

The Hidden Curriculum of Wilderness: Images of Landscape in Canada

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Landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focus for the formation of identity. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 2)

As a landscape artist, I sometimes wonder about my decisions to paint wood, water, and stone as wilderness. When I first read that “landscapes are culture before they are nature” (Schama, 1995, p. 61), I did not completely understand this, for I was enveloped in my normalized perspective of the land as a vast, rich inheritance; as a playground; as a resource. There is a thread of self-affirmation in the act of translating the land onto watercolour paper; yet, in the relationship of self to land and to others in the land, I was missing something important. My cultural frame shaped what I saw, felt, and acted upon with regard to the environment, but I admit a lack of awareness of the ways cultural representations of nature affected my perspective. As teacher and artist, thinking and writing about painting is educative; it leads me to examine a familiar, pervasive Canadian equation: wilderness equals national identity. I contemplate the ways that landscape images become institutional markers for defining national identity and contribute to the ongoing development of personal and collective identity. By

disassembling the wilderness myth within my and other representations of the landscape, there is an opportunity to learn how various ideas of the nation become normalized in popular culture and education. The broad field of cultural work dedicated to landscape in Canada can be a catalyst to help students critically understand the roles that wilderness images play in the creation, maintenance, or disruption of normative assumptions embedded in nationalism.

Because of the reality of increasing encounters with difference in schools, teachers and students need space within their curricula to examine their epistemological and ontological grounding: how they come to know who they are in the time and place of contemporary life. Relationships with images of the land are cogent parts of this kind of deep, reflexive inquiry and pursuit of these connections involves critical visual literacy. In the global arena of image-based communication, education is central in understanding the power structures inherent in image manipulation and consumption. This has been the aim of many educators who have called for increased debate surrounding the use and abuse of images through discussions of visual culture (Darts, et al, 2008; Desai, 2005; Duncum, 2002; Freedman, 2003; Garoian, 2008; Hicks & King, 2007; Stuhr, 2003; Tavin, 2003).

In this writing, I interweave these related areas: first, I examine some of the forces that shape the development and maintenance of national identity in Canada. Second, I look at the influences of landscape images on contemporary, collective identity, and within Canadian culture where the construction of nationalism through landscape and wilderness is persistent. Specifically, I trace the historical example of the landscape work of the Group of Seven painters to the level of national icon. Third, I discuss the ways that the signifier of wilderness maintains hegemonic, discriminatory practices within schools. The hidden curriculum of “wilderness nation” is an influence that runs counter to the realities of many students’ learning experiences in Canadian schools. I offer an

analysis of the Canadian relationship with the land as a point of departure for educators to consider personal modes of resistance so that the curricular goals of communal responsibility for the land, and understanding within and across differences can begin and continue to flourish.

Canadian National Identity, Eh?

There is a curious irony in the fact that the search for national identity is one defining characteristic of being Canadian. In her commission on national identity done for the Canadian Ministry of Heritage, Rummens (2001) concluded that more research into the role of the state in the formation of identity, and more theoretical development of the formation and negotiation of identity was needed. Both areas are connected intimately to ways that culture is produced and consumed both inside and outside institutions such as education.

National identity is invented from mythmaking and the development of meta-narratives (Brennan, 1990; Sojka, 2002). As with all nations, distinct and romantic characteristics associated with being Canadian have been created and subsequently normalized. Our identifications with the democratic West, with the New World, and with anti-American sentiments are examples of the concerns of the collective Canadian psyche (Kymlicka, 2003; Sumara, 2002). In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Canadianization movement, an academic, nationalistic movement, revealed the strong desire to be distinct from the United States. With the intention to provide greater Canadian content in cultural and academic settings, many scholars attempted to slow or stop a "brain drain" to the south (Cormier, 2004). While these goals generated much debate about national ownership and meanings of nationalism, the popularity of the movement revealed the ubiquitous push to find and label national uniqueness.

Debates about language and bilingualism continue to shape our notions of our collective identity. Also, the regionalism that is a result, in part, of the physical vastness of the country has been institutionalized as a characteristic of being Canadian. Provincial and federal groups continually negotiate for power from within their respective institutions. Thus, the high value placed upon the processes of negotiation, conciliation, and mediation has also been cited as characteristic of the Canadian identity (Chambers, 1999; Kymlicka, 2003; Laidlaw, Davis, & Sumara, 2001). Finally, a deeply embedded association with the land as wilderness is a distinctly Canadian reality. While these characteristics are often presented as enduring, identity has a quality of unpredictability and instability to it, particularly as we shift in contexts that are local, national, and transnational. Kymlicka (2003) notes, "To be Canadian is just one identity within this larger set of identities" (p. 357). The tensions among these identities are often recognized and acknowledged through cultural work.

Contemporary selfhood is constantly renegotiated as the boundaries determining one's familiar places shift because of the proliferation of electronic media (Bhabha, 1994; Kostash, 2000; Rogoff, 2000). A sense of the landscape is no longer limited to a physical connection or environment. Some cultural scholars suggest that a transnational understanding of the world is possible because we transfer our conceptual attachments of identity from one place to many places: physical and psychological homes that Chowder, (2002) describes as "homelessness within the self" (p. 5). Indeed, as we move about the globe with increased frequency and ease, and as the technologies of telecommunication have relaxed the ties of identity to physical landscapes, it seems natural for Western citizens to conceive of themselves as global citizens (Kymlicka, 2003). Reflection on our multiple landscapes of identity formation could be an opportunity to re-envision how we relate to, and are responsible for each other, locally situated in the land as well as globally. This ideal echoes the call by

Phelan and Rogoff (2001) for changes in the ways we consider our national borders as fixed, due to a narrow view of nationalism built upon stable and prescribed characteristics. They comment,

If nations, states, borders, and citizenships are not perceived as forms of belonging, or are not the naturalized relations of subjects to places, then they can be seen as active forms of unbelonging, or of being, “without”... rather than fight the issues of rights, belonging, exclusion, and migration we might be able to envision a whole other set of relations of being somewhere. (Phelan & Rogoff, p. 35-36)

The possibility of a “new set of relations” requires openness to the complexities of life in local contexts as well as a communal responsibility on a very personal level to global events. The role of visual culture, particularly images of the land, is key to a reconceptualization of nationhood so that flexibility in national identity is “felt” at the psychological level of subject formation.

Walker (2004) notes, “Simply living in a highly visual culture does not imply an understanding of the import of the relationship of the visual to the cultural” (p. 36-37). Critical readings of images are an important aspect in understanding the ways that power is often nebulously dispersed. An awareness of the semiotic nature of images is a vital part of this process of understanding how images contextually acquire meanings that influence conceptions of self. As Irwin (2004) argues, “[visual imagery] receives much less attention than narrative as a way of understanding the world in deeply profound, semiotic, analytic, and interpretive ways within educational and research communities” (p. 32). Given that the emergence of contemporary subjectivity and collective identity is influenced by a continual exposure to images, both in virtual spaces and physical places, the ways that landscape images are read in relation to living together in the land warrants careful attention.

Of course, global pressures have influenced the fabric of the nation state for many years. In what was a radical approach over ten years ago, Appadurai (1996) called for a transnational identity to replace, or at the very least to work in tandem with a definition of nationalism that he suggested had outlived its potential. People in Western cultures, particularly youth, are adept at shifting their perceptions of self as they simultaneously 'become' within local, national, and transnational contexts. This reality of lived experience is slow to move from popular culture into our institutional conceptions of the land. While still very important as an aspect of self, physical relationships with the land do not completely describe our experiences due to our interactions with various technologies. If nationalism were understood as continually emergent with multiple interpretations possible, it would better reflect the realities of contemporary life that include increased mobility and technological forms of interaction. However, numerous, repeated images of wilderness landscape tend to fix national identity instead of opening possibility for change.

Landscape and Nationalism

The literature regarding landscape crosses a number of disciplines including art, education, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, sociology, and architecture. A general theme throughout these investigations is the relationship of people to the land and to each other in the land (Cosgrove, 1984). Etymologically, landscape derives from the Dutch "landskip" and refers directly to the art of painting scenery. It still retains that meaning, as images play an important part in the conceptualization of the land. While existing as an art genre, landscape is also a discourse that emulates values and attitudes (Thomas, 1999; Wilson, 1991). According to Mitchell (1994), landscape is the site of cultural practice and an instrument of power. Following this

interpretation, Osborne (2001) suggests, “Values of the dominant culture expressed are symbolized in visual form of landscape” (p. 8). It is this process that gives rise to the history of one group acting as representative for all groups within the society (Bhabha, 1994; Hitchison, 2004). Thus, power relations become entwined with representations of the land. In this way, landscape art plays an important role in the continual shaping of national identity. Darby (2000) notes, “landscape became a locus of identity formation by virtue of how it was read about, toured through, experienced, viewed physically or in print, spoken about and painted” (p. 72). Collective memory includes the place of memory: the landscape.

The terms “landscape” and “landscape art” are fraught with difficulties because of their contested histories in the Western world. As New (1997) queries, “Why is it...that people treat the land as protector, or as cloak, or a comforter? Why and in what ways do they consider it theirs?” (p. 5). Land ownership is often affirmed through cultural representations. The British and European tradition of contracting artists to create representations of estates transferred to colonial North America as the land became mapped, documented, and “owned” (Thomas, 1999).

In landscape painting, images of places using one point perspective, a mathematically-based device introduced in the Renaissance, is a common method of design, but it is distorting. Places are never really experienced from a singular viewpoint, as the illusion that this form of representation suggests. Friedberg (2006) traces the historical relationship between representation of space using one point perspective and the understanding of the modernist, Cartesian subject. This art historical discourse puts into sharp relief the normative power of repeated exposure to images to both reflect *and* influence how ideas of self emerge.

The patriarchal nature of these practices is embedded in present attitudes toward land and identity. Painting privileges sight over the

other senses and historically, this has been the domain of male privilege, with women having been relegated to the perceived lesser sense of touch: read lesser arts (Saunders, 2004). Darby (2000) sums up this male privileging in landscape art, where the militaristic and male gaze is consistently evident in most mapping and exploration; early promoters of landscape tourism were male; art critics and artists were mostly male; and, the art market was determined by men. In nineteenth and twentieth century America, this privileging of the male gaze is noted in the connection of a wilderness experience with a revival of masculinity. According to this perspective, a man needed to experience the wilderness to reaffirm his maleness. Becoming too civilized, which had connotations of becoming feminized, was a condition to avoid (Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, 1985). In the Canadian context, the signs of wilderness and the Mountie that often symbolize the nation are also representations of white, male dominance (Sojka, 2002). I make the distinction between sexes in my discussion of landscape as a nod to Elizabeth Grosz (1995) and to other feminists whose work opens up the possibility that men and women experience places and landscapes in different ways. Canadians' repeated exposure to wilderness landscape images and the constructed associations about Canada that are taught in conjunction with such images shape collective identity. This is evident in ways that the patriarchal dimensions of Western imperialism are tied to how the nation became synonymous with wilderness.

A Hidden Curriculum in Landscape Painting: the Group of Seven

In the field of Canadian visual art, the Group of Seven sustains the mythological notion of "Canada as wilderness" which correlates to the familiar theme of nationhood (Beer, 1999; Bordessa, 1992; Hill, 1995; Mackey, 2002; Whitelaw, 2000; Wright, 2004). The creation of visual national icons in the form of landscape paintings resulted in the creation

of a particular national identity that benefited settler groups of British colonial ancestry at the possible expense of other groups within the country. To fully understand the significance of the marriage of landscape art with nationalism it is important to point out that the development of nationalism through the manipulation of landscape imagery was part of colonial expansionism in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, United States, and Canada (Thomas, 1994; Mitchell, 1994). In the case of Canada, the promotion of certain art works to the status of national icon can be traced to a series of events and conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In considering the Group of Seven, among the major producers of the nationalism myth were the artists themselves, who firmly believed in the romantic notion of the land as pristine and wild: inspiration for describing a unique, northern nation. The original group members were Frank Carmichael, J. E. H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Fred Varley, and Frank Johnston. Tom Thomson, an influential associate of these men, died before the group was officially formed but he is often included with the group. They were seven urbanite men who took trips into the areas north of Toronto to sketch and paint the scenery. Although Zemans (2000/2007) notes that as individuals, they painted in other genres throughout the years, such as abstraction, cityscapes, and portraiture, and they held differing opinions about art, the group's legacy continues to reside in landscape. Through their associations with the National Gallery of Canada, the English business elite, and Canadian collectors, their nationalistic paintings and writings influenced popular culture. Because of the promotion of their paintings, Canadian art gained greater international recognition than had previously been experienced (Hill, 1995).

In the early twentieth century, Canadians were attempting to extract themselves from a powerful European influence and they were searching for images that would reflect a uniquely Canadian identity (Hill, 1995;

Nasgaard, 1984; Osborne, 1988; Reid, 1979). This fuelled the popularity of the Group of Seven whose paintings no longer signified the places visited but rather the power of wilderness that was their interpretation of Canada. This coding of these paintings and their creators propelled them into iconic status. In this case, upon viewing the landscape of northern Ontario, I smile in recognition of Wright's (2004) comment that the landscape looks just like a Thompson painting, rather than the reverse. Furthermore, through tourism, the promotion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late nineteenth century helped develop the wilderness myth. Artists were commissioned to create images of the wilderness for marketing purposes (Reid, 1979). The tradition of the "tourist artist" was a strong one and this role was important in the development of landscape images that came to represent Canada.

The National Gallery of Canada, under the considerable influence of curator Eric Brown, strongly supported the Group of Seven and this was another major impetus for their rise in popularity from the 1920s onward. In the 1940s, the National Gallery commissioned reproductions of many of the paintings and distributed them without fee to any Canadian institutions that requested them (Zemans, 1995/2007). Hence, schools across the country became homes for images of the Group of Seven and the relationship between these landscape images and education was cemented. In subsequent years their popularity among the general populous has only continued to grow.

Dawn (2006) notes that the works were particularly attractive to English Canadian leaders in the 1920s because of a paradoxically superficial separation from imperialist Britain. The focus on the virtues of the wilderness landscape manifest in a stylistic break from pastoral English landscape paintings. However, the connections between the Group's paintings and this British tradition of pastoral landscape painting did exist, albeit covertly. When the paintings were exhibited in Britain they were quite well received. Dawn (2006) comments,

The positive responses of the English critics that have been taken as proof of the independence of Canadian art, also confirmed the dependence of that art on English precedent...the imperial solidarity and sameness could be confirmed at the same time that national independence and difference were paraded, a paradox that corresponded to Canada's political position at the time. (p. 33)

Thus, the Group of Seven retained the values and colonial support of Britain in the ways that the works were shown and received there. Approval from Britain was something the English Canadian leaders greatly desired. Tellingly, the French reception of these same paintings was very cool (Dawn, 2006).

The spreading popularity of the paintings also benefitted from the patronage of Robert and Signe McMichael. As collectors, they were enormously influential in promoting and establishing the works within the canon of Canadian art. Today, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection is housed in a gallery near Kleinburg, Ontario, a major portion of which consists of works by the Group of Seven and their contemporaries. The gallery is within easy reach of the major southern Ontario population, hosts 30,000 students annually, and the web site boasts 10,000 hits weekly (Wright, 2004). Clearly, the promotion of the Group of Seven landscape painters continues as a force in Canadian nationalist culture today (Cormier, 2004). The McMichaels donated their large collection to the provincial government with the specific mandate that the works be aligned with the nationalist theme.

These nationalist ties were only loosened in 1998 when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the McMichaels were not within their rights to set the mandate for a public gallery (Wright, 2004). However, in a reversal of this ruling in 2000, the Ontario government returned curatorial decisions to Robert McMichael so that his interpretation of the

original mandate of representing Canadian works by the Group of Seven and Canadian contemporaries would continue. The Ontario Museum Association, artists, and art historians strongly opposed this interference with the government policy of arms-length arts funding (Cavalier, 2002).

Although there is an acknowledgement that the national influence of the Group of Seven was focused on the population of central Canada, for many years there was little indication of an awareness of the limited nationalism that is implied: that of the white, British settler. Hill (2007) laments the continued bias within the gallery toward the wilderness myth of nationhood when he asks,

Is McMichael's icky blood and soil nationalist sentimentality too profoundly wired into the whole [gallery] project, or is there hope? ...Visiting the place has always given me the creeps. The exterior, main entrance, and lobby suggest that you might be visiting a ski chalet rather than a gallery... it's hard to believe they didn't put in a man-made lake nearby just so Pierre Trudeau could paddle up in a canoe in his fringed buckskin coat. What completes it all for me is that they collect and display Aboriginal art as though it somehow has an obvious ancillary role in this tourist caricature of Canada. (p. 213-214)

Some changes in the philosophy of the McMichael Gallery are evident in the exhibition entitled, *The Other Landscape*, organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery. Curator Andrew Hunter (2003) sums up the myth as he states,

Canadians have long dreamt of that little island, that lone pine tree, aspiring to a romantic vision of Canada as wild 'virgin' nature... "Nature" has driven our tourism industry and informed the flattering images we have produced for ourselves and the world, yet most often these images are

like the signs on suburban developments, naming the thing that is being irreversibly altered by our presence. (p. 6)

Both Hill and Hunter make important gestures toward the much needed commentary on Canada's current record of land ownership and use, for the mythologizing of wilderness in landscape art denies many of the realities of northern development, such as logging, mining, and other activities that harm the environment. Also, the Group of Seven often romanticized poor northern towns with a quaintness the belied the residents' hardships (Hill, 1995). Exhibitions like *The Other Landscape* contribute to the demystification of the Group of Seven's Canada-as-wilderness trope and to the critique that has been articulated by a number of artists and academics in the field of art. However, within education, these issues have not received much discussion. Because of the important ways in which our conceptualizations of landscape and wilderness are linked to questions of subjectivity and national identity, it is an important part of the hidden curriculum of discriminatory practices embedded in normative attitudes.

Art historians and artists have commented on how the depiction of an uninhabited land is a detriment to aboriginal peoples (Beer, 1999; Nasgaard, 1984; White, 2007; Wright, 2004; Yuxweluptun, 1991/2007). The Group of Seven painters unwittingly silenced a number of Native groups by ignoring their long history of living in the places depicted in the paintings. The painters intentionally excluded images of people as subject matter in an effort to diverge from earlier pastoral British and European interpretations of the colonies, which did include stereotypical versions of First Nations people. However, in the Group of Seven's romantic interpretation of the land as wilderness, their lack of acknowledgement of aboriginal existence reinforces the patriarchal, settler point of view (Cormier, 2004; Mackey, 2002; O'Brian, 2007). Dawn (2006) refers to this institutionalized othering of the many aboriginal

groups as a “discourse of disappearance” whereby influential colonial leaders within the dominion of Canada repeatedly romanticized the disappearance of “Indians”, lamenting a loss of purity. In fact, no one disappeared. Rather, ceremonies, traditions, cultural artifacts, and languages continued to be practiced despite extremely discriminatory and damaging laws against such cultural activities. The tension within the desire of English Canada to remain independent but aligned with Britain, coupled with the romantic version of an uninhabited wilderness and the disappearance of First nations people is at the heart of a more complicated version of history in Canada (Dawn, 2006).

The Group of Seven artists continued to influence the development of Canadian art for years after the group broke up because of their individual status and their positions as teachers. Because the Group continually espoused that their inspiration was derived from the purity of nature and the land, they often did not acknowledge influences within the world of art, such as the Scandinavian landscape movement, Art Nouveau, and Impressionism. Thus, not only did a generation of artists who came after them remain relatively ignorant of world art trends, but also, the Group’s narrow description of inspirational sources was instrumental in developing the “wilderness nation” (Dawn, 2006; Nasgaard, 1984). Hill (1995) notes that judgment of the paintings on their Canadian-ness, rather than on artistic qualities, created a climate of critique that resulted in other contemporary artists, such as David Milne, to be under appreciated for his breakthroughs in abstraction.

Despite these criticisms, in many contemporary educational settings and in popular culture, there remains a strong association of nationalism with wilderness that manifests in attitudes toward the Group of Seven that are government supported. In the seventy-fifth anniversary year of the group’s first exhibition, a large retrospective show called “The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation” was organized at the National Gallery of Canada. Jessup (1996/2007) comments that despite approximately

twenty-five years of multicultural legislation embedded firmly within the country's constitution that supports nationalism framed by diversity, the 1995 retrospective exhibition did not critique the wilderness vision of Canada which supported "a nationalism based on the notion that there is an essential Canadian identity" (p. 189). Furthermore, the Group of Seven were reinforced as national icons within popular culture through various government sanctioned initiatives surrounding the show, such as the commission of the rock group, Rheostatics, to put the images to music and a line of house paint that was developed from the colours in the paintings (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2005). Although much critical discussion has occurred within art historical circles in the past fifteen years, since Jessup's comments, little has changed within the visual culture of schools.

This is partially explained by the fact that due to the increased technological mediation in contemporary life, most people are more disconnected from the land than they once were. They often appreciate landscape because their lives are devoid of significant experiences in the outdoors. It makes landscape seem more precious, and consequently, there is a tendency to idealize nature (Cosgrove, 1984; Mitchell, 1994). The popularity of idealized landscape images of wilderness in the forms of paintings, posters, and other decorations is related to this predisposition. As Mitchell (1994) states, "landscape is an object of nostalgia in a postmodern and postcolonial era" (p. 20). This romanticism of wilderness landscape has a strong history in our culture that continues in education.

Curricular Considerations of Wilderness Images

I am not suggesting that Canadians should not take national pride in representations of the historical artistic canon, such as those of the Group of Seven. Nor do I discount the aesthetic appreciation of nature, as this is

a real and important experience for many people. Aesthetic and emotional responses to nature and landscape have inspired creative thought for centuries. I have personally been moved to create art because of my reaction to the land. However, within the pervasive, institutional maintenance of the wilderness myth, and its accompanying blindness to relations of power that are inherent in the development of many national art icons, educators must question their part by reflecting upon their positions in relation to such images and the ways that they incorporate images of the land in their classrooms. Educators are well placed to address the complications and assumptions hidden within landscape images.

A consideration of the associations between the myth of wilderness and national identity uncovers convoluted relationships. Firstly, narrow understandings of Canadian landscape images do not speak to the lives of many Canadian youth. While many students see themselves as Canadian, they often have multiple nodes of identity through experiences within global relationships via technology and migration, and thus, students (and teachers) align their identities differently in different contexts (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). The complexities of identity as performed in relationships with others results in ambiguity and flexibility. As Yon (2000) suggests

...globalization, diaspora, and difference act in such ways that these subjects (youth) can be seen to transcend the idea of an absolutist national identity and culture in favour of a set of experiences that connect them. In this way, they forge communities and a sense of belonging through differences rather than conformity. ... Youth can belong and be Canadian in many different ways. (p. 135)

This runs counter to the idea of national identity reinforced in much landscape art. Through the pervasive exposure to images of wilderness in classrooms and in popular culture, one static version of national

identity is implied, thereby denying the complex reality of virtual and physical formations of the self. Educators have the opportunity, through a critical examination of the ways these images are used, to open fruitful discussions surrounding these ontological issues.

Secondly, if one is not of white, colonial ancestry, the subtle and not so subtle institutionally discriminatory realities of schools affect students' learning experiences with regard to many manifestations of difference, including race, gender, and class (Dawn, 2006; Hill, 2007; Yon, 2000). The colonial framework that assumes a homogenous Canadian subject and that propelled wilderness paintings to the status of national icon, is embedded in images within the lived experiences in schools. These examples can be as innocuous as the pictures chosen to decorate the hallways and classrooms, to the selection of photos in a social studies textbook. Even the "image" of an authoritative figure as white and/or male is reinforced through the disproportionate number of white teachers and administrators in comparison to the student population, which leaves students with limited or non-existent educational role models. This can affect the opportunities that students take for verbal engagement within class discussions (Frideres, 2007), and it can greatly affect how they view their involvement as school community members. In many cases, it is the *missing* image that evidences discrimination. This can be a subtle and more difficult aspect of school life to pinpoint. In other words, schools need to ask what kinds of images of the land are not being shown in classrooms, hallways, and libraries? It is worthy of our consideration as educators that we look closely at connections among educational inequities and the pervasive wilderness myth still alive today that manifests in various visual ways. Teachers must consider how visual education practices might alienate aboriginal youth, immigrants, and anyone else who does not fit into the idea of Canada as wilderness nation. How can alternative views of Canadian landscape enter into the curricular conversations?

Thirdly, a critical study in classrooms of this largely unconscious acceptance of Canada-as-wilderness in contradistinction to the realities of environmental degradation is an area worthy of continual discussion. While science classes have developed as a strong voice in environmental education, the continual exposure to romantic landscape images inside and outside of classrooms can inadvertently undermine the message of environmental responsibility. This is especially true if students are falsely reassured through these idealized images that there is a vast green space of “untouched” wilderness that is their legacy.

I suggest that self-awareness is one area in which all educators can become leaders so that this curriculum of landscape images, either those of the Group of Seven or the myriad other visual expressions of the wilderness that seep through textbooks, television, advertising, and other spaces in popular culture can be addressed in schools. In this way, images can be viewed with an awareness of and respect for difference by unraveling the myths they produce and historically situating them so that this Canada-as-wilderness concept is seen as just one of many representations of Canada (White, 2007).

The ethical challenge for educators involves critical and sensitive teaching about landscape images. Wilson (2005) recommends a pedagogy that is non-hierarchical with the aim of deciphering meanings embedded in the images of our culture so that we honour difference. This challenge leads me to the work of education scholars (Chambers, 1999; Irwin, 2004; Laidlaw, Davis, & Sumara, 2001), as I highlight three notable assumptions about teaching: that the democratic principles of equality and inclusivity are goals to be pursued within education; that there is power in images to influence people at the deep level of subject formation and collective identity; that a critical examination of epistemological and ontological implications of living in an image-soaked world, particularly with regard to the land, can help to bring

students greater ownership over aspects of their lives, including informed decisions about how they choose to perform their citizenship.

With these goals in mind, I conclude with this consideration: we are a country where the majority of the population hugs a skinny, horizontal line along the forty-ninth parallel, our backs to the social and physical realities of vast tracks of worked land to the north. We need to psychologically turn around, and in doing so, layer our virtual and urban places over, under, and between the idea of nationalism as tied to wilderness so that we become more flexible in our collectivism. This is critical because we live in a period that is characterized by a continued blurring of national borders in so many aspects of life. As Canadians, we share this land but we can do a better job of taking care of it and of each other in it. Noting the ambiguous influences of the land upon our national psyche, Chambers (1999, 2008) proposes that our educational institutions, and specifically our curricula, look to difference ways of representing who we are, in relation to where we are. Landscape images have an important role to play in this regard.

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