Picture for Women*, and *Double Self Portrait* are images which address contradicted or unfulfilled passion. They are scenes in which relationships are impaired due to technical difficulties. Wall's work is permeated by a contradiction between control and expression: "There is a sense of something being out of control in Wall's images, for all their obvious control - of something artificial in them, for all their theatricality" Kuspit says, continuing: "They are technically expert theatre - blatantly, even militantly obsessed with technique - yet this obsession reflects a sensuality, uncertain how to express itself except 'technically'" (56). In Wall the fetishization of technique that is evident ends up as the means by which emotional intensity is expressed. This is accomplished by Wall's total control over the form and technique of execution. It creates an inner tension attuned to the sign of passion in the work. Kuspit concludes by saying that "Wall's work is self-legitimizing to the extent that

it seduces us into believing in the presence of a passion so profound that it undermines the impact of his technical brilliance” (56).

In 1984 two of Wall’s artworks, *Double Self Portrait* and *Picture for Women*, were included in an important exhibition curated by the New Museum in New York. This exhibition, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, confirms that the reception of Jeff Wall’s art is, at a certain historical moment, strongly associated with the theoretical ‘crisis of representation’ and its framing in the discourse of ‘postmodernism.’ In the *Difference* catalogue, curator Kate Linker explains that the exhibition was organised as a consideration of how sexual difference is produced. Many of the other artists included in the show -- Barbara Kruger, Victor Burgin, Hans Haacke, Mary Kelly, Martha Rosler -- are, by now, classic representatives of the postmodern deconstruction of representation. British art historian Griselda Pollock, discussing the landmark role played by the *Difference* exhibition, explains that the show operated as an emblem of seventies cultural politics in the more conservative climate of the 1980s, which was witness to a revival of traditionalist and expressive styles of painting (Pollock 155-199). The *Difference* artists, informed by Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, represent a field of art production that is concerned with examining the social construction of language and identity through the politics of race, gender and class.

In the accompanying catalogue essay, written by Craig Owens, the artworks in *Difference* are examined in relation to the act of ‘striking a pose.’ His essay attests to the currency, during the early ‘80s, of deconstructive and post-structuralist theory in art criticism; especially the feminist decoding of the sexual,

gendered body. Owens takes up the question of 'the pose' from two angles, the social and the psycho-sexual. Drawing on Foucault and the panopticon to talk about surveillance, and on Lacan to talk about desire, Owens' theoretical framework looks at photography in terms of both rational and irrational forces. Scopic pleasure, he says, turns the active subject into a frozen object. This, he argues, is the story behind Wall's *Double Self-Portrait*. In Wall's image we see the corner of a generic room, occupied by the same figure, twice. On the left side of the picture he appears standing, arms crossed awkwardly, wearing a dress shirt and pair of cords. On the right side of the picture the same figure appears again, dressed in a sweatshirt and a pair of jeans, with a slightly different pose. The figure in the picture, which, as the title indicates, is the artist himself, does not look across at his double, but rather, out at the viewer. The spectatorial gaze is thus divided, caught in the choice between two objects. The difficulty involved in looking is further complicated by the look of the figure(s) in the picture, who also attempt to reverse the pose by turning the gaze outward, and making the spectator, (which could of course *also* be the artist himself), into the object of the gaze. In the representation of this doubled figure, the spectator is presented with a scenario which can only be made 'real' within the framework of the photographic image.

The picture, in showing a double, makes reference to the division between subject and object that is enacted in photography, to the way in which the photographed subject is separated from its resemblance. The pose, which acknowledges the artist as both subject and object, is thus a gesture of both passive and active agency, of submission and defiance. As Owens comments,

“This splitting of the subject is staged in Jeff Wall’s *Double Self Portrait*, for which the artist posed not once, but twice - double exposure - as if to illustrate the fundamental duplicity of every pose” (Owens 15). He ponders to what degree Wall’s self-portrait has to do with the construction of gender, commenting that “Wall’s picture is (supposedly) split according to the sexual differential; but why, then, do I find it so difficult to determine which Wall is masculine, which feminine?” (Owens 15)

A Canadian exhibition, *Subjects and Subject Matter*, mounted in 1985, the year after the *Differences* exhibition, serves, once again, to position Wall’s work clearly within the postmodern critique of representation. *Subjects* exhibited photo-based works which relied on appropriation, deconstruction and quotation in order to strategically engage the limits of mass media imagery. It confirms that the artistic practices of the time were increasingly reliant on a critical engagement with photography. Elke Town, the curator of *Subjects*, argues that Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger represent a shift away from the traditional role of artist as creative genius to a postmodern emphasis on the artist as a kind of cultural commentator (Town 7). Rather than looking back to the conventions of fine art or even art photography, she says, a more accurate heritage for these artists would be the photo-montage techniques first explored by the historical avant-garde (Town 8).

In her catalogue essay, Town suggests a direct affinity of purpose between the art of Jeff Wall and that of American artist Cindy Sherman. Sherman’s work, like Wall’s, relies on the careful staging of life-like scenarios. Both artists create images which resonate with inter-textuality, referencing older

pictures from cinema or the history of art. Sherman, using herself as a model to recreate a diverse range of fake 'movie stills,' creates a visual commentary on the range of stereotypes which govern the representation of women. Town also argues for an affinity between Jeff Wall and Barbara Kruger, on the grounds that both artists are "engaged in an enterprise that projects a stance directly critical of the cultural fabrications and biases embedded in capitalist society" (Town 10). Where Sherman's work borders on an "unpoliticized parody of women as objects", Kruger's attests to "opposition, resistance and rage" toward media-dominated culture (Town 13). Town sees in Wall a degree of political critique which sides more closely with the feminist cultural politics of Kruger: "Similar to the way in which Barbara Kruger is able to create a sense of discomfort in the viewer through her use of language, Wall strategically confronts the viewer's personal biases, racial prejudices and cultural assumptions" (Town 17). She goes on to emphasize the ideological critique of spectatorship which is embedded in Wall's practice: "The viewer is placed in a crisis of interpretation which reveals the underlying ideological constructs that contribute both to the making and the reading of his pictures" (Town 17).

By outlining Wall's affinity with Lukacsian realism in the previous chapter I attempted to emphasize the way in which the artist's 'conceptual realism' demonstrates a willingness to embrace the conventional tenets of visual representation. As the essays by Graham, Kuspit, Owens and Town attest to, however, Jeff Wall's return to the picture has also been influenced and shaped by the postmodern critique of representation. That is to say, the art holds both constructive and deconstructive elements with respect to the problematic of

representation. Wall's concern with the role of the spectator, as of the role of gender in constructing the operation of the gaze, suggests a level of critical self-reflexivity with respect to the social and formal function of the photograph. As I have tried to demonstrate so far, his art is embedded with a form of cultural politics which take a great deal from both the historical avant-garde and from the kind of ideology critique which was established by post-structural theory and the kind of 'postmodern' art discourse which championed theatricality. That is not to say that Wall positions his own work within this kind of discourse.

During the early 1990s there is evidence to suggest that, far from finding an affinity with postmodernist discourse, Wall renounces it, primarily on the grounds of its 'iconophobia.' This is apparent, for instance, in Wall's essay about his former student, Roy Arden (1993). In this sweeping history of photography Wall celebrates Arden as an artist whose work has overcome the failed aspirations of the postmodern generation of the 1970s and 1980s. In this vein, Wall mentions postmodern artists and writers including Craig Owens, Allan Sekula, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger. The essay characterises the critical aspirations of the 1978 to 1993 period as a light summer breeze blowing inconsequentially against the foundations of historical representation. Wall claims that postmodernism's "essentially political and ideology-critical analyses, however, have not disturbed the cultural or aesthetic validity of the practice of representation as such, and have had only a limited effect in the area of reception-theory" (Wall, 1993: 25).

What Wall seems to be saying, in other words, is that (in the face of a current cultural hegemony which would suggest otherwise) the critical discourse

of postmodernism has *not* disturbed the foundations of 'high art.' If it has succeeded in disturbing anything, it is only within the less important realm of audience research. Given the apparent diversity of strategies that characterize the current post-medium condition, there is room to argue that Wall's account of contemporary art lacks persuasive power (Foster et al, 2004).

The degree to which Jeff Wall's position could be perceived as a conservative defense of tradition was evident even during the 1990s, as we saw earlier, with Clint Burnham's review. This attitude also surfaces in a comment made by French curator Catherine David, about the scepticism of the post-conceptual, or contemporary, generation. She says, "The young artists now have a problem with the object that replays and yet goes beyond the questions of the sixties and seventies. ... When you try to think this situation through, the works of [Gerhard] Richter and [Jeff] Wall seem at once very powerful and not directly pertinent. They are in another space" (Buchloh, David et al 1997: 639). And it is confirmed, again, by Wall's former student, Robert Linsley, who comments: "I don't think that there is a wide enough appreciation of how conservative Wall's position really is ... he is not trying to continue any tradition of the avant-garde, nor does he take up a polemical content"⁶ (Linsley, 2003: 115).

Wall seems to be arguing that the validity and function of the modern picture has not, and will not, be eroded by the challenges posed by postmodern critiques of representation. In the Arden essay he continues, apparently imposing

⁶ Linsley goes on to note: "It's kind of a perverse formulation. Jeff would say, and I agree, that you could easily argue that avant-gardism is completely conventional and therefore a conservative choice. ... Jeff's work also has sources in the eighties and the so-called return to painting - a moment when categories such as conservative and progressive were up for reassessment." Linsley (personal email, 2005-09-06)

a division between the logic which supports his own 'dramatic interiors' and the progressive (i.e. feminist, anti-racist, neo-Marxist) cultural politics which inform the 'new iconophobia' in the arena of recent art photography: "Rephotography, contextualism, and new, more suave versions of productivist strategies have worked out their problematics very quickly, lapsed into epigonism, and have lost the angle of attack they enjoyed at the beginning of the 1980s" (Wall 1993, 25). Given the way in which the logic of this argument legitimates a practice of more or less 'straight' representation, it comes as no surprise to witness that Wall remains committed to the dramatic interior of the picture.

Wall's pictures lie outside the logic of postmodern art because they rely on systematic reconstruction as compared to parody or fragmentation. This is a matter which has to do with different views about the social function of art; with contrasting interpretations about how to understand the connection between 'art' and 'life.' Through the technology of the photograph the contemporary picture is related to the world through mimesis; it is a partial and fragmented copy of what exists out there in the real. Postmodernism builds from the logic of the fragment. That is, the documentary-based and conceptual aesthetics emerging out of the sixties (i.e. artists such as Sekula and Rosler) contend that the way to bring these domains (art and life) closer together is through increased proximity. Because it is a mechanical reproduction of reality, the photograph is thought to achieve greater authenticity when it is allowed to function as a document; as an interrupted, or uninterrupted, snapshot of the real. This is the means by which the progressive artist tries to escape from the alienation which technological rationality insists upon, the rationality of the spectacle from which the photograph, through its

mechanical reproduction, cannot escape. Through 'capturing the moment', through a montage created by cutting and pasting directly from 'life', the identity between the natural world and the mechanical reproduction is solidified.

This might seem to be an argument which serves only those committed to the observed content of the unedited 'snapshot' style, but I want to argue that it is also relevant to those photographs engaged with the postmodern critique of representation. This is because the logic of the postmodern picture -- of rephotography, parody and appropriation -- takes from the documentary the assumption of identity, and turns to the spectacle, instead of nature or everyday life, for its sources. Postmodern 'theatrical' or appropriation photography (i.e. Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger) follow this documentary logic, rejecting the presence of the individual artistic signature style, and asserting authenticity by reinforcing the empirical connection between photograph and reality. Stealing images from the media to exhibit in the gallery, breaking down the doors of a social institution which has *always* defended white male privilege, art gnaws away at its own autonomy.

The picture as it belongs to the history of art would make a different claim, because it operates on a different premise with respect to the connection between art and life. From this vantage point art functions as a microcosm of the real, rather than its impoverished extension. This aspiration can be traced back to the conventions of the pictorial tradition established during the Renaissance. Art has the potential of positing an organic unity, in terms of the work itself. This is the assumption made in the Western tradition of painting, and also in the modern novel. This is the reason why formal conventions arising from theatre and

dramatic narrative are called upon in order to restore to this imaginary microcosm a dimension of realism. The real is not literally carried in from the outside world, but is, rather, re-created as an approximation, at a critical distance. The identity which is posited by this relationship, an apparent reconciliation of art and nature, occurs within the dramatic interior of the picture. This picture, however, is fundamentally alienated from actual identity, or organic unity, because it can never transcend the technology through which it appears.

Earlier on I mentioned that the foremost champion of American modernism, the critic Clement Greenberg, showed very little enthusiasm for photography as an art form. Greenberg's rejection of photography had to do with its perceived transparency. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Greenberg's 1946 review of Edward Weston makes the claim that: "Photography is the most transparent of the art mediums devised or discovered by man. It is probably for this reason that it proves so difficult to make the photograph transcend its almost inevitable function as document and act as work of art as well" (Greenberg 1946:60). While his review attests to the difficulty of establishing photography's place within the imperatives of modernist painting, it also suggests a possible direction for further exploration, and one which confirms the narrative possibilities in the photograph.

As Greenberg explains, later on in the same review, photography, by virtue of its tenacious grasp on the world that it represents, necessarily engages with a form of social content: "Therefore it would seem that photography today could take over the field that used to belong to genre and historical painting, and that it does not have to follow painting into the areas into which the latter has

been driven by the force of historical development” (Greenberg 1946: 62). In the final section of his review, Greenberg suggests the aesthetic affinity which photography has to literature. He concludes by saying: “And in more than one way photography is closer today to literature than it is to the other graphic arts. ... The final moral is: let photography be ‘literary’” (Greenberg 1946: 63).

Art critic Thierry de Duve has recognized the importance of this Greenberg article in understanding Jeff Wall’s work. “Wall has admitted to me that this article is of great interest to him, and it is easy to see why” De Duve comments (1996: 28). Greenberg allows for the fact that photography has a different kind of engagement with the central tenet of modernism, which is to be reflexive about its medium. Unlike painting, Greenberg suggests, photography must encompass the ‘content’ which its transparency as a medium guarantees. De Duve explains:

Not only does photography have the right to be naturalistic, but it is urged that it be so, and beyond the right to ‘human interest’ - in other words, the social - this is the right to a natural relation to representation and beauty which is being rehabilitated. It is above all the right to reclaim the field of genre and history painting (29).

The means by which the picture functions naturalistically is through the established conventions of dramatic narrative. The history of painting which has imagined the picture as a dramatic world, as a means by which to portray dramatic scenarios through epic narrative, has been in decline since the advent of modern art during the 19th century. One could say that modernist painting, in fact, represents a diminished interest in displaying theatricality within the picture. That is not to say, however, that the picture has ceased to operate dramatically.

Rather, the locus of theatricality has shifted locales, and this shift is concomitant with the technological innovations which gave rise to cinematography. Rather than look to the postmodern attack on the spectacularisation of the image, or to the loss of figuration in the history of modernist painting, then, it is to cinema that we must turn in order to examine the aesthetic rationale which supports and informs Jeff Wall's defense of the dramatic interior of the picture. That is to say that the figurative basis of Wall's approach to photography is fundamentally cinematographic.

Where it has become commonplace today for film analysis to be approached through plot summary, types of shots, and editing, earlier approaches to film, by contrast, considered individual narrative 'scenes'. In their 1997 book *Theatre to Cinema*, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs emphasize that early film studies approached film in a manner that is strikingly different from current conventions, and throughout their book they aim to show that this has to do with film's heritage in theatre. Early films, called photoplays, they say, "were thought of as a sequence of 'scenes' on the model of a stage play" (Brewster et al 4). One of the means by which to understand the historical evolution of fiction-based film, therefore, has been in terms of its gradual differentiation, as an art-form, from theatre. "As soon as the cinema turned to fiction, it took the theatre as its model, and the true history of the medium since then has been one of its emancipation from the tutelage of theatre, the discovery of an autonomous aesthetic" (Brewster et al 5). The development of editing techniques unique to the medium would gradually differentiate film from the aesthetics of theatre.

The argument made by Brewster and Jacobs regarding the importance of theatricality in early film production builds from A. Nicholas Vardac's 1949 book *Stage to Screen*. Vardac traces the transition of the theatrical method from stage to screen in the last part of the 19th century. According to Vardac, the historical invention of cinema was a result of an increased need for greater pictorial realism which had developed during the nineteenth century. This need for realism was particularly evident, Vardac says, in the history of the theatre: "The necessity for greater pictorial realism in the arts of theatre appears as the logical impetus to the invention of cinema. This necessity, an 'aesthetic' tension of the 19th century, found its preliminary satisfaction in the theatrical forms preceding and surrounding the arrival of film" (Vardac 32).

The need for realism, or greater objectivity, that is identified by Vardac with modernity is connected to the technical evolution of the motion picture: from animated pictures to animated photographs, and then to a diversity of devices designed for the ongoing projection of photographs in order to produce the illusion of motion. It is not, however, accurate to say that film is a product of scientific invention and technological progress alone. Vardac's argument emphasizes that the invention of film also coincides with transformations in modern culture, emphasizing the realist-romantic strain of literature, which also attempt to create credible and intense accounts of everyday life by providing a greater degree of realistic detail. Vardac argues that this form of pictorial realism, in accommodating the needs of romanticism, is also increasingly oriented toward greater intensity of affect: "When, however, realism and romanticism had, toward the end of the century, attained real leaves, bees and ships, the stage could go

no further. But the need for pictorial realism on an ever greater scale remained. Only the motion picture with its reproduction of reality could carry the cycle” (Vardac 34).

Building from Vardac’s argument, Brewster and Jacobs argue that it is the demand for ‘spectacle’ rather than ‘realism’ which better explains the historical transition from theatre to film. They use ‘spectacle’ as a means of emphasizing the fundamentally *pictorial* conventions which underlie the proto-cinematic imagination. These conventions, which have informed theatre, photography and film, are deeply attached to a history of painting which dates back at least as far as the Renaissance. Rather than a simple attempt to imitate reality, the development of narrativity in film, which required both spatial depth and dynamic psychological impact, is reliant on the conventions of pictorial illusionism. “Spectacle described a kind of staging that appealed primarily to the eye, and what appealed to the eye was conceived in terms of painting rather than photography, and if photography was appealed to, it was as a genre of picture, not as a token of reality” (Brewster et al 8).

Although increasingly present as a force in modern culture, the term spectacle often carries with it a pejorative connotation. This dates back to Aristotle. “Aristotle had argued that spectacle (*opsis*), the part of drama that appealed merely to the eye, was subordinate to the words of drama” (Brewster et al 9). The influence of Aristotelian thought in modern culture has meant that language, rather than the visual, has been given primacy in theatre. This stance against the spectacle is one of the means by which the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture has been conceptualised, because an anti-spectacular attitude

can be identified in both modernist and avant-garde critiques of popular narrativity. It has also been the means by which critics since the time of Diderot have discussed the limits of theatre.

What I aim to show here is that the practice of 'dramatic unity' exploited by Wall belongs to longstanding historical debates about the cultural value of theatricality. To trace the 'scenic' history of film is to suggest the complex range of practices involved in its development, in that the *mise-en-scene* employed by cinema bears a complicated relation to both theatre and the history of pictures. As I have outlined elsewhere, one of the identifiable characteristics of pictorial theatricality is the degree to which, through the positioning and identification of characters, the picture can be said to actively involve the spectator. This approach to the *mise-en-scene* dates back at least as far as the writings of Diderot during the period of the Enlightenment.

It has been argued, as Brewster and Jacobs confirm, that Diderot was a proponent of anti-theatricality (11). He advocated what has been called a 'peep-show' theatre, a reform which would free the stage of that type of narrative action which was designed to have a direct effect on its audience. Diderot preferred, instead, a form of dramatic action in which the actors were fully involved, even at the expense of its spectators. In this way, dialogue would be favoured over action designed merely for its spectacular effect. Diderot aimed to avoid a theatre made merely to please the eye. He wanted to "place on the stage a world that is no more concerned with the spectator than if he did not exist" (Diderot as quoted in Brewster et al, 12). This is the means by which to understand that both theatrical

and anti-theatrical attitudes play a role in shaping the dramatic interior of the picture.

As Homa King has argued in a recent essay, Jeff Wall's pictures make room for narrativity by drawing on methods established through cinematography. King points out that Wall's work possesses a number of elements reminiscent of film; that the artist's photos are constructed using many elements familiar to the film industry. Wall relies, for instance, on constructed sets which include conventional stage lighting, set design, props and costuming. The formal arrangement of scenes relies on staged actors who pose for the camera. Furthermore, viewers encounter Wall's artworks in a manner which, approximating life scale and artificially illuminated, is also reminiscent of filmic experience. For all these reasons it is important to keep in mind that Wall's art functions as a register for the ongoing dialogue between still photography and film.

In recent decades writers interested in the semiotics of the image, such as Roland Barthes, have contributed to the contemporary understanding of the ways in which film and still photography are related.⁷ One of the means by which this comparison is often made has to do with the 'stillness' of the photograph, compared to the 'motion' inherent in film. Barthes' writings champion the meaning which can be achieved through the arrested motion of the film still; or as Kerry Brougher says, "photographs that have the life of cinema embedded within them" (Brougher 21). Wall has repeatedly referred to this issue as, for instance, in a

⁷ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. [v.o. 1980] New York: Hill and Wang, 1981; "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on some Eisenstein Stills" [v.o. 1970] *Image Music Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Tr. Stephen Heath: 48-68.

1997 lecture, when, referring to Barthes, he explains that “I, and a lot of artists I knew then, were very interested in the fact that a film still could be looked at as a pictorial composition, maybe as an art photograph, maybe as a painting. It also made it clear that all a film is is a large number of still photographs that are shown to you in a certain way” (Wall, *Transcript* 1997:28).

Film and photography posit, therefore, an ongoing dialogue. Because film must be experienced across time, it places an emphasis on the present, whereas photography, which looks back to a ‘lost’ moment, evokes the melancholy of what has passed. Given that film is in motion, it demands from the viewer a level of constant engagement. In order to follow the narrative flow, the film viewer must remain passive. The still photograph, by contrast, is bound by the conventions of the picture and it therefore demands a greater degree of active agency on behalf of the spectator. Film offers the spectator a degree of illusion with which to be involved, whereas the photograph is the token of a moment which has been lost or removed from the spectator. In these various ways, film is associated with life where the still photograph is associated with death.

The technological screen image - whether digitized, cinematic, projected or photographed - has taken on an increasingly familiar, even inescapable, presence in the post-medium world of art. The erosion of modernism has allowed for, perhaps even necessitated, artistic strategies comprised of hybrid aesthetics cognizant of, and responsive to, a world permeated by simulated imagery. While Jeff Wall’s dedication to the cinematic potential of photography is a strategy aimed at succeeding in this expanding image world, it is also a position that has been underwritten by a personal history of forays into the film industry. In a 2000

interview, Wall explains that the period between 1969 and 1976 was spent searching for a method, and one of the avenues of investigation was film: "For quite a few years, from about '69 to '76, I wasn't too sure what to do. ... for a while I thought maybe filmmaking would be the way" (Wall in Enright 43). In a 2004 interview, Wall, once again, highlights his film background: "Thirty years ago I thought I would make films; I thought that film was the art form" (Wall in Figgis). Although he doesn't mention his film work with Ian Wallace and Rodney Graham, in this interview Wall does mention working on projects alone and with Vancouver writer, Dennis Wheeler.

In a biographical survey of Jeff Wall, Kerry Broucher mentions Wall's forays as a screenwriter: "By 1975 he had returned to Vancouver, and began writing feature film scripts, making two or three visits to Hollywood to meet producers. He pursued this only briefly, feeling that he would never be able to come to terms with Hollywood criteria" (Broucher 21). Further along in the 2004 interview Wall admits to his admiration for directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Jean Eustache and Rainer-Werner Fassbinder, explaining "I tried to go in that direction, by attempting to write scenarios for those kinds of films, with the hope of somehow finding the means to make them" (Wall in Figgis). Wall explains that he was held back from a career in film for various personal reasons: "But as I worked on those scripts, I realized that I wasn't the person for that kind of thing, and I felt that there was no possibility that I could raise the money I'd need" (Wall in Figgis).

It was also during this period, the mid-seventies, that Wall worked as a film programmer at Vancouver's Pacific Cinematheque; selecting and organizing films

as well as writing announcements for the monthly film schedule. The Cinematheque grew out of an informal cine-club originally started by Kirk Tougas at UBC in 1972.⁸ Wall was employed as one of two Cinematheque programmers for about a year, from September 1975 until June 1976. Some of the directors and themes featured during this period include 'Silent Classics', 'American Comedy', 'Samuel Fuller', 'Orson Welles', 'Godard', 'Robert Aldrich', 'John Ford', 'Rainer Werner Fassbinder' and 'Roberto Rossellini'.⁹

The Cinematheque *Program Guide* for September 1975 includes an essay written by Jeff Wall, announcing a series of upcoming screenings on the theme of 'The American Movie.' In the essay Wall characterizes the history of American cinema as a battle between the artistic freedom of the individual film director and the restrictive conventions of Hollywood industry. It is valuable as an indication of how, during that era, Wall perceived the politics of the spectacle. The defining identity of American film, for Wall, is the integration of its 'art' potential into the cycle of capitalist mass production and standardization. The standard film genres which developed during the twentieth century - western, gangster, musical, horror, melodrama, comedy, romance - are united by their mass audience appeal and linked by Wall to earlier historical forms of entertainment and popular culture including pulp literature, mime, burlesque, drama and picture stories. The essay also reflects the kind of psycho-analytically informed ideological critique typical of seventies screen theory, where the conventions of Hollywood movies are employed to seduce the mass audience by way of stimulating and satisfying

⁸ Mike Hoolbloom. "As Seen on TV: David Rimmer and Vancouver's Fringe Film" in *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press: 257-281.

⁹ The brochure reads "Programming: Jeff Wall, Tony Reif." Pacific Cinematheque Archives, Vancouver.

desire. Cognizant of how spectatorial desire is shaped by the structure of viewing, he comments “In ‘satisfying’ the audience, the movie inscribes its values, its dreams, and its prohibitions at the heart of the Desire-Satisfaction-Desire cycle itself” (Wall 1975).

An archival document housed at S.F.U. also confirms Wall’s early identification with film as an aspect of his professional career path. The document is a one page announcement for a screening of a 1950 film by Kenji Mizoguchi at the SFU theatre in March, 1977. Described as a “guest film critic,” the biographical blurb says, in part, that “Jeff Wall’s interest in film as an art form began in 1972, after he earned his MFA at UBC and had commenced his doctoral research in visual arts at the University of London, England.” A quote by Jeff Wall positions his professional identity in relation to film, saying that “Since 1972 my work as an artist has been screenwriting” (SFU Archives F109/740/14).

Wall left the Cinematheque to take a teaching job at SFU, where he worked as a professor between 1976 and 1985. During 1977, the same year that the first of his ‘transparencies’ was created, he taught a course entitled *The History and Aesthetics of Film* (SFU Archives F109/6/2/048). The course surveyed the invention of cinema and the era of silent film, examining the economic, theoretical and aesthetic foundations of national film industries in the United States, the Soviet Union, France and Germany. Wall’s course was structured around screenings by directors including D.W. Griffiths, Sergei Eisenstein, Luis Bunuel, Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

Early film studies gave Wall the opportunity to examine and come to terms with the historical tension between expressionism and realism which would come to inform so many of his later pictures. I am thinking of this in relation to early German cinema, such as for example F.W. Murnau's 1924 'Kammerspiel' film, *The Last Laugh*. Looking at the silent film era also provided a means by which to reflect on the pictorial structures and values of a form of narrativity created without reliance on a sound-track. As Michel Chion has commented, this is a matter of creative imagination: "So it is not silence - the absence of voices - that the sound film destroys. Before the advent of sound, it was up to the audience to imagine the voice and that is what the sound film eradicated" (Chion 18). It is not difficult to see that Wall's photographs, because of the nature of the medium in which they are presented, have a heritage in the early development of cinema. They too, are 'silent pictures,' and the means by which they achieve dramatic unity is reliant -- as it is with silent film -- on the expressive possibilities allowed for by the arrangement of setting, objects and human characters.

As Wall himself has admitted, his efforts in film were not wasted, since they taught him a great deal about making pictures. Wall's concerted attempts to establish a career in film contribute to understanding the turn away from photoconceptualism as well as his 1977 return to the picture. In the same interview I cited earlier, Wall explains that "when I finally reconciled myself to the fact that I was some kind of ordinary visual artist, probably a photographer, I was able to make use of what I'd learned and struggled with in film" (Wall in Figgis).

Throughout his career as an art photographer Wall has repeatedly relied on the cinematographic as a means of explaining his approach to photography.

As he explained in a 2001 interview, "Cinema was my first model in order to break out of the aesthetics of photography. I had always admired the film effects of great directors such as Bergman or Antonioni" (Wall in Lauter). And he continues, explaining the importance of dramatic performance: "By watching films, I learnt a lot about the relationship between performance, staging, design, composition and photography, so that I see film as a principle model for photography" (Wall in Lauter 16). Cinema demonstrates the degree to which narrative, typology and fabricated settings can also be used by photography. Wall relies on the cinematic mode because it is the means by which intimate, private situations can be depicted: "In the theatre it's the sense that the audience is not there," Wall says, "in the cinema the sense that the camera is not there. That illusion goes back to the beginning of art, it's very much at the origin of it" (Wall in Morris 2002:27). The aesthetics of reportage do not provide the same access to dramatic interiority as the cinematic: "It seemed that, at least in part, the model of the cinema, or, more accurately, of cinematography, would provide aesthetic grounds for opening up spaces that would otherwise be closed" (Wall in Morris, 27).

Based on these indications, it is fair to say that cinematography has been more valuable for Wall than documentary or street photography. The cinematic mode integrates the principles of both neo-realism (document) and creative invention (fiction).¹⁰ Pictorial photographers accept that representation has a demonstrable, if fiction-based, relation to the real and the cinematic mode brings

¹⁰ For a further discussion of this, see the Bill Jones interview with Jeff Wall: "False Documents: A Conversation with Jeff Wall" *Arts Magazine* (1990):50-55 and *Wall/Barents* (1985).

these two positions, documentary and fiction, together. This is because the cinema is both objective and subjective, and has shown how a photograph can be a 'true fiction'.

Wall's first 'picture', the sort rendered in the back-lit cibachrome transparency format which has since become his signature device, is entitled *Faking Death*. Completed in 1977, it is exceptional in Wall's oeuvre because of the degree to which its construction is self-consciously didactic. Rather than comprised of a singular polished and monumental tableau, the viewer is shown a narrative sequence which also takes us 'behind the scenes' of the work's own construction. *Faking Death* is a triptych; the left panel looks like a still from a film set in which a nude male actor is preparing to lie down on a bed, the camera lights and crew gathered informally around him; the centre panel is cropped to depict the singular dramatic scene in which a man -- the same man -- lies alone on a bed in an unremarkable room and stares intently at the ceiling; the right-side or final panel identical to the central panel except for the addition of a supernatural burst of light flooding across the man's face and bare chest.

Faking Death was originally shown in a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 1979. While typical of Wall's work in certain respects, its virtual disappearance in the literature suggests that *Faking Death* has been dismissed as transitional, and that it set out in a direction which the artist later thought better of.¹¹ I'd like to consider *Faking Death*, for a moment, as if it does indeed

¹¹ The work rarely makes an appearance in the Wall survey catalogues and has not been shown in another exhibition since that time. In a 1984 essay, Ian Wallace mentions in passing that the piece had been rejected by Wall. (Wallace, 1984) Nor has the artist allowed the picture to be reproduced in this dissertation (personal correspondence with Jeff Wall Studio, July 2005).

represent a tentative and false step; a step Wall was to later re-evaluate and judge worthy of corrective redirection.

The catalogue accompanying the 1979 exhibition includes a letter written by Jeff Wall, which is addressed "To the Spectator." In it, Wall provides a short, stern explanation of the art historical and social intentions behind his work. He talks regretfully about the expensive production cost, but argues that the back-lit format is necessary in order to engage, exploit and criticize recognized social forms of literacy (Wall 1979). At a certain moment the text takes on a distinctly Situationist tone, posing this kind of artwork as a critical response, and commentary, on the conditions of the spectacle: "Although the ideological domination of audiences by spectacles is not simply the result of the structure of the image involved, but rather of the social relationships of production of the representation as a whole" Wall says, "this domination is exerted within the levels of access which the image opens in the spectator, and holds open like a gap during the experience, and on into memory" (Wall 1979).

As with his other 'spectator' pictures, *Faking Death* attempts to offer a kind of visual counter-balance to the dominant regime of the spectacular mass media image. *Faking Death* does so in a number of ways: by creating visual allusions to canonical modern paintings -- in this case, David's revolutionary *Death of Marat*-- which transmit a level of embedded political commentary; by self-reflexively referring to the means by which the naturalistic image is constructed -- that is, by referring to artifice in the title of the work and then by actually showing the set-up, lighting and so on; and thirdly by mimicking the predominant language of the spectacle -- that is, by relying on an advertising-like format of display. I imagine

that the 'mistake' lodged in this first picture created by Wall is that it appears to go too far toward the vanguardist theatrics of postmodernism. It forfeits an open range of aesthetic experience by being too immersed in quoting the methods of its own construction. I think that it does remain effective, however, as an allegory for the artist's ongoing attempt to work between film and photography. It is worth noting that Wall himself is the actor who is *Faking Death*. What is on view for the spectator, then, is Wall the film-maker, who has been laid to rest by Wall the cinematographic photographer. Where the action of the motion picture offers the illusion of life, it is the still photograph which guarantees both the fixity of death and the furtive hint of immortality.

Make fixed angle shots of death
In black and white
If you like Godard
And Straub makes you cry

- from Bernardo Bertolucci *Partner* (1968)
screened at the Pacific Cinematheque, February 1976

Chapter Five

The Historical Matrix of the Spectacle

These situations of passivity, as uniquely disclosed and interpreted by ignoble feelings like envy (of the disempowered for the powerful) or paranoia (about one's perceived status as a small subject in a 'total system'), can also be thought of as allegories for an autonomous or bourgeois art's increasingly resigned and pessimistic understanding of its *own* relationship to political action.

- Sianne Ngai (2005)

In a picture completed by Jeff Wall in 1994, the viewer is invited to witness a solitary middle aged man, lying uncomfortably on the floor of a kitchen. [Figure 24] The man's hair has not been washed, his pallor is pale, and his skin is clammy with sweat. His impassive gaze addresses us from underneath the modest table which he has taken as his improvised and miserable shelter. The surfaces of the kitchen, like the figure himself, convey a grimy aspect. Through the window we are given to see that it is night-time, and that the only source of light is the cold fluorescent tube that has been mounted on the ceiling. The title of this artwork, *Insomnia*, serves to reinforce a suggestion of the hidden, interior, dimensions of this man's unhappy state.

One of the recurring thematics in Wall's dramatic tableaux is the appearance of negative affect. A number of his pictures deal with unhappy emotions or states of mind. In a public lecture, Wall introduces *Insomnia*, saying:

This picture is one of a group of pictures I've done over the years of unimportant people in unhappy states of mind - bitterness, rage, sadness,

defeat of one kind of another. [...] I feel these kinds of feelings, or states of mind, states of being are important¹

Critics have commented on this tendency in Wall's work. In a 1997 catalogue essay, Kerry Brougher emphasizes that the artist's concern with unhappy states of mind has centred around the male subject: "In works such as *Insomnia* 1994, *Untangling* [1994] and *Man in Street* [1995] ... Wall has limited himself to a single male figure." Brougher continues, stressing Wall's apparent concern with 'absorbed' subjects: "In each work, their complete absorption in themselves and obliviousness to the environments seems to suggest the awkwardness of men in dealing with women (banished from the image and perhaps from their minds as well) and with one another, resulting in lonely battles with themselves" (40).

In one section of a longer interview with the artist which took place in 2001, French curator and critic Jean-Francois Chevrier alludes to Wall's affinity with the romantic tradition, discussing how the realm of private fantasy painfully and relentlessly intrudes into the objective reality of the everyday world, generating a potentially fitful psychic state. Chevrier comments, "I think it's rather difficult to present *Insomnia* as an image of rest." He goes on, explaining: "The house isn't a refuge offering protection from urban (i.e. social) violence anymore when it becomes a haunted place, a place of sleeplessness. When I look at *Insomnia*, a phrase of the poet Pierre Reverdy comes to mind: 'If once you've opened your eyes, it's hard to sleep soundly again.'"²

¹ This is a quote taken from a public lecture given by Wall in London, UK in 1996. Rpt. in *Transcript* 1997:15.

² "A Painter of Modern Life - An Interview between Jeff Wall and Jean-Francois Chevrier" *Figures and Places*, exh. cat. 184.

Another commentator, Rolf Lauter, has drawn attention to the way in which *Insomnia* belongs to the art historical tradition of relying on domestic interiors to show modern subjectivity. Lauter comments, "By the mid-nineteenth century at the latest, the greater attention to interior scenes was an expression of the increasing solitude of the artist and his withdrawal into his inner world. ...In Jeff Wall, interior scenes are a place to observe the subject in his private, intimate ambience" (Lauter 2000, 46). Referring to the social dynamics of modernity, Lauter's comment emphasizes that the increasingly isolated role of the artist in society is but one aspect in the composition of modern subjectivity.

There are a number of historical precedents for the type of work that Wall is demanding of the picture. In a much earlier interview, from 1990, Wall spoke with Chevrier about the need for dramatic mediation to be restored to the image. "But what makes dramatization possible?" Wall ponders aloud, "I think it is a program or a project that was once called *la peinture de la vie moderne*. I always think of the etchings of Goya underneath which he wrote: 'I saw this.'"³ In the catalogue accompanying an exhibition of Jeff Wall's work that traveled between London, Paris, Helsinki and Chicago in 1995, Catherine David also draws a parallel between Wall and Goya, emphasizing 'the painting of modern life': "Faithful to his programme of a critical painting of everyday life, yet far from any realism, he [Jeff Wall] is now approaching a new form of the social supernatural, offering - like modern *Caprichos*- the least transparent, but most raw and cruel images of alienation, irrationality, violence, and crime, when 'the sleep of reason awakens monsters'" (David in Whitechapel, 8).

³ "The Interiorized Academy: Interview with Jean Francois Chevrier" [1990] in *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, 1996:104.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the dramatic moment evoked in Wall's *Insomnia* is vaguely reminiscent of Francisco Goya's well-known etching, #43 from his *Los Caprichos* series, published in 1799.⁴ [Figure 25] Although nothing has appeared in the public record to indicate that Jeff Wall intended *Insomnia* as a direct remake of Goya's etching, a comparison of these two works may be instructive. This is because a speculative comparison of this kind provides the means by which to investigate the historical movement of a tradition with which both artists have consistently been associated, *the painting of modern life*. Debates about the relevance of this tradition continue to shape discussions of modern art up to the present day. Indeed, as I will attempt to show, *how* to understand Jeff Wall's place in this tradition has been one of the central issues in the critical reception of his work.

Goya's etching is a self-portrait; it depicts the artist asleep, with his head across his folded arms. On the front of the pedestal where he is working is inscribed the phrase "El sueño de la razon produce monstruos." [The sleep of reason produces monsters.] A dark horde of night creatures - owls, bats, cats - swarm in the background behind the artist. The phrase and image together are fundamentally enigmatic: Is the sleeping figure intended to be the embodiment of reason? Is he also a figure of the modern artist? How is modernity, and the force of human reason which is its central engine, reconfiguring the creative labor of the artist? Why go to sleep, if it results in nightmares? And what would it take to awaken this figure?

⁴ For an overview of this series by Goya, see Philip Hofer. *Los Caprichos by Francisco Goya y Lucientes*.

Goya made at least two drawings in preparation for *Caprichos* 43; they are helpful in establishing the range of ideas at issue. Both preparatory drawings show a dramatic and unresolved struggle between 'darkness' and 'light' taking place in the immediate environment of the sleeping artist. Similar to what Goya will use for the final etching, the second preparatory drawing (#28) also shows a pedestal on which the artist's head rests. [Figure 26] The earlier version of the inscription is more direct than the enigmatic 'sleep of reason': "Universal language, drawn and etched by Francisco de Goya in the year 1797." In the lower margin is written "The author dreaming. His only intention is to banish harmful superstition and to perpetuate with this work of fancy the sound testimony of Truth."⁵ Eleanor Sayre describes the second preparatory drawing [#28] as follows: "Above the artist the light of Reason or Enlightenment forms a strongly defined arc against which the creatures of darkness and disorder, bats, owls and lurking cat, cannot prevail. A single broad beam of light issues from the artist's head, linking him with the circle of light."⁶

Sayre and other scholars have consistently argued for the central importance of the Enlightenment in shaping Goya's artistic imagination. The French Revolution, and the ideas of the Enlightenment which had a role in bringing it about, provide a starting point for the kind of historical context that is necessary in order to grasp the meanings embedded in Goya's art. The 'Enlightenment interpretation' of Goya was inspired, in part, by an explanatory note originally recorded on one of Goya's manuscripts. It reads "Imagination

⁵ As cited in AEP Sanchez and J Gallego. *Goya - Complete Etchings*. Munich: Prestel, 1995:58

⁶ See Eleanor A. Sayre. *The Changing Image: Prints by Francisco Goya*. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1974. The quote appears on p. 100.

forsaken by Reason begets impossible monsters; united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders.”⁷ George Levitine’s influential essay on the emblems used by Goya in his etchings emphasizes the artist’s conviction in the illuminating powers of human reason: “*Caprichos* 43 is conceived not as a manifesto of a new dark art glorifying unfettered phantasy, but as a warning which shows what happens when an artist lets himself be overcome by his own imagination.”⁸

Along these lines, Sayre has argued persuasively that the frontispiece of Rousseau’s *Philosophie*, published in 1793, was one of the models that Goya relied on when creating *Caprichos* 43. In this frontispiece Rousseau is shown seated at his desk, actively involved in his writing. The source of light, shining down from the heavens, is divine. Comparing it with Goya’s second preparatory drawing, Sayre explains that “In the frontispiece to Rousseau’s *Philosophie*, the light was shed by the Triune God and fell on the philosopher as he worked. In this drawing [i.e. Goya’s] the immediate source of light is human. Through the creative mind and intellect of an artist the darkness, with its symbolic bats and owls, is to be pushed back” (Sayre 1989:114).

In Goya’s world ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ are polarized. Sleep, or the unconscious, which is the subjective realm that the artist must enter in order to access his creative imagination, is the domain in which ‘reason’ and ‘unreason’ encounter one another as opposites. Goya’s art professes a belief in the relation between art and truth. This etching suggests that artists sufficiently guided by

⁷ This quote was conventionally attributed to Goya. More recently however Goya scholars have found evidence to support that its authorship is more likely a friend of Goya’s. See Sayre 1989.

⁸ George Levitine. “Some Emblematic Sources of Goya” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22:1-2 (1959) 130.

reason are capable of keeping the fantastic nightmares of unreason at bay. An artist interested in showing 'truth' must attest to this conflict. The social world surrounding Goya supported the conviction that the progress of human reason would guarantee 'enlightenment', and banish the monsters of darkness.

Insomnia has changed the terms across which we come to know modern subjectivity. Unlike Goya's etching, there is no indication that Wall's *Insomnia* is intended as a portrait of the artist. The generic subject remains unknown, an 'unimportant' man. Although perhaps tortured by inner demons, the contemporary subject remains in a state of sleeplessness. He cannot 'sleep'; which is also to suppose that he cannot feel what it means to be fully 'awake.' Lying, conscious, under manufactured, artificial light, there is no secure means by which this man can discern between the light of reason and the darkness of private fantasy. Wall's artwork has immobilized the dynamic tension between 'light' and 'darkness'. This figure is not surrounded by the creatures of darkness or light, but by the adequate comfort of mass-produced goods, which are utilitarian rather than transcendental. Vacant of the kind of light that acts as an allegorical guide to truth, the picture reinforces the notion that industrially manufactured fluorescence must suffice, as it has become the only kind of illumination readily available today. Bathed in such light, it is difficult to dream.

Insomnia belongs to the mature phase of Wall's career. Produced in an edition of two in 1994, it draws from many of the same conventions on which he had relied during the two preceding decades. The work is large (a little more than two metres across), so as to engage the spectator with a figure that approximates 'life size' proportions. In this way Wall attempts to continue the grand tradition of

modern history painting. Many of his pictures are life scale. He explains, in a 1996 public lecture:

Life scale is a very particular scale ... it's the one place in the whole register of scale in pictures that cannot be compared with any other, this is the only one that's like us, exactly like us. I use it because of its impact, but also because I believe that life scale is the most intimate scale we can have in image making. Artists like Manet, Caravaggio, Goya, Velasquez understood that... (*Transcript 17*).

In that he chooses to portray people who lack any obvious social standing, Wall consciously continues the transformation of history painting through the conventions of 'the painting of modern life'. In his 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire "laid down a realist agenda by challenging artists to invest contemporary subjects with the dignity heretofore reserved for noble or mythical themes. 'Paint your fellow Parisians life-size, and dress them in black, he counseled'" (Reed 2003). Some of Jeff Wall's earliest photo-transparencies were, in fact, direct re-stagings of the great painters of modern life, Delacroix and Manet. Refuting the suspicion that this gesture was purely derivative, in a 1985 interview Wall justified his reliance on this tradition with reference to the importance of drama, saying, "It's standard procedure in theatre, where the same plays are produced over and over again, interminably" Wall explains. He goes on to say that "as long as painting remains 'painted drama'- which it always does, in my opinion - then these issues of the dramas of the past and their representations in the present, whether staged or painted or photographed, must

be at the centre of the problematics of painting and its relations with other technologies of representation” (*Typology Luminescence...* 96).

As one commentator notes, writing in 1996, the interpretation of Wall as a ‘a painter of modern life’ (including Wall’s own writings) has become something of a cliché (de Duve 27). This standard account holds that Wall “has given himself what amounts to the task of being *today’s* ‘painter of modern life’, just as Manet was in his day. Since painting can no longer assume this function *today*, the painter would become a photographer” (de Duve 28). The problematic that is suggested by this commentator, Thierry de Duve, is not that of ‘the painting of modern life’ per se, but rather, what it has to do with Jeff Wall’s chosen medium, which is a variation on photography; the light-box transparency.

Whereas Jeff Wall’s professed aims promise ideological critique, the art that he creates relies on forms of representation (i.e. staging) that are difficult to distinguish from the dominant forms of representation supplied by the mass media. This blurring is arguably a phenomena of the contemporary moment, as the theatre of representation that is typical of today’s visual culture had no such parallel when Goya was involved in ‘the painting of modern life’. In a 1988 essay Abigail Solomon-Godeau points out that this gap between intention and artwork “underscores the contradictions of Wall’s photographic use within an ostensibly politicized endeavour” (Solomon-Godeau 87). Wall is, by this account, insufficiently self-reflexive in his use of photography. That is to say, he gestures toward social and class relations in terms of the subjects he addresses, but then he problematically conjures them away through staging and illusion (Solomon-Godeau 86). Solomon-Godeau sees this as a difficulty with his reliance on the

spectacular and illusionistic attributes of photography, because they do not come forth in detailing the link between subject and spectator. Other artists, by contrast, (she mentions Lorna Simpson and Dorit Cypis), address issues of race and sexual difference in a manner which directly implicates the spectator, with the intention of eliciting the unconscious sexist and racist mechanisms involved in viewing (Solomon-Godeau 92).

The art historian T.J. Clark, in a 1989 interview with Wall, echoes similar concerns (Wall, Clark et al. *Parkett*: 82-85). Referring to the artist's meticulous control in staging dramatic pictures, Clark notes how carefully Wall manages the subjects that appear, in order to convey the gestures which have been curtailed and repressed by capitalist culture. TJ Clark, like Solomon-Godeau, is sympathetic to Wall's attempt to portray a critical and 'truthful' image of the social dynamics characteristic of capitalism. The problem, following Clark's line of questioning, is that Wall's strategy might result in an unforeseen, and unintended, set of constraints imposed on the spectator. This has to do with the degree to which Wall maintains control over the regime of the picture itself. Clark asks, "Could it be argued that what is happening here is that all these characters and situations are being de-realized and de-animated in order to be re-realized and re-animated as part of *your own tableau*, that finally the picture is one of the artist's means of control over things?" (*Parkett/Phaidon* 114) In the last instance Clark suggests that Wall is in danger of becoming a kind of puppet master, because the work "opens itself up to a reading as your own puppet show..." (114).

A number of years later, the nascent critique of Wall turns, once again, to the artist's redeployment of the historical practice of the painting of modern life.

Rosalind Krauss, in a 1997 article, argues that not enough of the critical reception has addressed the fact that Wall is a photographer, and that photography is, itself, a medium distinct from painting. The historical background necessary for coming to terms with Wall's work must not ignore the trajectory of technological innovation which has given rise to photo-based images. Instead, Wall has repeatedly been seen as 'a painter of modern life.' But this kind of 'return' is, for Krauss, impossible: "I am astonished all over again by the position taken by his supporters when they argue that Wall simply returns to the moment when painting was internally riven by modernism..."(Krauss 28). The limit of this account has to do with the erasure of the critical project with which modernism was engaged. She continues, "Going back to this moment, yet traveling over this same road but now as a photographer, Wall's restagings ... are seen as gaining access to a narrative (and figurative) tradition that modernism simply, perversely, interrupted" (28). Krauss means to show that modernism cannot, of course, be overlooked in this way, since it is an integral aspect of the western pictorial tradition. We have inherited the problems of representation which modernism only served to articulate. She goes on, "And not only do they argue that Wall has reforged a kind of historical continuity, but that he has reconstituted the kind of pictorial unity of the old master tableau, a unity in which composition is able to weld a variety of elements seamlessly together" (28).

In Chapter Four I made the argument that Jeff Wall's project, of returning to 'the painting of modern life' as a photographer, belongs to a widespread return to 'the picture' taking place during the 1970s and 80s. It is a reaction to the 'dematerialized' experiments in language and ideas typical of the 'conceptual art'

movements of the 1960s. In Benjamin Buchloh's interpretation, Wall is an emblem of the return to the 'visual' after the art world's experiments in a linguistic paradigm. He is critical of the direction taken by Wall, commenting recently that "Wall's work seems to suggest that photographic narrativity, and photographic representation, in spite of their extreme artificiality, are basically reconstructible. In other words, that you can construct contemporary art or historical representation" (BB *Lier en Boog* 1997, 18). His concerns are similar to those voiced by Krauss. He continues, "simply turning things around and going full steam back into a historical representation, as though there never was any reason to question the condition of historical representation, is for my taste much too fast an answer" (18).

Wall's project overlooks something critical with respect to getting at the relationship between, as Buchloh would have it, the 'representation of politics' and the 'politics of representation'. He warns against the attempt to nullify or invalidate the kinds of problems that were brought up with abstraction and conceptualism, by making a 'counter-move' back to representation (1997 *Lier* 18). According to Buchloh artists such as Allan Sekula and James Coleman, who also employ devices in photography not entirely dissimilar from Wall, have been more successful in conveying the problematics of representation. He says, "The difficulty of constructing the representation of history is precisely what is at stake in that historical confrontation between conceptual art and postconceptual art" (18).

Buchloh's perspective suggests that the kind of project Wall is engaged with contains a dangerously reactionary element. Rather than signaling a

transcendence that goes beyond the problems of representation once examined by modernism, the monumental photo-tableau actually draws out, and even repeats, the older problems of conventional painting, in a high-tech format. It relies on a faith in the pictorial that displaces the more radical potential promised by other modes of photography and art-production. "With increasing intensity, the large-scale, colour, photographic image has been pictorialized to such a degree that it has effectively taken the place of painting. So the radical void created by conceptual art and by the inevitable demise of painting has now been massively filled with enlarged photographs, single image colour prints, or single image transparencies"(BB in Sekula, 40).

By way of further establishing the gulf which separates Wall from Goya with respect to their investment in the Enlightenment, there is a need to articulate more clearly the kinds of issues at stake in the critical reception of Wall. Earlier on I suggested that this had to do with 'the painting of modern life.' Wall, as I mentioned earlier, defends his return to the picture on the grounds of 'drama,' arguing that the value of the image is deeply tied to "the content of the drama" and to "its composition as a picture" (Wall, Guilbaut Archives:40). What writers including Solomon-Godeau, Clark, Krauss and others draw attention to, however, is the role of mediation in this process. This leads to questions about *how* and *why* incidents from modern life are repeatedly staged by the artist, for the camera. That is also to ask, I think: what do older practices of representation, such as 'theatre' or 'drama,' have to do with the modern picture, and more precisely, with the art photography of the post-medium era?

I have been looking at how, during the sixties and seventies, various kinds of theatrical strategies would come to dominate the stage of contemporary art. An increased commitment to *material* gave rise to a concern with the process and context of art, moving away from the realm of modernist aesthetics. This, in turn, would problematize the place of the spectator. Practices including environmental art, such as Smithson, and site-specific art, such as that which came to be known as Minimalism, generated a new level of phenomenological awareness of the objects in time and space (Harrison et al. 813-867). Another vein of materialist exploration was taken up through conceptual art, in which the status of the modern art object was put into question. Artists also began to engage with the institutional politics of art, turning back to consider its status and function as a commodity in the bureaucratic system of affirmative culture that supported and displayed their work. As early as 1967, these were precisely the strategies that Michael Fried's modernist stance had attempted to refute.

At a public forum held in 1987, looking at *Art and Objecthood* twenty years later, Perry Anderson (a member of the audience), directed a question to Michael Fried: "Has anything happened in painting or sculpture in the last twenty years to cause you to repent, to revise - or in any way extend - your position?" (Foster, Fried et al. 1987: 84) Fried replies that his essay was problematized by the sheer predominance of art that relied on strategies of theatricality: "Boy, was I right about art moving towards theatre! There's a sense in which everything new in art since then has happened in the space between the arts, the space I characterized as theatre. ... On the one hand, I haven't been moved or

convinced by all this theatrical work; on the other hand, I recognize - I think - that it's not subject to blanket dismissal" (84).

At the same 1987 event, art historian Rosalind Krauss underlines the importance of the article, saying that *Art and Objecthood*, written in 1967, ushered in a new era. Krauss' place on the panel alongside Fried can be explained by the fact that she, as a critic of American sculpture and founding editor of *October* magazine, has been a major force in shaping the reception of Fried's idea of 'theatricality'. Her 1977 book, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, argued that the progression toward modern sculpture was all about rejecting idealist space and turning toward the theatricalised, three-dimensional body of the viewer. Considering Fried's essay in 1987, Krauss says it is significant enough to have "often been seen as having driven a theoretical wedge into '60s discourse on art, somehow dividing that period into a before and an after" (in Foster, Fried et al. 59).

Fried, rooted in ideas about theatrical representation which had their beginnings in the Enlightenment, championed a notion of art which *ignored* the presence of the spectator in order to achieve its own aesthetic aims. Krauss works to muddle the certainty of Fried's claims, arguing that what Fried was really getting at in *Art and Objecthood* had to do with the experience of the viewer. His position represents the attempt to make the viewer into an abstract presence; to take away the bodily presence without actually becoming absent. "And it is this question of the goal of the experience that *Art and Objecthood* expresses most fully. That goal is to produce the illusion in the viewer that he is not there ... what

we have here then, is not exactly a situation of nonpresence but one of abstract presence, the viewer floating in front of the work as pure optical ray" (61).

At that 1987 panel, Krauss was therefore making the argument that the kind of pristine absorption represented by Fried belongs to the realm of mainstream entertainment, rather than, as Fried would have it, acting as its *other*. Mass media renders the viewer empty and bodiless in the same way as Fried's claim to modernist 'presentness'. "This very abstract presence, this disembodied viewer as pure desiring subject, as subject whose disembodiment is, moreover, guaranteed by its sense of total mirroring dependency on what is not itself" she argues, "is precisely the subject constructed by the field of pop art and the world into which it wants to engage, the world of media and the solicitation of advertising" (62). That is to say, the subject as constituted by visual culture at large.

Her critique gathers force from feminism, supposing that Fried posits a model that, among other things, fails to take into account the difference between men and women when they look at art. His account of theatricality carries with it a tremendous force of anxiety, having to do with the relentless reflexive exchange between object and embodied gaze; as Wagner comments, "Fried's fear, it seems, involves just this relentless reflexivity, a view of this art [i.e. minimalism] as a kind of homing device that locks onto the viewer like radar, triggering a kind of psychic quarantine" (Wagner 14). This is what is bound up in his fetishized notion of 'looking'. Krauss continues, trying to draw attention to what Fried has left out: "The gendered body, the specificity of site in relation to its political and institutional dimensions - these forms of resistance to abstract spectatordom

have been, and are now, where one looks for whatever is critical, which is to say non-Imaginary, nonspecular, in contemporary production. All the rest, we would have to say, is pure pop” (Krauss in Foster et al, 64).

In a 1994 exhibition catalogue essay about the minimalist sculptor Robert Morris, Annette Michelson (co-founder of *October*) emphasises that what is ‘transgressive’ about the art of the recent past has been, not its distance *from*, but rather its *reliance on* theatricality. She suggests that Fried’s position in *Art and Objecthood* represents an outdated moralism, commenting: “The assault launched by a Modernist critical establishment on ‘literalism’ and ‘theatricality’ thus had the aspect of a desperate defense by the sclerotic theoretical apparatus of a movement in decline, of a critical orthodoxy unequipped in its Symbolist-derived fetishization of ‘presentness’ to deal with the polymorphic, polysemic renewal of temporally grounded artistic practice.”⁹

As James Meyer points out, “Michelson and Krauss’ interpretation became the dominant account of ‘Art and Objecthood’ and the late modernism it came to represent” (Meyer 85). It was the writers that gathered around *October* magazine, including not only Krauss and Michelson, but also Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster and Craig Owens, that would make a significant contribution to the interpretation of theatricality, reshaping it into a productive analytical tool for considering contemporary art. From Fried’s perspective, the avalanche of art practices openly relying on the conventions and practices of theatricality were accompanied by an equally significant crisis of artistic value.

⁹ Michelson in *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem*, p 60 as quoted, interestingly enough, in the footnotes to Michael Fried’s essay, “An Introduction to my Art Criticism,” in his book *Art and Objecthood- essays and reviews* 1998:71. Fried mentions it because of its “mandarin ferocity.”

The *tableau* is of interest as a format because it is the historical meeting place of theatre and image. The tableau itself, as a form, was extremely popular during the Victorian era. It is at least as old as modernity, with a heritage in older theatrical forms such as Greek drama, medieval Passion play, and *commedia dell'arte*. Tableaux were constructed for the purposes of academic painting, or performed live as *tableaux vivants*. As with the conventions of the theatrical stage, the spectator establishes an *optical* relation to the tableau. "Whether painted or live, sacred or secular, the tableau communicated religious, moral, political and social values through a universally understood cast of characters and language of pose and gesture" (Hoy 9). The tableau as a form is thus attached to the legislation of human life.

The theoretical problem encountered by photographers interested in narrativity is the tension between the picture as a whole and the technical constraints of photography as a medium. In photography this tension goes back as far as early attempts at creating or staging narrative tableaux. Two of the best known 19th century figures are O.G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson, both of whom staged events with the intention of photographing them; producing genre scenes and religious allegories. Their procedure involved combination printing, with the superimposition of one negative on another.

Rejlander's *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) represents an attempt to establish the cultural aims associated with academic history painting within the practices of photography. [Figure 27] *The Two Ways of Life* portrays an allegorical scene in which the father figure is sending off two sons into the world. One direction promises a life of virtue, piety and moral uprightness and the other

a life of vice, indulgence and sexual temptation. Rejlander composed and carefully organized the allegory as a series of small vignettes moving outward from the central figure. It represents a pictorial space turned into allegory; the framing of a moral dilemma for the spectator. In its day Rejlander's photograph was rejected on the grounds that it was considered inappropriate for photography to address grand, moral themes. What provoked such unrest was the way in which the photograph betrayed its proximity to the real world: the spectator was confronted with 'real' bodies, draped in an unconvincing attempt at allegory (Jones).

In her 1987 book, *Fabrications: Staged, Altered and Appropriated Photographs*, Anne Hoy explains that recent years have seen a move beyond the conventions of both documentary and traditional formalist concerns and a tremendous expansion of photographers turning to 'fabrication'. Arguing for 'fabrication' as a defining genre in photography, the book surveys the work of more than fifty photographers who challenge the conventional means by which photography has been deemed fine art. Although she does not discuss the work of Jeff Wall, many of the artists that she covers explore similar techniques. That is to say, they do not conform to the purely formal interests established by the black and white photography of figures such as Edward Weston and Ansel Adams. Nor do they practice the strictly documentary snapshot, or the vernacular of street photography, as demonstrated by figures such as Henri Cartier-Bresson or Garry Winogrand.

'Fabricated' photos, as Hoy defines them, have been "openly staged for the camera and/or manipulated in the darkroom" (Hoy 6). They are intriguing

because they appear as “falsified documents,” pictures that “exploit photography’s status as evidence, but also show their hand” (6). Because these photos document ‘fake’ situations that nevertheless actually took place, they are neither ‘true’ nor ‘false’. “Theatre is their model - with its surrogate reality, narrative continuity, and emotional charge - and the studio is their stage” (6). Anne Hoy argues that these ‘fabrication’ artists represent “the most inventive movement in photography (and arguably in *all* the graphic arts) in the last twenty years” (7).

Hoy makes the argument that the narrative tableau can be distinguished from other kinds of art photography because, unlike the relative neutrality of the snapshot or the documentary, its mode of construction is inevitably inscribed with the emotional and personal traces of its creator. Artists creating narrative tableaux depend on a mode of production that requires a wide range of skills. They are not just photographers, but also directors, set designers, costumers and casting agents who require actors, props, and constructed settings. To put their ideas into a narrative form, they must employ new aspects of technological innovation in order to make the best use that they can of photography’s possibilities. In striving to establish a fuller engagement with objectivity, while at the same time investigating the alienated grounds of modern subjectivity, such fabricated photos utilize the legacy of both modernism and romanticism. With the tableaux, Hoy declares, “storytelling has returned to photography” (9).

In Hoy’s account, contemporary narrative tableaux are often constructed so as to leave traces of their grounding in artifice. This is done by using amateur actors, unprofessionally built sets, and so on, and in so doing, these tableaux

draw attention to their own construction. "The photographs surveyed here reveal an unabashed artifice, making it plain that the sets were constructed in the studio and that the actors are amateurs. The illusion is intentionally incomplete and calls attention to its maker as well as to what was made" (9). These tableaux have two aspects: they are the record of a creative performance organized by the photographer; and they are the expression of a theatrical content which demands the suspension of disbelief. They therefore have both documentary and aesthetic content, which combine together to form a narrative. They demand that we ask the questions: "Who are these people?" and "What does this scene mean?" (Hoy 9)

For most of the twentieth century modernism had championed a documentary and purist approach to art photography, and this approach remained predominant until the 1960s. Ingrid Jonge furthers the groundwork laid down by Coleman and Hoy, positioning Jeff Wall among a generation of postmodern artists who would turn to the possibilities of the photographic tableau as a means of breaking through the norms and conventions of modernist photography. An investigation of the veracity of representation in all its forms was the impetus that inspired the turn to this kind of staged photography. "Fiction and empirical reality were played off against each other, with the result that photography's authenticity crackled" (Jonge 18). The practices of artists such as Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince, like that of Jeff Wall, involve the use of intertextuality, or pictorial quotation, within the format of the tableau (Jonge 20). According to Jonge, Wall's use of staged photography

was fully consonant with the contemporary art of the 1980s; the time when staged photography enjoyed a “massive renaissance” (17).

What remains uncertain is how the recent turn to the photographic tableau, this massive renaissance of theatricality, addresses its contemporary audience. In a recent article T.J. Clark wrestles with changing modes of spectatorship in art and society (Clark 2002). This issue is deeply entwined with the historical transition between modernism and postmodernism. Given that modernism, as an artistic paradigm, was attuned to the facts and possibilities offered by the everyday life of modernity, Clark wonders whether we have recently entered into an era so different (postmodernity) that it has demanded another paradigm of artistic production (postmodernism). This depends, he admits, on whether the conditions of modernity have been so drastically reconfigured during the past thirty or forty years that they are on the verge of something new. Clark’s grounding in modernism lends him a skeptical eye.

The advent of the mass media image, and in particular, of television, signifies a level of technological advance that has transformed the social fabric. “If there is any technological watershed of the postmodern, it lies here,” Perry Anderson says, apropos of the advent of colour TV in the early 1970s (Anderson 88). Whereas modernism was produced in response to the machine, postmodernism responds to “a machinery of images” (88). Modern technologies which restructured and improved the efficiency of industry and domestic life also offered a generative matrix inside which the modernist imaginary grew into being. At the same time modernists recognized that technology posed a vast threat, both in terms of the possibility of complete annihilation, and through the insidious

power of its mundane rationality. Postmodern machines, by contrast, deal not in production but in reproduction, generating an unprecedented volume of images, a technical environment overwhelmed by this new density. This is the context which makes sense of the return to the 'picture' that has occurred in art, and the resurgence of theatricality. "Since the seventies", Anderson says, "the spread of second-order devices and positionings in so much aesthetic practice is comprehensible only in terms of this primary reality" (89). Unlike the modern machine, the circulation of images is not without a realm of insistent chatter and explicit ideological content. The new apparatuses, Anderson says "are perpetual emotion machines, transmitting discourses that are wall-to-wall ideology, in the strong sense of the term" (89). Art is an index of the dramatic shift that has occurred in the relationship between advanced technology and the popular imaginary.

Clark ponders how deeply the onset of the 'postmodern' is attached to modes of visibility. Is there, he asks, "a tipping of the social balance from a previous regime of the word to a present regime of the image?" Assuming that we *are* in a new regime of the image, how will this affect the visual arts? It is possible to suppose that the visual arts, dealing in the image as they do and have, will regain a degree of cultural importance within the world of postmodernity. The visual arts, after all, represent a long history of dealing with the structure and meaning of images. On the other hand, the proximity of the visual arts to dominant image culture might prove limiting; "not closeness but identity" (Clark, 2002). It is this latter condition which has been the case; postmodernity has come to stand for art's affirmation of contemporary culture and the industries on which it

relies to produce its socialized subjects. From Clark's vantage point, this is unfortunate. Postmodernists have yet to carry through on the lessons of incredulity and negation established by modernism. In order to address the constraints and possibilities of the current era, postmodern art will have to retain a skeptical attitude:

It will have to probe, as Manet and Picasso did, at the concepts that truly organize - that produce - our present fictions of the now. Once upon a time that meant mobility, and the free play of appearances, and the great myth of individuality. Those were Manet's and Picasso's raw materials. Nowadays it is the notions of virtuality and visuality. It is time this imaginary were put to the test of form. (Clark, 2002)

In consumer society it is the realm of appearance which shapes lived experience; not the other way around. One of the best writers to address the political meaning of this transition in the post-war era, and to theorize the technological origin of the image, was Guy Debord. During the 1960s, as the technology of the mass media rose to create a culture of the image, Guy Debord offered an analysis of the commodity which convincingly showed how the conventional division between ideal and material realms has become confused and dislodged. Debord asserted that the means by which this confusion occurred was through a materialisation of ideology that he called the spectacle. This analysis was most famously offered in his book, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), and updated in his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988). It is worth noting that Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was published in 1967, which is to say that Debord mounts a concerted attack on the 'spectacle' at the same

moment that Michael Fried wages his polemic against 'theatricality' in *Artforum* magazine.

The spectacle is meant to indicate that the realm of representation has come to dominate reality. Debord draws from Marx, in particular his theory of commodity fetishism, which has as its basis the objectified representation of money. Debord also draws on Lukacs, who furthered Marxism in his account of reification, showing the ways in which people were misunderstood as things, while things were mistakenly thought to possess the attributes of life itself. In the Marxian tradition it is money which acts as an autonomous form of representation, becoming the basis of a cumulative, ongoing distortion between real and material. Debord's concept of the spectacle will push this notion further. He will show that commodity fetishism is no longer illusory, but rather that representation has *in fact* become autonomous. In the spectacle, "the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which at the same time are recognized as the tangible *par excellence*" (Debord 1967, 36).

Debord argues that the process of commodification is exerting an ever increasing pressure onto everyday life in the form of false appearances. The consequence of this process is an ever increasing blur between reality and representation. The commodity, which renders an object abstract for the purposes of exchange, imposes a level of appearance onto the thing-in-itself. As David Hawkes points out, following Debord, the stakes of this operation get higher as we move into the epoch of postmodernity: "The thing-in-itself is obscured by its form of appearance. But the thing-in-itself in this case is *ourselves* - human labour, human activity, and therefore, human life itself, which

is hidden and dominated by its simultaneously objectified and symbolic form of appearance: capital” (Hawkes 162).

As commodity culture has intensified, the human subject has become fully objectified. This new being, the commodified subject, is thought to have the magical power of life itself. What appears as life, however, is not consciousness, but rather ideology - ideology so complete that it renders even the concept of ‘false consciousness’ obsolete. For Debord the roots of this condition properly belong to political economy and are specifically the effects of commodity exchange. His notion of the ‘society of the spectacle’, while still a commodity society, is organized at a higher and more abstract level. Best and Kellner define Debord’s version in this way: “In one sense, it refers to a media and consumer society, organized around the consumption of images, commodities and spectacles” (84). They go on to point out that “the concept also refers to the vast institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism, to all the means and methods power employs, outside of direct force, which subject individuals to societal manipulation, while obscuring the nature and effects of capitalism’s power and deprivations” (Best and Kellner 84).

The spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization - a narcotic, a form of opium that prevents people from actively and creatively experiencing their own life. It diffuses its pacifying narcotic through images, leisure activities, consumption, entertainment and communication industries that operate according to the dictates of advertising. These practices imply separation because in order to consume we are split from one another and made to passively take in the spectacular forms.

Debord paid close attention to the new function of the image in the society of the spectacle: "The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image" (Debord 1967, 34). Debord and the Situationists had recognized early on that the realm of the image was, increasingly, "the social location in which and against which a possible future politics would have to be framed" (Clark 2000, 89). Clark characterizes writing on postmodernity (he is referring, in particular, to Anderson's 1998 book) as so much realism after the fact, an 'own-up-to-the-power-of-the-image' tone in which denunciation sounds hopelessly retrograde. Postmodernity, as it is theorized by figures such as Jameson and Anderson, emerges as the result of a definitive break in culture and society. Yet, as writers including Clark point out, many of postmodernity's ostensibly 'novel' features have precedents in modernity.

Clark argues that Debord's reading of the spectacle remains relevant today because it refrains from positing a definitively 'new order': "Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* was not a book that proposed a periodization of capitalism. It deliberately did not say when 'the spectacle' arrived" (90). Rather, he says, readers of Debord must understand that the spectacle was seen as "a logic and an instrumentation inherent in the commodity economy, and in certain of its social accompaniments, from the very beginning. No doubt that logic became clearer as the instrumentation became more efficient and widespread ... but the logic has always been relatively clear..." (90).

Debord's spectacle is reminiscent of the critique of the culture industry made by members of the Frankfurt School. His spectacle is meant to show that commodification has colonized new realms of human life, resulting in a totally

administered or one dimensional illusion of reality. Like Debord, Theodor Adorno would remain attached to a mode of social analysis that found some use in dialectical thinking. Adorno shows the way in which ideology permeates all the levels of social existence. Adorno traces how the subject has been objectified under capitalism. Historically, human beings were both subject and object; under the conditions of capitalism, they are turned into objects alone. The organization of modernity dissolves actual subjectivity, and replaces it with a subjectivity which has been artificially manufactured. What this results in is a society in which objectified subjects operate as though their subjectivity was not objective. The attributes of the self, meanwhile, are supplied from the outside, by the sophisticated operations of promotional culture. Postmodern society has reduced the hierarchy between subject and object by making the subject into an object. From this perspective ideology does not operate in an independent realm; ideology is "a kind of glue: the false identity of subject and object" (Adorno, ND 348).

In these new circumstances ideology is not about how we think, but rather about a new and fundamental distortion or misapprehension of reality itself. For Slavoj Zizek, like Debord, ideology has exceeded the realm of ideas and has taken its place in the real world. Zizek shows how current conditions have moved beyond the conventional idea that ideology refers to the real world, turned upside down. Instead, it is the autonomous sphere of representation that has come to stand in place of the real. Zizek recognizes that the conditions in which subjects have been objectified, referents have disappeared, and representation has come to stand not for appearance but for the real, are rooted in the conditions of late

capitalism. These are sometimes celebrated as the characteristic features of the postmodern condition. Zizek, similar to Debord and Adorno, follows an argument that does not collapse dialectics. Skeptical of postmodern 'joy', he says "Far from containing any kind of subversive potentials, the dispersed, plural, constructed subject hailed by postmodern theory (the subject prone to particular, inconsistent modes of enjoyment, etc.) simply designates *the form of subjectivity that corresponds to late capitalism*" (Zizek *Tarrying*, 216).

The shape of modern subjectivity has long been determined by the theatre of representation. It is, in fact, not difficult to see how deeply Debord's thoughts on the spectacle delve into the long history of debates over the ways in which modern representation shape human agency and well-being. That there is a formal identity between *theatrical* and *political* stages has been remarked upon since the revolutionary period in France. This formal identity has been a fundamental and continuing component in the machinery of state formation. Paul Friedland, in *Political Actors*, argues that "the French Revolution is fundamentally related to a revolution in the theory and practice of theatre, and that both revolutions are manifestations of an underlying revolution in the conception of representation itself." Representative democracy and modern theatricality, he says, are "conceptual siblings" (3). If there are any meaningful claims to be staked in the contemporary return to the dramatic tableau, it will be necessary to draw them out by examining some of the historical narratives upon which this return has been built.

Theatre was hugely popular during the revolutionary period in France. Francois Riccoboni's influential essay, 'L'art du theatre', published in 1750, is

indicative of the changing relations between actor and spectator which were coming into being during this time. Riccoboni introduced a mode of theatre which emphasized *appearance* rather than *authenticity* in acting. This method of acting, which was based on imitation rather than the dramatization of inner emotions, would transform theatre during the last half of the 18th century. The writings of Denis Diderot clearly articulate these ideas: "The actor's entire talent consists not in feeling, as you the spectator suppose, but in rendering the outward signs of feeling so scrupulously that you the spectator mistake them for real" (Diderot as quoted in Friedland, 22).

This new theatrical genre would in fact shape the modern relationship between actor and spectator, as it is understood today. "For it is crucial to understand that the passive and silent individual, seated in the darkness, obsessed with the action on the lighted stage, did not exist in the middle of the 18th century," Friedland points out. "That willing and pliant spectator had to be manufactured in theory and then meticulously sculpted in practice over a period of several decades" (Friedland 23). Prior to the middle of the 18th century the relationship between actors and spectators had been more pliant and fluid. As Friedland describes, spectators often sat on stage among the actors, regularly commenting on the play as it was taking place. The theatre, it might be said, held recognizable traces of the festival. It was not until the 1760s that the stage was regularly cleared of spectators, and that the stage was given more light while the audience was cast in shadow.

The practical reform of the theatre was matched in theory by the concept of the 'fourth wall'. This involved a redesign of the representative space of the

stage in which actors, rather than addressing an audience directly, were meant to convey a plausible reality. "Instead of directing their performances toward the audience, actors should pretend that the open space between the stage and the audience was a fourth wall. Actors should behave, in short, just like real people enclosed in a defined space, without observers..." (26). This imaginary wall would divide the actor from the spectator, allowing for the perception of a staged, constructed performance. Diderot promoted the idea of the fourth wall throughout France, saying "think no more of the spectator than if he did not exist" (as quoted in Friedland 26).

Debord's use of the term spectacle was cognizant of the fourth wall, and the implications that it carried with respect to spectatorship. As commentators have since remarked, his account had presupposed a distinction between 'spectacle' and 'festival'. In his account, modernity was structured in such a way as to have seen the 'spectacle' overtake the historical possibilities of the 'festival'. David Roberts, drawing on accounts by Durkheim, Turner and MacAloon, points out that the distinction between festival and spectacle can be understood according to the mode of participation that is involved. "The festival, strictly speaking, excludes spectators. It consists of a collective act of presence in which the participants are actors and spectators at the same time. The spectacle, as its name indicates, signifies a separation of actors and spectators, which is almost inescapable once the social group exceeds a certain size" (Roberts 55). He situates the transition from sacred festival to the modern spectacle in the period of the enlightenment. "The revolutionary spirit of the moderns was imbued, in its very founding act, with a nostalgia for a lost unity, with the dream of the once and

future republic of the free, equal and fraternal people” (Roberts 56). The difficulty of the modern period would be how to restore the sacred unity of the festival without returning to the premodern unity of throne and altar. “But once you have broken the sacred spell, how is the empty space at the heart of society to be filled?”(Roberts 56)

Debord will respond to this by suggesting that it is the commodity which comes to fulfill this function. He will show that culture offers the illusion of lost unity, and “the spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion” (Debord 1967, 20). The goal of Debord and his fellow Situationists was to restore the presence of life once offered by the festival. Influenced by Sartre’s idea of a ‘situated context’, Lefebvre’s theory of everyday life, and the ‘Arguments’ and ‘Socialisme ou Barbarisme’ groups, the Situationists constructed ‘situations’ that recovered aspects of the historical practice of the festival. The project was geared to explicitly transforming modern society. Refusing both bureaucratic state communism and capitalist consumerism, they embraced ‘council communism’ which emphasized the “need for workers and citizens to democratically control every realm of their life” (Best and Kellner 82).

The struggle between *festival* and *spectacle* remains, even today, one of the central conflicts within modernity. Debord’s take on ‘postmodern’ society charges that the spectacle is organized around a theatre of representation that guarantees our alienation. In an essay from 1998, Lloyd and Thomas respond to Debord’s position by drawing attention to the role of representation in modern politics. The basis of modern political life is achieved through representation, which enables the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote. The modern

social order allows for procedures and institutions that enable the individual subject to achieve political goals. In the modern nation state, then, representation acts in the progress of humanity toward freedom and civilisation, rather than, as Debord would have it, as a guarantee of individual alienation.

Lloyd and Thomas outline the means by which the spectacle - which is, of course, the French word for 'theatre' - became the basis of representation in the modern world. Modernity, through the organization of various state institutions, would see individual agency replaced by various forms of representation. This is the basis of the democratic state. The spectacle is posited by these authors as the point of tension between the ideas of Rousseau (who defended a 'natural' self, free of the spectacle) and Schiller (who believed that human fulfillment necessitated various forms of representation, and argued for the spectacle as a place of reconciliation between sensuality and morality).

Rousseau's writings champion an ideal of transparency in communication. For Rousseau this ideal is lost, yet potentially available. Language itself, while potentially deceptive, need not be estranged from 'natural' goodness. The authors make reference to Rousseau's famous letter to the French encyclopaedist M. D'Alembert, written in 1758 as a polemic condemning theatre as a mode of entertainment. In his letter Rousseau argues that people can exceed self-interest and communicate with honesty and transparency by participating in a republican constitution. In this model of social organization, the division of spheres and of labour are unthinkable. Rousseau compares this ideal to the educated sociality of Paris, where individuals must present themselves by what they do, and in this way showing only a limited part of themselves. The arts,

he argues, have destroyed the higher art, which is the totality of our nature. (36) Selfhood and moral being are more easily attained by those without privilege than by those with sophisticated, cosmopolitan circumstances. He does not advocate education as a means of civilizing, but rather the stripping away of mediation in order to allow for a greater degree of moral choice as well as spontaneity of contact between people.

For Rousseau the theatre is an emblem of the loss of social communion. This has to do with its structure, which obliges people to sit beside one another without engaging, focussed on a distant stage. Actors play out the contradictions and tensions of lived experience while the spectator watches, requiring no involvement or risk. "In giving our tears to these fictions we have satisfied our rights of humanity without having to give any more of ourselves..." (Lloyd and Thomas, 38). This is the opposite of the 'assembly' in Rousseau's Social Contract, "where we cannot bracket, ignore or disregard those around us" (38).

Rousseau counter-poses the theatre with the Fête, which is meant to refer to an open, transparent and immediate community. His notion of a social contract between citizen and sovereign, as the embodiment of the General Will, is an extension of the Fête: "The Social Contract stipulates at the level of *having* what the Fête realizes at the level of *being*" (Lloyd and Thomas 40). Rousseau recognized that individual experience would suffer under the fragmentation and cleavage of a society organized under the banner of modern reason; that modernity is premised on the institutionalisation of division and the privilege of certain aspects of self, at the expense of the whole. He champions 'participatory' over 'representative' democracy. This is because of his wariness of

representation as such. Rousseau wants politics to be participatory and collective, rooted in the cultural festival. What is productive here is the way in which Rousseau's position elicits a critique of the developing culture of representation in modernity.

At the time of the French Revolution the tension around notions of mediation and representation were expressed by the Jacobin rejection of bourgeois property relations. The Jacobins enforced a state of unruly terror where mediation was explicitly refused. This form of rule prevented the conditions necessary to assemble civil society. The Jacobin cry for immediacy in politics was associated with Rousseau's utopianism, especially in the British political philosophy of Edmund Burke, who wished to contain the revolutionary fervour by aesthetic means. The masses represented a threat to property and order on moral and aesthetic, as well as economic and political grounds.

In contrast to Rousseau's ideal of transparency created through an undivided space such as the Fête, Friedrich Schiller would make the argument for aesthetics as the basis of a sound educational experience. In his 1784 essay, "On the Stage as a Moral Institution," Schiller argues that it is through a proper aesthetic education that a person becomes harmonized with themselves and others. The formation of the subject occurs through institutions that allow individual identity to interact with others. For Schiller the divisions of class, occupation, and status are mediated through the formation of an 'ethical citizenry', and it is the stage, in particular, that offers a paradigm of this. Schiller's contribution is to show a definitive connection between the public form of the theatrical performance and its role in state formation. This is because the theatre

mediates between private and public experience; offering a temporary unity around a shared aesthetic object. From this vantage point the disinterested spectator, rather than the involved actor, is a desirable subject position. It is the aesthetic object, in particular, that affords the contemplation and insight of a disinterested spectator in a space not governed directly by material and political interests. Following Schiller, Lloyd and Thomas argue that the theatre does what neither law nor religion can do because the stage is “a paradigmatic scene of fundamental political pedagogy, mediating between the prohibitive or coercive force of the law and the prescriptive but abstract principles of religion” (Lloyd and Thomas 55).

Contrary to Rousseau, Schiller defends the value of representation, recognizing in it a productive form of deferral. According to this view, an experience such as theatre allows spectators to temporarily set aside potentially divisive circumstances such as gender, class or health, uniting them together as audience. This gathering of individuals parallels the assemblies organized by representative democracy. The theatre, as an ideal moral institution, acts as an exemplary state apparatus. Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), will show the way that human agency is externalised, drawing out the inherently mediated character of self. Drawing on the analogy with theatricality, Hegel shows that the individual in culture is both actor and spectator: “The subject drops the mask just because it wants to be something genuine. The self, appearing here in its significance as something actual ... stands forth in its own nakedness and ordinariness, which it shows to be not distinct from the genuine self, the actor, or from the spectator” (Hegel, 744).

Joanna Lowry, in an essay about Jeff Wall, shows how contemporary photography has become divorced from its historical origins. This has to do with changes in viewing habits. Looking back at enlightenment forms of viewing paintings, Lowry discusses the preference that spectators once had for viewing pictures in which the painted subjects appeared to be self-absorbed; unaware of being watched. When the painting defied theatricality and communicated a degree of self-absorption, the spectator could find pleasure by inferring the means by which life had escaped what was being pictured. Lowry speaks about this in relation to the conventions of the tableau. "When, in the 18th century Diderot described the 'tableau' as the privileged aesthetic form for the representation of the significant historical moment, he called for a unified composition that could in some sense mirror the soul, a concept that represented the psychic state of the beholder" (Lowry 109).

The historical conditions of modernity have changed the terms of this spectatorship. "In the era of communication technology it is precisely this frame that has been put into question and with its disappearance has vanished our certainty about how to map the coordinates of identity and subjecthood" (Lowry 108). It is the impact of technological innovation that has played such a significant part in changing the relationship between the spectator and the work of art. In today's postmodern world circumstances have changed and the tableau can no longer fulfill this function. This is because, Lowry says -- following Jameson -- the postindustrial conditions mean that the human subject has become too fragmented to appreciate the 'absorption' of older art forms. "There can be no

consoling reaffirmation of the subject in relationship to the modern version of the pictorial tableau” (Lowry 109).

Wall’s highly constructed tableaux have been understood as an attempt to provide an antidote to the mechanisms which normalize the representations of the mass media. During the 1980s in particular, when he is committed to staging dramatic interiors as well as highly modernized landscapes, Wall relies on the life-scale, back-lit transparency. This media format, most familiarly employed by advertising, and residing comfortably in the heart of the spectacle, is used to turn the purposes of the spectacle against itself.

Considering the place of art within the culture of the spectacle adds another aspect to the interpretation of a picture such as *Insomnia* (1994). The picture is, perhaps, a story about the function of contemporary art in relation to the imagination of significant political action.¹⁰ We might suppose that the figure that can be observed in the picture, alone and immobile, lying on the kitchen floor, *is* that of the artist, an artist who is necessarily also, according to the standards of promotional culture, an ‘unimportant’ man. As such, what we are looking at is the fate of modern art itself.

What we are seeing, then, is that art is called to stand in as an expression of the melancholy state of affairs in a radically disenchanted modernity. This strategy, which is one of critical self-reflexivity, could be said to provide a valuable means of countering the mechanisms that allow for the ‘visual dominant’ to pass for ‘the real’. It could also be said, however, that it has become the means by which Wall’s work reaches an impasse. That is to say that Wall’s pictures, in

¹⁰ For more about the politics of affect in contemporary culture, see Ngai (3-37).

banishing all contingency, end up restaging precisely that form of dominance they had attempted to critique (Bryson *Enlightenment Boxes*).

It has become clear during the course of this chapter that the theatre of representation with which Jeff Wall is engaged participates in a series of unresolved debates which have their heritage in the enlightenment period. The dramatic form of the photographic tableau calls into play contradictory claims which rightly belong to both modernism and the avant-garde. “Modernity comes to an end, as Jameson observes, when it loses any antonym. The possibility of other social orders was an essential horizon of modernism” (Anderson 92). Fully historical, or not, it would seem that the reception of modernism remains controversial, and in the following chapter I examine how current interpretations of contemporary pictorial photography continue to wrestle with the unresolved legacies of the modernist imagination.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Elephants and Termites

Nobody wants the social history of art to be, in Hegel's words, 'an external activity - the wiping-off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from the [artistic] fruit, so to speak - one which erects an intricate scaffolding of the dead elements of their outward existence - the language, the historical circumstances, and so on'; but to do more than this is difficult, especially with fruit of this kind.

- T.J. Clark 1990:181.

Unsystematically, but with a fair degree of frequency, this dissertation has relied on the writings of both Michael Fried and T.J. Clark. Fried's notion of theatricality, and its postmodern reception, have flickered in and out of each chapter; hopefully short of having become something of a straw man during the process. And, with a similar rate of frequency, I am supposing that my sympathy for the writings of T.J. Clark, and his ongoing attempt to see modernism in light of the spectacle of modernity, has also been demonstrated. In this concluding chapter I thought I should try to address, more directly than I have so far, some of the motivations that have been at work during this writing process. If I should begin by saying that my desire has been to rely on both Clark and Fried to animate the notion of 'spectacle' in order to establish a methodology relevant to contemporary art photography, this would be true enough, but may not go sufficiently far in terms of establishing why this might be meaningful to the field today. This has, indeed, been one of the motives informing this text, but I need to go back to historiography in order to explain why the encounter between Clark and Fried begs analysis, and, too, why it remains so productively fraught.

While both T.J. Clark and Michael Fried have dedicated their efforts, across several decades, to a formidable engagement with modern art, their respective projects represent radically different conceptions about its socio-political function. Clark's affiliation with ideology critique and the critical theory of the spectacle, as with his historical ties to Guy Debord and the Situationist International, continue to inform his intellectual work; while Fried's devotion to the critical project of modernism, as with his rejection of 'theatricality,' are grounded in an ongoing refusal of any such vanguardism.¹ Fried, by contrast to Clark, characterizes his study of art in terms of its distance from the political. I am thinking, for instance, of the introduction to his book *Absorption and Theatricality*, where he comments, "Nowhere in the pages that follow is an effort made to connect the art and criticism under discussion with the social, economic, and political reality of the age" (Fried, 1980:4). While it is possible, and even necessary, to locate these authors as having engendered divergent scholarly traditions, the ways in which the work of these two historians meet and overlap is a complex weave of mutual influence and critical tension which cannot readily be summarized.

In a short review of a recent Jeff Wall exhibition, Michael Fried identifies one of Wall's current pictures, *Fieldwork...* (2003), as a 'near near documentary' practice. Fried relies on *Fieldwork* to discuss Wall's recent turn toward 'straight'

¹ Clark demonstrates a longstanding commitment to examining how art is mediated by the political world, as is indicated by his membership in the *Situationist International* during 1966-67. See TJ Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith "Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International" www.notbored.org May, 1997. For a sense of Clark's wider, ongoing, political interests, see also the Retort Collective article, "Afflicted Powers: The State, The Spectacle and September 11th" *New Left Review* (May June 2004) and book, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* Verso, 2005.

photography, outlining the effort involved in Wall's representation of two field workers engaged in an archaeological dig. He explains that Wall's preparation involved spending three weeks on the actual site, so as to allow for the workers to become accustomed to the presence of his camera. There is an emphasis, then, on the documentary, since the artist is taking great pains to photograph actual workers, rather than, as he has done in the past, staging actors to mimic modern social types. Fried points out that the resulting transparency falls short of pure documentary, though, in that it is a composite; digitally enhanced so as to keep the entire scene in focus. That Wall is, nevertheless, concerned with emphasizing the veracity of the photo is indicated by the detailed, descriptive, title which he gives to the work: *Fieldwork: Excavation of the floor of a dwelling in a former Sto:lo nation village, Greenwood Island, Hope, B.C., August, 2003, Anthony Graesch, Dept. of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles, working with Riley Lewis of the Sto:lo band.*

In his review of Wall's art, Michael Fried finds the occasion to revisit the tenets of theatricality which have concerned him across so many decades. If my own account of Jeff Wall is taken into consideration, I trust that it will come of something of a surprise to discover that Michael Fried, once a staunch defender of modernism, has lately begun to evince a serious interest in Jeff Wall's pictures. Surprising because photography -- which is *inherently* theatrical -- sits so uncomfortably within the history of modernism. Surprising, as well, because Jeff Wall's photoconceptualist roots betray an investment in the aims and ideas of theatricality which Michael Fried, once upon a time (i.e. in 'Art and Objecthood' 1967), vehemently decried.

As I discussed in Chapter One, Wall's foundational aesthetics demonstrate an affinity with the radical openness of Robert Smithson and Dennis Wheeler rather than with the rigorously modernist stance of Michael Fried. Being on location with the 'moto-flâneur,' and the aesthetic encounter with modernity which it expresses, is the *modus operandi* which informs Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, as well as Wall's *Landscape Manual*, *Cine-text*, and his early Vancouver landscapes. The philosophical grounds by which photo-conceptualism represents a direct refusal of Fried's stance thus speaks to the arguments outlined in Chapter One.

Fried's disavowal of politics, or, rather, his careful investment in a method formulated around the conventions of Euro-American visual art, stands at some remove from those currents of writing (I am thinking, for example, of T.J. Clark) which have made great strides in expanding the discipline and placing art's concerns within a much more general tradition of critical writings on modernity. Fried's recent expression of interest is thus surprising a second time round, given Jeff Wall's demonstrable involvement with the critical discourse of modernity. This is the material which I was attempting to address in Chapter Three, when I outlined Wall's heritage in "the ultra-left", and considered some of the ways in which his pictures represent an engagement with the critical realism of the New Left.

My question here has to do with establishing the methodological grounds for studying the kind of photographic practice that Wall engaged in during the 1980s. If this is the question, then what is the importance of reflecting on what Fried currently thinks about Wall? How is Fried's argument relevant to this

argument? It is relevant because, way back when (1967), Fried's polemic (quite unintentionally) recognized, and contributed to, the case for theatricality in contemporary art. This is not, of course, the place to delve into the developmental shifts in Fried's thinking since he launched that impassioned attack against theatricality almost four decades ago. At the same time, it is precisely to this development that we must turn because it helps to make sense of the current situation. The shifting trajectory of Fried's writings speak to a much larger field of artistic concerns. Beginning with Diderot, Fried explored the history of modern visual art in terms of the conventions of theatricality and absorption. What I take this to mean, this discovery by Fried of Wall, is that the basis of a persuasive theoretical language for art photography are becoming evident, which is also to say that the history of art is beginning to establish the groundwork necessary to cross that great divide between modernism and the neo-avant-garde.

Jeff Wall and other contemporary photographic artists - Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, Beat Streuli, Philip-Lorca diCorcia - present, for Fried, a renewed need to examine the tension between theatricality and anti-theatricality. This 'near documentary' approach, which relies on documentation while nevertheless also reflecting on its own mediated nature, presents for Fried "a dramatic new turning in the relations between theatricality and anti-theatricality" (Fried, 2004:54). This is the rationale behind his claim that photographic art has yet to be studied in relation to the arguments made in 'Art and Objecthood,' and furthermore, that this is the topic of a current, as yet unpublished, book project. While the painting practices of modernism might be said to have worked against the conventions of theatricality, these conventions were not defeated. They have

been renewed, once again, Fried finds, in the work of Wall and other contemporary photographic artists.

Earlier on I suggested that Jeff Wall's art could be looked at as a cipher for the divergent approaches of Fried and Clark: 'I am suggesting', I said in Chapter Four, 'that Wall's contemporary pictures can be thought of as a cipher of the longstanding, and still unresolved, struggle between these divergent and highly influential interpretations of modern art.' In order to establish some support for this claim I want to turn to the methodological model presented by each of these art historians. Because of the relevance to Jeff Wall, I propose to examine their respective analyses of the modern French painter, Edouard Manet. Before turning to the comparison between Clark and Fried, however, I want to turn briefly to a recent essay about Jeff Wall.

In earlier chapters I mentioned a recent reading of Jeff Wall's 1990 picture, *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947*, written by Fred Orton and Lisa Joyce and published in 2003. (Orton/Joyce, 2003) In the article these authors review many of the issues that I have been working through in this dissertation. Through a close reading of the Ventriloquist piece, during which they also talk about Manet, the painting of modern life, and about T.J. Clark's critique of Wall, the authors defend Wall's art as a worthy critical project. They champion Wall's work on the grounds that it offers the viewer a "critical hermeneutics of suspicion." The following few pages represent a summary of the Orton/Joyce article, which I include here as a kind of mini-review of some of the central issues that I have been discussing throughout the dissertation.

Jeff Wall has written an essay about Edouard Manet (1984) in which he discusses the paradoxical unity and fragmentation characteristic of his work. Wall clearly sees his practice in some association with Manet's work. When he began to make pictures in the late seventies Wall was self-consciously engaging and disengaging with the art of Manet, as demonstrated, in particular, by his *Picture for Women* (1979) and *The Storyteller* (1986). Jeff Wall talks about Manet in terms of the disintegration of the classical unity of the picture, and about how the unity in Manet's paintings depends on the very force that manifests that disintegration. How does Jeff Wall theorize Manet's pictures of the 1860s? Manet's display of objects is reminiscent of window displays in a department store, where each commodity receives the same lighting and attention so as to indicate the equivalency of its value and importance. In this way Manet deliberately troubles the conventions of art. There's a sense in which both the department store display and Manet's painting are produced by the same conditions: capital.

Manet wanted to make pictures that conformed to the Salon's idea of classical art, both in terms of genre and historical importance. What turned out to be unacceptable to the Salon was his subject matter, the painting of everyday life, *la vie moderne*. He both negated and conformed to the historical weight and attention given to the subject matter. Manet's play with solidity and distance, while it achieved a certain kind of unity, does not conform to the Salon model. Because his work was characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity and undecidability, it communicated a world which was incomplete, broken into bits, and persistently fragmented. What Wall recognizes is that Manet's success in

picture-making is in the coherence of his painting, which is not simply fragments so much as the organization of fragments which mourn for a lost unity; which decorate a lost and dead kind of picture. There is a way to talk about Manet's style as constitutive of what happens to everyday life in capitalism. (Joyce/Orton, 19) Wall's ideas about art are inspired by Manet, and his "authorial identity" is as well. He is, like Manet, a 'painter of modern life'. They say he situates himself between traditional and modernist art. Also between capital and Marxism (Orton/Joyce 19).

Wall had to figure out how to continue the work of Manet in a mode appropriate to the present day. Rather than painting, he turned to photography. Rather than documentary photography, or art photography, he relied on the tenets of cinematography to construct and conceptualize the model of his practice. This allowed him to create and control dramatic narrative tableaux. Relying on film as a mode of production not only allowed for narrative but also for creative montage effects, that unity of fragmentation that Manet was able to achieve on the painted surface.

Accepted models of art photography, both canonical (Cartier-Bresson) and de-skilled (Dan Graham or Ed Ruscha) utilized the immediacy of the camera to emphasize the means and effects of photographic production. Cinematographic photography, by contrast, emphasized the artist as *auteur*. In order to achieve the kind of detail and depth necessary for the project, Wall had to leave the established aesthetics of the snap-shot behind, and move to the large format camera. In order to engage with the theatre of modern representation, the artist gravitated to the transparency and the lightbox. The light projected from behind,

critics observe, is what enables the spectator to see the picture, and, as such, it can be understood to lend another dimension of aesthetic experience to Wall's project.

As I discussed earlier on in this dissertation, T.J. Clark has argued that Wall's pictures end up being read through the certainty of the authorial modernist subject and that his pictures exert such a careful control by the artist himself that they are insufficiently critical. The characters and situations are re-animated by the artist in such a way as to remove the agency of the spectator. Clark wonders whether the closed and controlled image created by Wall is problematic because of the kind of viewing subject that it enforces: "the picture dictates to the viewer a reading in terms of the kind of subjectivity which has had to be criticized deeply in the past two decades" (Clark in Joyce/Orton, 23).

Joyce and Orton counter Clark's argument by showing that Wall has been sufficiently schooled in the 'problem' of the subject. In philosophical terms the modern subject, they say, has been looked at in terms of constituting forces which put into question its apparent autonomy and agency. Through Marxism, semiotics, linguistics and psychoanalysis this critique of the modern subject suggests that consciousness is mediated and produced, rather than self-possessed and centred. Joyce and Orton argue that Wall's task poses a challenge because, while understanding the problems of the modern subject, he still wants to make 'beautiful pictures' (Joyce/Orton 25).

Does Wall limit the experience of viewing through an artistic process which ends up mirroring the control exerted by capitalism on the social subject? This is where their notion of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' comes into play. Rather than

enforcing control, Orton and Joyce argue that Wall is showing its mechanisms, while at the same time giving us reason as viewers to be suspicious and ask questions about what we are seeing and understanding. Through various consciously imposed viewing strategies, Wall's art intentionally destabilizes our viewing. They go on to describe how this works, by showing the mechanisms of inconsistency and staging that are built in to the *Ventriloquist* piece. Orton and Joyce close their argument by saying that "[i]t seems to us that Wall, aware of the difficulties noticed by Clark, has managed to produce a body of work that, at its best, avoids reproducing the kind of control exercised by capital by effecting, as Manet's salon-type pictures did, and still do for some persons, existential and ontological moments of rupture with it and resistance to it" (Joyce/Orton 28).

While the argument made by Joyce and Orton serves as a fair introduction to some of the issues central to the understanding of Jeff Wall's art, I think that it is also necessary to examine, in a little more detail, the way in which the artist's work has been informed by recent revisions in the field of art history. That is also to say that their reading of Wall remains entirely consistent with the way in which Wall himself has positioned his work. In order to try and understand what underlies these claims, in other words, I want to go further in recovering some of the tension embedded in the Joyce/Orton interpretation of Wall. The significance of 'Manet,' for instance, cannot be fully understood without considering his place within the work of two of the most influential art historians of modernism, T.J. Clark and Michael Fried. While I am sympathetic to the Orton/Joyce defense of Wall's work as a form of critical hermeneutics, I want to try and elicit the *political*

grounds of the debate on which these kinds of pictures rest. This is the subject to which I will now turn.

T.J. Clark positions the paintings of Manet within the maelstrom of modernity.² Manet is introduced as “an impeccable child of the Bourgeoisie,” who deeply loathed his own class. Clark’s history emphasizes the artistic attitude toward the emergence of the bourgeoisie, which represents a new, self-conscious class of people whose social power is based on individual effort, usually in commerce and industry. The bourgeoisie, or middle class, is distinctively not aristocratic in structure, but rather in affect and imitation. It gives rise to new social institutions and codes, becoming a fundamental aspect of the 19th century, and an unavoidable fact of life. In the 19th century the bourgeoisie are often taken as subjects for paintings; shown shopping in the arcades, or sitting at cafes and seaside resorts, a picture of the changing appearance of the public realm. Painters also turn to the household, the training ground for the seriousness of the wider world, to consider the means by which individuals establish the rules of social conduct. This implies a mounting tension and anxiety in the bourgeois or middle class individual, who must negotiate between remaining dutiful, keeping up appearances and expressing individuality. Sexuality is difficult to depict, swinging between extreme idealisation and prurient interest.

Manet and his contemporaries are, for the most part, also bourgeois. Clark stresses that at a certain historical moment it is difficult to tell whether the bourgeois order will fulfill the ambitions of democracy represented by the French

² My summary of Clark’s argument is drawn from his lectures on 19th Century French Painting (UC Berkeley, Fall 2000).

Revolution, or if this order will be won by the greed which rules the stock market, and capitalism's 'survival of the fittest' ethos. Manet belongs to that strain of French painters which are neither celebratory nor dismissive of the new social order. For Clark, Manet represents a position which is not neutral so much as it is undecided; his paintings are seen as the expression of someone trying to make up his mind by investigating the apparent contradictions.

Clark's thinking turns to the question of how artists have depicted the arrival of modernity. Modernity presents a contingent and fragile order, produced by an effort of will, yet appearing as if it were the result of an accident. He stresses that this is a world increasingly driven by market forces, even in art. The gallery apparatus begins to thrive and the art of the era is increasingly established by this new network of commodification, which steers artists toward establishing their work as a long-term brand, in order to corner the market. Increasingly, it aims to please the crowd by catering to demands for sentiment and sensation, and its central features have to do with openness and improvisation.

Manet wrestles with contradictory perceptions of modernity, seeing the experience as confusing and fragmentary, or, at other times, as gathering together into some kind of coherence. He paints in a manner which evades simple interpretation. The picture of modernity created by Manet and his contemporaries is not a simple duality of stability and instability so much as a picture of a new and modern flow which, through a process of imposed control and conformity, sweeps through the city and reconstitutes the presentation of the self. As a result of Haussmanization, Paris has been remade, opening up new

corridors and spaces of leisure. Painters such as Degas and Manet capture the strangeness of the modern city, and succeed in showing how space has been occupied by independent, self-regulating, individuals. The paintings of the mid-century tell the story of a city in which the new spaces of leisure and consumption have pushed classes of people out to the periphery. Painters such as Manet understand that the particular *quartiers* or *arrondissements* they choose to paint are imbued with these modern struggles and conflicts.

In a painting such as *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-82), Manet displays the psychology of the new city. [Figure 28] Through the figure of the bar-maid, who has taken great care in deciding what to reveal of the self, the artist has dramatized the technique of disguise. She reflects the new and modern constraint on behaviour and the monitoring of the self. Manet, Clark says, is the painter of the dead-pan. The bar-maid's expression is deliberately opaque and inexpressive; blasé, blanked out, carefully unreadable to others. She conveys the notion that she has seen it all before, that nothing can shock her, displaying a sophisticated inscrutability which is aware of being looked at and yet not responding. To us as modern urban dwellers, Clark says, this has become a familiar expression. At the time, though, Manet had captured an experience which was still in the making. There is a fine line between taking on the appearance of modern life as a form of protection, and becoming trapped and concealed by its blasé gaze. Hiding from others in a realm of artificial self-production becomes a toss-up between dead-pan and total self-effacement, where the self turns into a commodity sign. And, Clark observes, we just can't be sure how to read Manet's bar-maid, or if she will even make it through.

Fried's 1996 book, *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, looks at Manet from quite another vantage point. Fried is interested in Manet as representative of the issues and concerns that were important in painting in mid-19th century France. The most significant concern of that historical period, he says, is "the relationship between painting and beholder" (185). Manet's art, he argues, can only be understood in the context of this relationship, and more precisely, when it is positioned within the anti-theatrical tradition in painting which emerged during the mid-eighteenth century.

Fried takes on Manet and his contemporaries, what he calls 'The Generation of 1863', by elaborating on this painting/ beholder relationship; analysing paintings for the degree to which they engage the spectator ("theatricality"), or, by contrast, depict scenes which appear to be taking place regardless of the spectator's presence ("absorption"). Thus he can position the work of a painter such as Jean-Francois Millet on the far side of the continuum, because his paintings show laborers fully focused on their labors. As he goes on to explain, "the representation of absorption carried with it the implication that the figure or figures in question were unaware of the presence before the canvas of the beholder;" and, he continues, "in this sense it was an *antitheatrical* device, one that was instrumental to attempts by successive generations of French painters to make pictures that would somehow negate or neutralize the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld" (Fried, 1996:189). Absorption, in Fried's terminology, is meant to include both the representation of absorption of the figures within the art, and secondly, the way in which a viewer (beholder) is absorbed by the artwork.

Through a close reading of period paintings, Fried develops his analytical method by carefully differentiating between various strategies with respect to the beholder. He shows how different paintings demonstrate strategies including absorptive closure or 'facing' outward, as well as drawing in, or by contrast, pushing away, the spectator or 'beholder' (Fried 1996). Throughout his discussion Fried makes it clear that his own research is historically grounded; that the issue of absorption and beholding played an important role in both the painting and the critical discourse of the 1860s. Through the course of his discussion, it also becomes clear that the issue of character, or the depiction of particular social types, is connected to theatricality. The means by which modernity could be evoked was closely tied to the ability of the artist to convey an internally coherent, or absorptive, world in which the appearance of an appropriate social type made sense. It follows, then, that theatrical conventions threaten to dissemble the depiction of the social type.

Fried makes it clear that his reading of art history differs from the dominant account, in which painting is interpreted through the framework of modern life and the expansion of consumer society. While modernity has been characterised as an experience of illegibility, where 'all that is solid melts into air,' Fried argues that it is necessary to separate this claim from an interpretation of the art itself. Absorption, or anti-theatricality, was a strategy which had conventionally been used by painters in order to achieve a realistic representation of modernity.

For Fried the significance of Manet's painting has to do with his disruption of the painting/beholder tradition. The work is both theatrical and anti-theatrical. As he says, "It is as though Manet intuitively recognized the ever greater

difficulty, verging by the 1850s on impossibility, of effectively negating or neutralising the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld...” (Fried 1996:265). The consequences of this realisation transformed Manet’s fundamental approach to painting, and made it difficult for viewers to interpret. It is “as though he recognized too that it was therefore necessary to establish the beholder’s presence abstractly... in order that the worst consequences of the theatricalizing of that relationship be averted” (Fried 1996:265).

Manet’s paintings exhibit a degree of flatness, which is generally interpreted as the nascent expression of modernism, and is the reason why he is commonly accepted as the first modernist. The logic behind this flatness, for Fried, is not attributed to the expansion of capitalism, and the confusing effusion of commodity signs in urban Paris but is, rather, seen as Manet’s changed relationship to the presence of the beholder. Fried says “what has always been taken as a declaration of flatness is more importantly the product of an attempt to make the painting in its entirety - the painting *as* a painting, that is, as a *tableau*, *face* the beholder as never before” (Fried 1996:266). The tableau functioned within the art world of the 1860s as a sign for the interior coherence of an earlier era; specifically, for the genre of late 18th century history painting. It was contrasted with the fragmented and incoherent style which the painters of modern life, including Manet and Courbet, employed in an attempt to achieve a sense of realism. Delacroix, one of the great painters of the tableau, was held up as an exemplary artist. Fried’s interpretation of this period in painting is characterised by the tension between the fragmentation and emphasis on surface materiality which has arisen from realism’s response to modernity, and the internal

coherence of the picture which had long been established through the historical conventions of the tableau.

In his 1984 book, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, T.J. Clark provides a close reading of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, returning, at one point, to the way in which the painter chooses to figure in the blasé attitude. In his account of the painting, he is building on concepts that he has laid down throughout the book. One of the concepts which Clark relies on throughout his account is that of the spectacle, which, he explains in the introduction, builds on the work of Guy Debord. "The concept of the spectacle," he says, "was an attempt to revise the theory of capitalism from a largely Marxist point of view" (Clark 1984:9). He goes on to explain that the original appearance of the term was "as a weapon of combat," and that, while its reappearance in a book of art history is absurd at best, he hopes at least to convey an air of the same "chiliastic serenity" characteristic of Debord (9). Clark's interpretation of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is then, fundamentally about class difference, about the ambiguity of class signification that this woman conveys, and about the way that she disguises the fact of not belonging to the Bourgeoisie through a careful masking of her appearance: "For if one could not be bourgeois... then at least one could prevent oneself from being anything else: fashion and reserve would keep one's face from *any* identity, from identity in general" (Clark 1984: 253).

In his 1996 Manet book, Fried responds directly to Clark's reading of the painting. He finds Clark's argument to be "inconclusive," on the grounds that "it fails to relate those qualities to the larger topic of Manet's figures'

inexpressiveness and illegibility that was one of the major themes of his critics from 1863 until well after his death” (Fried 1996:287). Fried is careful to show his respect for Clark, admitting at one point that *The Painting of Modern Life* represents “the most scrupulous” and “powerful” of the social-historical accounts of Manet written to date. His dissatisfaction has to do with Clark’s method, which remains ultimately “thin” because it emphasizes social and political interpretation at the expense of purely artistic concerns. Fried, by 1996, knows that his methodology counters that of social art history: “Of course, my more or less exclusive concentration on various aspects of that engagement is unlikely to satisfy Clark or other social historians of art, who might be said to be interested in questions that go beyond those I am trying to answer” (Fried 1996:288).

The debate between Clark and Fried over the paintings of Manet is one aspect of an exchange which goes back at least two decades. In the fall of 1982 the journal *Critical Inquiry* published a short article by T.J. Clark on the subject of Clement Greenberg’s modernism. Interestingly enough, the same issue of *Critical Inquiry* printed a rebuttal by Michael Fried, entitled “How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark.” (Both of the papers had been presented in Chicago at a *Critical Inquiry* symposium held the previous year.) For my purposes here I mean to highlight, and in an admittedly cursory fashion, what I take to be the central tenets of this encounter. It will become apparent that the struggle over Manet bears witness to the much larger question about the way in which modernism is to be placed within modernity.

Clark’s article is an attempt to contend with the modernist legacy established by the pre-eminent critic Clement Greenberg. (Greenberg, you might

recall, was also Michael Fried's mentor during his days as an art critic.) Clark begins by tracing Greenberg's early interests in Marxism, reviewing those key articles, from 1939 and 1940, which attest to his leftist interpretation of culture. Clark interrogates the means by which Greenberg engages with the Marxist tradition, and more importantly, the ways in which his developing theory of modernism makes a concerted departure from this tradition. This departure rests on the way in which modernist and avant-garde art respond to the established Bourgeois order.

Clark admits that he is more or less in agreement with Greenberg with respect to the critical interpretation of modernism and the decline of culture which is brought about through the expansion of capitalism. By this account, both modernism and the avant-garde come about as a response to the decadence and decline of the bourgeois order. Once upon a time there was a bourgeois art, and we can look to the work of figures such as Jacques Louis David, Balzac, Stendhal, Gericault and Constable to gain further insight into its meanings and forms. But, Clark observes, "from the later nineteenth century on, the distinctiveness and coherence of that bourgeois identity began to fade... I should say that the bourgeoisie was obliged to dismantle its focused identity, as part of the price it paid for maintaining social control" (Clark 1982:53). As the structures of mass society were built, the middle class would expand its cultural forms until they were emptied of meaning. Both modernism and the avant-garde respond to this situation, to create art for an order which no longer functions with ideological or cultural coherence.

Clark and Greenberg differ with respect to how they interpret modernism's response to modernity. Whereas Greenberg's version of modernism refutes vanguardism and defends visual art as the site of self-reflexive formal critique, Clark draws on the concept of negation as a groundwork which unites the aims of modernism with those of the avant-garde. Greenberg, he points out, is disdainful of negation, because for him it is extraneous to the meaning of art, which can only be determined through consideration of the conditions of art-making itself. For Clark, however, modernism's self-reflexive investigation of form can only be understood in terms of negation: "the fact of Art, in modernism *is* the fact of negation" (Clark 1982:59). Modernism, including the avant-garde, relies on negation in order to express the breakdown of meaning and coherence which has taken place in all aspects of culture.

Clark accuses Greenberg of interpreting modernism through a spirit of Alexandrian decline. Greenberg's later withdrawal into formalism is supported by the belief that art will come into its own as a value; that its continued autonomy will eventually result in a system of value which is sufficient to counter the dissolution which capitalism represents. Greenberg believes that "art can substitute *itself* for the values capitalism has made valueless" (59). What he has missed, Clark argues, is that modern culture is constituted not only by the declining power of a coherent middle class, but also the presence of a working class which holds the potential of benefiting from the breakdown of the current social order. Clark ends his critique of Greenberg by emphasizing the role which modernism has played in imagining the possibilities of another social order. Modernism, Clark argues, is threatened with dissolution unless it is attached and

fed by the project of “resistance”. Although he does not explain the term, I take this by implication to refer to the kinds of resistance which are activated as a result of class struggle. He ends by saying that “I still draw back from believing that the best one can hope for from art, even *in extremis*, is its own singular and perfect disembodiment” (Clark, 1982:60).

The tactic taken by Fried in his response to Clark’s article is to criticize the central place of negation in the interpretation of modernism. Fried’s strongest objection, he says, is that Clark’s reading of modernism ultimately fails to recognize “the magnitude of the achievement of modernist painters and sculptors I admire ...” and their search for conventions appropriate to art-making (Fried 1982: 73).

Fried turns to consider the place of Manet, who is generally taken as the first painter to have recognized the encroaching spectacle of consumer culture, and to have responded, perhaps unconsciously, by imposing a degree of unintelligibility. Fried makes it clear that he doesn’t see this as indicative that Manet is involved in the negation of meaning but rather, he argues, that this unintelligibility works “in the service of aims and aspirations that have in view a new and profound and, for want of a better word, positive conception of the enterprise of painting” (Fried 1982:66). Fried will go on to develop this idea, of an ‘instantaneousness’ that emphasizes pictorial unity without repeating the conventions of absorption or theatricality, in his 1996 book on Manet. Fried defends a version of modernism which sees the disruptions in the pictorial tradition not as breaking away or attempting to overthrow the past, so much as a

renewed “attempt to equal its highest achievements, under new and difficult conditions...” (Fried 1982: 70).

If my understanding of Fried is correct here, it would seem that he chooses to overlook the far-reaching political implications which loom large in Clark’s account of modernism, and what he finds instead is that Clark fails to be sufficiently affirmative in his reading of modern art. He comments at one point in his review: “I find Clark’s thumbnail analysis of the socio-political content of modernism both crude and demeaning ... What on earth can he be thinking of?” Fried says. Is it so difficult, I ask myself, to locate those aspects of modern life which lead toward a critical practice of negation? Fried skirts around the disenchanting aspects of modernity which comprise the foundations of Clark’s account. He also misses the productive aspect of negation, the fact that it worked for decades as the basis of a diverse range of aesthetic responses to the increasing awareness that modernization was eroding, as much as it was helping to structure, the progress and betterment of society. He concludes by admitting that while a Marxist critic might dismiss his account as the epitome of bourgeois ideology, his position is ultimately legitimated by the responsibility and the reward of exercising his intuitive judgment in the appreciation of an artwork (Fried 1982: 75).

The kinds of issues raised by the longstanding debate between Clark and Fried, which speak to the conflicts at work in the discipline of art history, were not unknown to Jeff Wall. By the late seventies Clark’s revisionist tactics had become relevant to a much more general field of cultural production, and I will mention only one example in passing. In the spring of 1980, Vancouver played host to one

of the more attention-grabbing pop groups of Britain's so-called "second wave" scene then being fashioned out of a new, rapidly growing, underground, alternative music industry. The Commodore Ballroom at 868 Granville St. held a standing tradition of bringing to Vancouver many of pop music's more innovative and progressive acts, modeling itself after San Francisco's Fillmore Hall and the legendary CBGB's in New York City. That night the club introduced to Vancouver the Gang of Four, fresh from the University of Leeds, the academic and cultural hub of one of England's largest working class urban centres.³

Poised both geographically and politically at the very edge of England's economic reform under Thatcher's new right agenda, Leeds provided a uniquely vibrant, highly politicized arena of cultural and social debate -- much of it outside its institutions in the form of violent street confrontations between neo-fascist nationalists and Marxist students. The Gang of Four, formed by three art school students and one working-class bass player, had thus found its voice by identifying the seemingly innocuous parallels between shifts in consumer behaviour and increased economic privatization. That the group's lyrics and performances emphasized the loss of social welfare programs and feminist labour politics ("Capital, It Fails Us Now!" and "It's Her Factory") instead of pop music's usual themes of sentimental romance, testifies to an education that began not so much in clubs as in university classrooms under the tutelage of a

³ For more background on the Gang of Four, see interviews with Andy Gill <<http://www.furious.com/perfect/gangoffour.html>> and <<http://www.gillmusic.com/>>.

new generation of young, leftist cultural critics and art historians, like T.J. Clark, who taught three of the band's members.⁴

Britain's "second wave" of alternative music seemed thus to be dominated by acts influenced equally by the culture of provocation innate to rock and roll since the 1950s and an even longer history of western leftist criticism. Pop music, as the Gang of Four strove to assert, could be a significant critical tool, carrying as much historical and cultural relevance as any other form of art in the late 20th century. Opening for them that night at the Commodore Ballroom was a band considered by many in Vancouver's own independent music scene to be a perfect match in both sensibility and musical style. The UJ3RK5 presented the crowd with yet another musical act bred in the schools of art and cultural criticism of the late 1970s. Onstage with the Gang of Four that night were Vancouver artists, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham and others, who were, of course, the earliest teachers and students of the nascent Vancouver School.⁵ In a recent Rodney Graham catalogue there is a photo documenting the UJ3RK5 rehearsing in the set built for Wall's 1978 *Destroyed Room* picture (Graham 2002). Given that Wall's *The Destroyed Room* was based on a famous painting made by the master of the tableau, Delacroix, the UJ3RK5's rehearsal suggests a kind of highly theatricalized, but internally coherent, post '68 version of a *tableau vivant*.

While the music stage stands in as more of a random and coincidental encounter, I want to emphasize that the critical approach to culture established

⁴ See Southwood "Guy Debord will not be Missed." Greil Marcus elaborates on the 'Situationist' sensibility in the Gang of Four in his *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Harvard UP, 1989.

⁵ See Grant Arnold. "It Always Makes Me Nervous..." in *Rodney Graham*, exh. cat. Vancouver Art Gallery et al, 2004:181-196 and Rodney Graham "A Little Thought..." in *Rodney Graham* exh. cat. Whitechapel, London, 2002:75-92.

by academics including T.J. Clark was a familiar part of Jeff Wall's world during that era. Wall was exposed to the revisionist tactics involved in 'social art history' by a former student of Clark, Serge Guilbaut, who was hired at UBC, in the department of art and art history, in the late seventies. Guilbaut says, "As soon as I arrived [here in Vancouver] in '78 I got a phone call from Jeff [Wall], who was [teaching] at SFU, and he came, and we talked, I remember, in the garden in my house ... And we had a good discussion about contemporary culture and history" (Guilbaut interview 4). Guilbaut went on to organize 'The Vancouver Conference on Modernism' (March 12 - 14, 1981), which was later documented in a publication called *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*. Guilbaut mentions that Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace were among the audience, and that invited speakers included Clement Greenberg, Benjamin Buchloh, Allan Sekula, Thomas Crow and T.J. Clark among others (interview 5).

It was at the Vancouver Conference that T.J. Clark first presented his attack on Greenberg (an earlier version of the *Critical Inquiry* text I discussed above), generating a heated discussion which, in addition to a lively audience, included the response of Greenberg himself. Guilbaut describes:

And also the debates [at the conference] were kind of strong, hard. The battle between Tim [Clark] and Greenberg was quite wild. ... I did that because of modernity, and the end of it, people were already talking about *postmodern*. ... So that's why I did this conference, to discuss this, and to say well, what was wrong with it, and what was good, about modernity, that's what I wanted to debate (Guilbaut interview 5).

One of the questions which remains to be answered, then, is what does Jeff Wall's art have to do with the 'social history of art', whose best known exemplar has been the writing of T.J. Clark? Wall himself has admitted that social art history has shaped his ideas as an artist: "none of my work could have been done without the turmoil in art history" Wall said, in an interview with Clark, Guilbaut and others in 1989 (Guilbaut Archives). It is not sufficient to find that Wall is conversant with art history, although there are numerous indications in his writing, teaching and published interviews which confirm that this is so. I would like to follow the direction of Thomas Crow, who, in a short article on Wall, makes the argument that social art history formed the basis of Wall's reliance on figuration (Crow 151-172). What the artist took from social art history is the renewed importance that it had placed on figuration, in particular with respect to the 19th century French painting of modern life. The reappearance of figuration in the discipline of art history renewed a discourse which had been dominated by a modernist rejection of subject matter. Crow says that the perceived radicality of social art history had to do with this willingness to return to a discussion of the iconographic, symbolic, and social codes informing the production of art.

While figuration is clearly central, something also needs to be said about the materiality of Wall's illuminated lightboxes, the means by which the artist also engages with the disruption or fragmentation of narrativity characteristic of modernism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Wall's return to figurative traditions is widely understood as the means by which the artist has attempted to restore the painting of modern life, as a photographer. This iconographic reading of Wall's art is reinforced by mechanical reproduction; that is, by the various

books and exhibition catalogues which reproduce Wall's art, not of course in their original format as monumental back-lit light-boxes, but rather as photographs reduced to a familiar, hand-held size. As small format reproductions, Wall's pictures will circulate indefinitely. The artworks themselves, however, tell a different story.

When Wall's pictures -- I hesitate to say 'original' here, since I am referring, after all, to a form of mechanical reproduction which, in itself, betrays most claims to originality or uniqueness -- are viewed in the gallery they become three dimensional objects, asserting a degree of materiality and physical presence, rather than simply functioning as pictures that invite iconographic interpretation. Facing the pictures directly, in the gallery or on the page, the primary means of engagement becomes interpretation; from a distance or at an angle the viewer is subject, rather, to their monumental presence, the warm glow of illumination. Routinely produced in limited editions, Wall's back-lit transparencies assert themselves as fragile, sculptural objects susceptible to fading, discoloration, buckling, damage and decay.

In her 1997 article about Wall - the one that I discussed in Chapter Five, where she attacks Wall as postmodern pastiche - Rosalind Krauss draws attention to the means by which Wall's light-box transparency has come to be associated with the artist himself, as a kind of unique signature device (Krauss 1997). Here she is following a comment made by Thomas Crow, who explains that in the late seventies "Wall began his series of large, back-lit photographic transparencies, establishing a signature format he has continued to use for all of his work" (Crow 152). Krauss utilizes this observation as a means of emphasizing

that the historical reception of Wall's art has emphasized the narrative content of the art at the expense of adequately addressing the material aspects of his work as a photographer.

Accounting for the disruptive, material aspects of Wall's art, I want to suggest instead that Wall's signature device is not the light-box so much as it is the *seam*. The seam is a funny thing, since it appears in the large scale pictures themselves, but not in their small format reproduction. In the gallery, the seam is clearly visible to any spectator; often cutting straight across the middle of the image either vertically or horizontally, it looks like a marker that has been applied across the surface or even the dark edge of a film transparency. Nor is the seam uniform; it varies from work to work in thickness and density. Even within a single light-box, the seam will be thinner at one end than at the other, ranging from less than one millimeter up to five or more. Given the monumental scale of Wall's transparencies, more than a single sheet of film is sometimes necessary, and I am assuming that the seam is created by the overlap of two sheets of film. While it is perhaps an unavoidable necessity, a vertical layering that can't help but diminish the light coming from behind, what remains interesting is that over more than two decades of production Wall has not attempted to mask the seam but has rather sustained it as a material impediment, a disruption, to the transparency of meaning. Some may suppose that the seam is insignificant on the grounds that, while being technically necessary, it is not driven by artistic intention. I would argue, in turn, that this matter is not quite so readily resolved, since it is a condition *inherent* in the medium to which the artist has repeatedly returned.

I have mentioned in passing that one of Wall's early pictures, *Picture for Women* (1979), is a re-make of a Manet painting. [see Fig. 22] *Picture for Women* is highly loaded on many levels: dramatically (it offers a complicated relationship with its spectator), art historically (it is a remake of Manet's *Bar at the A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*), theoretically (it is structured by a highly contrived male gaze), photographically (it places photography squarely into the self-reflexive practice once ascribed solely to modernist painting) and politically (it represents an attempt to turn art into a form of visually based literacy).

Various arguments, here and elsewhere, have already been set into place by way of establishing a credible basis for showing the importance of Manet to Wall.⁶ Crow, for instance, describes how Wall's *Picture for Women* compares to Manet's *Bar at the A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*:

The lines of bare bulbs in the studio echo Manet's globular lamps in a perfect diagram of Albertian perspective, the window frames and the two symmetrical lamp standards chart the artist's translation of depth into a functional linear grid (that being the stable order permitting the *Bar's* multiple violations of unified illusion). Studio space and mental map become one. ... The play with edges is a further formal homage to Manet, and, like the painting, it employs the effect of a mirror behind the model... (Crow155).

Although I have not found evidence in the historical record, I would venture to say that T.J. Clark would hesitate to find in Jeff Wall a contemporary version of Manet. It may even be possible to say that Clark's many hesitations about Wall's

⁶ This work has been done by Jeff Wall (1984), Thierry de Duve (1996) and Lisa Joyce/Fred Orton (2003).

art are informed by his many *more* reasons for appreciating the paintings of Manet. I can't go further with this right now, except to say that Clark's method (and I mentioned this in the previous chapter, following recent work by John Roberts) has yet to be stretched into art *beyond* modernism. As Clark himself has admitted: "I am no expert on contemporary art. I am conscious of living deliberately in a modernist past, and of feeling a depth of identification with certain modernist art works, which has made it hard for me to give much of the art of the last two decades its due" (Clark 2002).

To date, the most sustained reading of *Picture for Women* has been that of French critic Thierry de Duve (Duve 1996). Wall, Duve explains, takes from Manet the 'self-reflexive' rigour that was formerly associated with modernist painting, but applies it to photography. In his *Picture for Women* Wall does this through his use of the picture plane. The picture plane, the 'imaginary window' or flat, transparent 'glass' through which we see the picture, is the basis of the pictorial tradition of the west. And, Duve says, it is the picture plane which best explains the fundamental unity between painting and photography. The self-reflexive procedure of modernist painting involved a process which made the existence of this plane visible through the application of paint, because it served to draw attention to the surface of the canvas. In photography this kind of materialist tactic is not, of course, possible. Duve's study of *Picture for Women* outlines the means by which Wall has achieved a similar degree of reflexivity within the medium of photography. Through the complex arrangement of figures in relation to the camera, Wall's *Picture for Women* succeeds in drawing attention to its own pictorial structure. This *Picture* equates a mirrored surface with the

picture plane itself, thus making the process of seeing available for critical scrutiny.

None of the existing readings of Wall's *Picture for Women* have elaborated on the picture's title, which strikes me as elusive in its meaning. It is clear that the title is intended to reflect the historical, theoretical, climate of its production in the late seventies, which is to say, the critical practice of feminist 'screen theory,' which was then reshaping the interpretation of Manet in both theory and practice. Comparing *The Bar* with *Picture for Women*, Brougher comments: "Both works address point of view, the male and his privileged position, his fixation on the female, and the female's knowing return of his look" (Brougher 22). This scene, of a male artist regarding his female model, is calling upon old and established conventions. Wall's picture makes explicit the means by which the structure of sexual difference results in the subordination of female interest. Because the camera stands in for the male patron of *The Bar*, the audience of Wall's picture is made to see that the objectification of women occurs through the male gaze and its technological manifestation in the camera. A picture 'for' women: is this photo-transparency intended to tell a story about sexual difference which will be productive in overcoming patriarchy? Is it directed toward, or dedicated to, a female spectator? Is this a salutary artwork, attempting to compensate for all those other modern pictures which were not made *for* women? Although the woman appearing in Wall's picture has been captured by the camera, it is important to acknowledge that her body is actually positioned off-stage, beside the artist-photographer. As such, it is only her reflection which is subject to the voracious gaze of the art viewer. It is in this sense that the picture could be *for*

women (Duve 30). As I imagine the artist himself intended, however, Wall's picture remains an irritant because, more than compensatory, didactic or salutary, it is an image which serves as a reminder that all the undeclared, undedicated pictures, pictures in general, must be made *for* men.

Further work remains to be done in terms of exploring how Wall's awareness of spectatorship develops during the nineties. There seems to me an interesting continuity between *Picture for Women* (1979) and *The Giant* (1992). [Figure 29] Unlike *Picture for Women*, *The Giant* makes no pretense toward naturalism but rather relies on a comic distortion of scale, as well as a fantastical scenario involving public nudity in a library; all of which serves to alert the viewer to the imaginary basis of the picture. If I am not mistaken, this is Wall's first and only female nude to date, and is consistent with the artist's demonstrated engagement with the gendered gaze. The picture troubles the historical conventions of the nude in a number of ways, most apparently by showing an older woman engaged in a straight-forward task, looking up a book in a library, in a pose which offers little erotic appeal for the conventional male viewer. The picture toys with scale, inverting the implication of largeness suggested by its title, *Giant*, while being among the smallest figurative pictures, in terms of the dimensions of the light-box, that Jeff Wall has ever made. As with *Picture for Women*, this image conveys a degree of patriarchal realism. That is to say that while her personal search for knowledge may make her *feel*/like a giant, what the spectator (the public world in general), sees is a grotesque, vulnerable, tiny and inconsequential creature.

One of the issues that was examined in the previous chapter was the relationship which Jeff Wall's art bears to the legacy of the Enlightenment. As you will recall, through a reading of his work *Insomnia* (1994), I discussed the means by which Wall's art demonstrates a fundamental ambivalence about the relationship between modern art and Enlightenment reason. In the last section of this chapter I would like to return to the question of the Enlightenment by way of attempting to establish, a bit more clearly than I have been able to so far, the means by which the combined methods of Fried and Clark seem to offer the possibility of a viable method for the study of contemporary photographic art.

In a recent interview with the art critic Benjamin Buchloh, Los Angeles artist Allan Sekula draws a distinction between two contemporary trends in art by making reference to the difference between 'elephants' and 'termites'. Drawing on the funny analogy originally developed by American film critic Manny Farber, Sekula explains, "'white elephant' art aspires to the conditions of the masterpiece, while 'termite' art couldn't care less" (Sekula 43). Sekula's own alliance lies with the termites, because he is concerned with 'eating away' at the boundaries between art photography and photojournalism. "The key question for me," he explains, "is whether the meaning-structure of the work spirals inward toward the art-system or outward toward the world" (Sekula 41). For Sekula, the opposite pole, the 'white elephant' art, is typified by the recent work of Vancouver-based artist Jeff Wall. The problem, as he explains it to Buchloh, is that "conceptualism's historical failure" is seen by Jeff Wall and others as necessarily leading contemporary art toward the *restoration* of the 'picture' (Sekula 41). That is, the spiral turns inward, toward the museum.

The distinction that Sekula is working with here, between elephants and termites, might also serve as an analogy for addressing the distinction between the art historical models offered by Michael Fried and T.J. Clark. The material that I have reviewed in this chapter is deeply suggestive of a generalizable distinction in which Clark's method represents the critical theory of modernity while Fried's method is more narrowly concerned with the history of visual art in isolation. While there is room to reinforce the notion of a seemingly unbridgeable divide, it seems that the time has come to establish the common interest between them.⁷ Through his longstanding distinction between 'absorption' and 'theatricality,' Fried suggests a means by which to come to terms with the pictorial conventions which structure the work of art. Through sustaining the wider notion of how the visual functions within the spectacular regime of capitalism, T.J. Clark points to a method which helps to explain why, beyond the audience of pure art lovers, these pictorial conventions are worth looking at in the first place.

I have toyed with the idea that the way to definitively 'read' Jeff Wall is to argue that the historical development of his art demonstrates a move from a 'Clark-informed' interest in social history toward an increasingly 'Fried-informed' concern with the pictorial. Or, one could say that Wall's art is consonant with the baby-boomer generation: early on (in the heyday of the sixties), Wall's photo-conceptualism showed an 'ultra-left' edge, but it was later judged to be juvenile vanguardism, and discarded in favour of a less 'radical,' and more serious, conventional, and established mode of art-making. Furthermore, it can be said

⁷ Fried himself has talked about this of late. See "An Interview with Michael Fried" in Toni Ross et al, Eds. *Refracting Vision - Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*. Sydney Australia: Power Publications, 2000:377-404.

that while Wall's early pictures were overly 'theatrical,' his current pictures have differentiated themselves from this postmodern style by restoring a necessary element of 'absorption.' While all of these readings contain an element of truth, I also think they need to be avoided because they are, when it comes down to it, fundamentally misleading. This is because the storyline implicit in each of them is that of modern art's social failure, and I don't think this is the narrative which properly suits the current situation.

When I first began thinking about this project, I had in mind to talk about the significant impact that Wall has had on the art community in Vancouver. (This is a claim from which I have not been dissuaded; the impact of Wall and his contemporaries has yet to be accounted for.) When I thought about writing a dissertation, I wanted to talk about the means by which a whole generation of 'teachers' and 'students' had created an aesthetics which has lately come to be known, all around the world, as 'The Vancouver School.' I also wanted to talk about the invaluable efforts which Wall expended in the classroom, across decades, teaching generations of Vancouver students about the history of modernism and about studio practice. Referring to his years at SFU in the late seventies, Wall has lately mentioned how important teaching has been to his work: "For five or six years, I was deeply involved in my teaching job, and I organized myself in such a way that I could give form to my ideas by way of classes and seminars... I've never really worked on anything else with such intensity..." (Wall *Tableaux* 109). While it appears that much of this is a project which must be deferred to a later date, I nevertheless see that it also provides some potential for a more productive narrative of Wall's work. My idea is that his

art, because it has constantly functioned as a critical depiction of modernity, could be productively looked at from the point of view of participating in the field of 'cultural literacy.' I don't mean to suggest that Wall's art should be absorbed into the wing of museological edu-tainment, but rather to defend the place of aesthetic experience as a legitimate sphere of value, which is, by definition, non-instrumental. Wall, it seems to me, has always been willing to defend the idea that the institutions of modern culture would benefit from ongoing critical reform, and that the site of the 'dramatic interior' is as good as any other. His play with various theatrical conventions has consistently been, it seems to me, underpinned by a concern for social democracy. "Suffering and dispossession remain at the centre of social experience. But at the same time and for the same reasons the contestation continues at every moment" (Wall *Typology...* 104).

Looking back at Wall's pictures from the 1980s I would venture to say that their mode of address has by today's standards become historical. Imbued with an air of utter seriousness (even in their comic aspects), Wall's pictures represent a mode of storytelling which avoids the amusing, contingent and collective aspects of everyday social life. These monumental tableaux, so heavy-handed in their formulation, function as a reminder to the spectator that at some point not too long ago it was possible to think, and say, that 'art' had not fully collapsed into the all-consuming logic of promotional culture. These days, however, as the predominance of visual culture tends toward the total collapse of the distinction between 'art', 'politics' and 'entertainment', even the ad agencies have abandoned the kind of obvious dramatic realism that typifies Wall's early work.

The best minds of *my* generation are working for Adidas, which is to say, not in a world where 'nothing is impossible' but rather one in which 'Impossible is Nothing.'⁸ In other words, instead of an ambitious reach toward something (i.e. an entire social order) which seems 'impossibly' good, the rhetorical force of promotional culture hammers away at the idea that any such aspirations are without substance or value; they are 'nothing.' Such circumstances *have* made the critical engagement informing Wall's early pictures seem old-fashioned and unnecessary. 'Difficult' and 'serious' art, like any other kind, is just another cog in the wheel of the 'perpetual emotion machine' of the Image Industries (Clark et al 2004).

Many of the older critiques of mass society that were created by the language of modernism have since become the standard language of the market: self-reflexivity, negation, social realism, drawing, 'abject' art, shock and taboo are the creative principles regularly used to reach today's cynical and sophisticated consuming subjects. Contemporary art, if it aims to have any currency as a socio-political presence, must constantly and strategically reinvent itself. This - i.e. the climate where 'impossible is nothing' - is why Wall's own pictorial conventions underwent a shift during the 1990s. This is also why, in recent years, the global art-world has witnessed such a forceful return to the politics of the 'festival' in the guise of *relational aesthetics*.⁹ It may be worth comparing the socio-political aspirations of Vancouver's historical 'counter-tradition' to the 'relational' affinities demonstrated by younger, emerging artists such as Geoffrey Farmer or Kirsten

⁸ This is the slogan of the Adidas 'intelligent shoe' campaign, 2004-2005.

⁹ See Nicholas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) and Hal Foster "Arty Party" *London Review of Books*, 4 December 2003.

Forkert. What has not yet been achieved through established conventions will inevitably be attempted by other means.

The need to theorize the pictorial conventions necessary for a critical understanding of the capitalist spectacle are, in other words, more necessary than ever. This is not a question of defending art as a site of isolated privilege but rather a strategy by which to recover the self-reflexive rigour which lay at the heart of modernism. This is what I was talking about earlier, about the shared interest between Clark and Fried. Humans have an unending capacity to struggle against the regimes of power that come to occupy by force. I suppose that this capacity is shared by elephants and termites alike.

Figures

INFORMATION

N.E. THING CO. LTD.
 1419 Riverside Drive North Vancouver B.C. Canada tel. (604) 829-3082 Telex D4-507822 Cable Anything Vancouver B.C.

Project	FAST PROJECTS: COMMERCIALS DEPT. PHOTOGRAPHY DEPT. PROJECT DEPT. THING DEPT. A&CT-ART DEPTS.	FORWARDED 320 West Broadway New York, N.Y. (212) 966-6160 10am - 6pm Tues-Sat.	Number 10.1-8
10.71		007.16 - 70/71	

History

The N E THING CO was founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1966 as the N E BAXTER THING CO and since late 1967 has operated under its present name. Its main office is located 1419 Riverside Drive North Vancouver, B.C. The N E THING CO includes eleven departments: Research, Thing, Accounting, ACT, ART, Photography, Printing, COP, Movie Project, and Consulting.

N E Thing Co

Glossary

SI - Sensitivity Information
 A term developed by NETCO to denote all forms of cultural activities i.e. dance, music, theatre, film, fine art, poetry, novels, etc. It is based on the theory that there are all types of INFORMATION around in the world. INFORMATION is usually, or tends to be, confronted with and dealt with in either a practical or sensitive manner. Thus INFORMATION which is handled in this pure or sensitive way constitutes in SI (Sensitivity Information) in general context, and essentially leaves its mark on our life as culture. The divisions within SI are based on the dominant characteristic of that particular area of information, for example: Vision - VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information (painting, sculpture, architecture, books, etc.)
 SSI - Sound Sensitivity Information (music, poetry [rhaps], singing, oratory, etc.)
 MSI - Moving Sensitivity Information (movies, dance, mountain climbing, track, etc.)
 ESI - Experiential Sensitivity Information (theatre, etc.)
 It should be recognized that there are categories where certain types of sensitivity information are combined with others to provide their form, but for the most part the categories above have been established because the arts tend to have a particular emphasis on one kind of information characteristic.
 • We feel that by setting up a new set of definitions like this that people are better able to see the cross-relationship between the "arts" and in so doing can become much more involved and supportive of the new types of "arts activity" — Sensitivity Information — SI — that are going on.
 • The idea of comprehending "all arts as Information handled sensitively" breaks the historical chains that keep them apart from each other and greatly misunderstood.
 VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information
 A term developed and used by the N E Thing Co to denote more appropriately the meaning of the traditional words "art" and "fine art" or "visual art". Before the handling of visual information in a sensitive manner. Also refers to the "artist" as a VISUAL INFORMER, as someone who knows how to handle visual information sensitively.

COMPANIES ACT No. 84010
 NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. was incorporated under the Companies Act on the 14th day of January, 1969.
 The Company is authorized to issue and transfer shares without consent or assent of the holder.
 The address of its registered office is 1419 Riverside Drive, North Vancouver, British Columbia.
 The classes for which the Company is authorized are:
 (a) To provide a memorandum and resolution in respect of shares;
 (b) To produce, maintain, inspect, certify, transfer, and otherwise deal in shares of all kinds.
 A. N. Mall, Director of Companies, Vancouver, B.C., January 10, 1969.

Description	Project	Year
Vancouver Board of Trade	Nothing Project	1969
Radio Commercials	Press Release	1969
Intentional Non-inclusion	Video-VSI - Visual Clashes	1970
Intentional Inclusion	Buyer-Appeller Light	1970
North American Time-Zone Photo-VSI	VSI Formula # 3, 360degrees	1962
Shallanally, October 18, 1970	Other projects	
Baiton - VSI 67-70		

FOR REPRODUCTION PLEASE ENTIRE PRESENTATION INCLUDING THIS STATEMENT

LAYOUT SHEET INFORMATION DEPARTMENT N.E. THING CO. LTD.

Figure 1 N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter). *Art is All Over*, 1971



Figure 2 N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter). *Ruins*, 1968



photo: final activity of art
(in delirious housing develop-
ment)

*Note: left-hand rear-view mirror
suddenly registering housing dev-
elopment factor.
Also: reflection of window in puddle
(confluence of speeding mirror-
images.*

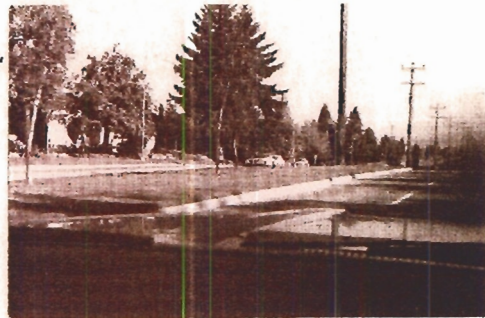
obviously only just begun. Sit as you are sitt-
ing now chart your activities, thoughts, obser-
vations, etc.—hold the charts up to the light
see what corresponds with what. Obviously, this
kind of charting has only just begun.

INDEXED UNREELLED

Some among us might want to undercut or sub-
vert all possibilities, all dry roads of "mean-
ing", establishing instead only a silent sophis-
ticated well-considered domain apparently without
problems of sequence, hierarchy or iconology—by
fixing once and for all the principles of actual
organization. Nevertheless, the illness remains.
Subversion in these terms (subversion/destruction
of one specific continuum of "meaning") is always
merely an attempt at reformulating the center of
importance in particular structures. As long as
one kind of organization is absolutely preferred

34

to another, then the genuine field awareness
cannot be grasped. In "functional" terms, one
always chooses, makes distinctions, etc.—as I
choose this varied and synthetic process over
some other. The question confronting the man the
table the small pile of mechanical images is why
are necessary attachments made between things??
Why would you try to make "sense" out of the
apparent "noise" of this picture ~~game~~ game??
Stop trying to shut off the bothersome noise—
the symbols which you don't choose the symbols
which "impose themselves" upon you and suddenly
—quiet. Immense fields precise as focussed
film spread easily effortlessly beneath the eye
the lens the hand raised in front of the face.
In the moving car, sitting the way you are sitt-
ing now, the vacant sequences form beneath the
tires, all the windows show blank and the sun
glinting across the silvery dashboard fixtures
the speedometer set at a steady 33 or 34 miles
an hour. Look down into your hand: there is a
small photograph you did not choose representing
a landscape you do not know. Look out the wind-
ow, scatter the photos, return the image of the



picture-game landscape

landscape back to the "source"; beneath the
tires of the car the terms of your consciousness
girlish fond hands proffer city chemistry the
conclusions ~~AWAY FROM~~ ———contin-
uous possibilities for accepting a deep symbio-

Figure 3 Jeff Wall. *Landscape Manual* (detail), 1969-70



Figure 4 Ian Wallace. *La Melancolie de la Rue*, 1973



Figure 5 Ian Wallace. *Lookout*, 1979



Figure 6 UJ3RK5. LP record cover, 1980



Figure 7 Rodney Graham. *Ponderosa Pine, Princeton, B.C.*, 1991



Figure 8 Jeff Wall. *The Jewish Cemetery*, 1980

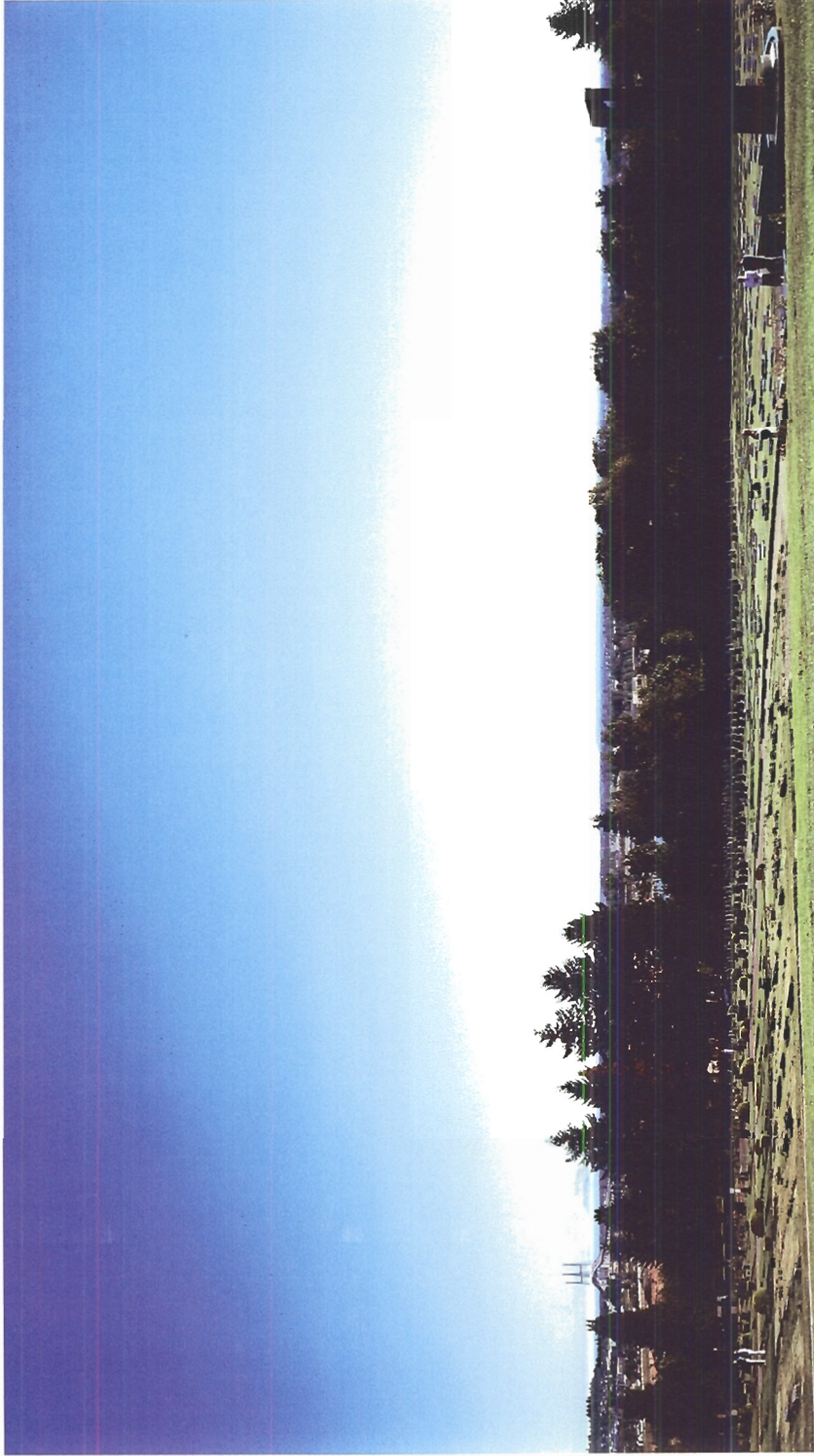


Figure 9 Jeff Wall. *The Holocaust Memorial in the Jewish Cemetery, 1987*



Figure 10 Jeff Wall. *The Pine on the Corner*, 1990



Figure 11 Jeff Wall. *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947* 1990

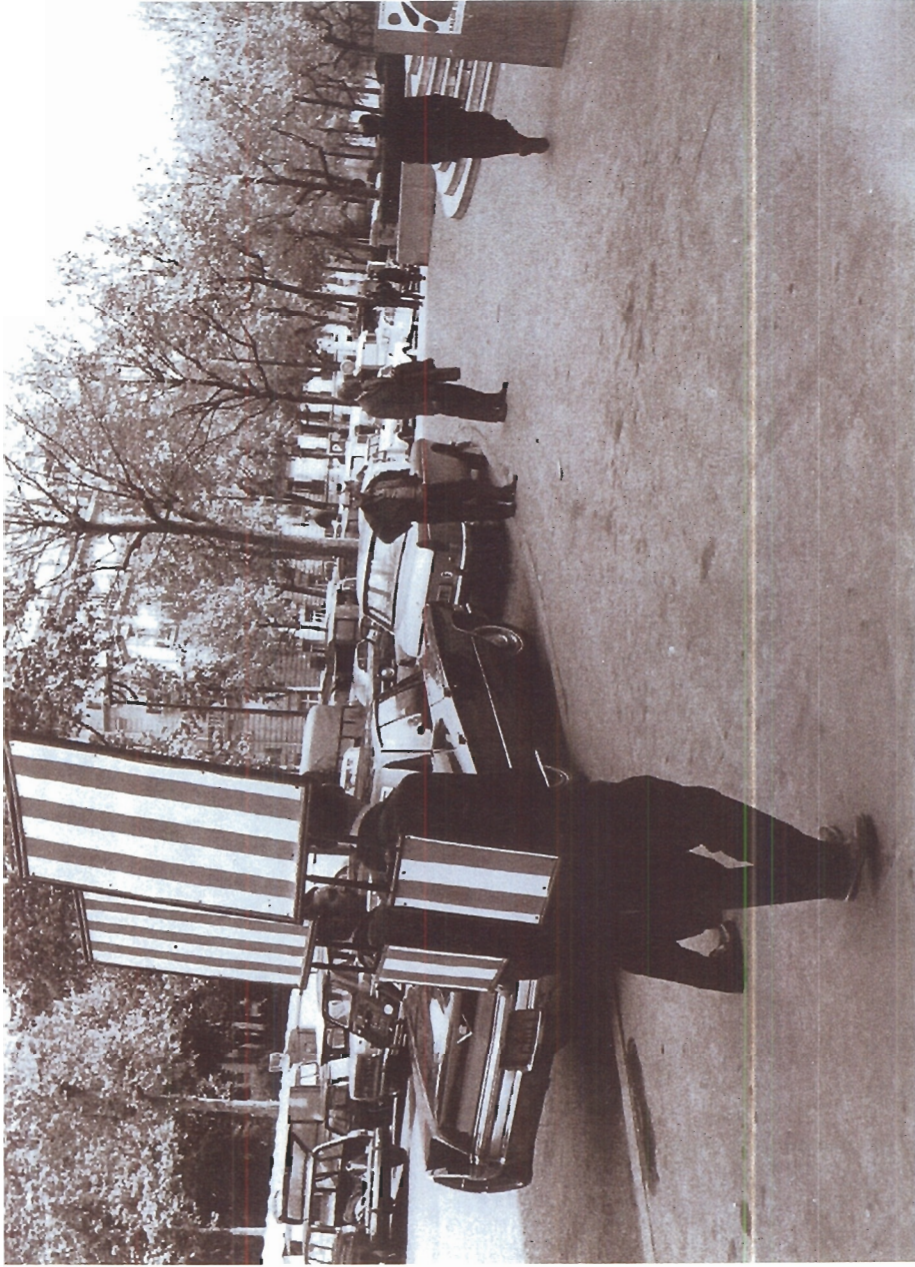


Figure 12 Daniel Buren. *Untitled*, 1968



Figure 13 Jeff Wall. *Milk*, 1984



Figure 14 Jeff Wall. *Mimic*, 1982



Figure 15 Ken Lum. *Youth Portraits* (detail) 1985

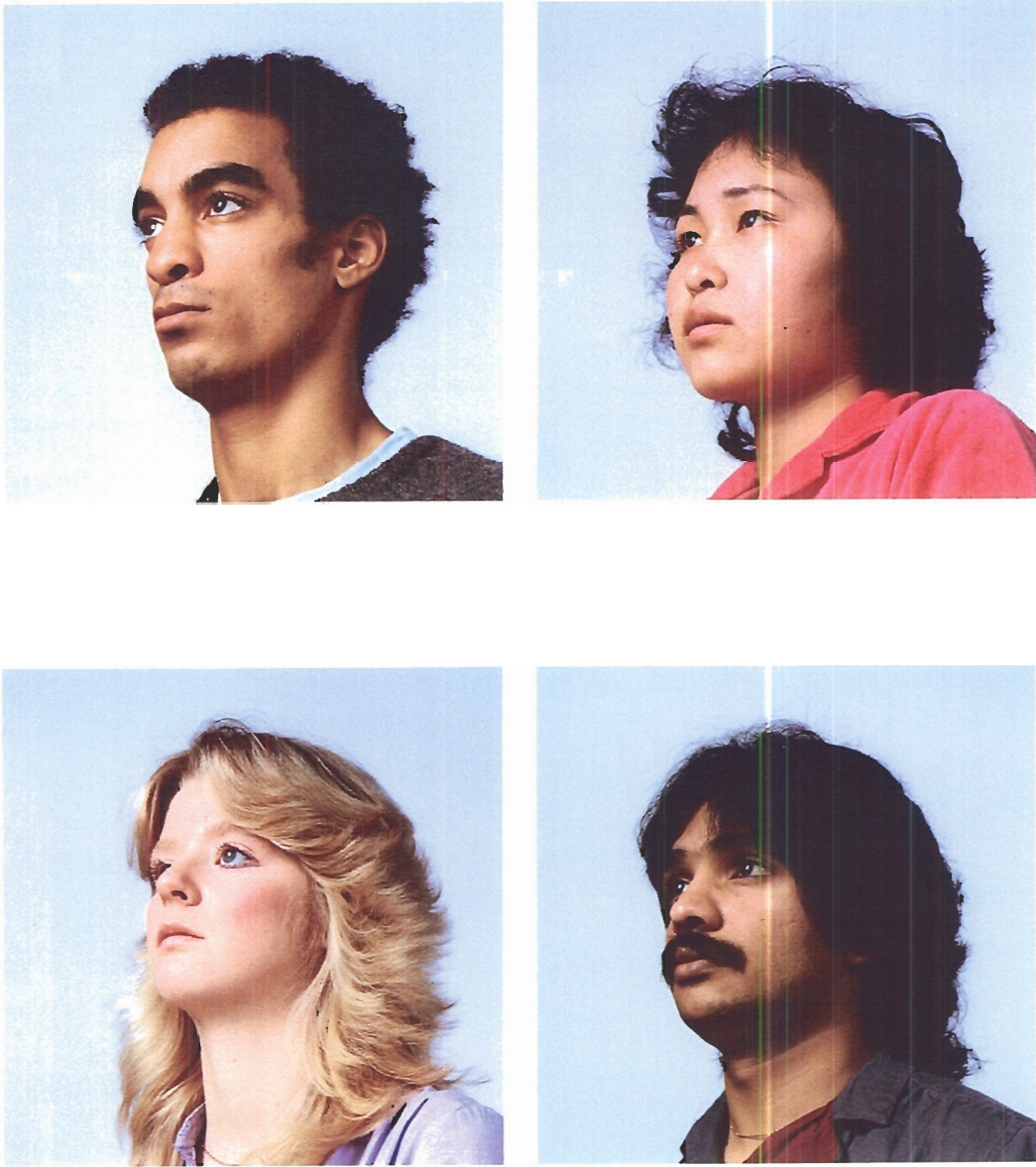


Figure 16 Jeff Wall. *Young Workers* (detail) 1978-83

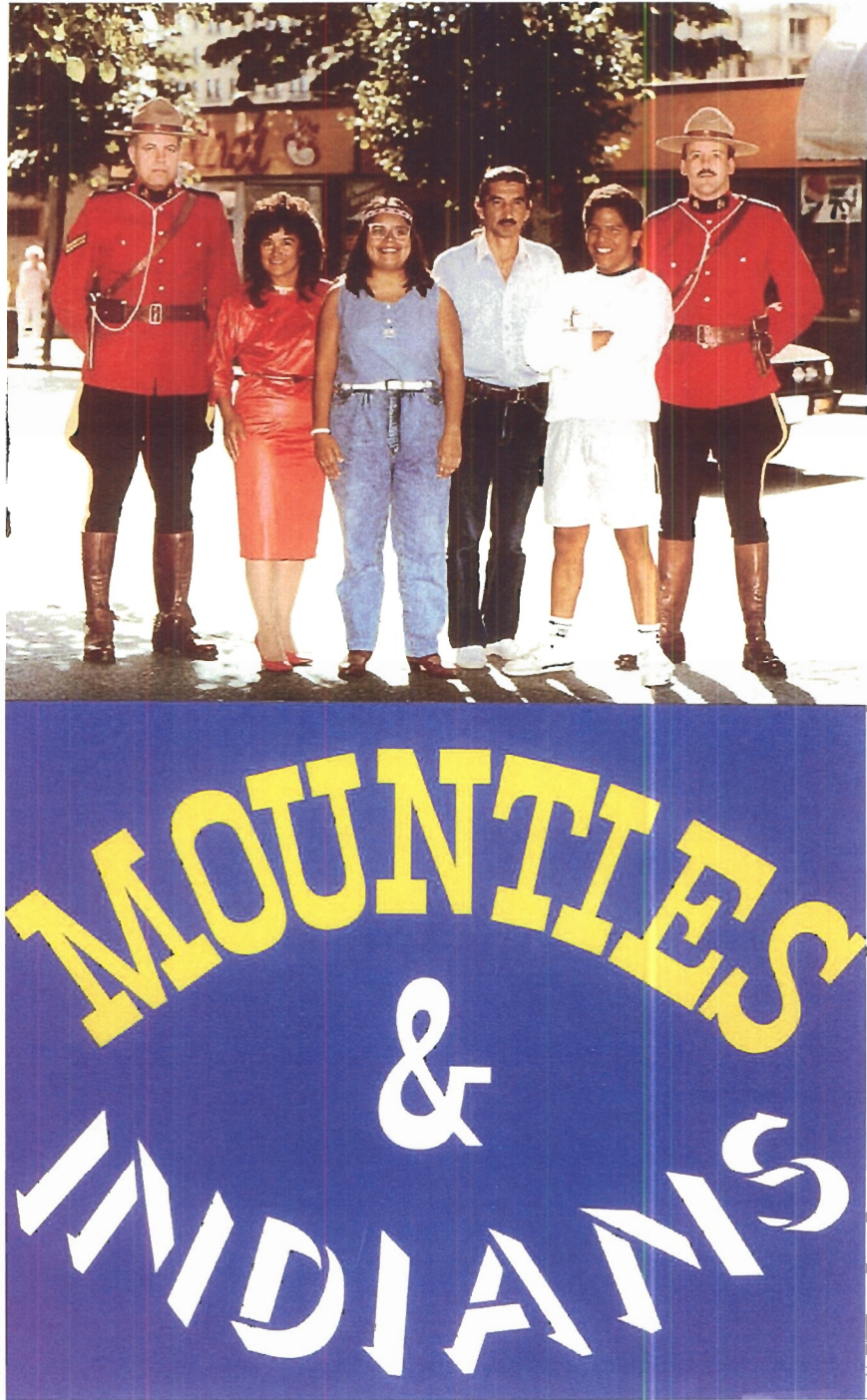


Figure 17 Ken Lum. *Mounties and Indians*, 1989



Figure 18 Rodney Graham. *Fantasia for Four Hands*, 2002



Figure 19 Jeff Wall. *The Destroyed Room*, 1978



Figure 20 Jeff Wall. *Movie Audience* (detail) 1979



Figure 21 Jeff Wall. *Double Self-Portrait*, 1979



Figure 22 Jeff Wall. *Picture for Women*, 1979



Figure 23 Jeff Wall. *Bad Goods*, 1984



Figure 24 Jeff Wall. *Insomnia*, 1994

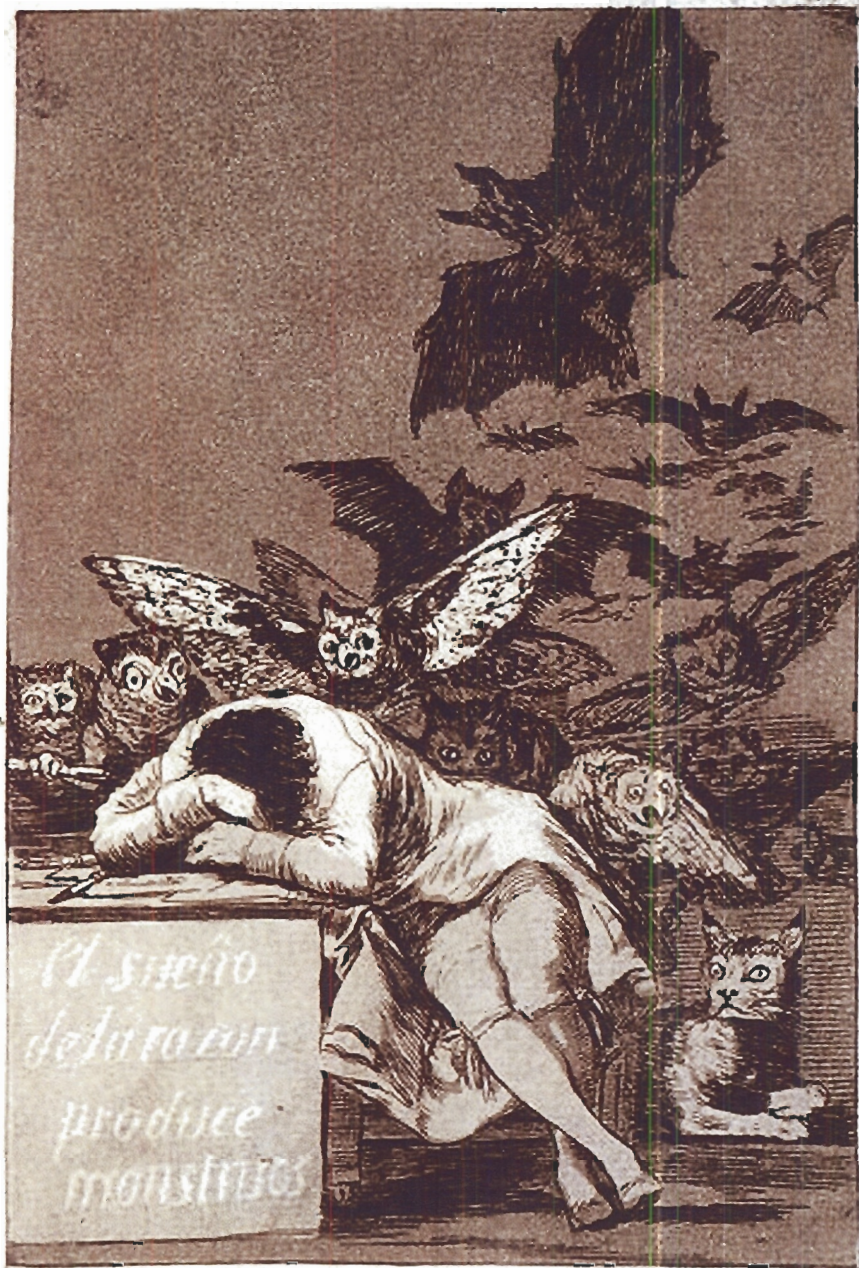


Figure 25
Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. 'The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters'
from the series *Los Caprichos*, #43. First edition, 1799.



28 El Autor señala
 frecuentemente solo es despertar buñe. Tades
 por su diuinita, y porptar con esta obra de
 caprichos, el estremo mudo del mundo.

Figure 26 Francisco de Goya y Lucientes.
 'Frontispiece to a set of Dreams',
 Second Version. 1797



Figure 27 O.G. Rejlander. *Two Ways of Life*, 1858



Figure 28 Edouard Manet. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82

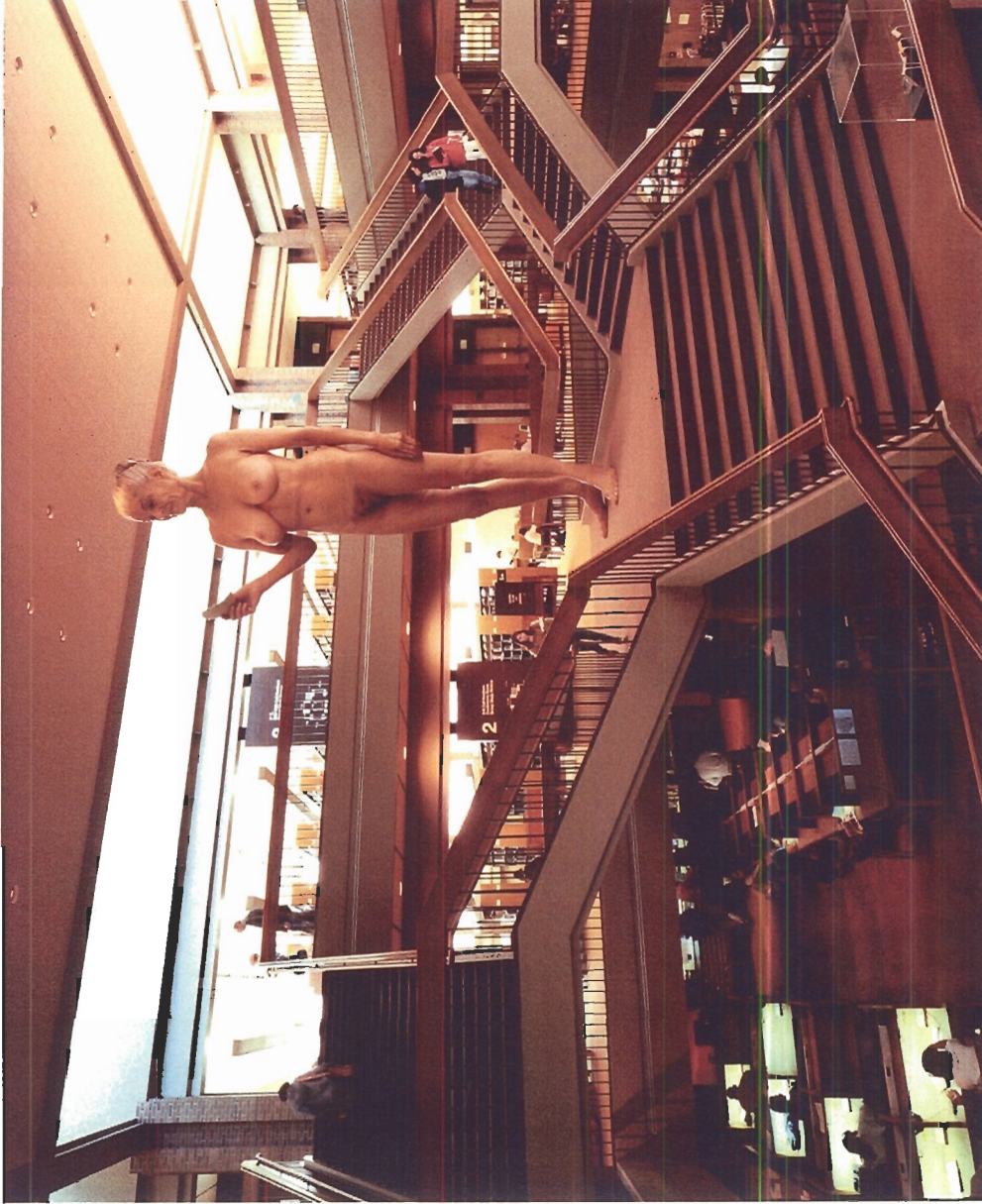


Figure 29 Jeff Wall. *The Giant*, 1992

Works Cited

Unpublished Sources

Ian Wallace Archive Files, Vancouver BC
Pacific Cinematheque Archives, Vancouver BC
Serge Guilbaut Archive Files, UBC Campus, Vancouver BC
Simon Fraser University Archive, Burnaby BC
Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives, UBC Campus
TJ Clark lectures on art history (UC Berkeley, Fall 2000)
Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre
Vancouver Art Gallery Archives

Published Sources

- Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. 1966. New York: Continuum, 1992.
- . *Aesthetic Theory*. [v.o. 1970] Trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . *Minima Moralia - Reflections from Damaged Life*. Trans. E. Jephcott. London: Verso, 1978.
- . "Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukacs' *Realism in Our Time*." [1958] Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholzen. *Theodor Adorno: Notes to Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 216-240. Also published as Theodor Adorno. "Reconciliation under Duress." *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: NLB, 1977. 151-177.
- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. [v.o. 1944] New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Anderson, Andrea. "Tom Burrow's 'Sculpture of Concrete, Sculpture of Dreams' or, looking for the utopian in the everyday" MA thesis UBC, 1997.
- Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodernity*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Arnold, Grant. "'It Always Makes Me Nervous When Nature Has No Purpose': An Annotated Chronology of the Life and Work of Rodney Graham." *Rodney Graham - A Little Thought*, exh. cat. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery et al, 2004.181-196.

- Ashton, Dore. *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.
- Barish, Jonas. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on some Eisenstein Stills." *Image Music Text*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 48-68.
- . *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. [v.o. 1980] New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Batman Begins*. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros., 2005.
- Bernstein, J. M. *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida to Adorno*. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania UP, 1992.
- Best, Stephen and Douglas Kellner. "Chapter Three: From the Society of the Spectacle to the Realm of Simulation - Debord, Baudrillard, and Postmodernity." *The Postmodern Turn*. Guilford Press: New York, 1997. 79-123.
- Bordwell, David and Noel Carroll, eds. *Post-Theory: reconstructing film studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- Bourriaud, Nicholas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon, Fr.: Les presses du réel, 2002.
- Brewster, Ben and Lea Jacobs. *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Brougher, Kerry. "The Photographer of Modern Life." *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997. 12-41.
- Bryson, Norman. "Jeff Wall: Enlightenment Boxes." *Art and Text* 56. Feb. 1997: 56-63.
- . "Too Near, Too Far." *Parkett* 49. May 1997: 85-89.
- Buchloh, Benjamin. "Theorizing the Avant-Garde: A Review of Peter Bürger's 'Theory of the Avant-Garde'." *Art in America* Nov. 1984:19-21.
- . "Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: James Coleman's Archaeology of Spectacle." [1995] Rpt. in *Neo-Avant Garde and Culture Industry - Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2000: 141-178.
- . "The Politics of Representation." *The Photographic Paradigm*, Eds. Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager. Lier en Boog Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory Vol. 12. Amsterdam, 1997: 17- 29.
- et al. "Roundtable - Art at Mid-Century." Hal Foster et al. *Art since 1900*. (2003) 318-328.

- Buchloh, Benjamin, Catherine David, and Jean-Francois Chevrier. "1960-1997: The Political Potential of Art." *Documenta X - the book: politics poetics*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Ger.: Cantz Verlag, 1997. 375-403.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minnesota UP, 1984.
- . "Dear Jean-Francois Chevrier." *Documenta X - the book: politics poetics*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Ger.: Cantz Verlag, 1997. 379-380.
- . "On a Critique of the Neo-Avantgarde." *Jeff Wall Photographs*, exh. cat. Vienna: MUMOK, 2003. 158-179.
- Burnham, Clint. "Reading Jeff Wall." *Boo* n.7 Vancouver (July 1996) n.p.
- Campbell, Deborah. "In the Studio with Ian Wallace." *Canadian Art* Winter 2004: 60-65.
- Chaudhuri, Una. "Land/Scape/Theory." Eds. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri. *Land/Scape/Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. 11-29.
- Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema*. [v.o. 1982] Tr. Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Clark, T.J.. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. [1973] Berkeley: UC Press, 1999.
- . *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851*. [1973] Berkeley: UC Press, 1999.
- . "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." [1982] *Fascina* 47-64.
- . *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*. 1984. Rev. ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- . "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction." [1986] *Reconstructing Modernism - Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*. Ed. Serge Guilbaut. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.
- . "All the Things I Said about Duchamp: A Response to Benjamin Buchloh." *October* 71 (Winter 1995) 141-143.
- Clark, TJ and Donald Nicholson-Smith "Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International." May 1997. < www.notbored.org. > Accessed: 3 Nov. 2000.
- . "Origins of the Present Crisis." *New Left Review* 2 Mar.-Apr. 2000: 85-96.
- . "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Stream." *October* 100 (Spring 2002) 154+
- et al (Retort Collective). "Afflicted Powers: The State, The Spectacle and September 11th" *New Left Review* May-June 2004: 5-21.

- et al (Retort Collective). *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Coleman, A.D. "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition." [1976] Rpt. in Coleman *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings 1968-1978*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979. 246-257.
- Cosgrove, Denis. "Spectacle and Society: Landscape as Theatre in Premodern and Postmodern Cities." in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, Eds. Paul Groth and Todd Bressi. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. 99-110.
- Crimp, Douglas. "Pictures." *October* 8 Spring 1979:75-88.
- Crow, Thomas. "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts." [1981] Rpt in *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1996: 39-88.
- . "Profane Illuminations: The Social History of Jeff Wall." [1993] Rpt. in *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1996:151-172.
- David, Catherine. "Untitled." *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery et al, 1995-1996:8-9.
- Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. [v.o. 1967] Detroit: Black and Red, 1983.
- . *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. [v.o. 1988] Trans. Malcolm Imrie. London: Verso, 1990.
- Dikeakos, Chris. "Ian Wallace: Selected Works 1970-1987." *Ian Wallace*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988. 6-19.
- . "Glue Pour and the Viscosity of Fluvial Flows as Evidenced in Bottle-Gum Glue Pour Jan 8.70 9:30 to 11:30." *Robert Smithson in Vancouver - A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2004. 38-47.
- Duve, Thierry de. "The Mainstream and the Crooked Path." *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, 1996. 26-55.
- Duvenage, Pieter. *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Emery, Tony. "The Vancouver Explosion." *Art International*. Oct. 1968: 38.
- Fairbairn, Catherine Rebecca. "A Short Trip on Spaceship Earth: Intermedia Society, 1967-1972." MA thesis UBC, 1991.
- Foster, Hal, Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh. "Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop." *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*. no.1 Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle Bay Press, 1987: 55-87.

- Foster, Hal. "Who's afraid of the neo-avant-garde?" *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press (an October book), 1996: 1-33.
- . "Arty Party." *London Review of Books*. 4 Dec. 2003: 21.
- Foster, Hal, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-alain Bois, and Benjamin Buchloh. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.
- Frascina, Francis, Ed. *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- . "How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark." [1982] Frascina 81-88.
- . *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . "An Interview with Michael Fried." *Refracting Vision - Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*. Eds. Toni Ross et al. Sydney, Austral.: Power Publications, 2000. 377-404.
- . "Being there: Michael Fried on Two Pictures by Jeff Wall." *Artforum*. Sept. 2004: 53-54.
- . *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Friedland, Paul. *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002.
- Gasher, Mike. *Hollywood North—The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2002.
- Gill, Andy. "Gang of Four." 26 June 2005. <<http://www.gillmusic.com/>>.
- . "Andy Gill Interview" n.d. Accessed 26 June 2005. <<http://www.furious.com/perfect/gangoffour.html>>.
- Goldman, Robert et al. *Sign Wars - the cluttered landscape of advertising*. New York: Guilford, 1996.
- Graham, Dan. "The Destroyed Room of Jeff Wall." [1979] Rpt. in *Art and Photography*. Ed. David Company. London: Phaidon, 2003. 240-241.
- Graham, Rodney. "Appendix 1 - Artist's Notes" in *Rodney Graham Works from 1976 to 1994*, exh. cat. Toronto: York University et al, 1994.
- . *Rodney Graham - A Little Thought*, exh. cat. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery et al, 2004.

- . "A Little Thought: A conversation with Rodney Graham and Matthew Higgs" *Rodney Graham*, exh. cat. London: Whitechapel, 2002:75-92.
- Greenberg, Clement. "The Camera's Glass Eye: Review of an Exhibition of Edward Weston" [1946] Rpt. in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*. 1945-49 Vol. 2 Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 60-63.
- Griffiths, Colin. Personal Interview. 26 June 2003.
- Guilbaut, Serge et al, eds. *Modernism and Modernity--The Vancouver Conference Papers*. 1983. Halifax NS: NSCAD Press, 2004.
- Guilbaut, Serge. "The Relevance of Modernism." Ed. Guilbaut. *Modernism and Modernity* xi-xvii.
- . *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art - Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1983.
- . Personal interview. 26 Feb. 2004.
- Harris, Jonathan. *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Harrison, Charles, et al, eds. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1989.
- Hawkes, David. *Ideology*. [1996] Second Edition, London: Routledge, 2003.
- Hirsch, Robert. *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, USA: 2000.
- Hofer, Philip. *Los Caprichos by Francisco Goya y Lucientes*. New York: Dover, 1969.
- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. "Art Work and Modernity: The Legacy of Georg Lukacs." *Reappraisals: Shifting Alignments in Postwar Critical Theory*. Cornell UP, 1991: 53-74.
- Hollander, Anne. *Moving Pictures*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.
- Hoolbloom, Mike. "As Seen on TV: David Rimmer and Vancouver's Fringe Film." *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*. Vancouver BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1994. 257-281.
- Hopkins, David. *After Modern Art 1945-2000*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Hoy, Anne H. *Fabrications: Staged, Altered and Appropriated Photographs*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1987.

- Ingram, David. "Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment." *New German Critique* 53 (Spring 1991) *Academic Search Elite*. 29 September 2004 <<http://www.ejournals.ebsco.com>>.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Reflections in Conclusion." *Aesthetics and Politics*. Tr. ed. Ronald Taylor. London: New Left Books, 1977: 196-213.
- . *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 1990.
- . "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity." [1998] Rpt. in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998*. London: Verso, 1998: 93-135.
- Jenkins, William. *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, exh. cat. Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 1975.
- Jones, Edgar Yoxall. *Father of Photography: O.G. Rejlander 1813-1875*. David and Charles Holdings Ltd. Devon UK: 1973.
- Jonge, Ingrid Fischer. "The Repressed Encounter - Pictures by Jeff Wall." *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. Louisiana, Denmark 1992:16-23.
- Joyce, Lisa and Fred Orton. "Always Elsewhere: An Introduction to the Art of Jeff Wall (A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947)." *Jeff Wall Photographs*, exh. cat. Vienna, Au.: MUMOK, 2003: 8-33.
- King, Homy. "The Long Goodbye: Jeff Wall and Film Theory." *Jeff Wall Photographs*, exh. cat. Vienna, Au.: MUMOK, 2003:110-127.
- Kleinhans, Chuck. "A ventriloquist psychoanalysis" *Jump Cut* 9 (1975) 30-32.
- Klute* (film). Dir. Alan Pakula. Perf. Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland. USA: Warner Bros., 1971.
- Krauss, Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977.
- . "...And then turn away? An Essay on James Coleman." *October* 81 (Summer 1997) 5+.
- . "Reinventing the Medium." *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999) 289-305.
- Kuspit, Donald. "Looking up at Jeff Wall's Modern 'Appassionamento.'" *Artforum* Mar. 1982: 52-56.
- Last Laugh, The* (film). Dir. F.W. Murnau. Germany: Universum Film A.G. (UFA) 1924.
- Lauter, Rolf. "Jeff Wall: Figures and Places." *Jeff Wall Figures and Places Selected Works 1978-2000*, exh. cat. Ed. Rolf Lauter. New York: MfMK Frankfurt/Main and Prestel, 2001. 13-125.

- Leader, Darian. "The System of Rodney Graham's Costume Trilogy." *Rodney Graham*, exh. cat. London: Whitechapel et al, 2002: 35-56.
- Leider, Philip. "Vancouver Scene with no Scene." *artscanada* June-July, 1967: 6-7.
- Levitine, George. "Some Emblematic Sources of Goya." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22.1-2 (1959): 106-131.
- Lindberg, Ted. "955,000 - An Exhibition organized by Lucy Lippard." *artscanada* June 1970: 50.
- Linsley, Robert. "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia." *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*. Ed. Stan Douglas. Vancouver BC: Talonbooks, 1991. 225-245.
- . "Image Literatures." *Cameras Indiscretas*, exh. cat. Barcelona: Centre d'Art Santa Monica, 1992.111-118.
- . "Landscape and Literature in the Art of British Columbia." *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*. Ed. Paul Delany. Vancouver BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1994.193-216.
- . "Mirror Travel in the Yucatan: Robert Smithson, Michael Fried, and the new critical drama." *Res Magazine* 37. Spring 2000: 7-30.
- . "Art in British Columbia Draft 2003." unpublished manuscript.
- Lippard, Lucy. "Iain Baxter: New Spaces." *artscanada* June 1969: 3-7.
- Lippard, Lucy ed. and comp. *Six Years: the Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972....* London: Studio Vista, 1973.
- Lloyd, David and Paul Thomas. *Culture and the State*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Lord, Barry. "Canada: the Stir in Vancouver." *Art in America* May 1968: 119.
- Lowry, Joanna. "History, Allegory, Technologies of Vision." *History Painting Reassessed - the Representation of History in Contemporary Art*. Ed. David Green et al. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. 97-111.
- Lukacs, Georg. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Trans. John and Necke Mander. London: Merlin Press, 1972.
- Lum, Ken. Interview with Jerome Sans. *Flash Art* June, 1988: 92-93.
- . *Ken Lum works with Photography*, exh. cat. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada et al, 2002.
- . Personal interview. 12 February 2004.

- Lyons, Nathan, Ed. and curator. *Toward a Social Landscape*, exh. cat. Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 1966.
- . "Interview with Nathan Lyons" *History of Photography* [Oxford, UK] 21 (2) Summer 1997:147-155.
- MacAloon, John J. *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*. Philadelphia: ISHI Press, 1984.
- MacWilliam, David. "Allegorical Imperatives: Ian Wallace at the Nova Gallery." *YVR Magazine* [Vancouver] Jan. 1978:15-17.
- Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Harvard: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Marcuse, Herbert. "The Affirmative Character of Culture." [v.o. 1937]. Rpt. in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. Trans. Jeremy Shapiro. London: Free Association Press, 1988: 88-133.
- . *One Dimensional Man - Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Mastai, Judith. "Conceptual Bogeyman - Art and Media in the City by the Sea." *C Magazine* [Toronto] Spring 1996: 21-25.
- Meyer, James. "The Writing of 'Art and Objecthood'." *Refracting Vision: Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*. Eds. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, Toni Ross. Sydney, Austral.: Power Publications, 2000. 61-96.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* [UK] 16:3 Autumn 1975: 6-18.
- N.E. Thing Co. [Iain and Ingrid Baxter]. *Report on the Activities of the N.E. Thing Co. of North Vancouver, British Columbia, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa and other Locations, June 4-July 6, 1969*, exh. cat. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969.
- . *Trans VSI Connection NSCAD-NETCO Sept. 15-Oct. 5, 1969*, exh. cat. Halifax: NSCAD Press, 1970.
- Newhall, Beaumont. *The History of Photography*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Oleksijczuk, Denise, curator. *Lost Illusions*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991.
- Osborne, Peter. "Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts." *New Formations* no9. Winter 1989.

- Owens, Craig. "Posing." *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, exh. cat. New York: The New Museum, 1984: 7-17.
- Partner* (film). Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci. Italy: Red Film, 1968.
- Perez Sanchez, Alfonso and Eleanor A. Sayre. *Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment*, Exh. Cat. Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1989.
- Perez Sanchez, A. and J Gallego. *Goya - Complete Etchings*. Munich: Prestel, 1995.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Chapter Seven-Screening the seventies: sexuality and representation in feminist practice - a Brechtian perspective." *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. London: Routledge, 1988. 155-199.
- Real Pictures - Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft*, exh. cat. Curated by Grant Arnold. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005.
- Reed, Arden. "Spanish France Manet/Velasquez The French Taste for Spanish Painting." *Art in America* May 2003: 32.
- Rey, Jose Lopez. *Goya's Caprichos- Beauty Reason and Caricature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1953.
- Roberts, David. "Towards a Genealogy and Typology of Spectacle - Some Comments on Debord." *Thesis Eleven* Nov. 2003: 54-68.
- Roberts, John. "Chapter Ten - Jeff Wall: The Social Pathology of Everyday Life." *The Art of Interruption - Realism, Photography and the Everyday*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998. 184-199.
- . "On Autonomy and the Avant-Garde." *Radical Philosophy* 103 Sept. 2000: 25+.
- Rockman, Arnold. *Vancouver Life* 1968: 63.
- Rose, Gillian. *The Melancholy Science - An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*. London: MacMillan, 1978.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre." *Politics and the Arts - Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*. Trans. Allan Bloom. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1960.
- Sava, Sharla. "As if the Oceans were Lemonade: the performative vision of Robert Filliou and the Western Front." UBC M.A. thesis, 1996.
- . "Jeff Wall: Regarding the Jewish Cemetery." *West Coast Line* 46 (39/1) 2006.
- Sayre, Eleanor A. *The Changing Image: Prints by Francisco Goya*. Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1974.

- Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Toronto: Random House, 1995.
- Schudson, Michael. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: its dubious impact on American Society*. [1986] London: Routledge, 1993.
- Scott, Kitty. "Ken Lum works with Photography." *Ken Lum works with Photography* exh. cat. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2002.12-29.
- Sekula, Allan. "Conversation between Allan Sekula and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh" [2003] *Allan Sekula: Performance Under Working Conditions*, exh. cat. Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2003: 20-53.
- Selz, Peter with Alvin Balkind "Vancouver: Scene and Unscene." *Art in America* January 1970: 122-126.
- Shadbolt, Jack. "Setting the Compass." *British Columbia: Visions of the Promised Land*. Vancouver: Flight Press, 1986.
- Shaw, Nancy. "Siting the Banal: the Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co." *You are now in the Middle of a NE Thing Co. Landscape*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993. 32-36.
- Smith, Tony. "Talking with Tony Smith." *Artforum* Dec. 1966: 18-19. Rpt. in *Art in Theory*. Ed. Harrison et al: 760.
- Smithson, Robert. "Rejoinder to Environmental Critics." n.d. *Collapse 2* [Vancouver Art Forum Society] 122.
- . "Letter to the Editor." *Artforum* Oct. 1967. n.p. Rpt. in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*. Ed. Nancy Holt. New York: NYU Press, 1979. 38.
- . "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects." *Artforum* Sept. 1968. n.p. Rpt. in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*. Ed. Nancy Holt. New York: NYU Press, 1979. 82-91.
- Smithson, Robert and Dennis Wheeler. "Four Conversations between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson (1969-1970)." *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Ed. Jack Flam. Berkeley: UC Press, 1996: 196-233.
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "Beyond the Simulation Principle." *Utopia Post Utopia*, exh. cat. Boston: Boston ICA, 1988: 83-99.
- Southwood, Vivian. "Guy Debord will not be missed."
<<http://www.toysatellite.org/doods/txt/debord.htm>>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2005.
- Soutter, Lucy. "The Photographic Idea: Reconsidering Conceptual Photography." *Afterimage*. March, April 1999. <<http://www.findarticles.com.>> Accessed: Jan 5, 2005.
- Speight, Allen. *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

- Stimson, Blake. "An Art and Its Public - A Public and Its Art: Robert Smithson versus the Environmentalists." *Collapse* #2, December 1996; 126-137.
- Thompson, John. *Ideology and Modern Culture - Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990.
- Town, Elke. *Subjects and Subject Matter*, exh. cat. London, On.: London Regional Art Gallery:1985.
- Townsend, Charlotte. "Vancouver Photo Show." *artscanada* (June 1970) 49.
- UJ3RK5. LP. Vancouver: Quintessence Records, 1980.
- Vardac, A. Nicholas. "Realism, Romance, and the Development of the Motion Picture." excerpt from A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film: David Garrick to D. W. Griffith*. [1949] Reprint in Robert Knopf, Ed. *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology*. Yale UP, 2005. 27- 36.
- Wagner, Anne. "Reading Minimal Art" *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Gregory Battcock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 3-18.
- Wall, Jeff. "Berlin Dada and the Notion of Context" MA Thesis UBC, 1970.
- . "Short History Data." ca. 1972. unpublished, Ian Wallace Archives.
- . "The American Movie." *Pacific Cinematheque Programme Guide*. Sept. 1975. Vancouver: Pacific Cinematheque, n.p.
- . "To the Spectator." *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. Victoria BC: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979. n.p. (2 pp.)
- ."A Draft for 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel'." [1981] in Jeff Wall *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991: 87-115.
- ."Unity and Fragmentation in Manet." *Parachute* [Montreal] Summer 1984:5-7. Rpt. in *Jeff Wall* Phaidon, 1996. 78-89.
- Wall, Jeff and Els Barents. "Typology, Luminescence, Freedom: Selections from a Conversation with Jeff Wall." [1985] *Jeff Wall Transparencies*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987:95-104.
- Wall, Jeff. "La Melancolie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome in the Work of Ian Wallace 1967-1982." *Ian Wallace: Selected Works 1970-1987*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988: 63-75.
- . "Into the forest—two sketches for studies of Rodney Graham's work." [1988] *Rodney Graham—Works from 1976 to 1994*, exh. cat. Toronto: York University. 11-26.
- . "My Photographic Production." [1989] Rpt. in Ed. Company. 249-250.

- Wall, Jeff, Serge Guilbaut, TJ Clark et al. "Jeff Wall - Unpublished Interview Transcript." Interview with Serge Guilbaut, TJ Clark, Claude Ginz, Anne Wagner. Ca. Spring 1989. Serge Guilbaut Archives, UBC Campus Vancouver.
- Wall, Jeff, TJ Clark, et al. "Jeff Wall: Three Excerpts from a Discussion with TJ Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut and Anne Wagner." *Parkett* 22: 1989: 82-85. Rpt. in *Jeff Wall* Phaidon 1996: 112-124.
- . "Four Essays on Ken Lum." *Ken Lum*, exh. cat. Winnipeg Art Gallery et al, 1990: 25-79.
- Wall, Jeff and Bill Jones. "False Documents: A Conversation with Jeff Wall." *Arts Magazine*. May 1990 (64/9) 50-55.
- Wall, Jeff, et al. *An Evening Forum at the Vancouver Art Gallery with Terry Atkinson, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Lawrence Weiner*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1990.
- Wall, Jeff. *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991.
- . "Traditions and Counter-Traditions in Vancouver Art: A Deeper Background for Ken Lum's Work." *Witte de With: The Lectures*. Rotterdam: Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 1991: 67-81.
- . "An Artist and his Models." *Roy Arden* exh. cat. Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 1993: 5-26.
- Wall, Jeff and Mark Lewis. "An Interview with Jeff Wall." (October 1993) *Public* 9: 1994: 54-61.
- Wall, Jeff. *Jeff Wall*. Other contributors: Arielle Pelenc, Thierry de Duve, Boris Groys. London: Phaidon, 1996.
- Wall, Jeff and Arielle Pelenc. "Arielle Pelenc in Correspondence with Jeff Wall." *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, 1996:8-22.
- Wall, Jeff. "'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art." *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975*, exh. cat. Ed. Ann Goldstein et al. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995: 375-434.
- Wall, Jeff et al. "The Interiorized Academy: Interview with Jean Francois Chevrier." [1990] Rpt. in *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, 1996:104.
- Wall, Jeff. "Jeff Wall Interview Lecture." *Transcript: A Journal of Visual Culture*. Scotland 2 (3) 1997:5-29.
- Wall, Jeff and Roy Arden. "The Dignity of the Photograph." *artpress* [Paris] 251. Nov. 1999:16+

- Wall, Jeff. "A Guide to the Children's Pavilion (a collaborative project with Dan Graham, extract)" *Jeff Wall* Phaidon (2nd Edition) 1999:102.
- . "Introduction: Partially Reflective Mirror Writing." in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on his Art*. MIT Press, 1999.
- Wall, Jeff and Robert Enright. "The Consolation of Plausibility: An Interview with Jeff Wall." *Border Crossings* 19/1 (2000):38-51.
- Wall, Jeff et al. "A Painter of Modern Life - An Interview between Jeff Wall and Jean-Francois Chevrier." *Jeff Wall - Figures and Places: Selected Works 1978-2000*. Munich: Prestel, 2000:168-185.
- . "Introduction: Entretien entre Jeff Wall et Jean-Francois Chevrier" *Jeff Wall: Essais et entretiens 1984-2001*. Paris: ENS, 2001: 7-36. Tr. and rpt. "Conversation between Jeff Wall and Jean-Francois Chevrier." *Jeff Wall Tableaux* exhibition catalogue, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, 2001:107-119.
- Wall, Jeff and Lynda Morris. "A Conversation between Jeff Wall and Lynda Morris 4 October 2000 in his studio in Vancouver." in *Jeff Wall Landscapes* exhibition catalogue, Manchester Art Gallery, 2002:27-33.
- Wall, Jeff and Mike Figgis. "Interview: Mike Figgis and Jeff Wall." 2004 *Contemporary Magazine*, UK. <<http://www.contemporary-magazine.com/interview65.htm>>. Accessed: April 22, 2005.
- Wall, Jeff et al. *Jeff Wall Catalogue Raisonné 1978-2004*. Basel Switzerland: Schaulager, 2005.
- Wallace, Ian. "A Note on the Film in Progress (Script II) by Ian Wallace." Feb. 1974. Unpublished. Ian Wallace Archives.
- . "Jeff Wall's Transparencies." *Jeff Wall - Transparencies*, exh. cat. London ICA and Kunsthalle Basel, 1984. n.p.
- . "Ken Lum: Image and Alter-Image." *Vanguard*. Winter, 1986: 23-25.
- . "Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver." *Thirteen Essays on Photography*. Ed. Martha Langford. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, 1990:93-116.
- . "Dan Graham in Vancouver." *Dan Graham*, exh. cat. Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2003:8-11.
- . Personal interviews (14, 17, 19 and 20 October 2003)
- Watson, Scott. *Jack Shadbolt*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.
- . "Discovering the Defeatured Landscape." *Vancouver Anthology: the Institutional Politics of Art*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991:247-266.

- Wheeler, Dennis. "The Limits of the Defeated Landscape: A Review of the Four Artists exhibition, Fine Arts Gallery, UBC Feb 1970." *artscanada* 144 June 1970: 50-51.
- Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements - Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: M. Boyars, 1978.
- Witheford, Nick. *Cyber-Marx: cycles and circuits of struggle in high-technology capitalism*. Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Wood, Paul et al. *Modernism in Dispute - Art since the Forties*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Wood, William. "The Patient Wait: Ian Wallace." *Vanguard*. Sept. 1988: 10-15.
- et al. *You are now in the Middle of a NE Thing Co. Landscape*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993.
- Young, Nigel. *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.
- Youngblood, Gene. "World Game: the artist as ecologist." *artscanada* 27:4, August 1970: 42-48.
- Zaslove, Jerald. "Faking Nature and Reading History - The Mindfulness toward Reality in the Dialogical World of Jeff Wall's Pictures." *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. Vancouver BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1990: 64-103.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1993.