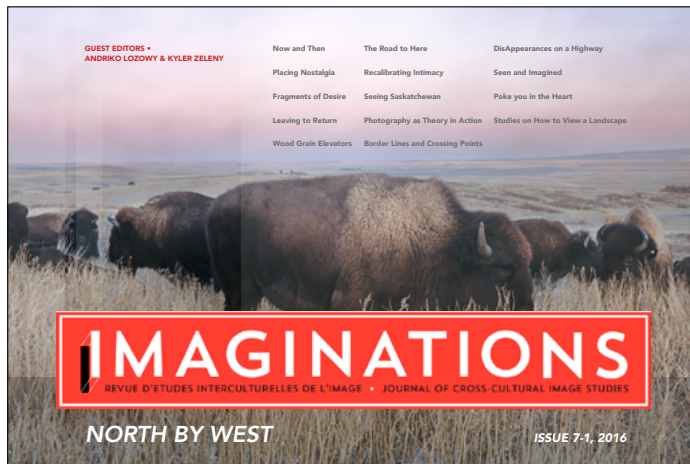


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North By West

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INTRODUCING NORTH BY WEST

ANDRIKO LOZOWY

In this collection, *North By West* refers to a way of dividing North America. Our grade-school days, with maps hung on walls, provide our initial navigation of real and imagined spaces. Yet in this issue *North By West* signifies more than just a bounded geographical area. Here *North By West* names a series of collaborations between individuals situated in place. We invite the readers of *North By West* to engage in the imaginative work of locating their own spatial assemblages—mentally, physically, topographically, and geographically.

This collection is focused on a large region of Western Canada, rather than on an entire national boundary. This version of *North By West* conducts an inquiry into how visual culture is entwined with ideas of place, identity, and memory. Canadian visual and cultural landscapes are diverse, yet a certain tension exists between national and regional identity in Canada: what Amelia Kalant, in *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka: Native Belonging and Myths of Postcolonial Nationhood in Canada* (2004), describes as an uncertainty linked to our colonial history that leaves us ungrounded:

Image - 03 Vera Saltzman



Joel Garreau's *The Nine Nations of North America*, [The New York Times](#) 3 Jul. 2014. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.

For some, Canada invokes memory or an imaginative drive to picture place. In this collection we have asked image makers to contribute their own representations of *North By West* and invited scholars to write about these images from their own disciplinary perspective. In some cases the photographer-researcher—an embodiment of methodology and considered practice—appears in action throughout the collection. The photographer-researcher undertakes hybrid ways of doing scholarly, creative, and collaborative inquiry. Without presuming a particular method upon our contributors, the point here is to identify one of the theoretical elements at play in this issue: we asked individuals to submit work reflecting their expertise and gave these visual scholars and visual practitioners room to collaborate.

The profusion of colorful landscapes on Canadian dollars, part of an obsession with the production of a Canadian sense of place, suggests that the 'problem' of Canadianness is not the soul, but an ingrained consciousness that the place/body of Canada exceeds the capacity to name and claim it...The dilemma of Canadian identity is a product of a metanarrative that makes uncertainty of place foundational to the imagining of the Canadian nation...This occurs as a whole as well as regionally. A nation amongst nations perhaps? Regionally speaking of course. Canada as a whole suffers from a 'failure of place,' a narrative of territorial failure, a historically successful one at that. (31, 33)

Naming Place

We borrow the name *North By West* from Joel Garreau's *Nine Nations of North America* (1992). Garreau defines the Northwest as "The Empty Quarter" and "The Prairies." His map provides a starting point for open-ended dialogue and a place where questions persist: what does The Empty Quarter mean, if it consists of almost half the land-mass of the nation; why does Quebec adhere to geo-political boundaries as a distinct cultural signifier; and, are boundaries actually about demography and culturally productive forces? Rather than taking its delimitation of space literally, we use this map to help us consider some of the more abstract ways in which place is imagined collectively, the ways in which perspective can nurture visions of homogeneity or diversity. *North By West* focuses on the

latter, providing a space the diversity of visual scenes and practices that exists across the 12 million square kilometers of The Empty Quarter.

In *American Nations* (2012) Colin Woodard argues that North America ought to be thought of in the plural. As his title suggests, the nations of America presume a multiplicity, a perspective with unique geographic locations nurturing unique cultures, practices, and customs. Thinkers whose work engages the multiplicity of North American nations will already have the sense that the very concept of the Empty Quarter contains a variant of colonial discourse. Others who have been following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and may have read the final report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (2015), will know that the *North by West* depicted in this issue is also treaty territory and unceded land—Treaties 1, 2, 4, 5, 6,7,8,10, and 11 to be a little more precise.

American examples of regional photography are plentiful. *Ain't Bad* magazine's (2014) visual series on "The American South" reminds the reader/viewer that returning home to places such as Clayton, Crawfordville or Decatur, Georgia serves as an opportunity to see anew and capture with glass and film or digital sensors the deeply social nature of an individual environment (Goffman 72). What might the Canadian equivalent look like? How might it work? What is Canadian visual culture in Western Canada and can it be thought

of outside or beyond American examples? *North by West* serves as a brief historical and contemporary introduction to and survey of photographers working in the Canadian West.¹ Moreover, we intend this collection to act as a kind of muster point, an affective topoi (see Shields 2013) which others interested in Western Canada and photography can engage with together. As a settler nation, Canadian culture and identity is necessarily multiple. Collectively we wonder if Canadians perceive identity as antithetical, as not-American. This collection aims to offer a sustained focus on Canada on its own terms through visual culture.

Revisiting Place

Returning to a place is a central theme that my co-editor Kyler Zeleny and I shared when we first envisioned *North By West*, and now looking at the collection, we note a cyclical character reflected back by the contributors. We find Woodhard's work useful as he writes about the power of a cycle of revisiting a specific place with camera in hand. In matters of the whole of the North and the West, a more human scale for visual and scholarly consideration might be relatable to walking. For example, walking for one day gives a clear indication to an individual the scale of a possible spatial consideration. How many days a year does one spend walking? If you spend one day a year walking, and perhaps photographing, could there be a benefit to navigating and interpreting an area that is familiar but changing? In this regard we also draw inspiration from photographer Edward Burtynsky, who speaks of growing up in rural Ontario, playing among the trees and lakes (Campbell 2008, 43). Some of his own inspiration for photography comes from capturing still images of changing landscapes that could be easily read as on the verge of being lost to industrial processes, commercialization, housing, and so forth. *North By West* is a working collection that finds common yet fragile ground in considering the vastness of our given territorial focus. At the same time, we recognize the finite limitations on resources. On the one hand, an outsider might see the limitless

expanse and draw a reductive conclusion such as "Saskatchewan is so boring; it's all the same," whereas a local inhabitant might have a more refined way of recognizing and describing in detail landscapes that could easily fool an outsider into thinking subtlety is synonymous with homogeneity.

Yet freedom of physical movement cannot be assumed here. Moreover the North and the West relate specifically to the real cartographic distinctions made over human history wherein borders mean the difference between freedom of movement and violent power. Unlike monetary capital, human capital is often caged by immobility when nation states act in guarded ways. For some, we might acknowledge the relative freedom afforded by the luck of being a Canadian, that movement across and through the vast expanse of Canada is not only taken for granted, but also presumed and encouraged. This project does not focus on the political intersections of human geography but rather on the relationships of memory, photography, rumination, and certain forms of distinctly Canadian identity making. *North By West* strives to occupy a space of serious and critical inquiry between the known and unknown boundaries of real and imagined space.

The Photographer-Researcher

Returning to a place is a specific action, whether mindful or passive. Photographer-researchers document, aestheticize, reveal, and capture the specificities of place, culture, and milieu. The photographer-researcher reflects on multiplicity while considering the visible and the invisible (Lozowy 2014, 393). At the same time the photographer-researcher is methodologically working through registers of the; gaze, glance, focus, depth, exposure and representation (Shields 23-35).

The photographer-researcher works within a methodological set of parameters with which to negotiate fluid dialogisms, such as when a photographer walks with deliberate patience amidst fluctuating intensities of light and shadow, through spaces both real and imagined, and encounters bodies, minds, emotions, and affective spatial milieu. The photographer-researcher also moves through the mechanical limitations of the given photographic apparatus (Flusser 2000, 76) and makes expletive and discriminatory choices of when to press the shutter.

With the camera in hand, we see things differently. Pausing, perhaps to converse with another person or press the camera shutter, breaks the veneer of the everyday and elevates the moment to a level of engagement that offers an opportunity for theoretical reflexive moments that, yet again, abstract to other bisections of space and time. The act of photography—as well as other modes of knowing, such as painting, audio-recording, video-recording, dictation, and so forth—puts action into a direct relationship with theory because it breaks the expected unconscious moment-to-moment-ness of the everyday. It gives the photographer, or otherwise engaged practitioner, reason to pause, to become aware of the subtle pulse between breaths.

North By West

North By West is organized into three themes: histories, places, and visions. *North by West* is a social experiment where image makers who might use image-making techniques as ways to ask ontological questions are then met by scholars who often ask further ontological questions followed by epistemological ones (see Sontag 1977; Barthes 1981).

Histories

Section one relates to four contributions that revolve around ways in which history, place, and memory work in relation to patterns of settlement, the vocabulary of Canadian landscape, fragile materiality, and return cycles. Elizabeth Cavaliere kindly offered to create a groundwork for the collection by attuning her focus to the power of photography as a technology that shapes cultural discourse. Cavaliere looks to the work of Humpry Lloyd Hime and the heavy, wet, messy, and toxic process of image making in 1839, when expansive prairie lands were being visually surveyed and documented with an eye to resource development. Cavaliere argues that, along with technological shifts in the nature of photography over the last 180 years, pragmatism has been largely displaced by more recent shifts towards photography as a means to know place as reflexive, embodied, and affective.

In “Placing Nostalgia,” Jon Petrychyn meditates on the currents between the photographic work of Vera Saltzman and Valerie Zink. Petrychyn notes that the old pastoral and bucolic Saskatchewan is dead; the new Saskatchewan is on the move, but prosperity is not for everyone. In a province where pumpjacks have replaced combines, both literally and in the imaginary, the change represents progressive visions of acceleration and opportunity at the cost of fearful displacement, the kind that means many people and even places are left outside of the halo of abundance and plenty. Through this reading, Saltzman’s and Zink’s images reverberate with one another while the visual language of Canadian prairie landscapes makes itself apparent: grain elevators stand upright as place markers inscribed with histories unbound by the brief period where rail lines linked grain elevators dotted black across a fertile carpet of green and yellow.

Devotedly touristic and intensely private worlds collide in the contribution by Karen Engle and Trudi Lynn Smith. Smith’s work reimagines what it means to do archival research. There is a sense of fragility in an exchange that saw materials shared, not over online connections, but rather through carefully packaged postings. Engle shared her delight at receiving a package from Smith, not merely from the material artifacts, but also the gesture of trust.

Kyler Zeleny’s contribution “Leaving to Return” projects a pattern of artistic practice and scholarship that plays out on a daily basis for any person of any age who grows up feeling alienated and disenfranchised

amidst the pragmatism of making a living in rural places without artistic communities. Zeleny illustrates connections between notions of settler expansion, pastoralism, identity, and geography, while asking serious questions about what opportunities for even temporary community assemblages are lost when the individualist tendencies of photographers deny any hope of mentorship. His images, presented alongside Thomas Gardiner’s, invite the viewer to tangle with the textual argument he puts forward—where geography coupled with topography defines not only what is seen, but also how place is lived, imagined, guarded, and rooted.

Places

Ali Piwowar offers a detailed consideration of place-making effects in “Wood Grain Elevators,” beginning with a historical and spatial analysis of the organizing principle of farming and harvesting practices tied to distribution through grain elevators and trains carrying grain east to ports such as those found in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Piwowar offers a multifaceted approach to the ways in which wood grain elevators occupy, represent, signify, and command attention to a range of people. Piwowar reveals the political in the prairie sublime—the indigenous farmer recalls standing at the back of the line, forced to wait until the settler famers had finished their grain dealings.

Beyond the standard narratives of boom and bust Michael Granzow and Kevin Jones meditate upon Eamon MacMahon’s photographs that challenge the rhetoric of division between the urban and rural to remind the reader that spatial divisions might fuel animosity; yet a closer look reveals interdependence on micro and macro scales. Under the view of Granzow and Jones, MacMahon’s images refute ruin porn and instead offer a considered view of the ways in which ruination is much more a lived process that bears the trauma of lost prosperity rather than the predatory pathway for contemporary photographers to entice viewership with the promise of salacious decomposition. The notion of uneven relations of place comprise the central argument here where Granzow and Jones describe how sites of ruin now exist as nodes in a network that once bore the livelihoods of extraction. Ruin is a material reality where decomposition anchors signposts to the geographic and symbolic places that are coming up next. Perhaps most unsettling is the sense that, because work camps have become shelter for the long-shift working skilled laborers of late-modern capitalism, the possibility of ruin at multiple registers is just an unlucky hand away.

Lily Cho, in *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (2010), expresses her views on the matter of diasporic lives of those who live to meet the demands of hungry customers looking for Canadian-Chinese cuisine. Cho returns to the subject for “Recalibrating Intimacy,” situating Elyse Bouvier’s photographs of Chinese restaurants as an invitation to look repeatedly. Cho invites readers of text and

image to consider not only this article but the entire *North by West* collection as an opportunity to extend critical thinking practices around the body of work that is generated by photographers who argue and ask questions with light, shadow, and colour. Cho and Bouvier engage in a dance of intimacy and publicity through carefully waged narratives and counter-narratives that revolve around the pithy cultural/racial/ethnic/diasporic question, “who has authority to say that egg foo yong is not real Chinese food?”

In dialogue with Stephen Shore’s *Uncommon Places: The Complete Works* (2004), John Conway’s *Saskatchewan: Uncommon Views* (2005) provides visual evidence of the significance, not only of Canadian image making but, more accurately, of prairie landscapes that eschewed aesthetic beauty for the resignification of the weird as iconic. Conway’s contribution to *North By West*, both as image maker and scholarly interlocutor, coalesces around the way in which Saskatchewan, the subject of his 2005 collection, remains burned into his vision. Conway elucidates the metaphor by drawing visual connections to the way that his new surroundings on the West Coast persuade him to seek out the horizontal expanse of the ocean as a surrogate for a big-sky prairie horizon.

By tracing lines through not only the invention of photography but also of the idea of the West, Matt Dyce offers a comparative analysis of the ways in which photographers confront personal ethics and in many cases make decisions based on commercial viability. William Hanson Boorne and George Webber,

a pair of photographers separated by 100 years, are connected by the geographic places they traversed. The 100-year separation is where Dyce has room to contrast relationships of identity, cultural practices, appropriation, and how notions of the spiritual have been underrepresented in Canadian visual cultural studies. Dyce looks carefully at the ways in which Boorne chose to represent the Blood Tribe celebrating/performing a sun dance ceremony, images that we now read as racist and dehumanizing. The second half of this essay contrasts George Webber’s work with Boorne’s. Webber was already an acclaimed photographer by the mid-1990s and his images illustrate not only the shift in relation to the previous 100 years, but also pave the way for photographic styles that push and pull the vastness of prairie landscapes into sharp focus: billowy clouds, pastoral grasses, social or material ruin, and subjects who embody fully fleshed humanity wrought with all manner of suffering, humility, and even spiritual transcendence. Dyce illuminates, as his title suggests, “Photography is theory in action when it becomes a means for people to negotiate the context of both their representation and place in history.”

Visions

Andreas Rutkauskas’s images focus on actual borders as political and spatial lines that were more porous before the spectacle and performance of power and control intensified following 9/11. Karla McManus writes in relation to Rutkauskas’s images; their comradery began in Winnipeg during

childhood. “Border Lines and Crossing Points” brings the images of place to the forefront, each captioned with brief detail. Though readers might have the impulse to skip ahead, these images demand multiple viewings. As McManus writes, we come to know in more affective ways the sensorial spectrum of power relations at play. The brilliance of Rutkauskas’s images emerges as McManus points out the tension between the act of photographing and the social effects of bodies in space in relation to borders.

Erin Ashenhurst offers a playful view through the construct of a toy windshield, where subjectivity meets the mountains and wrestles with contemporary points of cohesion—small towns along winding roads. “DisAppearances on a Highway” locates the viewer safely behind the windscreen of a playmobile car, the view similar to the plastic lens images conjured by Lomo cameras. Forward momentum ensures that the pursuit of the horizon makes for a sense of familiarity for those who face similar geographic expanses, such as those in Australia or Siberia. At the same time, the DisAppearances might also allude to more romantic possibilities of getting lost in land and the self.

“Seen and Imagined” brings visual sociology pioneer Douglas Harper in conversation with Tara Milbrandt, both of whom bring text and images together in deeply personal ways. Together, Harper and Milbrandt invite the viewer/reader along for a walking tour of Edmonton, Alberta. Edmonton is represented here and read as a kind of gritty postmodern frontier, a necessary hub for the far greater expanse of the North and the West, at

all degrees of compass and thermometer. Through the lenses of each photographer and researcher, Edmonton bleeds the themes of settlement patterns and conflict restrained in held breaths. Brutalism stands as an affront to the big skies that offer limitless visions beyond the built utility of a city known for its blue and dirty collars, a city once surrounded by fertile fields bearing wheat and corn but now paved and serviced for the resource industry.

Jenny Gerbrandt's "Poke you in the Heart" examines the anthropological scholar at the intersection of two photographers, one from outside, read as an ally, and one from inside, read as Indigenous. Aaron Elkaim responded to the initial call for images, which we paired with Gerbrandt because of her geographically specific engagement with the Métis near Fort McMurray, where she connected locally back to Nadia Bouchier of Fort McKay who had worked closely with Elkaim in the first place. In the text by Gerbrandt, Bouchier's grandmother speaks strikingly of the Athabasca River, wondering how she could take care of the river when the river could no longer take care of her. Gerbrandt's articulation of the spoken narrative reinforces the

need to make sure that we as academics, scholars, and photographers work together to remember what we might otherwise selectively forget. In the same way, Elkaim the outsider and Bouchier the insider both offer photographs that reveal a part of what is now at least a binocular vision.

Readers will be struck by the candidness that Jessica Auer brings to her photographic vision, one sculpted and shaped by her parents' divorce when she was 10 years old. Auer joined her father during a summer of travel with a book and a camera. The Auer we meet here is shaped by her traversals across time and by returning to places; in turn she reminds us to return again and again, to gaze, to ruminate, to notice, and to recognize that everything changes—a metaphor for the project of *North By West*.

North By West

When this special issue began to take shape we aspired to create a publication that allowed contributors to think critically and steadily about images, and to work together and to open a space for creative forms of scholarship.

Upon reflection Lily Cho noted, and our editorial team agrees, that this special issue represents a kind of social engineering and could be looked upon as a useful model for combating the dizziness of visual oversaturation.

Thank you to our photographers and interlocutors for contributing to this experiment, and to our readers alike for joining us in this exploration of the North and the West, via the shared virtual space of *Imaginations*.

Notes

¹ Of course this is not a comprehensive list. For instance, it does not focus on historical photographers such as Orest Semchishen or Sandra Semchuck. However, it does provide a range of contemporary work in the region.

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