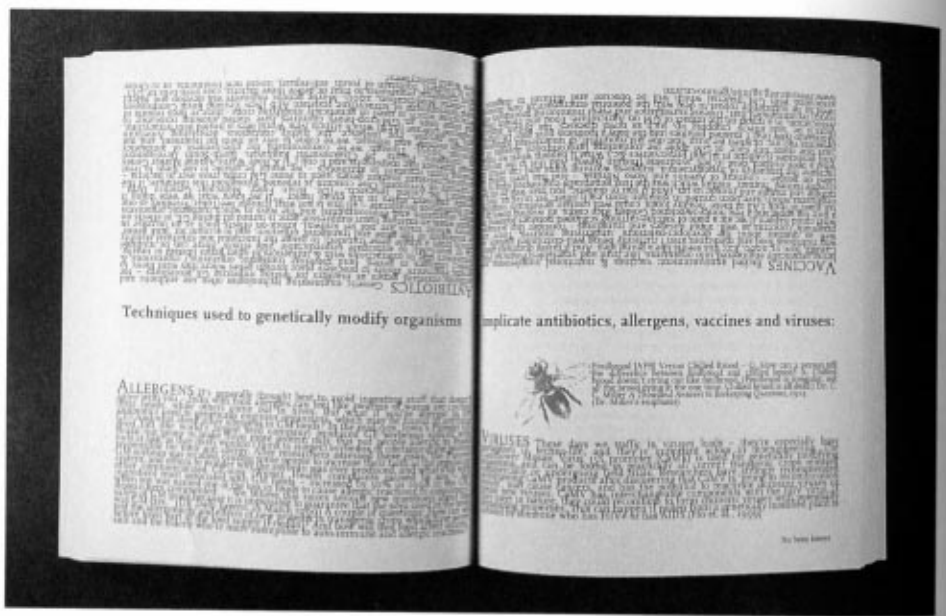

Margot Leigh Butler, Pages 92–93 from "Swarms in Bee Space,"
West Coast Line, vol. 35, no. 2 (Fall 2001)
Courtesy of the artist

Roy, Marina. "Adventures in Reading Landscape." *Vancouver Art & Economies*. Eds. Melanie, O'Brian. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press: Artspeak, 2007. 69 - 96.

Pulp Press, 2007. p.69-94.

> Production of difference ... is itself a fundamental activity of capitalism, necessary for its continuous expansion. One might go so far as to say that this desire for difference, authenticity, and our willingness to pay high prices for it (literally), only highlights the degree to which they are already lost to us, thus the power they have over us.
>
> —Miwon Kwon[1]

The spatial representation of capital, most notably in the form of the geographic and social configuration of the city and of an industrially ravaged natural landscape, has figured prominently in the production of contemporary artists and writers in and around Vancouver. Highlighting the manner in which ideology permeates social spaces constituted one of the most important forms of artistic critique,[2] in large part due to the long tradition of landscape associated with the area. For decades the image that dominated the popular Vancouver imagination was that of a majestic landscape, uncontaminated by industry and commerce, while in reality the city had become an important centre for trade.

In the late 1960s, a group of socially conscious artists and writers began to represent landscapes that collapsed the myth of nature and exposed the urban reality of an increasingly globalized economy. Concurrently, an analysis of the production of the "other" took on increased importance due to the need to critique new and historical forms of imperialism and inequality. Artists and writers began to reflect on how their sense of place was deeply affected by the historical and present-day relations between colonizer, colonized, and immigrant. While much of the colonial attitude can be seen as having diminished today, this does not mean that Western constructions of the world do not dominate: their economic ideals have been exported to all parts of the globe, unhindered since the fall of Communism and the new reign of neoliberalism. Embracing difference within today's context (a hybrid and/or marginalized identity and history) too often signifies new opportunities for market expansion rather than a desire to fight for justice and inclusiveness.

A large number of theoretical texts have been published on the subjects of place and identity[3] and in an increasingly consumerist, standardized, and interconnected world, these two terms have become inextricably

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linked. Some of the most interesting art being produced today engages with issues of both place and identity, which in turn uncovers the complicated issues related to "belonging" and a desire for recognition within the present world order. Be that as it may, poststructuralist, sociological, ethnographic, and geographic currents of thought have done much to change the face of art and writing, all the while (it could be argued) having minimal political repercussions in staving off the forces of capitalist greed. This shift in consciousness regarding the effectiveness of culture in bringing about positive social change begs the question: how has attention to difference and place been played out in the Vancouver art community, and to what end?

Historically, the idea of British Columbia as a geographic area cut off from the rest of the country has been deeply ingrained in the popular imagination, and has fed into the region's identity as a distinct place where one can retreat into the wilderness. The representation of spectacular landscape dissimulated many anxieties related to its history. Since Canada became a country about 140 years ago, numerous historical markers—conquest and colonization, the dispossession of First Nations by colonizers, a resource extraction-based economy, the settling of Chinese and other immigrant peoples, the cultivation of an exoticized wilderness, and a taste for the sublime and pastoral—can all be cited within a fairly compressed period of art production in British Columbia. Early landscape tradition preferred a "lyrical, romantic, expressionist, subjective and above all a social and bourgeois landscape"[4] associated primarily with Emily Carr's paintings.

By the mid-1970s, the impact of a postmodern culture and global economy was being felt in Vancouver, and the newly sprawling city, with its attendant suburbs and industrial wastelands, began to be represented pictorially through photographic means (only later to be classified under the rubric "photoconceptualism"). With the drastic changes in Vancouver's metropolis, artists identified a cultural and economic shift away from regional and national concerns toward more international ones. And so, as superstructure follows substructure, art shifted from a regional to an international aesthetic.[5] In a more itinerant world and with expanding interdisciplinarity, contact with internationally recognized artists visiting the city had a massive impact on local production.[6] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a (mostly) photographic practice, particular to Vancouver but pointing to the global economy, uncovered omissions and instabilities written into Vancouver's local history and geographic identity, opting to portray a more pluralistic social demographic, as well as the deleterious effects of capital as the economy shifted from resource industries to service and information markets. It is interesting to note, however, that while the term "counter-tradition" was used expressly to question this idea of a "Vancouver art," as a way of rejecting "the mythic self-image of Vancouver,"[7] the international recognition that these artists

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using the term eventually gained from what is now seen as aggressive pedagogical and self-promotional theorization (employing avant-garde strategies of oppositionality to tradition), ironically resulted in them being known as the "Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism."

By the end of the twentieth century, a new envisioning of the landscape materialized in the work of a younger generation of artists. But while new, this reimagining was not inconsistent with the concerns of local tradition and counter-tradition. I would go so far as to say that the new emphasis on west coast geography occurred because, being what is most distinctive about this place in a consumerist world (e.g., the film and tourist industries), this is chiefly what the global market understands and demands. It is no surprise that much legitimatized art is framed this way today. If an artist's work reflects a sense of belonging to a particular place/culture, however cynical or nondescript that image might be, then it is easier to package. In other words, while nomadism on the biennale and art fair circuit is the reality for successful artists today, this itinerant privilege is, more often than not, dependent on serving up local flavour.

A large number of texts which aimed to introduce the Vancouver scene to national or international audiences begin with a condensed description of the social, cultural, economic, and geographic aspects of the city. I have chosen quotations from two local artist/writers:

> So many photographs of Vancouver picture an ubiquitous nowhere; Vancouver texts often confirm its self-appointed status as a non-place.... Non-places must be a bit like every place. The lion's share of self-reflexive representation of Vancouver have valorized its status as Terminal City, keeping in play all the connotations of that phrase: end-of-the-line hinterland and transnational nexus.... Vancouver emerges as a utopian mixture of radicals and mandarins, disinclined to battle physical and financial colonization and transformation.
>
> —Trevor Mahovsky[8]

> A city on the edge, a "terminal city," Vancouver lies in a region that gave the world grunge, Generation X, the 1990s WTO protests, and cyberpunk (not to mention Pamela Anderson, Bryan Adams, and Microsoft), so it's no surprise that the generation of artists who emerged in the 90s in Vancouver (the slackers) have followed in the globalized footsteps of their seniors, the Vancouver school of photo-conceptualists.
>
> —Clint Burnham[9]

The articles in which these quotations appear were written within three years of one another (both for glossy magazines, one national,

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one international), and in both cases a textual snapshot of Vancouver is proposed with what seems like an insider's perspective. Emphasizing the culturally hip and soulless aspects of the city, Vancouver is hyper-fetishized into a brand image.[10] This strategy of introducing the Vancouver art scene using pop-cultural tropes and a last-frontier *topoi* conforms to the reigning discourse around global cities and global cultures that necessitates a distinct identity, a way to culturally validate one's image for international recognition amidst much market competition. (It is Vancouver's image as non-place that tends to attract film production, while majestic mountains, forests, and oceans seduce tourists and future residents.) Both articles also look at the institutionally sanctioned community of artists and the generational construction of an art lineage—the dominant art narrative over the past two decades. The artist-as-intellectual or humanist, and the "slacker" or pop culture-savvy artist, comprise two well-documented successive generations. These categories are prevalent locally as well as internationally, and have precipitated the emergence of like-minded practices. The market demands as much, and in the exclusionary art market of Vancouver, with its handful of collectors and dealers, the competition to be a success is all the more tangible. The Vancouver Art Gallery's *Baja to Vancouver* exhibition[11] embodied precisely this idea of how hip, successful art is framed around locality[12]—as display of difference-as-brand within a world where, due to forces of globalization, a sense of belonging to a distinctive place seems tenuous:

> When first exhibited at Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver, Terada's [Welcome to Vancouver] sign seemingly poked fun at the way Vancouver artists are often identified, for purposes of commerce and publicity, in terms of a regional brand. (A recent article on Jeffries in *Canadian Art* asserted: "When you collect one of her artists—say, a Ron Terada or a Damian Moppett—you are ostensibly 'collecting Vancouver.'")[13]

As an insular cultural enclave, visual art has a strange economy that portends to resist the globalized capitalist structure (where all aspects of life are commodified), and yet invests in a neatly constructed scene of career success and generational succession, largely a result of the international art market, but also helped along by legitimizing factors at home. As insinuated in the quotation above, commercial art dealers in Vancouver exert a considerable influence on who gets international exposure and how local artists' works are contextualized. For all the talk of freedom from the constraints of vulgar mainstream interests (due to art's codified system of legitimating and reductivist endgame and in-game strategies), and from the strictures of overbearing art theory, so much successful contemporary art manifests a formulaic tendency. In addition to the prescribed look of geographic difference in art, one discovers the token use

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of self-reflexive investigations of media, art historical precedence, and pop cultural quotation, a hodgepodge of stylized, revisited avant-gardisms within highly consumable works.[14] William Wood relates the phenomenon of "geographical grouping" to the

> ... neoliberal state of affairs where, following 'democratization' and deconstruction of some aspects of its social role and position, the absence of a strong agenda for contemporary art accompanies and serves its self-styled global market-reach and spectacular character in order to supply designer labels that mark packages to be consumed as signs and traded as equity, colluding in the encroachment of administered capital into every aspect of life.[15]

The above quote notwithstanding, there has been much writing which has enlightened the world about the state of Vancouver art and in particular served to (re)affirm the merits of a geographically specific art, while very little has provided a critique of this artistic trajectory and categorization.

According to Jeff Wall, "conceptual art's intellectualism was engendered by young, aspiring artists for whom critical writing was an important practice of self-definition."[16] After two decades of Cold War ideology and the entrenchment of Abstract Expressionism in art schools, the 1960s saw a younger generation of socially conscious artists asking important questions about symbolic cultural capital: in light of the worn-out art criteria, what would constitute the next logical avant-garde manoeuvre? Who could stand as a voice of authority on new artistic paradigms, and how? The availability of conceptual and minimalist artists' writings as a result of a burgeoning art publishing industry was instrumental in turning the tides of art history. Art writing and art criticism were a way for artists to process this paradigm shift in art, through linguistically deciphering the mysteries of difficult avant-garde works for the greater art public.

Starting in the late 1970s, a similar phenomenon occurred in Vancouver. Many artists took up writing in a serious way. In his essay "Radical, Bureaucratic, Melancholic, Schizophrenic: Texts as Community," artist and critic Trevor Mahovsky maps out a discursive, critical, curatorial, and pedagogical community of texts which were not only a "significant contribution to art production and critical thinking in the city," but also "transmit[ted] intellectual and cultural authority and enact[ed] a process of self-legitimation [sic]."[17] Mahovsky's essay traces the textual practices inherent to the legacy of the Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism with finesse and historical accuracy, therefore I will not repeat this well-documented history here. What is important to note, however, is the role that writing played in the construction of this artistic counter-tradition. The model of the artist-

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writer-intellectual was instrumental in dictating the terms by which a new consciousness inherent to new forms of production and representation was to be framed. Artists Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall, Ken Lum, and Roy Arden wrote with incredible authority and intellectual rigour about a select group of related practices, creating a tight-knit community of theoretical discourse, resulting in what we now recognize as a movement. Much of the Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism's success, beyond its local context, is dependent on this very important factor: these artist-intellectuals took the theorization of their work into their own hands.[18] According to artist and writer Robert Linsley, the emergence of the photo-conceptual pictorial mode was not just "an argument within art history," but an "acting out within art of a broader social struggle"—namely the need to represent to the public the image of the real social and material landscape of British Columbia.[19] There is, of course, a much larger discourse around landscape in Vancouver than just this male-dominant photo-pictorial impulse, but perhaps because these other discourses were not part of an aggressive intertextual community, they have not been represented to such a degree internationally.[20]

If this type of theorization and textual practice has been largely abandoned by a younger generation of artists, it is perhaps because they feel there is no longer any need. While many artists continue to write—writing being an integral part of one's art education[21]—rigorous theorization seems to have largely fallen out of favour internationally. And besides, Vancouver is now highly visible on the art world map, and its writers, curators, critics, and art historians frequently contribute to international publications as "experts" in the field of local art trends and counter-traditions. The danger, however, is that younger artists who are dependent on the critical writing of others can become disillusioned when their time in the spotlight fades (or never arrives), not realizing the potential value in developing a writing practice parallel to an artistic one. Furthermore, writing can be an act of generosity, not confined to one's own success.[22]

Since the mid-1990s, artists have arrived at a new condition under the sign of a "regionalized" international identity. One discovers a marked difference in tone—a more pop-cultural, pastoral, and/or abject aesthetic. If there were a "broader social struggle" apparent in the previous generation's work, a continuation of a humanist modernist project of sorts, in recent times one might discover what artist Jeremy Todd describes as "a kind of informed archaeology of culture."[23] What characterizes the use of landscape today is an impulse to obliterate most references to the city, instead directing one's gaze to the more idyllic or "simulacral" image of nature as backdrop.[24] On the heels of an education heavy in poststructuralist theory, this about-face in agenda could be understood as careerist (i.e. internalizing the correct posturing and formulas to make successful work) or as a defeatist response to the near total domination of everyday life by the "culture industry" (what effect did post-structuralist theory or

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politicized art have on changing the world in the 80s and early 90s, anyway?). A major distinguishing feature of this newer generation's work is a turn inward, a nostalgia for the historical moment of one's youth.[25] Much art today flirts with the cool of counter- or subcultures. Investing in youth has become a way of recalling a less complicated moment in time (when the tightening grip of the consumer market had not yet strangled one's options; or is it that it hearkens to the moment when this marketing of youth was becoming more obvious?).[26] This non-participatory point of view has its counterpart in the mass media, which encourages consumers to avoid responsibility, finding that edge of *jouissance* that makes life's alienating effects more bearable. While youth culture played a big part in the utopian imagination and politics of the 1960s, the image of rebellious youth today does little more than sell products.

6: New Vancouver Modern at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery was a groundbreaking exhibition which confirmed the emergence of the so-called "next generation" of Vancouver artists.[27] The cover of the accompanying exhibition catalogue displays a blurred photograph of RCMP officers and German shepherds surrounded by chain-link fencing and cement barriers taken at the anti-APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) demonstration at the University of British Columbia in November 1997, which became notorious for its police abuses.[28] Unwittingly or not, the image served to highlight a new breed of anti-globalization countercultural protest with which these artists are being associated—problematic, considering the reigning cool attitude of the show, lacking in any flagrant socio-political oppositionality, not to mention the overall tempered criticality of the texts in the catalogue. More importantly, however, is the fact that two of the catalogue writers maintained that the works exhibited were bereft of "any direct associations with a 'local' tradition," having more in common with "contemporary artists working in places such as London, Los Angeles, and New York."[29] While this might have been the case in 1998, by 2000, issues around landscape and nature re-emerged in full force with the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition *These Days*.[30]

A stellar example of landscape's re-emergence is Kevin Schmidt's video *Long Beach Led Zep*, first shown at the Contemporary Art Gallery in 2002 and later in the *Hammertown* exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh that year. Schmidt's work treats landscape as a backdrop to leisure activities, and more particularly, to the selling of image.[31] Shot on the west coast of Vancouver Island, the lone figure of the artist as unsung romantic hero was complicated by an overlaying of the contemporary image of the failed rock-star. The quasi-earnest guitar wailings of Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" against the sublime backdrop of Long Beach, BC, at sunset is a particularly humourous take on the idea of the artist as pastoral figure.[32] In an essay in the journal *Public*, poet and essayist Peter Culley discovers many grains of aesthetic resistance and allegiance in the work:

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> Kevin Schmidt's *Long Beach Led Zep* attempts to restore to the parched discourse of landscape a liberating trace of the sublime in its most vulgar sense; that sense, however degraded or symptomatic, that the landscape's beauties are democratically available, that Friedrich and the four-wheel drive are trying to access, for better or worse, the same place. Neither the aristocratically pristine imaginary of the environmentalists nor the virtual service wilderness of the tourist industry, Schmidt's Long Beach is public space, freely inherited and held in common.... In its combination of theoretical rigour and qualified humanism LBLZ enters the increasingly elegiac and recuperative discourse that has in recent years emerged from the critical asperities of the Vancouver School.... Like his colleagues [Kelly Wood and Scott McFarland], Schmidt seems less concerned with the rewards of institutional critique than with the reclamation of transcendent possibility—however fleeting and contingent—from a corrupt culture.[33]

Culley fashions an incredibly seductive text, as much in his use of a colourful and complex language as in his knowledge of pop culture and the sublime, and demonstrates a profound understanding of the value of landscape counter-tradition as it has evolved from the local "canon." All the same, most viewers need no convincing as to the work's merit, for its thirst for nostalgia combined with the tongue-in-cheek use of the "Super, natural British Columbia" sublime is near impossible to assuage.[34]

Distinctive of the exhibition catalogues for *6: New Vancouver Modern*, *Hammertown*, and *Baja to Vancouver* is that so many of the essays were written by Vancouver novelists, poets, and essayists.[35] This phenomenon originated in a fertile relationship between artists and writers that has existed since the mid-80s. Several elements contributed to this, including *Vanguard* magazine as a venue for art criticism, literary and art events taking place at Kootenay School of Writing (KSW); and at artist-run centres such as Artspeak, the Or Gallery, and the Western Front. As in art practices, many local writers developed a politically charged poetics that laid bare the forces of capital at work within representations of the west coast landscape.

In large part due to the formation of KSW[36] and Artspeak, numerous artist-writer relationships were forged in the latter half of the 1980s. Many artists and writers participated jointly in lectures and writing workshops at KSW, as well as in their publications.[37] In *W*, one notices a large number of writings by artists, including Margot Leigh Butler, Peter Conlin, Kirsten Forkert, Donato Mancini, and Judy Radul, to name a few. Artspeak, an artist-run centre known for its commitment to works that investigate

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visual art and writing, began as an offshoot of KSW.[38] Artspeak's strong publication record also gave first-time writers and artist-writers a chance to have their work published, and was instrumental in encouraging a *belle-lettrist* type of writing about art (as well as other forms) through the co-presentation of readings, talks, and book launches, as well as their invitation to writers to participate in its publishing program and on its board of directors.

Kevin Schmidt, *Long Beach Led Zep*, 2002
single channel video from DVD, 8 min. 42 sec.
Collection of National Gallery of Canada
Collection of Reid Shier
Latner Collection, Toronto
Collection of Mellisa and Robert Soros, New York
Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

In 1988, Artspeak's Director Cate Rimmer asked artists and writers to collaborate on an exhibition entitled *Behind the Sign*. The show resulted in textual, object, and pictorial-based works investigating a variety of socio-political issues by five artist-writer pairings: Roy Arden and Jeff Derksen, Stan Douglas and Deanna Ferguson, Donna Leisen and Calvin Wharton, Sara Leydon and Peter Culley, and Doug Munday and Kathryn MacLeod. Acknowledging the spirit of cross-disciplinarity between artists and writers, the exhibition proved prescient and influential to future artist-writer collaborations. Subverting artistic individualism and disciplinary specificity, and sharing common interests in poststructuralism, local politics, and in the development of new modes of writing and art production (to countermand highly mediated, acculturated, or opportunistic

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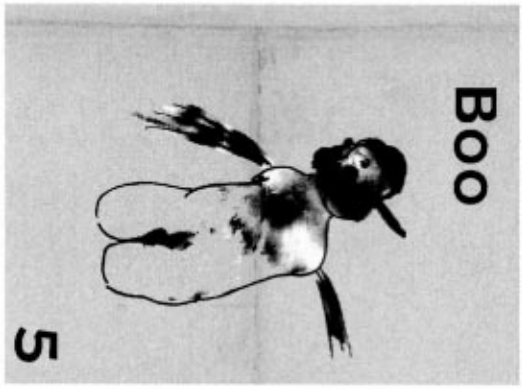
forms), these artists and writers had come to form an active, close-knit community of ideas.[39]

In the early to mid-1990s, a fertile, more non-professionalized period for art-related writing[40] emerged in Vancouver. Several artists and writers oversaw the publication of *Boo* magazine (1994–1997), including Dan Farrell, Deanna Ferguson, Phillip McCrum, Melinda Mollineaux, and Reid Shier.[41] In the eleven issues that *Boo* published, artists and writers



Myfanwy MacLeod, cover of *Boo* magazine #5, 1995

actively wrote about one another, and art reviews and criticism could be found alongside book and film reviews, poetry, letters, and image-text projects. Much of the writing mirrored a growing global perspective on the art world, as well as a heightened awareness of diasporic, hybrid, or pluralistic identities. Quite extraordinary were the lengthy interviews between important writers, curators, and artists, outlining in an informal but highly intellectual manner the development of their respective practices, as well as the history of art/writing communities in Vancouver. A number of articles also addressed the growing number of local exhibitions dealing with the issue of nature and landscape. *Boo* became a site not only for dialogical interaction between art and writing, but also for agonistic debate. Many letters to the editor and full-length articles were full-fledged rebuttals and polemical responses by readers to previous articles and reviews, divulging the publication's textual space as a healthy forum for much needed debate about creative production in Vancouver.

After *Boo* terminated publication in 1997, this community of artists and writers was portrayed one last time in an exhibition of Phillip McCrum's artwork *Tear*.[42] McCrum had made portrait paintings of his friends/peers (many of whom had been active in *Boo*) in the guise of prominent figures from the French Revolution, a kind of homage to a "revolutionary" creative group spirit that existed in Vancouver at that time. The exhibition catalogue brought together writings by many of the artists, curators, and writers portrayed, serving as a kind of complement to the portraits in the exhibition.

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Looking back at the 1990s, one cannot help but notice the increase in the volume of writing in an ever-growing number of exhibition catalogues (both glossy and low-budget), and, after the demise of *Vanguard* magazine, occasional art writing appearing in *Boo*, *Last Call* (2001–2002), *Collapse* (1995–2002), *Front* (1989–), *Yishu* (2002–), and more recently, *fillip* (2005–).[43] The literary journals *West Coast Line* (1966–) and *The Capilano Review* (1972–) also publish artists' (writing) projects. Keeping an art rag such as *Boo* or *Last Call* up and running in Vancouver is no small feat, and the appearance of new publications over the years has been sporadic and often short-lived, due to the difficulty in securing stable funding. As a result, there are some who believe that there is a dearth of serious art criticism and debate in this city, given the lack of stable venues for critical writing. We live in different times, but this does not mean that great efforts haven't been made to publish intellectually stimulating material; the problem is that recognition of these efforts is depressingly minimal in a time when much of the art public has its sights set elsewhere (on the pulse of international success), adding to the frustration of those trying to create a stimulating community for ideas.

The status of the artist and the nature of artistic discourse in Vancouver have changed significantly since the late 1990s. Gone is the avowal-based, heteroclite writing in publications such as *Boo*. In its place, more "professional" writing about art has become prevalent (for instance, compare *Boo*'s largely local perspective and looser format and style to *Last Call*'s and *fillip*'s greater international scope and more standardized format). What such publications as *Boo*, *Last Call*, and *fillip* do share, however, is institutional independence.[44] While this makes for a less sustainable situation, it can impart more freedom to contributors and editors; with fewer fiscal interests at stake, they can focus on what lacks in terms of most local writing about art—a diversity of perspectives and critical analysis combined with high standards of writing on contemporary issues in art. Be that as it may, art writing in Vancouver today is largely relegated to exhibition catalogues.

Catalogue writing for an art institution, whether public gallery/museum or artist-run centre (ARC), is a curatorially regulated form of writing, and in the end its own interests, as well as those of the artists represented, are being served. For years, the Canada Council for the Arts supported galleries, museums, and ARCs on a project-by-project basis. Since 1998, these institutions secured greater financial assistance through their operational funding for catalogue publications—but in the case of ARCs, this support was only readily available if they had previous experience in producing impressive publications. For instance, under Lorna Brown's directorship, Artspeak developed a distinctive publishing program because of its publishing history and relationship to writing, promoting more creative types of writing about art, as well as alternative catalogue formats. More recently, ARCs have been more successful in securing funding for publications; for

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Phillip McCrum, from *A Diagrammatic Interpretation of the French Revolution based on George Lefebvre's The French Revolution: From its Origins to 1793*, 1998
oil paint, modelling paste or plaster on recovered wallpaper
Courtesy of the artist

Roy, Marina. "Adventures in Reading Landscape." *Vancouver Art & Economies*. Eds. Melanie, O'Brian. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press: Artspeak, 2007. 69 - 96.

2) Diderot, Denis

Editor of the Encyclopedia. (Stan Douglas)

8) Roux, Jacques

Demanded the death penalty for hoarders. (Jan Coyle)

9) Marat, Jean Paul

Beloved of the red hats, head of the Circular of Vigilance Committee. (Gerald Creede)

14) Rousseau, Jean Jacques

Romantic. (Peter Culley)

30) Bürger, Gottfried August

Song of reproach, "He who cannot die for Liberty deserves nothing better than chains." (Rick Ross)

32) Brezé, Henri Évrard, marquis de

Master of ceremonies at the Estates-General, whose order was ignored by the Third Estate. (Hank Bull)

46) Grimm, Friedrich Melchior

Duellist and friend of Rousseau. (Rory)

47) Orléans, Louis Philippe Joseph

The revolution could make him king. (Michelle Normoyle)

48) Hume, David

Rousseau's close friend. Considered him mad. (William Wood)

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instance, the Or Gallery has produced a few anthology-type publications related to its curatorial programming, and the Helen Pitt Gallery is planning a similar venture to supplement its ongoing low-budget publications.

However, if writing about art in Vancouver is increasingly confined to a professional context, a reigning laudatory language could be seen to minimize the instances of critical debate and plurality of perspectives on diverse practices occurring within and *outside* the institutional framework. When language defines artistic production in mostly positive, professionalized terms, critical judgment tends to be withheld, thus diminishing the public's encounter with polemical and epistemological issues related to art. As the publication of catalogues certainly filled a void in terms of local publishing on art, creative writing also emerged to fill in for the lack of art criticism. In large part influenced by the publishing of alternative forms of writing as investigated by Artspeak, public galleries also began promoting this type of art writing by literary writers.

The criticality and historically conscious nature of the writing of Vancouver poets is, in many ways, appropriately suited to the practices of Vancouver artists. The conceptual, complex work of these poets complements the difficult issues and artistic strategies being explored by many Vancouver artists. And it is important to note that this type of writing provides a literary component to the specialized language commonly used by art historians and critics. The poets' literary aptitudes lend symbolic cultural capital, and the art they write about lends them legitimacy as art writers in turn. Much catalogue writing is, of course, produced out of economic necessity (a writer must make a living, after all), hence restricting most art writing to that of laudatory supplement. It is unfortunate that there are not more venues where critical, literary writing about art can be handsomely rewarded. Anyone well-versed in this corpus of Vancouver art-writing must also acknowledge how these writers share an understanding of representations of the social, economic, and aesthetic landscape with local artists.

Both Lisa Robertson and Peter Culley contribute writings to art catalogues and journals (and the occasional review) that reflect their strong interests in a deconstructive language writing about nature and landscape. A return to direct experience, combined with a strong historical understanding of literary genres and a critical historical consciousness of "one's embeddedness in a place," contextualizes their use of lyric and landscape.[45]

Under the name The Office for Soft Architecture, Lisa Robertson has written literary essays for exhibition catalogues in addition to her being an important, prolific local poet. Her piece about fountains in Vancouver, delivered during a panel on the subject of the city and conceptualized during her time working within the context of KSW, provides an example

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of critical ideas related to landscape with which both her poetry and essays engage:

> Downtown in the economic district, each fountain's site is clandestinely scooped from the monetary grid, hidden among corporations, rather than symbolically radiating a public logic of civic identity and access as in Paris or Rome. Here the water features seem gently irrelevant, or relevant only as cheerful prosthetics to the atmosphere of the logo.[46]

Robertson's contributions to exhibition catalogues act as more of a supplement to the artwork—a reaction to the work with her own literary interests in mind—than as a critical interpretation of the artwork at hand (while Culley's writing is a more critical meditation on the meaning behind an artwork, as seen in his text on Kevin Schmidt). Laden with historical research, a sensual and often strange language acts as a space of resistance. Within the context of Liz Magor's exhibition catalogue, Robertson's essay meditates on primitive forms of shelter found in nature as a way to address the artist's oeuvre:

> Marc-Antoine Laugier, the French architectural theorist writing in 1753, posed the shack or hut as the first principle of architecture, the idea from which all theory extends.... Laugier tells a simple story: the retreat from lucid pleasure to protective opacity, then to willed structure. Is architecture a monument to the failure of pastoral utopia, whose greeny bliss only passes, like a tempest? The shack as first principle seems to offer a protection against weather and time.[47]

In his book of poetry *Transnational Muscle Cars*, Jeff Derksen reconstructs the image of the global urban and natural landscape using a language in tension, at once poetic, historical, materialist, philosophical, and shot through with global statistics:

> The sun glints off the chrome bodies
> of the gondolas of late capitalism
> as they labour up the mountain.
> The mountain is named
> after a commodity. Art has made this
> a nonalienated view. Is that what
> we asked it to do? If "each day" seems
> like a natural fact? And if "what we think
> changes how we act" should art not
> reveal ideology
> rather than naturalize it?[48]

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In "Fixed City and Mobile World: Urban Facts and Global Forces in Ken Lum's Art," a catalogue essay for *Ken Lum Works with Photography*, Derksen's writing frames Lum's body of work in the context of urban sprawl and the social tensions, fragmentation, and alienation that result from effects of global capitalist flows. According to Derksen, the built environment of Vancouver and its spatial and social global/local tensions are at the centre of Lum's work:

> His drive is towards a cataloguing of forces, effects, and practices which, arrested, are arranged into a form that gives them materiality and density. His works with photography are about fixity and mobility: the mobility of money, the limited mobility of people and ideas, and the fixity of capital, as well as the photograph as a fixity of these processes.[49]

As is made obvious, it is as an urban geographer and theorizer of globalization that Derksen understands Lum's work rather than through the more habitual discussion of modernist, avant-garde idioms that preoccupy curators, art historians, and critics.

Derksen wrote the essay "Urban Regeneration: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy" in collaboration with Neil Smith for the book *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings* in 2003. While no mention is made of Douglas's panoramic photograph of the dilapidating Edwardian buildings on this infamous Vancouver block, the writing provides a critical context from which to view Douglas's work: the history of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and of urban gentrification, "which evolved as a competitive urban strategy within the global economy." Under the banner of a single artwork, multiple types of research related to this area of the city, as well as the strategies employed by Douglas, are assembled in one publication. The DTES's working-class history and strong grassroots community, its decline due to the effects of de-industrialization and unemployment, the closure of the Woodward's building and the struggle for its renaissance in the form of low-income housing, the high incidence of drug abuse, HIV infection, and the tragedy of the missing sex-trade workers, emerge from the aesthetic strategies of this one photograph.

In 2003, *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings* shared the City of Vancouver Book Award with Lincoln Clarkes' book of photographic portraits of DTES women, *Heroines*. The two practices could not be more distant in terms of artistic strategy, but it is no coincidence that two books focusing on the Downtown Eastside shared in winning this prize.[50] There have developed many competing, vested interests in the area and pressure from grassroots political organizations and activists has made the future of the DTES and its residents an ongoing political issue for the city. Numerous artists have created work related to the area's architecture and

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urban planning, as well as the people living and working there—many out of opportunism, many out of historical/avant-garde interests, and many out of genuine concern.

Dissatisfied by the overriding spirit of careerism and product-oriented practices in the art community, not to mention the growing professionization of artist-run centres, many artists have turned to relational, interventionist, situated, and participatory art practices, and to alternative institutions with which to work. KSW has been one such place; others have created their own collectives and gallery spaces. For these artists, writing, teaching, and activism have often been equally important, as they attempt to develop an ethos of "situated" art production and performance:

> let's expand or even explode
> against the city as information
>
> let's perform an action in an obscure part of town. Let's go somewhere where people will barely leave their houses, barely look through the windows, only occasionally get into their cars and drive away.
> [...]
>
> We may make no impact, leave no trace. We may never even be part of a conversation, barely make a difference in someone's thoughts. This is the reverse of the idea that the more central the location the better. let's resist the dynamic of centralization that creates oases of "urban living" for the privileged and makes the rest of the city a nowhere zone, and let's resist the fear of being left out. let's work in the nowhere zones. let's be at the wrong place at the wrong time.[51]

This excerpt is from a manifesto called "against information" by Kirsten Forkert and was performed in 2002 at KSW and subsequently published in *W6*. Along with being engaged in public interventions and collaborative art practices, and co-founding the collective Counterpublics, Forkert investigates writing as a central component of her art practice. Frustrated by the necessity to "make it" within Vancouver's art economy, Counterpublics is dedicated to the possibility of political consciousness and/or social change through art; one of its founding principles was the construction of a "commons" where ideas "outside the rhetoric of official culture" and "market populism"[52] could be sounded and hashed out. One event organized by Counterpublics, which engaged the landscape, was a guided walking tour of the city by writer Stephen Collis, starting in a park off

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Commercial Drive in East Vancouver, and ending at the Vancouver Public Library downtown. Entitled "Of Blackberries and Libraries, or, Tracings in the Contemporary Urban Commons," the event took participants past abandoned and undeveloped sites (many surrounded by the overgrowth of barbed blackberry bushes), resulting in a discussion around the term "commons" (from common use of land to intellectual property rights and media ownership).[53]

In the context of Artspeak's series *Expect Delays* (2002), curated by Kathleen Ritter, and similar to Counterpublics' walk-and-talk event, "Spending Time Together" was developed by Forkert as an open meeting ground where people could participate in a *dérive*-like psycho-geographical investigation of the city. In keeping with the manifesto "against information," the event focused on neglected urban spaces in Vancouver; this group collectively set out, on foot and by public transportation, to explore fringe spaces within the city, spaces off the beaten track that had never been explored by any of the participants. Uncommodifiable as art, and perhaps barely existing as art to begin with, the conversations that arose and the experiences recalled by participants became the point of the work itself. This approach to making art seems to relate to the phenomenon that writer and curator Claire Doherty calls a new situationism:

> ... as cultural experience has become recognized as a primary component of urban regeneration, so the roles of artists have become redefined as mediators, creative thinkers and agitators, leading to increased opportunities for longer-term engagement between an artist and a given group of people, design process or situation.[54]

Although an interesting alternative to product-based practices in Vancouver, I'm not sure of the more far-reaching repercussions of this type of work. In the end, it affects a limited, local, and marginalized group of people. Participants experience a private event in a given space, and for the individuals who might inhabit or frequent this space, these participants stand out as being out of place, even a bit of a spectacle. So what does this achieve? What could be perceived as a possible "lack" within this type of art practice seems of no importance to the artist, who states in her manifesto: "We may make no impact, leave no trace. We may never even be part of a conversation, barely make a difference in someone's thoughts."

Margot Butler is an artist and educator whose principles of positionality, responsibility, and implicatedness have guided her writing and artwork, providing it with the critical feminist viewpoint with which to parse the interested fields of knowledge and cultural production. From biotechnology to the socio-economic sources of violence against women, her writing dissects a contemporary landscape that implicates us all: one, dealing with the changing face of nature, and another, the social land-

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scape of class and gender oppression where women are treated as commodities. For example, her article "The Hero of Heroines" critiques Lincoln Clarkes' photographic project which fetishizes the bodies of women sex-trade workers from the DTES. Her essay "Swarms in Bee Space" is a lucidly written critique of biotechnology, a field that is changing the face of the biological world while being controlled by the hegemonic forces of neo-liberal ideology. Using bees as "figurations who show us how implicated we [have become] in biotechnology," Butler guides us across an historical trajectory, pointing out how these creatures have come to be cultivated by humans across history, and all the implications therein:

> Bees are beings, figurations, metaphors, narrative devices, images, sounds, allegories for model societies, indicators, shapeshifters; and they're important to genetic modification (GM), for not only are they pollinating GM crops and beeing changed in the process, they're crosspollinating GM and non-GM crops, showing up humans' hubris, &c., about 'control and containment' in the shared world, and bees are now themselves beeing genetically modified.[55]

Butler goes on to explore the effects of "bio-property," that is, life forms that have become private property, and the invention of such genetically modified organisms as the Oncomouse and Enviropig. The oppression of both humans and animals is furtively being carried out ostensibly in the name of knowledge and human progress, in which certain beings are seen as expendable or perfectible, victims of so many scientific social "experiments." At the level of society and the natural environment, the world is undergoing a series of "disappearing acts" that are replacing a diversity of life with new simulated life forms and lifestyles.

In 2005, Charo Neville curated the exhibition *Picturing the Downtown Eastside*[56] that brought together community-based art production from and about the Downtown Eastside. The exhibition attempted to bridge the divide between artists of drastically distant habituses (social/class backgrounds). As a participant in this exhibition, Margot Butler's video piece *Other Honey* was installed in the front window overlooking Hastings Street. The video is based on a drive out to the Willie Pickton's farms in Port Coquitlam where Butler was to do research on the missing women of the DTES. There, she came upon a stand selling varieties of honey from different flowers; one of the jars labeled "other honey" was "made by bees who pollinated flowers growing on the Pickton farms."[57] The video combines the image of a woman's arm waving in the air with a subtitled narrative: it recounts how the beekeeper at the honey stand waves in the direction of the Pickton farms, where the bees collected pollen for the "other honey." Using this narrative, the video provides an image of the suburban/rural landscape of Port Coquitlam with its farms and fields of

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flowers and bees. It also alludes to the harrowing subtext of the sex-trade workers allegedly killed on Pickton's farms.

In the first issue of *fillip*, critic Clint Burnham, also a participant in the *Picturing the Downtown Eastside* exhibition, responded to the panel discussion that accompanied the exhibition with a piece entitled "No Art After Pickton." The article focuses on the complicated interrelationship between art and the DTES, from the elite artists living outside the DTES, but making work about it, to artist-run centres situated in the area, to the community artists living in the neighbourhood. Burnham questions the attitude that assumes artistic programs for the homeless, addicted, and poor are therapeutic, or somehow help them get ahead in life. Provocative and well-informed, Burnham cannot avoid being cynical about the parallels he sees between the management of human capital by corporate interests and the social "therapeutic" work with DTES residents, both bureaucratically banal and tragic: "It is banal in the sense that you should try to have decent meetings when getting things done ... it is tragic in the sense that it raises the question if it is possible to engage in ways that have not been co-opted (or done better) by the imperialist-capitalist hegemony."[58] In other words, there is a huge gap between the "ontological" crisis of art preoccupying trained artists and the "beneficial experience for street addicts."

This type of polemical debate around what art is, what it could be, how it functions, and how it could be taught and practiced when situated in different fields, is what the Vancouver art community needs. Criticism does not necessarily come up with solutions, and Burnham's certainly does not—although not for want of trying—and the same could be said for the need for alternative venues, practices, and/or collectives. In addition, with the influence of such exhibitions as *Picturing the Downtown Eastside*, and publications like *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings* and the "Woodsquat" issue of *West Coast Line*, intersecting communities might be able to expand their influence in preventing gentrification from overtaking the DTES area. The fate of the area is still uncertain, especially in light of the construction boom leading up to the Vancouver/Whistler 2010 Olympics.

Language defines how art is received. It can be instrumental in constructing a seemingly cohesive art scene or movement through its intentional inclusions and exclusions. It can also open art up to new avenues of meaning, perpetuating new ways of thinking, new theories and practices. Critical and imaginative writing is needed for the public to resist and influence an art and culture that continues to be overrun by market interests. A large part of this essay has focused on the textual mechanisms employed to put Vancouver firmly on the art world map—the construction of a lineage, a geographic identity, and generational difference. Vancouver has

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produced many great artists, but much of the dominant contemporary art narrative circulating locally and internationally is a construction based on stylistic avant-gardisms, largely devoid of socio-political intentions. Writing and art practices have shifted with the influence of the monopolizing character of global markets, based on privatization of interests and on the market's need for brand identities. Even politicized literary writing practices are in danger of being co-opted for intellectual cachet by institutions. In writing this, it is my hope that more artists will take up critical writing as an activity complementary to art: criticality and generosity of aesthetic judgment means that artists can be active and influential in the formation of new critical work and communities, supporting those artists/curators/writers whose work merits critical attention on grounds other than careerism and fashion.

As Miwon Kwon's quote states at the beginning of this essay, the "desire for difference, authenticity, and our willingness to pay high prices for it (literally), only highlights the degree to which they are already lost to us, thus the power they have over us." Without denying Vancouver its distinct history and demographic, it is important to note that, within the context of globalization, the city shares highly pressing socio-economic and environmental problems with other cities around the world. Alternative local art practices, which address issues related to urban blight and social anomie and inequality using strategies that implicate the viewer or participant, may stand out as "minor," marginalized practices, and they may even be seen to reflect the logic of a service sector economy, nomadic and privileging private or special interest group experiences, affecting only those it targets. However, given the general climate of fashionable artistic production in Vancouver of late, these practices represent the potential to activate a strong intellectual and socio-political agenda within the art community, proposing alternative paths to those that Vancouver's official art narratives have traced, and from which we can choose to diverge.

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1. Miwon Kwon, "The Wrong Place," *Contemporary Art from Studio to Situation*, ed. Claire Doherty (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004): 32.

2. This tendency was inspired by new texts emerging in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s: Michel Foucault's analyses of how power structures space, as well as texts about lived experience of urban space by Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre writes: "What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?... Ideology per se might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space." *The Production of Space* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991 [1974]): 44. For Michel de Certeau, "Denial of the specificity of the place [of production] being the very principle of ideology, all theory is excluded. Even more, by moving discourse into a non-place, ideology forbids history from speaking of society and of death—in other words, from being history." *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988 [1975]): 69.

3. Place is a complicated concept to define, especially in its distinction from space. Space has historically been treated as an abstract and limitless entity, while place has a sense of being situated, delimited, and having a historical identity that endures and changes through time. The current interest in place in the field of visual art has recently been theorized in *Place* by Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

4. Robert Linsley, "Landscape and Literature, in the Art of British Columbia," *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1994): 193.

5. "Remarkably, it is through these "international" practices [e.g., N.E. Thing Co.] that Vancouver first comes to be represented in art, not through the nature abstractions of the regionalists. Urban reality is represented as a crisis whose local conditions and circumstances represent, in turn, more general crises recognizable almost anywhere. Issues around identity and community surface in a more diverse way in an "international" context, whereas regionalism has no new proposal for negotiating identity." Scott Watson, "6: New Vancouver Modern," *6: New Vancouver Modern* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1998): 21.

6. For the photoconceptualists, this means the visits to Vancouver of Robert Smithson in 1969 and 1970 and Dan Graham in 1978.

7. Jeff Wall, "Traditions and Counter-traditions in Vancouver Art: A Deeper Background for Ken Lum's Work," *Witte de With: The Lectures 1990* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1991): 80.

8. Trevor Mahovsky, "Radical, Bureaucratic, Melancholic, Schizophrenic: Texts as Community," *Canadian Art* (Summer 2001): 50.

9. Clint Burnham, "Aperto: Vancouver," *Flash Art*, November/December 2004: 57.

10. In Burnham's text, perhaps because he is writing for *Flash Art*, Vancouver is closely associated with cultural elements specific to Seattle. The north-south connection between Vancouver and the Western States down to California has been coined Cascadia: "Cascadia—a region meant to unite BC, Washington, and Oregon—may be something of a pipe dream ... but it speaks to one part of the BC psyche." Phillip Resnick, *The Politics of Resentment* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000): 19.

11. *Baja to Vancouver: The West Coast and Contemporary Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco; Seattle Art Museum; Vancouver Art Gallery, 2004.

12. While urban realities, multinational and transnational corporations, and the information flows are what bind Vancouver and BC to the rest of the world (hence the need for an internationally viable art), what is valorized increasingly in global culture, and on the art market, is the display of difference in terms of locality.

13. Ralph Rugoff, "The West Coast and Contemporary Art," in *Baja to Vancouver*: 18–19.

14. For more on the subject of the international art market see Julian Stallabrass' *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

15. William Wood, "The Insufficiency of the World," *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists* (Antwerp/Vancouver: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen and Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005): 65–66.

16. Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965–75*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995): 254–255.

17. Mahovsky: 52.

18. Other important writers such as Scott Watson, William Wood, and Robert Linsley contributed invaluable insight and legitimization to the discourse around an urban, de-featured landscape as counter-tradition.

19. Robert Linsley, "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia," *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991): 235. Also, Miwon Kwon states: "throughout the

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twentieth century, the history of avant-garde, 'advanced,' or 'critical' art practices ... can be described as the persistence of a desire to situate art in 'improper' or 'wrong' places. That is, the avant-garde struggle has in part been a kind of spatial politics, to pressure the definition and legitimation of art by locating it elsewhere, in places other than where it 'belongs.'" "The Wrong Place": 41.

20. For example, Jin-me Yoon's work has focused on issues of national and regional identity using the subjects of immigration, racial stereotyping, tourism, nature, and nation. Her series of photographs *Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) and *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991–2000) and her video and film series *Fugitive (Unbidden)* (2004) investigate the relationship between cultural identity and geographic place. What one may see as disjuncture between race and place speaks to our preconceptions about identity and belonging. Liz Magor's wilderness-inspired sculpture, photographs, and installations conflate a mythically charged local/national landscape (again playing off stereotypes of Canadianness) with a nostalgia that quite often veers into a manic survivalism (hoarding, storing, and hiding of provisions), a seemingly anachronistic symptom that perhaps could be rationalized as a defense mechanism in the face of unstable and volatile capitalist relations.

21. See Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

22. For instance, Ron Terada's exhibition *Catalogue* at the Contemporary Art Gallery (2002) came across as a rather cynical gesture resulting in the publication of an expensive catalogue with the help of donors; this was all made possible by the artist's successful career.

23. "In its most degraded forms this may appear as a performative declaration of connoisseurship vis-à-vis earnestly romantic or shrewdly calculated evocations of subcultural marginalia. There is also the possible repetition of structural models which might, through re-contextualization, evacuate originary historical circumstances and socio-political intentions." Jeremy Todd, "Mad Tales: Considering Allegorical Tendencies Now," *Last Call* 1:2 (2001).

24. I am thinking quite literally here of such examples as Shannon Oksanen's film *Spins* (2002), with its fake outdoor winter backdrop, or Evan Lee's panoramic photographs *S. Fraser Way, Surrey, BC, Landscape #1 and #2* (2000). It is also interesting how many works use generic, pastoral or sublime BC landscapes, such as Kevin Schmidt's *Long Beach Led Zep* and Althea Thauberger's *Songstress*.

25. This phenomenon is echoed in the popularity of bad boy/girl culture emerging from Britain (the yBas), as well as the thriving of rock/punk/alternative music, skateboard, surfboard, and graffiti cultural references in art from California and elsewhere.

26. I am thinking here of Steven Shearer's works depicting 1970s teen pop idols.

27. Curated by Scott Watson at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, the artists were Geoffrey Farmer, Myfanwy MacLeod, Damian Moppett, Steven Shearer, Ron Terada, and Kelly Wood. Many of these young emerging artists had shown at the Or Gallery in exhibitions curated by Reid Shier just months before. Amongst the reviews/articles of 6 was Ken Lum's critical assessment in *Canadian Art* (Summer 1998): 46–51.

28. Mass pepper-spraying and arrests by RCMP mostly, but police officers also tore down signs that demanded free speech and democracy, all supposedly due to Prime Minister Jean Chretien's demands to quell protest. The demonstrations stemmed from protesters' resentment of Indonesian dictator Mohamed Suharto's presence at the talks, whose government was known for its human rights abuses.

29. Patrik Andersson and Shannon Oksanen, "Expo Research," *6: New Vancouver Modern* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1997): 30–31.

30. *These Days*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000. Shown alongside artists of the previous generation, many young emerging artists combined the landscape idiom with a pop culture aesthetic. See my review of this show in *Last Call* 1:2 (2001).

31. Kevin Schmidt does a similar thing in his work from 2000, *1984 Chevrolet Caprice Classic Wagon, 94000 kms, Good Condition, Engine Needs Minor Work, $1200 OBO 604 888 3243*.

32. Thomas Crow speaks of "the pastoral contrast between large artistic ambitions and a simultaneous awareness—figured through the surrogate of the child and consciously childish activities—of everyone's limited horizons and modest powers." *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996): 182.

33. Peter Culley, "A Bustle in Your Hedgerow: Long Beach, Led Zeppelin and the West Coast Sublime," *Public* 28 (2003): 108.

34. Shot in natural settings throughout the Victoria area, Althea Thauberger's *Songstress* (2002) showcased young women singing folk, rock, alternative, and new age songs for the camera, traipsing about in nature as creating a self-promotional video. *Songstress* combined the strategies of Gillian Wearing (putting an ad in the newspaper for young vocalists),

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Lillith Fair rock video earnestness, and art videos' one-continuous-take aesthetic. See my review on the work, *Canadian Art* (Spring 2003).

35. Douglas Coupland, Peter Culley, Lisa Robertson, and Michael Turner are writers/poets who have written extensively about Vancouver artists' works.

36. Kootenay School of Writing is a Vancouver writer's collective, or for want of a better name, a writer-run centre, formed in 1984 after the Social Credit government shut down the David Thompson University Centre in Nelson. For a more extended history of KSW, see *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*, eds. Andrew Koblucar and Michael Barnholden (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1999).

37. *Writing* (1981–1992); and more recently the web-based magazine *W*: www.kswnet.org/w/

38. Artspeak shared a space with KSW from the gallery's inception into the early 90s. For a history of the KSW/Artspeak relationship, read Nancy Shaw's essay "Expanded Consciousness and Company Types" in *Vancouver Anthology*.

39. For another look at the formation of this artist-writer community in Vancouver, read Reid Shier's essay "Buddies, Pals" in *Intertidal*: 80–89 and Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, "A Conversation on 'Cultural Poetics' with Jeff Derksen" in *Poets Talk* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005): 127–128.

40. I use art-related writing to distinguish it from art criticism proper, which had become much more of a rarity in the city after the demise of *Vanguard*. Many art critics had left to do their PhDs elsewhere, such that more poets, curators, and art historians were filling the gap.

41. Michael Barnholden, Clint Burnham, and Mina Totino also were involved in the publication at different times. *Boo* did not have stable funding, could not pay its contributors, and relied on advertising. It filled a gap within the art community, and was essentially a labour of love for the editors and contributors. The profession of art criticism was unsustainable for most writers in Vancouver and there were very few venues for writing after the demise of *Vanguard* magazine other than *C*, *Parachute*, and *Canadian Art*.

42. Phillip McCrum, *Tear*, Or Gallery in 1998; catalogue published in 2000. Many thanks to William Wood for bringing this publication to my attention in the context of this paper.

43. I exclude discussion of art reviews as printed in *The Georgia Straight*, *Terminal City*, and the *Vancouver Sun*. The limits of this essay do not give me sufficient space to discuss all forms of writing about art in Vancouver. I have restricted it to art writing and art criticism found in catalogues, journals, and independently published local broadsheets.

44. Although *Last Call* was published through the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at UBC, edited by Deanna Ferguson and Scott Watson, it did not publish articles or reviews about Belkin shows. Furthermore, it was a free publication and covered the local context substantially.

45. Miriam Nichols, "Urban Landscapes and Dirty Lyrics: Peter Culley and Lisa Robertson," *Public* 26 (2002): 55.

46. Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office of Soft Architecture* (Astoria, OR: Clear Cut Press, 2003): 54–55.

47. Lisa Robertson, "Playing House: A Brief Account of the Idea of a Shack," *Liz Magor* (Toronto/Vancouver: The Power Plant/Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002): 47.

48. Jeff Derksen, "Preface: Jerk" in *Transnational Muscle Cars* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003): 9.

49. *Ken Lum works with photography*, eds. Kitty Scott and Martha Hanna (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2002): 90.

50. In 2002, the future of the Downtown Eastside had been a hot election issue, due in part to the Woodward's Squat. In September, a number of homeless people and community groups occupied the long-vacant Woodward's building and formed a tent city around the perimeter of the building, demanding more social housing. That same year, Larry Campbell won the mayoral election, largely due to his wish to pursue the "four pillars" approach to Vancouver's drug addiction problem, also that same year, Port Coquitlam pig-farmer Robert Pickton was arrested and charged in the murder of fifteen missing women from the DTES.

51. www.kswnet.org/w/six/w6.pdf: 9.

52. The artist's own words: www.visibleartactivity.com/kirsten/about-kirsten.html

53. The term "the commons" was made popular by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

54. *Contemporary Art From Studio to Situation*: 10.

55. *West Coast Line* 35:2 (Fall 2001): 75.

56. Exhibition contributors included Rita Beiks, Rebecca Belmore, Clint Burnham, Margot Leigh Butler, Desmedia, Stan Douglas, Arni Haraldsson, Hermes, Sharon Kravitz, Paul St. Germain, and Susan Stewart.

57. Words from the video's subtitles.

58. *fillip*, 1: 1: 3.

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