# University of Alberta

**Picturing Calgary: an analysis of a collaborative, urban photography project**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of residents new to Calgary through their participation in a collaborative photography project named "Picturing Calgary." Within the framework of this project, participants explored the city and documented their reflections on it, addressing a fundamentally ontological question: how is being new conceived, and what are the routes to place-making for those new to a city? The results of this study afford both an understanding of how place-making is constituted, and how people come to identify with place. Further, this thesis demonstrates that the establishment of discursive and critically reflective spaces can facilitate ownership of new places. Despite the creation of such social spaces, there is a perceptible void of social spaces approximating public life - an aspect particularly salient for residents new to a city.

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# I - Introduction

Picturing Calgary, the photography project that is the subject of this thesis, aims to study the ways in which people new to Calgary, through their various photographic practices, convey their sense of *being* in the city. Picturing Calgary was designed to address a fundamentally ontological question: how is *being new* conceived, and what are the routes to *place-making* for those new to a city? A related question is how is place making constituted and how do people come to identify with place? It is contended that the establishment of discursive and reflexive spaces, through a collaborative photography project, can facilitate a sense of belonging to new places.

In responding to these questions, photographers participating in the project took on the role of investigator as they explored both the city of Calgary itself, and their own reflections on it. The photographs they produced were then presented during bi-monthly discussion meetings. Through the social and visual space afforded by the project, participants were able to reflect on their own representations and those of other participants. Here, the research interest can be seen to subsume both the practice of photography, and an *inter-ness* that is created between people - what Jackson refers to as a field of "interest, inter-experience, inter-action, and inter-locution" (Jackson, 1998:3). Such reflexivity contributes critically to ontological formulations of self and place, and being in place is hence conceived from this visual and dialogical field.

From a broader perspective, the project also serves as a response to a changing anthropology in a global world. The life of the postmodern subject consists of permanent expe-

riences of dislocation and urban migrants are perpetually learning to negotiate a diversity of experiences in rapidly growing cities. More often than not, as migration brings about fast and drastic changes to an increasingly hybrid world, the only place to speak from are points of dislocation, contradiction and ambiguity. In seeking visual representations from such locations, the project therefore aspires to pose new questions on the condition of dislocation, and in doing so, bring new tensions to light. Finally, the project also demonstrates that the social spaces created through the project approximate public life in that they serve as critical moments of discursivity and reflection. Such social spaces are acutely missing in modern, urban lives - an aspect particularly salient for residents new to a city.

**Picturing Calgary: a collaborative, urban photography project**

The photography project was held for approximately sixteen weeks between the months of January and May of 2008. Participants were recruited in a variety of ways: from the researchers existing social network in Calgary; on email listserves and online bulletin boards for art, educational and cultural institutions across the city; on *artsmart,* the city of Calgarys main art events website; and finally, through advertisements on the online social networking site *Facebook*.

The recruitment mailout and advertisements called for people between the ages of 25-40, who have lived in Calgary for less than five years, and who were "interested in photographing and sharing their experiences" in the city. The responses exceeded the limit of the participation group, which was set at 15. Throughout the course of the project, about half of the original fifteen participants dropped out of the project, mainly owing to time commitments on their part, though many continued to come to meetings, or took part in online submissions of photographs. From the eventual eight who stayed on the project, five produced photo essays which are included in chapter 4 of this thesis.

A website was built and hosted at www.picturingcalgary.com allowing participants to upload their photographs to private albums. Server space for each participant was set at five gigabytes each to enable participants to upload as many photographs as they liked. Website features included the ability to comment on one's own or others' images; an intuitive, user friendly interface; personalised, and easily navigable photo albums; and finally dynamic features meant to draw a viewer's attention and encourage on-site activity: most

recent comments, recently updated albums, and random images. Links to the dynamic albums were emailed to participants frequently to encourage ongoing involvement with the project.

Discussion meetings took place every two weeks on Thursday evenings. The meetings were scheduled to last two hours, but were usually extended to three. The structure of the meetings was informal, but settled into a particular pattern after several meetings: a discussion topic was scheduled for the first forty-minutes, led by either the researcher or one of the participants. Topics discussed included photographic perspectives, urban art and New Urbanism. The presentations and resulting discussions were intended to create a comfortable listening and discussion space, and to encourage involvement from participants.

In the second part of the meetings, participants were asked to select five images (though the limit was regularly exceeded) from those taken during the prior two weeks, and to discuss them. Using a digital projector, the photographs were projected onto an empty wall. In most meetings, the group ran out of time before they had the chance to view everyones photographs, having lingered on earlier ones for too long. After several weeks, at the halfway mark of the project, participants were requested to produce a photo essay consisting of four to five images, and to write an accompanying narrative consisting of their reflections on the photographs selected. As with the images presented at the meetings, they were to choose any topic they wished within the parameters of the projectss stated intention of "photographing and sharing experiences of Calgary". These essays are included in chapter four.

**The Structure of the Thesis**

Outside of this introduction, this thesis is organised into four chapters as follows:

The second chapter of this thesis sets out the theoretical directions for the photography project. It reviews the four main themes that constitute the research, which in essence work to explicate the rationale of the project. The first problematizes the status of community as "imagined", suggesting instead that varying configurations of sociality occur among urban populations. The second theme looks at how trans/im/migrant selves or identities find form within larger socio-political contexts. The third theme looks at how the self is ontologically constituted through phenomenological acts of exploration. Finally, the last theme centres around a "crisis of representation" debate within anthropology, and discusses the role visual methodologies play within the discipline as a result.

The third chapter takes the form of on a more personal narrative as it expands from the themes above. Interspersed with experiences from the photography project, this chapter looks at how cities are explored: how the city is constituted by narratives, how places are conducted and lived, how ontological explorations are conducted, and finally how the shape of participants' walks - the form of their urban journeying - shed light on their explorations of the city.

The fourth chapter consists of five photo essays composed by participants.

Finally, the fifth chapter examines the historical and contemporary roles of photography - particularly as it approached as a line of inquiry within anthropology - to demonstrate

how visual discourse within the context of the project is framed. The second half of the chapter looks at how various participants practice photography by using their narratives, photographic representations and reflections to draw insight.

## II - Theoretical Directions

### Reconfiguring Community

Picturing Calgary is collaborative in nature, is geographically an urban project, and formulates both urban issues and photography as its subject matter. In drawing a group of people new to the city together, the project can also be easily perceived as involving a small community of newcomers. However, as is hereafter addressed, the project is set apart from "community" as we understand it from recent literature primarily because the concept tends to conjure notions of collective identities. This thesis contends that "community" has unwittingly become a reified category in recent scholarship for conceptions of community as "imagined" or "deterritorialised" has actually served to deflect attention away from the *actual* bases of interaction that constitute social and cultural lives. Subsequent sections will reveal that Picturing Calgary espouses a different sort of sociality - in effect, the project exposes an inherently ontological question surrounding the status of the community, which demands further investigation.

In the classic rendition of modern alienation, the urbanite living within the diverse spaces of the city no longer claims affinity based upon proximity. Lately, we see such affinity taking the form of *community*. This is largely due to an underlying query throughout much of contemporary anthropological scholarship focussed on themes of migration and displacement - such studies often emphasize the role of larger processes such as the industrialization of a global economy, the formation and maintenance of nation-states, and the passages of urbanization. Subsequently, the production of collective identities is often

implied in attempts to account for the incorporation of sociocultural groups within these larger global processes.

An examination of anthropological scholarship in the last few decades sheds light on the conceptual trajectory "community" has undergone. We begin by noting that with the interpretative turn of anthropology, a "crucial contribution to unpacking the conflation of place, people, identity and culture" (Amit, 2002:16) occurred. If resultant understandings of community have always revolved around an obsession with ethnicities, we find its genesis in Barth's revolutionary reconceptualisation of ethnicity. In his schematic, self-ascribed markers of identity lead to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries that remain in the face of cultural change. Consequently, boundaries were seen to be both circumstantial and segmentary, serving as "an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content" (Barth, 1998:14) across space and time. Barths work marked a crucial turn in scholarship, for research now emphasized both an unequivocal distribution of culture, and ethnic boundaries that were deliberately and consciously created. Here, ethnic identities became distributed rather then shared and, as Amit notes, access to cultural paradigms were no longer contingent on the coupling of location with sociocultural affiliation.

Consequently, a resultant and enduring legacy has been the conflation of community with ethnicity and identity. To illustrate, Anderson's "imagined communities" arise from autobiographical narratives borne from particular facets of history. Aided by the onset of nationalism and print capitalism, it is a political development that relies on the capacity of a people who, despite the lack of physical and social interaction, imagine themselves a part

of the same community (Anderson, 1991). While it is undeniable that the imagination may work in the process of identity formation, it can also serve as a safe "conceptual haven" (Amit, 2002:17), for in invoking community as a categorical referent, it easily becomes a reified, sentimentally charged, and even valorized category of sociocultural grouping. An "imagined community" that contemplates collective identity as either oppositional or relational gives rise to slippery conceptual errors in the process. As Amit notes, the scholarship that results actually ceases to be critical for it overlooks investigation into the different sorts of social affiliations that may occur and in consequence, overlooks the *actual* processes of interaction between people.

A similar criticism can be made of Appadurai's exposition that the media and migration create "diasporic public spheres" that in turn spur the imagination. His work traces new sociocultural linkages that account for transnational "global flows" in today's global culture. However, such a perspective can be seen to propagate the ascription of categorical identities that do not take into account ambiguous or multiple movements within a given identity. Here, the linkages between personal network and social group, and category and collectivity need to be problematized. As an example, one can imagine instances where the imposition of a single categorical identity can be fraught with resentment (Gilroy, 1991; Hall, 1999). As Amit poses, if members of an imagined community were to partake in a collective movement, several different categories may be drawn upon to mobilize action; and if one category becomes reified over another, the process tends to silence other categories, be they religious, linguistic, geographical or nationalistic (Amit, 2002). The danger of conceptual slippage again easily occurs in such analysis: it offers the an-

thropologist the possibility of lazily escaping the consequences and locations of his or her sociocultural constructs simply by invoking the global linkages mediated by the media.

As a result, community as a concept clearly needs to problematized, and it beholds two particular theoretical tendencies that require re-examination. First, assumptions of "community" result in the tendency for individuals to see themselves and others in classificatory terms such that, a priori, these collective identities align with nationalism, ethnicity, religiosity or class status to become the "prism through which all else is read and known" (Rapport, 2002:145). Second, as a consequence of the invention of alterity, the concept of community becomes unintentionally associated with reified collective difference. Within the "crisis of representation" that problematized the relationship between context and speaker, alterity arose as a reaction against the hegemony of eurocentric knowledge, modern institutionalisation and the rationalism of modern economics. Yet, even if invocations of cultural difference and authenticity by "others" are viewed as instances of resistance or empowerment, such invocations can also be viewed as occurring as a reinvention or valorization of cultural difference, in effect functioning as a "deliberate project of the other" (Amit, 2002:44). In such instances, issues easily become re-cast as polemics of "us" versus "them". Furthermore, while this theoretical shift in the production and representation of anthropological work resulted in a greater acuity of a speaker's position and emphasized forms of representation, Amit cautions that such reification of categorical difference also results in an empirical "hollowing out" (2002:45), in the case of this thesis the glossing over of the nitty-gritty details that make up the actual bases of interaction between modern, urban lives. Such changes to the shape of anthropological research is

significant: as Amit writes, a danger lies in "how much heuristic progress we can claim for a move away from representations of communities as sociocultural content without broader contexts, to representations of communities as entirely contextual but empty of social content" (Amit, 2002:46).

In this respect, social groupings of newcomers tend to be ascribed with collective identities, and are often viewed as communities with either linguistic, cultural, geographical or religious similarities. Recent literature has failed to address the different social configurations composed by people new to cities: within the context of dense, rapidly growing cities, notions of difference in recent scholarship has been reconfigured such that communities are the result of intense associations distributed across self ascribed, distinct collectives, each responding to new orientations within nation-states. As a result, particular ethnic groups are often viewed as disenfranchised entities within the city's social fabric and remain a vestige perhaps, of anthropology's tradition to "study down" while serving as advocates for disenfranchised groups within the urban polity. The paradigmatic shift noted above is often dressed within the discipline in rather heroic terms, illustrating what Marshall Sahlins viewed as the moralising tendencies of the discipline (Sahlins, 1999); the sustenance of ethnicised identities is largely perceived by anthropologists to be rational responses to modernity on the part of those silenced by the hegemony of western knowledge (Amit, 2002).

In the wake of this criticism, Picturing Calgary can perhaps be viewed as taking on innovative dimensions. Amit's insight has been critical for this thesis, particularly because the photography project is comprised of a diverse group of transnationals, each drawing upon

different ideological and cultural paradigms. It is in not placing the project within any particular geographical, linguistic or religious confines that the photography project can be viewed as experimental. When a diverse group of people come together, preventing reifications of collective identities from occurring as a result, a novel question can then be posed: what are the kinds of social affiliations and identities that result from such ever increasing social spaces?

We find other common interests and affiliations existing among participants of the photography project, and such commonalities result in very different social groupings than has been conceived in recent scholarship on community. These commonalities can be identified as such: Picturing Calgary is comprised of a group of people who are (1) new to the city; (2) young, self identified urbanites between the ages of 25 to 40; and (3) interested in photography and urban issues. Within these common interests, the photography group spun a network of social affiliations and connections that became central to the project. demonstrating that as a contemporary urban ethnographic initiative, the project reflected diverse and dialectical lives that refused to be reified into any singular grouping or identity. The ways in which particular social identities and associations are drawn, configured and reconfigured with different invocations forms a central theme of the thesis. It is suggested here that both the inter-discursive fields created between participants, and the critical reflections brought about by the project resulted in a production of identities that have very little to do with "community" as understood in recent literature.

As we have seen, current theorizing on community does not offer enough by way of the small, informal networks and affinities that we draw upon in our everyday, urban lives.

Rather than operating the photography project from within the paradigm of community as we have been given to understand, Picturing Calgary can be viewed as functioning from within the dynamics of its own sociality. In positioning itself as a response against the sort of reified, collective identification described above, the project repositions the anthropological subject such that both researcher and participants work themselves into the theoretical framework, and reconfigure the dynamics and categories of investigation in the process. It formulates anthropology as a practice wherein scholarship becomes implicated (Fletcher & Cambre, in press): subject as researcher, researcher as subject, are inextricably linked in an urban ethnography that reworks both categorical identities and larger, global processes from a basis of social interaction, while engaging in a critical, ontological exploration of a new city.

**Locating the Transmigrant Self**

The social networks and affinities that constitute modern urban lives form within wider socio-political contexts. Trans/im/migrant identities in particular are complex and diverse, and construed with much variation, yet in western liberal democracies such as Canada, diasporic and transmigrant identities usually take shape against a backdrop of political multiculturalism. In escaping the reification of collective identities that so often plague trans/im/migrant identities, it is necessary to examine how the photography project works to provide a social and visual space for participants to search for self and place, and to inadvertently respond to these existing narratives. Hence, the narratives of race and culture that unfold within the confines of modern nation states and a capitalist world economy are traced here.

Together with the increase of trans/im/migrants in urban centres and the subsequent emergence of multicultural societies, the familiar story of multiculturalism is formed. The history of the past century is a history of nationalist expansion, one that is marked by well-defined geopolitical boundaries, the market economies of nations, and the rise of nationalisms. From Foucault, we are reminded that the latter emerged as a symbolic formation through discursive power; citizenry is achieved by rendering oneself as *a subject of* and *subjected to,* the power of the state. With this compromised imagination of its citizenry, ethnicities can then be cobbled together, or in Canadian terms, a mosaic of cultures can be formed. Within this mosaic, the image of a unified and primordial state proliferates, while at the same time encountering counter-currents of paralleled flows of labour, capital and goods.

For the nation-state, tensions exist between two competing exigencies: to develop nationalism on the one hand, and to abide by its transnational imperatives on the other. This is the contradiction at the heart of a modernity that, as Wallerstein reminds us, serves a capitalistic economy (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). Hence, we see the advancement of formalized notions of multiculturalism pushed along in the wake of globalization. Yet, the equilibrium between nationalism and the transnational imperatives of a globalised economy is often terse, for dislocations and ruptures to multiculturalism often threaten to expose a spurious national identity. When the image of the primordial nation as both unified and multicultural is disrupted, a hypothesized *cultural difference*, one that is at once rigid, ethnicised and unnegotiable, takes over.

Subsequently, this shift in the notion of cultural difference results in two different, but closely related phenomena. First, it offers minority groups a modus operandi to advance social, political and economic interests. In an alternative permutation of Amit's exposition, multiculturalism based upon difference allows social groups to take on oppositional and constructed categorical identities to mobilize themselves for social action. Second, seen with a different lens, such categorical identities serve what Balibar and Wallerstein term a new racism that emerges from a threatened nationalism (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). Culture, now operating as a new code word for racism, becomes naturalized and is perceived as both immutable and insurmountable: equal, but *different*. The willingness to be subsumed into the confines of state identity becomes an indicator of *belonging*, and a negative reading of belonging threatens to disrupt the imagination of the nation as a uni-

fied cultural community, itself a concept constantly being reconfigured in the unfinished project of "difference" multiculturalism.

In the Canadian context, the story of multiculturalism is familiar as a state-initiated project. First Nation peoples, refugees, illegals workers, immigrants, temporary labourers, visa workers and students, and finally, Canadians, all contest to make home in the shifting space offered by the project of multiculturalism. As Bannerji notes, the meaning of Canada is dependent upon the person who does the imagining. In the Canadian imaginary, core assumptions of cultural homogeneity results in a national 'we' that through its occlusion of difference, tolerates and accommodates the marginal Other. Multiculturalism in a liberal democratic context takes the form of a conceptual apparatus that reconfigures issues of social justice and racism into questions of diversity, identity, customs and language. The reification of difference takes a further step: the conflation of multiculturalism becomes associated with cultural identity, and becomes the *only* venue for social and political agency (Bannerji, 2002). This has become embraced by transmigrants themselves: if transmigration is defined by a constant state of mobility, then notions of cultural difference succeed in pinning transmigrant identities into rigid, ethnicised categories. Culture is overdetermined and difference remains superficial, reduced to ethnic food, dances, clothing and traditional customs. The only venue for their discourse on difference becomes "race relations", and through a language of culture and diversity, agency is obscured, displaced and erased. When the Canadian core community is defined through the same processes that *others* those residing on the margins, the other is incorporated as a national project. Tensions between the state's multicultural project and its *otherised* sub-

**Shop 2** (Maryann)

*"We see designs that reminds us of home and that's what's beautiful about Calgary....it's Multicultural."*

**Asian Supermarket** (Jee-Sun)

*"People shopping for food in a large Asian supermarket."*

jects are strengthened, and as immigrant communities become depoliticised and dehistoricised, disjunctures occur between the actuality of migrant lived experiences, and the dominant multicultural paradigm. Gilroy's work among black culture in Britain goes further in explicating the disjunctions caused by new mythologies of race and culture. He draws our attention to the kinds of near fascist ethnic absolutisms that mask the complex cultural reality of our urban centres. Corporate multiculturalism's articulation of black popular culture pervades a constant commerce in blackness, racialising the black body by presenting "race" as "ethnicity" and "culture", and presenting them as a form of property to be owned. To push Bannerji's schematic of state multiculturalism further into the corporate sphere, we see a public arena produced out of a new consciousness of race that, in reducing cultural politics to a mere aesthetic and commercial concern, is able to draw from the spectacle of imagery found in advertising and popular culture. This creates a climate of racialised iconography wherein the "stimulating pattern of this hyper-visibility supplies the signature of a corporate multiculturalism in which some degree of visible difference from an implicit white norm may be highly prized as a sign of timeliness, vitality, inclusivity, and global reach" (Gilroy, 2000:21). This aestheticization of blackness takes on new heights as a carnivorous consumption of iconography gains popularity in the global marketplace and for more remote audiences, the exotic allure of blackness is far removed from its origins in the cultural community. The politics of blackness undergoes further digestible transformations, and the destructive power of these processes results in the blending of the cultural and the linguistic such that more homogenous representations are now able to take hold (Gilroy, 2000).

The requirement to constantly negotiate between divergent cultural identities is, particularly for the modern alienated subject of western nation states, a requisite of contemporary urban life. Yet, as Fanon and Dubois famously remind us, disjunctures between lived experience and dominant, state paradigms are doubly felt for in the trans/im/migrant. With what Bannerji describes as "ethnic self-appellations" (Bannerji, 2000:49), conflicting narratives, borne of a conveniently forgotten colonial and imperialist discourse that denies the real history of ruptures and conquests, resides in the individual himself. Fanon famously draws upon psychoanalysis to describe the pain of self-consciousness from his experience in France, noting that being colonized by a language has insidious implications for one's consciousness, for "to speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1967:17-18).

In attributing to the diasporic subject an agency that does its work through constant refashioning and transfiguring, Hall provides a more optimistic reading of cultural identities. Aligning our trans/im/migrant's production of identity with Hall's diasporic subject's formulation of identity, we learn that identities are positions from which, and within which, he or she is constantly refashioning and re-articulating. Armed with the inherent understanding that identities are foremost representations and deliberate processes in the making, diasporic subjects are conscious that identities can be viewed as spatialized occurrences taking place from across a "lack" - a division separating the location of the "Other". For Hall, diaspora becomes a state of assuredness because it is able to engage dominant cultures along a very broad front: the "merely local" and the global, or the trans/im/migrant and the state, are intricately intertwined, for each is a requisite for the

other (Hall, 1993). Where communities were once imagined and deterritorialized, and where urban collective identities were once relational, oppositional and vertically construed, diaspora should be conceived as a transnational movement whose connections are both multiple and *lateral*. Hall surmises that it marks the end of a western-styled modernity: rather then being subjected to the "macdonaldisation" of the global cultural market place, or to the domination of capital and other global processes, diasporic processes can be seen to subvert and de-center western models. While Hall acknowledges that current diasporic processes do not possess overt power, they slowly work to translate and negotiate the "global cultural onslaught on weaker cultures" or state initiated projects of nationalism (Hall, 1999:17). As Bannerji (2000) observes, the current Canadian imagination can "only be prevented by creating counter-hegemonic interpretive and organisational frameworks that reach down into the real histories and relations of social life, rather then extending tendrils of upward mobility on the concrete walls of the state. (129)" Here, we find encouragement that diasporic processes are given a positive reading: they are testament to the construction of "vernacular modernities" (Hall, 2001:17) and the heralding in of a new, transcultural consciousness.

Previously separated by geography, the trajectories of subjects are facing greater intersection in the metropolitan centres of today. Hence, the wider social-political contexts in which identity is produced is crucial. The trans/im/migrant in a constant state of mobility can no longer return to his or her original state if identity formation is to be conceived as a process in the making: rather then searching for a *return to roots* the trans/im/migrant is constantly *enroute*. The process is well explicated with what Hall terms the "diasporic

aesthetic" (Hall. 1999:8). Identities are like narratives whose meanings are positional, in constant flux and dialogically appropriated. Hall (1996) contends that identity formation is a two fold process: first, it requires the narrativisation of self, and second the "suturing" or stitching together of such narratives. Furthermore, the formulation of self is not undermined by the intangibility of this invented and fantastical process: identities are constituted from the *outside*, then performatively and politically materialized.

Transculturation - changes the trans/im/migrant self undergoes in a new sociocultural landscape - is never a unidirectional journey. While it depends on access to cultural paradigms and tradition, the production of culture and identity occurs in perpetuity and is materialized through music (Hall,1999) or other art forms as demonstrated by Picturing Calgary. Hence, diaspora constantly reproduces itself as new kinds of subjects in the process of cultural formation, while always remaining enmeshed in local particularities and social affiliations. Therefore, to speak of diaspora here is not to speak of communities moved by the power of imagination and sentiments through media forms alone: diasporic identities are also subject to the social affinities, and critically reflective qualities of the individual, which remain *in place*.

The process of transculturation often holds particular assumptions as to the temporal quality of the immigrant's ontological status. Transculturation is never a matter of *becoming*, in the sense of "being on the way *somewhere*", but should rather be conceived to be in *constant production* and a process set against the abstractions of modern, nationalized cultural identities. In other words, the immigrant's temporal constitution as *Becoming* holds connotations of a *future*, and such notions, particularly as it relates to immigrant

identity, tend to focus on future endeavours and identity production, to the detriment of the individual's ontological status of the present. Hence, to conceive the temporality of immigrant identity as *Becoming* requires further examination: the composition of immigrant identity needs to be viewed as an ongoing process; it is one that is constantly being refashioned and in the making, often in response to the dictates of state multiculturalism.

In consequence, one often envisions immigrants to be characterized by investments in a new future, and transmigrants by a constant state of flux and mobility. Yet, if the possession of a Canadian permanent residence is to be the main distinguishing factor between immigrants and transmigrants, then in the photography project, there was not a marked difference between participants in their temporal constitution of ontological status in Calgary. For example, participants who were permanent residents of Canada spoke of their decision to get permanent residence status as a pragmatic one, providing them with "further options"; in fact, most of them were not at all decisive about committing to living in Canada for an extended period of time. Thus, state differentiation between residency statuses (Canadian, landed immigrant, visitor) did not have an effect on participants' temporal constitution of ontological status. Subsequently, to conceive the trans/im/migrant as residing in a state of "becoming" would be a misrepresentation for it focusses on a perceived "lack" on the part the trans/im/migrant/ - the "thing" he or she is missing and is "yet to become", rather then on how he or she formulates his present ontological status, particularly if, as we understand from above, identities operate from positions that are constantly being refashioned and rearticulated.

In seeking participants "new to Calgary" for the photography project, this thesis did not set out to seek ethnographic and visual representations of Calgary by a singularly identifiable group of people, but instead attempted to study how place-making can occur through a process emphasizing reflection and dialogue. In this sense, it was an inclusive project that brought a diverse group of people together. Hence, while the project's conception worked to refute any categorization of trans/im/migrant populations or an emphasis on collective identities, it also served to challenge the borders of nation-state, community and ethnicity in the process. Aggregate behaviours are not necessarily the prerogative of a single social or cultural group, and by not demarcating differences between groups of migrants (intraprovincial, interprovincial or national) prior, it hopes to shed light on such difference should any exist. To make a distinction between different types of trans/im/migrants is to attribute a categorical referent to a class of transnational or diasporic peoples, inviting connotations of class, status, ethnicity and nationalism into the process, and complicating the relationship between people, social context and place. Rather, the project has broader implications: keeping in mind that it does not strive to inquire into representations of place or experience per se, but rather into the ontological status of *being new*, the decision not to distinguish between categories of trans/im/migrant helps bring into relief any fissures in ontological status, and opens up interesting concepts of place and identity within the photo discussion group.

This project is led by several presumptions. If we are to believe with Hall that cultural hybridity is central to conceptions of diasporic identity, then diasporic identities should not be viewed as a necessarily conscious process, but rather one that occurs as a flux be-

tween states of unconsciousness and reflexivity. In addition, an individual's identity formulation is the result of a dialogical construct that unfolds in the presence of others and, as Amit contends, occurs through social networks and dialogue. Finally, such sociality occurs with the manoeuvrings of a single social agent and in consequence, locality becomes a conception and accumulation of his or her own experience.

As discussed in the next section, the photography project group worked to break down specifics of place or identity, and focussed instead on sharing meanings and learning as an experience of the project. In this constant back and forth process, participants were able to critically reflect on and formulate social connections with other participants in the group. In sum, such research provides critical insight into the processes of creating affinity across an otherwise diverse group of people, and refutes otherwise established categorical identities in the process. In the same vein, any disjunctures or tensions that occur within such fields of commonly held meanings can only bring about critical reflection and change.

## Ontological Explorations

As individuals, we are constantly trying to rise above and transcend the conditions of our existence through chosen and consciously enacted narratives, action and thought. At times, we envision ourselves to be of the world, and at times we remain apart from it, subjecting our individually held knowledge to critical reflection. Learning however, is also corporeal - acts of walking and conscious engagement with our immediate environment become phenomenological acts of exploring. Finally, our ontological selves also find meaning in the presence of others: the sharing of self narratives and the creation of dialogue is an empowering process. As this section illustrates, such acts are critical to the ontological self finding place in a new city and hence constitute a fundamental theme of this photography project.

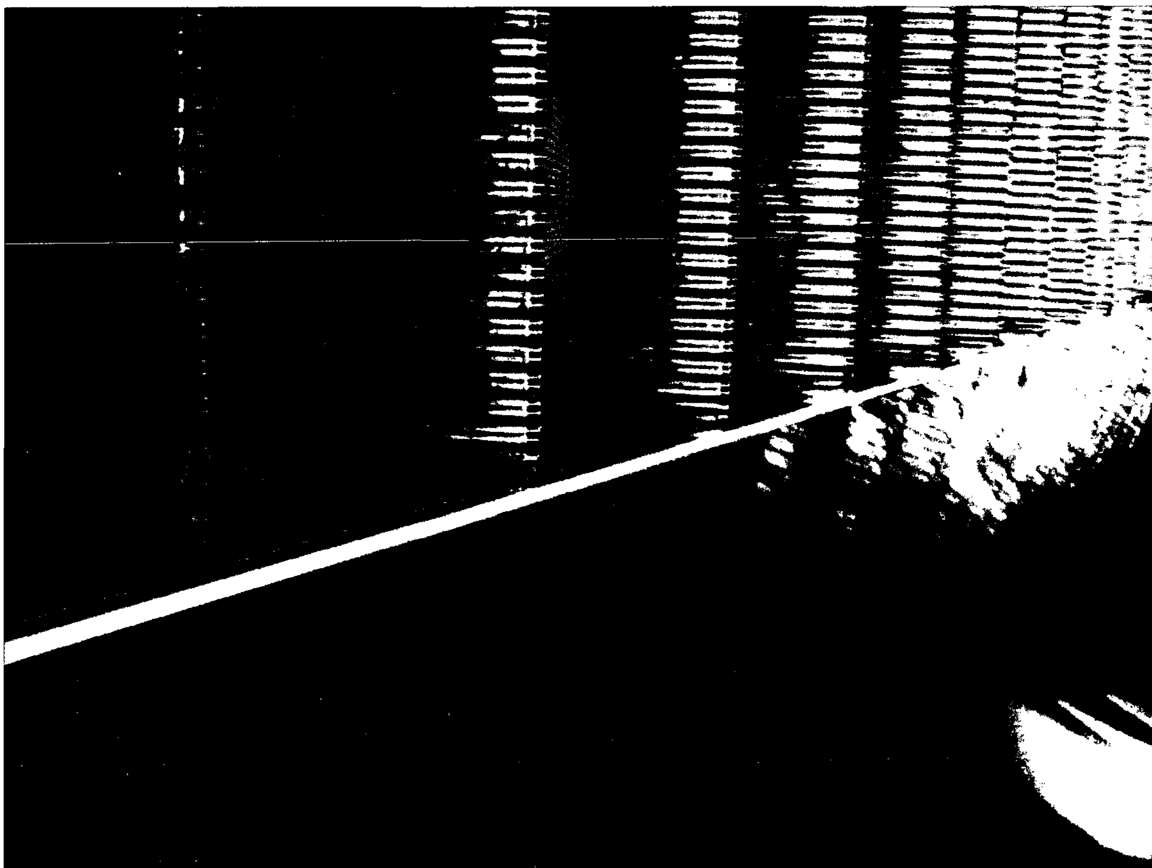
One's search for self or as Heidegger would say, as *Dasein*, is always constituted by temporality, serving to illuminate and elucidate his or her existence or presence in the world,. For most, this would consist of the tendency to imbue the lives we lead with intentionality, which can be conceived as being led in accordance with rational plans: whatever that is actually given and inevitable in our lives appears intentional when we recast our own lives as chosen and recreated. Hence, as Heidegger writes, human consciousness is a field of energy, focused on lifting us out of the merely material and endowing it with a creative spirituality of our own making (Heidegger, 1993).

With this tenet we are of course, aware that we are constituted of more than our ontological present. We are in fact, conscious beings with a "historical density" (Merleau-Ponty,

2002:297) and heritage. Furthermore, as social beings we are also imbued with sociality: any given person's conception of the social is already located within a certain perception of co-existence in a socially ordered world. As such, the "social is already there when we come to know or judge it....the social exists obscurely and as a summons." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:445).

However, while the habitus (of any given class, status or history) may reside in the individual subject, it is not necessarily materialized through the individual. If he is seen to possess a transcendent existence, then the individual is able to subject these densities of history or the realities of the socially ordered world to his or her will. Through the pursuance of conscious choice and freedom, our existence and the sort of person we would like ourselves to be finds form. Sartre (2003) further explains that with this very act, the individual is in fact choosing the ideal image of Man as he or she thinks Man ought to be. Hence, while Man may participate and act in a wider world of others, he is also simultaneously locating himself at the centre of this world. In other words, by choosing the ideal image of man, we also locate ourselves as being responsible for all men.

We therefore arrive at the recognition that man is comprised of ontological complexities: a person can at once be viewed as positioned *apart from* and *within* a world carved from understandings of history and sociality. In recognizing that people live within, in Husserl's term, everyday "life-worlds" that compel them to imagine and reconfigure forces of history and social realities in various forms, such a perspective acknowledges the interplay between the universal and the particular, subjectivities and objectivities, and the constitution of the past and the present.



**onwards and upwards?** (Jacqui)

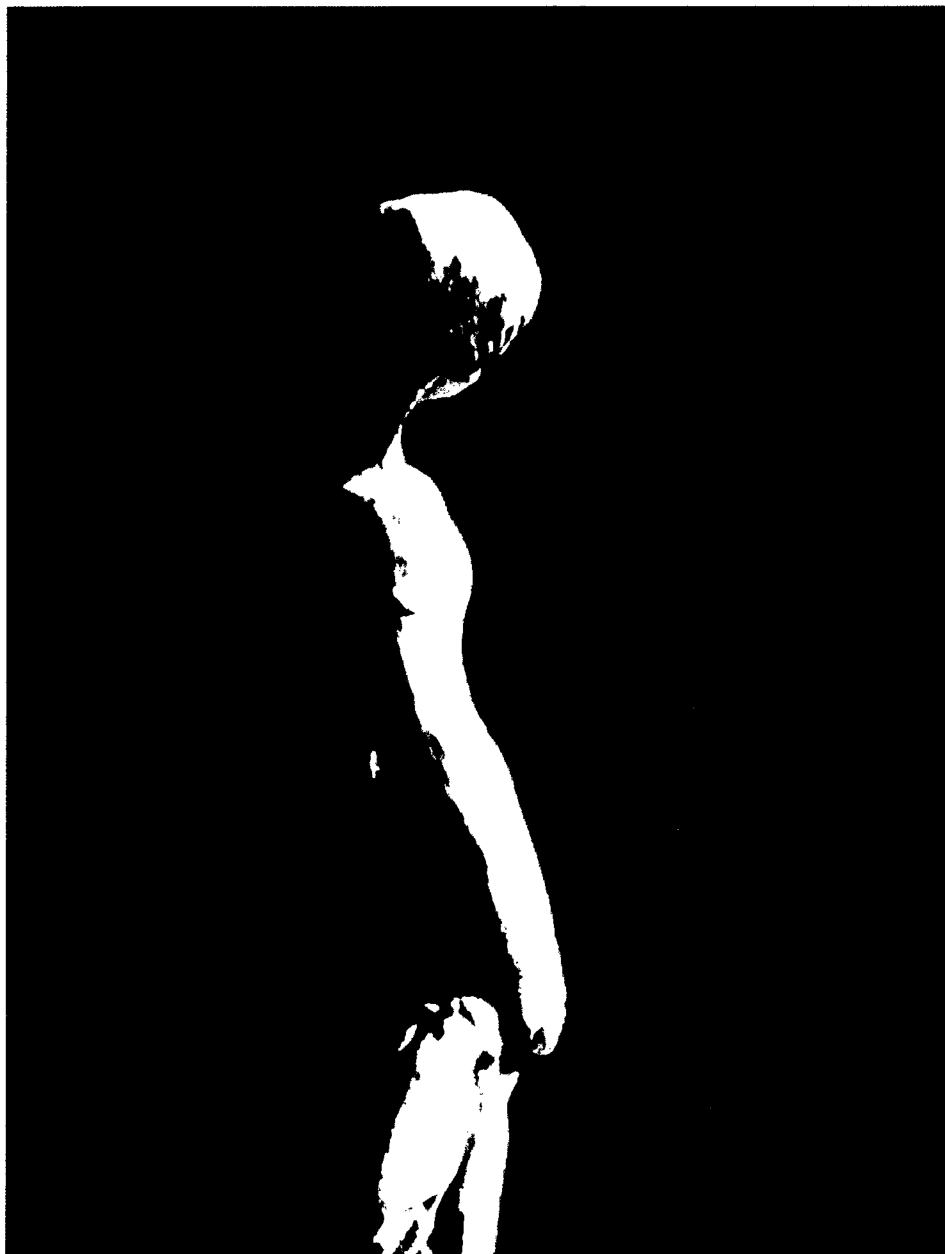
*"....really reminded me of a painting I would do, the idea of being here and moving onwards with my life... only its the wrong way 'round?"*

Yet, while we may desire to reconfigure the world by imbuing it with our own acts of intentionality and meaning, we do so in accordance with our current comprehension of the world and its corresponding epistemological roots. Such contemporary understandings of the world resonate the modern wisdom that *Man is a rational actor,* given to *further measure and analyse his world-as-object*. According to Arendt, the origin of such rational thought can be traced to Galileo's discovery of the telescope and the ability to make astronomical observations, and later, to Descartes' influence in analytical geometry, both of which have worked together to configure modern man's formulation of his epistemological world and his ontological self (Arendt, 1958). The ability to see the earth from afar, to map, survey and measure her lands, and to reduce to abstract algebraic symbols sensually derived data, results in a "shrinkage of the earth" (Arendt, 1958:251) that succeeds in removing "the eyes of the mind (267)" from given phenomena. In our minds, the submission of perceptual events to universal laws beyond the reach of human sense experience results in a conceptual distantiation from our surroundings and fails to give us a "purchase on human reality" (Jackson, 1998:25). Objective thought annihilates the possibility of subjective perception; the world is already presented pre-packaged and as a given, the setting for every event predetermined.

If we are to remain optimistic by the above caveat that we are foremost beings with a transcendent existence, then there needs to be the belief that we can indeed be *empowered* to subject whatever historicities, sociocultural realities and prior understandings of the world to our will and challenge them. Here, I contend that the catalysts and subsequent modalities in which we engage in critical self reflection infuse meaning into our everyday

duties. Our daily, ongoing realities are reworked into chosen and conscious ideals occurring through word, thought and action. By rediscovering our corporeal and sensory selves, and through the sharing of narratives and the creation of inter-subjective, discursive spaces, Picturing Calgary therefore equips participants with the tools and space to redefine their everyday worlds. Particularly because transmigrant experiences are a constant "dialectic between giveness and choice" (Jackson, 1998:27), the photography project allows participants to partake in a reflective and shared process of negotiation. Through this process transcendent consciousness may be realized, and each participant feels a substantial difference is made in their day-to-day lives.

In Picturing Calgary, the sensory body is instrumental in enabling participants to engage with their immediate environment and reflect upon these experiences. The use of a camera to explore the city on foot demonstrates a form of urban journeying and practice of photography that is a return to the "everyday life-world". The novelty of the photography project finds its heart in the retreat from daily lives offered to participants. On such liminal excursions, the voluntary and temporary removal from a once rational world remind participants that their bodies are a part of the world and as such, remain perceptually open to sensory experiences. Through these phenomenological explorations, a participant's body serves as a receiver and interpreter of sensory derived data to the extent that their immersion in the world is an extension of their sensual perception of it. Thus both the participant's external perception and the perception of the participant's own body are in effect "two facets of the one and same act" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:237). Put in other words, a body becomes central to one's world insofar as it is instrumental in making



**Untitled** (Maciej)

sense of the world. By putting together and formulating knowledge from, and of, the things we experience around us, "our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:449).

Thus, the practice theory of Bourdieu and de Certeau serves as a good reminder in further illustrating our daily journeying to and from the constructed environments of our cities. Our learning is phenomenal: sensual bodies move past the streets of the city, following "the thick and thins of an urban text" (de Certeau, 1993:153). We learn through sight and smell and touch, constantly moving, visualising, and mapping. We learn to cherish particular routes and practices, lingering over and pausing in certain spaces. It is in these spaces that we reflect, imbuing them with our stories, investing them with meaning, and creating place in the process.

Throughout the photography project, discursive spaces lead not just to a renewed engagement with the world, but also to the formulation and affirmation of ontological statuses. Merleau-Ponty explains that in the presence of others, a person is always constantly outside of himself, projecting himself, losing himself outside of himself. As he writes,

"how can the I be out into the plural, how can the general idea of a I be formed, how can I speak of an I other than my own, how can I know that there are other I's, how can consciousness which by its nature, and as self knowledge, is in the mode of the I, be grasped in the mode of Thou, and through this, in the mode of the 'One?' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:403).

At once “a subject for himself or herself - a who - and an object for other - a what” (Jackson), the understanding that one’s ontological presence is the result of one’s own intuited world is arrived at. Rather than each individual self having a hold on truth as it were, plural spaces help us to formulate ontological questions.

Within the discursive space of the photography project, a close camaraderie occurred. It would be easy, however, to dismiss the discursive and inter-subjective spaces of the project as shared goodwill and understanding; in Picturing Calgary, as with any given social situation, affinity is always accompanied by conflict and the meeting up of difference. In the photography project, it was not in the avoidance of polemics, but rather in the determination to head straight into difficult questions that led to interesting and fulfilling conversations, the process in itself allowing a graceful exit from the universal and the particular, and from subjectivism and objectivism.

It is also useful to note here that the conversations and images surrounding Picturing Calgary were more than simply representations of lives as experienced or places as lived. The explorations that participants embarked upon led to images and conversations that took on an essentially existential form. Hence, while these explorations did lead to photographic representation of ontological statuses, they also led to engaged discussions. Conceived through the project was thus an inter-*ness* between people, a field of “inter-est, inter-experience, inter-action, and inter-locution” (Jackson, 1998:3).

In consequence, following Jackson, one question that arises is whether, in the study of relation and the inter-*ness* of being, there lies the risk of losing sight of the phenomenol-

ogical reality of any individual representation. A study of a *route to being* is undeniably ambiguous: one gives up the search for any determinate or even subjective knowledge. Instead, one depends upon shifting fields of human interaction where contending needs, modes of consciousness, and values are always in production, without hope of a final resolution. It is useful to reiterate here that the focus of this thesis strives to avoid the consequence of seeking answers to understanding the experience of dislocation and relocation in a new city. Rather, the research question strives to reflect the nature and subject of the project itself: the dialogical aspect of the project highlights the experience and value of inter-subjectivity in ethnographic work among a diverse group of urban trans/im/migrants. It is observed that two things have been achieved through the project. First, the *doing*, and the *discussing* contributes to critical learning and thought among its participants, and is perhaps where the value of the project lies. Second, a study such as Picturing Calgary is not completely without ambition for resolution. The gist of knowledge gained through the project lies in its residuals. Through the after-effects of imagery, discussion and exploring, something otherwise deemed too difficult or intangible to grasp is achieved: a glimpse into ongoing experiences and conversations surrounding trans/im/migrant lives.

The anthropological project is not found in academic abstractions, but in social and cultural lives. The research therefore does the groundwork of examining the determined processes with which people make their lives in new places. At heart, being in a new place draws fundamental parallels with the existential process: it is a narrational process that searches for connections between the world from which "I" came, and the carving of

a new home in the *place* "I" currently reside. In so doing, the photography project does not locate participants as participants on a project of self-actualisation; rather, the focus is on the inter-subjective, inter-active, and inter-experiential ways in which participants have explored, shared and represented their various conceptions of being in Calgary.

Finally, places become invested with meaning through stories, which are fundamental to our lives and the places we reside. Jackson imagines storytelling not as stories that are told, nor stories that are isomorphic in nature, but rather as an action of mean-making. Stories are not the pure creations of autonomous individuals, but rather the result of on-going dialogues and reactions within fields of subjectivity. Central to our daily lives, stories form the backdrop of existential tension that informs every inter-subjective encounter. Like images, although stories can be canonical in any society and embedded into political, historical and social affairs, storytelling also questions, blurs, transgresses and sometimes abolishes boundaries (Jackson, 2002).

Telling a story is an empowering and inherently political process. While some (such as propaganda or totalising state narratives) create and sustain divisions between the powerful and the powerless, others work to redress injustices, enabling the powerless to recover their own agency. Truth, at times selective and practised, can therefore also challenge the assumptions of the core cosmologies of the powerful. Storytelling provides insights into the struggle to overcome the opposition between realms of symbolic determinacy and power by mediating between them. In providing these insights, agency, purpose and events come within one's grasp (Jackson, 2002). By acknowledging story telling as an ongoing process and dialogue focused on inter-subjective lives, we realise that it can lead

to open-ended questions of belonging by working through the dialectics surrounding urban, trans/im/migrant lives - of dispersal and reunion, continuity and discontinuity, attachment and loss.

## Visual Methodologies in Anthropology

In what is now largely viewed as the "writing culture debate" within anthropology, we learn that culture has become "contested, temporal and emergent" (Clifford, 1986:19). In the last two decades. the recognition that culture is always structured within global processes and power has created a "crisis of representation" that emphasizes the need to pay closer attention to the epistemological formulations of anthropological research on the one hand, and the accompanying processes of reflection and representation (both for the anthropological project and for the subjects of anthropological inquiry) on the other. As we have seen above, if the conditions of our existence are always dependent upon the specifics of history, locality and shared social understandings, then such a crisis necessitates the realization that representations are also contested and complex. Keeping these discussions in mind, this section examines the basis of the project's methodology, particularly as it relates to visual and collaborative research in anthropology.

This thesis contends that broader sociocultural, political and historical contexts need to be emergent in the design, production and representation of ethnographic knowledge. In visual anthropology, the "crisis of representation" has resulted in self-reflexive approaches and collaborative research, both of which are produced out of contestations and negotiations which constantly work to undermine essential truth (Pink, 2001). Subsequently, reflexivity has become a part of most researchers' toolkits, reflecting both the heightened awareness of the researcher's presence in the communities he or she is studying, and the modus operandi of the research itself. For Pink, this should not take the form of a precursory and obligatory method to eliminate the possibility of bias, but rather should repre-

sent a theoretical and ethical development within the discipline for the ethnographer to take responsibility towards the authority of an ethnographic account.

Hence, reflexivity should not simply be a matter of writing oneself into representation, but should also be emergent in the design and production of the research project itself. This research shares with McDougall (1998) in calling for a "deep reflexivity", requiring ethnographers to be conscious of their position in the very design, construction and representation of their research. What is required here "is a recognition of the constantly shifting position of the fieldworker as the research proceeds and as she or he experiences "differences in levels of understanding" as well as the shifts of mood and rapport characteristic of fieldwork (Pink, 2006:34)." In an anthropology that strives to become implicated in the process of ethnographic research and representation, it is critical to envision the ways in which epistemological knowledge is formulated, and as Pink writes, the processes involved in construing the positions of both researcher and informants.

Anthropologists become implicated in the lives of those they research and seek to represent. While most researchers inevitably approach their research subjects through seeking out difference and reflexively acknowledging their own sociocultural backgrounds as a frame of reference, this research with Picturing Calgary approaches that of Rabinow's, who confesses to being more comfortable working among urban professionals in his research, and begins from a perspective of similarity (Rabinow, 1986). By this I mean that the research herein involves working with participants and informants whose circumstances I understand and whose interests are similar to mine. In the same vein, it involves a mode of investigation - photography in a collaborative setting - which I am familiar and

enjoy working with. In addition, with this particular research subject, it is felt that the ability to share similar personal circumstances and interests with participants allows one to tread softly in areas that require more sensitivity, while the personal familiarity with the subject matter can lead to new and interesting dimensions of ethnographic work among diverse urban populations.

It is in working in locales, subjects and methods that we are familiar with that a sort of "anthropology at home" occurs, and blurs the distinction between sociology and anthropology. Both are after all, as George Marcus remind us, in the business of interpreting everyday lives (Marcus, 1986). Bourdieu's work for example, reflects an interest in the distinction between both disciplines. He recognizes that the anthropological paradox involves "the dialectical interplay of (the) two poles of objectivism and subjectivism, of structualism and phenomenology, of the strange and the familiar. (Lane, 1997:124)". With a "de-familiarising strategy", Bourdieu made a constant effort to turn the anthropological gaze onto his own society. The anthropological gaze, which he felt to be an act of critical engagement, allowed him to suspend both his and his readers' uncritical involvement in the apparent order which governed their existing social worlds. While it is difficult to ascertain in certain terms what such a "de-familiarisng strategy" might entail for the anthropological gaze, we see an evident political act at work here, for as we are challenging the dialectics between estrangement and empathy, objectivism and subjectivism, or the strange and the familiar, we are also challenging those deemed able to possess a anthropological gaze and have access to knowledge production and representation.

As noted above, a reflexive turn in anthropology has given way to more phenomenological approaches. Visual anthropology is an area particularly well suited for engaging critical reflections on power relations and truth formulation in ethnography (Pink, 2006). When working with the visual, representative frames are seldom fixed. Rather than a cursory exposition of informants' or researchers' positions, the specifics of shared understandings, or the place and history in which both operate, the production of visual knowledge takes a step further in dissolving frames of reference by allowing contesting representations to emerge through the ethnographic work. When working with photography in Picturing Calgary for example, the collaborative and discursive aspect of the project tended to draw greater attention to the representative frames of the images, bringing to the surface the rich, inter-subjective and critical engagements of research subjects. In creating a shared visual and discursive space among participants, the project allowed for greater participant agency and dialogue, and emphasized shared commonalities among participants despite different epistemologies and visual perspectives.

Picturing Calgary was a collaborative endeavour. Collaborative work in photography is usually understood to involve either researchers giving cameras to research subjects - usually children - to create their own images, or the engagement with a form of photo-elicitation (Banks, 2007). Given the problems associated with photo-elicitation however, it is important to differentiate and locate the project as an altogether different type of investigation. First, with photo-elicitation, it is impractical to "read" an image taken by a research subject given the image's inextricability from the photographer's sociocultural experience. Second, as we will see in subsequent chapters, photographs are ambiguous

and can be read in any number of ways. Thus, the researcher is unable to "interpret" the images without further input from research subjects, particularly if the photographer was given little direction.

Despite this, photo-elicitation is useful for particular types of research. To *elicit* is to hope to gather information from research subjects through their images. If the intention is for the images produced by research subjects to become subjects in themselves for further analysis, and if the images were provided with enough context for an adequate analysis, then photo-elicitation may prove an invaluable method, as researchers at the University of Amsterdam have demonstrated with participant-directed photography in their investigations of diversity in a Dutch neighbourhood (van der Does, Edelaar, et al., 1992).

In addition, the goal of Picturing Calgary was not to represent transmigrant experiences or their perspectives on the city, but instead understand how newcomers come to *formulate place for themselves*. Subsequently, it is conceived through this project that by taking photographs and creating a space where people can discuss the images in the presence of others, they can arrive at a better understanding of place, get a better sense of what there are doing "here", and ultimately create a semblance of "home" whether or not their stay in Calgary is permanent.

Methodologically then, the difference is slight but crucial: rather then having project participants produce representations of *living in a new city* or even of *the city* itself for eventual analysis and representation on the part of the researcher, the project takes on a more process oriented focus, reflecting on the *manner* in which participants use photography

and discursive methods to reflect on their presence in a new city. In other words, the research inquiry is focussed on how transmigrants, as visual practitioners new to the city, reflect on *being* in the city (in an ontological sense), as opposed to their experiences in Calgary or even what they think of the city itself.

Admittedly, each is a condition of the other. I have therefore chosen to place the conceptual equivalent of brackets around the photo essays. The essays are presented separately in chapter, with minimal editing other then for grammatical inconsistencies. It is hoped that as far as possible, self-representation is allowed to occur, and that through both text and image, the reader is able to piece together various aspects of each participant's involvement with the project.

It is important that an attempt has been made to provide each image with as much context from participants as possible, for as Pinney (1992) observes, the fixing of meaning with text, or putting a series of photographs alongside one another such that they enter into paradigmatic or metaphorical relationships with one another (as in the instance of a photo essay), produces a momentary closure to the image. He concludes that perhaps "all we can ever say is that the *what is* of photography, like that of anthropology, lies in the *what it is not,* its con-text" (90). Here, we can consider that it isn't so much a power that resides in the visuality of the image itself, but that it is the structuring certainty of a context that gives an image its power.

Individual images are also interspersed throughout the thesis. These images have been produced through the duration of the project and are the result of participants' explora-

tions and discussions. While these are accompanied by comments from participants where available, they are also bound to enter into a metaphorical relationship with the accompanying academic narrative. Hence, two readings are possible with each photograph: that of the photographer's, and that of the researcher's. The intention behind the placement of the visual within the text is to allow for inter-textuality within the research to emerge.

It is necessary to explain how "the collaborative" in the visual project is constituted, for the term "collaboration" can be rather broad and is often applied to a wide range of research projects without further clarification of what it entails. If the measure of collaboration in a project is simply the involvement of research subjects in the production of knowledge, then all first hand social science research projects can be seen to be essentially collaborative. (Pink, 2006). On the one hand, Picturing Calgary would seem a likely candidate of a collaborative endeavour, for participants had control over the production and representation of imagery and participated in discussions central to the project. Yet viewed differently, the status of the "collaborative" within the project can come into question, for here the researcher stood back and remained relatively removed from the actual process of information or "data" collection, while participants were involved to a larger degree in the production and discussion of images and photo essays.

The collaborative nature of a project can be gauged, following Pink (2006), by the *applied* nature of the research. Subsequently, research that functions as a tool of social intervention and introspection for research participants can be seen to be applied. In Picturing Calgary, several participants expressed an interest in the project because it served as

both a social space and forum for themselves as photographers, and as new residents of the city. In addition to easing the transition to a new cultural environment, participants have, in the production of photo essays, sought an avenue of self representation to a wider audience, primarily through searching for a publication venue for the essays. Furthermore, participants were crucial to the construction of the project itself by suggesting structures for the discussions, bringing equipment, initiating meetings and leading discussions. It is through their active contribution to the construction of the epistemological process, their representation of any knowledge acquired, and their determination that the project should serve as a tool of intervention in the quiet, winter months of the city that the project can be viewed as applied, and consequentially collaborative.

Hence, collaborative work often constitutes multifaceted experiences and knowledge constructions that are not visible (Pink, 2006), and even then a single project can hold different meanings for different people. It is therefore difficult to delineate the different ways in which a single project may have affected change upon the lived experiences of its participants. In any case, Pink observes that collaboration works to problematize the timeless quality of the research subject's experience, and draws attention to the fact that the subjectivity of the research subject is central to the construction of his or her own knowledge. Furthermore, in recognizing inter-subjectivity, collaborative research serves as an ethical alternative for the ethnographic project. It empowers participants through the production of their own images, provides a space for reflection, and acts to further the causes of its participants.

Both Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005) stress the important role collaboration with visual practitioners plays in both pushing the limits of using the visual in social science research, and in investigating ways of embodied and sensory knowing. With regards to the latter, they follow ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall in recognizing that visual research may be an ideal way to represent the perceptual experience of individual subjectivities (1997). Reflexive and subjective ways of knowing found in sensual epistemologies often work to problematize the ethnographic authority of a scientific, anthropological project of modernity.

A visual approach to research entails a fundamental reorientation of how knowledge is formulated. Research operating within a visual paradigm entails the understanding that knowledge is not formulated discursively through language, explanation, or generalisation, but rather through a re-insertion of the sensory self into a renewed enquiry and engagement with everyday life. In anthropology, the visual is particularly apt in accessing sensory registers, offering a route to other senses, and resolving difficulties faced in communicating about other sensory facets of experiences (MacDougall, 1998). The visual language may well be metaphorically and experientially closer to certain subjective experience and in some cases, serve as a better medium of representation than text. As we have seen earlier, if the different modalities of sensory experience can be understood as inseparable (Taussig, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 2002), and if the perception of everyday experience can only be accessed tacitly, then the sensual body can be seen to serve as the central conduit for the metaphoric organization of experience. Hence the eye, through contact and copy (Taussig, 1993), yields knowledge through proximity, a *relating to*.

Here, vision is understood to be inherently tactile: through prior experience or touching, we fill in the gaps as to what any object, event or occurrence witnessed, *is*.

Finally, image based inquiry opens the possibility for new and different kinds of knowledge to come into view (Grimshaw, 2001). It exemplifies the recurring call for a renewed anthropology where artists and visual practitioners can share an engaged commitment to experimental forms of ethnographic work. Hence, in the spirit of experimenting with emergent forms of representation, Picturing Calgary is an inquiry into new possibilities of experiential ethnography. The experiences of both researcher and subject within a field of image-driven discursivity problematizes representation, emphasizes individual subjectivities, and creates critical spaces for reflection and dialogue in the process.

# III - Picturing the City

## Picturing Calgary

The centrality of the city in the minds of its inhabitants affirms its confidence. Such centrality is not just spatial and political, but also historical and social: the urban city mediates the organization of economic production, distribution and exchange, serves as a site for the reproduction of social and cultural life, and attends to the centrality of political power. Urban centres also stand testimony to a new geography where an increasingly dense and diverse population of inhabitants behold daily practices that serve as the core and localization of a global culture.

This chapter looks at narratives of Calgary's historical growth, traces the city's development in the last decade, and discusses how space - conceived here as both physical and virtual - is ontologically constituted. It also looks at how participants in Picturing Calgary perceive the city they live in, contending that place can be claimed through acts of spatial appropriation. Finally, it looks at the act of walking on urban streets, particularly as it relates to the shape of participants' exploratory walks.

In Picturing Calgary, photography occurs as an act of exploration of the city on foot. While the daily lives of newcomers involve encounters with a new cultural landscape, physical infrastructures are also significant to the imagination of a city's residents because its urban morphology is often reflective of sociocultural landscapes. In North America, particularly in western prairie cities like Calgary where space is abundant, urban development occurs laterally and cars constitute a crucial component of each resi-

dent's daily life. Consequently, the present era of architectural design disdains pedestrians; for the newcomer used to the transpiration of public life on streets, the effects are particularly distressing: walls, guards, security systems, telecommunications, technology and design appear designed to purge physical public space. Jacqui, a participant in the project from the UK, relayed to the photography group her experience during the first months of her stay in Calgary. Living in her partner's parent's home in the community of Chestermere five miles east of the city limits, she felt a crippling sense of isolation from the rest of city life, and was depressed from being restricted at home for those first months. Her experience reminds us of the criticality of denser infrastructure scaled for humans rather than cars. Without a car in Calgary, it becomes remarkably inconvenient to access most major shopping centres outside of the downtown core. Where bus routes make an area accessible, the infrequency of their arrival and long meandering routes renders the service provided overwhelmingly impractical. Pathways to and from bus stops generally remain unshovelled, making the experience of walking a slippery, burdensome and potentially hazardous task.

While gentrification is often the most cited reason for the development of large suburban projects on the outskirts of the city, the clearly demarcated borders and resultant isolation of suburban neighbourhoods, satellite towns, or massive housing projects outside of urban areas demonstrate a structural violence designed to maintain the inaccessibility of certain areas, which serve to keep *out* or keep *in*. From Castells we learn that cities are sites of economic production, and urban spaces often reflect unequal geographies (1977). This perpetuation and experience of capitalism is central to the urban imaginary, which is

in turn projected onto physical space. Processes like ghettoisation are integral to an exploitative social and physical reproduction of urban space, producing class inequality and class based consumption. Inaccessible public transport, wide highways, busy roads, and other physical barriers serve as instruments restricting and determining the fluidity of movement of particular social groups. For example, Caldeira's comparative work of fortified enclaves in San Paolo, Brazil and Los Angeles in the United States shows how segregated spaces can lead to perceptions of exclusion and restriction for both the wealthy and the poor. For the poor, particular urban trajectories - the usage of public transportation, width of sidewalks, or parks located behind facades - contribute to an actual sense of exclusion borne from physical, constructed boundaries. For the wealthy, a sense of fear arising out of feelings of suspicion and danger both constructs and is constructed by, physical borders (Caldeira, 1999). Segregation takes the form of an imagined boundary, keeping one away from peoples or areas identified either as dangerous or exclusive.

However, cities can be read as more than sites of economic production and uneven distribution of wealth. They are alternately observed to be sites of eclecticism, diversity and fusion. It is within urban centres that projects like Picturing Calgary, with its diverse group of participants, can occur. Cities enable one to indulge in an agglomeration of expressive cultures in urban spaces, and celebrate an interconnection that "in its insubordinate and carnivalesque best, has been known to project an immediacy, a rebel solidarity, and a fragile, universal humanity powerful enough to make race and ethnicity suddenly meaningless" (Gilroy, 2000: 249). Yet, as we have seen earlier, and in what Sassen terms a "global politics of place" (Sassen, 2006), the global is becoming pervasively and insidi-

ously rooted in the local. We see two major actors - global corporate actors, and diasporic communities, activists and transmigrants - forming linkages that create global interconnections that operate above and beyond the nation, in effect denationalizing urban space. In consequence, a rescaling of regional, national and global processes occurs, such that we see more "multi-scalar" (Sassen, 2007, p. 6) activity: global conglomerates in the form of multinational corporations for example, take on more abstract organization as they transfigure into local organizing models that promote local management and service operations. In demonstrating greater strategic flexibility, the agglomeration of economies is ultimately beneficial for such global conglomerates (Sassen, 2007).

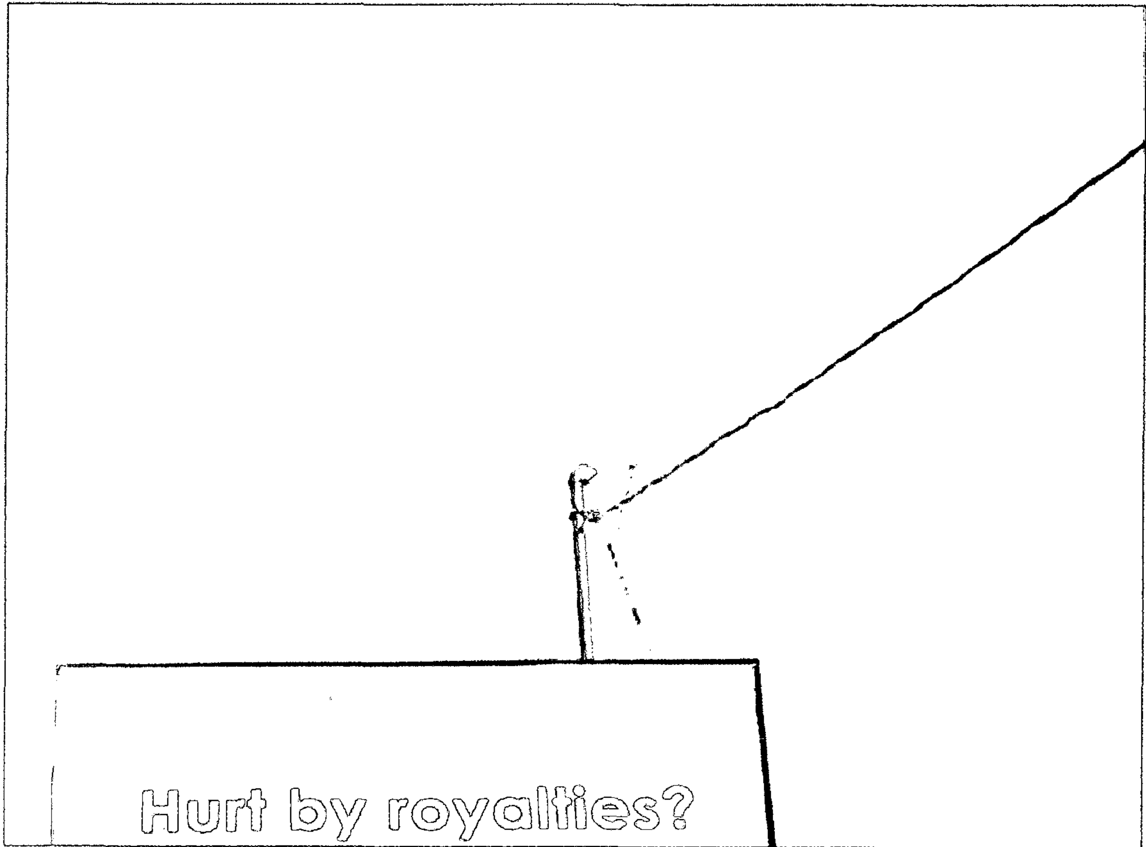
Global linkages, rooted in local networks and affinities, result in interconnections that are increasingly multiscaler - while cities remain global centres of economic, political and social lives, some serve a greater role in a regional or national sense. This regionality is represented in how global expertise is increasingly constituted by local services. We can see this in the development of Calgary in the past decade, as oil and gas activity reconfigured the city's regionality such that it is now a crucial node in the international coordination of a resource economy. Yet comparatively, Calgary is not a churning global metropolis; it does not, for example, host the vibrant ethnic communities Toronto or Vancouver are known for. Such communities play a vital role in enhancing global trade, financing and investment, and serve as crucial propagating grounds for processes that create affinity among a city's many migrants and residents. In this sense, cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver are much more globally interconnected than Calgary.

Calgary's growth is a direct result of national migration. Looking at migration patterns over a five year census period from 1996-2001 for Calgary, we find substantially larger interprovince migration patterns than we do international migration (Statistics Canada, 2002). Similarly, from the 2006 census, we find 80,400 migrants from other provinces living in Calgary, as opposed to only 62,830 who migrated internationally (Statistics Canada, 2008). In comparison, international migration in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver serves overwhelmingly as the primary source of growth (Statistics Canada, 2008), far exceeding interprovincial and intraprovincial migration.

During Calgary's critical boom period of the last decade, Alberta gained substantial population increases, receiving far more interprovincial migrants than cities like Toronto. During this period, Calgary's growth rate was by far the highest among Canadian cities (Statistics Canada, 2002). Along with Edmonton, Calgary demonstrates characteristics akin to what Hillier terms "arriviste" cities - cities that have recently obtained power and influence, though lacking the acceptance and recognition of a traditionally global metropolitan centre. In consequence, the arriviste city's newly found growth and development translates to what is often viewed as a brash tone of new power, marking an uncertainty perhaps, about its changing, untenable status among the larger cities (Hillier, 2007). The city can be seen undergoing an intense transformation and expansion process as it tries to locate itself within the national fabric and urban hierarchy. This is evident in the city's many revitalisation and urban development projects, as well as corporate expansion in its urban core.

Oil and gas developments in the area serve as very significant staples offering tremendous economic advantages for the region, setting the two Albertan cities - Calgary and Edmonton - apart from the rest of the Canadian cities. As the administrative and corporate centre of the petroleum industry, we see considerable changes to the city's urban morphology. Calgary has a well developed pool of capital around its resource: the formation of hundreds of small oil companies have resulted in a formidable urban presence in downtown Calgary, and an extensive range of consulting and support services have developed around the industry (Hillier, 2007). As mentioned earlier, Calgary is rapidly becoming a crucial node for the national and international co-ordination and servicing of firms and financial markets in its resource economy. A large amount of global corporate offices, many of them providing support service capacities to the resource industries, have only recently been located to the downtown core (Hllier, 2007). Their presence echoes a demand in today's global markets for highly specialized corporate services (Sassen, 2002). Labour and capital flows are also bi-directional: many industry specific specialists evolving from the industry, especially in engineering, have been mobilized in energy and resource developments around the globe, leading to an exportation of technology and expertise internationally.

Hence, a valued resource in Alberta has led directly to the establishments of local, national and international networks and connections around the globe. The narrative of Calgary in the last decade has been one of rising employment, economic growth and rising housing costs. Its popular boom town imagery has garnered much attention and serves as a magnet for migration, particularly among the young. Indeed, the links and penetrations




**Mo money; mo problems** (Oliver)

*"manifest civility ever westward"*

generated by the new resource economy often prompt new growths of migrants (Sassen, 2006). Paralleled with the expansion of blue-collar jobs, we also see a rise in white collar service sector jobs as expanding local national and foreign companies seek to gain a foot-hold in the growing economy. Characteristic of an arriviste city, Calgary exerts a growing amount of international influence, not just through the exportation of industry specific services, but also through the connections of the energy industry with activities elsewhere in the world. To the life of its citizens, it adds an international dimension to a once re-gional outlook. It is perhaps breaking out of a regional role, and establishing itself as the self-styled "Heart of the New West" (The City of Calgary, 2008).

Our understanding of a city is also comprised of its historical narratives, which inform residents about the foundational myths of the city. My own understanding of Calgary at times feel like this: part subject to the idiosyncrasies of my experiences, part my own re-flections and part what I understand of the city's historical identity, all sweeping into a single construct.

Like most who are new to Calgary, I began my residence here with little idea of what the city was about. I began gathering knowledge of the city in my own ways, gleaned through fleeting moments of observation. My first apartment in Calgary, when I first moved here in 2006, was one block north of 16th Avenue in the northwest, a major thor-oughfare which also functioned as the Trans-Canada highway as it weaved out of the city. I looked forward to weekends in the mountains and from my perspective, the Trans-Canada beneath appeared as a straight line, always heading straight out west towards the Rockies.

In Calgary, I would experience its chinooks and (oddly enough given the bright lights of the city), my first glimpses of the flickering northern lights. Chinooks, that occasional warm blast of winter wind from the mountains, were much anticipated, both for the prospect of warm weather, and for the dramatic change in scenery. From the rooftop of my apartment building, chinooks make for spectacular sunsets. On chinook days, Foran and Foran observes, "a grey arch of cloud stretches like a giant canopy to frame the sky and the mountains below. The white fingers of mountain protruding into a blue, almost mauve, sky and produce a contrast of awesome grandeur. (Foran & Foran, 1982:6)".

I've moved since, but then as it is now, the ten minute walk to the north bank of the Bow river is one of my favorite evening activities. From this northern escarpment running west to the rockies, one can command inspiring views of the mountains on a clear day. The community of Rosedale Crescent is a thriving community today: numerous upscale residences sit perched on the river's bank, gazing down into the sweeping valley of the Bow and peering across from the city's downtown. The view is particularly inspiring at sunset, when the uninterrupted and imposing skyline of downtown Calgary glimmers from the south bank of the Bow. It is startling to learn from Elsie Kneeshaw, who went to high school in the area in the early 1920s, that the community of Rosedale Crescent sitting on that same hilltop consisted of only five houses at the time. Yet, the view remains as magnificent. As she writes, "I feel quite certain that nowhere in the world does any city have a skyline more dominant, more etched, and significant to it than the northern escarpment which Calgary possesses." (Kneeshaw, 1975:317).

**Alberta Ghost Towns** (Gareth)

*"[from album discription]These are photos I took in two towns in Alberta at the end of January. They are Dorothy and Rowley, both semi-abondoned ghost towns near Drumheller. I decided to take a trip out there specifically to photograph these towns for a number of reasons. Firstly I find tumble-down wooden, prairie landscapes to be beautiful, you certainly don't find this type of setting anywhere near home. Secondly I think it's important to understand and document the growth and decline of communities. It's a cliche to say learn from others mistakes but I think it holds true. Exploring and documenting Calgary's growth is fascinating to me, especially when I contrast that with these towns, which makes me start to ask many questions. Calgary is definitely growing and these places are definitely not. It's interesting to think that at the time Dorothy and rowley were being established so was Calgary, what made Calgary go on to become a city of a million and these towns fall into disrepair? Is it as simple as a decision somewhere to re-route the trainline or is there something more to it? I spoke to a local in Dorothy who had recently (couple of years) moved there. He at first seemed annoyed but after speaking with him for a while he showed us the churches and invited us to go inside. He had immense pride in the restoration work the locals were doing to preserve these stunning buildings. I feel like in some way documenting these buildings through photography helps that restoration, if only in spirit."*

**Branding 1** (Jee-Sun)
[from the album "Branding - A day spent helping brand calves in Nanton, AB"]

*"People chatting before branding starts. Branding is where neighbor networks come in. Everyone helps each other."*

It was also the same spot where in the summer of 1875, Northwest Mounted Police halted at the northern bank of the Bow River following a ride across the prairie (McEwan, 1975). With an expanse of land laid out around them, they decided that Calgary looked ideal as a place to establish a fort. Ten years later, the Canadian Pacific Railway built a railway station in what was then a growing settlement. With tracks stretching from Toronto and Montreal, Calgary soon established itself as the chief distributing centre for the developing agricultural and ranching hinterlands of south and south central Alberta. The settlement saw a brief population boom from 1909 to 1912, and the city soon established itself from a railroad centre to a moderately sized city. (Foran & Foran, 1982)

The city experienced brief excitement when oil deposits were discovered in May of 1914, at Turner Valley. However, over the next three decades, it would face a dip in growth largely owing to two world wars, declining immigration and an economic depression. When oil was discovered again in February of 1947 at Leduc near Edmonton, the city was ready to herald in a modern era of commercial oil exploration and extraction. (Foran & Foran, 1982). Today, oil developments represent the successful experience that has earned Calgary big city status.

In fact, both frontier ranching and petroleum & natural gas developments are cornerstones of Calgary's identity. The Stampede, a symbol of an unpredictable and often struggling ranching industry, is presented to the city's residents each year as a proud spectacle. While outsiders may look on with a trace of irony, behind the festivities stand a proud legacy of the ranching frontier spirit of the Old West. The event *is* central to Calgarian life: each year, the city shuts down for a week as a good majority of the city's population,

including its corporate citizenry, don their cowboy hats and boots and head to the Roundup Centre for "The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth" (The Calgary Stampede, 2008).

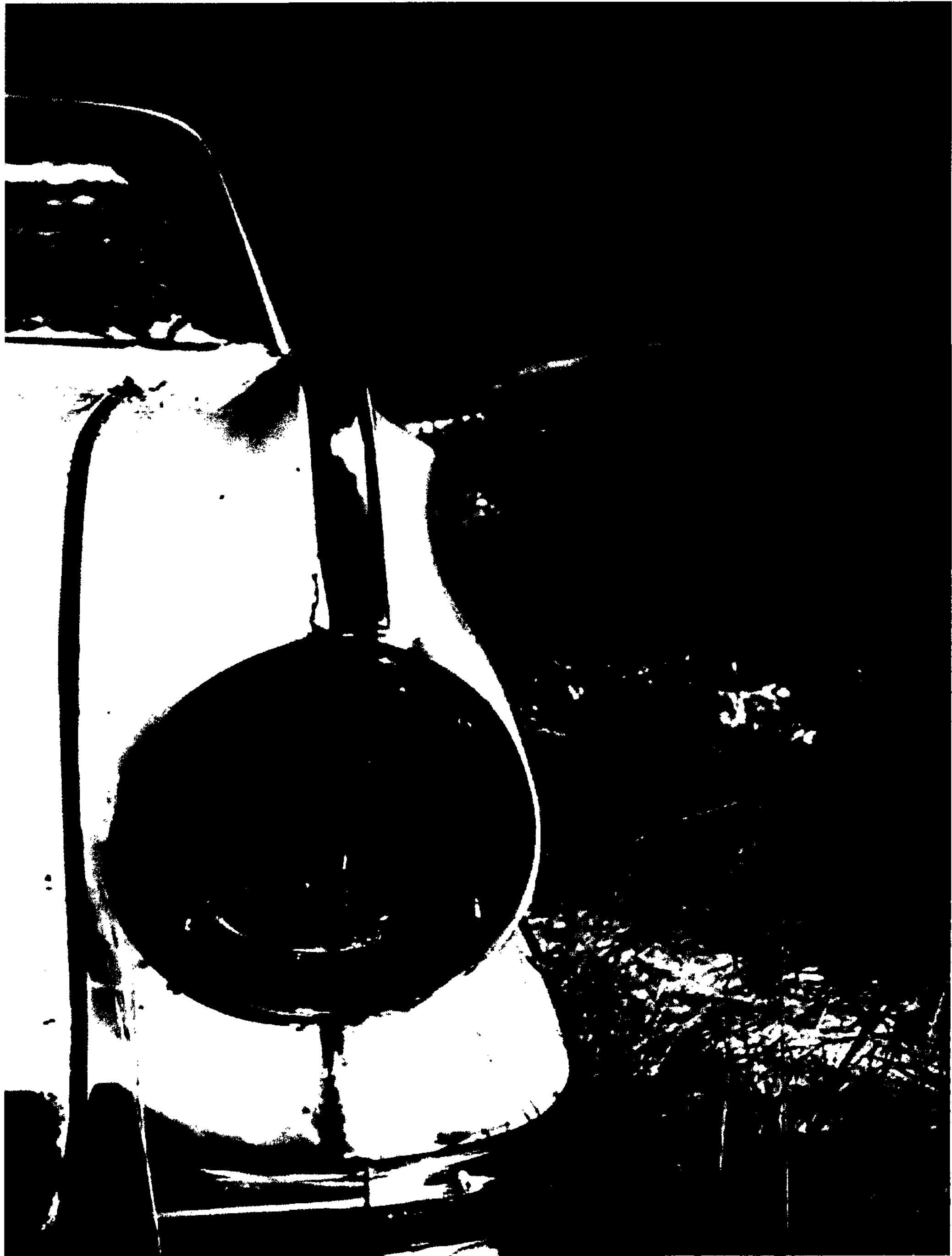
Calgary may exhibit some of the commonly held disdains for the city - Van Herk (2001) lists the three most often cited ones as "cowtown, oiltown, or American (308)" - but it is nevertheless a city thriving on its contradictions. Van Herk articulates it as "a town that mixes ranching and business, oil and dark water, full of briefcase-carrying cowboys and computer hackers and pickup trucks. It's a raw city, all elbows and knees, sprawled on the cusp of the prairie and the foothills of the Rockies, grazing toward the mountain scenery to the West and reeling from the inebriating mountain air" (Van Herk, 2001:308).

Alberta itself is popularly conceived of as a maverick province (Van Herk, 2007; Foran & Foran, 1982). In Van Herk's imagination, the province is characterized by its audacity, endearing contradictions and wild unpredictability. She writes that growing up in southern Alberta in the fifties and sixties was to be "full of energy and conviction, endlessly expansionist, crazily unpredictable, seeded with evangelists and dust-driven gravel rocks and the wild optimism of oil strikes and growth. There was so much promise in the air that we could tip it out and drink it" (Van Herk, 2001:xii).

Calgary, sitting as the bastion of oil and ranching culture in South central Alberta, has cultivated a singular frontier image over the decades, one that is proudly characterized by individualism, freedom and opportunity. In popular imagination, it is also envisioned as nestled at the foothill of the rockies, sandwiched between the endless prairie to the East

**Horses In Kananaskis Country** (Jean)

*"I was thinking about Jacqui's 'Horsey' when I took this. It was very neat - they started galloping towards me the moment I pulled out my camera."*



**Untitled. from the album "Alberta Ghost Towns"** (Gareth)

**sweep** (Gareth)

*"The Archway at the entrance of the University is kind of iconic.
This I think is a slightly different perspective on what used to be the footbridge over Crowchild Trail before it moved here in 1986."*

and the rolling green meadows to the south and west. Like the glossy pamphlets dished out by the tourism industry, my own romantic narrative of Calgary is composed of a similar enchantment with place: cattle graze off the land in rolling meadows, interspersed with golden seas of wheat, and against a backdrop of alpine scenery, mountain trails, emerald lakes and streams.

Narratives of Calgary vary widely: they may consist of personal or cultural narratives, or may be understood from within any array of perspectives, be they historical, global or economic. Yet, our understandings of place are constituted by many such interweaving and at times, conflicting, narratives. Hence, it is only through the examination of how different narratives of place are configured that we gain greater insight into the ways in which places are constituted for residents.

It is evident through Picturing Calgary that a host of different perspectives are held for the same city, each representing different ontological formulations of place by its various participants. For example, the very first photographs Maciej showed the project group were taken in Poland, one of which was of a sculpture along a public street in Krakow. What he found missing in Calgary, he said, was the presence of sculptures that "actually mean something" to the city's residents. This is held in contrast to Krakow's sculptures which serve both as focal points for one's gaze and as markers for people to arrange to meet and converse with friends.

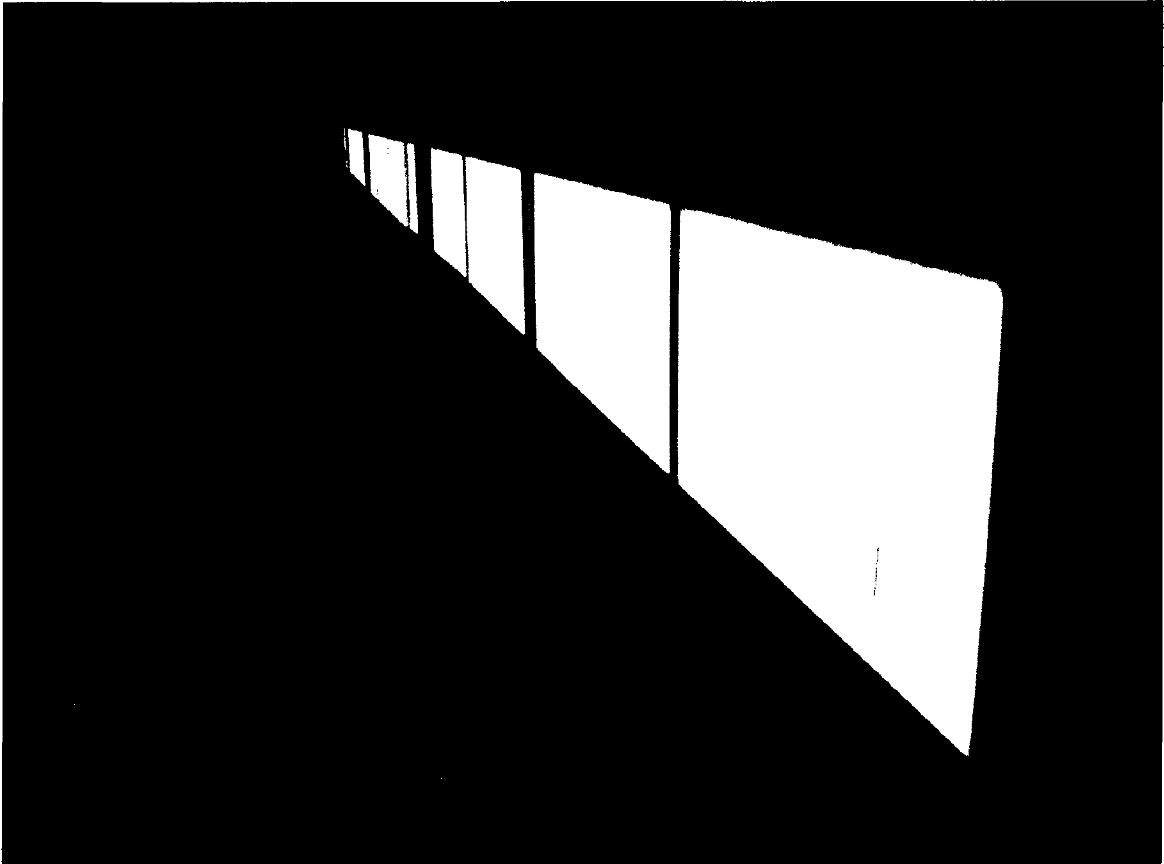
In the following weeks, Maciej took photos of old heritage signs, icons and other architectural embellishments in the heritage community of Inglewood, and of sculptures in the

downtown core. On another occasion when we met for a walk to take pictures, he took several photos of sculptures dotting the streets. He was particularly bemused by the the location of a sculpture we found at the back of a hospital, located next to a large grease waste trap. "Could you imagine," he asked, "if you were the sculptor, and a friend asked you where he could view your sculpture? You would have to say it is next to a dumpster at the back of a hospital!" For Maciej, not only are the aesthetics of a sculpture's immediate environment important, its locality and surroundings stand testament to the relevance and status of sculpture in the everyday lives of the city's residents. Left dejected, the sculpture becomes both immaterial and insignificant. Unseen and without context, they are rendered meaningless as they stand alone along street corners.

The *thing* lacking in the city, the *elusiveness* most participants in Picturing Calgary are trying to pin down, I suspect, is the quality we each find missing in the city. And the thing that we are missing, the *absence* we are trying to enact, are our memories of what we think the city *ought* to be. For me, this takes the form of the bustle, sights, sounds and smells of crowded streets enveloped by towering skyscrappers. In their absence, my conceptualisation of Calgary is marked by a disquieting silence. If personal histories seem to linger like an aura for the newcomer to the metropolis, then we arrive at an acute awareness of how history can be tied to our spatial surroundings. Since space can be constituted by the fissures of contrasting histories for the (postcolonial) subject (Chakrabarty, 2000), then the newcomer to the metropolis is also such a historically dense subject. The tensions that occur are not simply social, but also historical and spatial: for where histories meet, fissures are created between the lived histories of the transmigrant, and the structur-

**Inglewood Birds** (Maciej)

*"Calgary Pioneers :-) Inglewood"*



**Space** (Jacqui)

*"I like this - I took it because it was so empty, and now I feel like it represents space for me?"*

ing surroundings of the city. These tensions can manifest *and* be dissolved through spatial practices and explorations of place, and as Geertz (1973) would say, "the stories people tell themselves about themselves" - our images and narratives.

Picturing Calgary reveals different perspectives on the same city. Ontologically, we inhabit virtual spaces that for the postmodern subject, can be conceived of as borderlands. Residence in these borderlands are marked off by our existence against two polemics, or opposing borders. Here, in our daily lives, we reside in perpetuity, discursively and experientially, always moving tangentially towards and away from these borders. Such perpetuity is not defined by an elusiveness - that would be far too bleak. Rather, it is an existence that is defined by in-betweeness: a nothingness/somethingness, an absence/presence. It is, as Shields (2006) writes, a dynamic, interactive and vital place: a being that is actualized and realized through performative action.

Subsequently, pertinent to physical space, recent trends in humanistic geography tend to focus on the social construction of localities, wherein a sense of place is carved out of the creation of relationships between space and social life. Such research usually focusses on how space as imagined by the evocation of sentiment in particular settings, hence the constitution of a *sense of place* (Tuan Yi-Fu, 1977). This is a subjective rendering of place, where in everyday day life, to know a place is to develop a deep sentiment, nostalgia or sensuous knowledge for a place, and is derived through memory, attachment and social interaction as seen in the photographs of Picturing Calgary.

Thus, each of us behold different perspectives and sentiments of the city, and if the borderlands that constitute the virtual, ontological spaces we inhabit are to be realized, action needs to be initiated upon the spaces we inhabit. "Social spatialisation" (Cooper, 1999) offers a useful concept for how space can be practised. Here, the possession of the spatial occurs through discursive and non-discursive elements, individual practices and inherently social interactions with the landscape: narratives, paintings, diagrams, maps, and photographs. Here, agency can be claimed through the employment of action upon physical space (Bourdieu, 1977; de Certeau, 1993), and ownership is further practised through acts of discursivity, exploration, negotiation and representation. In calling for more public spaces to be created, Wood and Gilbert (2005) observe that the urban landscape is a powerful site for the negotiation of cultures, knowledge and powers between different groups. They hold Toronto's downtown core of public spaces and ethnic neighbourhoods (more than 50% of its inhabitants are immigrants) in contrast to suburban landscapes, where conflicts often arise when different expressions of cultural identity attempt to challenge a homogenous landscape. Hence, public spaces can further become places of ownership through spatial practices, the proliferation of cultural expression and negotiation of cultural identities, and mediation between private selves and public roles.

**The Places We Live**

Jacqui's first photograph in her photo essay (chapter four) conveys a sense of disconnectedness from her immediate network of friends, places and social gatherings when she is suddenly confronted with a poster stand on a city street that is covered with startlingly unfamiliar people, events and references. Similarly, during a recent visit home to the UK, Gareth talks about "opening up the box" upon his arrival home, a reference to the sudden and overwhelming rush of familiar social contexts, places and people he had otherwise put away while living in Canada. His reference was familiar for me, and we talked about how "opening up the box" was always bittersweet: the experience is a perpetual sensory overload compressed into a couple of weeks, comprised of the sudden rush of familiar friends, food and landscapes, and followed by equally rushed goodbyes afterwards.

A "loss of place" often operates as a metaphor for transmigrant culture. For those new to places, people, professions and jobs are left behind. This section looks at how place, whether places "at home" or places we currently reside in, is ontologically and temporarily constituted. Such constitutions affect how we conceive the places we currently reside in, and consequently our experience in these places.

There is a certain frustration at having our experiences in Calgary/Canada negated or overlooked while at the same time there is a tinge of guilt for being absent from "home". Gareth and I talked about the stresses of being bombarded by questions of "when are you coming home?", or "how long are you staying in Canada?". For Maciej, whenever he called home, there was a certain, urgent insistence from family and friends about when he

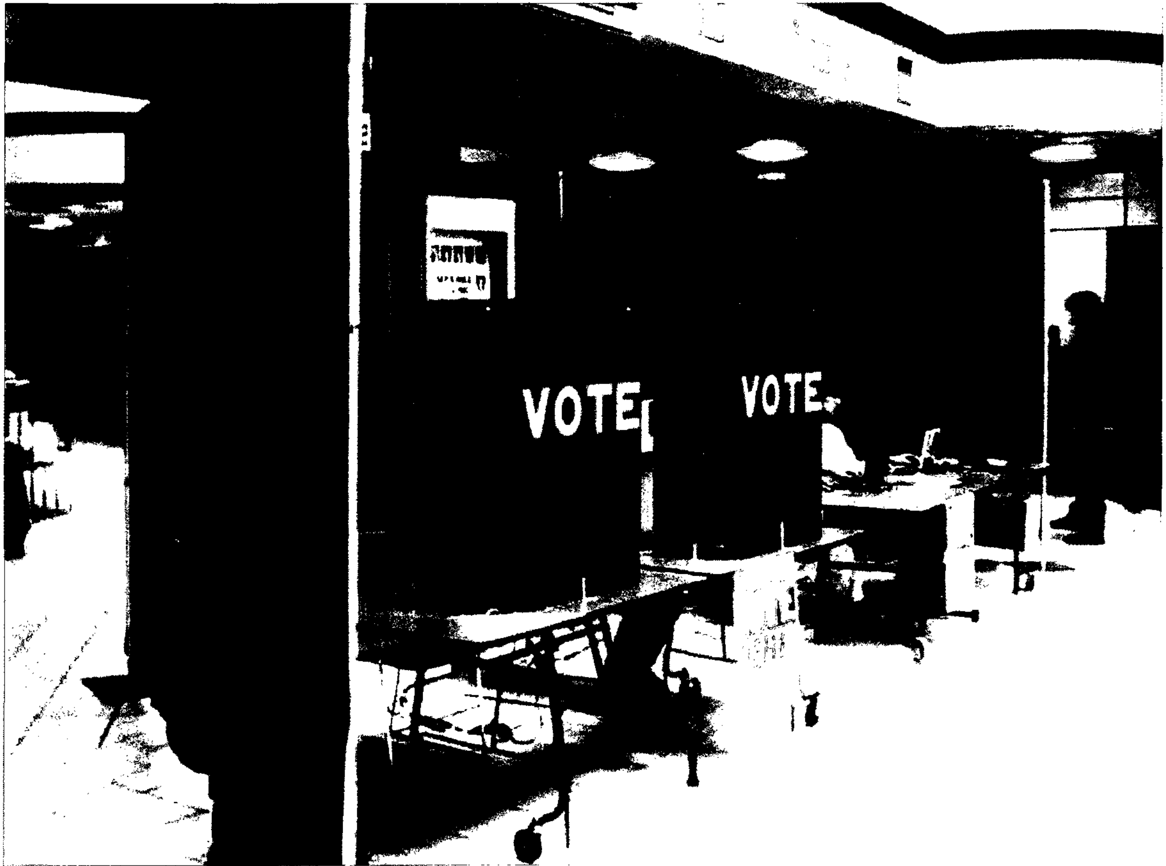
was "coming home". "They still think I am coming home soon," he said, although he is now a permanent resident of Canada with an eleven year old son residing and going to school in Calgary. For both Maciej and I, there are elderly parents residing back home.

While certainly not the intention on the part of the inquirer, it leads to the feeling that our presences in Calgary/Canada are being overlooked and denied, while a presence in our absence at home lingers on. It is something I have come to discover when I have visitors from home visit Calgary. A quiet uncertainty lingers on for the first few days as family and old friends from "home" observe who I am and the person I have become in their absence. They try to relocate me in a new context that they have yet to understand, attempting to reach out to the fragments of me they recognize from the past, and re-piecing it together in a new context. It is always a disorienting process for both sides.

Yet, our presences in Canada/Calgary are equally less marked. Transmigrants are mobile objects either "from somewhere", or are otherwise constantly moving, relocating beings. Many times, in the attempt to make a new place home, there is the perception, imposed from within or without, that they are striving to reach a permanent presence here. Such lives are thus always marked by polemics: a presence/absence, mobile/stability, from somewhere/reaching-to-be-something (a return, or a liberation), a disjuncture in these lives to transcend. To be sure, all members of the project group, whether visitors on study or work permits, Canadian citizens or immigrants in the full sense of the word with permanent residence statuses and family in Canada, have expressed ambivalence about future plans, and are unsure if their presence in Calgary will be a permanent one. Maciej for example, is a professional architect in Poland and has difficulty getting credentialised in

Heart of the New West (Jean)

*"Screens along condo construction on 4th street"*




**Vote!** (Gareth)

*"Everywhere you look it seems people are voting, or being asked to vote for someone..."*

Canada. As a result, he has kept the possibility of returning in the near future open so that he may continue his career there.

The participants have all demonstrated critical engagements with place. The very fact that they had decided to participate in a photography project showed a certain interest in engaging, sensually and socially, in *place.* Yet, the uncertainty over "how long we will be here for", finds their expressions in day to day contradictions. Gareth for example, has managed to live within a quality of impermanence, though the tension recently found its expression in decisions over furniture. Asking if I had noticed that all the couches in his living room were actually futons without armrests, he told me that he used to fantasize about "owning one of those couches with real armrests", where he could lean back and enjoy a good movie or book. Futons however, he said, were good for people on the move: one could easily pack it way, and if needed, ship it across the Atlantic to the UK. A couch however, a good solid couch, was not something you could move around with ease. The day came when a friend offered to exchange one of his futons for a couch, and he readily accepted the offer. "I'm now a couch owner," he says, grinning and leaving the connotations of his remark hanging: over the status of a couch person, over the consequences of remaining a mobile person with a couch, over how long he and his partner intend to stay.

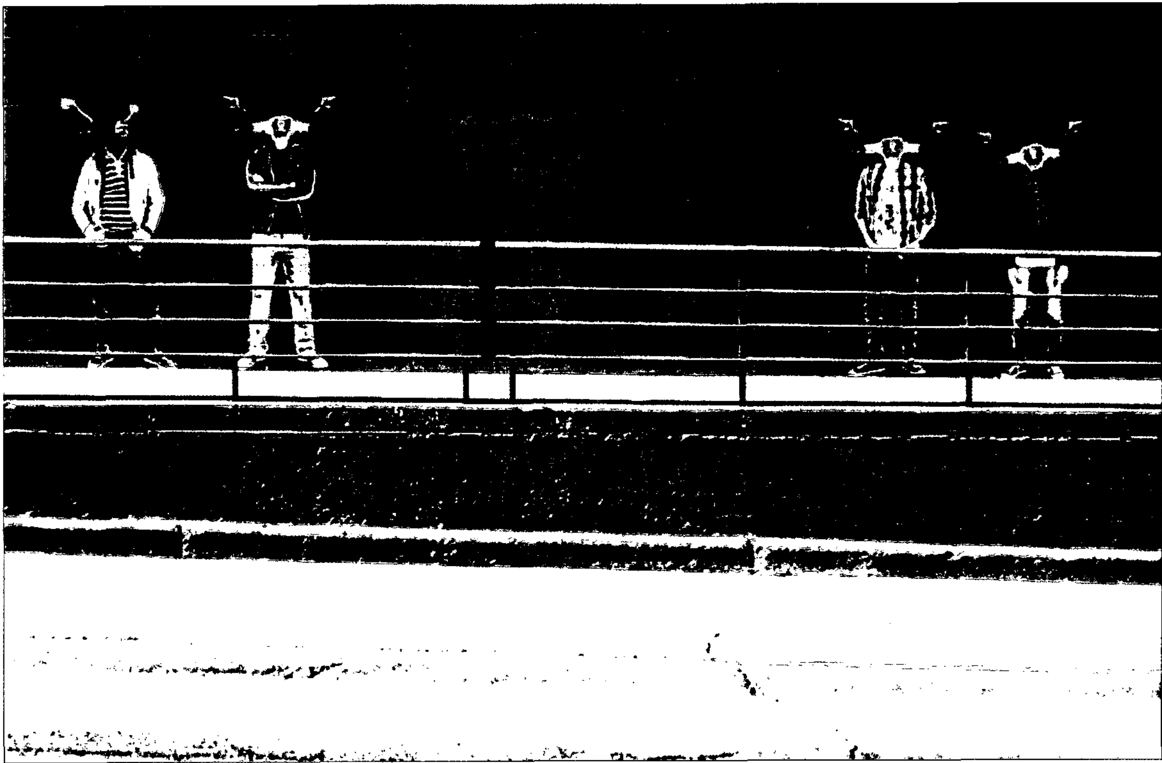
The decision to move or stay is not an easy one, for such decisions are tied to family and jobs and are never solely an individual's choice. We are implicated beings, wrapped up in webs of social relationships and obligations that always leave the question of "moving" an open-ended one. Gareth admitted that Calgary has yet to feel like a home, a remark that left me pondering over the temporal constitution of place: what will our memories of

Calgary be after we leave it, and how will it differ from how we view our experiences in it now? Culture, Olwig (1997) observes, remains inextricably wrapped up in place. In this sense, culture becomes *sited*: by stepping out of what we previously regarded as a social cultural normality, we sharpen our own cultural competence and allow ourselves to be reflective of our own cultural site. Hence the places and homes we have left are not only experienced by our presence, but also by our absences: a more or less permanent existence is created in-site even after we leave. In consequence, if places truly become cultural sites after we leave them, then it also appears that places of the past are to some extent also constituted by the present.

The participants of the photography group seem to comprehend that places are also constituted by what the participant make of it. Most of them indicated that their desire to join the project group was inspired by a need to "get out and do something". For example, Jee-Sun told me that she joined the group so that she could discover more of Calgary in her time here, while Jacqui said that she wanted to engage more with the city so that she could be inspired to produce more work. Yet, place making is not always facilitated by simply being involved in a project group like Picturing Calgary. For Gareth, his ownership of place is facilitated by the right to vote, for it signifies an ability for him to exercise his democratic right and engage critically in public life. It was an interesting conversation, and made me think of our own individual processes of place making. For me the concept of exercising citizenship rights through voting was somewhat novel: where I was from, voting had always felt ineffectual to the effect that I have not fully embraced, understood or fought for citizenship rights. The conversation had the effect of me question-

ing my own process of creating place meaning: while political processes also involved critical engagement with place and people, my thoughts on place-making, as exemplified by my conception of Picturing Calgary, had emphasized the phenomenological and social more than the political.

Most of my meetings with individual participants unfolded over numerous walks or coffee. My meeting with Gareth took place in late spring, and as the sun set over the rooftop bar in downtown Calgary we were at, both our partners joined us after work and our conversation soon widened. The evening probably reflected one of the more enjoyable aspects of the photography project as noted by participants: networks of social affiliations had been spun between participants such that it extended past the participants themselves to their friends, colleagues and families. Exemplified by moments like this, another effect of the project was that, in gathering a group of people sharing similar interests but holding remarkably diverse backgrounds, the project somehow managed to temporarily reconcile the contradictory conditions of modern life in a complex global world. As residents new to this city, participants in this project walk and travel along these borderlands everyday, living a liminal existence that, through such spaces of inter-connections and interbeing, create temporal, fleeting instances of critical reflection.



**mo-heads** (Jacqui)

**Finding your Inner Flaneur in Calgary**

By the end of the eighteenth century, North America began to witness an explosive growth of migrants into its major urban centres. At the same time an urban figure, equally emblematic of the quintessential condition of modernity, came into the scene. The flaneur is a literary figure that is detached but observant; he possesses confidence, but in the bustling nineteenth century metropolis of strangers, also embraces disjuncture, freedom and anonymity. Walking alone in a city of strangers, he bears his own thoughts while traversing the borderlands of his imaginations. The flaneur is a figure seen in places where public life unfolds on streets; to indulge in flaneurie is to indulge in the pleasure of visual consumption. Using the figure of the flaneur, this section examines how spaces can be explored, practiced and claimed in Calgary.

Flaneurie can be conceived as a state of pleasure for the urbanite, to be in a state of observation with his or her senses keen, yet residing in a terra incognita of reflective space; a creative sanctuary offering pleasures of introspection. My attraction to the figure, other than the fact that he may easily be identified with, is that he reminds me of the modern urban commentator, reorienting himself to a changing world by visually mapping and consuming the strange and the exotic on urban streets; he is seduced by the spectacle of people and goods on streets, but is also resistant to the pressures of our modern world.

Buck-Morss (1995) offers us useful tools to frame the current condition of the flaneur in the city. Beginning with the modern European cities of the nineteenth century, and despite different political rhetoric, societies shared similar dreams of transforming and imagining

the natural world beyond material scarcity through massive industrial constructions. These expressions of cultural forms were however, as temporary as fashion, and evident in their endless production of the new, lending perhaps to a countertrend in our present conjuncture where dreams of the masses are divorced from spaces of the present. In our North American city, transient shopping malls do not appear as inspirational urbanscapes, but rather as residuals of a "dream world" for the urban dweller.

Hence, our modern photographer takes a *further* step and his actions become more deliberate. Indulging in flaneurie in our somewhat prosaic North American city of box stores and malls necessitates the deliberate re-mapping and repossession of the city through imagining it such that, as Solnit quotes Benjamin, the flaneur " goes botanising on the asphalt" and urban streets are rendered foreign. However, while the Flaneur is the native who becomes a foreigner, we can see the Stranger as the inversion of such a figure - a foreigner who tries to become native (Shields, 1994). And to be the Stranger, as Simmel reminds us, is to embody a state of wondering that suggests "a state of detachment from any given point in space" (Simmel, 1971:143). He is also the potential wanderer, "the man who comes today and stays tomorrow" (143), and is marked by a quality of both remoteness and nearness. The particular condition brought about by this abstract figure is the result of a marked objectivity about him. As a freer man, his objectivity allows him to be both involved and invited in to examine conditions with less prejudice.

To model in this thesis the contemporary and urban migrant photographer of Picturing Calgary after these figures allows us to uncover interesting qualities they might possess. The Flaneur and the Stranger from his borderlands, fluctuates between foreigner and na-

**Blubooker** (Jacqui)

**Falling Apart** (Jean)

**Downtown Disney....** (Jacqui)

*"This looks nice but SO FAKE.. is this for real?"*

tive in a rapidly changing city. From within the structuring spaces of this city, the possession of a camera serves as an excuse, and the practice of photography serves as an reaction. Public life is rarely perceived like a theatre in self-conscious Calgary; rather one hunts down the strange and uncanny in this nouveau riche, newly-confident and brazen city. The photographer enroute to further understanding the composition of this Albertan city forms a social commentary, sometimes accompanied by a trace of irony: oddly crumbling structures nestled next to striking skyscraper development, the many manifestations of the Cowboys and Indians narrative, oil derricks and oil money, or confederation-era Alberta and the small towns of the old west. Yet he who wields a camera is a self-professed marker of objectivity and is free to comment on his surroundings - they are remote, and he has experienced alternatives.

The practice of flaneurie on the streets of many North American cities built for cars is never an easy task. The imaginative function of the city has become eroded under ill-imagined urban planning and architecture, both indifferent to what Jean-Christophe Bailly writes as the "basic unit of urban language, the street, and the 'ruisellement de paroles' (streams of words), the endless stories, which animate it" (Solnit, 2001:213). The manifestation of suburbia has taken its toll on the social and physical morphology of cities such as Calgary. The freedom of walking is not much of a use without a place to go, and as Solnit declares, the walking city finds its end in the suburbs. The vast, geographical separation of family life from work has resulted in the relegation of the family home to a place of consumption and recuperation. The suburbs are marked by homogeneity:

large free standing dwellings without much of a place beyond house and lawn and a startling expanse of tree-lined, quiet residential streets.

Such critiques are not specific to suburbia. Within urban corridors, pedestrians remain, as Los Angeles city planners announced in the 1960s, "the largest single obstacle to free traffic movement" (Solnit, 2001:254) and most infrastructures - suburbs, highways, and large parking - are built specifically for driving. When people are no longer expected to walk, the pedestrian is almost despised. In my first years in Edmonton, I walked the routes of the uninitiated - through large fields of snow, climbed snowbanks while walking through enormous parking lots, and trudged alongside curbs on major arteries to bus stops. I seldom find myself in these situations now that I have learnt the routes to take and situations to avoid. Unfortunately, these learned routes represent a loss of freedom. Flaneurie is expected to occur through predestination rather then choice, but instead it becomes more self conscious, more deliberate, more purposeful. Instead of heading off in a direction of one's choosing, one has to purposely select time and places to explore.

Thinking about walking in Calgary was sparked off by a discussion that Alex, a participant with a keen interest in urban planning, led on New Urbanism. It is a movement that strives to construct friendlier communities with walkable streets by encouraging pedestrian-level activity, accessible urban services and mixed housing, and discouraging cars on main thoroughfares. MacKenzie Towne is one of North America's largest New Urbanism initiatives and is located a few miles outside of downtown Calgary. One weekend, I accompanied Oliver, another participant in the project group, to MacKenzie Towne to take a look at what we thought was a bewildering development. For me, it seemed a

commendable effort - the tree-lined boulevards looked cheerful and friendly, and sure enough, it was scaled to the level of the pedestrian for strolling. Yet, the faux "neotraditional" facade contributed to the sense that a very conscious deliberation went into its development, demonstrating a "fakeness" that Jacqui seems to have captured in *downtown disney*.

The development seemed to indicate an experimental and self-conscious attempt at an "old towne" neighbourliness on a large scale, and in doing so, failed to take into account the kinds of organic growth that naturally occur in urban, mixed-use neighbourhoods at times of urban in-filling and development (Jacobs, 1961). While this is an opinion I share with Jane Jacobs on her critiques of large-scale urban housing projects, it is perhaps indicative of the tenacity and determination one has to possess to indulge in flaneurie in Calgary. Here, one has to employ a good dose of irony to catch the elusiveness adrift, and search out "authenticity" in making any statement.

Discussion on the monumental, social urban architectural projects represented by New Urbanism led to further thoughts on authenticity of place and on personal identification with representations of "Authentic Calgary". Gareth asked the photo group one evening if we ever felt "apologetic for living in Calgary". The remark also came in the wake of another question as to the kind of photographic representations of Calgary we sent to families and friends "back home". His question was met with a silence: most in the project had moved to Calgary for family or work opportunities, and there were mixed feelings about the city. Maciej for example, had spoken about the lack of public life on the streets,

**Untitled** (Alex)

*"C-train passenger. This vital urban link has a street downtown reserved for its use. Its greatest strength is the well designed layout for accessing the city. Its greatest weakness is the unmitigated growth of the suburbs, and slow greyfield growth."*

and Jacqui had spoken about her experience so far being rather uninspiring for her as an artist. Jee-Sun, a civil engineer from Germany, said she acutely understood Gareth's remark when she came back from a visit to Vancouver, and when a friend visited her in Calgary. It was difficult to "Picture Calgary" she said, when it got so cold that it was difficult to even get outside and "push the button on the camera".

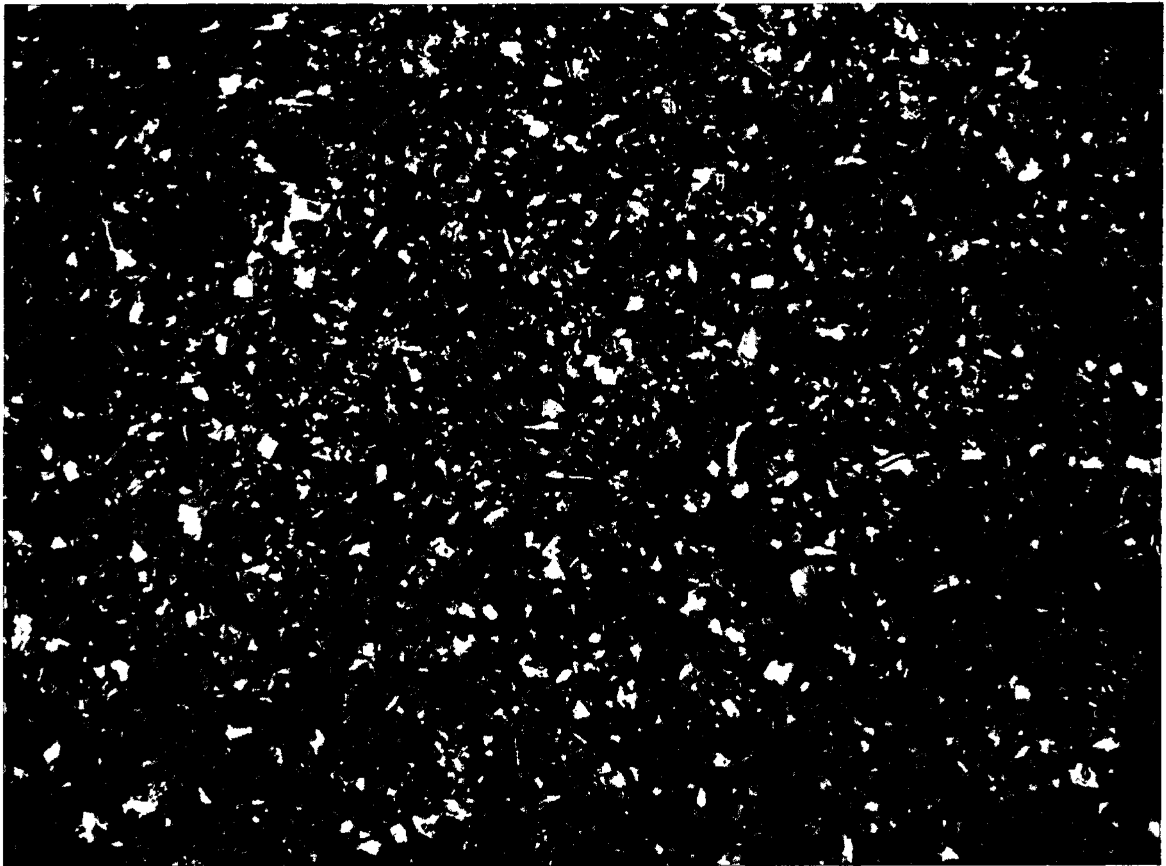
There is a certain guilt in identifying with Gareth's comment. These are a group of participants who lead engaging professional and social lives in the city, and perhaps as a result of the social space represented by the photo meetings, or participants' self-identification, there wasn't an expressed sense of disempowerment or disenfranchisement on the part of the participants. The comment on feeling apologetic came from a lack of identification with what Calgary represented, and hence what the city represented of their lives. If social and cultural identity is, if not inextricable then closely associated with place, then participants resented having a representation of the city and consequent identification imposed upon them.

This is evident in carefully selected representations of lives in Calgary to family and friends abroad. Participants would attempt to carefully control representations of the city, particularly if the decision to come to Calgary was not theirs in the first place. Calgary wasn't easily definable to family or friends back home: it was not Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver for example, and it needed to be carefully represented to put their lives in context. My representations of life in Calgary to family and friends abroad, like those of Maciej and Gareth, are usually photographs taken outside of Calgary, of weekends spent in the mountains. Calgary is represented as a part of the "Rockies of the West", with its

spectacular national parks and superb skiing and hiking opportunities. With this exposition, Calgary is defined by its proximity to the mountains.

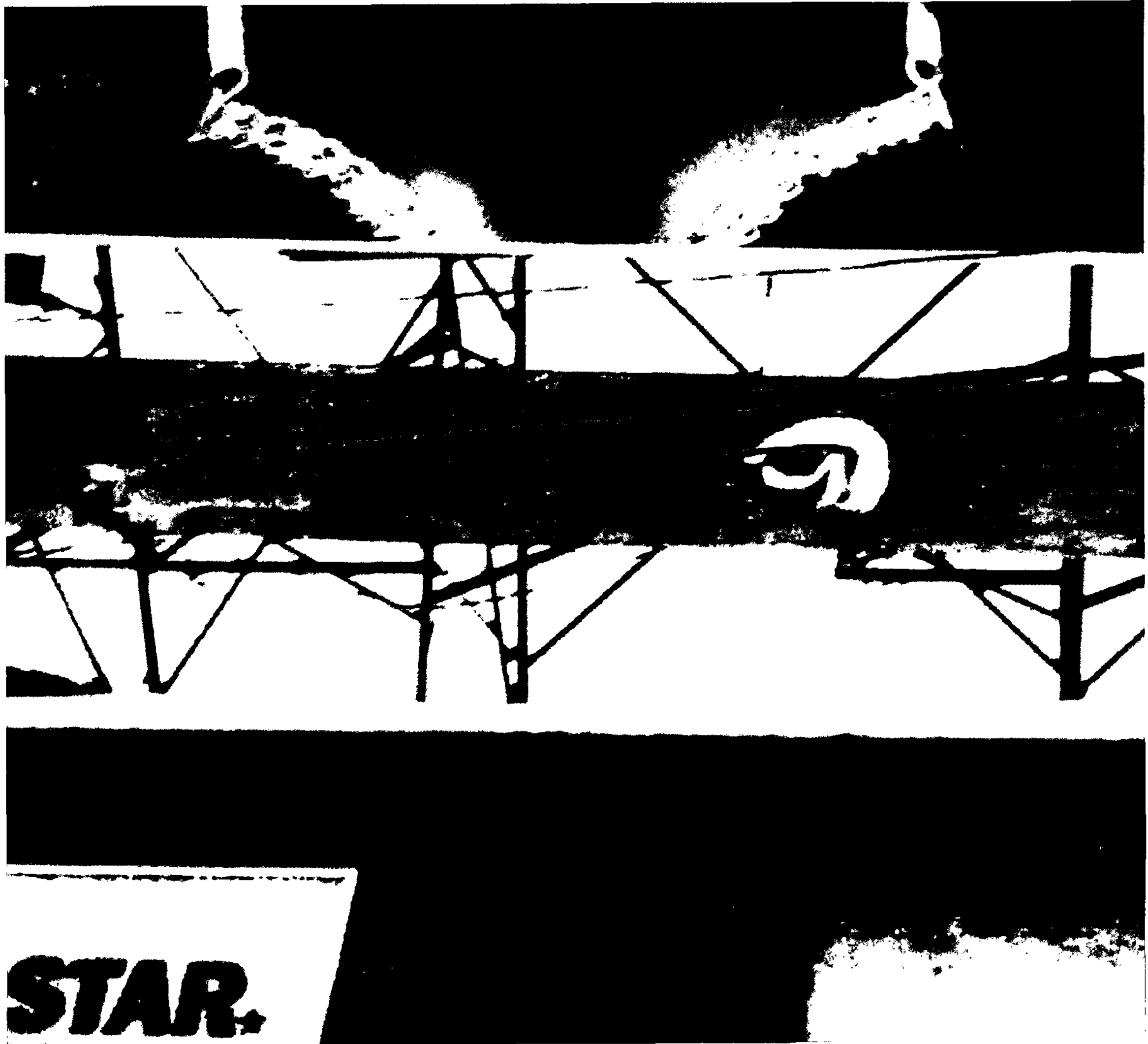
Interestingly, this information is not derived from photographs taken for the bi-monthly meetings, nor are they found on the Picturing Calgary website. Rather, through conversation with participants, it arose that different photographs could be found on Facebook, a social networking website where photographs serve as a form of self representation. For example Maciej, on showing a photo of himself hiking, mentioned that the photo was not located on the Picturing Calgary website, but was rather found "on my Facebook". He was apologetic, telling the group that it was more of a "Facebook picture than a Picturing Calgary picture". On several occasions, participants who did not have pictures to show at the meetings, either because they did not have the time to take pictures that week or simply because it was too cold to take photos, turned up at the meetings anyway. Gareth for example, ended up showing photos of Pittsburgh after returning from a conference there. He made the comment that "they are from my Facebook", making a clear distinction between "Facebook" pictures and "Picturing Calgary" pictures. Consequently, those pictures did not turn up on the Picturing Calgary website.

It marking a clear distinction between genres of photography, participants were demonstrating a clear difference between how these genres materialized in their everyday lives. Their distinction with regard to photographic genres of Calgary were quite clear: Facebook was a place to share self-representations of their lives in Calgary to family and friends, while Picturing Calgary was a place where critical reflections on Calgary could be shared and discussed. Not only were photographs of Picturing Calgary produced



**Shimmering....** (Jean)

*"I have no idea what it is, but I see this shimmering turquoise curiosity on some lawns while running..."*




**c star** (Jacqui)

*"hmm what can I say ... sex sells?"*

**untitled** (Jacqui)

within context specific and shared frames of reference, alternate narratives of self and place were also reconfigured and shared among the social space provided by the photography group. In reflecting upon the complex photographic representations in participants' dialogical lives, it is evident that social identities and associations are drawn, configured and reconfigured with different invocations.

The photographs taken for Picturing Calgary were usually critical reflections on Calgary. It was usual for images shown and discussed to exposit a "sentiment of the moment", or something more tangible: a found object or scene that either needed deciphering (*shimmering*), or provided an illustration for a comment on Calgary. Jacqui's photo *c-star* for example serves as an example of her usual tongue-in-cheek criticism. The reflections of a UK artist in North America, it emphasizes her view on the triviality of marketing campaigns on billboards and posters, and on the emerging wealth of a resource city.

Untraversable and with streets that fail to enchant, it takes the work of the imagination to transcend phenomena on the streets of Calgary. Returning to Hall, the imposition and implication of place upon one's identity meets up with reaction on the part of the transmigrant. Rather, the production of culture and identity should be seen to occur in perpetuity and in response, materialised either through political action or discursive and performative acts. The somewhat alienated transmigrant redefines flaneurie: reflecting critically from the dynamic borderlands of one's own design by creating walking routes and visual practices. As we have seen, writers such as Bourdieu and de Certeau stress the everyday practices of social agents, who never simply enact culture but reinterpret it and reappropriate it in their own ways. Michel de Certeau's practice of space is a second spatiality, a

poetic and mythical rendering of space constituting of a social experience mapped on top of a more literal geography. In opposition to a privileged, totalizing view of the city's core from developers, government institutions, and global corporations, ordinary "practitioners of the city" inscribe "an urban text" onto a space they now tactically claim (de Certeau, 1993:153). Hence, walking creates places, filling the fissures created between individual and the state with stories, both fragmentary and fleeting. The pace of the walk is slow, allowing the space for thought, and reacting against the pace the world sets as it passes us by. It is a resistance by the embodiment and repossession of space and time.

We claim back our urban spaces by walking our urban neighbourhoods and patronizing the shops, bakeries and cafes that dot our route. In doing so, these areas are re-popularized. At the time of writing in 2008, many of the older neighbourhoods in Calgary's inner city are undergoing a revitalization in the form of in-filling, attracting a host of urbanites, albeit those who can afford housing in the inner city, who move into the city's interior and further contribute to the revitalization process by patronizing local neighbourhood shops and cafes. We witness urban planners beginning to take the pedestrian's stroll into account as wider sidewalks are being built, train stations renovated, and independent store owners being encouraged to open businesses along the sidewalks of these older neighbourhoods. To be a stranger in this young city is to embrace with a certain excitement the prospect of coupling the city's changing morphology with the city's newly found and ever growing wealth. Newly redeveloped neighbourhoods, revitalised heritage communities, the rise of the downtown crowds, and even the cranes hanging in the air take on a new optimism for some participants.

**The Shape of Our Walks**

In walking, we invest a universal act with particular meanings. As we walk, we allow our imaginations to shape our paths, bringing about both a consciousness of being in the world, and a sense of freedom away from the busyness of our minds. Our walks generate a rhythm that resonates with the rhythm of our thoughts, such that an uncanny unity develops between the passage of the walk and the passage of the mind. Walking is enlikened to traversing the passages of the mind and the "landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts". Thoughts seem to arise, Solnit further writes, "like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were travelling rather than making" (Solnit, 2001:6). Walking is hence both visual browsing and consumption, a leisurely tour to see and mull over new sights, each a potential utility for thinking. It is at once both a travel and a destination, a means and an end. This sub-chapter looks at the pleasures of walking and thinking, studying how it forms an ontological space that is very much reflected in how participants shape their walks and their practices of photography.

At times our walks can take on such an interiority such that we remain deeply immersed in our own thoughts. During one meeting, both Jacqui and Gareth came across the realization that they shared similar "North American Moments", which they describe as the experience of walking along the streets of Calgary, immersed in their own thoughts, when they are suddenly jolted into a startling realization that they *are* in North America. Such triggers take the form of what they perceive to be a particularly "North American" feature in the streetscape. Gareth caught one of these moments with his camera, triggered by a

street sign in downtown Calgary, that was to him emblematic of one such "North American Moment". Such jolts of sensory awareness demonstrates not just the criticality of place, but in demonstrating how the virtual and physical spaces we inhabit are never constantly congruent, it also illustrates how walks afford us space and freedom outside of the busyness of our minds and reengages us with our environment in our daily lives.

Taussig (1994) reminds us that knowledge is formulated through a tactile knowing. The movements of our feet move in rhythm to the thoughts of our mind and the sights of the landscape around us; any insight gained is intimately interconnected with other sensory perceptions to formulate our knowledge of the world. Where it grounds thoughts through personal and embodied experience, walking is deeply reflective and personal. Hence, walking is art, with "walkers flowing in and out of reveries and revolutions," (Solnit, 2001:196) and inspiring a wealth of stories. The freedom of the walk can be paralleled with the sudden, found freedom of the mind and in consequence any writing that emerges is reflective of the twin processes of walking and thinking, a stream of consciousness that is both descriptive and personal. Walking is a mode of fashioning the world, but also a way to be in it. It represents a constant dialogue between our interiority and externalities. The solitary walker, Solnit notes, is "unsettled, between places, drawn forth into action by desire and lack" (Solnit, 2001:26), is in the world, but apart from it.

One overcast morning in late March, excited by the prospect of warmer weather, I took my camera on a walk through my soggy neighbourhood. My ambitions were merely to remark on the conditions of that day. In something akin to a walking photo diary, I wrote:

*"It strikes me that so much of the visible public interaction in Canada makes use of a private space. In the winter time especially, there are hardly any public spaces one can belong to and own ... life in Calgary exists in a private realm: houses, cars, and private shops. Yet, I find that something here is often amiss, for I crave public life in the big cities where I grew up, and where private lives unfold easily in public.*

*These photos were taken with a simple point and shoot camera one dreary, overcast day. I was searching for signs of life, and instead the boundaries between private and public held my thoughts. Sidewalks are public, but when walked on a day like this, they're filled with puddles, sand, ice and slush and nearly untraversable. Inversely, houses look warm, colorful and filled with light, music, conversation - yet behind closed doors. My intrigue approached a fetishization, as I craved the private lives and their colour inside... Back alleys also held my attention; in them I found the unintended signs of private lives, furniture discarded behind houses, hollowed out cars filled with abandoned junk. I ended up in a chinese kitchenware shop where the shelves were packed with all sorts of crazy kitchen utensils. Inside, the TV was blaring with an episode of "Lonely Planet: Turkey," and the owner let me take as many pictures as I wanted."*

I had in mind a conversation with Maryann, a photography student and participant in the project, who had recounted a story about how a security guard in a mall prevented her from taking pictures earlier that week. Interested in Calgary's downtown urban infrastructure, she had wanted to capture the gleaming glass and stainless steel structures of a mall from the inside. Below freezing, and without a space to walk, think and take pictures, her

story was a testament to the difficulty Calgary presents in finding refuge in public spaces. On my walk that day, as I avoided the puddles and grit on wet, slippery sidewalks, I felt frustrated that while we are given a multitude of choices in the market place, our modern lives are structured such that we are barely afforded virtual spaces to think and reflect. At the same time, the city's failure in the provision of its residents with adequate public spaces to walk and engage with others should be viewed as a form of structuring violence brought on by contemporary urban design.

Public spaces should not simply be conceived as public squares or atriums, but should also be conceived as routes taking the strolling pedestrian into account. Cities that are made for walkers - with Paris most often cited as an example - behold a pleasure for strollers primarily because public lives occur on streets. Framed by thought fragments that arise along the paths and sidewalks we choose to travel, walking is a sensitive, permeable and vulnerable act. To permit the self to interact with a place, is to allow oneself to be open to the possibilities offered by the place. Some of Calgary's revitalized older neighborhoods are great for a stroll, and I recall a jaunt on a Sunday afternoon accompanying Maryann on a photo assignment. I tagged along as she took photos according to a predetermined plan. I did the opposite. Urban walking that day was a shadier business - loitering, cruising, skulking, and shopping, on the lookout for people and opportunities, but also inevitably for goods.

The process was exhilarating: I found a shoe dangling of telephone wires; an urban garage sale complete with roller skates, old records, and an eccentric owner; a high-tech portable toilet on a main thoroughfare; a recycling dumpster encased behind the gates of

a forbidding black cage; and finally pink shoes with white stripes that captured my attention. It was a chance to indulge in a sense of revelry of the moment, a sort of freedom that occurs when one is open to the possibility of seduction.

Later that April, I found myself again in the same reverie, this time with Maciej. It was the day I finally understood the youthful euphoria of Calgary in the wake of a chinook. As the city soaked in the warmth and sunshine of a beautiful blue spring afternoon, the streets were stuffed, and it was a joy to be able to feast on the energy offered by the moment. Maciej and I were thoroughly engaged, taking picture after picture. I saw a portrait of my imagined self in a girl with glasses and a checkered tunic reading from a pile of abandoned national geographic magazines on a lawn, took many pictures of buildings framed against blue skies, and exchanged a laugh with a couple of bare chested guys sitting on the balcony of a quaint prairie styled house with cans of beer in their hands.

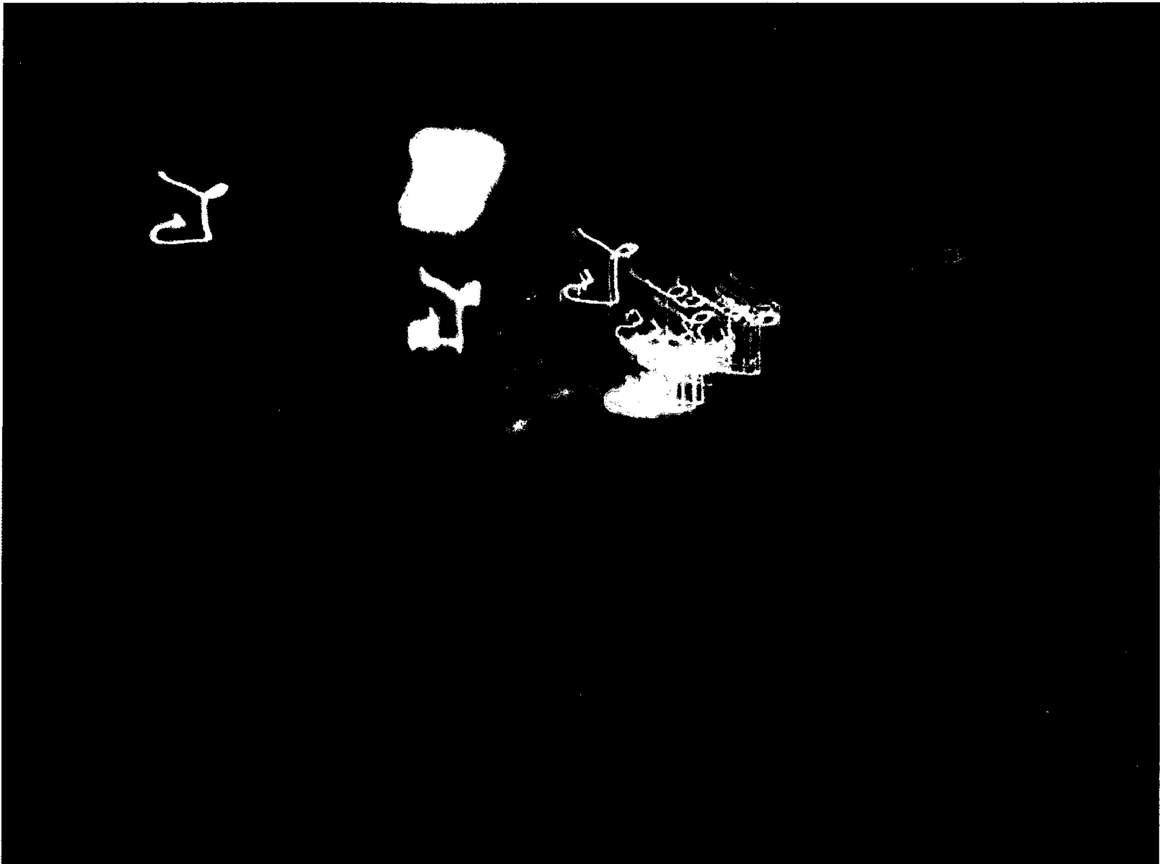
Maciej used a telescopic lens with a profound zoom. Our photographic excursion was interspersed with an ongoing and impassioned debate as to what constituted place. I expressed a comparative evaluation: some places were more attractive than others, and there were certain places I would choose to live over others. He argued that people constituted places: having good friends or family constituted one's experience in a new place. In that sense, places were the "same" as long as one had invigorating social networks. The conversation unfolded under towering cranes and the drone of the perpetual construction from the office towers and condominiums of Calgary.

Indeed, in its interaction through activity, a walk can be immensely social. My walk with

Gareth avoided the bustle of people, construction and traffic as we headed into the heritage community of Inglewood. The shape of the walk was exploratory as we pondered over ideas along a little path by the Bow river. A large heritage building, composed of time-worn red brick with photogenic concrete slabs that brought the building into relief, held our attention. Gareth, like me, used a little digital "point-and-click camera" so that he could keep it in his backpack most days. He participated in the project, he said, so that he could "make a point of taking photos more often" particularly after a long absence from photography. As I composed my shot, Gareth shared that his engagement with photography began after his grandfather passed away when he was seventeen, leaving his camera and darkroom to Gareth.

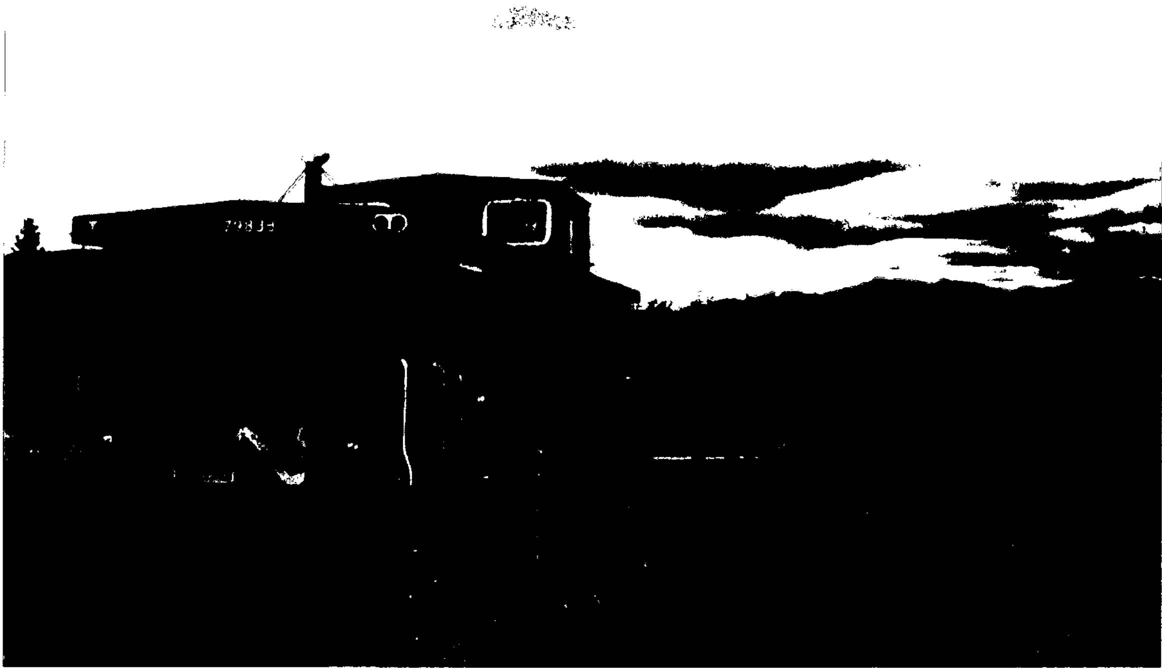
Gareth's practice of photography is rooted in his daily jaunts back and forth from various destinations. In fact, he noted later that it was the only day during the duration of the project that he had deliberately gone on a walk to take pictures. Photography seems to take the form of a hunt when we embark on excursions such as this. In his more quotidian practice of photography, the photos that resulted were interesting, itinerant commentaries of his daily routes. In *hurrying home*, the use of a slow shutter speed suggests an urgency to reach indoor warmth as quickly as possible, while the quiet, almost frozen moment of the dark night invokes memories of quiet, winter cold.

The shape of each participant's walk is dependent upon various personalities and moods. Early on, the photography group had decided that photographs taken outside of Calgary should contribute to the project, for the city is not solely constituted by what is within



**hurryhome** (Gareth)

*"In the cold weather I'm always walking home as fast as I can. Sometimes things pass you by as a blur, especially when you lengthen your shutter speed and turn the flash off..."*



**CN Train** (Oliver)

municipal boundaries but at least in part by things outside it. Hence the travels that participants embarked on, though not always in Calgary, outdoors or conducted solely on foot, were subject to further embellishments of the mind. Driving Southwest of Calgary through Turner Valley and up into Kananaskis Country, Oliver and I came across a peculiar abandoned train that was startlingly scenic against the backdrop of the foothills. Oliver's practice of photography during the duration of the project felt like snatches of respite in between a busy schedule. He might for example, go for a walk during a lunch break or after work, or take a drive out of the city during the weekends. Getting out of the car that day and touching our feet to the asphalt felt refreshingly foreign. We walked down into a ditch, ducked under a barbed-wire fence and waded through grasses to perceive this anomaly. The oddly situated through picturesque train was evidently somebody's home. Its location, bordered by a highway on one side, and rushing waters of a river on the other, seemed an unlikely refuge. As we walked around the train, trying to compose photos for Picturing Calgary, we entertained scenarios of the eccentric person who might make the train home. If our formulations of place can be constituted by the actions and stories that we inscribe upon them, then my memories of the landscape are comprised of the stories we made up and the routes that we took that day. While such stories and playful explorations are abstract creations that has little to do with the tangibility of place, they allowed a kind of exploration in our minds that was nonetheless invoked by the landscape itself.

My walk with Jacqui further reminds me of the abstract adventures and playful engagements we have with the places in which we reside. Jacqui and I drove south of the city to

Bragg Creek, stopping along highways and roads to take photos of whatever caught our attention. Herself an artist, the shape of Jacqui's walk and her photography was interestingly expressive and exploratory. She peered under rocks and crevices, poked under and over junked piles, and crouched next to rushing creeks to catch pictures of water running from under ice shelves. Jacqui explained that she found her time here unsettling, having no drive to make any work. Her practice of photography then, inspired the imagination through playful exploration of place through her walks. It is at once both a tactile engagement with place, and an abstract distancing and creative freedom spurred on by acts of imagination.

Jee-Sun, a civil engineer sent by her engineering firm from Germany to work on a project in Calgary, described her photo explorations as directed. She wanted to "see as much of Calgary" while she was here, and in the process imbued a sense of energy and enthusiasm into the group, driving from place to place on photographic explorations of specific sites in Calgary. She was not so much interested in exploring her own ontological narrative as discovering those that the city had to offer. To this end, she took pictures of what the city and some of its long term residents fully embraces as authentically Calgary: the Stampede, and the ranching culture of southern Alberta. As requested by her colleagues, she made prints of these photographs before returning to Germany and had them framed and displayed in her Calgary office.

The photographs that emerged from those four months reflected particular ontological moments for the participants. Unlike the shape of a walk, photographs lend a quality of permanence to otherwise ephemeral moments; travellers, visitors or immigrants, each ex-

hibiting various circumstances at different times, possess diverse ontological explorations and formulations of place. Hence, places are lived and constituted differently: the city is composed of different narratives, evident through the shape of participants' walks, their practices of photography and finally, their visual representations of place.

**Jacqui** (Jean)

# VI - The Photo Essays

## Practices of Photography

Possessing a camera positions one differently in the world. Often, a camera is described as an extension of one's body: to be out in the world with a camera, is to be open to encounters of the different, the strange, and the uncanny. Each of the photo essays that follow are accompanied by narratives, with minimal editing other then for grammatical inconsistencies, written by the photographers. It is hoped that such a presentation will provide the images with as much context as possible, allowing for these reflexive representations to speak for themselves. Each photo essay is also informed by different photographic conventions and is produced in the context of the discussion meetings. The images demonstrate the photographer's critical reflections: on the images of others', on photographic practices, on place, and on self.

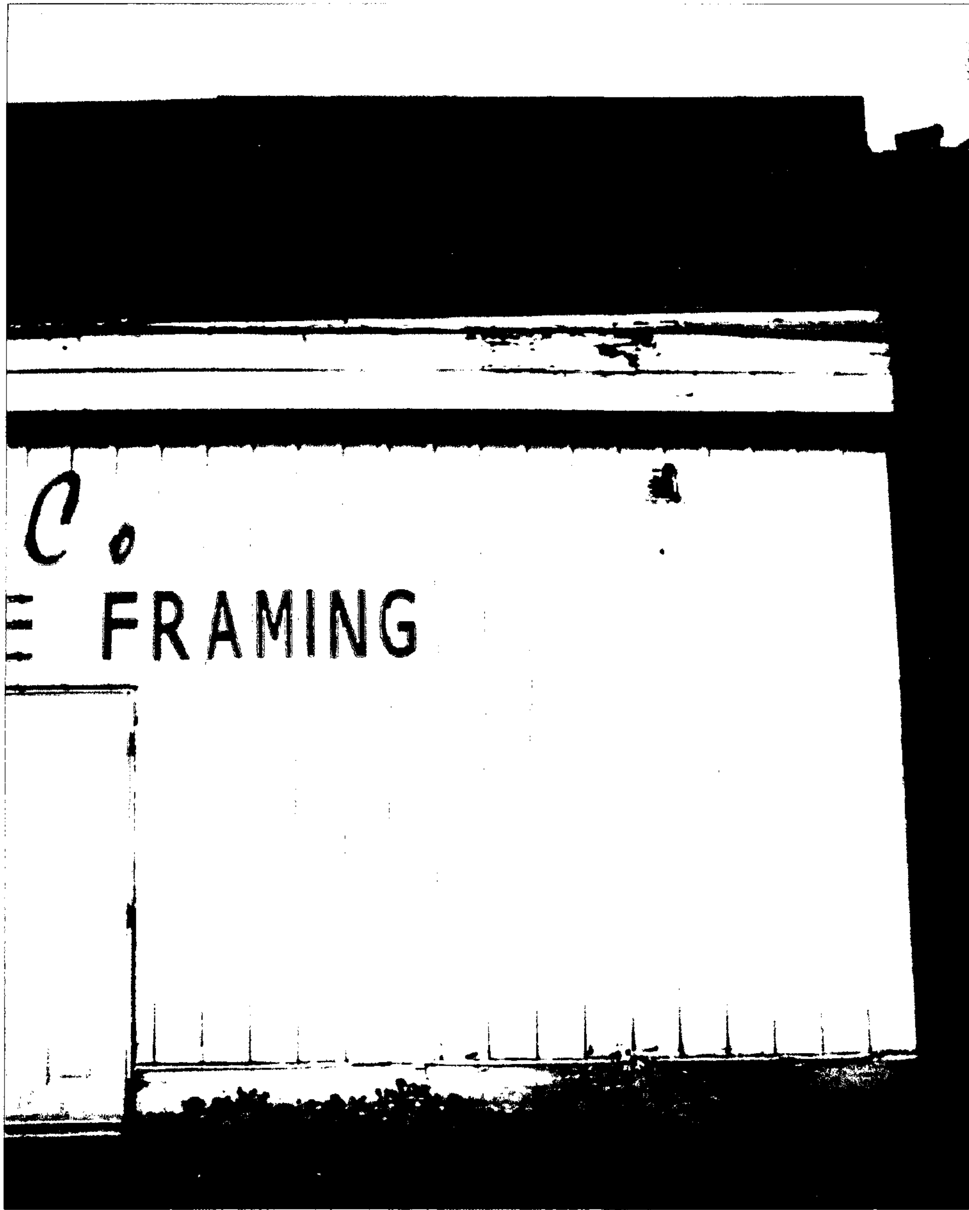
## The Role that Space and Architecture Play in Governing Our Lives in a City

**GARETH JOHNSON**

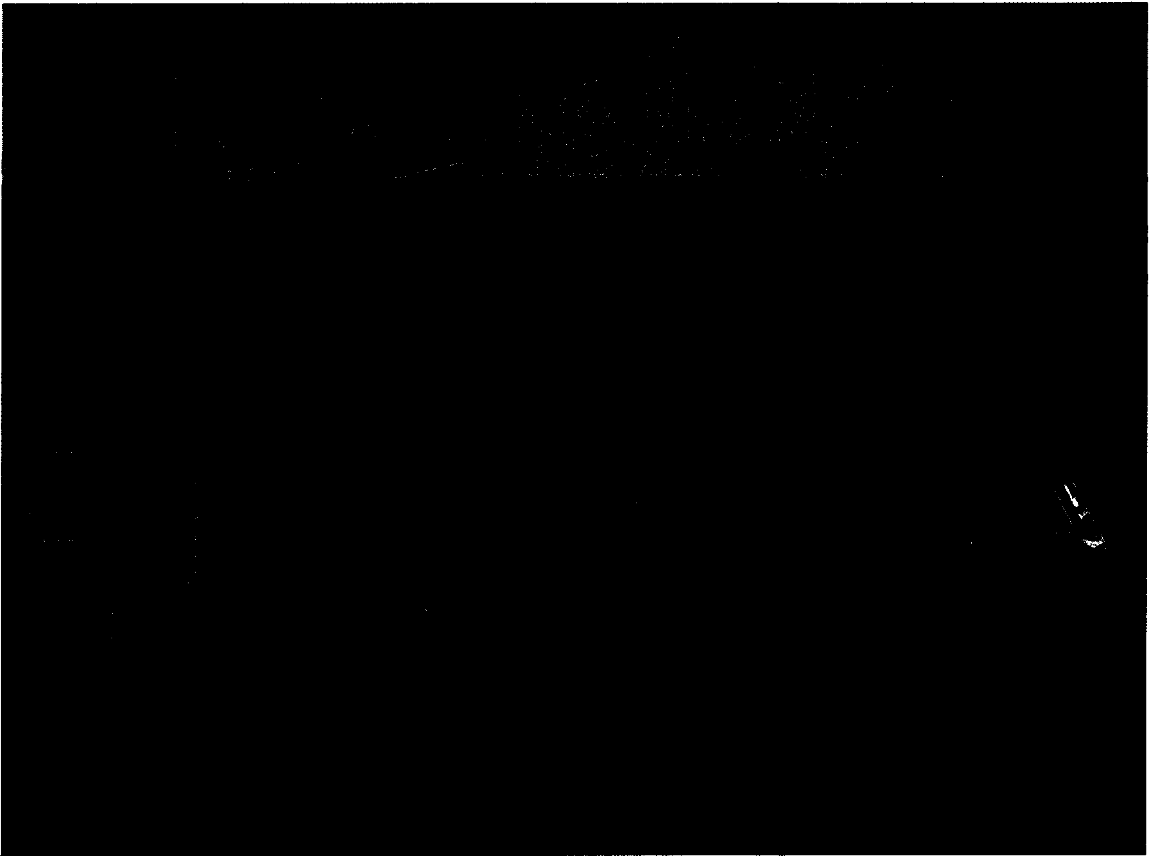
By signing up to live in a city we sign part of our lives away to the physicality of anthropogenic structures. A city creates a structure to which our life clings, whether we choose it or not. The bus may be late, and we end up rushing, the footpath is pot-holed and we step in a puddle, the building we live in may be cold and breezy and we have to put on an extra sweater. Bright colours (Framing Flowers) make many of us happy and attract our stares, but they are governed by the person that chose the colour of the paint. Did they choose that colour to try to create aesthetically pleasing sights and to enhance someone's life or society in general? Or, on a more cynical note, did they choose it to attract our attention and lure us in to consume (This Way)?

Where cities grow, nature is pushed out, but then we either try to include it deliberately (13th Avenue) or it sneaks back in itself (Framing Flowers). Finding open space in a city can be challenging; we often need to look up to find that space, but looking up isn't necessarily a spontaneous act. We are inevitably drawn to look up by following a line that is cut by a structure (Looking Up). Gratefully, sometimes these lines aren't necessarily vertical (The Long Straight), our gaze can be drawn in many directions by structures and corridors of every shape and size. These structures, natural and anthropogenic, which define our cities, can ultimately define our mood, and, our lives.

What do these photos say about me? They say that I am governed by the city that I chose to live in. Sure, I can be happy or sad no matter where in the world I am, but when it's negative 30 degrees outside, the bus is late, I step in a puddle and my house is cold, it's hard to see the positives! I crave space, I choose to "escape" from the city as often as possible, to take in the mountain air and let nature do the attention grabbing. I should look up more in the city; it makes it easier to breath. I also like to be entertained, or I guess stimulated. Perhaps one day I will retire to the countryside, but right now I like the buzz of the city; the hoardings trying to sway my consumption decisions; the colours attracting my gaze, and the physical structure of a city that guides me on my daily business. So yes, I crave space and nature (Looking Up, The Long Straight), but I also love the city and the way it is keeping me perpetually entertained (This Way, Framing Flowers, 13th Avenue).




**Framing Flowers**



**This Way**

**Looking Up**

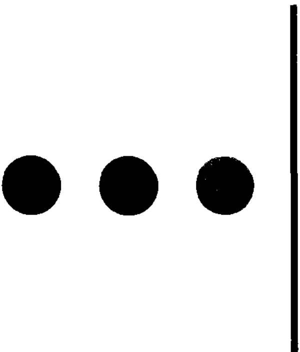
**13th Avenue**

**The Long Straight**

Gareth has spent approximately two years living in Calgary. He and his partner moved here from the UK. He is currently pursuing his PhD in geology while his partner works at the University of Calgary. They have plans to leave Calgary when he is finished with his studies, after which they intend to either move back to the UK, or perhaps elsewhere in Canada. The decision depends on where he can find work in his area of specialty. The next move he says will have be his partner's choice, for their move to Calgary was specifically for his research on carbon storage.

# Picturing Calgary

Maciej Kijak



**People**

Most of the time we don't see differences…

We see new places, buildings, streets, cars. But the differences in how we see this city, we can only "see" when we start talk to different people. They ask: where would you like to live? in which country?, which town?…

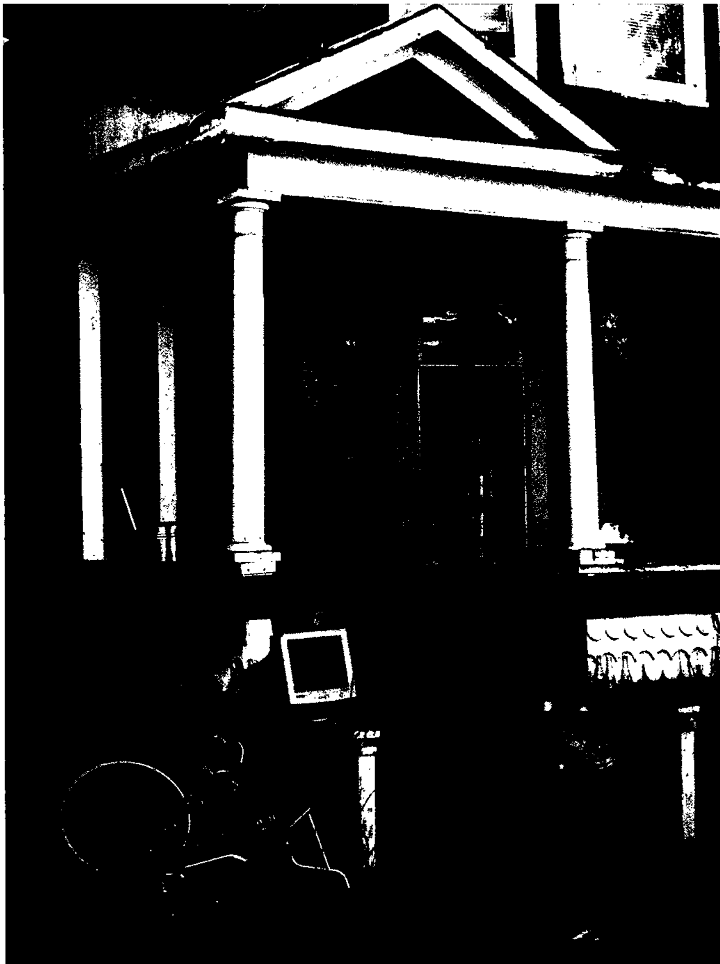
They are surprised when I answer: it doesn't matter…it's more important with who you are in this new place then where it really is…

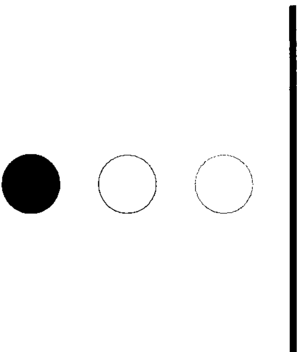
People create "the places"; not places create us. People make every place unique…

So if you don't feel here good, it just means that you didn't meet right people here…

**$4^{Th}$ street, Saturday afternoon**

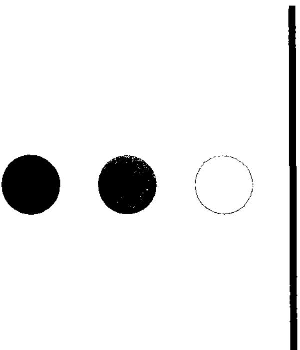
Buildings in row, each similar to the other; but this one was "alive". Home with bikes, monitors, magazines and other stuff on lawn. Girl was reading National Geographic at front of house. Young people were trying to sell completely useless stuff…but it was enough to make it "picture" different.

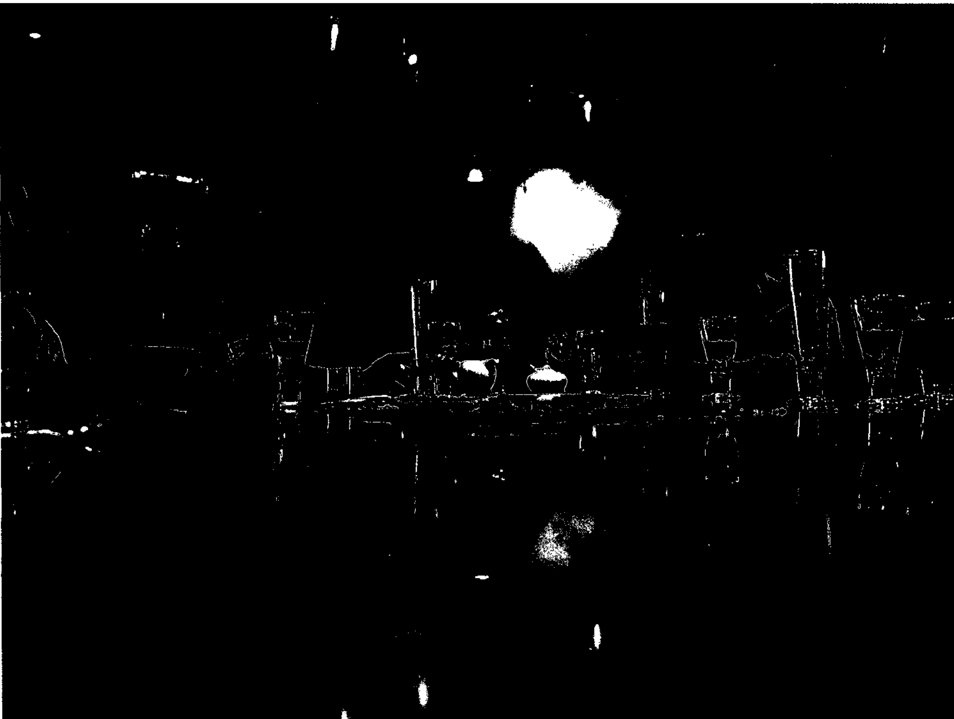




**Stanley Park, Sunday afternoon**

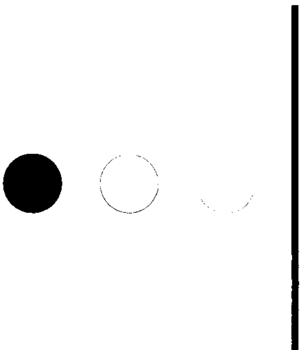
A few families were celebrating Holy Communion. It was raining; all the adults were sitting inside, only girls in white dresses were running on wet grass in a park. Happy to be outside…happy to be together…





**Falkridge, Priddis**

Sometimes I think that colors on a picture can say more than the picture itself. It was a very nice day, with people I use to work with. And how important those friendships were now that I know most of them quit from the job. Similar is with all the people we meet in our life. We don't have time, or we don't care who they really are, what their passions are…We concentrate on surface, "first look." And when we put more effort to know and understand people, we discover a different world…sometimes completely different then that what we see everyday…



**4th Street, Late afternoon**

Cheesecake…and coffee? The server who had time to talk, and people who had time to sit down and relax…☺ with sweet dessert and head full of new ideas…

It was good, busy day; we both see each other from different side…

Maciej is an architect from Poland. He moved to Calgary three years ago with his eleven year old son when his spouse, whom he is presently divorced from, took up a transfer with a large multinational company as an interior designer. At the moment of the project, he has his permanent residence here, is working as a draftsman and is planning to either gain accreditation for his profession, or undertake graduate studies to further his chances for employment here.

# <u>The Only Way Out is Through</u>

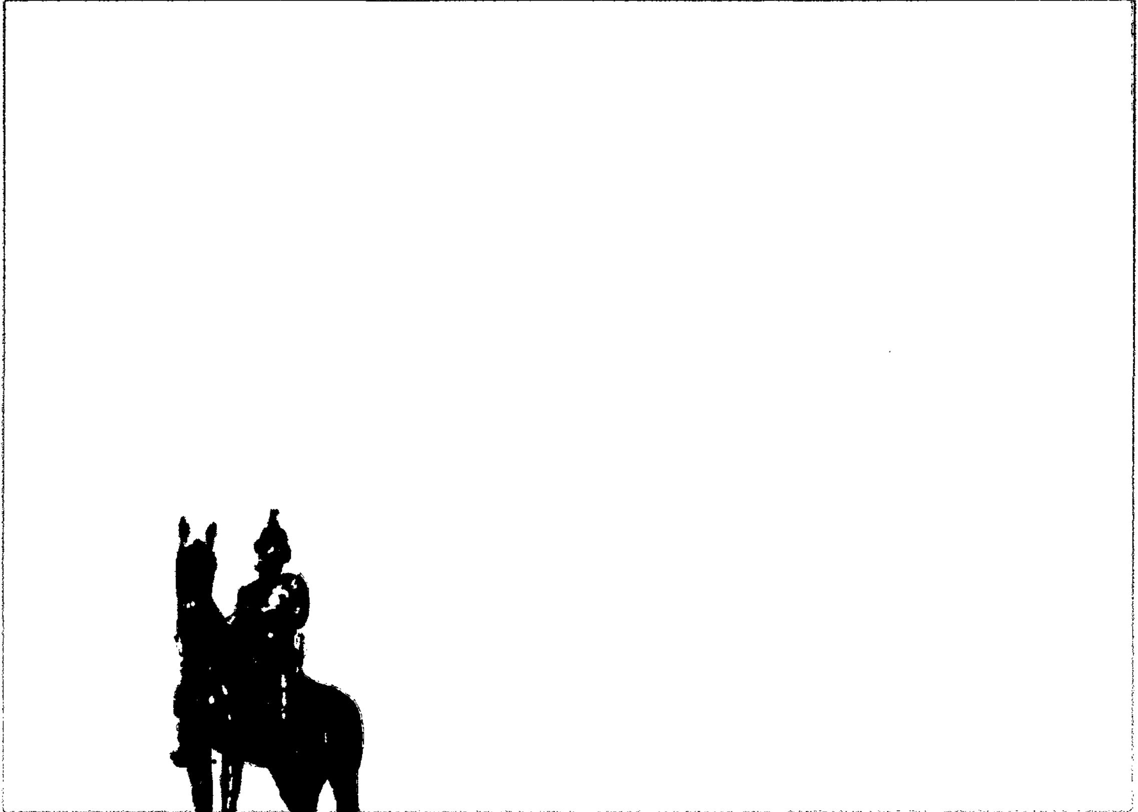
**OLIVER MacLAREN**

As I look at these photographs, after making some distance between the time they were taken and my review, I'm startled by the isolation in them.

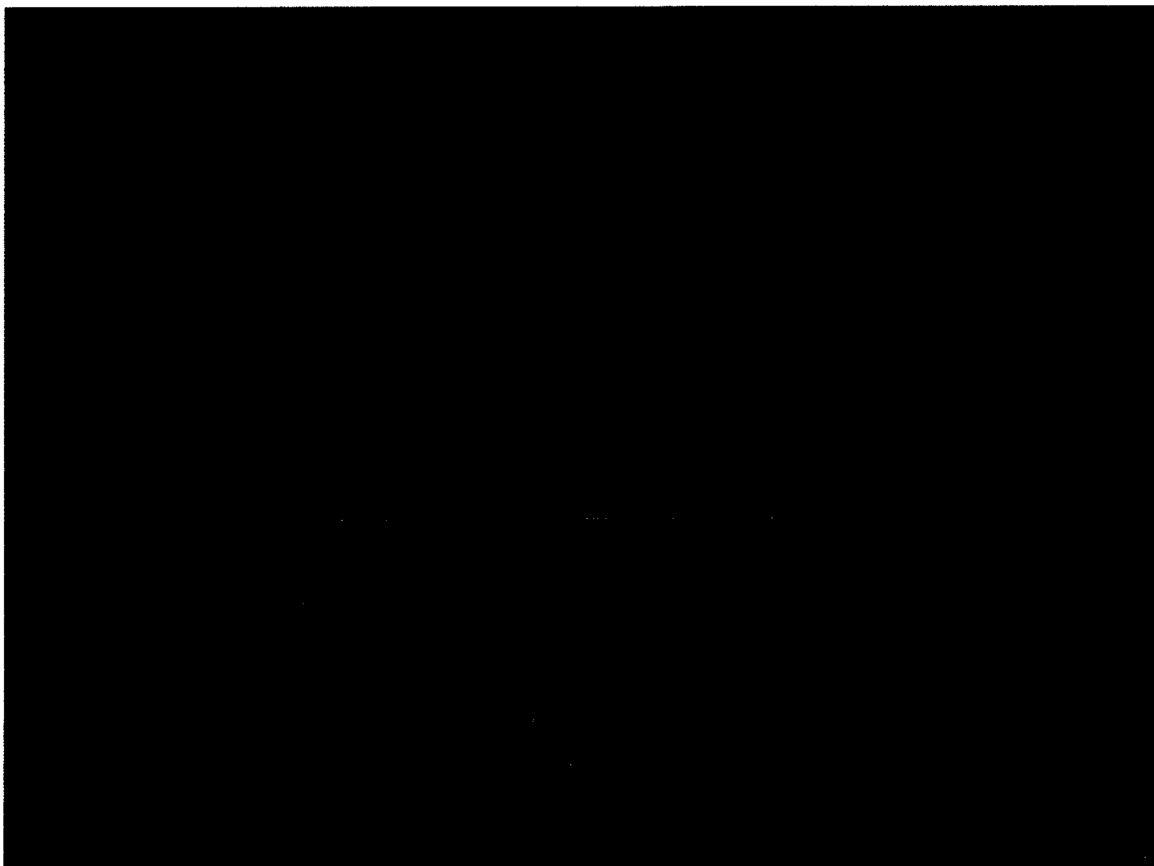
The images are from February, March, April, 2008.

The empty spaces, the muted enthusiasm, the heavy focus on straightforward ambition betray a survival instinct of mere determination. Beauty is sparse – what there is of it is uncomplicated and unembellished; and it is left where it is found.

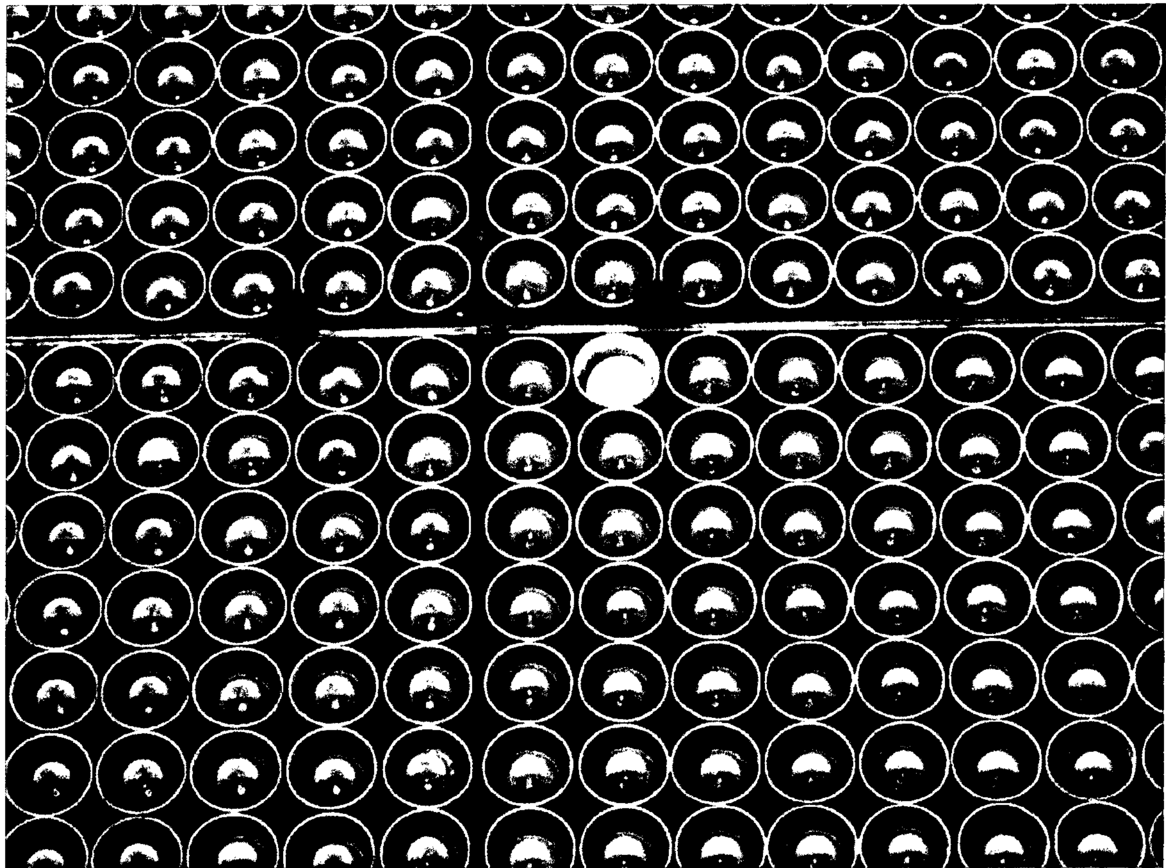
For me, this was the winter of 2008. Sometimes I was a resilient sentry, marching forward against a blazing sky; sometimes I saw the climb to the top of a skyscraper as a slow leap into a pale and uninspiring abyss. It was a perpetually agonizing season, and I struggled to keep the lights on. Where there was refreshment, it was too precious, unfocused, and easily ignored.



**Sentry**



**Leap**



**One Light Left On**

**Thick Asphalt**

**Muted**

Oliver is originally from Edmonton, and has lived in Calgary for about three years. His participation in the project was at a time in his life he described as "crazy". At the time, he was completing the articling duties incumbent upon students of law. Working 80-hour weeks, he described the project as a "breather" and an activity necessary for the maintenance of a social life.

## Life verses Real Life

**JACQUELINE MANN**

I believe that life should be lived, not merely survived. Living life to the full and existing in a fun and happy place are what I believe to be the fundamentals of living.

The four images I have chosen, "Life vs. Real Life" reflect the conflict of living the way you would like too, and having to live realistically.

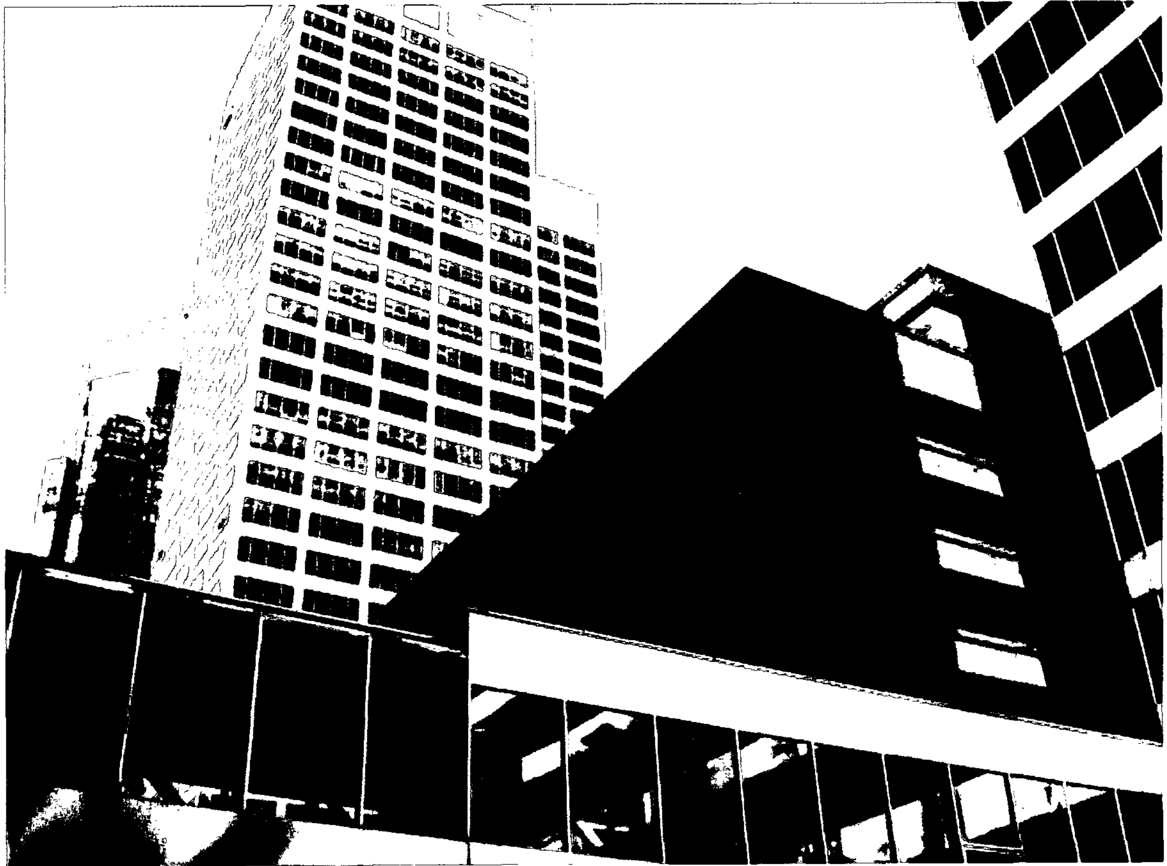
I believe "Cowtown" encompasses a subject matter of advertisements and bold formulated statements that portray a happy vibrant city with lots of activities full of fun, friendly people and excitement. This rush of energy filters through into the flashy dynamic appearance of the city's buildings in "Reflection" and "Tower", where a 2 dimensional, 'cartoon-like' demeanour, almost virtual feeling, is present. However in "Sundown" I feel this kind of appearance is less evident, yet the dark contrast between the sky and the foreground does expose a flat 2 dimensional image, which in many ways relates to that of a movie set or backdrop image. In my opinion the very fact that the three images of the city depict a cartoon and movie-like theme, conflicts with the actual subject matter of the buildings, and the reality of what actually takes place in them; a mundane money making environment where each individual is forced to make a living, save for the future, buy our groceries and exist in real life. "Cowtown" on the other hand displays the fun side of living.

Upsettingly, I feel very lonely when I look at "Cowtown", where I am reminded of these type of advertisements from my home country, the way you would walk past something like this and it would make you think of a place you're going to, or have been too, where you reminisce about the friends you met, or would be going to meet, the way you might see a band you knew from school on there, or just have memory of the venue that is advertised, the sights and the smells would all be brought back to you, who you wanted to be there, who you would avoid, what you wore, what you were going to wear, would be all going through your head as you walked past this mass of information, however here I have no connection with "Cowtown", instead I'm forced to look at the harsh reality, that I have not yet found any of those things in Calgary.

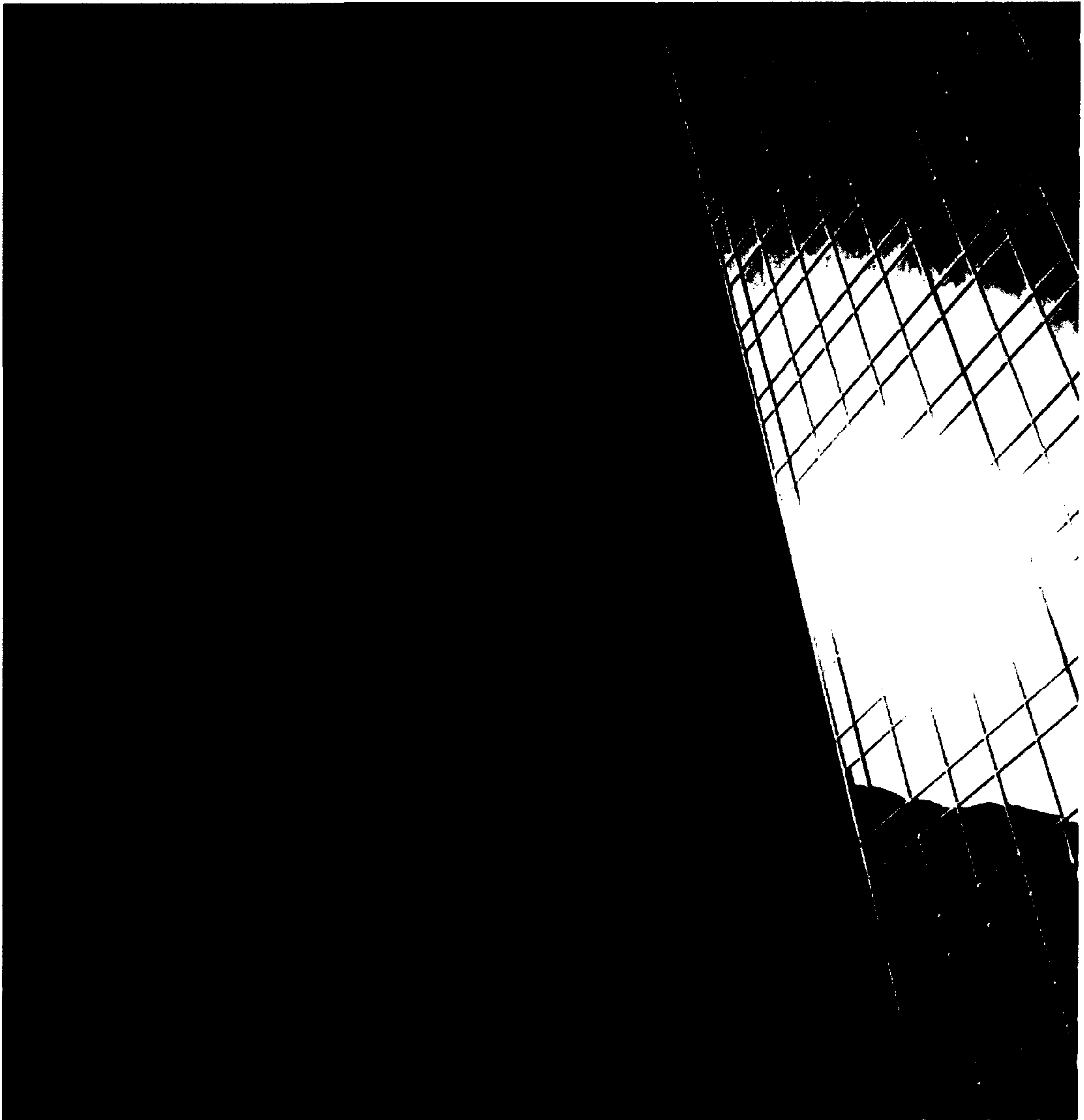
In comparison I feel comforted in the three other images, "Reflection", "Tower" and "Sundown" that exemplify an unrealistic view of the city. Oblivious to the reality of life, the 'movie-like' quality, the sharp defined lines, mixed with the fairy tale blue sky reminds me that I'm in North America, the movie set virtues of the images expels nostalgic memories, ideologies of Hollywood and America and the make-believe images that I grew up with. Superheroes were created here; my childhood dreams were born here. Living in America was always my dream. These embedded qualities

of "Reflection", "Tower" and "Sundown" fill me with excitement and hope. Hope that someday the real life that I'm living, the money that I'm making, will sooner or later make me happy, and the life that I long for will eventually happen. The hope that "Cowtown" will one day mean something to me. That one day I will indeed be '*living*' in this city.

**Cowtown**



**Reflection**



**Tower**

**Sundown**

Jacqui moved to Calgary from Scotland, and she has been living in the city for over a year. Both her partner and her are artists. She's currently employed in the service industry for an ambulatory services company. They moved to Calgary because her partner has family here, and because of the opportunities presently offered by the labour market. Jacqui recently received permanent residence status, and joined the project because she thought it might help to inspire her work as a performance artist.

## Picturing Calgary: What makes your new town your new home town?

**JEE-SUN STEPHAN**

We've all done this: relocating to a new town. What happens in the process of exploring and getting to know this new place? What is our active role in this process? What is our passive role, what are our reactions to the new place? What makes us like or dislike things about the new place?

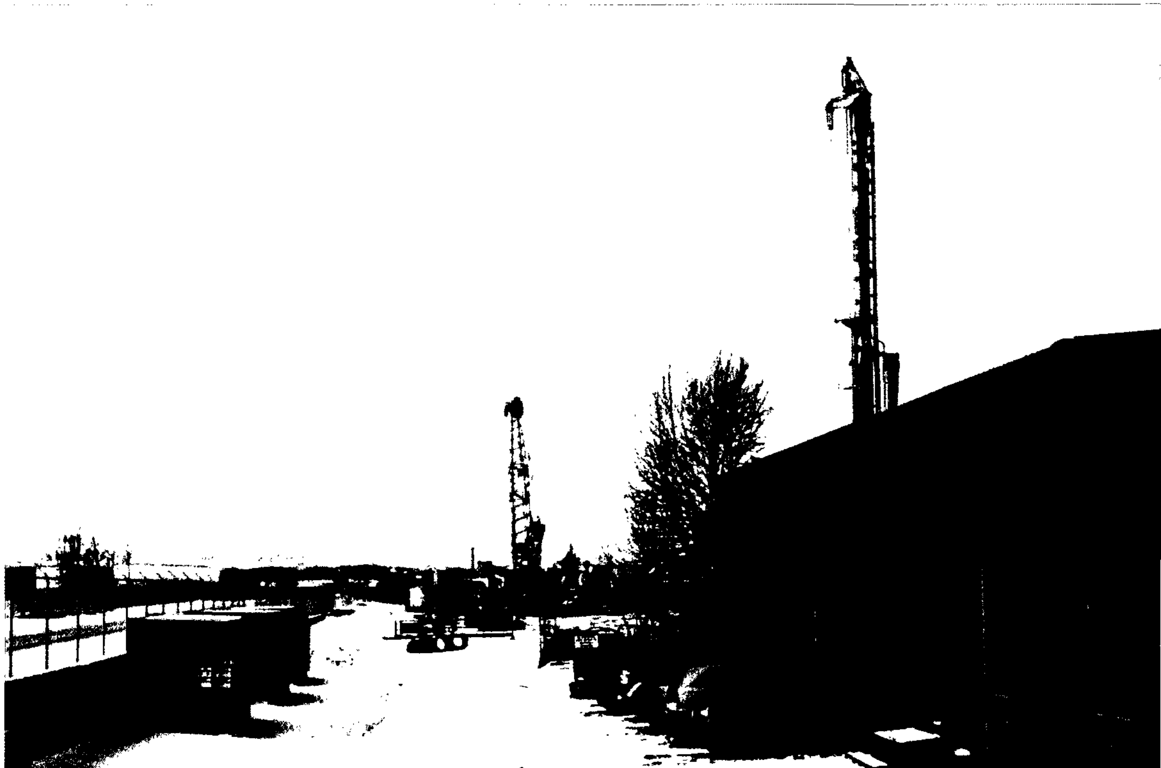
**First impressions:**

When first getting to know a place, we will try to replace preconceived ideas that one may have had of the place by real first impressions. We will explore landmarks of the city, carefully start to wander about the place and to catch the feel of it. We will also have to use other people's knowledge and opinions (second hand information of the place,) which we will eventually replace with our own opinions once we have gotten to know the place better. Another aspect is that we will try to reveal whether myths or prejudices of this town are in fact myths and prejudices or whether there is some truth to them. We will also try to get a glimpse of the culture and the people in this place.

In Calgary's case, these preconceived ideas could be Oil, the Stampede and the Rockies. This picture of Stampede park was taken in an attempt to photographically explore the Stampede phenomenon, and this in the off-season, when the gondolas are still, look on and wait for their time, when the place is deserted and when you are more likely to run into a dog show in the Casino than to see a horse in a Rodeo. If you listen really hard, you can hear the sound of horse carriages racing through the place. Or is it all in your imagination? The eerie feeling that there is something to the Stampede phenomenon will catch up with you when you see a cowboy hat downtown or when you drop into a hat and boot shop in town.

**The great outdoors:**

Everyone new to Calgary will, on the first possible occasion, charge out to the Rockies. The Rockies, quite rightly so, mean a lot to the Calgarians. The spectacular beauty and a magnitude of leisure activities so close at hand is a boosting factor for the location. People in Calgary even seem to think it a good thing to have the Rockies omnipresent in their daily lives. Does the sight of them add status to our existence? Or do they simply inspire a yearning for outdoor activities or getaways? This picture was taken in the yard of the company which I work for. Having the office overlook the Rockies even though we do not work in a glitzy downtown office tower means a lot to us.



**The role of architecture and urbanism:**

Architecture and urbanism is a major factor on the way you see the city and affects your relationship with the place. This photo, for example, shows Calgary's downtown area by night. This sight will inspire admiration for the city as the skyline is quite distinctive. For those working downtown, this place is also where they spend their days, so it is an integral part of their working lives. If you ask European immigrants about the centralised concepts of their cities, you will find that they like their downtown also to be a part of their private lives, as a place that they come to for their social lives, something that they can find less in a North American city plan such as Calgary.

To go one step further, architecture and urbanism thus create identification and an emotional connection with a place. Sometimes it is that you can find something in the new place that you were looking for, or that you want your new place to be like the old places you knew, or that you find that the characteristics of this new place are better than the old place. In this photo of Stephen Avenue, at least to me, it is probably that the new place reminds me of the old places I knew. Stephen Avenue is an avenue which is pedestrian by day, and this, in combination with the texture, materials and architecture, just reminds me a little bit of Europe.

**Social life, activities and interests:**

When we are new to a place, we venture out to connect not only with the place, but with the people which live in it. We strive to build a social network, to connect through activities and common interests. These can be sports, a photography project, bible class, you name it, or the dog park where even your dog gets to network. The dog park is a life changing experience for those of us who are not dog owners. The not-dog-owner will be flattened by the sheer amplitude of breeds, but also be baffled by the differences in character of each dog. And have you noticed the suspiciously high number of single guys with really cute dogs? Online dating move over, go out to a dog park!

**Possibilities and what's offered in a town:**

Did you ever hear yourself saying that you find it important that your town has a theatre programme even though you normally do not go more than once every 3 years? Still, the range of possibilities and the scope of what the town has to offer for everyone's likes is a defining factor in how much we feel comfortable and embrace the town as a habitat to live in. Calgary, I have found out, has so much more to offer than I ever would have thought. Activities, restaurants and bars, sports centres, education, arts and stage, interest groups, shopping, you will find everything. I would like to single out a small food place which I have found amazing and unique. It is a hot dog shop by the name of "Le Chien Chaud" where they serve 12 styles of gourmet hot dogs, all home made and the place is a family business. The floor is in checker board tiles and on the walls you see caricatures of hot dogs and, I kid you not, a hot dog shaped overall for a baby. This, to me, is a haven in the food landscape and if a place like this exists in a place like Calgary, then Calgary cannot be such a bad place.

I have completed my 4 month long journey of discovery and exploration and can say that I do now feel that Calgary is becoming my home town and that I have grown to appreciate this place greatly. The fact that in a month I am being transferred to a new place, which is my old place, is another story…

Jee-Sun is a civil engineer sent by her company in Munich on a project-based contract. Prior to coming to Calgary, she spent several months in Québec, and as she revealed to me, was rather tired of the lack of permanence constant travel represents. While Jee-Sun was quite clearly engaged in plenty of social activities during her stay in Calgary, she felt that her life at the moment was characterized by too many disjunctions. As such, she craved the stability of home and the network of friends she had in Germany.

## V - Photographic Truths

Insofar as photographs have been discussed in chapter two, the idea of a "practice of photography" has been alluded to; participants possess different ontological formulations of self in place, which is evident through their various understandings of how photography should be practiced. This chapter goes on further to examine the historical and contemporary roles of photography, particularly as it is approached as a method of inquiry within anthropology. There are two reasons behind such a line of inquiry: first, it is important to distinguish between different photographic genres and subsequently establish how photography is approached as a methodology in this research since imagery is central to Picturing Calgary. Second, because each participant envisions the role of photography in the project quite differently, their approaches toward the project are similarly varied. Yet, towards the end of the project, we see participants reflecting on both their own visual practices and photographic representations, and on the dialogical role photography played in the project.

We first begin by problematising the image, for photography as both practice and representation are deemed ambiguous. If photographs can no longer hold claim to truth, and if as Solomon-Godeau (1984) indicates, art photography, like its predecessors in the modernist/pictorialist/romantic genres, is just as problematic, then we are left in a fix. If all we are able to do is create a series of representations, then it appears as though one cannot lay claim to truth in anything one creates. In such a defeatist climate, as creator, there leaves an emptiness borne out of an inability to claim substantiality in any representation, while as a viewer or researcher, a crisis of representation leaves a feeling of emp-

tiness from the inability to grasp a hold of anything, to satisfy curiosity, or as Taussig puts it, "from peering deeply therein" (Taussig, 1993:xvi).

Following Taussig, if our images or cultural expressions are simply regarded as a series of representations, "how come it (life) appears so immutable? How come culture appears so natural?" (Taussig, 1993:xvi). At the heart of my inquiry lies the reluctance to release the grip I hold from the "depth" of each image I produce. As this chapter demonstrates, images follow deeply rooted traditions of visual epistemologies, of visual ways of knowing the world. The images we make, like what Taussig reminds us of culture, are deeply personal. They offer glimpses into the photographer's innermost self, of the ways in which he or she intimately perceives the world. The weight of the camera sits comfortably in the palm of the photographer's hand; it is an instrument that connects him with his world, an intimate extension of his body that aids him in sensually perceiving his immediate environment, and facilitates his immersion in the world.

Our deep attachments to our practices of photography and of our images are subjected to the scrutinizing gaze of others. Yet, a fundamental ambiguity surrounds the photograph, resulting from an inability to theorize in the simplest form, what an image *is*. It often appears as though perspectives emerging from visual literature, at times from the "surface of the image", at other times from the "depth of the image", are either contradictory or rhetorical. Photography is a site of tension, lending itself to speak from polemical positions of the subjective/objective or from the universal/particular. Such perspectives are totalizing in their inability to rise beyond such polemics, in consequence rendering a kind of inertia on the part of both photographer and spectator.

In Picturing Calgary, while photographs take on real meaning for the photographers, they also operate as dialogical instruments within the discursive spaces of the project group. Hence the second half of this chapter looks at how various participants practice photography, and their reflections on their photographic practices and representations. It also examines how the inter-subjective and visual discourses within the context of the project are framed and understood.

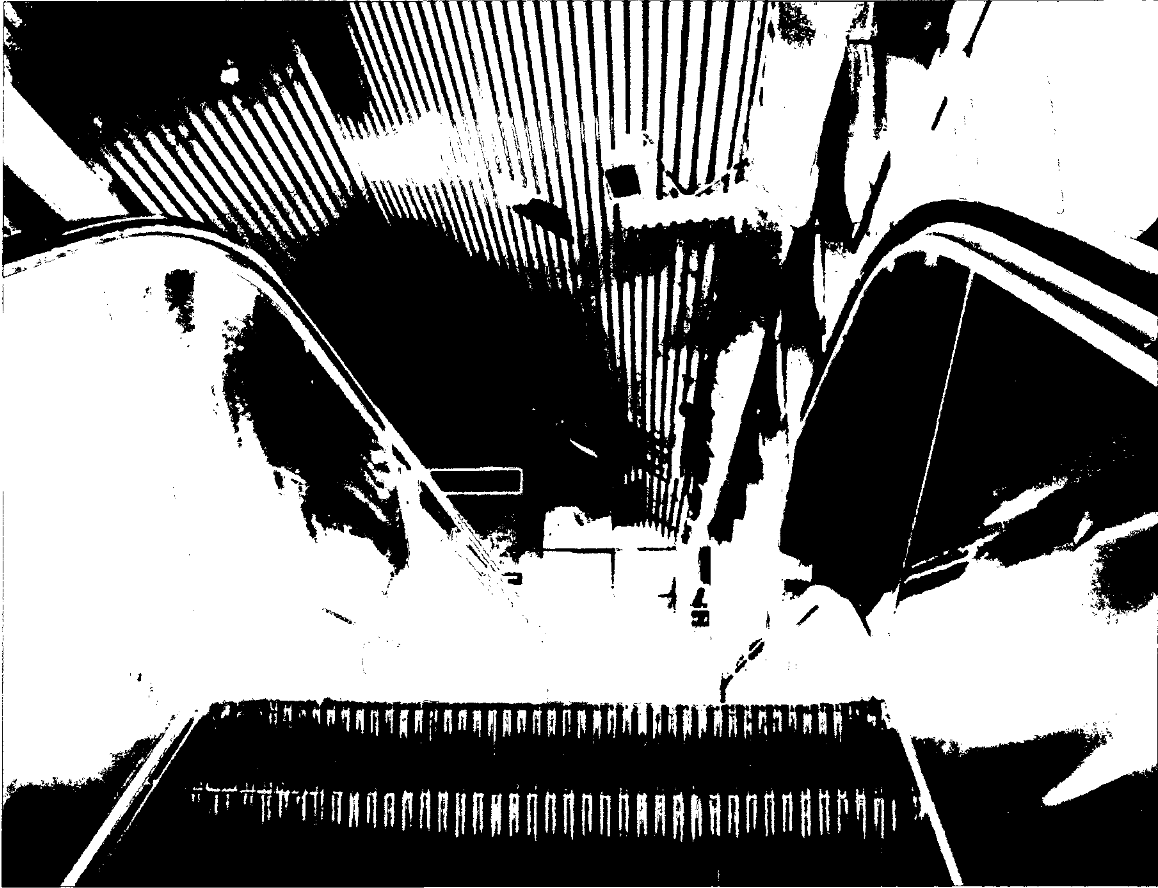
We begin by observing that photography found its root as a western concept of perception, and a way of representing reality. Barthes notes the two events in history which contributed to the development of photography: the invention of a chemical process to record the light emanating from the surface of the object depicted, and the invention of the camera obscura (Barthes, 1981). The camera obscura was a box like device which could be as large as a room. Light passed through a hole on one side of the wall such that the scene outside was projected onto an opposite wall. The intent was for the camera obscura to serve as an artist's tool in creating a representation of reality so that a copy with the correct perspective could be made on paper.

Since its invention by William Talbot in 1839, photography's popularity's soared as the public became enamored with its inexpensive and accurate attention to detail. In return, the recognition of the importance of new technology led to constant refinement and attempts to streamline the photographic process, facilitated by Talbot and his successors' constant technological innovation and revision to the chemical process. Portability was the key: smaller cameras were made, and the negative was invented, making the con-

sumption of photographs increasingly available to a burgeoning middle class (Rosenblum, 1997).

Rosenblum describes the invention of photography as timely, appearing following the enlightenment and the industrial revolution when the western world was ready for more accurate representations of reality (Rosenblum, 1997). Wright observes that photography is *inherently* cultural. Implicit here is the notion that "to see is to know", borne out of a cartesian mind-body dualism that is implied by an eye-camera analogy of photographic seeing, and wherein the lens/eye is an organic, perceiving body. Such a perspective results in an occularcentric epistemology rooted in the belief that the accurate eye of the camera was able to record reality (Wright, 1992). As nineteenth century societies grew increasingly secular, the scientific inquiry of the industrial revolution sought to portray actuality with greater verisimilitude. The camera was seen as a conduit of knowledge, and was invested with the power to possess an independently disinterested and objective eye, which could subsequently be used to study the laws of nature dispassionately.

This western quest for scrutiny and visibility resulted in the use of photography in anthropological endeavors. Poignant's reading of the social history behind anthropological uses of photographs in Victorian England sheds light on a discipline attempting to establish itself as a science. Photographs, existing as "facts" gathered from the field by missionaries and officials of the colonial government, were employed towards typological and anthropometric uses (Poignant's, 1992). Similarly, Western perceptions of the "Other" were central to the creation and consumption of photography in the second half



**"until we become conscious..."** (Jacqui)

*"This is kind of a 'homage' to George Orwell.. coming from the UK I'm used to seeing lots of CTV cameras, I never found them sinister but when put in the context of '1984' there is definitely something dark about these cameras, especially this one as it is located at Franklin station."*

of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Viewed as "visual evidence to check rash generalizations about race (55)", the observation, recording, classification and interpretation of photographs fit within the paradigm of a scientific anthropology that served as an arm of colonial expansion and power. As proof of empirical "truth", photographs were seen as fragments standing in for the whole. The final work of synthesis and generalization could then begin to construct a unifying account of culture (Edwards, 1992). Noting that "truths should not be left to impartial judgments" (61), we see attempts by an emerging discipline to impose structure on the reading of these photographs by placing them within an investigative, institutional framework to give them more scientific character (Poignant, 1992).

In the fifty years following the invention and subsequent popularity of the camera, debates surrounded how the new means of mechanical production should be utilized. In the late nineteenth century, we see several strands of experimentation with the camera, and our present ambiguity with the camera can be viewed as a continuance of this uncertainty. We see here that photography has always had an ambiguous ontological status. While on the one hand the camera could be put to use in service of a realist paradigm to reveal sociological, physical and scientific phenomena, on the other hand, artistic photographers advocated for the expressive qualities of the medium by experimenting with lighting, focus, and composition in landscape and portraiture. Experimentation with photography as an aesthetic medium led to the establishment of photographic conventions, some of it allegorical or narrational in character.

As the 19th century drew to a close, the new technologies of mechanical reproduction made photography and its products available to a larger segment of the population. As noted earlier, this was partly due to the invention of new equipment and processes, but during this period, the accessibility and commercial marketing of these products also increased popular consumption of photography. A rise in commercial photographers, particularly in portraiture, was also accompanied by the production of photographs for consumption. These took the form of prints with allegorical or narrational themes, or of travel postcards. Alison Nordstrom's study of the Tupper travel albums is particularly revealing of how travel albums, as material objects with a complex social history, can shed light on the visual culture of the period. Serving as a travelogue and photograph album, Tupper's purchased tourist postcards, careful drawings and detailed annotations delineate his travels like a diary. Through his sequencing of images and descriptive captions, we are able to discern the linkages he makes with certain images while distancing himself from others (Nordstrom, 2004). Hence, we note an emerging popularization of the photographic object as a result of the inexpensive reproductive quality of photography, reflecting a changing visual culture.

The practice of image construction is always critically reflective, the formation of one genre responding to the limits of another. In anthropology, Poignant (1992) suggests that the popularization of photographic genres such as travel photography, documentary and photojournalism rendered problematic the use of photography in anthropological projects of that period. W.H. Rivers therefore strived to establish photographs as social facts by rejecting readings of photographs he felt to be subjective or artistic (Pinney, 1992). With

the exception of the Torres Straits expedition led by Haddon who experimented with sensory and visual methodology as a modern and innovative approach to research (Pink, 2006; Grimshaw, 2001), we see a withdrawal from an active engagement with visual methodology as a research tool.

As the founding figure of anthropology's primary methodology, Malinowki seldom used photography in ethnographies, often opened his monologues with the textual equivalent of establishing shots (Poignant, 1992), a convention used in photography and film to establish the scene from which an event was about to unfold. He envisioned the ethnographer to be a participant-observer, a researcher immersed in fieldwork and absorbed in the documentation of minute details to inform the scientific project. While he thoroughly ' rejected the subjectivity of the visual or sensory', and advocated for the observation of scientific facts (Pink, 2006), Grimshaw interestingly observes that in practice, his work reveals hints of romanticism borne out of an ethnographer's apparent innocence. Here, we see the emergence of the notion that ethnographic work involves unique moments of personal insight arising out of intuition. As a writer, Malinowski's ethnographies were derived from richly textured narratives. Grimshaw (2001).

Poignant suggests that Malinowski's work marks a shift in anthropology where primacy is placed on the ethnographic monologue as text, and resulting in a subsuming of the visual in the process. Not only did photography become redundant under the objectifying intentions of the written monograph, she suggests that this resulted in the emergence of the ethnographer's role as "Creator" and "Interpreter of Cultures". Consequently, it is

through this idiom of visualization that we see the *internalization* of photography in anthropology (Poignant, 1992). Pinney takes the observation further, making the point that the triumph of fieldwork in eliminating the photographic image as a substantial component of post-war anthropological research is because anthropology has so completely absorbed the idiom of photography into the production of its texts that it becomes invisible, like "a drop of oil expanding over the surface of clear water" (Pinney, 1992:81). As a result, the fieldworker emerges as the central figure validating the anthropological enterprise.

Pinney suggests that both photography and anthropology require a temporal distancing from the object to create an "ethnographic present". Here, privileged knowledge is borne out of an alliance with vision, thus formulating the linkage: "Photography-vision-Western Knowledge-power" (Pinney, 1992:81). He draws parallels between the ethnographic and photographic narrative, noting that the heroic figure of the ethnographer, exposed to cultural "data", plus distance, served as a guarantee of "social-facts". Thus by linking the role of the ethnographer and photographer, Pinney noted that the ethnographer's exposure to data "occurred during a period of inversion from his normal reality, a stage which is formally analogous to the production of the photographic narrative when the all important rays of light which guarantee the indexical truth of the image are allowed to fall on the negative's emulsion" (82).

As observed, anthropology's denial or subsuming of the visual has led it along a different path from photography following the 1940s. With the exception of a handful of anthropologists (such as Mead, Bateson and Evans-Pritchard) experimenting with photography

in their research (Pink, 2006), photography in anthropology was used primarily as illustration alongside written text. While photography during the twentieth-century took different paths, anthropological and photographical approaches emerged out of similar roots, and we begin to see a convergence later in the century.

As a genre, documentary views the photographer as an agent of illumination, and may be said to begin with Emerson who, in founding "naturalism", saw photography as capable of expression. As opposed to the sentimental conventions of genre, he sought to move from the manipulation of photos in producing picturesque images, to one that was capable of illuminating aspects of the real world (Rosenblum, 1992). While his work can be viewed as representative of a fictionalized, aestheticizing genre, it ushers in the beginning of a documentary employment of photography by seeking to capture ephemeral expressions and gestural expressions and depicting figures in natural and life like poses.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the quest for empire promoted the photograph as an unproblematic means of expanding knowledge of the visible, modernizing world. Light revealed truth, and prints were commissioned by government, publishers, private companies and individuals to this end. The realist paradigm informing early documentary was rooted in the perspective that truth was invested in an all powerful eye, and was a reaction against seeking truth by invoking timeless moral or religious truths (Rosenblum, 1992).

The same objective lens was turned towards the documentation of ethnic customs. Yet, the genre of "documentary" was itself riddled with contradictions and ambiguity in

whether or not it was seen as a truthful record of the world, or as a tool of expression. Whether or not the documentary reinforced dominant stereotypes against non-Europeans, or made viewers more conscious of individual differences among subjected peoples, was dependent upon both the individual photographer's attitude and approach, and the context in which the images were viewed. Rosenblum locates Edward Curtis's depictions of Native American Indians however, as the first formal representations of a Western "Other", as pictorialism and not documentation (Rosenblum, 1997). His work served as a form of aestheticizing salvage anthropology, sometimes by employing the use of traditional costumes and artifacts that were in fact no longer in use (Rosler, 1989). This hardly served as realist documentary; the employment of soft focuses in Curtis's photographs obscured any detail that may have provided any useful information. Again, we see the unclear demarcation between aesthetic and realist paradigms: his photographs attempted to revive a 'dying' tribe, yet conveyed a sense of nostalgia achieved by an aesthetic rendering of the photograph.

The photojournalist's creed is to construct the everyday dramas of ordinary peoples' lives and comment on the political events of the time. In journalism, the recurrence of the figure of ethnographer/anthropologist noted above can be observed: through the act of de-heroicizing and de-mythicizing a politically constructed occurrence, the photographer himself becomes herocized (Rosenblum, 1997). The power invested in photography is that it serves to *illuminate* as well as record, and the journalist is the medium through which this occurs. By taking the basic unit of an experience, a fragmentary moment, pho-

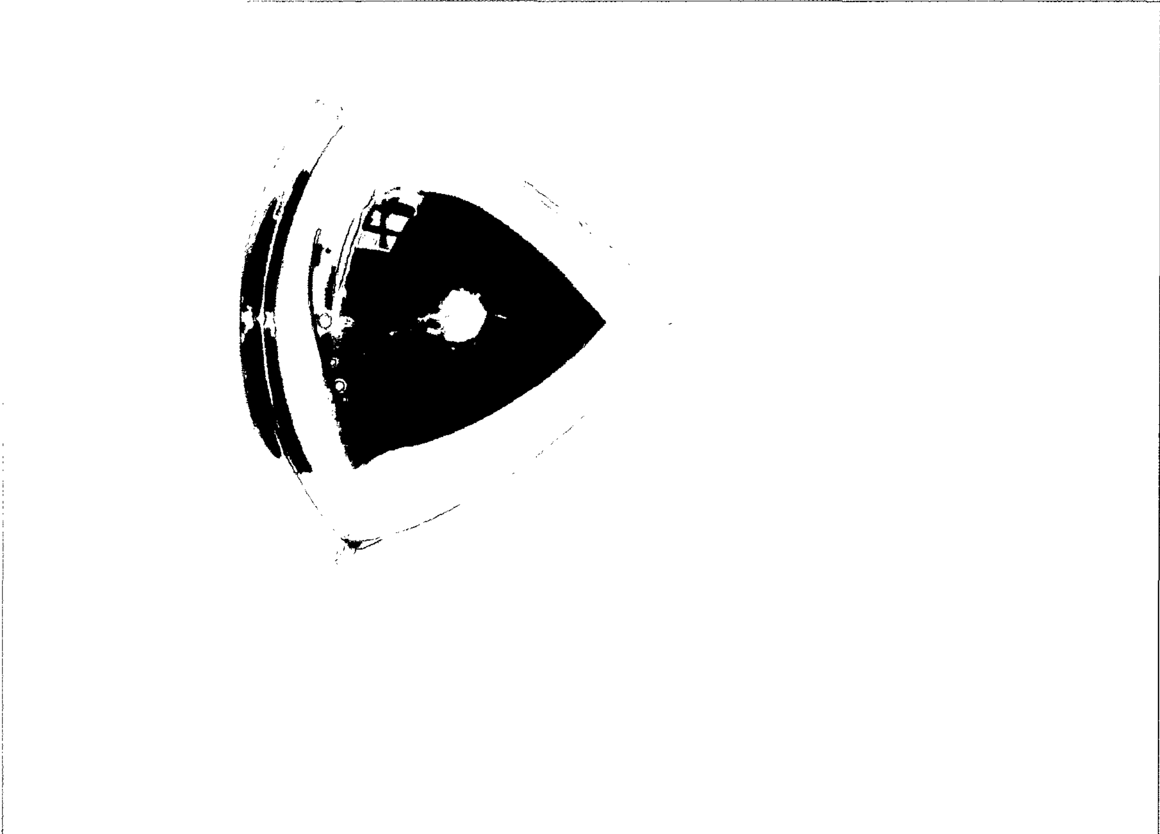
tojournalism transcends time and space by projecting a general statement about the world and a person's relations within it (Rosler, 1989). Here, we can draw parallels between documentary and structural-functionalism, for in the latter, cultural specifics were employed towards the illustration of a timeless statement about the structuring of social relationships that work to ensure the functioning of society as a whole.

Sontag (Pinney, 1992) observes that the act of photography implies a sense of power. For her, the metaphors used to describe the formation of a photographic image - to shoot, to take, to capture and to load - results in the feeling that through the act, something is lost, or that a death has been incurred (Metz, 1985; Barthes, 1981). She is indicative of a certain violence that is associated with the practice of journalism. While it serves an almost typographical function by situating an event or person within particular social categories (Rossler, 1989), the documentation of a social occurrence through aestheticizing images also has the unsettling effect of reinforcing "reality" by appealing to the aesthetic. More recently, we see different strands of journalistic/documentary photographic work emerge, particularly in portraiture. While Cartier-Bresson subscribed to the illuminating instant where aesthetic composition and subject-matter came together, and stalked his subjects like an animal on the hunt (a form of journalistic "shooting" that reminds one of the flaneur on the lookout for the uncanny in a city imagined as wilderness), the work of Strand has the opposite effect. Berger observes that his moment appears to be informed by the accumulation of biographical histories, noting that his "photographs enter so deeply into the particular that they reveal to us the stream of a culture or a history which is flowing

through that particular subject like a blood" (Berger, 1980:43).

The 20th century saw an emphasis on the mechanical and objective characteristics of the photo-eye, reifying the photographic subject and focusing on minute aesthetic details in the process. Modern ways of seeing included linking aesthetic experimentation with social change: new perspectives on angles, focus, visual perception and cultural understanding linked social progression and change with the new and more accessible camera technologies. Brik is fascinated by Rodchenko's photograph of a Moscow house from an unusual viewpoint. "The familiar object (the house) suddenly turned into a never-seen-before structure, a fire escape became a monstrous object, balconies were transformed into a tower of exotic architecture" (Brik, 2003:90). By investing the photo-eye with power, he sees potential outside of visual monotony: photographic technologies allowing for a breakaway from the ordinary radius of the human eye, enabling one to see things differently and consequently effect social change.

The emergence of aestheticized documentary images in art galleries was met with the development of art photography as an institution. While photographs began to be displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York and San Francisco for example, the very act of entering documentary images into the gallery circuit imputed a different status to the images (Solomon-Godeau, 1984). Willumson (2004) observes that the museum or gallery as an institution offers assurance: by formulating the canon of high and low art in the medium, it assures photography of its status while articulating and defining the material



**eye** (Jacqui)

*"I like this - there is something gentle yet frightening about it?"*

qualities of the formal print: rich tonality, large formats and good compositions for example, articulated aesthetic control. As a photographer, Edward Weston's control of the medium was remarkable, and serves as an example. He situates his work, not as documentary (though his work makes a documentary statement), but as art. As an artist, the finished print needed to be created in full before the film was exposed. Hence, it was necessary to preconceptualise the image and adopt an experimental approach to composition, exposure, developing and printing. For Weston, the photographer as artist had the potential to reveal and offer emotional insight into the nature of the world: his job was not to *document,* but to *explore and reveal.* He formalized the practices of photographer as artist, and emphasized the need for attention to be paid to detail through definition, tonal quality, paper, and clarity. However, the ultimate goal of the experienced photographer was to subordinate technical considerations to pictorial aims without allowing himself to be dragged down by photographic formulas and dogma, for his larger purpose was to "be free to put his photographic sight to use in discovering and revealing the nature of the world he lives in" (Weston, 1964:108). Presently, we emphasize the destabilization of links between representation and reality. Genres as we have understood them - documentary, photojournalism, and even family photography - are collapsing. Wells notes a final paradox: as art photography was finally accepted and formalized as fine art, we see an aesthetic movement in the emergence of artists using photography to challenge formalist art practices and the status of the art institution, eventually creating fissures between art photography and the larger art movement (Wells, 2003).

Solomon-Godeau argues that since its conception, mainstream art photography, pictorial

ist or modern, has remained substantially unchanged throughout its various historical permutations, for the art photograph has always been the expression of the photographer's interior rather then the world's exterior (Solomon-Godeau, 1984). Like anthropology's ethnographer, the photographer's eye is the site of sensibility, authenticity and authorship. Self expression and subjectivity function as the warranty of art, claiming a priori over the blurred, gauzy effects of soft focus and allegorical meanings that once served to convey emotion. The photographer now mediates his world through his instrument, viewed, as a machine subjected to his will, while photography as a method is formulated to fulfill more intense self-realization.

This is not to diminish the importance of mastery of the medium, for it takes control of a medium to be able to express or convey an emotion or statement. Rather, as we observe following Weston, the photographer has to subordinate photographic formulae to the power of inner revelation, further reinforcing the similar roles played by the photographer/ethnographer. Perhaps, as Pinney had suggested, in a final testimony to the power invested in western ocularcentrism, visuality has been so thoroughly subsumed into western epistemology that it triumphs over the medium itself.

The photographic medium, like anthropology, has experienced tides of uncertainty over its ontological status, hovering between its alliances to science, or to the aesthetic throughout its history (Pinney, 1992). However, it is suggested here that an unnecessary pathological consequence is tied to either western ocularcentrism, or to the ambiguity of

both disciplines. As a matter of fact, when used as a tool of exploration and reflection in a discursive context, photography as practice can be quite empowering.

## Photographic Practices

Photographic practice is a way of engaging visually with the world while utilising photographic conventions. This section discusses the various participants' photographic practices, their reflections on their photographic practices and representations, and their ontological formulation of self and place through visual practice. It also looks at how the inter-subjective and visual discourses within the context of the project is framed and understood. Readings of participants' practices and reflections are intuited from both the participants' own representations, and the conversations that unfold within the discussion group. Such an examination of the dialogical aspects of photography sheds light on the configuration of social networks and affinities, the ways in which multiple gazes within a discursive discussion group result in critical reflection, and how place making is materialized through visual and discursive acts.

Participants' photographs represent a wide cross section of photographic genres: from art photography, social commentary, objective documentary to aesthetic experimentations. Jacqui's practice of photography for example, illustrates the accessibility and telescopic nature of new technologies in bringing into focus new angles and perspectives. By sticking her camera overhead, into drains, around corners and beneath bridges, she gains access to views not otherwise accessible through the normal radius of the human eye. In demonstrating a curious break from visual monotony through her photographs, viewers are able to see things differently and are offered new perspectives.

As we have seen earlier, visual commentary serves as a critical aspect of place making: Foreigner or Native, Flaneur or Stranger, the photographer hunts down the strange and the uncanny. Ownership over place is evident through our investments in place, and commentary often appears as a form of expression of such investment. Both Canadians in the group, Alex and Oliver, document the city's development quite specifically: Oliver is evidently interested in the social effects of the city's development while Alex comments on the physical manifestations and immediate effects of city planning.

Similarly, some of the other participants approach the project utilizing different photographic conventions. Maciej approaches the medium with such mastery that his images show a keen emotive and revelatory quality: his mostly photographic portraits display a sensitivity towards his subjects and a sentient attachment to the photographic moment. Finally, Jee-Sun's photographs approximate an objective commentary, alternating between illustrations and comparisons of Calgary, and her opinion and reflections on the city.

Picturing Calgary's participants inadvertently utilize a wide range of photographic genres. Yet, due to the dialogical nature of the project, no single genre claims either ascendancy over others or the primacy of truth in the project. Documentary as a genre for example, is ether understood as the single photographer's expression of truth or is further subjected to the photographer's critical reflection. Because no singular photographic practice claims a priori over others in the project, all photographic practices become a part of Picturing Calgary's dialogical experience and contribute to the inter-subjective spaces provided by the project.

Hence, photography in the project is conceived as a process and an experience. Terence Wright introduces an "action and experience" based approach to photography on the part of the perceiver, whereby self-determination is based upon the spectator's active engagement with his environment. Such an approach sees 'natural correspondences' occurring between the photograph and the perceived environment, operating *in conjunction* with pictorial conventions, as opposed to the opposition between naive realism and convention. Here, the camera, "in sampling some of the ambient light, enables the photograph to provide a limited amount of *information* about the photographed environment" (Wright, 1992:29). As opposed to reading images based upon pre-established iconographic conventions, this posits an *experiencing* of the photograph.

A participant's photographic practice reflects a similar engagement with the world. It illustrates both participants' practice of space, and their varying ontological formulations of self in place. In what follows, different photographic practices are described, and pertinent issues arising from any individual's visual practice is discussed. The focus here is on the ways in which ontological formulations are materialised through each photographers' actions: by creating walking routes and visual practices, each photographer redefines and re-appropriate the places he or she resides.

Jacqui's photographs accompany her work as a performance artist such that her photography itself can be viewed as a kind of performative experience. Her practice of photography is similar to the actions of the performance artist: her images are fun, playful explorations between the environment and the imagination, creating novel, delightful and revealing insights on everyday objects and sights. As a means of creating art, the practice

serves as an unbounded exploration of the relationship between ideas, action and the material world. In watching her take pictures, one notices an emphasis on means over ends; it appears to me a way of remaking the world through objects and gestures. Out of this the extraordinary is devised and created, and the process recounts the rich relationship between the body and thought by envisioning the abstract. Her photography appeals to the imagination of the rest of us in our own practices of photography; it invites us to reshape the world by drawing and acting upon it, creating our own walking routes and photographic practices such that we are able to encounter it in novel ways.

As we have seen in chapter three, Gareth's practice of photography is intricately linked with his everyday practices. Because he doesn't drive, his photography expresses his thoughts and sentiments during his quotidian journeying: on walks to and fro to the university, daily errands through his neighborhood, and on leisurely jaunts on the evenings and weekends. As evidenced in his photo essay, his is a reflexive practice that journeys between moments of consciousness and unconsciousness. His immersion in this sentient practice is expressed in the rich and thoughtful commentaries that accompany his pictures, and in the novel, reflective compositions of his photographs.

Oliver's photographs are similarly critical reflections on his current ontological state. As he sifts through his collection of photographs taken for Picturing Calgary months after the project, he is startled by the accurate revelations of his ontological state at that particular point of his life. Looking through the photographs, he recounts how he is humbled and rendered vulnerable by their revelatory strength. It gives him insight into a time of his life when he was thoroughly absorbed with work, and the images appear to him as if

**Glow** (Jacqui)

**Empty** (Jacqui)

**I drempt...** (Jacqui)

*"...something is lost, just wish i could figure out what it was?"*

**Missed Me** (Oliver)

attempts to emerge from beneath deep water to take a few breaths of respite in between the unrelenting pace of life and work. The images represent a practice of photography that served as a welcome refuge, allowing him spaces of freedom and snatches of rest at times that almost seemed bleak.

His viewing of the photographs posits an *experiencing* of the image. It is evocative of memory and sentiment for either photographer or viewer. With their allegorical nature photographs are revelatory, and powerful in their ability to evoke sentiment. The image's metaphorical attributes demonstrate the power of the visual in communicating other facets of sensory experience. Jacqui's photograph *Empty* illustrates the strength in sentiment for memory and loss, and elaborate upon Taussig's point that everyday experience and sentiment can only be accessed tacitly. *Empty* for example, appears instantly accessible: the sentiment of loneliness or loss invoked by the image is comprehended visually, but only due to a familiarity with these sentiments through prior experiencing. The same can be said for *I drempt* - it invokes a powerful sentiment because we have experienced and are thus able to imagine the sharp coldness of a tiled floor against our skin. Consequently we may for example, equate the body's unlikely location next to a cold space with the disconcerting jolts of unfamiliarity emblematic of dislocation in a foreign place.

My own experience with photographic seeing and subsequent photographic practice was informed by an expatriate from Los-Angeles who came to Singapore to teach photography to our photojournalism class. We first explored novel ways of engaging with our world through encounters with interesting angles, odd hues and strange compositions before learning the conventions of photographic seeing. Like Weston's, the photography we

practiced was very much an aestheticised social commentary; as with the usual practice with professional photographers and photojournalists, we were taught to be sensitive to the formulation of images in our minds before taking the photograph.

Central to our photojournalism assignment for the term was the production of a photographic essay that was to represent ourselves. The essay had to formulate and represent "self", and was in essence a photographic exploration of identity. The novelty and challenge of the assignment resided in the uncharacteristic request to produce self, a particularly alien concept, as "self" was a an enigmatic concept given the cultural context. Within *our* media education, photography was produced according to photographic conventions, and in service of state media or industry. The unfolding of the assignment within such a context was unsettling to a group of young people who had thus far been taught to formulate their "selves" as part of greater institutional or social structures.

The photographic essays that resulted were consistently unreserved explorations of lives: my own were a series of detailed photographs on fragmented textures of fauna and body, representing both a time when I spent more time outdoors taking photos and away from classes, and a refuge I etched for myself in response to Confucian ideals of responsibilities before self. Metz (1985) would say that the photograph is an inherently fetishizing object. Such constructions are the result of a material fragmentization of the referent to articulate experience and personal sentiment, achieved through a framing/deframing of the world. While he contends that such fetishization leads to the inevitable death of the subject, it does point to a peculiar condition: the selection of borders around a field of lived experience by framing/deframing or hiding/revealing our experiences in the world.

Many photographs in Picturing Calgary for example, demonstrate this tendency. Looking at Jacqui's *glow* and *empty*, there appears to be a haunting quality within the photographic frame, as if something is amiss in the photograph. Back in my photojournalism class, the fetishizing framing/deframing of our experiences pointed to a power inherent in the *process* of photography itself, which from my recollection of the photo essays produced that year, served in their various permutations as escape, narrative and response against the structure of the state. Documentary television and film production at school taught us realist conventions and practices that worked to keep the viewer unaware of the construct of any given situation. Trained as future media producers for state television, the assignment introduced a new dimension to our education: the formulation of "self" and the emergence of self-reflecting entities.

I would parallel the experience with learning anthropology at a time when, as Lutz and Collins comment following Rabinow, the current anthropological gaze seems to "anthropologise the West" (1991). It is a climate Sahlins refers to as the moralising tendencies of the discipline: the current anthropological project being a moral project of the West. In my first few years of undergraduate anthropology classes, I recall likening classes to looking in a mirror. From my recruitment into the discipline's current paradigm of critical reflexivity, the reflection produced an anthropological self and introduced an interesting tension: between materialising into the unintended form of the Other, or somehow finding a need to identify with this moralism.

Learning is an inherently ontological experience. Our formulations of self are the result of complex and competing epistemologies; such ontological discoveries materialize and

find form through action and narration, or through discursive acts and visual practices. Thus, Picturing Calgary is conceived out of a perceived need to create dialogical spaces that go beyond structuring polemics that leave little room for maneuvering.

As we have seen earlier in the chapter, our deeply rooted and visual epistemologies are the result of a Descartian mind-body dualism that Pinney formulates as *Photography-vision-Western Knowledge-power.* Such a perspective can be explicated by the well known painting by Spanish painter Diego Velazquez, *Las Meninas.* Here, we find that the spectator/painter/photographer is a central figure in western visual culture, reflecting, as Berger (1980) would suggest, an ontological state of being as understood in the European tradition. Second, not only would this suggest the frontality of the image, it also features the inclusion of the spectator in western visuality. At the same time, the viewer is left aware that he or she is being painted or rather, included into the painting's perspective. It hints at what Burgin describes as the viewer being *produced* out of an ideological construct, and further implies that the viewer is already complicit and recruited within a particular way of looking. Finally, just as Velazquez paints himself into the painting, the viewer becomes aware that he or she is also recruited into a complex network of multiple, interweaving gazes involving self as spectator. Along with the the king and queen of Spain and the painter, each person can be read to negotiate their recruited space within the painting.

Even as we are recruited into a multiplicity of interdependent gazes, as photographers and consumers of images, it is our practice of experiencing the image that introduces meaning into the photograph. More precisely, it is the critical engagement with our recruitment

into this system of photographic gazes that gives power to photography as a *process* in meaning formation. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the notion that both spectators and photographers are produced out of a structuring visual perspective constricts both viewer and photographer into an ideological bind, and renders visual perspectives and their accompanying practices already pathological. Hence, if the visual perspective is so thoroughly subsumed into the photographic and anthropological gaze like "a drop of oil expanding over the surface of clear water" (Pinney, 1992:81), it seems nearly impossible to get out of this totalising bind.

If photography is to be viewed as a process in meaning formation, then the photographers of Picturing Calgary should be seen to critically construct the borders of their own photographic practices through reflecting on and responding to, each others' photographs, words and photographic practice. Very often, such critical construction arises through conflict. The different photographic conventions drawn upon by each participant in Picturing Calgary presented an interesting challenge to a collaborative photography project. This was especially for so for one participant for whom photography represented, not just a tool of expression or investigation, but a *career* in commercial photography. Maryann notes that the project was not really "about photography"; for her, the discussion space at meetings should have consisted of art criticism. She mentioned that at times she had wanted to comment on the technicality of certain shots but decided not to because in the social space created by the group, "it would not be nice".

Yet, in the inter-subjective space created at the photo meetings, such a perspective represented *one* perspective out of many. Many of the participants reported reflecting on their

own practices of photography when given the opportunity to compare with those of others, mentioning like Oliver did that some of his photographs were like snatches of time that he stole throughout the day. Hence, any stress on the technicality of photographic practice *as art* would have proved intimidating for other participants. Jee-Sun, Oliver and Jacqui for example, expressed concern that they were not "very good" at photography. Yet Maciej and Maryann, who had both expressed disappointment that the project wasn't enough "about" photography, kept returning. I suspect the social space for the project, and the opportunity to see how photography as a practice was constituted for others held their interest in the project. They both mentioned that they enjoyed seeing different perspectives in photography, or in Maryann's words, "how they saw photography". The project, I feel, left the question of photography open and ambiguous for them.

In the past decade, photography has rapidly taken on new meaning. More then two decades ago, Taussig observed that the mimetic quality of mechanical means of visual production allowed one to *other*, to deflect against the outside world (Taussig, 1994). While he contends that a new violence emerges from the mimetic capabilities of our technology, we note an optimism in Benjamin, who saw in photography the opportunities to close the gap between citizen and state by popularizing both art and technology. Benjamin (1936) was referring to photography as a new means of mechanical reproduction that took art out of the hands of the bourgeoisie and into the streets. Much as small, push button, film cameras once put photography into the hands of a large segment of the population, today we see another form of technology emerging: the ubiquity of digital cameras and digital modes of sharing pictures has lead to the emergence of a global community engaged in

visual culture. *Flickr* is an emerging and constantly evolving website where anyone with access to a digital camera, computer and internet connection is able to upload and share pictures with anyone across the world. Very often, accompanying text contextualizes an image, at times inviting discussion of both form and content of the photograph.

Digital photography has become a global form of exchange. Visual anthropological research has stressed how various visual cultures have accorded different statuses to the visual, leading to different engagements with photography in creating meaning. Orobitg (2004), reminds us for example, that for the Puma Indians, images are comprised of complex, negotiated meanings. Similarly, Harris (2004) has demonstrated the different meanings and practices accorded to photographs of the Dalai Lama among Tibetans in exile; Pink and De Silva have experimented with photography to show us how researchers can collaborate with informants to formulate identity within the photographic frame (Da Silva & Pink, 2004). What is interesting about the work of these researchers is that they emphasize that images are not two dimensional objects; they take on a multi-linear and multidimensional quality as people use them to negotiate and make meaning of their lives, be it as photographers, or as spectators. In effect, images are *material*, dialogical objects.

In the photography project, attention paid to the materiality of the visual image can serve to illuminate the web of social relations within which the digital image performs its work. The Picturing Calgary website provided participants with the means to share and comment on photographs. However, as mentioned in chapter two, while it worked well as a repository and organizational tool, and functioned as a form for participants to present their photographs meetings, I soon realized that people organize their photographs into

different conceptual categories. In turn, each category represented different ways of organizing social relationships. As we have seen in chapter three, on various occasions participants referred to images on either their own *Facebook* pages, or those of other participants during discussions. Very often, this was a way of referencing what they had done in the last two weeks between meetings. Here, *Facebook* pictures were not categorised as "Picturing Calgary" pictures, but as "normal" pictures of family, vacation, and travel. Thus on *Facebook*, images as material culture (Edwards & Hart, 2004) function as a form of sharing and exchange among friends and family: they strengthen connections between people and serve as a way to represent everyday experiences and events. While this sharing occurs in a "virtual" space, the way in which the images are used suggests that they are no less tangible.

Thus, central to the photography project, photographs take the form of social relations as people talk about and through images, creating social affinities among a group of novice, amateur and professional photographers. On both *Facebook* and *Picturing Calgary*, we see a multiplicity of gazes occur: intersecting gazes, reflected gazes, returned gazes, and my own academic gaze (Lutz & Collins, 1991). Admittedly, photography as practiced in *Facebook* or *Flickr* has a sometimes aestheticising quality, reflecting the world as wilderness, or even spectacle such that it inspires both anxiety and perverse fascination. Particularly in the case of *Flickr*, photographs may be experienced as fragments of experience, wherein through spectacle, one identifies with a technical apparatus to establish truth. By providing an experience, photographs on *Flickr* veer between fetishization, nostalgia, and a compelling sense of eroticisation of the past or an irretrievable other. This is however a

problematic rendering of the site: far from attributing to a sense of atomization or impoverishment of experience brought on by the modern, alienating condition, photography here takes on a sense of connectivity through images. In many ways, photography becomes a tool as people talk past images to make sense of their worlds. The frames are complex and evolving, and power relations are changing. It allows for greater negotiations of identities and a space for a multi-vocality to occur. In sites like *Flickr*, a new form of visual culture is emerging in a broadening world, posing new challenges for the central figure of photographer/ethnographer as a voice of authority.

When framed within the understanding that photography is both practised and experienced within a discursive space of critical reflection, we become acutely aware of both the materiality of the image, and their production through dialogue and context. As participants in Picturing Calgary become aware that their own representations reflect the representations of others, it provides them with a critical understanding of their own gaze. As we see from Gareth, Jacqui's and Oliver's photo essays, the self conscious "I" is central to their photographic and textual narratives. The task of a critical reflection, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is one that aims at self-comprehension. It consists of recovering from an unreflective experiencing of the world, and subsequently reassigning to it a reflexive attitude that displays one possibility of *being* in the process (Merleau-Ponty, 2002).

If, following chapter one, imagined communities or deterritorialised ethnoscapes are to be problematised, there is the need to stress the ways in which places become culturally constituted. An emphasis needs be placed on the processes in which people come to identify with place, and form the social affiliations that contribute back to the formulation of

place. As Maciej exposits through his photos, friends form a social network that for him constitutes place. In response to the conversation between us as described in chapter two, he writes in his photo essay that cities may differ from place to place, but because place making is for him formulated by the friendships, he could live anywhere for as long as he was in the presence of a strong social network.

Place-making, conducted through the practice of photography, does not always take the form of ontological explorations; sometimes it occurs as an ontological *affirmation*. It is useful here to recall Maciej's earlier comment that Picturing Calgary was "not really about photography". Maciej's photographic practice consisted not so much as snatches of respite, or playful explorations of place, or reflections of quotidian journeying such as those we see in Jacqui's, Oliver's or Gareth's essays. Rather, it occurs as the careful composition of a subject matter within the image's aesthetic frame. It is a more deliberate and considered practice of photography that he sought through the photography project. Hence, in his photo essay stressing that place was formulated by people, each photograph was more an expression of a preexisting sentiment than it was the expression of a playful instant. In comparison to the photographic practices of the others, the camera in Maciej's photographic practice served less as an exploratory tool than the materialisation of one's existing sensibility within an aesthetic frame. Place-making, seen through his photography, was formulated as a question to be answered rather than a question to be explored. Yet, Maciej's practice of photography was no less reflexive. In noting to the rest of the discussion group that his photo essay was *his* opinion into what constituted place, he was acknowledging that his ontological formulation of Calgary was *one* among others.

**11th St** (Gareth)

*"Probably not that intriguing to a North American, but this was me attempting to capture a little of what was so new to me only 18 months ago."*

In another example, Gareth and Jacqui's shared "North American Moment" from chapter three perhaps best exemplifies how imagined places can transpire into actual, constituted places through acts of narration and discursivity. As we recall, Gareth's "North American Moment", taking the form of a street sign in *11th*, immediately invoked in Jacqui a shared understanding of what it means to be in North America. Such signifiers on the streets trigger the senses, causing one to realise that "you are in North America," Gareth explains. It is for example, "in the newspaper dispensers you see on the streets". "When you think of North America", Jacqui further demonstrates, "you think about Superman, tall skyscrapers, and Hollywood". While the rest of us remained bewildered and unable to share in their shared, cultural constructions of North America, it provided Jacqui with the opportunity to reconfigure and re-map these prior imaginings of place into a personal and evocative photo essay. As described by Jacqui herself in the following chapter, the epiphany of such a moment becomes crucial to her constitution of Calgary as a place, and her ontological formulation of *being* in the city.

Finally, Jee-Sun's photo essay stands apart from the rest of the participants and offers further insight into the other photo essays. Because she was on a work contract with a predetermined time frame for her stay in Calgary, her exploration of the city through photography is best characterized by a visual consumption of sights, people and events. In doing so, her essay took on a more comparative nature: how "Calgary" was different from western Europe or Germany, and how it was the same. Jee-Sun's explorations of Calgary was quite clearly conducted from the perspective of the "Visitor". Putting Jee-Sun's photo essay beside the others, it becomes evident that the other photo essays were each

photographer's explorations of their ontological status in a new city: each essay addressed questions of *being* and *place*, demonstrating participants' critical reflections on ontological formulations of self in the process.

It was an encouraging sign that participants intuited the intentions behind the project's conception. In further explicating what he meant by Picturing Calgary not really being "about photography", Maciej mentioned that the project was more "about people". The photographs, he said, seem to serve more as illustrations of what other participants felt, thought and did. Hence, participants demonstrated an understanding of the project's goals and motives, and in following the project through to its conclusion, participants of Picturing Calgary must have found some value in the project, and its relevance to their daily lives. All indicated that they rather enjoyed the discursive spaces offered by the project, the ability to share their photographs, and finally the opportunity to reflect on and respond to each others' images and narratives. The images that emerged seems to reflect the dialogical process in turn, contributed back to further explorations of ontological selves in Calgary.

**Branding 2 (Jee-Sun)**

*"riding back to the ranch after the day"*

# VI - Conclusion

## "Wherever you go, you will be a polis"

Picturing Calgary was conceived out of an interest in creating engaging dialogue between people. As evident from the project's promotional mail-out, participants involved in this project consisted of those who come from different places, were interested in employing action onto the landscape, and wanted to share these experiences with others. Evidently, those who stayed on the duration of the project must have found value in contributing to a discursive space within which they were willing to share their thoughts and ideas while listening to those of others.

Most participants recall enjoying the discussions at the beginning of the evening best. They found discussion topics invigorating; most mentioned experiencing new ways of looking at the world, and considering perspectives or ideas they had not otherwise thought of before. Many reflected on their own practices of photography. On a couple of occasions, participants' partners mentioned to me that their partner would come home and recapitulate the discussion of the evening, which they themselves found to be interesting.

Yet, there were never any ambitious intentions for the discussion portion of the meetings. This aspect of the evening was structured primarily as a way to get people talking. Participant responses enabled the realization that the project had a fundamentally political dimension, and I suspect that the possibility of participating in an approximation of public life kept participants in Picturing Calgary showing up at my door every two weeks despite cold weather and busy schedules. Simply put, people wanted to engage in intelli-

gent conversation: they want to discuss ideas or things they have read or observed, in a public, shared space.

Arendt observes that there is a privately held loss in the modern condition beginning. It begins, she contends, “with the much more tangible loss of a privately owned share in the world”. This observation is made in reference to life in the Greek polis, where inclusion amongst citizenry consisted of the opportunity to participate in public life through speech and action. Just as I was frustrated during my walk in chapter two at the palpable lack of public, physical spaces, I was similarly startled by the realization that our modern lives are marked by an absence of casual, public discussion spaces. By this, I do not just refer to public space: the structure of society and our modern lives seem to be set up such that we lack the facilities to create common, discursive ground between ourselves. As Arendt writes, we observe a weirdness where “a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible”. (1958:53).

In our diverse cities, geographic proximity no longer functions as an indicator of social affinity, nor are such affinities solely characterized by collective identification. Research needs to look at new ways of framing the novel connections that are being made across the diverse populations of our cities, and study how social affinities are being configured. It is suggested here that there is the need to find commonalities among people when looking to create similar discursive spaces; in the photography project for example, a group of new residents with an interest in photography and urban issues utilized imagery and dis-

cussion as a way of creating commonly held ground and maintaining, as Jackson writes, an *inter*-est between individuals in the process. Finally, the project demonstrates the importance of encouraging critical reflection on the part of individuals, for such reflection is instrumental to the inter-subjective and dialogical nature of the Picturing Calgary initiative. Towards the end of the project, participants started to gain some ownership over the project: they began leading their own discussion topics and offering their own homes as meeting places, expressing both a willingness to *invest* and *share* in the project.

Place making is a fundamentally ontological act. Place is constituted temporally; just as present places are constituted by memories of past localities, the places we have resided within are also constituted by the present. Place making, like the production of identity, is therefore a dynamic and ever evolving process. Ontological formulations of place occur additionally through the employment of action and speech. This is evident through the shape of participants' walks, and their practices of photography and visual representations of place. The revelatory character of action, together with the ability to produce stories or images and reflect upon them, form the very sources from which meaning springs into being and illuminates human experience.

It is empowering to have others stand witness to our words and affirm our experiences. What was once private now becomes public, further contributing to the commonly held ground between us. Human plurality, Arendt writes, is marked by equality and distinction (1958). With the possession of a public life, we are able to actively engage in action and speech. Consequently, it is through action and speech that we are further able to distinguish ourselves: we become individuals, equal, but different. Finally, it is through the

production and representation of our stories in a public space that we make our experiences real. By demonstrating a willingness to share and be vulnerable, as Oliver writes in his photo essay, we breathe life into and give shape to a previously ambiguous and shadowy experiences. Consequently, to be deprived of this space is to deny them and thus ourselves an ontological reality.

We never fully possess or consume a place or experience: it still appears haunting and elusive; "What makes the "reality" of the thing is therefore precisely what snatches it from our grasp." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:271). We therefore approximate it, filling in the gap or haunting of the image through the mediations of the body or the presence of others. Publicly held, our images and narratives undergo transformations as they become subject to the dynamics of discursive space. In Picturing Calgary participants explore the city, and reflect on and respond to each others' photographs and words such that "representation and reality reflect each other like a pair of facing mirrors (Solnit, 2001:196)." My own walks have been enriched by the observations of other participants. I started noticing the "strange" sculptures of downtown Calgary, while taking my own interest in the city's murals. In the meantime, Oliver took a number of photographs of sculptures in response; many of them were framed by a blue sky, which Gareth confessed to being enthralled by. Maciej, who lives in a suburb in Calgary's south, recalled finding Alex's discussion on New Urbanism enlightening, while Gareth's own "North American Moment" formed the inspiration for Jacqui's photo essay.

The self-reflexivity evident in the project tested ambiguous relationships and dissolved the exigencies of the cultural, ideological and political. It exemplified the ways in which

**Blue** (Gareth)

*"I liked Oliver's blue skies and had to have a go myself..."*

people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds can find commonality through shared images, conversations, and common metaphors. For example, within the discursive space afforded by the project, participants rarely spoke in terms of reified categories, for collective identification quickly dissipated in the face of plurality and difference. The very fact that everyone came from different places threw open forced polemics of "us" and "them". The creation of such inter-subjective spaces represent a certain optimism in a climate where one usually sees only either collective difference imposed by reified cultural categories, or inversely, similarities in the form of a homogenizing global culture.

The photographs of Picturing Calgary certainly lend a quality of permanence to ephemeral moments; by suspending the fleeting moments of reflection and thought and opinion, the dynamic and fluid quality of identity production and place making is denied. However, the conception of the project as a dialogical act sidesteps the timeless quality invoked in photographic representations, as the ability to talk about and through images provides participants with the space for critical reflection. For example, the temporal quality of participants' photographic essays, accompanied by text, seem to suggest an awareness of the ephemeral nature of their ontological understandings.

This project is also characterized by learning; by giving form to their experiences, people transcend and rise beyond the conditions of their existence. The presentation of the ontological self as an individual learning subject, along with the suggestion that the individual can re-appropriate hegemonic narratives and space, is encouraging because it brings about an optimism of change. While I am hesitant to conclude that the experience was transformative after a period of only four months, there is an acute sense that the project

provided for a richer experience. There was for example, a definite appreciation for the opportunity it provided in creating affinities between participants. Gareth noted that he had met many people through the project that he would otherwise not have met, and it surprised him that he could get along with them given their diverse background and experiences.

This paper does not assume to speak for all who are new to Calgary. Rather, it studies a rather specific population of new residents who identify themselves as visual practitioners and urban professionals. As an experimental and qualitative study into how place making is achieved through visual and discursive means, the project attracts a particular segment of the population. In that sense, the conclusions can be expected to be somewhat self-serving.

Nevertheless, there are several ways in which the project can be expanded and take new directions. Results from such endeavors would be interesting to correlate with the present study, to provide further insight into ontological formulations of place and identity among residents new to cities. It would, for example, be interesting to widen the parameters of the project to see how other segments of the population might respond to a similar methodology, or examine the ways in which other sensory modalities might be included in the project: for instance, the role of music or food in place making.

In addition, if representations and reflections are conditions of each other, it would be intriguing to see how if a long term longitudinal study with the same participants would provide deeper insight into the process of place making and identity production. In previ-

ous chapters, we have examined how participants categorized images differently, and that such categorization often suggest different configurations of self, place and relationships. Another dimension the project could take would be to expand on the ways in which *Facebook* photographs complement the role images play in Picturing Calgary. In approaching digital photographs as material culture among new residents, we can gain further insight into how images represent different configurations of self and place.

Finally, it would be interesting to look into how ontological explorations differ with resident status. As demonstrated earlier, the photographic practices of the two Canadians in the group, Alex and Oliver, seem to suggest that they have a greater interest and stake in the development of the city. Hence, a comparative study between the photographic practices of say, Canadians and non-Canadians, or even between long-term residents and short-term residents, may illustrate significantly different productions of place.

For participants, the project is certain to represent a time during their stay in Calgary when they were able to arrest ontological moments and reflect on them. Their willingness to participate in the project, and the reflexive quality of their photographic representations are encouraging signs that people have the capacity to create meaningful contexts out of mobile, modern lives through the use of narratives, images and actions. Above all, Picturing Calgary demonstrates that participants' ability to create and participate in public life despite such shifting and complex conditions serves as an encouraging anecdote for the famous Geek dictum, observed by Arendt: "Wherever you go, you will be a polis".

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