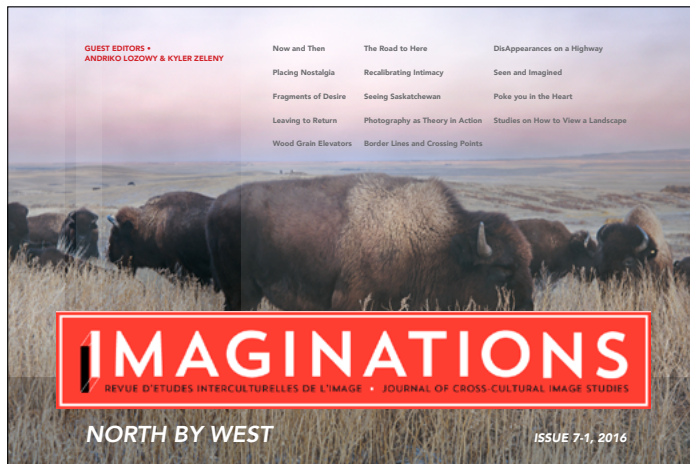


IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE ▪ JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



IMAGINATIONS

JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy
and instructions for contributors:

<http://imagination.csj.ualberta.ca>

North By West

Editorial Team: Brent Ryan Bellamy, Daniel Laforest, Andriko Lozowy,
Tara Milbrandt, Carrie Smith-Prei, Sheena Wilson

November 23, 2016

To cite this article:

Gardiner, Thomas, and Zeleny, Kyler. "Leaving To Return: A Photographic Case Study In Western Canada." *Imaginations* 7:1 (2016): Web (date accessed) 52-75. DOI: 10.17742/IMAGE.NBW.7-1.5

To link to this article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.NBW.7-1.5>



The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions.

LEAVING TO RETURN: A PHOTOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY IN WESTERN CANADA

THOMAS GARDINER & KYLER ZELENY

Résumé

À travers un cadre collaboratif, cet article aborde le projet Western Canada (2005-2010) de Thomas Gardiner comme un catalyseur afin d'explorer le concept de communauté photographique dans l'Ouest canadien. Y est examiné l'impact de l'appropriation des paysages de l'Ouest du Canada par les productions filmiques hollywoodiennes en quête d'un cadre américain à rabais. À ce titre, l'article questionne également l'absence d'un canon photographique établi lié à l'Ouest canadien et la rareté des ouvertures institutionnelles apte à créer une tradition ou à tout le moins une communauté de praticiens dans cette aire géographique. Les travaux de Thomas Gardiner et de Kyler Zeleny sont ainsi examinés en lien avec leurs méthodes de « multi-localisation », méthodes qui incluent un entraînement formel et le développement d'aptitudes relationnelles, et qui prennent place surtout à l'extérieur des centres ruraux. Enfin, le concept de regard photographique renouvelé est exploré dans l'article à travers la lorgnette de l'attachement affectif au lieu et son influence sur les photographes ayant quitté le Canada dans le passé et y revenant pour mettre en scène des lieux qui leur furent familiers. À la place d'une conclusion traditionnelle, l'article offre une séquence d'images produites collectivement par Gardiner et Zeleny et qui servent en quelque sorte d'exercice dialogique afin d'attirer l'attention du lecteur sur le pouvoir d'évocation de la construction du lieu en photographie.

Abstract

Adopting a collaborative framework, this paper utilizes Thomas Gardiner's project Western Canada (2005-2010) as a catalyst for exploring the concept of a photographic community in the Canadian West. The article considers how Hollywood's production of feature films has appropriated landscapes in Western Canada to represent American spaces. Furthermore, the article discusses how the absence of an established photographic canon in the Canadian West and the lack of institutional opportunities to assist in fostering a photographic community create particular conditions for photographic practitioners in the region. Thomas Gardiner and Kyler Zeleny's work is discussed in relation to their multi-locational working methods. These methods include formal training and relationship building that primarily takes place outside of rural centres. The concept of a renewed photographic vision is discussed through the frame of place attachment and its relation to photographers who leave the Canadian West only to return to document once familiar spaces. In lieu of a textual conclusion, a collaboratively negotiated sequence of images between Gardiner and Zeleny serves as a dialogical exercise that is intended to draw the reader towards the imaginative work of place-making.

Welcome to the West

A son of the Prairies, photographer Thomas Gardiner was born and raised in Western Canada. After a few years abroad, Gardiner returned to the prairies with a fresh perspective and began documenting his origins—the landscape and its inhabitants that had once been so familiar. As a photographer and researcher I followed a similar developmental path: I was raised in rural Western Canada, spent time abroad, and ultimately felt the pull to return to document the region—the end result of which was a book titled *Out West* (2014). What Gardiner and I are both enacting through this process is the motif of the ru-

ralite leaving only to return. The following sections will explore why the motif of “returning home” and the concept of a renewed photographic vision is important to understanding documentary photographers operating in Western Canada. Adopting a collaborative framework, this paper reads Thomas Gardiner’s project *Western Canada* (2005-2010) as a catalyst for exploring concepts and ideas related to photography and the photographic community in the Canadian West. The analysis culminates in a collaboratively negotiated sequence of images between Gardiner and myself, serving as a dialogical exercise designed to immerse the reader in the imaginative art of regional placemaking.

Appraising Gardiner's work beyond pure aestheticism can illuminate how the images empower a narrative of expansion and pastoralism that is particular to the Canadian West. Similar to other work that explores Canadian identity and environs, Gardiner's work raises questions about the relationship between the land and its inhabitants. In other words, Gardiner's lens operates as a conduit allowing us to question our conceptions of landscape, place, and identity in the region.

Western Canada raises a set of broad questions: What is Western Canada? Who is representing it? And echoing Northrop Frye's famous "where is here" inquiry, where is Western Canada? Geographically speaking, we know the lines that demarcate Western Canada. We can identify them on a map and for most of us those very lines also limit our probing. Yet the question remains, how is Western Canada signified spatially? That is, what spaces are used to represent it? What are the signs and symbols that trigger the awareness of being in its bounds? Examining Gardiner's provocative large-format images, one can begin to problematize what is often taken for granted in this region—its photographic identity. Primarily captured in the southern regions of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, Gardiner's images contribute to an underdeveloped documentary form—colour photography in Western Canada. In a similar manner, five years after Gardiner completed *Western Canada*, my project *Out West* (2014) aimed to create an expansive visual account of rural Western Canada, operating as a critical response to the lack of widely exulted image-makers photographing the region (Zeleny).

Acclaimed photographers have photographed in the region. For instance, American-born New Topographic photographer Stephen Shore photographed in Saskatchewan in the 1970s. However, his images do not include typical Canadian identifiers—Canadian flags, Royal Mounted Canadian Police uniforms, or granaries with "Wheat Pool" insignia—and are not clearly marked as Canadian, nor are they quintessential representations of Canadian spaces. Through a textual silence, they easily become subsumed under the banner of American life and American space. Shore's Canadian photographs then become an unknown simulacrum for representations of American space. Much in the same way, many films and shows are produced in the landscape of the Canadian West but are used to represent American spaces. For instance, the following titles were filmed in Alberta with dialogue and set modifications (including American flags or signage changes) that obscure the locational nature of the film: *Days of Heaven* (1978), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *The Assassination of Jesse James* by the Coward Robert Ford (2007), *Interstellar* (2014), *The Revenant* (2015), *Cut Bank* (2014), and *Fargo* (2014-2016). As a result of what communication theorist Will Straw calls a "shared visual space" (24) and some cinematic imagination, the average viewer registers these settings as American. This is an international affair and speaks to the complex transnational relationship we have with film and disjointed imagery, or what the diaspora theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff calls Intervisuality (Straw 28). This process is largely driven by the economics of film production (production costs), where it is often more cost effective to shoot films in Canada than it is

to produce them in American studios or environments. However, in the past (particularly in the 1920s and 1930s) the opposite was true. American writer James Oliver Curwood's film *God's Country and the Woman* (1937) represents a Canadian logging community while the film's principle photography was shot exclusively in Washington State (Francis 155). Similar films about Mounties and the Canadian frontier were filmed in Hollywood studios.

When I began photography for *Out West* in 2012, I had had no previous exposure to Gardiner's work; it was only in 2015 that I came across an online news article that discussed his photography. Realizing that we were photographing the same region contemporarily and given the difficulty in locating likeminded photographers, I was excited to discover another documentarian photographer operating in the area (although Gardiner self identifies as a fine-art photographer, I view his work as belonging to the documentary tradition). This personal reflection underlines the issue of support and promotion of photographic culture in the Canadian West, where aspiring documentarians have difficulty finding access to inspiration and mentorship.

In the spirit of this special issue of the *Imaginations Journal*—a largely collaborative effort between artists and academics—I will be responding to Gardiner's *Western Canada* series through text as well as a series of images. The included images from Gardiner's and my own work have been chosen and sequenced collaboratively and viewers are invited to read them

complementarily, together creating an imaginative space through a shared familiarity. Gardiner's images illuminate the anxieties and topics (issues of representation, changes to rural culture, and the Western inhabitant) I was working with when conducting my own visual work. Furthermore, our respective works do not exist in a creative vacuum. As a contemporary of mine, I use Gardiner's images—from his projects *Untitled USA* (2011-2012) and *Western Canada* (2005-2010)—as a visual starting point. Thus, some of the imagery for my most recent project *Crown Ditch & the Prairie Castle* (2015-ongoing) has been influenced by Gardiner's work. Our intention for a collaborative sequences is to acknowledge that each project represents its own reading of the Canadian West while also lending a complementary nature to the other when read together as a form of cooperation or synergy. The case for a visual synergy is favourable for a number of reasons. Both projects employ the journey as a performative method of research-creation (Adler). In the North American context, the car journey is the quintessential emblem of narrative-based road culture. In rural Canada, the autonomous movement afforded by the automobile is central to reconciling its sparse population with its topographical vastness.

Furthermore, both *Western Canada* and *Crown Ditch & the Prairie Castle* (*Crown Ditch* for short) focus on the Canadian West and, through the application of self-imposed boundaries, are geographically specific projects while also spatially unspecific, given the vastness of the boundaries. Robert Adam's geographically specific work uses much the same

process. Adam's space-specific approach is signified in his book titles—*The New West* (2008), *Photographs of the American West* (2010), and *Prairie* (2011). Contemporary documentary photography reflects a particular resurgence of regionalism. A number of recent projects establish visual expressions of regionalism: *Looking at Appalachia* (2014), "The United States" issue of *Mossless* (2013), "The American South" issue of *Ain't Bad Magazine* (2014), "Notes From the Foundry" in *Spaces Corners* (2013), as well as this current issue of *Imaginations Journal*.

Both Gardiner and I were raised in the Canadian West, spent time abroad learning photography, and then returned to reflect photographically on the region. Our regional consciousness, modified by a cosmopolitan reading of rural space, further binds our approaches. This peculiar familiarity has afforded us an intimate level of engagement coupled with a renewed vision of the space. This idea of understanding landscape echoes Jacques Derrida's concept of ontopology: "a way of thinking about claims to belonging that posit a connection between behaviour and landscape" (17). Gardiner's shooting style, through which familiarity of space presents itself with a renewed sense of vision, demonstrates this relation between learned behaviour and lived experience. Leaving one's home and returning to it anew facilitates this particular sense of vision.

"... a way of thinking about claims to belonging that posit a connection between behaviour and landscape"

Geography as Experience

Defined here, Western Canada is an amalgamation of the prairie regions (with varying prairie climates) of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Cordillera region of British Columbia—mountains and prairie grass juxtaposed. However mundane, landscapes are nonetheless monumental, exerting a place-specific vision upon its inhabitants. From a phenomenological perspective, one “unself-consciously and self-consciously accepts and recognizes the place as integral to his or her personal and communal identity and self-worth” (Seamon 17). That is to say, the landscape and place-attachment produces a particular way of seeing and understanding the land based on prolonged interaction. An Albertan ranch-hand once shared an anecdote with me that captures the contradictions in holding different perspectives of the land. A lumberjack and a farmer stand shoulder to shoulder facing East towards the Rocky Mountains. The lumberjack says, “Now isn’t this something to look at?” The farmer replies “But it’s blocking the view.” The Rocky Mountains act as a natural barrier between the boreal forest and the prairies, a formation to be breached by pickaxe and dynamite, and although passages between the two has been established, the differing geography poses more than a symbolic rift. Geography extends beyond a way of seeing and becomes a way of living. Distance has the ability to breed difference (cultural, economic, and social). As Author Brian Moore observes in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, geography is the enemy and the battle over it has yet to be won. Modifying Moore’s claim that

geography is the enemy, we can interpret the enemy not simply as geography but as distance—nowhere else is this more observable than in studies of Canadian space (the Far North as well as the Canadian West). Viewed at a distance, the differences in geography and climate of the West become obscured and the specificities of the Canadian West become invisible—the mountains, plains and prairie fold into each other and come to represent a unified space. How Western Canada is defined is often debated. Gardiner classifies Western Canada as extending from the West Coast to the Manitoba-Ontario border with the upper boarder being the northern territories. I myself classify it similarly, however I exclude the Vancouver metropolitan area (as it belongs to the Vancouver school of photography). The North-to-South formations of the Prairies and Rockies arguably bind the Canadian West more to its southern neighbour than to Eastern Canada. The East to West split in the United States is often defined as the 100th Meridian. The 100th Meridian acts as a geographical (western boundary of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico) and a cultural border (settlement patterns change west of the demarcation) that both create a clear demarcation for the American West. Comparatively, Canada is without a geographically or culturally constituted east/west claim. As the French geographer Andre Siegfried postulated, America is Western Canada’s geographical centre (1937). As much as the Rocky Mountains operate as a barrier, they also operate as a spine, one that binds the two into a unified sense of Western Canada. Once we view this formation as a spine, opposed to

a barrier, the space becomes conflated. As an issue of visual representation, this topic requires more critical attention, beyond the scope of this article or Gardiner’s imagery. Geographers and Canadian Studies scholars have yet to address the shortage of viable examples of long-term space-orientated projects in Western Canada. Through this interrogation, the community may unearth knowledge of a new photographer, perhaps Canada’s version of Vivian Maier, who bears witness to the visual historicity of the West.

Visually underrepresented and compounded by other forms of marginalization, the rural parts of the Canadian West are placed in a position of the Other (Krause). This sense of othering stems from two sources and is therefore compounded—Eastern Canadian urban centers and American imperialism, which often diminish the existence of Canada’s West. Through these two factors we often forget that at least two Wests exist in North America. When represented photographically, communities in Western Canada are often fetishized for their pastoral, unproven, and open-range qualities. Lacking a strong photographic history, the Canadian west can be viewed as a space unsure as to how to construct its historical narrative. As Amelia Kalant argues, “...Canada continues to create its identity through the quandary of doubting its own existence” (86).

Creative Exodus

Commenting on the early state of the arts in Western Canada, a journalist from the *Globe and Mail* once remarked, “no wonder young Canadian artists go abroad whenever they can earn passage money” (Francis 27; original emphasis). Although this comment was made over a century ago with regards to the Ontario Government’s decision not to extend the commission of Canadian painter Edmund Morris, the phenomena still persists as documentary photographers frequently search elsewhere for community, training, and commissions. The Vancouver School of Photography (comprised of Fred Herzog, Jeff Wall, Greg Girard, among others) belongs to what Joel Garreau calls the region of “Ecotopia” (1981)—the coastal region of British Columbia, rather than Western Canada. Vancouverites do not experience the cold and extended winters that fall over Western Canada. They do not photograph the anxiety of seclusion and the serenity of a never-ending sky offered by the open prairies and plains. Because the West was so recently settled, it arguably lacks a strong photographic identity. Small Western towns illustrate this claim. Only recently have a majority of rural communities celebrated their centennials; Alberta and Saskatchewan became official provinces in 1905 and Manitoba extended to its current boundaries only in 1912. Historically speaking, from the time of colonial settlement, the West has been a region of raw-material resource extraction. The process continues today with most of the West’s industries focused around primary resources (energy, grain, and lumber-based industries) rather than

tertiary industries. The nuanced process of industry creation and factors of assembly are outside the scope of this paper, but it should be noted that this economic condition is bound by present demographics. A small population in a vast geographical space does not yield the same creative specialization as high-density areas (Knudsen, et al. 462). However, the concept of *creative density* is a modernist perspective and loses potency in post-industrialist economies through the proliferation of information communication technologies (ICTs) and an increase in global connectivity where the local meets the global (see Bathelt; Malmberg; Maskell). That is not to say that photographic-artists (documentarian and fine-art photographers rather than commercial photographers) did not historically operate in the Canadian West. The point worth stressing is that photographic-artists are forced to chose one of two mutually exclusive options: move elsewhere to seek training and access to community resources, or remain in the West and stagnate.

There are a number of striking examples of painters and photographers who chose to relocate in order to further their training, develop their skills, and find a community before returning to immortalize the area in pigment and silver gelatin. Emily Carr trained in San Francisco, London, and Paris (Francis 31) before returning home to British Columbia. Paul Kane, a self-taught painter who depicted scenes of Western Canada, was raised in Toronto and visited Europe in 1841 on the basis of a “painting study trip.” The painter Frederick Verner was born in Sheridan, Ontario and trained at Heatherly’s

Art School in London. Verner was renowned for painting images of Western Canada, including striking landscapes that depicted grazing bison. However, by some accounts, Verner had never seen a bison, further problematizing authentic representations of Western Canada. Photographer Geoffrey James, in a similar vein, operates as an outsider from Toronto. In 1988 James was invited by the Southern Alberta Art Gallery to create imagery of the community of Lethbridge as it underwent a period of accelerated expansion. James’ images, published in an artist monograph titled *Place: Lethbridge, City on the Prairie* (2003), provide a well-executed surface understanding of the community and its connection with its sub-plain landscape. To assert that James’ project provides a surface understanding is not to denigrate the work, but rather to describe his interpretation of that space from an outside perspective. James acknowledges this perspective when he states:

I worked over the period of a year, with four visits to the city, and had the luxury of time to reflect on what I was doing. In a sense, most of the photographic projects I embark upon are the same, in that, at their conclusion, I have accumulated almost enough knowledge to begin. (9)

James was not a native of Lethbridge, and no native of Lethbridge enjoyed the same prestige as the established Toronto artist. Similar to James' commission, the *Keepsafe* (1980) project, coordinated and conceptualized by Douglas Clark and Linda Wedman to document a variety of Albertan communities, also relied heavily on photographers either trained or originally from somewhere other than Alberta. The project was intended to "create statements about people and their environments by collecting photographs which represented a broad range of social and aesthetic sensibilities" (Clark and Wedman 11), and was accomplished by ten documentary photographers in conjunction with seven researchers. Each photographer was tasked with documenting a particular community or region. The purpose of the data collected by the researcher was to inform the photographers of the particularities of each community. Given the expansive scope of the project, photographers with varying training backgrounds and from a diverse set of locations were invited to participate. How photographers were chosen for the project is not discussed in the book; however, a review of the historical record of Albertan photographers active at this time indicates that the decision was partly based on a dearth of proficient documentary photographers residing in the province. Of the ten invited photographers, six were trained either fully or partially outside of the province (Gabor Szilasi, Ronnie Tessler, Mark Arneson, Douglas Curran, Hubert Hohn, and Lauren Dale), with the remaining four photographers either Alberta trained or self-taught.

Nowadays, given the limited availability of post-secondary photography courses in Alberta, aspiring photography students can either embark on a program of self-training, leave the province to train formally elsewhere, or some combination of the two. These examples highlight the precarious position not only of the photographic arts in Western Canada but also in the nation as a whole. This trend is still persistent, as the Fall 2016 edition of *Canadian Art* magazine featured 12 international artists with Canadian ties. In a section titled "Spotlight," the term "Satellites" is used to describe Canadian artists working abroad. Editor-in-Chief David Balzer describes the term as a way to "describe Canadian artists working abroad, and non-Canadian artists whose practices do or have orbited around this country" (par. 2). On a personal note, when I had reached the limit of self-taught photography, I left the west for London to pursue graduate work at Goldsmiths University in visual sociology. Gardiner also left for New York to train and to be part of a photography community:

Aside from really wanting to live in New York, I also felt the experience I had there with regards to the art and artists I was interested in, and everything that came with that... I suppose it is true that it was an education I could not get while I was going to school in Western Canada, but it was more that I was excited to go to a new place and live in another country and be in a city, which to me, while I was there, seemed like the center of the world. (Personal Correspondence, 4.1.2016)

A photographer gravitating towards larger centers is not strictly a Canadian phenomenon but represents a larger movement in art communities in North America. For instance, North Dakota raised photographer Sarah Christianson moved away to do "what a lot of young artists feel they must do, and I moved to New York City" (Personal Correspondence, 20.9.2016). Echoing Gardiner and Christianson's concerns, my interests aligned with developing my visual practice and relocating to a vibrant photographic culture milieu, something more easily obtained in the cultural powerhouses of World Cities than in the Canadian west (Soja & Kanai). The desire to be located at the epicenter of an emerging or established artistic community is particularly attractive. For instance, anecdotally, it is harder to cross paths with a Londoner, or a Berliner in Winnipeg, Manitoba, or Elbow, Saskatchewan, than in other international culture and art hubs, like New York, which is home to a vibrant international arts community.

On The Return

Writing in *Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot remarked, "...the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time" (38). Eliot describes the psyche's ability to interpret events experienced afar and how these events are carried back home and leveraged to create new meaning in a once familiar space. The journey changes the individual and their understanding of their once familiar environments. These environments operate as sites of reflection, both for the self and the community. Often an underexplored topic, the narrative of return is a constant refrain in photography. For instance, photographer Raymond Jones, speaking about her project *Deep South Paradise*, stated, "It wasn't until I paid my dues in New York City and moved back to the South that I came to understand the rich, complicated cultural melting pot that is Southern culture. And I fell in love with all of it" (Jones). Lesser-known photographer Maryanne Gobble, commenting on her return to Brooking, Oregon, said she "moved away because it offered nothing. I continue to come back because it offers everything" (Gobble). Sarah Christianson, returning from New York, felt a renewed sense of place. She began to work on her project *Homeplace* (2013) and was able to tap into a perspective that leaving had afforded her:

I saw my home with a fresh perspective. It was suddenly clear to me that our family heritage was crumbling: my grandmother had sold her farmhouse and moved to town, my siblings had also moved away for jobs, and my parents were the only ones left out there. (Personal Correspondence, 20.9.2016)

A project that relies on a combination of archives and creative practice, Christianson's *Homeplace* is a deeply sentimental work produced from the perspective of a long-time insider. Gardiner's work echoes similar sentiments with his photographs expressing a level of intimacy typical of photographers with a long and sustained familiarity with a space. Expressed throughout Gardiner's work are questions of space, perceived normalcy, and built environment. Gardiner's *Western Canada* and my own *Out West* both evoke notions of the delicate relations between landscape, heritage, and built environment, balanced between a proud rural history and an uncertain future. Both works are as much about the past as they are about the future, and certainly they are as much about understanding these temporalities as they are about understanding our own place within them as photographers local to the region. As Gerald McMaster writes, "'returning home' means contributing and reconnecting to local culture. Living and working in a changing world while maintaining a sense of identity is to recognize the importance of preserving fundamental philosophies and principles" (29). To the local photographer, the perseverance of fundamental philosophies and ideas occurs through their visual documentation. Through documentation, an avenue for critique and reflection

emerges, for the self as well as the community. For the photographer, this process operates as exposing the residue of lived memories and, like silver halide, these events cling to the negative, creating attachment. This creates a form of "place attachment," a cognitive process in which emotional bonds are formed between the landscape and its inhabitants (see Manzo & Devine-Wright). This process establishes "powerful aspects of human life that inform our sense of identity, create meaning in our lives, facilitate community and influence action" (Manzo & Devine-Wright). The process of place attachment is frequently visualized through landscape or environmental portraiture or through photo-elicitation and resident-employed photography by researchers (see Stedman, et al.). Photography of landscapes operates on a number of levels—personal, local, regional, national, and global. The Western Canadian image of Banff, Alberta will hold a multiplicity of meanings for different groups (residents versus tourists, for example). Rachel Sailor, author of *Meaningful Places* (2014), explains that "the stories that follow do more than just shed light on how western settlers used the photographic image as a settlement tool; they also illustrate how local and regional understandings of places have a fundamental impact on those places now, and how, taken as a whole, they shape modern concepts of the West" (xix-xx). A common theme in *Meaningful Places* is the process of place attachment and place creation through photography. Imbedded in this process is the destruction of Aboriginal place attachments for the place creation and subsequent attachment of

Euro-American settlers. Photography helped write the land as empty and by extension created a culture of ownership, plenitude, and expanse that becomes increasingly interrogated in the later decades of the 20th century, as discussed briefly in Liz Wells' *Land Matter* (2011) and Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen's *Photography and Landscape* (2012).

Following Manzo & Devine-Wright's definition of place attachment, Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia specifies how bonds are established between an individual and a place. In *Future of Nostalgia*, Boym builds upon this attachment by discussing how the emphasis is placed on nostos (the return home) with a purpose of rebuilding the lost home—in other words, to “patch up the memory gaps.... [This] category of nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth” (154). Framing nostalgia as the pursuit of truth rebinds it to the local documentary photographer who pursues an authentic visual representation through their lens—an authenticity that can be arguably found in *Western Canada*, *Crown Ditch*, as well as *Out West* due to the photographer's familiarity with the region. The photographer in search of truth often finds a tension between the past and the present. For the restorative nostalgic, “the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot” (Boym 49). For the photographer, the past is something that must be interrogated through a series of snapshots. Here lies the importance of the returning photographer. Taking Gardiner's images for example, we can detect an element of intimacy and knowing within them. It can be argued that Gardiner

is an informed insider, that this is his landscape and therefore he commands a particular expertise, and that a “visual weightiness” is implied in his imagery. “Visual weightiness” here means not visual composition but the elements within the frame that extend the meaning of the image. These are subtle but ultimately very important details for understanding rural space. In one of Gardiner's portraits (image 4) we see a man posing outside a community hall. Community halls are ubiquitous in rural and urban spaces in Canada; however, in rural communities they act as particularly significant points of meeting—dating back to weddings and dances where the rural community would walk or drive (by horse and later by car) for kilometres to attend a community event. In another one of Gardiner's images we see a house with a rusted carcass of an automobile (image 8), the strong composition strengthened by the knowledge that the rural is often home to car graveyards (Zeleny).

This level of expertise lay fallow in each inhabitant, and may become recruited by an individual's return with the intent to interpret the space with a renewed vision. In the case of both *Western Canada* and *Out West* this operation is twofold. First, both Gardiner and I return from abroad to photograph and, through this return, we acknowledge our new appreciation of the space, setting out to capture it. Second, as our photographic journeys end, we return home and once again arrive renewed, our understanding of home transformed. Gardiner's images express the ability to forage for a series of ideal images representing space. His ability to capture these moments is his cultural familiarity (internal element)

coupled with his technical proficiency (external element). Through this pairing Gardiner is able to photograph with familiarity and visual potency what a stranger would find difficult to observe. Gardiner expresses this relation when he writes:

A place that had been so familiar to me never appeared to be so sparse, quiet and vast and at the same time I thought it was extremely beautiful, which I had never acknowledged in that way before. Instead of the feeling that I always had growing up, wanting to leave, I returned actually valuing the experiences I had of where I grew up. (Personal Correspondence, 4.1.2016)

The above passage foregrounds Gardiner's appreciation of his prairie upbringing. Through *nostos*, Gardiner finds pride in his roots and this process reaffirms his attachment to the Canadian West. My own project *Out West* was particularly propelled by a nostalgic drive to reconcile memory with the contemporary—a project that was as occupied with “excavating the past as it is with recoding the present” (Coverley 14). Gardiner's work undertakes a similar conversation between the past and present and, because of his personal history in the area, he is able to bring both temporalities into visual dialogue. This is further coupled with his “renewed vision,” established by taking a leave and returning, along with the skills he gained elsewhere to realize this vision for others. For in the end, photography is not simply about rendering a space in a visual manner, but sharing a unique vision with a community.

Ending With Images

The following is a selection of images from Gardiner's *Western Canada* and my ongoing project *Crown Ditch*. The images have been selected and sequenced collaboratively by Gardiner and myself and represent a mutual reading of the Canadian West. The images are curated in such a way that the narrative space operates between and across the images—with each photographer's images speaking to others in the selection. The credits for each image are listed at the end of the paper. We urge readers to view the images as a narrative of Western Canada that operates as a dialogical exercise, intended to draw the reader into the imaginative work of placemaking.



Image 1



Image 2





Image 3

Image 4



Image 5



Image 6

Image 7



LEAVING TO RETURN:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY IN WESTERN CANADA



Image 8



Image 9



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



Image 15

LEAVING TO RETURN:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY IN WESTERN CANADA



Image 16



Image 17

Image 18



Image 19

Image 20





Works Cited

- Adler, Judith. "Travel As Performed Art." *American Journal of Sociology* 94.6 (1989): 1366-1391. Print.
- Balzer, David. "On the Politics of Staying in Canada." *Canadian Art*. 15 Sept. 2016. Web. 21 Sept. 2006. <<http://canadianart.ca/features/satellites-editorial/>>
- Bathelt, Harald, Anders Malmberg, and Peter Maskell. "Clusters and Knowledge: Local Buzz, Global Pipelines and the Process of Knowledge Creation." *Progress in Human Geography* 28.1 (2004): 31-56.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. Print.
- Clark, Douglas, and Linda Wedman. *Keepsake – Selections From the Archives of A Photographic Project: Alberta 1980*. Calgary: Western Emerging Arts Calgary, 1981. Print.
- Coverley, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. 1993. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Eliot, Thomas S. *Four Quartets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1943. Print.
- Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver, B.C: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992. Print.
- Foster-Rice, Greg and John Rohrbach. *Reframing The New Topographics*. Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2010. Print.
- Garreau, Joel. *The Nine Nations of North America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.
- Giblett, Rodney J, and Juha P. Tolonen. *Photography and Landscape*. Bristol: Intellect, 2012. Print.
- Gobble, Maryanne. "Place Where You Live: Brookings, Oregon." *Orion Magazine*. 3 Feb. 2015. Web. 04 Feb. 2016. <<https://orionmagazine.org/place/brookings-oregon/>>
- James, Geoffrey and Rudy Wiebe. *Place: Lethbridge, a City on the Prairie*. Vancouver, B.C: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002. Print.
- Jones, Raymond M. "Raymond McCrea Jones." *Crusade for Art.*, n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.crusadeforart.org/raymond-mccrea-jones>>
- Krause, Monika. "The Ruralization of the World." *Public Culture* 25.2 (2013): 233-248. Print.
- Kalant, Amelia. *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka: Native Belonging and Myths of Postcolonial Nationhood in Canada*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 29-85. Print.
- Knudsen, Brian, Richard Florida, Kevin Stolarick, Gary Gates. "Density and Creativity in US Regions." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98.2 (2008): 461-478.
- Manzo, Lynne and Patrick Devine-Wright. *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*. London: Routledge, 2014. Print.
- McMaster, Gerald. *Reservation X: The Power of Place in Aboriginal Contemporary Art*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998. Print.
- Moore, Brian, Peter K. Gould, and Priya Kuriako. *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1976. Print.
- Robinson, Marilynne. "A Great Amnesia." *Harper's Magazine*. May Edition, 2008. 20-21. Print.
- Sailor, Rachel M. *Meaningful Places: Nineteenth-century Photography and the Local Landscapes of the American West*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Print.
- Seamon, David. "Place Attachment and Phenomenology: The Synergistic Dynamism of Place." *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*. Eds. Lynne Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright. London: Routledge, 2014. 11-22. Print.
- Siegfried, André. Henry H. Hemming, and Doris Hemming. *Canada*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1937. Print.
- Soja, Edward, and Miguel Kanai. "The Urbanization of the World." *The Endless City: The Urban Age Project by The London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank's Alfred Herrhausen Society*. Eds. Richard Burdett, and Deyan Sudjic. London: Phaidon, 2007. Print.
- Steadman, Richard, Benoni L. Amsden, Thomas M. Beckley, and Keith G. Tidball. "Photo-Based Methods for Understanding Place Meanings as Foundations of Attachment." *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*. Eds. Lynne Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright. London: Routledge, 2014. 112-124. Print.
- Straw, Will. "Cross-Border Visualities and the Canadian Image." *Imaginations Journal* 1.1 (2011): 24-39.
- Wells, Liz. *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. Print.
- Zeleny, Kyler. *Out West*. Taipei: The Velvet Cell, 2014. Print.

Image List

Image 1: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled, 2015

Image 2: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 3: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 4: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 5: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 6: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 7: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 8: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 9: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 10: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 11: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 12: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 13: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 14: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 15: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 16: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 17: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 18: Thomas Gardiner, *Western Canada*, Untitled,

Image 19: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015

Image 20: Kyler Zeleny, *Crown Ditch & The Prairie Castle*, Untitled, 2015