

Today, it is the ruination of the forest by export development which permits buildings to rise in town. Graham commits a building to the task of waiting patiently for a tree to grow and then, when it is grown, to preserve it in its sight.

The tree as symbol appears also in a picture I made in 1988, 'Tran Duc Van'. There the tree grows up through an outlet in the sidewalk. It is reduced almost to the status of *street furniture*, but at the same time it provides support and shelter for a distraught and abandoned man, whose name is the picture's title. A Vietnamese, Tran Duc Van is another in a long line of people who have journeyed a long way to the West Coast, to begin again or to vanish.

Finally, Ken Lum's 'A Woodcutter and his Wife', made in 1990. The environmental movements in the rain forest areas must confront the historical experience of the longging workers, who maintain their families and way of life by cutting timber. The felling of the giant trees keeps the families together. Lum attempts to portray the structure of the togetherness of this couple by including in his *family group* the noble, tragic, threatened, immobile tree."

## IMAGE LITERATURES

### Robert Linsley

All art is essentially literary. The most anti-literary art of recent times, minimalism, is itself grounded in a particularly American tradition of literary positivism, exemplified by William Carlos Williams's famous dictum "no ideas but in things". A new art of pictures can only come about through the construction of a new relationship between literature and visual art, a new productive continuum between pictures, text and world. Such an art would not only be new in the art context, it would necessarily diverge sharply from most existing literary models. Yet if such an art, instead of seeking to circumscribe itself, insists on its interrelationship with various "literatures", it is also necessarily a product of a literary reading of art history, one that seeks out such inter-relationships in the already existing body of culture. The text of a new art of pictures is "ready-made".

Bakhtin's study of literary genres provides a model that can be useful in opening up the reading of pictures beyond formalistic approaches, older iconographic readings and exclusively art world concerns. Pictures can be seen to contain genres of story telling that are always profoundly historical; genres that are also found, with variation, in literature. This broader view that encompasses both visual and textual forms allows a social reading of art that does not need to deal with specifics of patronage or political events. Art works are grounded in the context of their production, yet without a certain distance in time and space it is hard to see how this is so. Broad patterns that cross the limits of the category "art" allow a social reading of art works where the drawing of direct links to contemporary social life would do violence to their complexity. Conversely, the use of genres in

the Bakhtinian sense allows the artist to point simultaneously in different directions; to let the indication of social realities occur as one moment of a process in which art works open up unrestrictedly and continuously throughout their making and later reception. The purpose of this paper is to show how a generic reading of British Columbia's art can delimit the shifting boundaries, in other words, the concrete social conditions, within which and against which the work of the artists in this exhibition struggles. In the course of this reading we will discover surprising continuities and breaks between their work and the artistic culture of B.C., both of which are constitutive features of a rich, openly evolving situation.

An important genre found in both art and literature produced on the North-West coast of North America is a variant of what Bakhtin calls the love idyll, one that weaves together bohemianism with Eastern religions in the natural setting of the forests and mountains of the region. The motif of retreat to a cabin in the woods, a retreat in which the modern artist acts out his rejection of the competitiveness and profit oriented busyness of the North American city is an old one. At least since Thoreau, this retreat has also included the discovery of a congruence between the literary tradition of romantic nature worship and oriental philosophies. Two of Vancouver's most important modernists of the 1930's, Fred Varley and Jock Macdonald, followed this pattern taking with them to the forest Buddhist, Taoist and other esoteric texts. Macdonald, later an important figure in the development of abstraction in Canada, moved with his family to a cabin on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Varley and his student Vera Weatherbie challenged the social proprieties of depression Vancouver by moving together into a small house in the mountains directly north of Vancouver. Here Varley painted the important work "Dharana", which shows Weatherbie rapt in ecstatic contemplation in the evening light.

In Varley's many paintings of the Coast mountains, the landscapes of German romanticism acquire gentleness and accessibility without losing any of their ultramundane grandeur. They are not fantasies of power or authority projected onto nature but instead rather inviting; nature brings peace, not threats or danger. But the appropriateness of this Buddhist vision of nature is guaranteed by the economic and political history of B.C.

The disenchantment of nature, the suppression of the spirits of tree and rock, is part of the Buddhist programme. In popular Buddhism, copies of sacred texts are understood to be defenses against demons and spirits; even for the illiterate, the actual texts of the sutras have this magical power. The recognition that ghosts and other supernatural entities are illusions that dissipate before the revelation of the Dharma, or ultimate reality, is fundamental to Buddhism and to its history as the great mediating religion of the world. Having travelled from India to China, building links between these two great cultural areas, it now works as an important channel of communication between East Asian and European cultures, mainly through a large and growing community of believers centred in the western United States and Canada. Its inherent rationalism means that it is able to survive the transition to a technological and materialist society, and that it could move easily into the "disenchanted" landscape of colonial America. The nature spirits of the indigenes, mythical/historical markers of their possession of the land for millenia, have shriveled and disappeared before the power saw, the railroad and the surveyor's transit. The land in which the natives have been dispossessed of their property and power and rendered invisible, the land which to the early European immigrants seemed empty, although every part of it was lived in and claimed by native tribes, is for the artist a tamed and passive landscape, one that offers no threat, but the ideal environment for the secularized spirituality of occidental Buddhism. The contemplation of nature as an empty space filled with the presence of silence, and with the slow, peaceful movement of growing things, is easily spiritualized, and forms the perfect complement to the violence of unrestrained commercial exploitation. The provision of parks and protected wilderness areas, large in themselves though only a minute percentage of the province's land area, ensures that the wilderness sojourner will rarely, if ever, come face to face with this violence. If the power of the sublime evoked in Romantic landscape is a projection of social power, the spiritualized landscapes of painters such as Varley, as well as those of wilderness photographers such as Ansel Adams, point to an important shift in the way that landscape is socially constructed. Peacefulness charged with significance is guaranteed precisely by the warlike, seemingly irrational consumption of the environment that frames it, that is the logging and mining taking place outside the park.

The social content of such landscapes, not immediately visible, is then the antagonism between Buddhist pacifism and social violence.

British Columbia as an economic/political entity is part of a larger geographical region including the North-Western United States and Alaska. Similarities in environment, climate, and lifestyles throughout the region have inspired many proposals over the years for a new country with names such as Cascadia or Ecotopia. More interesting, however, is the independent development of a similar aesthetic complex of oriental philosophy and wilderness experience on both sides of the border. Without Varley or Macdonald as models, the beat poets of the 1950's pursued similar paths. Of particular importance was Oregonian Gary Snyder, who worked as a trail builder and fire lookout all over the Northwestern United States. His early poems, rooted in his work experience, reinvented the Haiku form in a western idiom — much harder, more material and matter of fact. Snyder was the hero of Jack Kerouac's roman a clef "The Dharma Bums". In the climactic concluding section of the book, Kerouac spends a summer as a fire lookout on the top of Desolation Peak, about a hundred miles south-east of Vancouver, within sight of the Canadian border. These transnational correspondences further strengthen the association between the Buddhist idyll and the forests and mountains of the Pacific Coast.

The Buddhist/Beat ethos became very widespread in the 60's, in B.C. particularly, so widespread that it became difficult to separate out from other positions, some more urban, others less interested in spirituality. Everyone was a hippie to some extent. Regional variants of Pop, Minimalism and Fluxus, current in the sixties, were all inflected by the rural and mystical elements of the counter culture. The search for alternative spaces led a younger generation out of the city, and many artists were attracted to the community of squatters living on the beach at Dollarton, just across the harbour from Vancouver.

But this is also a place in literary history, home during the 30's and 40's to Malcom Lowry and his wife Margery. Lowry was also touched by the "oriental spirit" of the landscape. His short novel "The Forest Path to the Spring" expresses a vision of nature as a healing force. Lowry's narrator describes the scene that greets the couple at their first sight of the cabin:

"...children shouted and squealed, paddling in the mud, among the tide flats, from

which arose the most impressive and unusual stink I ever smelt in my life. This archetypal malodor on investigation proved partly to emanate from the inlet itself, which was sleeked as far as the eye could reach with an oil slick I quickly deduced to be the work of an oil tanker lying benignly at the wharf of the refinery I have mentioned opposite the lighthouse, so that now it looked as though one certainly could never swim at all; we might as well have come to the Persian Gulf. And to add to the heat, which further suggested the Persian Gulf, as we crunched thoughtfully over the barnacles and exoskeletons of crabs, or avoiding the deposits of tar or creosote, sank up to our ankles instead in slippery reeking slime, or splashed into pools themselves preened with peacock feathers of oil, came, from high up on the beach, a blast of hot breath and ashes from a dozen clambakes, round the fires of which, it seemed to us, hundreds of people were howling and singing in a dozen languages."<sup>1</sup>

The next morning, the holiday makers have left, and like a wave that always returns, pristine nature has re-emerged, cleaning away both pollution and the clamour of immigrant languages:

"But could you rent Paradise at twelve dollars a month? was our thought, the next morning, as from the porch of the shack, gazing on the scene of absolute emptiness and solitude, we watched the sunrise bringing the distant powerlines across the inlet at Port Boden in relief, the sun sliding up behind the mountain pines... From the oil company's wharf just visible down the inlet the oil tanker had vanished, and with it the oil slick: the tide was high and cold and deep and we swam, diving straight off the porch, scattering into dividing echelons a school of minnows. And when we came up, turning around, we saw the pines and alders of our forest high above us. To us lovers the beach emptied of its cheery crowd seemed the opposite of melancholy. We turned again and there were the mountains."<sup>2</sup>

In retreat to the country, the rhythms of the psyche, always accelerated by urban experience, begin to lose tension. The urban rhythm drops of and the feelings and unconscious synchronize with longer and slower natural rhythms which effect a "healing" of modern anxiety and neurosis. The congruence of inner and outer worlds then becomes the object of the poet's or artists's meditation. Lowry describes the process well as his daily journey to collect water

from a small pipe that channelled the run-off from the mountain above his shack turned into a transformative spiritual experience:

"But no matter how hard I tried I could not express what the feeling was like beyond saying that it was almost as if a 'great burden had been lifted off my soul'. Some such cliché as that. It was as if something that used to take a long and painful time now took so little time I couldn't remember it at all; but simultaneously I had a consciousness of a far greater duration of time having passed during which something of vast importance to me had taken place, without my knowledge and outside of time altogether."<sup>5</sup>

When one appreciates the strength of this contemplative, orientalist current in the culture of B.C., important aspects of the work of the artists in this exhibition come into relief. The early work of Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace was rooted in another literary tradition, one much stronger in the United States, and one that in fact already proposed a continuum between literary text and picture.

Robert Smithson was an early critic of the view that art works were limited by their physical boundaries. He saw the individual art work as a provisionally demarcated area of a larger discursive region including science, philosophy and literature. For Smithson, all artworks are fragments of a larger text which finally is written in the stones, dust, and ever diminishing energy sources of the astronomical universe. Smithson's cosmic vision of the universe as text, with its corollary insistence on the decaying materiality of all texts, evolved independently of Derrida's Kabbalistic theories of textuality, with which it does share some features.

However, during the sixties, Smithson's ideas were only appreciated in a fragmentary fashion. Language based conceptual artists such as Weiner and Kosuth accepted the fundamental factuality of the art object characteristic of American modernism. For them, language as a fact precedes its various forms, including pictures and sculpture; their work is obstinately reductive. Their attitude was shared by Smithson, but the complexity of his thought, which encompassed both reduction and expansion, was not shared by his colleagues. Text pieces such as "The Crystal Land" and "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey", which opened a language based conceptual art out into a rich body of social representations through allusion to a variety of literary genres (the tourist guide book, travel literature, the beatnik "road" novel, the poetry of

place, scientific literature and science fiction to name a few), found an echo only in Vancouver, in pieces such as Jeff Wall's "Landscape Manual" and others. Of particular importance for the Vancouver artists was Dan Graham's "Homes for America", which was also in dialogue with Smithson's work.

The views of Smithson and Graham were clearly in conflict with the anti-literary modernism of critics such as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. These latter held to a notion that art forms move in time exclusively toward a more complex internal development rather like the phenomenon of infilling, which increases the population density of urban neighbourhoods while maintaining their character. Wallace and Wall, by taking up the discursive text and image work of Smithson and Graham, were therefore doubly adversarial, in both the Vancouver context and in a broader one. But though they met resistance here, there was no recognition that they were just using a different kind of literature, one that roamed throughout the city and suburbs rather than staying put in a cabin in the country, or for that matter in an urban art gallery, and one that had links to the older nineteenth century literature of the flâneur, mediated by the new experience of the city built for automobiles. A drive through the newly enlarged urban area comprised of several suburbs linked by highways was recognized as a motor-flan — a North American version of the contemporary derive of the situationnistes. In this respect, their work was an authentic response to the realities of post-war Vancouver. Here distraction rather than peace is the prevailing tone. Montage, juxtapositions that always leave the subjectivity of the artist somewhere outside of the work rather than the harmonious congruence of natural images and emotions was both the structural and expressive principle.

As the urban form par excellence, montages let the clamour of disparate languages and voices be as it is. On the other hand, as Lowry's text reveals, the Buddhist idyll in a log cabin implies the suppression of urban conflict and diversity. This is the violence buried deep in the passive rejection of modern society practiced by the counter culture of the sixties. The search for peace through the building of self sufficient alternative communities in the countryside was doomed from the start because when the counter culture turned its back on the city it turned away from the social struggles taking place there, which alone are the generators of utopian energies. The

log cabin falls out of history, just as the mystical experience recounted by Lowry was outside of time.

Ian Wallace's piece "La Melancholie de la Rue", of 1973, juxtaposes a squatter's shack on the shore at Dollarton, exactly the sort of place described by Lowry, with a new suburban housing development. But these two images speak through two literatures: the poetic anti-urban idyll and a documentary conceptual art social realism. To read the work, the viewer has to be in prepossession of a number of "texts" comprising the literary and artistic traditions of B.C. as well as its social and cultural history. Composed of three unremarkable city views, Wallace's piece works through the juxtaposition of different literatures, not through subjective association. This is a statement of faith in the infinite readability of pictures, and is the germ of the later rich development found in the work of Wall and Lum.

This meeting of genres in Wallace's piece is equivalent to the reformulated relationship between poetry and the novel found in much modern literature. In general, poetic languages and voicings tend to collect in the novel, where they add to an already enormous stockpile of historical genres originating in rhetoric, drama, satire, folklore, epic, legal prose, advertising and countless other sources. The novel is the ultimate resting place of every genre of spoken and written language, and Wallace's piece points toward the possibility of a novelistic pictorial language founded on montage. The title of the piece summons up De Chirico and the Surrealist tradition, which itself opens out into a constellation of poetic, narrative and critical literatures ranging from Baudelaire through Aragon and Breton to Walter Benjamin, in which the city is seen as a text. If Surrealist montage is poetic, located in a single consciousness in a nonspecific "dreamtime" of elastic duration, and if Dada montage is journalistic, continuous with the newspaper page as a cross section of the city's activities in a business day, Wallace's montage is novelistic, includes both the city and its surroundings, and contains potentially all of the spacetime configurations (Bakhtinian chronotopes) possessed by the novel. These possibilities would be further developed in the more openly narrative work of Lum and Wall.

It would not be until the emergence of a Bakhtinian reading that Wallace's intuitive assumption of the expressive and narrative power of the innumerable details gathered by the photographic lens would be confirmed. The

pictorial genres of the snap-shot and the photo documentary, in both of which the image appears "ready-made", block interpretation even as they claim to tell us something about the world. While Wallace's work necessarily contains these genres, as well as others such as the film still, he was convinced that pictures could say more. The crucial element became a typically minimalist recognition that texts are also ready-mades; in fact, the articulation of photography with a generic reading allows the ready-made to speak for the first time. The common practice of putting a socially functional object on a pedestal, where it sits mute and impenetrable, forcing discourse to swirl around it in and through the context of its production and reception, is here reversed. When texts are seen as continuous with art they become supremely functional, turning a picture into an Argus with a thousand mouths, opening one by one over time, speaking, singing, and arguing in response to an ever changing environment. Considerations such as these must force a re-evaluation of the criteria of a critical art.

As the poetic idyll falls beneath the gaze of its antagonist, the more prosaic montage form, Wallace's work becomes implicitly critical of the absolute truth claims of mystical experience, as well as the strategy of retreat and its consequent exclusions. A critique of the literature of retreat is further constructed in the piece through the inclusion of the third urban space, the reconstructed city core, home of corporate and government bureaucracy. This space also has its innumerable literatures, including the Frankfurt school's critique of administered culture. All three spaces are placed in a continuum; the squatters shack is no escape. The tension that holds city apart from country, that holds bureaucratic languages and their critical antagonists apart from poetic languages and their silent forms of understanding, dissolves into a network of impulses travelling through an enormous number of literatures, all variously in productive and destructive processes of synthesis and division. The contemporary flaneur, an intellectual traveller, has a purview that includes all urban and rural spaces, which are now seen to be continuous and inseparable. Both wings of the triptych could be seen as destinations for the contemporary artist who, in North America at least, is often brought up in the single family suburban home and whose career could well move in a circle through all three spaces. This last observation supports my novelistic reading, for the piece does contain echoes of the



Bildungsroman and the Künstlerroman, novels of education and of the artist.

Wallace's piece is a touchstone for an emerging pictorial/literary language, a language that at its origins speaks about British Columbia as a place that is changing and in conflict. Signs of change and conflict are muffled in the establishment culture of B.C. by the invocation of a natural landscape apart from social life and its diversity, particularly in the form of a strong tradition of expressionist landscape painting. But if the experience of peace sought by the nature poets in a sense betrays the possibility of a real achievement of peace in the world, this experience is none the less real. Yet to sustain this contradiction would be impossible if today the violence of the city were not exploding the idyll from within in a new and productive fashion. The rise of so-called eco-terrorism — the blocking of logging roads, the driving of metal spikes into trees to destroy their commercial usefulness — grows out of an awareness that the peace of the wilderness will soon be the peace of death if exploitative practices are not stopped and then reversed. The pacifism of the counter culture is losing its passivity, and it is this that is now forcing a crisis for the landscape painting tradition in B.C. But if the poetic idyll has been deposited into a larger, novelistic framework in the work of the new photo-realists, we have to ask what role it is playing there.

The idyll did in fact contain critical and disruptive energies. These energies are visible in the work of Emily Carr, B.C.'s great painter of the religious experience of nature. Her now canonical work "Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky", is a cry of protest and a flag of resistance on behalf of the vanquished of the forest. Rodney Graham's and Jeff Wall's pictures of trees confirm this motif, both critical and utopian, as a still vivid legacy of the personal encounter with nature recorded by the idyll, one which has, via the suburbs, returned to the city.

In British Columbia the essence of social life has always been precisely that cacophany of immigrant languages noticed by Lowry. Since the 1850's when the discovery of gold brought increased immigration to the province, there has been a strong Oriental presence on the west coast. Though Chinese are the biggest group, many Japanese settled here and worked in the fishing industry. In recent years, Vietnamese and Filipinos have formed large identifiable communities in Vancouver. But to build conceptual links between the movement of

European and Asian peoples into North America and the dialogue between their two cultures which has been taking place in the arts is very difficult, if not impossible. The Chinese who came here to work did not bring painting or literature with them in a form that could influence the dominant western culture. They were mostly poor and uneducated people in any case; their main concern was survival. The social hybridization that has occurred as Orientals and Europeans have learned to live together in B.C. is alongside and apart from the process by which artists and writers have been profoundly influenced as they steeped themselves in oriental culture. Though both are aspects of the same process of meeting and hybridization, one on the level of real movements of peoples, the other on a philosophical and aesthetic level, there is here another antagonism, for the mystical landscape tradition has not been accompanied by a more social realist or documentary approach, and perhaps has even helped to block the possibility of an art that would bring to view the strains of assimilation and the racism that has long characterized white Canada's response to the other cultural bodies with which it must share the land. The artist of a documentary view of the town of New Westminster in 1887, Edward Roper, has left a written account of the scene, stressing "the strange diversity of people who passed by me along a sidewalk across the road". He notices Natives, East Indians, Chinese in traditional costume and Anglo colonists. Incredibly, the piece is perhaps the closest parallel in B.C. painting to an Ian Wallace street photo, and its simple acknowledgement of the diverse peoples of the province would not be seen in art again until the work of Ken Lum.

Peoples have come here from East and West in search of their future, and it appears that that future for each includes the other. From this perspective, the historical destiny of B.C. is a merging of two cultures, and hence two histories, more complete and more far reaching in its possibilities than any that has occurred till now. This merging occurs in a space filled with dream images and echoing with the sound of diverse voices. It is an ongoing historical novel, and happens as much in the exchange of fictions as in intermarriage and the exchange of customs. The resemblance of the B.C. landscape, with its mists, mountains and pine trees, to the landscape of the orient, particularly Japan, has long been assumed. Varley, who had never been across the Pacific, asserted "...that only the Chinese of the eleventh

and twelfth centuries ever interpreted the spirit of such a country."<sup>4</sup> For the early Chinese immigrants, B.C. was "Gum San", or Gold Mountain, a mythic land of plenty, for the white colonists it became an oriental landscape to be enjoyed on weekend excursions. The motif of dreamland, of "Fantasy Gardens",<sup>5</sup> is pervasive in B.C. history. One could ask legitimately whether the immigrants have ever actually arrived, or whether they are still seeking their fantasy images of each other.

Yet this is happening entirely over the heads of the indigenes, for whom it has no meaning at all, and is an unasked for and unwanted disruption of their own history. Before the arrival of any colonists the natives had marked their ownership of the land with thousands of petroglyphs and rock paintings. These early inscriptions on the land could be seen as the most ancient generic source for the literary/pictorial demarcation of space that we have seen in the urban photo montage. In fact, the Baudelairean "forest of signs" was conflated with the real forest and its native totems by German Surrealist Wolfgang Paalen, who visited the West Coast in the Forties and published the first sympathetic imaginative interpretation of native art in his magazine *Dyn*. Paalen described a walk through the forest; coming into a clearing, he received a sudden "shock" from the trunk of a burned tree, where he momentarily saw a primitive face.<sup>6</sup> From this typically Surrealist experience he derived a theory of the origin of totemic masks. Paalen's account is emblematic of the weaving together of fantasy and science in a history of Western attempts to interpret and understand native culture that have been singularly deaf to the native's own testimony. Image projection, free association and excessive verbal interpretation on the part of whites have often blocked the native voice. Yet Paalen's experience is still a significant one, for the land is always inhabited by any number of immaterial presences, whether the nature spirits of native religion or the many "texts", constellations of historical memory and cultural association, that we have seen clustering around images of the city. In fact, these may well be different forms of the same thing. The novelistic art of B.C. has to include journeys into the landscape of the natives, in complementary motion to the entry of Indians into the cultural field of the city. Today Indian rock paintings are presented as evidence of aboriginal land tenure in court cases. The presence of this other social/cultural status throws the meeting of Asian

and European on the West Coast into an even more unreal light. One could propose that precisely to the degree that the dominant culture fails to see the reality of the natives is the degree to which it appears fantastic itself.

The situation in B.C. is a complex one in which many strata of culture slide over one another, in indirect response to the real interaction of peoples. Not the least important element are the aborigines, yet many of them do not want to enter fully into the new situation. Intercultural contact for the natives was not a matter of choice, they were ill prepared for it, and it brought them disaster. The panorama of social life in the province includes a recalcitrant, nonparticipating element. Yet for better or worse, colonization has brought to the natives new experience of time and space. As the natives gradually recover from the intense shock of contact, for many of them the image of a lost past begins to fade into the vision of a never imagined future. Both the suffering caused by this and the new possibilities it brings are expressed in the works of young native painter Lawrence Paul. His pictures are parodic grotesque landscapes that bring together traditional native forms and their historical associations with strong time and space markers, such as perspective, taken from western art. His pictures are a native's reformulation of the melancholic street scenes of De Chirico that recognizes that the city is continuous with the devastated land. Skies and distant horizons represent an opening toward the future on the part of an Indian who chooses to explore this new wilderness.

While the history of painting offers many examples of the transferability of genres between pictures and texts, little work has been done in identifying the genres of conceptual art, some of which may not have literary equivalents. One genre of conceptual art might be called the philosophical object; an object which neither embodies nor expresses ideas, but which is itself a kind of thinking without words. The sculptures of Robert Smithson are supreme examples in recent art. In Bakhtin's theory, genres are time-space configurations with definite historical roots. While they may initially be discrete categories of production, over time they collect inside large open-ended forms where they can articulate with each other in productive ways. The idyll described above, for example, combines an historical, dateless sense of time (given a new reading as the eternal "now" of Buddhist meditation), with a specific place (the modern

wilderness park), and it inhabits the modern form of landscape painting. Nonrepresentational and empty of narrative, the philosophical object would seem to refuse the possibility of a Bakhtinian reading. Yet though it is uncompromisingly object, it is also entirely literary. This became clear at the recent (Nov. 1991) re-installation of Rodney Graham's 1979 piece "Illuminated Ravine". In this piece, a small wooded ravine cutting down from the bureaucratic functionalist edifice of Simon Fraser University was lit by three gas-powered industrial lighting rigs. Most of the spectators were content to stand behind the generators, treating the piece as a picture, and an extraordinarily vivid one it was. This violent intrusion into the night forest has as many social as philosophical readings, and they have been explored in the critical literature.<sup>7</sup> But new possibilities opened up when some people began to explore distant more regions of the piece, to treat it as an environment. The piece was discovered to be quite extensive as the light spread unevenly through the trees, broke into shadowed zones and dim clearings, and faded away. Each track through the trees became another narrative, with its own dark, incomplete sections; each thicket another story, with one side facing the light. The edge of the illumination could only be imprecisely located; objects became phantasmic and dreamlike. One path led down to the small creek at the bottom of the ravine; its sound could be heard beneath the hum of the generators. It seemed that the nature of one's footwear put limits on one's experience of art. Later, the artist and some of his friends crossed to the other shore, climbing the bank into another, brighter realm of illumination, looking back into the eyes of the lamps. In the lower regions of the piece, where the faintest trees stood just beyond the most umbrous thickets, with white teeth clenched and gleaming in the dim light, stood three Indian totem poles.

1. Malcolm Lowry, "The Forest Path to the Spring", in *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, Vancouver 1987, p. 227.
2. Lowry, p. 228.
3. Lowry, p. 268-269.
4. Varley quoted in *Vancouver Art and Artists: 1931-1983*, VAG 1983, p. 16.
5. "Fantasy Gardens" is the name of a Christian theme park created by a former Premier (head of government) of British Columbia. Its ridiculousness became scandal when he used the power of his office to help arrange its sale to a Taiwanese investor, actions that subsequently led to the fall of his government in October of 1991.
6. Wolfgang Palen; *Surprises and inspiration*, DYN. 2, July-August 1942, p. 5ap.
7. Jeff Wall, "Into the Forest: Two sketches for studies of Rodney Graham's Work", in *Rodney Graham*, exh. cat. V.A.G. 1988.