THE REFEATURED LANDSCAPE:
NOTES ON THE AESTHETICS OF DIGITAL VIDEO

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the emergence of postimpressionist painting and the breakdown of the camera obscura as a model for the fixed stable capacity of human vision. This relationship is posited as a possible framework for understanding digital composite-images in a broader cultural context. The construction of my video-conceptualist work <u>Hope BC, Chainsaw Carving Capital of the World</u> is situated as the primary research object. Writings by Paul Virilio on vision will be used to construct a relationship between vision, media and the virtualization of experience that is inherent to technologically mediated environments. The idea of the space-constructed image is extrapolated from the writings of Jonathan Crary, in particular, the relationship he constructs between cultural practices, technological innovation and the aesthetics of representation acts as a model in which the composite-image can be examined in terms of a larger field of cultural practices.

Dedication

To Eliot.

Acknowledgements

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1 Material Space and Imagined Space

"I have a story inside me..." – Vito Acconci [1]

<u>Hope BC, Chainsaw Carving Capital of the World</u>, subsequently referred to as <u>HBC</u>, is a video that examines the desire for authenticity in a culture which is characterized by the simulation or virtualization of experience, while exposing the artificiality of the medium of video to catalogue this experience. It explores the possibilities for the openly subjective post-photographic image, which is characterized by synthesis and manipulation, to be able to articulate this experience. The connection between the articulation of experience (narrative) and representational practices (form), as they evolve within a broader set of cultural conditions are at the core of this thesis.

I will use the writings of Jonathan Crary, in particular the relationship he constructs between cultural practices, technological innovation and the aesthetics of representation to act as a framework in which the process of making the video and the research involved in this text will be integrated. Just as Crary places a single work of art at the center of each of his chapters, I will explore both the process of construction and the aesthetic surface of <u>HBC</u> as the lens through which to focus and filter my ideas. It should be noted that <u>HBC</u> was not created as an articulation or as a demonstration of the concepts in this thesis but instead can be seen as coming from the same field of interests.

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[1] Vito Acconci, "10 Packed Minutes," narr., <u>Sound</u>, 10 Nov 2004 <<u>http://www.ubu.com/sound/acconci.html</u>>.

While this thesis is primarily concerned with constructing a framework in which these interests may be articulated, the video comes from the desire to surface the sensation of living within these fields of events. The video strives to find a line of empathy or recognition with the viewer as opposed to being an explanation or demonstration of ideas discussed.

While Crary will be used as a theoretical model, the writings of Paul Virilio will be used to define Western postmodernity as a situation in which the virtualization or abstraction of experience has been a pervasive condition. This virtualization will be explored as both a theoretical model and as a first person-experience which informs the construction of the video. Virilio makes a connection between the dissolution of the time and place in which an event takes place and the immediacy of new telecommunications technologies. He equates this loss of duration as the loss of our immediate horizon (both mentally and pictorially), which constructs a stable ground from which we can participate and/or construct meaning. Landscape for Virilio is not just an image or a place but a fundamental condition for human happiness.[2]

One feature of Western post-industrial society over the last twenty years has been the collapsing of distance. As has been mentioned, Virilio sees this collapsing of distance in a durational sense. However, It can also be seen as a broader cultural phenomenon. Distances that used to exist between the sites in which cultural meaning are derived, such as media and event, have also evaporated. The boundaries between entertainment and

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[2] In this instance I am equating Virilio's use of the term "horizon" to that of landscape. He defines the term "horizon" as both what are visible to the human eye and as a background from which figures can appear (as in painting). Paul Virilio, <u>Open Sky</u> (London: Verso, 1997) 1.

news, politics and fiction, marginality and popular culture are lost; each experience

interchangeable. In my artistic practice I construct a critical distance in which this loss of

actual distance can be seen, measured, or felt.

Once I have defined the parameters in which I will evaluate the pictorial forms in HBC, I

will insert it into the historical language and fabric of the "defeatured landscape", tracing

a direct lineage in my work to the use of the technology of the camera and the social

conditions of late Modernism, in which the "defeatured landscape" is said to have been

able to be articulated. Scott Watson identifies in "Discovering the Defeatured

Landscape" the development of an "urban semiotic or lexicon" which is able to

articulate, through the aesthetics of the "artless" photograph, a modernist industrialized

landscape (Watson 256).[3] The defeatured landscape first appeared in the work of a group

of Vancouver artists in the late 1960's and lasted (in its first iteration) until the mid 1970s

only to reappear in the 1980s and remains influential until this day. By drawing on the

history of the defeatured my intention is neither to rehash an already well-documented

history of Vancouver's photo-conceptualist practices; nor to draw out a new untapped

reading of these works. I will explore the relationship between the medium of

photography and the articulation of a modernist landscape as the basis to articulate the

possibilities of a new landscape, a landscape refeatured.

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[3] "For painting in B.C., the representability of the new industrialized landscape is the most important problem, and the new post-conceptual pictorial photography the most crucial development and challenge; painting's inability to recognize these facts and to respond to them has condemned it to a secondary and minor role to this day". Robert Linsley, "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia," Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991) 235.

1.1   The Landscape Image

The shifting to a more fluid, or as some would term fragmented, sense of place due to the increased use of simultaneous communication technologies, such as cell phones, chat rooms, e-mail, etc., is having a profound effect on our sense of the world around us and our place within it. Through an investigation of the landscape image as it is formed in HBC, there is the possibility of collapsing critical distance, or "making visible", the often invisible shifts that are occurring between ourselves, place and time (About Making Landscapes, Wall 12).[4] Often, however, Landscapes obscure this relationship.

Robert Linsley, in "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia", articulates how traditional landscape paintings serve to hide the relationship of urban centres and their reliance on, and exploitation of, nature as resource (Linsley 229). He writes, "distance is a fundamental constituent of landscape painting in the modern world, for landscape painting is a product of the urban experience of nature as spectacle" (Linsley 229). The distance in landscape is the distance between the presented image and what it serves to hide, or the unspoken *other* that is implied but never named. However, the collapsing of this distance, in effect constructing a critical distance can also be seen as recurrent theme within contemporary art, from close to far, inner and outer, that landscape can reveal as well as hide.

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[4] While I am referencing Jeff Wall's use of this phrase, it is commonly attributed to Paul Klee's affirmation, "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible." Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," Theories of Modern Art, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 182.

Figure 1. By Permission, Jeff Wall, *The Pine on the Corner* (1990), Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver.

If the landscape image is a double-edged image, then what is found on the reverse side is the subject. That while landscapes often exclude or relegate to a secondary role the individual or group, they reveal an implied social order. Jeff Wall, in <u>About Making Landscape</u>, articulates his own photo-conceptualist landscape works as being involved with "making visible the distance we must maintain between ourselves in order that we may recognize each other for what, under constantly varying conditions, we appear to be" (Wall 12). It is this "visible distance" or threshold in which we can recognize ourselves in concert with a larger synthetic social order that I seek to explore through the landscape genre.

Landscape is a way to work out what type of place I live in, to understand the decisions we are making, and that society is making. It is a way to understand how these decisions

will define what type of person I am, how I experience the world, my body, my sense of self and others. This is a field of some debate at this particular historical moment. Concepts that have been secure markers of self, others, place or meaning, are in flux. The world just doesn't look or feel like the place I grew up.

This is worth noting, as I am not very old, only in my early 30's, but I have found myself telling mythologized stories to slightly younger friends of what it was like when the first bank machine came to my neighbourhood, how it felt to be alive before cell phones or the Internet and, most poignantly, how it felt to be able to still be ahead or outside of commercialism. It was before counter-culture had been fully co-opted by corporations like the Gap, branding and cultural marketing was just beginning to surface as our most viable form of social identity, and when I envisioned my world, I still thought of my neighbourhood. In short I was on the cusp of the last analogue generation, and I feel that difference. I feel it in my bones.

1.2   HBC: Project Background

I watch; Eliot drives. I point out deer, a small vaguely familiar creature, open fields, gas stations. I feel the window of the car. I roll it down a bit, sitting sideways as the scene rolls by. We stop, we start, we stand on the side of the road. We watch television in a motel, sneak out at night, and watch the stars.

Three years ago Eliot and I began taking progressively longer car trips across BC and then across the prairies to Toronto and back. If we only had a week-end, we would drive to Hope, which is historically and actually the last stop before we drop off the edge into the expanse of the Interior. Hope communicates the overwhelming sense of being on

the way to somewhere else. It was this *on-the-way-thereness* that all these trips had in common, no matter how long or how short.

These trips were motivated by a vague desire to touch the outdoors. While the car offered the possibility to leave, in the end the surface and the movement of the car supplemented the possibility of any non-technologically mediated experience. We stopped at campsites, small towns, turn offs; we pointed to wild animals, stood beside fences, bought firewood. Each of these activities seemed to be on the way to somewhere else, never rooted in the moment. When we stopped, there was the pulling desire to get back in the car, to get going, to arrive.

Through these trips I became interested in layers or surfaces of experience and how they fold in on and interact with each other. The inside of the car, the window, the road, the landscape all occupied distinctly different spatial coordinates— the still body, or the observing body from inside the car to be the most *natural*. I found a strong correlation between the experience of viewing from the car's windscreen and the viewing of other screens, such as the computer or television screen. The windscreen was a world of sensation rather than experience, of instantaneous memory, such as a photograph, where the before or after moment is filled in, in reverse, after the moment has passed.

Through these trips I began to question how I had been conditioned for this type of abstracted viewing or consuming experience, to question why I felt more comfortable with the world through the windscreen as oppose to a world of participation. Intellectually I found this abstracted viewing experience particularly uncomfortable as it was caught up with the desire to supersede it. These trips formed a physical site in which a complex set of desires between artifice and an imagined reality took place.

1.3   Perceptual Goal of HBC

In 1998 at the Or Gallery Artist Run Society as part of the exhibition Monument Valley,
Scott Myles, "Here, There and Everywhere In-between" was on display. The memory of
this work has been influential in terms of the overall effect which I wanted to achieve
with the video. It is the memory of seeing this work and not the actual work that I will
draw from in this instance, as it is the memory that has guided me.

To my memory the work consisted of two photographs that looked at first glance to be
identical. They where obviously vacation photographs, the kind that students take while
travelling around Europe between high school and university. The first image consisted
of a young man smiling in front of a billboard, head tilted back, faded baseball cap on.
The visible part of the billboard constructed a backdrop of rolling desert hills, making it
appear as if he was in this landscape. What was obscured in this image by his body, was
the Marlboro man, sitting on his horse, smoking a cigarette. The second photo was
identical in composition, the young man standing in front of the rolling desert hills, cap
on, same tilt of the head, smiling. However in this photo everything was new, the cap,
his clothes, even the crispness to the landscape behind. I spent several minutes, my eyes
bouncing back-and-forth, trying to reconcile these two disparate yet identical images.
Each seemed to cancel out the possibility of the other's existence.

The second image was an analogue reconstruction of the first. In the second, the subject
of the photograph is standing somewhere in a desert in the United States, in the exact
location and position that the Marlboro advertisement was taken. The artist had
engineered himself backward into a real landscape from the illusion of the first. Even the
clothes he had been wearing in the first had been professionally remade, the illusion

seamless. What remained with me from this image was the sense of spatial distortion that took place in those first few moments of viewing, how the images travelled from being the same, to moving apart, to coming back to the same, and then to a final dissolution of the artifice. It is this sense of perceptual shifting which I wanted to capture in the last scene of the video, a moment in which the spectator loses his/her perceptual position to the work, only to have the image shift from one spatial relationship to another.

1.4   Practice Led Research: Methodologies and Approach

Anne Douglas et al., in their paper <u>Research as Practice: Positioning the Practitioner as Researcher</u> seeks to establish some clarity around the definitions used and the types of research being done in the fields of art, and design. They identify three types of practice-based research. They are (1) personal research, (2) critical research and (3) critical practice, and formal research (Douglas, Scopa and Gray). The combined effort of the development of the video project <u>HBC</u> and the writing of this thesis employ aspects of what Douglas et al. terms "personal research" and "critical practice and formal research". Douglas et al. awards no hierarchy or incremental value to the research community in any of these approaches.

The central argument of Douglas et al.'s research is that these research routes be clearly identified and that the methodological practices behind them transparent. That one of the major difficulties facing research in art and design today is that the same language is used to identify different types of practice research (Douglas, Scopa and Gray). The basic criteria for "personal research" is that the work reveals results through either professional secondary sources (such as sketchbook, interview, etc.) or as evidenced in

the final work. In this instance the "embodied knowledge within the artwork relies on the ability of the research community to understand the particular artwork and the research within it" (Douglas, Scopa and Gray). The context in which this research is shared with the community is generally through that of public exhibition.

"Critical practice and formal research" is more closely aligned with the goals and dissemination practices of science and technology. Its basic criteria are that it takes place within an academic community and employs, "recognisable and relevant research skills as a means of being able to make a contribution to a shared body of knowledge through a recognisable and generic process— i.e. statement of research aims and objectives, contextualisation of these through a literature review, identification and description of appropriate methodology for addressing the stated aims, analysis and conclusions" (Douglas, Scopa and Gray). While my research fulfils the basic criteria above, I consider my work as a blend between this route and "personal research".

In Douglas et al.'s "critical practice and formal research" model, they place an emphasis on the artwork serving as the primary source in which data is generated to support the research aims. In the examples cited, the artwork engaged the audience in a participatory manner and this participation was evaluated in much the same way as field research in the social sciences. They illustrated this process through examples such as, "Collaborative Drawing" which used video and still photography documentation to explore drawing as a tool that can facilitate collaboration in different environments (Douglas, Scopa and Gray). HBC does not engage the audience in a participatory manner, nor do I quantitatively or qualitatively evaluate audience response.

The construction of the video work HBC clearly falls into "personal research". The research was conducted through the evolution of the artwork and is communicated to the audience through the act of viewing. I found this to be a highly rigorous process, which required continual reinvestigation of the aims of the work, in-depth questioning of how, and if they were being realized, and stringent adherence to both self and peer review. The video project became a reflective tool from which a literature review could be tested, analysed and expanded into new areas of research. I believe there are certain advantages to using practice as a primary form of research, in that it allows for other forms of awareness and critical analyses that may be missing from a purely literature based review. An example from my own work is that while I would have been able to look at and define a space constructed-image from a variety of contexts (video games, films, etc.), I would not, in the same way, have been able to evaluate its historical relevance as opposed to faddishness and accessibility. My critical engagement with a work of art that aimed to *speak to* a certain cultural moment allowed for an in-depth and personal evaluation of this form. This is not to imply that literature based research is in someway limited, just that both approaches offer unique research opportunities.

As I have taken several different avenues to develop this thesis, academic voice has become an important aspect of how these practices are distinguishable, and also influential, on each other within the writing. There are three distinct voices which are used throughout this thesis: (1) personal reflection, (2) personal analysis (as in video description), and (3) reflective academic. Each of these different voices is chosen for its effectiveness in both communicating the concept at hand and clarifying the merit and understanding of the ideas within myself.

1.5   Theoretical Framework

Later in this thesis the aesthetic qualities of the video-surface will be explored in relationship to the late work of Cézanne, from 1900 onward. Cézanne sought to abandon the historical codes of perspective and the type of worldview they embodied for one that took into account the role of the observer. This will act as a framework in which the space-constructed image can be explored in relationship to new types of perceptual experience brought on by the increased use of telecommunications technologies.

In the introduction to his book <u>Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture</u>, Jonathan Crary identifies the emergence of what he terms "space-drained images" by Manet, Seurat, and Cézanne (1879-1900) as part of a larger set of cultural practices which redefined the subject in terms of an observer's capacity for paying attention. These paintings break with the cohesive space of Euclidian geometry, which had previously dominated painting and are characterized by "disruptions, vacancies, and rifts within a perceptual field ... " (<u>Suspensions</u>, Crary 9). Crary places the aesthetic practices on which these artworks are based in the same field of events (and not just symptoms of) that redefined the subject in terms of an observer's capacity for paying attention. According to Crary, Western Modernity has resulted in a dramatic shift in how we look at, listen to, or concentrate on an object in the last 150 years (<u>Suspensions</u>, Crary 1). He identifies these shifts as being brought about by the advent of photography/film, the modern production of labour, and a set of institutional practices that identified a narrowing field of perceptual states as *normal.*

<u>Suspensions</u> is a continuation of an earlier book by Crary, <u>Techniques of the Observer,</u> in which he lays the foundation for his argument challenging the accepted narrative

around the historical construction of vision. Unlike most histories of vision, which posit the break with Renaissance perspective as happening in the 1870's-80's with modernist painting, Crary identifies this break as apart of an already established process which begins in the 1820's-30's with the camera obscura. According to Crary, there is a dominant narrative of vision in the twentieth century that "goes something like the following: with Manet, impressionism, and/or postimpressionism, a new model of visual representation and perception emerges that constitutes a break with several centuries of another model of vision, loosely definable as Renaissance, perspectival or normative" (Techniques, Crary 3). He argues that the site of this break is not to be measured by changes in representation but in the formation of a new type of perceiving subject.

On the first page of the introduction to Suspensions, Crary states that while many theorists in the twentieth century have focused on the idea of "reception in a state of distraction" he argues that modern distraction can only be seen in relationship in the rise of attentive norms and practices (Suspensions, Crary 1). While Crary evolves this new subject over the course of his two books, at the core of his argument is a subject remade by the growing influx of images, commodities, and signs that has characterized consumer capitalism since the nineteenth century. While he focuses his argument on the late nineteenth century, he reminds us that through our current cultural obsession with the treatment of attention disorders such as ADD (attention deficit disorder) attention remains an important category of institutional power (Suspensions, Crary 35). We are left with a perceiving subject whose life is increasingly characterized by new levels of distraction on the one hand and more strident disciplinary controls on the other.

Crary sums up the primary art works of his study, In the Conservatory by Manet (1879), Parade de cirque by Seurat (1887-1888), and Pines and Rocks by Cézanne (around 1900),

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as having "an engagement with a general problem of perceptual synthesis and with the interrelated binding and disintegrative possibilities of attention" (Suspensions, Crary 9). He also states his simultaneous interest in "how these space-drained (but hardly flat) images are inseparable from emerging machine forms of 'realism' and optical verisimilitude" (Suspensions, Crary 9). If I turn Crary's statement around so that it fits my own project, I would pose the question: are *space-constructed* images (images which are produced through digital compositing but are hardly abstract) inseparable from emerging digital forms of post-realism and optical disenfranchisement? This question is related to my broader field of interest: how aesthetic forms in art emerge from within a broader field of cultural experiences and are insightful research objects that reveals the often-obscured subject as it is changed by technological invention.

This research has been informed by Crary's approach to perception as being conditioned by external forces; however, as I will be exploring a very different field of events than Crary, it will require substantively different methodologies and methods of approach. It is also worth noting that my work exhibits more differences from Crary than similarities. Rather than my work being seen as an updating of Crary's framework to apply to a more contemporary field of objects, my approach could be more accurately understood as writing through Crary. In this I do not propose to cover the range or to have the same underlying intentions as Crary but to use his initial statement to draft a relationship between the social integration of new technologies and an evaluation of representational practices in the image.

1.5.1 The Space-Drained Image and Perspective Codes

A starting point is the relationship Crary constructs between the pictorial surface of the paintings by Manet, Seurat and Cézanne and machine vision. While Crary is careful to articulate the distance between these three works, the untying of the mimetic codes of Renaissance or classical perspective is central to all three. That is, each is "drained of" the depth that these techniques construct; space no longer conforms either aesthetically or conceptually to the observer's relationship to an external world that these forms imply.

In the first two chapters of Techniques, Crary charts the historical course that vision moves in the nineteenth century, from a classical stable model to one that is determined by the instabilities of the human body. He constructs the camera obscura as both a technological object and as a site in which cultural beliefs manifest about the nature of human vision (Techniques, Crary 31). Epistemologically the camera obscura has two important features. The first is that the observer is isolated from the physical world, and the second is that there exists a pre-given external world available for observation. In this model vision is removed from the physiology of the body; there exists an unwavering eye which discovers an unflinching world. In this worldview we can rely on the purity of our observations to form a stable, coherent interpretation of the nature of the physical world. In the nineteenth century, however, the eye turns to look inward; the external world becomes conditioned by the eye's own limits, gaps and movements.

The technique of representing space in the image through perspective embodied this view of the world as both stable and pregiven. However, anyone who has ever attempted to learn to draw apples that look like apples has been confronted with the

stark difference between perceptual space and perspectival space. Errors are usually attributed to the student's inability to see correctly and not to the artificiality of the means. Erwin Panofsky, in his book Perspective as Symbolic Form, outlines how perspectival, or mathematical space is not only incorrect, but relies on two false assumptions: "[that] we see with a single and immobile eye, and second, that the planar cross section of the visual pyramid can pass for an adequate reproduction of our optical image" (Panofsky 30).

Panofsky goes on to outline how perspectival space transforms psychophysical space to one in which there is a fundamental discrepancy between reality and its construction. He claims perspective space should be understood as both a set of conventions and as a "triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real" (Panofsky 67).

> In much recent theoretical writing, the idea of the fixed (and usually monocular) eye has been posed as a formative element of classical systems of reorientation, functioning to arrest duration and change in order to achieve a conceptual mastery of phenomena. However, I am suggesting the problematic and contrary notion that the fixed, immobile eye (at least as static as physiological conditions ever allow) is what annihilates the seeming "naturalness" of the world and discloses the provisional and fluid nature of visual experience, whereas the mobile glancing eye is what preserves the preconstructed character of the world. (Crary, Suspensions 300)

In Panofsky's and Crary's appraisal, the monocular eye of perspective is not just a convenient tool which enables a seeming extension of the physical world into the image; it transforms our understanding of our relationship to the physical world. Later in this thesis I will explore whether a new type of perspective, one that is based on distance implied by the computer screen, can be seen as having the same transformative effects.

1.5.2   Vision and Modernity

Vision in the nineteenth century becomes increasingly an object of knowledge in and of itself. The conditions of the outside world are seen more and more to depend on the physiological make-up of the human body. One of the more profound consequences of this is that both the external and the internal world became open to the same modes of empirical study (Techniques, Crary 70-73).

> By the 1840s there had been both (1) the gradual transferral of the holistic study of subjective experience or mental life to an empirical and quantitative plane, and (2) the division and fragmentation of the physical subject into increasingly specific organic and mechanical systems. (Crary, Techniques 81)

The shifting of the conception of perception from a mental process to one that is conditioned by the body was fundamental to both the new social imperatives of control and the incredible burst of creativity in the arts (Suspensions, Crary 13). As new economies restructured how we lived, worked, and played, inattention came to be regarded as a serious social problem.

As vision became relocated in the body "… two intertwined paths open up. One led out toward all the multiple affirmations of the sovereignty and autonomy of vision. … The other path was toward the increasing standardization and regulation of the observer… " (Techniques, Crary 150). The demands by technology on the human body to conform to modern forms of industrialized labour, coupled with an increasingly saturated visual field, led to a social climate in which sustained attentive focus became an economical imperative but was hopelessly impossible to maintain. Crary places the cultural and philosophical implications of these shifts into three categories:

There were those who posed attention as an expression of the conscious will of an autonomous subject for whom the very activity of attention, as choice, was part of that subject's self-constituting freedom. There were those who believed that attention was primarily a function of biologically determined instincts, unconscious drives... which inexorably shaped our lived relation to an environment. [5] And there were those who believed that an attentive subject could be produced and managed through the knowledge and control of external procedures of stimulation as well as a wide-ranging technology of "attraction". (Crary, Suspensions 25)

Crary demonstrates the camera obscura in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a model for the stable observer relationship to the external world. This changed in the nineteenth century when the camera obscura was reconceptualized in terms of the conditions of the body (such as retinal afterimages) as a part of a larger cultural shift which modernized the subject.

Without getting into the lively debates on the continuations and disruptions that may or may not be part of the move from an industrialized modern culture to an information-based Postmodern society, I see our *current situation* as germinating in the cultural shifts that Crary outlines. They are the continuous upheavals of the observer's relationship to the visual field within the twentieth century, that has opened the senses to ever expanding methods of control (the use of pharmaceuticals to treat Attention Deficit Disorder for example) and the continued pacification of the body to work with machines which require the smallest of movements (the computer mouse).

The writings of Crary will provide a measure or instance in which to formulate an analysis of the video as being part of a larger cultural shift; however, I will not be looking

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[5] In original text footnote number 33 (5) reads, "Freud, *Origins of Psycho-analysis*, p.417". Jonathon Crary, Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999) 25.

Disorder for example) and the continued pacification of the body to work with machines which require the smallest of movements (the computer mouse).

The writings of Crary will provide a measure or instance in which to formulate an analysis of the video as being part of a larger cultural shift; however, I will not be looking to *other factors* such as Postmodern production of labour and whether research on the physiology of the human body is still an active and political area of research. Through the relationship that Crary draws between pictorial forms and the subject as it is formed by society, I will explore the video-image in HBC to craft a moment in which the elusiveness of our historical moment can be felt.

1.5.2.1 Georges Seurat's Parade de cirque

Seurat's <u>Parade de cirque</u> is illustrative of this move from perspective codes to a dynamic and shifting relationship of the observer with the picture plane. While Crary gives a more detailed account of the multiple layers within this painting, two aesthetic shifts are of particular relevance in illustrating the move from depth to flatness (space-drainedness) which is found in Seurat's work: (1) the abstraction of colour (160-162) and (2) the planar division of pictorial space (187- 193). I will also show how these aesthetic constructions were inseparable from the social reorganization which characterized modernity (152- 155 and 176-179).

Seurat was the founder of Pointillism; a technique in which tiny abstract brushstrokes of colour coalesce into a figurative image when seen from a distance. This technique subverts the stable central eye which is the hallmark of perspective image, as the painting's form dissolves and reforms depending on the position of the viewer. The active observer demanded by Seurat's work prevents "a single perceptual organization of

the painting, and instead it subsists uncertainly between its elemental composition and a never fully completed fusion" (Suspensions, Crary 160). In Parade de cirque there is no binding organization of spatial cues that are found in perspectival space that construct a stable, fixed image. The elemental or mosaic of colour that forms the painting is always on the point of dissolution.

The illusion of a three dimensional image on the flat surface of a canvas relies on the use of orthogonal lines to create the sense of space receding away from the viewer. Seurat intentionally excluded all but one orthogonal line from Parade de cirque, creating a planar or flat division of space (Suspensions, Crary 188). This lack of depth is also heightened by the absence of modelling to the figures; the Pointillist technique doesn't require a consistent light source from which surfaces are constructed. Crary writes that the lack of depth indicators in Seurat's work has the effect of collapsing the stage area, denying the viewer one of the key elements of scenography, the ability to tell the literal position of the figures on the stage (Suspensions, Cary 189-190)— in effect, denying the observer a stable frame of reference for the figure/background relationship.

In Crary's framework the move to a pictorial surface that is *space* or perspective drained in Seurat's work is inseparable from the modernizing of the observer. Outlined earlier in this essay, this is a process which involved the modern production of labour, new discursive forms of power and increased knowledge of the workings of the human body. However, unlike other examples that have suggested simultaneous developments as part of a general field of events, writings by Seurat indicate that he was aware of this process and actively addressed it in his work. Seurat's writing "… makes this clear: how a sensory world is dismantled, resynthesized, and represented is inseparable from the problem of how a world of objects, individuals and social relations organizes itself"

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(Suspensions, Crary 176). Seurat actively researched and addressed the durational, subjective processing of external information as an aggregate of sensations in his paintings. His work denies the observer as homogenous surface onto which external stimulus can be projected.

This articulation of Seurat's work as an example of Crary's concept of the "space-drained image," will be used as a point from which to develop the criteria for the *space-constructed image*. In particular— how Seurat addressed perceptual experience within the pictorial construction of his work, and why this led to the abandonment of perspective. Seurat acts as a guide from which Crary's use of the term "space-drained" can be fully articulated.

2 The Space-Constructed Image

Whether we like it or not, for each and every one of us there is now a split in the representation of the World and so in its reality. A split between activity and interactivity, presence and tele-presence, existence and tele-existence. (Virilio, Open Sky 44)

The historical emergence of different pictorial conventions can be understood as a striving to express a shifting social construction of space and time. Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay <u>Forms of Time and of The Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetic</u> gives the name "chronotope" to express the interconnected of space and time in literature (which has since been adapted to any number of art forms). He identifies the difficulty in isolating how real historical time is assimilated into literature even though generic and novel forms do emerge (Bakhtin 84).

The Cubists were artists who recognized the need to bring the new twentieth century experience of time to the forefront of space. It isn't that time hadn't existed in images that relied on the seamlessness of Euclidean geometry; time is condensed into a single moment. Time is quite literally pushing the edges of the image into movement in the Cubist painting. The act of observing recorded.

> In the past hundred years artist first fragmented light (and thus time) with impressionism. ... The cubists fractured the space-time barrier itself, providing simultaneous images of the same moment from different points in space and multiple views of a single scene at various pints in time... . (Friedland and Boden 2)

The Cubist identified the stillness of the image and tried to bring the movement (time) into the inert medium of painting. They recognized, as did Mikhail Bakhtin, that space and time are "where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied" (Bakhtin 250).

The landscape image can also be seen as an art form that has developed both generic (reflecting dominant ideology) and counter techniques that both express and reveal the social construction of time and space. From the abstract to the realistic, aesthetic forms of the landscape image have struggled to assimilate "real" perceptual experience. Jeff Wall describes landscape images as "making visual the distances we must maintain between ourselves in order that we may recognize each other for what, under constantly varying conditions, we appear to be" (About Making Landscapes, Wall 12). That is, as we renegotiate our relationship to our world, we also renegotiate our relationship to ourselves; as we inscribe these inner shifts on the physical landscape, we construct images to help us recognize this place we call home.

2.1   The Logics of Perception

Crary pinpoints moments of intersection, across a diverse set of historical events through the lens of attention. He weaves together research on the optics of the eye, changing aesthetic forms, the needs of institutional power, and sites of machine vision to get a glimpse of the elusive nature of the subject as it has been modelled by modernity. In this dialogue mechanical forms of reproduction, such as the photograph, have not just been technical devices but sites that have both illuminated and transformed our knowledge of our internal and external world.

The ubiquitous use of digital imagery and its inherent abstraction from real world coordinates is a site in which perception has been destabilized. The space-constructed

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image is not just an aesthetic made possible by the flexibility inherent in digital editing tools but is a reflection of this perceptual shift; and by analysing the aesthetic structure of the video HBC, we can glimpse how new technologies are reshaping how we view and conceptualize the world around ourselves.

The connection that is made between machine forms of recording and display and human perception has a long and diverse history. There is a tendency to simply gloss this connection over, as if it is something that we all know by common sense and needs no further explanation. This connection is further confused by the lack of differentiation between optical devices, such as the lens, that enhances sight at the locations, and photographs or computers that display images separated from both the body and from the time and place they originated. The binding thread, between display and the lens, is how they displace the observer from a set point of view.

Without oversimplifying the vast amount of writing that has been done on the relationship between the eye and the machine, there are two separate relationships that need to be clarified. The first is the machine as a site of conceptualization, an external metaphor in which the eye (or any of our senses) can be understood in relation to the external world (such as the camera obscura) (which was detailed earlier in this essay), and the second is the effect of machine or digital imagery on memory and imagination. In the second instance, it is how viewing images change how we perceive the external world.

This begs the question, "what is this relationship between perception and machine vision?" In the first chapter of Paul Virilio's book The Machine Vision, he makes a connection between memory and place; in another book, Politics of the Very Worst, he

refers to this as "mental-mapping".[6] Virilio makes a connection between the ancient

memory practices of the "Method of Loci, an imaginary-mnemonics which consisted of

selecting a sequence of places, locations, that could easily be ordered in time and space"

and the "remapping" of memory which is taking place due to new forms of digital

transmission (Machine Vision, Virilio 3). An example of this "Method of Loci" would be

a mental image of a house where the contents of a speech are assigned to each room,

with perhaps finer details of the speech being ascribed to chair or a table.

According to Virilio, optical devices that first appeared in the Renaissance, such as the

telescope, and which have proliferated ever since, alter the way in which our memory is

topographically stored and retrieved. Our place-based mental-map is being eradicated by

one that is no longer dependant on our physical location; distance is becoming irrelevant.

One of the consequences of this is that the site of mental images no longer conforms to

a physical location. Virilio quotes Merleau-Ponty's "I can" principle to emphasise the

importance of vision connected to the limits of the human body's location in time and

space. Merleau-Ponty states that "everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least

within reach of my sight, marked on the map of the 'I can'" (Merleau-Ponty as quoted in

Machine Vision, Virilio 7). Virilio states that seeing at a distance is the dissolution of the

map of "I can"— the "I can" of sight is the world within reach. This is the fundamental

position of perspective images, that when the viewer is placed in the center of the

presented universe, everything seen is within the map of "I can". According to Virilio,

the logics of teletopography have destroyed this logic of perception. We no longer have

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[6] *"Mental-mapping* evolves with the transportation revolution. The faster I travel to the end of the world, the faster I come back, and the emptier my mental-map becomes." Paul Virilio, Politics of the Very Worst (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999) 42.

a relationship to the map of "I can". He equates this to the loss of the ideal of human happiness, our ability to conceive of ourselves as present (Machine Vision, Virilio 7). It is the simplicity and the mobility of the conception of the relationship between perception and representation as a mental-map that are compelling about this idea. That is, the visual metaphor of the map is easily conceived of, and once conceived, it can be altered as different forces push and pull at its structure.

2.1.1 Electronic Perspective and Post-realism

As stated, classical perspective codes were based on a knowledge system in which the observer is central to an exterior scene. However, if electronic communication systems render the observer to a field of information, images, text, voice, gesture, all transformable, transmittable, and without original location, then older perspective systems no longer posses a cultural logic. In this situation, an "electronic perspective" needs to emerge to be able to articulate these experiences. An electronic perspective is necessarily outside of the unity of time and space of classical perspective; it needs to address the heterogeneous surface of information transmitted, real time. Paul Virilio states an electronic perspective, "... means chucking out the geometric perspective of the Italian Renaissance and replacing it with an electronic perspective: that of real-time emissions and instantaneous reception of audio-video signals" (Open Sky, Virilio 37). Electro perspective favours the unity of time over the unity of place and time; it is made up of objects set against an indeterminate or shifting backdrop. In other words, it *constructs* space opposed to representing space. This far off perspective takes over the perspective of the here and now.

While the space-drained images of Manet, Seurat and Cézanne were drained of (abandoned) the historical codes of perspective (and their cultural imperative), a perceived objectivity persisted through the mechanical lens of the camera. The space-constructed image is built from the fragments of the camera's claim to objectivity and truth. It retains certain mimetic codes, such as cues that indicate depth, icon, figure etc.; however there is a disjunction between the representation and the site or location of creation. Virilio refers to this disjunction between figure and ground as the "transparent or trans-appearance horizon" (Open Sky, Virilio 36). This is the figure against the horizon line of the screen as opposed to the horizon of the earth.

> A trans-appearance which then completes (finishes-off, so to speak) the natural trans-appearance of the earth's atmosphere, producing in the process a sort of stereoscopic intensification of tangible appearances, of representation of the world and so, indirectly, of aesthetics itself. The aesthetics of the appearance of objects or people standing out against the apparent horizon of classical perspective's unity of time and place is then taken over by the aesthetics of the disappearance of far-off characters looming up against the lack of horizon of a cathode screen where unity of time wins out over the unity of the place of encounter. (Virilio, Open Sky 36)

In this passage, Virilio makes an analogy between the earth's atmosphere and the invisibility (transparency) of the medium of the network. If the *real* horizon of the earth implies a unity of space, time, light and position, then the *far off* or digital horizon lacks a unifying structure. Classical perspective constructs a set context or backdrop from which figures and objects emerge, this stable context is missing in the digital horizon.

The image of information as opposed to the image of capture (such as the photograph), no matter how similar they may seem on the surface, has lost the chemical photograph's most essential feature: the appearance of truth. While the limits of the frame of the

photograph have been thoroughly critiqued in some circles for their ability to both include and exclude, in the popular imagination they have been equated to an unfaltering mechanical eye. With photography there was a sharp and comfortable distinction between the factual image and the subjective images of other arts such as painting. However digital photography has blurred this distinction. Digital technology has untied photography's claim to being an unbiased recording devise. The ease with which pixels are manipulated has reintroduced the hand of the artist into the image. The realism of the photograph "served the purposes of an era dominated by science, exploration, and industrialization" (Mitchell 225). However it is yet to be seen if the post-realism of the digital photograph will serve or undermine an era which is coming to grips with information as opposed to knowledge, transference rather than creation, and implication as opposed to truth.

Popular imagination has ceased to see history or time within the photographic image. Instead it is understood to be a chimera, something assembled rather than taken. "Since the optical unwinding of the reel now no longer lets up, it is becoming hard, even impossible, to believe in the stability of the real, in our ability to pin down a visible that never stops vanishing, … " (Open Sky, Virilio 91). It is this image that "never stops vanishing" like the image that one is only able to hold in view by turning one's head in the opposite direction of the trajectory of the car, so as to still it in reverse direction, just for a second, before it passes. This is the disenfranchised image, the one that you cannot catch.

2.1.2   Optical Disenfranchisement

It is important to reiterate the connection between the space-constructed image and the emergence of optical-disenfranchisement and post-realism. The terms *optical disenfranchisement* and *space-constructed* are a word play on Crary's use of the terms "optical verisimilitude" and "space-drained", and are meant to indicate a lineage with his argument. Post-realism refers to the shift in the cultural perception of the photograph from one of capture to one of fabrication with the move from chemical to digital photography/film. The space-constructed image, the type of image that is exemplified by (but not limited to) the video HBC, is an aesthetic that addresses the lived experience of post-realism and optical disenfranchisement. While they are both borne by the technical possibilities of the computer, the space-constructed image is a pictorial form, and optical disenfranchisement refers to a set of cultural events.

The cultural events which define optical disenfranchisement have been encapsulated earlier as the electronic horizon. Earlier this thesis recounted how the sensation of viewing the landscape through the windshield of the car was the initial inspiration for HBC. There is a connection between how the images formed and blurred from view in motion and the perceptual presence of the computer screen. Throughout Open Sky, Virilio makes a connection between forms of physical movement and those of virtual movement. For example, the virtual movement of tele-messaging is seen as part of the same field of events as air travel. Both are understood in terms of space/time compression. In Virilio's view, we become a mobile observer staring into the transparent (artificial) horizon of the television set.

With optical disenfranchisement, the crises in perception are not caused due to the instabilities of the body but to that of the machine. This has caused another crisis or liberation (depending on view point) of what has now become an older regime of vision, that of machine vision. Virilio refers to the technologies of transmission (internet streaming, for example) as a new form of optics. This is an optics that is based on the far off event as opposed to the near event. We are now dealing with a new horizon, one that is taking over the "apparent horizon which is the backdrop of all action" and the "deep horizon" of the imagination for the "transparent horizon," one that is caused by a magnification through technology of our world view (Open Sky, Virilio 22). In the works of Cézanne the lack of a fixed point of view is immediately discernable. In artworks influenced by the transparent or tele-horizon the lack of a fixed point of view is discernable from how the image is read and not necessarily how it appears. The space constructed-image often gives the illusion of using similar pictorial codes as the chemical photograph. However in the space constructed-image, the images are without stable signifiers, context or reference to specific places or events (apparent horizon). Cézanne engaged in an investigation of the relationship between the inner and the outer world, as the tele-horizon is a world out of view; it is a space that must be imagined and not presented. That is, to engage with the tele-horizon no singular site of prolonged contemplation is available; it can only be felt from the far off distance.

If electro-perspective constructs a worldview that is outside the "I can" of sight, then what type of observer does it presuppose? Crary states in the opening of Techniques of the Observer that the changes in representational practices in painting at the turn of the twentieth century were an indication of a new observing subject and not the site in which it manifested. The broader question implied in this thesis, is what type of observer does

this shift to representational practices based on the logic of the transmission presuppose? Yet it is outside of the boundaries of this project to outline this new observing subject. The space-constructed image is a lens in which this new observer/subject can be glimpsed and a nuance of their existent, felt.

2.2   Analysis of HBC

2.2.1   Space-Constructed Definition

HBC both builds and dismantles its own internal logic of representation and meaning. It uses the perceived objectivity of the camera lens to record reality and plays it against the subjectivity of the digital manipulated image. As the space-drained images of Seurat and Cézanne sought to abandon the historical codes of seeing, rather than breaking with the past, the space-constructed image seeks to build a new way of seeing through an assemblage of past codes. The space-constructed image speaks to a culture that is predicated on the idea of the mix as opposed to the site of original creation. It is an aesthetic of assemblage rather than one that relies on the original mark of the artist.

The space-constructed image is an image of the culture in which optics have been redefined by the tele-horizon. This is an image that seeks to address the perceptual experience of what could be referred to as *tele-culture*. The computer can also be seen as a site in which we have redefined our human relationship to the external world, just as the camera obscura was. While the camera obscura served as a model of fixity, the computer has been one of retrieval and process. An optics which is conceptualized on the model of the computer would have to be characterized by disarticulation, transition, and commutability: an eye that is not just severed from the body and supplemented by the

machine but one which roves freely, getting into everything from the smallest crevices of life to the expanse of the universe.

Crary contextualizes Cézanne's late work from the 1900's onward as moving toward a complete dissolution of the historical codes of vision. He says that these paintings are part of an attempt by Cézanne to see the world with an eye free from the bounds of perspective. In both <u>Suspensions of Perception</u> and <u>Open Sky</u> a connection is made between a changing perceptual experience and the loss of a stable, fixed horizon. In both of these works loss of a clear horizon or of figure/ground relationships in the image corresponds to a new understanding of the observer's involvement in the construction of the immediate world.

In keeping with Crary, I will use Cézanne's <u>Pines and Rocks</u> as a framework to identify optical styles in <u>HBC</u>. There are two aspects of this painting that will serve as my basis for analysis. They are (1) the optical styles present in <u>Pines and Rocks</u> and (2) how Cézanne strove to find a new type of synthesis within the work. In a critique of this work by Cézanne, my intention is to draw out the relationship that Crary makes between Cézanne and his proposal of a new type of perceptual synthesis and not as a broader investigation into the practices of Cézanne. Even though I do think there is the possibility of a rich relationship between the practices of Cézanne and current shifts in perception, I see this thesis as a beginning and in future projects would like to explore this idea across a greater breadth of sources and works. By drawing on this relationship between Cézanne and perception, I am not trying to make a historical connection between my project and that of Cézanne's, in that I am not placing my work as a continuation of his; however I am using the past as a way of illuminating the present.

Crary indicates two main "optical styles" in Pines and Rocks: they are (1) a diagonal swath of rocks cutting through the middle left side to the lower right which uses some conventional modelling and foreshortening techniques and (2) the rest of the painting, which has a two-dimensional surface and a more abstract quality. Crary attributes these areas of solidity and ambiguity to the centre and periphery of the eye (Suspensions, Crary 300 - 332). This leads to the destabilisation of a clear horizon, the horizon is being reformed throughout the image. Pines and Rocks is a particularly useful example of Cézanne's work in this instance because it hangs between older conventions of pictorial representation, such as perspective and modelling, and his new "optical" style (Suspensions, Crary 330).

HBC also hangs on to older conventions while disrupting them with new forms: it uses the objectivity that is inherent to the analogue camera, while at the same time using obvious signs of digital pictorial construction to undermine the reading of HBC as a documentary image. I can identify two distinct optical styles in HBC. They are (1) the objective or *natural* space of the middle ground and (2) the collapsed or edited space of the background. The most significant details of the middle ground are that it is shot as a continuous single take and that there is a seeming naturalness to the acting. The background, on the other hand, is edited in a series of jump cuts. The interaction of these two video spaces forms the conceptual intent of HBC.

Crary points to one theory of the optical styles present in Pines and Rocks, suggesting that Cézanne may have been trying to "grasp peripheral retinal sensation simultaneously and with the same immediacy and intensity as the central or foveal region of the eye" (Suspensions, Crary 297). If this statement is taken to be correct, then the different areas of pictorial treatment in Pines and Rocks are not a series of instances of the same view

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(as in the image evolving over time in Cubism) but an investigation into the nature of perceptual synthesis.

Cézanne produced a model of synthesis that was no longer based on the fixed monocular eye of perspective but one in which the eye constructed the world as a heterogeneous surface. Synthesis in this model was an active assemblage of information, one in which the observer took a participatory role in a creation. Cézanne engaged with the nature of perceptual experience that arose due to a new consciousness of the functioning human body and its role in perception.

My own investigation into the nature of representation has arisen from an awareness of the mediating role of technology and its role in the construction of experience. If Cézanne was looking for a new type of spatial synthesis, then it can be said that I am looking for a new type of temporal synthesis. To imagine what form this synthesis might take in a world where our sense of duration has been collapsed to the millisecond. Cézanne's view of the world was from that of a newly reconfigured surface of the eye: in my world the eye has been supplemented by the surface of the screen (or windscreen of the car).

2.2.2 Shot by Shot Overview

In its viewing entirety, HBC is 26 minutes and 53 seconds in length. There are only two shots in the entire production. The first 26 minutes and 09 seconds comprise the drive to Hope and are a composite image of a background and a foreground in a single shot. The second shot is 44 seconds in length and is of Eliot and I moving from the middle ground to the background plane of the video space. In the editing process this is achieved by: (1) driving in the car in front of the green screen in a composite shot (2)

getting out of the car (3) walking into the hotel room in the background image. The getting out of the car and the going into the hotel room, while only seconds apart on video were shot in two different locations at two different times.
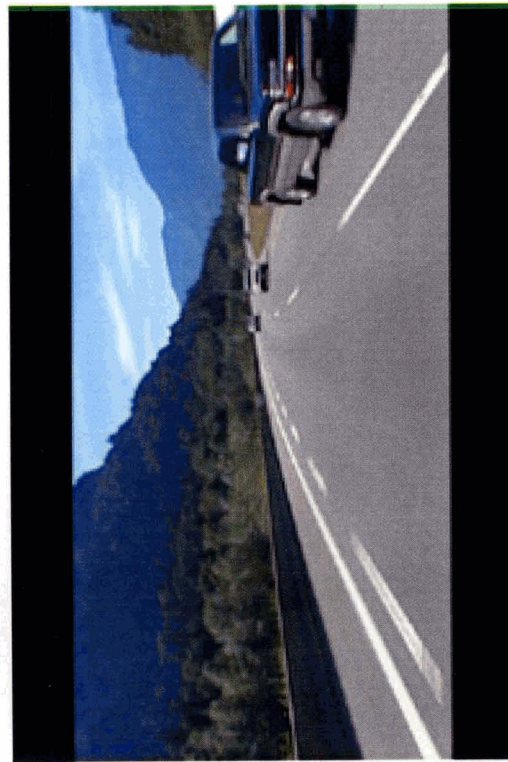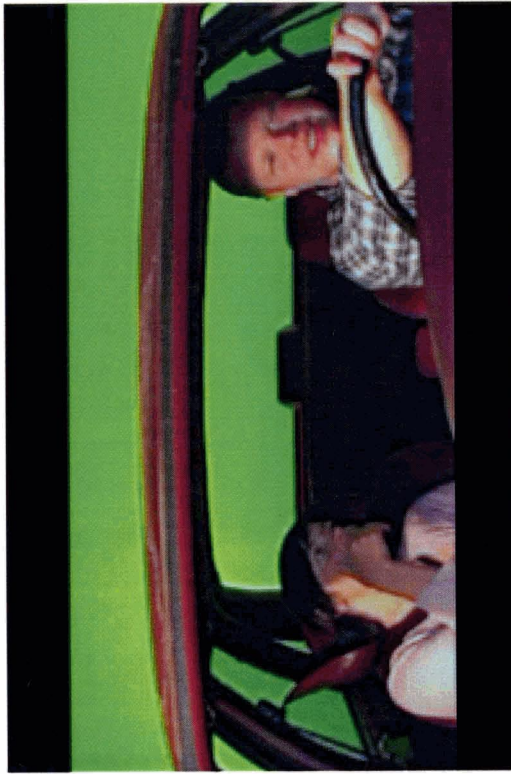
Figure 2.   Production Sequence, *HBC* (2004).

As the video is shot as two separate tracks that are composite in post-production, I will follow this structure in writing about the video, first as two distinct objects and then as a single scene with particular attention to how the scenes both merge and remain distinct from each other. There are four distinct spaces within the video: the inside of the car, the outside of the car, the overlapping or in-between space, and the sound. I will write about these from farthest to closest, as this is the order in which they are experienced by the viewer and also the order in which they were constructed
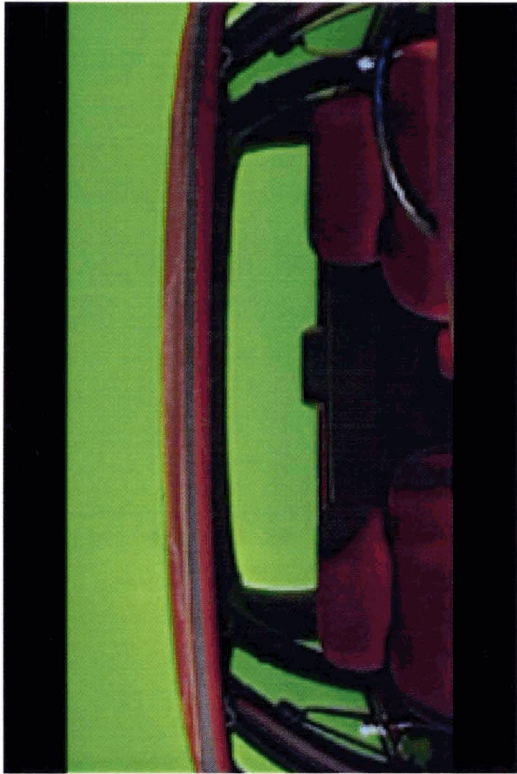
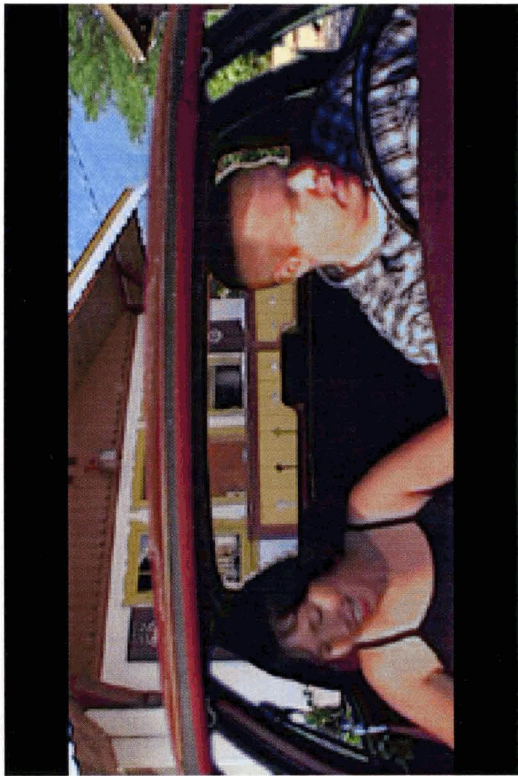Figure 3.   Final scene before composite, *HBC* (2004).

Figure 4.   Final scene after composite, *HBC* (2004).

2.2.2.1 The Background

The background image is shot by mounting a Sony DVR Pro on the trunk of a car and shooting one continuous shot (only stopping to change tapes) from my house in East Vancouver to the Swiss Chalet Motel located in Hope. I experimented with several different types of car mounts and positions of the camera before coming to the final set-up. In the end the rigging for the camera consisted of a tripod head bolted to a piece of wood, which was then strapped very tightly down to the trunk of the car. The camera was protected by two suitcases which were used to construct a blind. The resultant image was reasonably smooth under perfect conditions, but was prey to the bumps in the road and movements within the car. While at first I had planned to blend out any jumps or bumps in post-production, the actual in-camera quality of the video became an important reference to the artifice of the image.

The drive from Vancouver to Hope is approximately three hours in length and has three major landscape changes. The first part is from Vancouver to Surrey, which is urban sprawl, punctuated by farms and development lots. The second is from Surrey to Chiliwack, which is flat almost prairie-like farmland, and the last is from Sardis to Hope, which is a mountainous region. I choose an approximately six and a half minute chunk of each background type, urban sprawl, farmland and mountains, to be representative of that stretch of the journey. In terms of film time, a twenty minute continuous shot still had the weight to give the sensation of a substantial amount of 'real' time. At the time of the shooting I had planned for the driving shot to be in real time with only breaks where we naturally ran out of

tape in the camera. On viewing of the material, this seemed overwhelmingly long, and even as the author I was at a loss as to how to view three hours of rolling landscape footage. However, each editing decision implied some type of space/time compression and communicated a potentially confusing reference to film language.

The decision that seemed to produce the most comfortable balance was the rough splicing of the background footage into the three landscape sections. While the jump cut is a mainstay of modern editing, in this instance its lack of concealment offered a reasonable level of transparency. The obvious slight camera bumps and jerks and sometimes jarring shifts from one location to another created a distance from the *middle ground* or inside of the car, because the film could not collapse into a single space and time within the video-image.

Figure 5.   Background Sequence, *HBC* (2004).
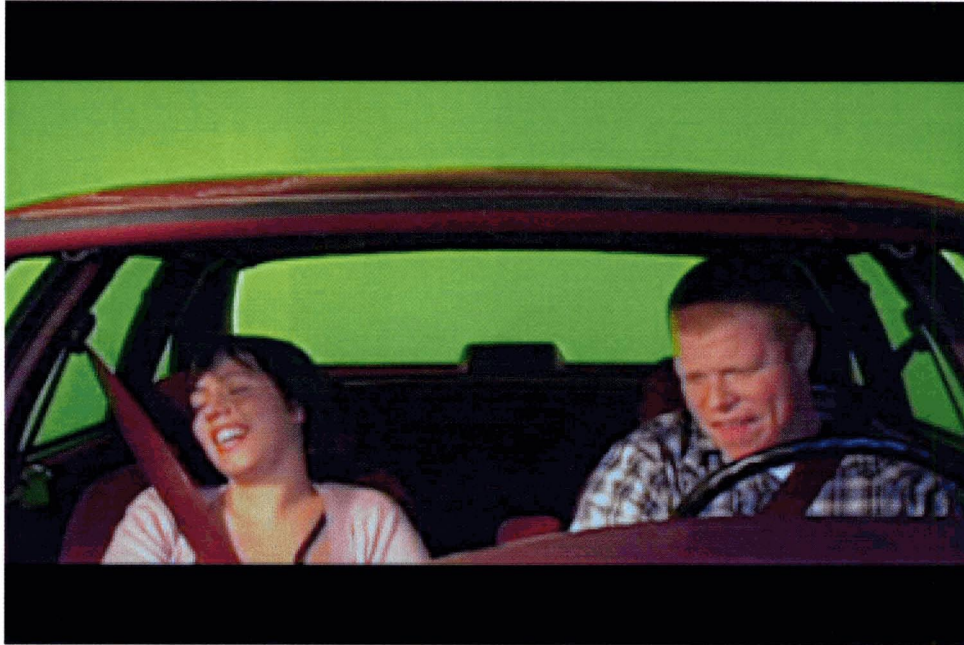
2.2.2.2 The Middle Ground

Figure 6.   **Middle Ground,** *HBC* **(2004).**

The middle ground was shot in a garage by placing a defunct car (with front and back windshield taken out) in front of a green screen. The drive is shot in one continuous take. Unlike the background in which a certain artifice was desirable, the space within the car needed to transcend the obvious fact that we where not actually participating in the activity which was being presented. Slowly the disconnection between the background and the middle ground dissolves the illusion of cohesion.
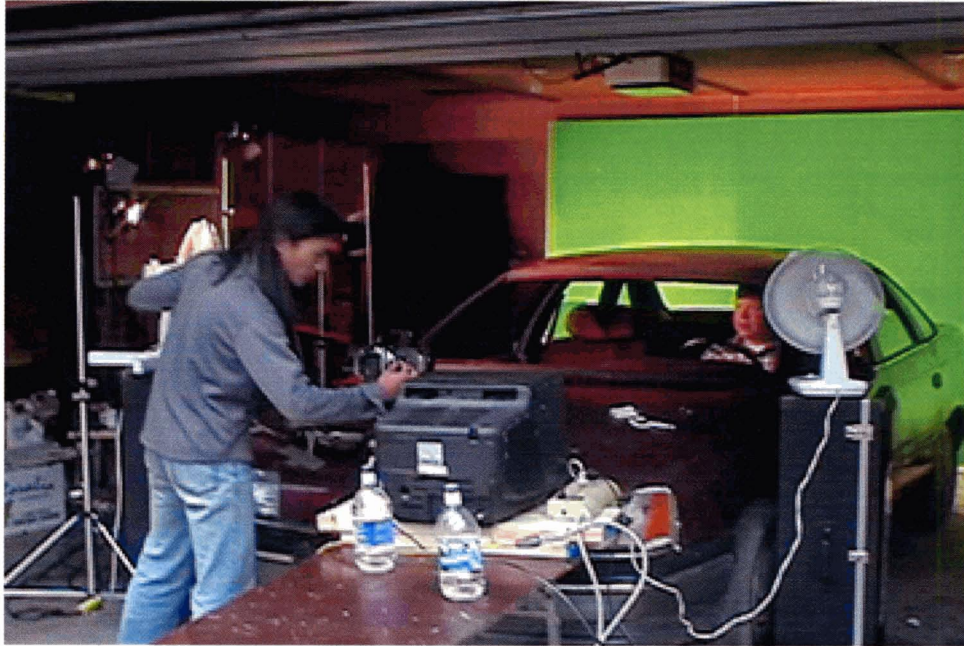
Figure 7.　　Green screen set-up, *HBC* (2004).

2.2.2.3 Camera Position

The camera (for the middle ground shot) is positioned to compress the foreground into a very shallow amount of pictorial space. There is very little shown of the hood of the car; the shot is framed to begin at the dashboard with Eliot's driving hand sitting close to the viewer. The viewer is constructed as an outside, yet intimate observer. This is in opposition to the other possibility, which was to have the camera pointing out of the car, the viewer essentially myself. While this option also has interesting possibilities, the distinction between fore, middle, and background was integral to the conceptual development of this work.

2.2.2.4 Overlap

There are several instances in the video that seek to confuse the division between the middle and background. These are: (1) the use of fans to create the look of wind acting upon hair and cigarette smoke within the car (2) the use of a blind crossing in front of the lights to give the illusion of shadows from an outside source crossing into the car and (3) the use of narrative elements (for example, pointing out the window etc. by Eliot and I). These become important references of connection between the two video spaces.
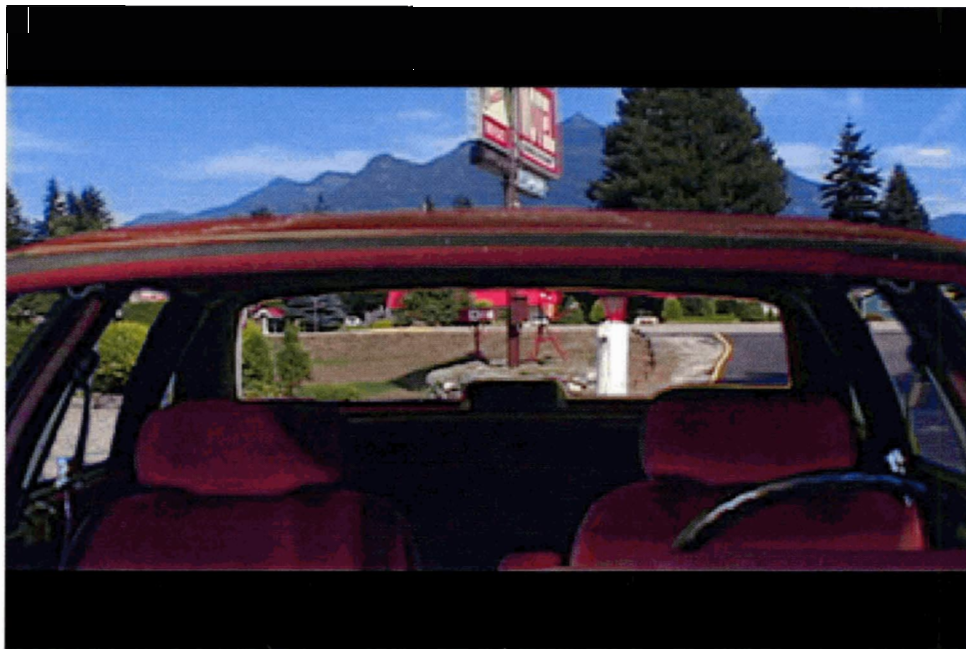
2.2.2.5 Parking, Empty Car

Figure 8. Transition scene, *HBC* (2004)

Just before the final scene of the video, when we pull into the motel in Hope, Eliot and I temporarily park the car and off screen register for the motel room. During this time the

viewer sees the empty car with the motel sign and highway behind. This scene takes place in approximately real time and is a transition between the driving scene and the final scene of the video. Aesthetically it is very pleasing; the redness of the motel sign plays off the blueness of the sky drawing the eye to the background space of the video. The transition in video-time from compressed (edited) time to real time gives the scene a feeling of being almost uncomfortably long, pausing the flow of the video, building a sense of anticipation in the viewer.

2.2.2.6 Final Scene

In the final scene of the video, Eliot and I exit the car and walk into the motel room, effectively moving from the middle ground to the background of the video space. In terms of editing, this is accomplished by: (1) getting out of the car in the green screen shot and standing outside the frame and (2) the background footage (entering the hotel room). This creates the illusion in video time of only a few seconds passing between getting out and walking into the hotel room; however, in terms of shooting time, these two scenes were several weeks apart. The desired effect of this moment is one of spatial collapse, the obvious distance throughout the video to this point of the two video-spaces as occupying separate space/time positions to one of sudden transcendence.

2.2.2.7 The Sound

The sound in the video is entirely constructed in post-production. While the initial impression may be one of seeming naturalness, the entire soundscape is constructed from a set palette that is looped and reworked. The baseline sound is that of the car, a low rumble that shifts between the interior sound of the car and the exterior sound of the car. This is accompanied by event sounds, which are used to push the viewer's attention around the screen. The sound of dialogue, changing radio stations, movement within the car, etc. rise briefly above the din of the car and then are swallowed again. The unnaturalness of the sound is both relaxing, in that it is highly repetitious, and disquieting as it subverts the desire to clearly understand or the dialogue or other seemingly meaningful exchanges within the video. The focus of the sound will be edited to reflect the subjective states within the video.

2.2.2.8 Optical Styles of HBC

As mentioned above, there are two optical styles present in HBC. First is the background image that is a reflection of the tele-horizon, or to further use Virilio's language, it is outside of the space of "I can" (Machine Vision, Virilio 7). This is the horizon/landscape that has the initial appearance of adherence to the laws of perspectival space but one in which the subjects float, always out of sync, unable to connect with or exhibit agency in. To return to Cézanne, the background in HBC is analogous to Cézanne's study of the periphery of the eye. Like Cézanne, who included the areas of sight that had been excluded by perspective,

the background here addresses the experience of space/time that falls outside of the here and now.

Next is the middle space of the video that adheres to the space of "I can," however, it is a small interior with limited scope or range. The subjects move within an unfiltered, unmediated presence within the boundaries or construction of the car. The middle ground is comparable to Cézanne's treatment of the "diagonal swath of rocks cutting through the middle left side to the lower right" in that it uses an older convention of pictorial style, in this case that of the film camera. Later I will explore the importance of the moments of intersection between these two video spaces, proposing a new type of temporal synthesis. This synthesis will be the basis of my definition of the refeatured landscape.

3 The Refeatured Landscape

Scott Watson categorizes his essay, <u>Defining the Defeatured Landscape</u>, as a "preliminary

sketch into conceptual and minimal practices in Vancouver in the late 1960's and 1970's"

(Watson 247). Albeit brief, Watson constructs a beginning, middle, end, and reoccurrence in

these events. Watson states that:

> 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.' 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 cold be located for very long before it was replaced. It sought in the
> 'facts' of the camera. The construction was conflated with the despoiled;
> wilderness and order collapsed into each other so that the narrative of
> entrepreneurial capitalism would reveal itself in the way the urban space was
> built. The medium that revealed the dialectical potential of this situation was
> the simple 'artless' photograph. (Watson 256)

I will use this statement to draw a relationship between the "defeatured landscape" and the

"artless photograph," to explore the space-constructed image and the post-industrial urban

landscape in HBC. I propose HBC as a new model of landscape image, one that is

refeatured through synthesis. While Watson gives a more detailed accounted of the artists

and practices that constitute what he has termed a "defeatured landscape", I will only be

focusing on the relationship between the camera and the landscape image. (This, however,

should not be taken as representing the breadth of practice which historically constitutes the defeatured landscape.)

In the introduction to this thesis, I made the point that landscape images can reveal as well as hide. That in order to reveal, landscape images must collapse the distances they presuppose between individuals, places and times. In the defeatured landscape, the distance between the dominant ideologies surrounding entrepreneurial capitalism (order) was collapsed through their association with nature/wilderness (disorder). The myths of stability, progress and individual freedoms that were disseminated through popular media were contested by the bleak or featureless nature of the industrial/capitalist landscape. Many of the photographs by Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, and later Roy Arden focused on scenes where the landscape is in the process of urbanization but there is still evidence of a past wilderness, such as a lone old growth tree. According to Watson, there are traces of Dan Graham's use of "innuendo" in Wall's work, in that all microcosms can be seen as "refracting images of one another," that rather than being locally specific, it was possible to view a larger unperceivable social order (Watson 252). The image of the landscape on the edge of becoming and destroying, captured in the defeatured landscape, presented capitalism as reliant on a constant state of renewal to survive.

In earlier works that constituted the defeatured landscape, it is the "artless" or documentary nature of the photographs that is able to communicate the relationship between capitalism and destruction/renewal. In later works (those taking place after 1980), the photographs are

more intentional, using the camera as a high art medium rather than a recording device; however, they maintain the same essential ability to expose the relationship between consumerism and chaotic systems (Watson 263). The mechanical or unmediated eye of the documentary image presumes a lack of interference on the part of the author. The audience engages with the photographs as a moment of truth or as unfettered documentation. A narrative is formed through the dialogue between the appearance of chaos (nature) and order (urban).

Watson makes the point that, in the defeatured landscape, the narrative of consumer capitalism "revealed itself in the way the space was built" (Watson 256). Earlier I quoted Bakhtin's reference to the chronotope as the assimilation of "real" historical time in literature (and subsequently other art forms). In the defeatured landscape it was the camera that revealed this new relationship; however it preexisted in the physical space. Modernism, as previously mentioned, can be viewed as the continuous upheaval of our social sense of space and time. This can be understood in terms of the larger shifts, such as newer, faster transport technologies, and smaller shifts such as the commuter's distance from home to work. It is the social reorganization of space through Modernism (and therefore our experience of space through time) that was captured in the defeatured landscape.

In the *refeatured landscape*, I have tried to find a way of contrasting the "natural environment" with the endless interchangeability and instability of our technologically mediated environment. In my work the natural is not equated with nature but with unmediated

human interaction (dialogue within the car). The digital composite image in a video projection becomes analogous with post-industrial capitalism as it evaporates the connection between signifier and signified. It created a new horizon; one where nothing can be pinned down or be connected to an event. The refeatured Landscape seeks in the subjectivity of the digital image to show the urban space as an assemblage through the technology of the computer. The space-constructed is conflated with the global village; the background image or the horizon-line is separated from the subject so that the narrative of post-industrialism can reveal itself in the way that time and space are structured. The medium that reveals the dialectical potential of this situation is the digital image.

In HBC I have sought to collapse or confuse the distance between what is seen as natural and what is understood to be a constructed or a synthetic order. Rebecca Solnit, in her essay The Elements of a New Landscape, identifies the word landscape as problematic, because it "describes the natural world as an aesthetic phenomenon, a department of visual representation" (Solnit 45). Solnit sees this conception of landscape as constructing nature as an object, which can be acted upon, as a site for consumption, rather than as having an inherent agency of its own. New landscape practices in fields as diverse as contemporary art, urban planning and ecology are now breaking down these older conceptions of landscape as a backdrop for human activity. Solnit encapsulates this shift in the move from the term landscape to the term environment (which she defines as now synonymous with landscape). The term "environment" implies a landscape that is constructed as part of a network, one

that includes "microcosmic as well as the macrocosmic, economies as well as ecologies, the cultural as an extension of the natural" (Solnit 45). In HBC the distance between natural and synthetic is collapsed through the confusion of the separation and unification of the video spaces.

In the refeatured landscape it is the subjective or constructed nature of the image that is able to expose the relationship between post-industrialism and optical-disenfranchisement. The audience engages with the images as a false or constructed event; the disjunction between the spaces of the video inhibits the single unified reading of the work. It is this state of unease that draws the viewer in, making her or him question the difference between what is being viewed and what is taking place.

HBC looks to construct a potential reconciliation between artifice and nature but offers no possibility of returning to an ideal garden. It looks to find an expressive form that would articulate the current shift in the perceptual experience of space and time. At the end of the video, Eliot and I walk into our motel room, which resembles a miniature Swiss village, seeming to transcend the construction of the video only to move to another construction, that of architecture. HBC doesn't offer a simple escape. However it does propose that there is a possibility for conceiving of new connections, that cross the ever-widening divide between the here *and the now*

The defeatured landscape is a landscape in which its banality becomes a source of interest. The urban sprawl's very featureless (defeatured) nature was able articulated through the generic quality of consumer capitalism and the mass production it is predicated on. I propose HBC as an initial gesture towards a landscape refeatured, refeatured through the new forms of temporal and spatial synthesis. As I articulated earlier, through different editing treatments, there is a separation between the subjects and the background within the video. However there is also present throughout the video the possibility of connection between the middle ground (subjects) and background (landscape) through events that cross between the two spaces, such as wind, shadows etc. Throughout the video the subjects are presented as within a *natural* or unedited space. This is reflected both in the editing, single long shot and through natural dialogue. However in the last scene of the video the subjects transfer from the natural space of the middle ground to the edited or distant space of the background. To return to Virilio, the landscape (horizon) becomes an area not without the potential of human agency, not without reach, consequence or action.

4 Conclusion

In the introduction, I referred to how a "critical distance" is formed in the landscape image when it reveals a hidden social order or agenda through its framing or physical construction. This work explores the possibilities of what I have termed a space-constructed image to articulate the narrative of post-industrial (information based) society. I have drawn on the sensation of living amongst these events to reveal a *critical distance* between ourselves, and the pervasive use of new consumer technologies. To find a lens through which the subject can be recognized as in a state of transformation.

Above, I referred to Dan Graham's use of "innuendo" through which the specific instance can be understood in relationship to a larger "unperceivable social order" (Watson 252). While HBC is constructed around a personal narrative, it displays the individual as shaped by society. While this work deals with the connection to landscape, it is a reflection of the moments of discord, which populate the everyday experience.

Last time I was at Metrotown (our largest local shopping center) I suffered a momentary inability to process the huge number of free-floating signifiers. Disassociated bits of the world, brought together to make everyone feel at home but nowhere in particular. I found myself emerging from under a sheet of plastic into the newly constructed food court. Each wall, each area, signified a different use, a different part of the world. Commodified, bright

and shiny, I saw remnants of airports I have been in, playgrounds, amusement parks, quiet

lounges. A huge fireplace encased in plastic cut through a room that didn't appear to be

round but had no visible corners. I went up and pressed the palms of my hands against the

Plexiglas to see if I could feel warmth. Everything was familiar and meaningless. Un-rooted,

contextless. I wondered if this is what it is like to be old, to be awash in the familiar

unfamiliar.

It has been at the heart of this work to explore this sense of the familiar-unfamiliar, the

rootless subjective against an undifferentiated background. However it has also been at the

heart of this work to explore the moments of connection. To propose that perhaps in these

upheavals there is the possibility to form a new connection to the environment, a landscape

of human integration rather than action. That in the moments when wind and shadows

cross our paths, we many find a connection between a now unfamiliar past and an unknown

future.

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Appendix: Hope BC, Chainsaw Capital of the World

The video referred to in this work, <u>Hope BC, Chainsaw Carving Capital of the World</u> may

be found in a DVD appendix in the inside back cover of this work.