THE TERMINAL CITY AND THE RHETORIC OF UTOPIA:
John Vanderpant's Photographs of Terminal Grain Elevators
1926 - 1936

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the photographs of terminal grain elevators produced by John Vanderpant, a successful Vancouver commercial photographer who also produced images that were consciously positioned within a high art discourse. Vanderpant turned to the grain elevator as subject matter in response to the remarks of an unidentified English critic who, while praising the images in a 1925 London exhibition of Vanderpant’s work, noted they lacked an identifiably Canadian character. In taking up the grain elevator, Vanderpant positioned his work within the national visual culture constructed around the work of the Group of Seven. He also tapped into symbolic meanings which resonated around the elevator’s modern functional architecture, an architecture which has been held up by Le Corbusier as a specifically North American expression of the engineer’s rigor and purpose. In the midst of the prosperity enjoyed by Vancouver’s urban bourgeoisie during the mid-1920s, the terminal elevators operating on Burrard Inlet embodied the promise of abundance held out by an increasingly centralized and modernized resource economy.

Vanderpant’s earliest elevator photographs employed the stylistics of Pictorialism, a genre of photography that relied on soft focus and hazy atmospheric effect to suggest a painterly surface. In response to the tension between his formal vocabulary and the modernity of his subject matter, Vanderpant rejected Pictorialism as a mode of representation that “travelled by horsecart midst the progress of motor power on wheel and wing.” Throughout the 1930s he worked within a modernist idiom that emphasized what were seen to be the intrinsic properties of photographic technology: sharp focus, clearly
delineated form, and tilted perspective. His modernist elevator photographs
verged on geometric abstraction, in an attempt to penetrate “superficial
appearance” and reveal the underlying “strength and sublime simplicity” of the
elevator’s structure. Combining an interest in mysticism and a Kantian
understanding of aesthetic experience, Vanderpant accessed a version of
modernism that held onto an optimistic, utopian vision in the face of the social
fragmentation of the Depression.

My thesis addresses the position of Vanderpant’s elevator photographs,
and the shift in his aesthetic vocabulary marked out by these works, in relation
to the construction of a national movement in Canadian visual art and an
historical context in which the state and capital were employing specific
measures to unify and transform a fractured social body. I argue that, within this
context, Vanderpant’s project was fragile and contradictory. Despite the anti-
materialism he articulated as the Depression advanced, the ideological force of
Vanderpant’s utopian vision would seem to have been aligned with the forms of
modern scientific discipline, such as Taylorism, that promised utopia through
success in production while naturalizing dominative social relations.
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INTRODUCTION

I first became aware of John Vanderpant's photographs in 1976, through the catalogue that accompanied the retrospective exhibition of his work mounted that year by the National Gallery of Canada. Initially, I didn't find these images to be especially compelling. At the time I was a photography student at the Banff School of Fine Arts, and — like many other photography students from that period — my understanding of the history of photography as art was shaped by the ideas of John Szarkowski and the publications produced by the Museum of Modern Art in New York during the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s. The history put forward by Szarkowski was essentially a narrative which emphasized a transition from the imitation of painting during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries toward an approach that drew upon what Szarkowski identified as the intrinsic properties of photography: sharp focus, subtle tonal gradation, and an emphasis on detail. This narrative revolved around a modernist, ontological approach to the medium; a conception that photography could distinguish itself from other art forms by adhering to its "essential" characteristics. Validation as art was achieved through the construction of an autonomous aesthetic vocabulary that was apparently capable of accounting for the visual structure of any photograph.

Within this framework, John Vanderpant's work represents a provincial example of the shift from Pictorialism to "straight photography" that occupied a central position in the narrative laid out by Szarkowski. In Vanderpant's work this shift was less dramatic than in the photography of someone like the American photographer Edward Weston, and as a consequence his images seemed less significant. This lesser status appeared to be confirmed by the inferior production values of the National Gallery catalogue; the comparatively low quality of the plates in the Vanderpant catalogue lacked the visual authority of the sumptuous
reproductions in the monographs on artists like Weston that appeared during the 1970s boom in publications on American photography.

While Vanderpant's work as a whole didn't generate any great interest on my part, his images of terminal grain elevators did have a special resonance for me over the following decade. This was, no doubt, due to my upbringing in Saskatchewan, and the importance of grain elevators to the inhabitants of the Canadian prairies. A persistent memory from my childhood is of a terminal elevator on the western outskirts of my home town of Saskatoon, which could be seen through the window of the family car as we made our way into the countryside for Sunday picnics during the early 1960s. Blazing white in the prairie sun, it had the phrase "Canadian Government Elevator" spelled out in twenty foot high letters on each side. At the time, I was not aware of the collapse of the international grain trade during the Depression, and the depopulation of the province that had been taking place since. Nonetheless, the elevator possessed a structure that seemed excessively clean and regular, and in this respect it intimated at a kind of failed utopian moment. Despite its connection to the agrarian activity that took place all around city, the architecture of the terminal elevator seemed curiously out of place. The sense that it was imposed upon the landscape — dropped there from somewhere else — was reinforced by the oversized text that ran across the concrete silos. The elevator was obviously part of a gigantic network. The scale of this network was beyond my comprehension, but it was clear that its center lay far beyond the horizon.

The connections between the terminal elevator and ancient architecture that informed the utopian projects of Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier were evident long before I had heard of either. I recall that when I first saw a photograph of the Parthenon, I thought it looked like the elevator on the edge of town. However,
because of its marginal status within the overall scheme of Canada, I never equated Saskatoon with Athens.

While Vanderpant's elevator photographs remained imbedded in my consciousness, I didn't give any serious consideration to them through the 1980s. The connection between Vanderpant's work and the nationalist project of the Group of Seven didn't help in this regard. I had held a resentment toward the Group ever since I had been forced to write an essay on J.E.H. MacDonald in grade five. Later on, when I was employed as a curator in regional art museums, the work of the Group of Seven had such an official and emblematic status that it seemed best to avoid it. The story was clear: the Group represented the emergence of a uniquely Canadian art which had eventually triumphed over its philistine opposition. Their activities had been examined so extensively that there couldn't possibly be anything worthwhile to add to the existing accounts.

After taking up graduate studies at UBC, it became evident there was a great deal to add. Exposure to post-structuralist and postcolonial theory raised questions as to the process through which nationhood is "narrated" and the manner in which a fairly limited range of imagery has been linked to Canadian identity. Homi Bhabha's discussion of the nation as a structure of ideological ambivalence within modernity — a site in which the mythical origin of the nation in the far distant past is held out as a sign of its modern character — was especially relevant in this regard. His assertion that on the margin of the nation space "the subject of cultural discourse . . . is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contestation of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative" closely coincided with my own experiences on the Canadian Prairies, in which the tension between individuation and interpellation within Canadian identity was heightened.
by a pervasive awareness of distance and displacement from the centers of cultural and economic power.

The writing of Michel Foucault was also crucial to a reconsideration of the nationalist visual culture around the Group of Seven. The understanding that within discourse analysis "we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes" pointed to major gaps within the existing histories of nationalism and modern art in Canada. The work of Bhabha and Foucault provided both a framework from which to critically examine the parameters of a nationalist visual culture, and an approach to John Vanderpant's photography that was clearly richer and more productive than the modernist teleology set out by John Szarkowski.

Charles C. Hill's 1991 essay "The National Gallery, a National Art, Critical Judgement and the State" is representative of the approach historians have traditionally taken to the modernism of the Group of Seven. In this text, Hill describes how the Group, National Gallery of Canada director Eric Brown, and Sir Edmund Walker, chairman of the gallery's board of trustees, triumphed "in the face of vicious opposition" so that "a creative, national vision" could flourish. The story is one in which a new art emerges as an appropriate expression of the "spirit" of a newly independent nation, displacing an outdated academic art. The emergence of this new art is natural; the support it received from the National Gallery is simply evidence of the visionary character of the gallery's staff and trustees. The discussion is limited to the realm of high culture — the interplay between this new art and broader social discourses is left unexamined. The question of why the modernism of the Group of Seven took the form it did — in Foucault's words "why it
could not be other than it was . . . how it assumes . . . a place that no other could occupy" — is neither raised or addressed.

Other accounts of this moment in Canadian art have devoted a great deal of effort and space to tracing the links between the work of artists like Lawren Harris, Fred Varley, Jock Macdonald, and John Vanderpant and mystical discourses such as Theosophy. While writers such as Ann Davis have noted that Harris, Varley, Macdonald, and Vanderpant turned to mysticism as they "were discontented with a civilization alien to the spirit" the nature of this discontent and the ideological character of the mysticism taken up by many Canadian modernists remains unexamined. Davis and others have acknowledged an anti-capitalist stance in the work of these artists, yet the precise character of this anti-capitalism and the question of how an art associated with such a stance could have been so readily accommodated — indeed enthusiastically supported — within the apparatus of a bourgeois capitalist state have not been addressed.

John Vanderpant's work offers a useful entrance through which to engage these questions. On one hand, his practice from the mid-1920s on was clearly shaped by the modernism and nationalism of the Group of Seven. He was an active supporter of their work, assisting in its presentation in Vancouver and defending their painting against critics in the local press. He also shared Varley and Harris' interest in mysticism and non-western philosophy. On the other hand, his location in Vancouver and his choice of photography as a medium left his work in a marginal position within this visual culture. Further, for practical and aesthetic reasons, he could not simply adopt the conventions and codes employed in the Group's painting. An examination of this marginal position within an ascendent nationalist visual culture permits the limits of that discourse, and the circumstances that governed the events that occurred within it, to be more clearly discerned.
This thesis focuses on the photographs of terminal elevators Vanderpant produced between 1926 and 1936. Vanderpant took up the terminal elevator in order to revitalize his practice - which was at a point of crisis - by investing his work with an identifiably national and modern character. The taking up of the grain elevator as subject matter, and the shifts Vanderpant's formal vocabulary took over the following ten years, point toward the boundaries and tensions that shaped the production of modern art in Canada, and the intersection between that production and broader discourses which were transforming daily life in Canadian society.

In Chapter One, I examine the tensions underlying the Pictorialist discourse in which Vanderpant had achieved great success during the early 1920s, and his rejection of Pictorialism in the face of the Group of Seven's critical success at the 1924 and 1925 Wembley Empire Exhibitions. Chapter Two examines the particular character modernism took in Canada, and the resonance this modernism held in relation to new technologies that held out a utopian promise in transforming a fractured social body. I argue that the ambivalence which characterized the relationship between Vanderpant's photographs and modernism in the broad sense, points toward tensions underlying bourgeois culture in the face of industrialization, and the modern nation as a structure of ideological ambivalence. Chapter Three considers the shifts in Vanderpant's formal vocabulary, his interest in mysticism, and an engagement with the aesthetics of the sublime which permitted him to maintain a modernist utopian vision in the face of the social fragmentation of the Depression. Central to this discussion is a consideration of Vanderpant's anti-capitalism, and the mode through which his understanding of "stimulating vision" operated. The final chapter looks at the reception of Vanderpant's work from the 1930s, together with that of colleagues such as Fred Varley and Jock Macdonald, on a local and national level, and considers his
production in relation to discussions of utopian work put forward by Fredric Jameson.

I have not devoted much space to the biographical details of Vanderpant's life, as these have been adequately covered elsewhere. At the same time, I hope that I have not entirely dispensed with Vanderpant as a subject. Rather, I have attempted to approach his work as that of an agent whose activities are qualified by the mediating structures of the discourses he enters and participates in — as a figure who both affects, and is affected by, these discourses.

In terms of methodology, I have drawn upon a range of post-structuralist strategies, including semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, and deconstruction. However, I have not taken an orthodox post-structuralist approach, and have attempted to avoid what I see as an excessively formal, anti-historical aspect of some post-structuralist methodologies. Rather, I have attempted to engage with what Stephen Greenblatt has called "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" and to consider intention, genre, and historical context in my account of Vanderpant's work, the discourses that shaped it, and the spaces it occupied.
NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION


5. Foucault, p. 28.


7. Davis, p. 162.


CHAPTER ONE
OF HORSECARTS AND MOTOR POWER: A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

... pictorial photography... is a way behind in photographically giving what other arts are doing in their medium. It still dwells in the fairyland of romanticism... it is travelling by a horsecart midst the progress of motor power on wheel and wing.¹

These remarks must have seemed like a provocation when they appeared in the November 1928 issue of The Photographic Journal. The journal, like the Royal Photographic Society that published it, had been a champion of Pictorialist photography during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and these remarks were clearly a challenge to a concept held dear by the journal's editors — the notion that "the principles of art are permanent and no [pictorialist photography] that is not based on them can be worth anything. They can be expressed in the same language and literary forms that have done duty in the past."² The surprise registered by The Photographic Journal's readers upon the appearance of these comments in the august journal's pages would have been compounded when their unlikely source — the Canadian photographer John Vanderpant — was considered. Vanderpant was well known to The Photographic Journal's readership, through the international reputation he had acquired as a Pictorialist photographer within the network of camera club salons that flourished in Europe, the United States and anglophone Canada. During the early 1920s, Vanderpant had participated in up to forty salons per year. He founded the successful New Westminster International Salon of Photography in 1923, and the Royal Photographic Society mounted a solo exhibition of his work in 1925, which subsequently travelled to the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Articles on his work regularly appeared in publications such as American Photographer, The Photographic Journal, and Focus, and he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, in recognition of his accomplishments, in 1926.³
By the mid-1920s, Vanderpant's practice was comfortably situated within a discourse that positioned photography as high art through the adoption of a codified formal vocabulary that emphasized qualities such as soft focus, atmospheric effect, and carefully balanced composition to emulate 19th century European painting. He was not a figure that The Photographic Journal's audience would have expected to challenge Pictorialism's legitimacy.

Vanderpant's break with a discourse in which he had achieved such success points to a moment of crisis in his artistic practice. We can infer from his assertion that Pictorialist photography was outdated and lagging behind achievements realized in other media, that this crisis was related to the ability (or inability) of his practice to address conditions of life in a modern industrialized society. However, as subsequent passages from Vanderpant's text demonstrate, this crisis was also related to the difficulty of linking the vocabulary of Pictorialism to the nationalist discourse that gained prominence in the visual arts in Canada during the early 1920s — in Vanderpant's own words, to "the impossibility of conveying the spirit of Canada . . . by employing methods of pretty representation." 

This public break with Pictorialism was both general and specific in origin. It was linked to contradictions inherent in Pictorialist art photography since the movement's inception. It also derived from the specifics of Vanderpant's position as an artist working on the geographic margins of a post-colonial society in which a particular set of discursive practices was seen to mark a break from the subordinating power of the former imperial center.

Pictorialist art photography had emerged out of 19th century social formations connected to the rapid growth of industry and mass manufacture of cheap commodities. In mid-19th century Europe, widespread industrialization represented a challenge to traditional aesthetic standards which alarmed members of the upper-middle class and triggered movements (the Arts and Crafts Movement
and Art Nouveau, for example) directed toward the aesthetic improvement of manufactured goods. In conjunction with these movements came an emphasis on the importance of amateur artistic activities. As Ulrich Keller has noted, "a growing number of the educated . . . began to retreat from the 'vulgar' and 'materialism' of their industrial environment into the tranquil and cultivated atmosphere of Tudor homes, floral wallpapers, undulating vases and bibliophile libraries." Photography became linked to aesthetic reform in the 1880s, as technical advances simplified the processes of making a photograph and generated widespread interest among amateur practitioners. Millions took up photography as a pastime in the late 19th century, including some who were influenced by the current of aesthetic reform and "began to look upon camera work as a serious occupation involving the purchase of sophisticated equipment, carefully planned vacation trips to scenic regions, frequent museum visits and art historical studies. In their hands photography gradually gained an artistic dimension, and in the process a special support system of clubs, periodicals and exhibitions sprang up around it." The affiliations between early art photography and the aesthetic reform movement are clearly evident in the emphasis Pictorialist portraiture placed on finely crafted artifacts, in emulation of aristocratic taste; as Keller has pointed out "... if art nouveau furniture and ceramics provided the proper environment for the fin-de-siecle aesthete, photographic likenesses in the 'pictorial' style offered the sitter a faithful mirror image."

Within art photography's network of clubs, journals and salons, Pictorialists developed a codified aesthetic creed to distinguish themselves from less serious amateur photographers, and from commercial photographers engaged in the mass production of portraits. Central to this creed was the emulation of 19th century European painting; "The photographer must go outside his profession and enter the province of the painter. The wielders of the brush must be his teachers." As art
museums, academies and most critics did not consider photographs as legitimate works of art, the development of a formal vocabulary that drew upon the aesthetic codes of established media and the production of exhibitions and publications that tapped into the traditions of the French Academy's salons were the only means available to satisfy Pictorialist photographers' longing for artistic prestige. While 19th century avant-garde cultures — such as the Secessionist movements — served as models for elite art photography organizations like the Linked Ring Brotherhood, the Elect and the Photo-Secession, the photographers who made up these groups could never quite define what they were rebelling against. "Art Photography was a more or less cosmetic proposition, one which stressed questions of appearance at the expense of substantive issues. Its ultimate goal was not the production of meaningful pictures, but the display of photographs in 'real' art museums."

While publications such as Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* stood "as an almost Pre-Raphaelite celebration of craft in the teeth of industrialization," the backing of a rapidly expanding photographic industry was crucial for the Pictorialist support system. The patronage of companies such as Eastman Kodak and Zeiss was essential in sustaining amateur photographic magazines — including *Camera Work* — and in mounting amateur photography exhibitions with "artistic" sections for Pictorialist photographs. The photographic industry avidly promoted the work of figures such as Stieglitz and Edward Steichen, looking to increase sales of equipment and materials by convincing the average amateur could be that he/she could enter "the dream city of art." During the first two decades of this century, the work of Pictorialists such as Stieglitz, Steichen and Alvin Langdon Coburn was widely imitated. While the members of the Photo-Secession may have positioned themselves as radicals, they were not, in fact, "revolutionary outcasts ridiculed by
the masses, but rather pilot consumers of photographic equipment and trendsetters for popular photographic styles.\textsuperscript{13}

Early twentieth century Pictorialists occupied a paradoxical and contradictory position in relation to modern industrial society. While many Pictorialists adopted an avant-garde posture, their ambition was essentially to "accredit the photographer before the exact tribunal he had overthrown",\textsuperscript{14} and consequently their work was easily subsumed into an emerging consumer culture. Further, while Pictorialists utilized an industrial technology and were closely connected to a rapidly expanding photographic industry, they deployed a formal vocabulary that called up a craft-like mode of production and suggested their images were hand-made rather than machine-taken. As Allan Sekula has argued, early twentieth century avant-garde photography "was fundamentally reactive, the outcome of a desire to seize a small area of creative autonomy from a tainted, instrumentalized medium, a medium that had demonstrated repeatedly its complicity with the forces of industrialization."\textsuperscript{15}

The support system associated with Pictorialist art photography appeared in Canada during the 1890s, as camera clubs were formed in urban centers such as Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton. By the early twentieth century, links with American and British Pictorialists were well established. Members of the Photo-Secession exhibited in the Toronto Camera Club's annual salons, Canadian Pictorialists such as H.B. Lefroy and J. Percy Hodgins participated in major American salons, Stieglitz published the work of Canadians Sidney Carter and Harold Mortimer-Lamb in \textit{Camera Work} and articles on Canadian Pictorialism appeared in foreign publications such as \textit{Photograms of the Year}.\textsuperscript{16}

While the Linked Ring dissolved in 1910 and the Photo-Secession disbanded in 1912 — and while many of the prominent figures associated with elite art photography rejected painterly effects in favor of a hard-edged approach that
came to be known as "straight photography" towards the end of the First World War — Pictorialism remained the dominant aesthetic discourse in the network of camera club salons that flourished in Canada (as well as the U.S., Europe and elsewhere) during the 1920s and 1930s.  

The postwar growth in the popularity of camera clubs and salons was linked to technological improvements in cameras, film and printing materials, as photochemical research driven largely by military demands produced the panchromatic emulsions and faster lenses which made amateur photography simpler. While their membership was drawn primarily from the bourgeoisie, camera clubs varied somewhat in their focus. Some were elite organizations for accomplished photographers, modelled on groups such as the Photo-Secession. Others were less restrictive in their membership. Most clubs, however, organized annual salons which — like Vanderpant's New Westminster International Salon of Photography — were often held in conjunction with agricultural and industrial exhibitions or fairs. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, photographic salons in Canada and elsewhere claimed status as art exhibitions by holding onto a system of classification loosely derived from the Salons of the French Academy, with photographs being submitted under categories such as landscape, architecture, portraiture, marine and genre.  

The images which filled camera club salons during the 1920s utilized compositions based upon broad arrangements of light and shadow that aimed at an overall impression or pictorial effect, while suppressing sharply rendered detail. They deliberately negated the specificity usually associated with photography — the sense that the image was produced at a particular place and time — in favour of a highly generalized image. It was standard practice to produce a single print by combining elements from several negatives. In Pictorialist landscapes, dramatic cloud-filled skies were regularly substituted for mundane, clear ones. Some
pictorial photographers employed printing procedures such as the gum bichromate or bromoil processes, which permitted brushwork during the developing stage and the incorporation of coloured pigments in images that deliberately resembled etchings more than photographs. Those Pictorialists who used standard silver-bromide materials favored printing papers with a pronounced surface texture, often placed in elaborate matts to claim status as a precious object.

The aesthetic parameters that informed the Pictorialist discourse during the 1920s are clearly evident in images such as Vanderpant's 1924 photograph *A Man's Portrait* [fig. 1]. Printed on a matte surfaced paper, the softly-focussed image relies on traditional compositional balance and atmospheric effect to emphasize a dramatic play of light over any sense of specific identity. Vanderpant's *The Stone Cutters* [fig. 2], also from 1924, uses similar formal devices to present a glorified, idyllic vision of manual labour, a vision clearly aligned with the ethos that informed the aesthetic reform movement out of which Pictorialism originally emerged. This ethos was reiterated in Vanderpant's address, entitled *Pictorial Photography*, to the 1925 convention of the Photographers' Association of America in which he criticized the increasingly mercenary character of the photographic trade and the poor quality of mass produced portraits, while urging his audience of commercial photographers to, "Love our profession for our profession's sake, not for the financial benefit in it."20

Both the formal vocabulary and the ethos of Pictorialism easily co-existed with the 19th century British traditions that prevailed within the Vancouver art community of the early to mid-1920s. Contemporary commentators such as Constance Errol linked Vanderpant's work to the pastoral paintings of urban life produced by Frank Brangwyn, a British artist avidly collected by the city's bourgeois elite.21 The philosophy that framed aesthetic reform and the Arts and Crafts
Figure 1
John Vanderpant
A Man's Portrait 1924
Figure 2
John Vanderpant
The Stone Cutters 1924
movement also shaped the goals articulated by the British Columbia Art League on its founding in 1921:

To promote and encourage education in arts and crafts, to cause to be founded and maintained a central and branch schools of fine arts and industrial arts and crafts, and permanent art galleries and museums, to hold arts and crafts exhibitions, to improve civic art, town and home planning, architecture and landscape gardening.22

Thus, the Pictorialist salon network — in which images adhering to conventions of representation formulated in imperial centers circulated to and from the cultural margins — and Vanderpant's practice of the early to mid-1920s fit rather seamlessly into the context of a newly post-colonial culture which still looked back to the imperial power for its ideals and standards.

While Pictorialism was ascendent in Canada during the early 1920s, it was not a discourse free of tension. The proliferation of salons during the 1920s set up a competitive context in which photographers vied to be accepted into as many salons possible, while the salons themselves were often in informal competition to gain prestige by including the largest possible number of international entries. As Pictorialism became increasingly popularized, questions were raised as to whether "artistic standards" were being denigrated, and to what extent "progress" was being made.23 In reviewing the 1925 Toronto Salon, J. Harold MacKay criticized what he perceived as the generally low quality of the entries, bemoaning that "... a great country so replete with natural beauty produces so few earnest workers."24 In a 1926 article entitled "The Danger of the Photographic Salon", John Vanderpant wondered whether the growth in the number of salons was "a sign of progress in pictorial photography, whether it tends to elevate the quality of work in general, or whether ... it tends to make pictorial photography a mere artistic sport." He went on to note "Many a print nowadays is made for the Salon instead of being an essential expression of the pictorialist."25
Further tensions were evident in relation to the incompatibility of Pictorialism's tenets and the sense of nationalism that was emerging within Canadian painting. The adherence to visual formulas derived from European academic painting, and the highly generalized character of Pictorialist imagery, worked against the expression of a regional identity or specific sense of place. As early as 1913 Harold Mortimer-Lamb complained that Canadian pictorial work had no national character and "might have been done anywhere." In 1920, Arthur Goss optimistically predicted that Canadian art photographers would follow the lead of the newly-formed Group of Seven, "I believe it will be along the lines adopted by a group of Canadian painters to paint our scenery in a Canadian way that photographers must progress . . . [to produce] something worthwhile and characteristic of our climate and our country." However, five years later the biologist and amateur photographer A. Brooker Klugh lamented the difficulty of adapting Pictorialist aesthetics to the Canadian landscape, in his monthly column in the British journal *Amateur Photographer and Photography*:

... scenery [in Canada] is by the mile, whereas in England it is by the foot. This very fact makes all the difference, because in England there is a great wealth of what one might term 'pretty bits'; just, in fact, the circumscribed and complete bits of landscape which make most satisfactory compositions. In Canada, on the other hand, there is a great lack of the 'pretty bits'; there are grandeur, vastness, and expansive views, which are entrancing to the eye, but which do not make effective compositions when reduced to the confines of a print of any reasonable size.

Thus, if Pictorialism was the dominant discourse in Canadian art photography during the 1920s, its viability was being called into question on two fronts. As Pictorialism was submerged into a rising consumer culture, it became increasingly difficult for "serious" art photographers to distinguish their work from the thousands of repetitious, banal and formulaic images that filled photographic salons. Perhaps more significantly, Klugh's comments indicate that Pictorialism was incapable of conveying the kind of "grandeur and vastness" that was central to
the aesthetics of the nationalist movement being consolidated around the figures of
the Group of Seven; a movement bolstered through the patronage of the National
Gallery of Canada — the kind of institution to which Pictorialists had so ardently,
but unsuccessfully, sought admission.30

The activities of the National Gallery were vital — at least in anglophone
Canada — in consolidating this nationalist visual culture. During the 1920s, the
gallery circulated loan exhibitions in which the Group of Seven's work featured
prominently across the country. Examples of these exhibitions were presented in
conjunction with annual agricultural and trade fairs in Vancouver and New
Westminster beginning in 1921. During the summer of 1921, National Gallery
director Eric Brown undertook an extensive series of lectures on "Canadian Art and
the Canadian National Gallery" in order to encourage local communities to
organize their own galleries and to garner support for modernist painting as
exemplified by the Group of Seven. The Group's work was characterized as a shift
away from the exact representation of nature, toward an aesthetic which more
directly expressed the artist's response to subject matter. Although the Group of
Seven drew upon traditions linked to 19th century aesthetic reform, their work was
represented as a mode of painting in which intense colour, a loose but controlled
handling of paint, and an emphasis on the wilderness landscape as subject matter
delineated a breaking away from the aesthetics of British academicism and the
shedding of a colonial mentality.

While the National Gallery emerged as an advocate of modern painting as
an appropriate vehicle for the expression of Canadian identity, the gallery was
careful to promote only those forms of modernism that were compatible with
bourgeois democracy, and to link them with the country's developing resource
economy. In a lecture given in Vancouver in June 1921 — a lecture cited in an
article entitled "Director Lauds Modern School" in the Vancouver Daily World —
Brown asserted, "We must not confound this [modern] tendency ... with futurism ... . Any movement tending to distort art and art's creations has as much relation to true art as Bolshevism has to true government, and candidly it is a sign of degeneracy." Brown went on to emphasize the material value art would hold for the country, stating that "Art will be to Canada of indescribable economic value. Canada's manufactures need art to develop them, and when the Dominion has more art she will keep within her own borders the talent and the enterprise which has left here to bring wealth and fame to other countries."31

Brown's coupling of modern painting and Canada's economic potential was characteristic of the discussion around the Group of Seven's work. Two years earlier, for example, Arthur Lismer had noted that Canada did not yet possess "art in the service of industry" and argued that for Canada to be competitive in the modern world it would be necessary to utilize art museums, technical schools and universities in the education of industrial designers who could produce "goods more pleasing to public taste and of more industrial value."32 The linkage of art and industrial progress was also optimistically reiterated in the foreword to the catalogue for the Group of Seven's third exhibition, which proclaimed, "In the midst of discovery and progress, of vast horizons and a beckoning future, Art must take to the road and risk all for the glory of a great adventure."33 As Paul Walton has argued, this emerging visual culture signified a desire to move away from a colonial mentality and reflected a widespread optimism that the development of the country's physical resources, through the utilization of modern technology, would end the post-war depression and permit the continuation of the "phenomenal progress" of the first decades of the twentieth century.34

John Vanderpant was well aware of the Group of Seven's work, and the activities of the National Gallery. He had served as vice chairman of the art committee for the New Westminster Provincial Exhibition — which mounted
National Gallery loan exhibitions — in 1922 and 1923, and was chairman of the committee from 1924-27. He also served on the executive of the British Columbia Art League, the organization that sponsored Brown's 1921 lecture in Vancouver.

While figures such as Vanderpant and Harold Mortimer-Lamb actively supported the Group's work, the National Gallery loan exhibitions were the focus of conflict between elements of the local art community and the National Gallery. In 1925, Mortimer-Lamb — who had been an advocate of the work of A.Y. Jackson as early as 1913 — engaged in a heated and public debate with Eric Brown in which he accused the National Gallery of discriminating against western Canada by requiring the host organizations to pay freight costs far in excess of those paid in the rest of the country, and by sending the West exhibitions made up of second-rate works. While figures such as Mortimer-Lamb embraced much of the nationalist agenda put forward by the National Gallery, they also held that the gallery did not recognize communities on the country's geographical margins as possessing the same cultural significance as Toronto or Ottawa. Within some quarters, then, engagement with the modernism advocated by the National Gallery served as an affirmation that Vancouver was a culturally advanced community, one in a position to demand its due attention from central Canadian institutions such as the National Gallery.

1925 was a watershed for the nationalist movement in Canadian art. In 1924 and 1925 the National Gallery organized exhibitions of Canadian art to be mounted in the Palace of Arts at the British Empire Exhibitions at Wembley [see fig. 3]. While the eight-person jury for both exhibitions was made up of members of the Royal Canadian Academy, the work of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven made up a prominent part of each exhibition. The response to the exhibitions, and the Group of Seven's work in particular, was highly favourable. The 1924 exhibition travelled to regional galleries in England and Scotland, and also to the
Figure 3
Exhibition of Canadian Painting in the Palace of the Arts,
British Empire Exhibition, Wembley, 1924
1925 International Exhibition in Ghent, Belgium. The Tate Gallery considered several works from the Canadian exhibition for acquisition, and purchased A.Y. Jackson's *Entrance to Halifax Harbour*. The 1925 exhibition was also circulated throughout Britain, and was subsequently shown at the Musée de Jeu de Paume in Paris. The National Gallery made sure that the highly favourable response of the British critics was reprinted in the Canadian Press, and also published a collection of foreign reviews entitled *Press Comments on Canadian section of Fine Arts British Empire Exhibition 1924 - 25*.

The meanings that circulated around the exhibition of Canadian art must be considered within the framework of the Empire Exhibitions as a whole. The Wembley exhibitions were major projects, "extravaganzas on a par with the Olympics or the 1939 World's Fair." While they were initially proposed as a venture to be undertaken by private capital, the Empire exhibitions departed from previous exhibitions in that they were the first to be planned and financed largely by the British government. Described in the official guide as "a Family Party of the British Empire," Wembley afforded a newly resurgent imperialist movement in Britain with "an ideal opportunity to acquaint the mother country with its dominion and colonial offspring. The lesson to be learned was that the empire stood for 'justice, progress and liberty.'" While the exhibitions were something of a financial disaster, they were a popular success, with over 17 million visitors attending the 1924 exhibition during its six month run, and extensive coverage of the exhibition in the British and Canadian press.

The Empire Exhibitions tied in with the "Buy Empire" movement that emerged in Britain in the postwar period, and the terms of the exhibition specified that "only empire materials were to be used in the construction of all exhibits and only empire products [were] to be sold in the fairground restaurants." While the colonial pavilions "invoked the splendors of Africa and the Far East," the exhibits in
the "ponderously neo-classical" dominion pavilions of Canada, New Zealand and Australia emphasized their principal industries: "fruit and wine from Australia, timber and wheat from Canada . . . [and] meat and butter from New Zealand . . ."\(^{43}\)

In addition to timber and wheat, the Canadian pavilion emphasized mining; it contained "a two-ton lump of silver ore from Cobalt [as well as] an imposing display of moose heads."\(^{44}\) Considered in conjunction with these displays of the country's natural resources, the wilderness landscapes of the Group of Seven called up in aesthetic terms the supposedly infinite nature that provided the raw materials essential to Canadian industry and supplied the very materials from which the pavilions were constructed.\(^{45}\)

The general drift of the British reviews of the exhibitions in the Palace of Arts suggested that Canadian art as exemplified by Thomson and the Group of Seven was more distinctive and advanced than that of Britain's other former colonies. The nature of the British response can be gauged from a May 6, 1924 review in *The Times*, which noted that "Emphatic design and bold brushwork are the characteristics of the Canadian section; and it is here in particular that the art of the Empire is taking a new turn."\(^{46}\) Three weeks later, the critic for *The Morning Post* attested "The most personal work from the Dominions is to be found in the Canadian Galleries. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa are in the main content to follow the ideas and methods of the Mother Country artists. Not so Canada, in landscape, at any rate."\(^{47}\) This position was supported by a June 7, 1924 report in *The Saturday Review*:

We shall, perhaps be most interested in the Palace of Arts at Wembley to learn what hope there is in the Colonies. We shall be disappointed everywhere but in Canada. The New Zealand painting is mostly cold and insipid . . . In South Africa there is more warmth and a rather tired vigour . . . . In the Indian and Burmese Gallery we fine [sic] the deplorable effect of Western art on Eastern art . . . With Canada, however we are in a happier position. We can acclaim a vigorous and original art.\(^{48}\)
The 1925 exhibition was equally well received. The *Nottingham Guardian* noted, "Outstanding . . . is the striking collection of modern Canadian art, testifying to the native strength of Canadian landscape art. The regrettable fact that Australia has this year made little effort to obtain fresh supplies of art throws into relief Canada's remarkable contribution . . ." The *Sunday Times* proclaimed "... the brilliant and original work of the Canadian painters stands out even more prominently than it did last year. The Empire will have to recognise now that Canada possesses a distinctive national school of landscape painters of the highest merit . . .""50

The response of the British press to the Wembley exhibitions, then, confirmed the position Eric Brown had delineated in his 1921 lecture in Vancouver. In effect the British critics — who likely seemed more experienced and aware than their Canadian colleagues — provided Canadian audiences with a reassuring paternal commentary that implied the new national school of painting was not "degenerate" and did not "distort art or art's creations." While this new visual culture signified an independent sensibility, it was one that was not excessively radical: it was a sensibility that represented neither a challenge to bourgeois democracy nor a complete rupture with the values and traditions of the imperial center which shaped anglophone Canada's dominant culture.

While the program of the Group of Seven and the National Gallery was contested after 1925 by figures such as Homer Watson, George Reid, Hector Charlesworth, and members of the Vancouver Sketch Club, the impact of the positive British response led to a widespread acceptance of the Group's work which was reflected in debates in the contemporary press: "The fact of the matter is that this hostility [toward the Group of Seven] is rapidly becoming out of date and ridiculous. The English notices of our pictures at Wembley have established the newer painters in a secure place."52

26
If the 1925 exhibition at Wembley marked "a day of rejoicing among the group's friends" the same year should have also marked a sort of triumph for John Vanderpant. Shortly after the exhibition of Canadian painting opened in the Palace of Arts at Wembley, Vanderpant's first European solo exhibition of pictorial photographs opened in the rooms of the Royal Photographic Society in Russell Square, London. The exhibition would subsequently travel to other galleries in England and to Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. As indicated by a review in the *The Photographic Journal*, response to the exhibition in Pictorialist circles was positive:

> The work of Mr. Vanderpant, of New Westminster, B.C., has steadily been drawing increased attention at the leading exhibitions during the past few years, and the collection of forty-three prints shown during July at the Society's House will go far to consolidate his reputation. It is clear that Mr. Vanderpant's work will always be looked for with anticipation in the exhibitions of the future.

However, this enthusiastic response was countered by the remarks of an unidentified English critic whose expectations were almost certainly framed by the success of the Canadian exhibitions at the Wembley, and the claims made for the Canadian work by the National Gallery. As Vanderpant was to recount three years later, this unidentified critic noted that, "though the work was good, it was regrettable that most of the landscape work may have been done anywhere and that it reflected so little of the Canadian spirit." Given the timing of these remarks, and the difficulties photographers had already acknowledged in depicting the Canadian landscape from within a Pictorialist tradition, this critique could not be dismissed. It set Vanderpant to "thinking and observing" and pointed toward the necessity of unlearning "the cultural old world concept of beauty in relation to its environment." The effect of this commentary, then, was to position Vanderpant's practice outside of a nationalist discourse precisely at the time when the movement in painting constructed around the Group of Seven was consolidating its
hegemony. Set against the response to the Canadian exhibition in Wembley's Palace of Arts, the tenets of Pictorialism left Vanderpant's practice in a similar position to the "insipid" painting of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, which, as the *Morning Post* had noted, were "content to follow the ideas and methods of the Mother Country artists." In effect, Pictorialism's reliance on "old world concepts of beauty" rendered Vanderpant's photographs functionally placeless.

For an artist in Vanderpant's circumstances, to be positioned outside of the national movement around the Group of Seven, was to be denied access to "the great adventure . . . in the midst of discovery and progress"\(^5\) on which they claimed to have embarked. In effect it was to be denied participation in the modern age, a position from which at least some of the contradictions inherent in the relationship between Pictorialist aesthetics and modern industrial society could become visible. In his 1928 article "Tradition in Art" — cited at the beginning of this chapter — Vanderpant drew parallels between progress in transportation and progress in art, and asked his readers whether it would "be right to suggest that air traffic cannot get anywhere because it is not built on tradition . . . would it be possible to satisfy men by merely improving and building railway coaches better than ever before?"\(^5\)

He argued that the "essential principle" of transportation remained the same, "the desire to move from one place to another," however "the medium by which it is achieved progresses with the growth of technical knowledge."\(^6\) Similarly, he argued, art was founded on unchanging principles but had to break with tradition and assume new forms in order to address its time. Pictorialism's anachronistic reliance on "strict representation of traditionally conceived beautiful subjects"\(^6\) rendered it inadequate to address the conditions of modern life. From this position Vanderpant could make his assertion that Pictorialism was "travelling by a horsecart midst the progress of motor power on wheel and wing." Further, as long
as Pictorialist photography held "to the pretty rendering of lens selected facts" it was "without [a] future except as an agreeable or pleasure giving pastime."\textsuperscript{62}

Thus, at the time of his first solo exhibition in Europe, Vanderpant's practice was located at an intersection of conflicting discourses linked to emerging manifestations of national identity and shifting responses to the processes of industrialization. Bound to a discourse which had already come under pressure, and which occupied institutional spaces that did not carry the artistic prestige associated with the art museum, Vanderpant's practice could not sustain itself in the face of these conflicts. Positioned outside the ascendent version of modernism advocated by the National Gallery of Canada, Vanderpant was unable to ignore the contradictions that had characterized Pictorialism since its inception. The conceptual underpinnings of his work collapsed, the intellectual aridity of his project and its lack of a viable future were revealed at the very moment his work was expected to attain its greatest success.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE


12. This term was coined in 1907 by the British critic A. Guest in an essay titled "Art and the Camera" published in London by George Ball. Cited in Keller, p. 252.


21. See Constance Errol, "Lens Revelations. The story of a camera artist who is revealing the spirit of Canada," MacLean's Magazine, (1 January 1927), p. 11. The Vancouver Art Gallery currently has a substantial collection of Brangwyn paintings, most of them donated by members of the city's business and cultural elite.


30. While most art museums did not exhibit photography during the first two decades of this century, there were a few exceptions to the rule. The Albright Gallery in Buffalo, for example, mounted a major photography exhibition in 1911. The exhibiton was selected by Alfred Stieglitz, and included the work of Canadians Sydney Carter and J.P. Hodgins. See Koltun, p. 46.

31. Anon., "Art Acclaimed National Need," The Sun [Vancouver] 21 June 1921. As Paul Walton has pointed out, the term "futurism" used by Brown was a generic one in the English-speaking world, which referred to any type of art seen to be radical or modern to the extent that it "offended and alarmed the general public." See Paul Walton, "Beauty My Mistress: Hector Charlesworth as Art Critic," Journal of Canadian Art History, 15, No. 1 (1992), p. 94.


35. See Mortimer-Lamb's letter to the editor, Montreal Star, 17 April 1913.
36. See Mortimer-Lamb, "National Art Board is Arraigned for Neglect of the West" in The Province [Vancouver], 8 February 1925.


40. August, p. 128.

41. August, p. 128.

42. August, p. 135.

43. August, p. 134.


45. August, p. 135. At least the exhibition buildings were supposed to be constructed from Canadian timber. August points out that Canada almost withdrew from the exhibition when it was learned that the Buy Empire regulations were being circumvented, and that Scandinavian timber was being used for some of the pavilions.

46. Cited in Press Comments on Canadian section of Fine Arts British Empire Exhibition 1924-25 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1925), p. 5. Hereafter this publication will be referred to as Press Comments.

47. Cited in Press Comments, p. 7.


49. Cited in Press Comments, p. 44.

50. Cited in Press Comments, p. 44.


52. See "The 'Seven' and the 'Star'" in Canadian Forum, 4, No. 48 (September 1924), pp. 358-9.


58. From the foreword to the catalogue from the third Group of Seven exhibition, 1922, cited in Mellen, p. 217.


CHAPTER TWO
AN INTENSE AMBIVALENCE: MODERNISM, PHOTOGRAPHY AND
THE TERMINAL ELEVATOR

In the aftermath of his 1925 Royal Photographic Society exhibition John Vanderpant's practice was at a point of crisis. The Pictorialist discourse in which he had achieved recognition no longer seemed viable in the face of the critical success of the exhibitions of Canadian painting at Wembley, and he was confronted with the problem of revitalizing his work. From Vanderpant's position as an artist working in Vancouver in the mid-1920s — an artist who wished to assert a measure of institutionally-sanctioned cultural sophistication while attempting to address the specifics of his locale — this dilemma could only be resolved by emphatically claiming a position within the same nationalist visual culture whose success had thrown the viability of his Pictorialist work into question.

Within this process of revitalization, three related issues had to be addressed. The first was the adoption by Vanderpant of an identifiably modern approach to photography that could parallel the methods of the modern painter, as defined within the visual culture of the Group of Seven. The second was the linkage of his photographs to issues of national identity by visually articulating the "essentially" Canadian features of his environment. The third requirement was an approach that would allow him to position himself as an avant garde figure breaking with Pictorialism's tired traditions in order to adequately engage with the modern era: an approach that would distinguish his work from the glut of banal, formulaic imagery that filled the salons. This break with Pictorialism, however, could not be too extreme. During the 1920s, the photographic salon was the only public forum open to Vanderpant's work, and he was not in a position to entirely alienate himself from that network and the audience it engaged.¹
Central to the modernism of the Group of Seven was a separation of the formal values of an image from mimetic activity; "modern" art was seen to possess a level of autonomy that distinguished it from earlier models in which representation operated through imitation. For contemporary commentators, such as F.B. Housser, the modern character of the Group of Seven's painting lay in its directness and elimination of unnecessary detail, which permitted the artist to "emphasize only form which was significant to mood, composition, design and rhythm . . .". This directness — it was claimed — was dictated not by artistic convention but by the Canadian landscape itself, the crucial feature of which was an underlying sense of rhythm that imposed itself on the artist's sensibilities:

Perhaps that which most differentiates Canadian landscape, from that of the older art countries is this curious thing, rhythm. It exists here in its elemental form, Nature and the elements being the sole designer . . . . Surrender yourself to the rhythm of the north shore of Lake Superior, the prairies and the Rockies and it will set within you the tempo of the mood Canadian.

In the year following his Royal Photographic Society exhibition, Vanderpant began to adopt a simplified graphic economy in his work, deepening the shadows and increasing the contrast of his prints in order to emphasize rhythmic pattern in images such as *Circus* c. 1926 [fig. 4], and *In the Wake of the Forest Fire* 1926 [fig. 5]. Echoing the claims made for the Group's painting, Vanderpant held that his new emphasis on rhythmic form and simplicity marked a necessary break with Pictorialism's "methods of pretty representation" - a break which permitted him to respond directly to the "spirit of Canada."

Canada is not beautiful in detail, but by the immensities of its proportions, the tragic [sic] of its forms and contrasts, the dramatic struggle to turn a virgin country and community into one with a degree of culture . . . . This rudeness, this immensity and tragic unfoldment one tries to express in extreme simplicity of composition, form strength, obvious contrast in light and shade. One is not looking for gloom, but rather dramatic strength . . . for the forms, contrasts, proportions and designs, which belong to Canada and to no other country.
Figure 4
John Vanderpant
The Circus 1926
Figure 5
John Vanderpant
In the Wake of the Forest Fire 1926
Through his emphasis on an aesthetic defined by the "free expression of form relationship" and the artist's "response to nature in his vibrating mood" Vanderpant was clearly tapping into a version of modernism informed by the writings of English formalists Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and the Russian mystic P.D. Ouspensky. Concepts such as "aesthetic emotion" and "significant form" provided the basis for an emerging *lingua franca* of Canadian modernism during the 1920s, and it seems likely that Vanderpant had encountered these writers firsthand by this point in his career. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum. A Key to the Enigmas of the World* had been reviewed by Lawren Harris, together with Maurice Buck's *Cosmic Consciousness*, in a 1924 edition of *The Canadian Bookman*, and Ouspensky's ideas were familiar to a number of Canadian modernists. Bell and Fry were well known in Canada through their essays in journals such as *New Statesman, New Republic* and *Nation and Athenaeum*, and through Bell's association with J.W. Morrice. Vanderpant's assertion that the modern painter enjoyed "freedom to compose in colour and form for their inner values, to reflect not Nature, but the response to Nature in his vibrating mood . . . what he is after is the free expression of form and colour relationship in things conceived as materialised appearances of mental realities" and his description of his own modern approach to photography, closely echo a passage from Fry's *Vision and Design* that was cited in *A Canadian Art Movement*:

Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist this detached and unimpassioned vision. The (esthetically) chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colours begins to crystallize into harmony and as this harmony becomes clear to the artist his actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him. Certain relations of directions of line become for him full of meaning. He apprehends them no longer casually, nor merely curiously, but passionately; and these lines begin to be so stressed and to stand out so clearly from the rest that he sees them far more distinctly than he did at first. In such a creative vision the objects as such tend to disappear, to lose their separate unities and to take their separate places as so many bits of the whole mosaic of vision.
If Vanderpant was able to conceive of a simplified approach which emphasized "form strength" in order to align his practice with the modernism of the Group of Seven, he could not simply turn his camera toward the wilderness which preoccupied the Group during the mid-1920s. As Brooker Klugh had already acknowledged, expansive views of the Canadian landscape seemed diminished when reduced to the confines of an averaged-sized black and white print. Photographs of such subject matter simply did not possess the visual presence of the Group's intensely coloured and larger-scaled paintings. Furthermore, there was no possibility of Vanderpant making a living as an "art" photographer and the demands of operating a commercial studio would have prevented him from undertaking the kind of extended tour of wilderness sites and tourist attractions that was central to the Group's practice.

In consideration of the parameters of the medium in which he worked, and the logistics of earning a living, Vanderpant turned toward the urban environment as a source for "the forms, contrasts, proportions and designs, which belong to Canada and to no other country." In keeping with the sense of directness he attempted to impart in his work, he rejected combination printing and sought out subject matter Pictorialists normally avoided: subject matter which might be considered "ugly" but which could also be considered "part and parcel of this country and [which] one therefore rather builds . . . into the composition, turning ugliness into beauty of strength . . ."\textsuperscript{10} Beginning in 1926, the motif to which Vanderpant turned most emphatically in order to locate "essentially Canadian forms" — a motif to which he consistently returned over the following decade — was the architecture of the terminal grain elevator.

As subject matter, the terminal elevator was ideally suited to Vanderpant's project. The elevators on Vancouver's waterfront were physically accessible, and this type of industrial subject matter would not, in itself, alienate Vanderpant from
the salons. The repeating cylindrical forms of the elevators' architecture could be worked into compositions that emphasized "simplicity of composition, form strength, [and] obvious contrast in light and shade . . . " More importantly, these forms could be linked to national identity. Associations between an expanding agricultural economy, the terminal elevator and Canada as a nation were not uncommon during the 1920s. Texts in Canadian popular magazines and trade journals often held up the terminal elevator as an example of the massive scale of industrial architecture, and as the expression of a robust resource economy. As a university educated Dutch emigre who had promoted immigration to Canada in Dutch journals, Vanderpant would also have been aware of the widespread European admiration of North American productivity, in which modern industrial structures such as the elevator had come to signify economic dynamism.

While the terminal grain elevator had been invented in Buffalo during the winter of 1842, the introduction of building techniques utilizing reinforced concrete in the early twentieth century had radically altered the appearance of terminal elevators, while greatly improving their efficiency. Although the early brick and wood elevators were often seen as "indescribably ugly [buildings] which loom up along the harbor slips and shock the artistic eye with their hideously grotesque angularity and their utter lack of symmetry . . . " the new reinforced concrete structures were lauded by modernist European architects for their aesthetic properties in which form seemed to follow function. In his influential 1913 essay "Die Entwicklung moderner Industriebaukunst" — which was accompanied by photographs of concrete terminal elevators from Canada and South America — Walter Gropius expressed his admiration for the "artistic naivete and ingenuousness" of the North American engineers who designed grain elevators. He also asserted:
The compelling monumentality of the Canadian and South American grain silos, the coal silos built for the large railway companies, and the totally modern workshops of the North American firms almost bear comparison with the buildings of Ancient Egypt . . . Their individuality is so unmistakable that the meaning of the structure becomes overwhelmingly clear to the passer-by.¹⁴

Gropius' convictions were reiterated in Le Courbusier's Vers une architecture, published in 1923, which reprinted some of the same elevator photographs Gropius had used a decade earlier. Le Corbusier identified the terminal elevator as North America's most significant contribution to architecture, proclaiming North American elevators and factories as "the magnificent FIRST FRUITS of the new age" while asserting "THE AMERICAN ENGINEERS OVERWHELMM WITH THEIR CALCULATIONS OUR EXPIRING ARCHITECTURE."¹⁵

For Gropius and Le Corbusier then, ancient architecture was reborn in North American industrial buildings such as the elevator. These structures marked the advent of a new age through their return to "the principles which govern our universe . . . Egyptian, Greek or Roman architecture is an architecture of prisms, cubes and cylinders, pyramids or spheres."¹⁶

By the early 1920s the terminal elevator was central to a polemic taken up by a whole chorus of voices — including Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Loos and Erich Mendelsohn in addition to Gropius and Le Corbusier — that argued for an architecture in which form followed function. This polemic valorized engineers, "who were thought to be functionalists at heart" and condemned architects, "who were thought to be historicists at heart" while arguing in favour of simple, unadorned, geometric forms and against ornamentation.¹⁷ Functional architecture — architecture that was a supposedly non-metaphorical embodiment of the artist-engineer's design — was linked to the production of a modern, rational social space which, it was argued, would lead to a more egalitarian society. In some quarters, the abolition of ornament was seen as a standard by which the humanity of a nation's culture could be measured: Adolf Loos, for example, argued in his
The 1908 essay "Ornament and Crime" that, "The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects."\textsuperscript{18}

The utopian idealism connected to industrial architecture and the figure of the engineer was widely taken up by North American artists during the 1920s. Charles Sheeler aestheticized "mass production as the core logic of a new social order"\textsuperscript{19} in his 1927 photographs of Ford's River Rouge plants, and the sense that industrial buildings marked a return to the universal principles that informed ancient architecture reverberated in Charles Demuth's 1927 painting of a terminal elevator, entitled \textit{My Egypt} [fig. 6]. Canadians Adrien Hébert and Marc-Aurele Fortin included terminal elevators in their paintings of the Montreal harbourfront [see fig. 7]. Fred Varley produced a painting of a terminal elevator shortly after his arrival in Vancouver [fig. 8], and number of Pictorialist photographers, including the Canadians Johan Holders\textsuperscript{20} and Brodie Whitelaw [fig. 9], exhibited hazy photographs of industrial buildings in mid-1920s camera club salons.

There were significant differences between the modernism of Le Corbusier, Loos and Gropius and that of the Group of Seven, differences that are immediately evident if one considers Loos' conception of form and function in relation to A.Y. Jackson's call for Canadians to make more use of the country's "own natural forms in decorative design [such as] textiles, wall papers, [and] jewelry . . . "\textsuperscript{21} However, for John Vanderpant the meanings that resonated around the architecture of the terminal elevator neatly lined up with the strategies he was deploying to revitalize his practice. The sense that the elevator marked a break with archaic European architectural traditions — the understanding that the form of the elevator emerged as a direct response to functional necessity — paralleled the claims made for the Group of Seven's painting as a mode of representation that responded directly to the Canadian landscape rather than European artistic conventions. Further, Le Corbusier's positioning of modern North American structures such as the elevator
Figure 6
Charles Demuth
My Egypt 1927
Figure 7
Adrien Hebert
Elevator No. 1 c. 1929
Figure 8
Frederick Horsemman Varley
Untitled c.1928
Figure 9
Brodie Whitelaw
Gas Tanks c.1928
at the dawn of a new age coincided with the Theosophist rhetoric that surrounded
the Group's work and which portrayed North America as the site of a new stage in
human evolution. An echo of Le Corbusier's polemical vision of a new age can
be detected in Lawren Harris' 1928 essay "Creative Art and Canada," which
asserts:

Just as we enter into new relationships in space which evoke a new attitude
and are giving rise to what we call the modern world, so there is a new race
forming on this continent, the race of a new dispensation which will develop
and embody the new attitude... Our art is founded on a long and growing
love and understanding of the North in an ever clearer experience of
oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding
sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age.

The convergence of a nationalist visual culture and the modernist
discourses tied to the architecture of the grain elevator is marked out in
Vanderpant's early elevator images, such as Colonnades of Commerce [fig. 10],
produced in 1926. In keeping with Vanderpant's conception of modernist
aesthetics, the composition of the photograph is highly simplified and direct,
focusing on detail to stress the rhythm of the elevator's repeating cylindrical forms.
The simplicity of the composition emphasizes the play of light over the concrete
surface of the monumental silos; the drama of the oblique lighting — heightened by
the shadow that falls diagonally across the cylinders — suggests that the form of
the elevator is illuminated in the dawn light of a new day. Links between the
architecture of the elevator and that of classical antiquity, as asserted in the writings
of Gropius and Le Corbusier, are established through the simplified composition,
which, together with the image's title, suggests the colonnades of an ancient
Egyptian or Greek temple. As a writer for Saturday Night noted in 1929

Anyone taking a cursory glance at "Colonnades of Commerce" would
assume that it was a glimpse of one of the Temples of the Pharaohs at
Luxor. In reality it is one of the great grain elevators which fringe Vancouver
harbor, and is indeed typical of many other Canadian harbors.
Figure 10
John Vanderpant
Colonnades of Commerce 1926
However, in spite of Vanderpant's attempts to adopt a modern approach to photography, his work retained many of the visual attributes of Pictorialism, and thus occupied a somewhat equivocal position in relation to both the modernism of the Group of Seven and that of Le Corbusier. In images such as _Colonnades of Commerce_ and _Shadow Castle_ (fig. 11, also from 1926) Vanderpant continued to rely on Pictorialism's characteristic soft atmospheric effect, a device artists like Lawren Harris and J.E.H. MacDonald had explicitly jettisoned from their work in order to signify a break with British academic traditions. While the emblematic paintings of Harris and MacDonald — such as _First Snow, North Shore of Lake Superior_ 1923 (fig. 12) and _The Solemn Land_ 1922 (fig. 13) — claimed to locate an essential Canadian identity in a liminal space — the apparently "empty," "eternal," and "infinite" wilderness that instilled itself on the sensibilities of the solitary artist — Vanderpant located identity in an artifact of human social interaction, an artifact that resonated with regional associations. If Harris and MacDonald attempted to take in the immensity of the Canadian landscape in a near panoptic view, the limitations of his medium and his conception of modern aesthetics compelled Vanderpant to focus on the detail in order to express in "extreme simplicity of composition" forms which could be claimed as intrinsically Canadian. Further, while _Colonnades of Commerce_ clearly evinced a sense of return to the universal principles that governed ancient Egyptian monuments, Vanderpant also drew parallels between the architecture of the elevator and that of medieval European structures — the very tradition Le Corbusier and Gropius saw as bankrupt — in photographs such as _Castles of Commerce, Castles of Today_, and _Shadow Castle_, where the ghostly trace of a medieval fortress is inferred through the shadow which falls across the concrete surface of the grain silos.

Vanderpant's early elevator photographs perform a double articulation, delineating "essential" Canadian forms while calling up the authority of European
Figure 11
John Vanderpant
Shadow Castle  c.1926
Figure 12
Lawren S. Harris
First Snow, North Shore of Lake Superior 1923
Figure 13
J.E.H, MacDonald
The Solemn Land 1921
history through their references to medieval and classical architecture. Positioned within the parameters of nationalist and modernist discourses, these photographs reinvented the terminal elevator as a public monument, a chronotope in which the individual's identification with the promise held out by the productive capacity of the nation is linked to a mythical point of origin in the far distant past. Within the process of this articulation, the narration of a unifying, essentialized Canadian identity is dependent upon a strategy that Homi Bhabha has identified as a central feature in the inscription of the modern nation upon subjectivity: the displacement of the modern space of the nation into a "signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of traditionalism." Through their deployment of European traditions in the attempt to evince essential Canadian-ness these images disclose a desire to subsume the interpellative power of imperial authority, a power which "interweaves itself throughout colonial societies, making the imperial power appear referentially seamless and the colonial culture appear radically fractured . . . " Thus, the hybrid nature of these images speaks to the context of a regional bourgeois culture — a culture that was both colonizer (of First Nations) and colonized — groping to find an adequate vocabulary with which to represent itself.

As Vanderpant's photographs indicate, the intersection of the modernism of Gropius and Le Courbusier — a resolutely urban modernism driven by an obsession with the production of rational space — and the modernism of the Group of Seven, which combined a somewhat Victorian lyricism with wilderness subject matter, is not as much of an anomaly as it might seem. As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, the visual culture of the Group of Seven was closely linked to the accelerated industrial growth that occurred in Canada during the early twentieth century. Paul Walton has linked the Group of Seven's work to the construction of an "extractionist myth" of progress in which the wilderness was
constructed as an inexhaustible source of raw materials that could be extracted without significant damage to the environment, through the application of modern science. A modern aesthetic which celebrated the wilderness areas of the country as a "limitless treasure house of raw materials," through the use of intense colour and an emphasis on direct sensation, countered the residue of a pastoral agrarian myth that shaped the thinking of the Group's opponents. Critics such as Hector Charlesworth were "unable to accept the view that a new aesthetic could emerge from an industrialized community rooted in technology" and saw such a project as a threat to "an ideal of beauty rooted in an agrarian myth of husbandry as the source of all that is most valuable in human culture." While the extensive exhibitions of the Group's work during the early 1920s made the wilderness emotionally accessible for a broadly-based audience, at the same time they allayed a widespread fear of technology by endowing the myth of progress with an aesthetic interest. Further, the Group's sense of shared purpose with the business community,

was reciprocated in a practical way, when a significant number of industrialists, financiers, and corporations began to purchase their works... and one senses a recognition on their part that the artists they patronized employed, like modern industry, what were regarded then as the most advanced methods of extracting artistic treasure, emphatic design, colour, and expressive effects, from the same hills, forests, rivers, and waterfalls that were the basis of so much material wealth in Ontario and Canada.

The affinities between the Group's project and the business community, however, went beyond an interest in the most advanced methods of extracting material or aesthetic treasure from the wilderness. The desire that shaped Lawren Harris' utopian conception of a new stage in human evolution (the "fostering of a new race and a new age" referred to in the quotation on p. 47), a point at which the modernism of the Group of Seven intersected with both the modernism of Le Corbusier and Gropius and with the interests of many of the country's industrialists,
was a sublimated desire to transcend traditional conceptions of class structure and thereby diffuse social conflict. Investigations of this specific conjunction of desire — which marks out the terrain in which Vanderpant's photographs were located — have been absent from written histories of Canadian art of this period. Given the hegemonic position the modernism of the Group of Seven had achieved by the late 1920s, it will be worthwhile to examine how the emergence of the visual culture in which Vanderpant was claiming a position intersected with broader discourses of rationalization which speak to the transformation and unification of a fractured social body. As we will see, this aesthetic discourse articulated an image of Canada that both reflected the ongoing transformation of daily life, brought about by changes in production in a rapidly modernizing culture, and worked to naturalize those transformations through the production of a consumable image of identity.

The years immediately following the Great War were marked by intense class conflict within Canadian society, a response to the increasing centralization of capital and the accelerated application of new production technologies associated with the war effort. As manufacturing focussed on large-scale production of identical commodities, such as shell casings, the development of assembly line and mass production techniques destroyed a pattern of relations in which craftsmen had employed a monopoly on skills to maintain some control over the pace and form of production. Production functions became routine, and were separated from the entrepreneurial activities of the main office, increasing the social distance between employer and employee. This rationalization of production was informed by new forms of managerial control and human engineering, associated with the kind of scientific management advocated by Frederick Taylor. Early in the century, Taylor had popularized a process of labour discipline and workshop organization based upon scientific studies of human
efficiency. Taylor's system was based on the timing of basic work actions, the development of programmed task instruction cards for employees and wage scales based on piece work. Through its links to science, Taylorism claimed to be an objective mode of structuring the workplace; expanded output within a coherent system would allow both management and labour to benefit from increases production. "Optimality," as historian Charles S. Maier has pointed out, "became the implicit key notion behind the application of engineering to industrial relations. Worker and employer would have no scope for quarrelling about wages or hours or conditions of labour when both parties were yoked to the arbitration of science."  

What Taylorism promised — and Taylor claimed this applied not only to the plant, but to all spheres of government and social life — was the elimination of scarcity and constraint. "It therefore implied a revolution in the nature of authority: the heralded utopian change from power over [humans] to the administration of things. Such an evolution logically removed the basis for class formation as conceived by sociology." Thus within both Taylorism and the modernism of Le Corbusier et al, the engineer emerged as a paradigmatic figure, a figure who was not only the master of machines, but who was also central in the production of new relationships in a society governed by rationalization and efficiency.

If Taylor's version of scientific management held out the promise of attaining utopia through success in production, in practice the supposedly impartial findings of science tended to consolidate control in the hands of capital. As Maier has argued, labour's power was sharply diminished in the face of technological imperatives and piece-work wages. Directing intelligence was concentrated in the hands of capital, and it was management alone that determined the norms of efficient production.

Taylor's ideas initially attracted attention in Canada during the first decade of the twentieth century. His influential essay "On the Art of Cutting Metals" was
published in *Canadian Machinery* in 1906, and in 1913 three of Taylor's essays on scientific management appeared in the Canadian Manufacturing Association's journal, *Industrial Canada*. In 1909, the Canadian Pacific Railway hired H.L. Gantt, an close associate of Taylor's, to reorganize its locomotive repair shops in Montreal. Referring to scientific management as "the new gospel of industrial progress," Gantt emphasized that the central tenet of scientific management was the elimination of chance through the scrutinization of every detail of the production process:

To eliminate this by-play with chance and substitute methods based on technical enquiry and proved results, is the task of scientific management. Every element in a business should come under this searching enquiry, from shop to office. And whenever it strikes, it means the elimination of waste time, waste energy, waste materials.35

Although adoption of Taylor's system in its entirety was not that common in Canada, the impact of the doctrines expressed by Taylor and Gantt was widespread, and Canadian-based manufacturers often applied eclectic versions of scientific management in pursuit of the goals Gantt had articulated.

The application of systems that measured efficiency was not confined to heavy industry, but was also widespread in administrative sectors. In what was probably the most extensive reorganization of any Canadian organization during the pre-World War II era, the Borden administration employed the American efficiency experts Arthur Young and Company during 1918 and 1919 to restructure the federal civil service along Taylorist lines. This reorganization was successful to the extent that Young and Company opened a Canadian office in 1920 — the same year the Group of Seven held their first exhibition — and were promptly contracted by the Government of Quebec, Massey-Harris (to which Lawren Harris and Group of Seven patron Vincent Massey had family connections) and Canadian
Cereal and Flour Mills Ltd to restructure their administrative and clerical departments.\textsuperscript{36}

The pervasiveness attained by scientific management can be seen in the results of a 1928 study undertaken by the federal Department of Labour, which found that the techniques of scientific management were widespread within the sample of 300 manufacturing companies and public utilities surveyed.\textsuperscript{37} The transformations these techniques effected in the processes of production are attested to in a \textit{Canadian Foundryman} article, published that same year, which boasted that the heyday of the craft-worker in Canadian metal industries had passed: "Twenty years ago a molder was at home with his slick and trowel, but place the good mechanic of those years in the modern foundry and he would feel like a 'fish out of water.'"\textsuperscript{38}

Large-scale manufacturing was the site in which the adoption of scientific management techniques was most pronounced, and the emergence of new rationalized forms of production was closely linked to the concentration of capital into large-scale corporate entities.\textsuperscript{39} This concentration occurred most noticeably in two waves of heightened merger activity, the first taking place during the four years preceding the Great War, while the second, and most extensive, phase came between 1924 and 1929, when the value of assets consolidated through mergers was equivalent to 40\% of all the business assets consolidated in the country between 1900 and 1948.\textsuperscript{40} While the former wave was greeted with widespread suspicion and hostility, the merger activity of the 1920s went largely unchallenged as the concentration of capital came to be broadly accepted as a natural feature of modern society. As an article in the May 15, 1925 issue of \textit{MacLean's Magazine} put it:

The public appears vastly less concerned, now-a-days... in the personalities behind these mergers, for the reason that mergers have come to be regarded in a different light. They are now recognized as the
compelling result of business economics. A similar trend is developing in
the United States, and abroad . . .

Why this world-wide wave towards consolidations in business?
In a word, because of modern machinery, rapid transportation and
communication - witness the development of radio - and expanding
population and intelligent advertising . . .

There is little doubt that our war effort lent a tremendous impetus to
cooperation and consolidations. It was discovered then that maximum
efficiency could be obtained only by huge-scale production and handling.41

The rise of the large-scale corporate entity within the Canadian economy
was closely associated with the penetration of the Canadian economy by American
capital. American investment in Canada often took the form of large-scale branch
plant operations, which were established to avoid Canadian tariffs and to take
advantage of the favourable status Canadian goods enjoyed as imports to other
British Empire countries. While Canadian industry became a popular field for
American investment in the early twentieth century, as the railways provided
access to the unexploited natural resources of western Canada, British investors
continued to provide the lion's share of investment flowing into the country in the
period preceding the Great War.42 However, as funds available through British
portfolio investments dried up with the beginning of the war, the United States
became an increasingly important source of investment capital for Canadian
manufacturing, especially as the war effort required expansion of the country's
productive capacity and corresponding infusions of new money. Between 1914
and 1920, the level of British capital invested in Canada remained static, while the
level of American capital nearly doubled. By 1922, over seven hundred branch
plants wholly owned by American interests were operating in Canada, including
International Nickel, International Harvester, International Paper, General Motors
and Canadian General Electric.43 In addition, there were about nine hundred
Canadian factories in which American capital held a controlling interest.44 The
Americanization of the country's economy was publicly debated, and while some
politicians and economists cited the dangers linked to the intrusion of American
capital, journals such as the *Financial Post* held that the northward migration of American capital was both irresistible and beneficial:

Eventually American capital must have attained the ascendancy in Canada, for geographically, ethically, and economically, there could have been no resisting the movement of American wealth northwards to find new fields for productive use.45

Thus, the post-Great War era was marked by the convergence of highly rationalized large-scale production — a mode of production that was seen as specifically North American in character — the concentration of capital into large-scale corporate entities, and a growing continentalism in terms of the financing of Canadian industry. The shifts and tensions in the structure of Canadian industry found their aesthetic counterpart in the debate around the work of the Group of Seven — in which a "modern" visual culture was pitted against an agrarian pastoral aesthetic linked to British traditions. At the same time, the conception that scientific management could transcend class conflict, and heralded a shift from "power over humans to the administration of things," was explicitly echoed by Housser (financial editor of the *Toronto Star* as well as an art critic) who asserted that modern technology in communications, transportation and electricity, together with modern forms of art would contribute to a new cosmic or planetary consciousness.46 It is not mere coincidence that American investment in Canada surpassed British investment in 1925, just a year prior to the publication of Housser's *A Canadian Art Movement* and Vanderpant's first photographs of Vancouver's terminal grain elevators.47

As opposition to capital's consolidation of power erupted in the two years following the war, actions such as the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 were seen by Borden's government as evidence of a Bolshevik conspiracy to take control of the Canadian state.48 The state and capital responded to post-war class tensions with the introduction of "hard" and "soft" measures to suppress conflict and create a
sense of unified interest within the social body. "Hard" measures included the formation of the RCMP, through the amalgamation of the Dominion Police and the North-West Mounted Police in 1919, together with the use of the military to intervene in a number of strikes. 49 "Soft" measures included the implementation of social reform programs: the introduction of old age pension legislation by the federal government, as well as minimum wage levels for women and children, funding of public libraries, introduction of workmen's compensation, and improvements in access to education by provincial governments. While the introduction of social reform did entail real benefits, the ameliorative role such measures played is clearly evident in a 1927 remark by A.M. Manson, Minister of Labour for the Government of British Columbia, who acknowledged that "progressive legislation reasonably assures contented labour and operates as an insurance policy for Capital." 50

"Soft" measures introduced by manufacturers in response to post-war class tensions included the implementation of joint works councils. These were essentially a sophisticated form of company union based on councils formulated in the Colorado Industrial Plan that Mackenzie King developed for John D. Rockefeller in 1915, in response to the bloody and extended disputes in the Rockefeller-controlled Colorado coalfields. 51 In addition, manufacturers introduced corporate welfare schemes that included pension plans, group insurance plans, bonus systems, and company social gatherings [see fig. 14] that replaced social activities formerly centered on craft-based unions. 52

As the logic of capitalism in the post-war era "was tending to increase the role of the state at the same time as class opposition to bourgeois domination was making political demands on the state for policies more appropriate to the subordinate classes," 53 the traditional Tory image of the state, in which a "strong central authority [linked] the private self-interest of the wealthiest and most
Figure 14
Hudson's Bay Company staff picnic, on Union Steamship vessel departing for Balcarres Park, August 1921.
influential citizens with the national interest" was placed under considerable stress, and could no longer be sustained in the face of the tensions produced within Canada's shifting economic formation. The most successful challenge to the Tory conception of the state came from a form of liberal-corporatism that received its most extensive articulation in Mackenzie King's book *Industry and Humanity*, published in 1918 — just three years before the decisive electoral victory which brought King to power.

In *Industry and Humanity*, King developed a theory which integrated class opposition into the capitalist system, while prescribing a prominent role for the kind of technocratic expert he embodied. *Industry and Humanity* described a future in which the petite bourgeoisie disappeared, and a fully industrialized society was divided fundamentally into capital and labour. Echoing Frederick Taylor's conception of the engineer as an objective mediator who relied on scientific methods to determine the optimal structure of production, King "attempted to break down the functions of ownership and control by distinguishing a managerial technostructure allegedly separate from capital. He then introduced the state as a neutral bridge between capital, management and labour, emphasizing the role of the state as a legitimizing force for the stabilization of class harmony." In *Industry and Humanity*, then, the state and management — the two neutral, objective components of the four "partners to industry" — were the key to social harmony.

This is not to suggest that there was a corresponding shift in the substance of the Canadian state. As political scientist Reginald Whitaker has pointed out, "One must not . . . confuse King's legitimizing ideology with actual restructuring of the state apparatus. Corporatism was to be symbolic, not structural." Nonetheless, King's conception of the state as a buffer against the interests of central Canadian capital gave the Liberal Party the ideological capacity to absorb most of the support of the Progressive Party in the federal election of 1925. The
success of these legitimating strategies in diffusing the opposition of farmers' organizations, middle class progressives, and elements of the trade union movement contributed to King's long tenure as prime minister. Even during the periods when King was not in power, the success of those strategies impacted on the policies of the Conservative party — R.B. Bennett began to expound aspects of corporatism in order to save his administration in the aftermath of the 1935 Regina Riot.  

The construction of a national visual culture not only mirrored the shifts and tensions within the structure of Canadian industry, but also the emergence of a new image of the Canadian state informed by a modern "scientific" logic and a notion that the basis for human relationships could be derived as a material reflection of a larger universal order. The correspondences between this new corporatist model of the state and the discourses surrounding modernist painting in English Canada, are evident if one considers Lawren Harris' construction of Canadian modernism as the awakening of a creative faculty marked by a communion between the "immediate and the eternal" and his mystical assertion that a particular people must "become aware of the universal spirit that informs all great manifestations and all noble living" in relation to Mackenzie King's assertion that the basis for the modern industrial state could be found in the material reflection of a universal cosmic order. As King put it in Industry and Humanity:

A universal cosmic order which is wholly rational and law-abiding is the fundamental assumption of all science. It assumes that those propositions are true which are necessary to make the facts of life intelligible and reasonable . . . The Law of Peace, Work and Health is a part of the larger Order which sustains a divine creation, and which evidences a universe begotten of a beneficent Deity, not a world the outcome of Chance, not even of Intelligence, limited to the direction of Matter and Force.

In short, then, the attempt to construct a unified and modern Canadian identity in the visual arts intersected with a range of strategies employed to
suppress and diffuse class conflict, and to instill a somewhat illusory sense of unity in a fragmented social body.

The implementation of measures such as corporate welfare, social reform, and joint works councils achieved, in large part, the desired effect. As the post-war recession came to an end, capitalism seemed triumphant, its hegemony strengthened as opposition to rationalized production subsided. The dynamic toward rationalization had widespread effects, and began to permeate a variety of social institutions. For example, by the close of the 1920s three out of every four female students in British Columbia were "being taught homemaking skills [characterized by] machine-like standardization, reliance upon new kitchen technology, and stereotyping of everyday household tasks . . ." In urban British Columbia, the consolidation of social reform and corporate welfare coincided with a period of unprecedented prosperity that brought the advent of consumer culture. Throughout the 1920s an expanding middle class began to "purchase items ranging from foodstuffs to clothing to toys [that had been] previously made at home." Electrification became common, and radio and movie theaters replaced the distinctive social cultures associated with craft unions. Magazines such as Saturday Night and Maclean's — both of which ran major articles on John Vanderpant during the twenties — gained widespread circulation, and "with features dealing with Canada coast to coast, helped develop a popular culture transcending class and geography." Middle class prosperity coincided with an interest in urban planning. In 1926 Harold Bartholomew, one of America's most influential city planners, was contracted by Vancouver and Point Grey to prepare a "comprehensive development plan for Greater Vancouver." Completed in 1929, the Bartholomew Plan represented a "massive attempt to make every detail of the urban landscape conform to a sanitary, rational vision of city life . . ." which shaped development in the city for decades to come.
As the province's economy expanded, one of the most dramatic areas of growth was the transportation of grain, as "Vancouver commercial interests began a deliberate campaign to take the grain market away from Winnipeg." The quantity of Canadian land used for the cultivation of wheat had increased ten-fold since the turn of the century. Canadian scientists developed new strains of wheat, such as Garnet and Record, which produced higher yields in a shorter ripening period, and articles in the popular press regularly boasted of the country's success in agricultural production:

...there is every reason to believe that industrially we stand at the dawn of a new era, the reason being the change in the relative position of Canada and the United States with regard to agriculture...the American agricultural industry is being forced to yield before the superiority of the Canadian.... The close knit interrelation of industrial processes in the modern nation enables changes in one industry to be transmitted to others with such rapidity that the wave of prosperity in agriculture will pass over the whole community till it touches every social class.

By the late-1920s Canadian wheat exports accounted for 40% of the international grain trade, and 40% of those exports were shipped through Vancouver. In 1919 there had been one terminal elevator in Vancouver. By the close of the decade there were six elevators operating on Burrard Inlet as the nexus of an extensive network for the transportation of raw materials. In this context, the terminal elevator could plausibly be re-invented as a kind of new Temple of Luxor, heralding the emergence of a new social order based on economic modernism's utopian promise.

While Vanderpant's elevator photographs from the mid-to-late 1920s — images such as Colonnades of Commerce, Shadow Castle, and Castles of Commerce — are clearly valorizations of an ascendent economic formation based on rationalization and mass production, they are marked by an underlying tension: they are representations of modern industrial structures produced using an industrial technology, however they retain Pictorialist codes — atmospheric effect
in particular — to imbue the image with a romantic character and to suggest a craft-like method of production. Despite Vanderpant's attempts to modernize his practice, then, his work was still marked by the ambivalence that characterized Pictorialist photography. If this ambivalence points toward the threat of mechanization in relation to conceptions of work and creativity in bourgeois culture, it also evokes a now inaccessible historicity — a sense of the relation between past and present — that Fredric Jameson has identified as a central characteristic of the modern movement, in which experience is marked by "the lived co-existence between several modes of production, the existential experience, within a single life and a single individual of multiple 'alternate' historical worlds..."71

The new emphasis Vanderpant placed on rhythm and contrast did put his work in an somewhat equivocal position in the eyes of Pictorialist critics such as J. Dudley Johnstone and F. Colin Tilney, who had previously supported Vanderpant's work. Johnstone noted that the majority of the photographs in Vanderpant's 1928 exhibition at the Royal Photographic Society "conveyed an extreme gloom," and he "failed to see what Mr. Vanderpant was getting at..."72 In commenting on the same exhibition, Tilney argued that the discrepancy between Vanderpant's earlier images — which had been admired by judges in England for their "sterling qualities" — and the "forcible effects" and "angular compositions" of Vanderpant's newer work was "lamentable."73 However at the same time, Tilney admired many of the images in Vanderpant's 1928 exhibition, particularly those "which give sunlight for its own sake, not for the sake of strange shapes made by black shadows..."74 Further, he generally praised Vanderpant's photographs of grain elevators, "We have all been struck with those stupendous caissons, of which Mr. Vanderpant has made a series of impressive pictures, giving the romance of industrial buildings."75 Thus, the formal vocabulary Vanderpant adopted in order to align his work with the modernism of the Group of Seven functioned as more of a
nudge at the boundaries of Pictorialism than a wholesale break with its traditions and his work continued to be exhibited and discussed within Pictorialist circles.

The ambivalence that lay at the heart of Vanderpant's tentative embrace of modernism is clearly visible in F.C. Tilney's analysis of Castles of Commerce [fig. 15], a 1926 image which depicted a concrete terminal elevator rising above three frame houses on Vancouver's east side. Tilney's article - the first written response to any of Vanderpant's elevator photographs - appeared in the November 1, 1926 edition of the British Journal The New Photographer. In this text, Tilney praised Vanderpant's photographic skills, while echoing the widely held European view on the primacy of industry in North American culture:

Industrialism is so supreme a thing in America that its "castles" are everywhere and the direct results of its power are all around. . . . It is the most natural thing in the world that a people who take pride in their industrialism and point to their highest, not their loveliest buildings, should reflect this sentiment in their photographs. And they do so. Many, indeed, are able to admit some other sentiment beyond grandiose expansiveness, but it is usually only the queer and the quaint. Fewer, of course, have that more subtle sense for a theme that is redolent of romance. Mr. Vanderpant has it. 76

However, while Tilney noted the visual similarities between the industrial architecture Vanderpant depicted and a medieval European castle, he admitted he had no idea as to the building's function; in fact he saw the elevator as two separate buildings, and didn't comprehend that the elevator's workhouse and the cylindrical storage bins were part of the same physical structure. Further, the architecture of the elevator — as presented in this image — embodied a threat or sense of potential violence as it loomed over the three domestic dwellings:

[Vanderpant gives] the place its most sinister aspect. He waits till the light is almost behind it. By this means he darkens the walls which in ordinary lighting are probably of the clean high tone of new concrete. Thus he gets the castle frowning against the sky, which gleams splendidly by the same condition. . . . Here . . . is a content of gloom and melancholy. . . . What hopelessness seems to emanate from those upper windows, beneath which there is nothing but blank denial of wall stretching so far to the ground. 77
Figure 15
John Vanderpant
Castles of Commerce  1926
Vanderpant's reliance on the codes of romanticism permitted Tilney to read an element of menace and hopelessness into the modern architecture depicted in *Castles of Commerce*, a reading clearly in conflict with the celebratory conception of modern industry that shaped the polemic of Gropius and Le Corbusier. Further, Tilney did not perceive anything specifically Canadian in the image. The second sentence of his article asserts, "Mr. Vanderpant is an American." While this may be taken as a reference to the continent of North America, the sites Tilney discusses while noting that "Industrialism is so supreme a thing in America that its 'castles' are everywhere" are all located in the United States: the Brooklyn Bridge, the Woolworth Building, the Statue of Liberty. The discussion of these sites, together with statements such as "there are no buildings in the States older than a Queen Anne house" effaced any sense of Canadian identity, and left the impression that Vanderpant was a resident of the United States.

In taking up the grain elevator, Vanderpant was clearly tying into a range of broader discourses that resonated in Canadian society during the 1920s — discourses relating to shifting conceptions of the state and transformations in the nature of production — which linked the developments shaping modern society to a utopian promise. At the same time, the Pictorialist traditions and the institutional framework that continued to shape Vanderpant's work throughout the 1920s left it in a state of intense ambivalence, both in terms of its position relative to modernism, and its claim to the articulation of a specifically Canadian identity. Yet this underlying ambivalence was portentous. If the position of the working class dwellings at the base of the concrete cylinders in *Castles of Commerce* echoed that of the peasant huts which clustered outside the walls of European castles during the medieval times, it also prefigured the position of the throngs of unemployed who, as capitalism imploded during the Great Depression, were forcibly re-located
to relief camps on the margins of "this city of destiny" — the term mayor Gerald McGeer used to describe Vancouver during the mud-1930s.\textsuperscript{78}
NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO


16. Le Corbusier, p. 31.


20. For further examples see Private Realms of Light.


22. See Michele Lacombe, "Theosophy and the Canadian Idealist Tradition: A Preliminary Exploration" Journal of Canadian Studies 17, No. 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 100-118.


34. Maier, p. 32.


37. Lowe, p. 33.

38. Canadian Foundryman, 19, no. 5 (May 1928), p. 39, cited in Heron, P. 104.


40. See Traves, p. 29, and Lowe, p.22.


43. See Van Der Hoek, p. 334.

44. Van Der Hoek, p.334.

45. Cited in Van Der Hoek, p.335.


51. Lowe, p. 33.

52. See Barman, p. 232.


54. Whitaker, "Images of the State in Canada," p. 22.

55. Whitaker, "Images of the State in Canada," p. 32.


60. See Whitaker, "Images of the State in Canada," pp. 33-4; and Barman, p. 236.


63. Barman, p. 244.

64. Barman, p. 244.


69. Friesen, p. 329.

70. Barman, p. 238.


78. Glescoe, p. 54.
CHAPTER THREE
CONCRETE POWER: IDEOLOGY AND VANDERPANT'S "STIMULATING VISION"

John Vanderpant is a man who has made his mark in photographic pictorialism. . . . he has proven himself an influence and an authority by the very fact that his work had gained consideration and criticism from prominent men in the field. . . . Oddly enough, after reading what a certain Englishman had to say of Vanderpant's radicalism the extreme conservatism of the following text strikes us as amusingly reactionary. It constitutes a difference in agreement. Two able critics oppose one another to establish the same facts.¹

If John Vanderpant was not already aware of the ambivalence of his work in relation to modernist aesthetics, the text cited here — which appeared as an editor's preface to Vanderpant's essay "Because of the Cause or Giving the Reason Why" in the December 1929 issue of the American journal Camera Craft — made this ambivalence quite explicit. These condescending remarks — a response to F.C. Tilney's review of Vanderpant's 1928 exhibition at the Royal Photographic Society — now seem like hollow rhetoric, given that pictorialists such as William Mortensen used the pages of Camera Craft to argue against the tenets of photographic modernism well into the 1930s. However, they do suggest the extent to which the conception of modern photography outlined in Vanderpant's essay — which was accompanied by reproductions of Towers of Today and Elevator Pattern [fig. 16] — reiterated ideas put forward a decade earlier by figures such as Paul Strand, whose photographs and writings had been widely published and would have been familiar to Camera Craft's readers. Vanderpant's assertion that "lens drawing must have all the characteristics of lenswork and not be by process manipulation transferred into prints which do not . . . reflect photography by texture resemblance of paintings, drawings, etchings, etc."² must have seemed like an echo of Strand's 1917 declaration that "the photographer's problem . . . is to clearly see the limitations and . . . the potential qualities of his medium, for it is
Figure 16
John Vanderpant
Elevator Pattern 1929
precisely here that honesty, no less than intensity of vision, is the prerequisite of a
living expression. . . . The fullest realization of this is accomplished without tricks of
process or manipulation, through the use of straight photographic methods."

The remarks of the Camera Craft editor, together with the hostile response
Vanderpant's work had received at the hands of critics such as Tilney, no doubt
contributed to Vanderpant's gradual withdrawal from the camera club salon circuit
during the early 1930s. As he distanced himself from the salons, Vanderpant also
moved away from his long-standing reliance on soft focus and atmospheric effect,
and developed a more fully resolved approach that drew upon an eclectic range of
modernist photography from Europe and the United States.

His close-up images of vegetables — such as Heart of the Cabbage c. 1930
[fig. 17] and Untitled (Cactus) c. 1932 [fig. 18] — clearly share formal similarities
with the work of modernist American photographers such as Imogen Cunningham
and Edward Weston [figs. 19 and 20], whose work was exhibited at Vanderpant's
studio on Vancouver's Robson Street in 1931. The exhibition was part of an
extended dialogue between Vanderpant and the two Americans. Cunningham
responded enthusiastically to Vanderpant's invitation to exhibit in Vancouver,
noting "the few things I have seen of yours and that only in reproduction have said
so much to me, that if you want my things, any amount of work would not be too
much." She also suggested a three person exhibition — with work by herself,
Weston and Vanderpant — be proposed to the Director of the Palace of the Legion
of Honor in San Francisco. Weston replied to Vanderpant's overtures by noting
the similarity of the work they had exhibited in the Fourteenth Annual International
Salon of Photography in Los Angeles, "I have had your name on my desk; to write
was my intention . . . but I have had a heavy year. Strange coincidence, we both
showed red cabbages, - halved! but mine was cut the other way."
Figure 17
John Vanderpant
Heart of the Cabbage  c.1929-1930
Figure 18
John Vanderpant
Untitled (Cactus) c.1932
Figure 19
Imogen Cunningham
Two Callas c.1929
Figure 20
Edward Weston
Artichoke, Halved 1930
Despite this reciprocal interest, Vanderpant did not share the technical purism advocated by the two Americans. For Cunningham and Weston — who formed the F64 Group along with colleagues such as Ansel Adams in 1932 — the image was to be pre-visualized prior to exposure of the film. They avoided enlarging or cropping, and contact printed large scale negatives on glossy paper to provide the widest possible tonal range and the sharpest rendition of detail. In contrast, Vanderpant used a roll film camera which produced smaller negatives than the view cameras employed by Weston and Cunningham. Vanderpant regularly enlarged and cropped his negatives, and his images were often printed on matte-surfaced, sepia-toned paper. Vanderpant distanced himself from the emphasis on technique put forward by the F64 Group, arguing that it could detract from the controlling agency of individual consciousness, "technique in itself . . . does not represent art - though art must be expressed through technique and medium. The basis of all human creation - is in the mental activity of the artist."  

The tilted perspective and industrial subject matter of photographs such as *Elevator Pattern* 1929 and *The Morning After* 1929 [fig. 21] also recalls the work of Bauhaus photographers, such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy [fig. 22]. However, Vanderpant's emphasis on the guiding control of the individual artist's sensibilities was at odds with Moholy-Nagy's rejection of privileged subjectivity, and his interest in keeping visual experience free from intellectually imposed associations. While Vanderpant granted a level of autonomy to the work of art, he held onto a conception of the work as a mediation between observation and perception. For him, the ordering activity of the intellect on external reality was crucial and he emphatically dismissed purely abstract photography, as embodied in Moholy-Nagy's photograms [fig. 23]:

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Figure 21
John Vanderpant
The Morning After 1929
Figure 22
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy
Untitled (from the Berlin Radio Tower) c.1928
Figure 23
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy
Untitled (Photogram) 1922
[a new ideal of beauty] does, to my mind, not mean that one should take
some paper-cut triangles and circles, play a light on them and compose an
abstract pattern just for pattern's sake. The result may be decorative, and,
for its newness, may attract attention, yet I doubt whether mere aesthetic
pleasure in itself is a lasting, a satisfying quality in artistic expression.
Unless the subject matter used in photography . . . is a result of human or
natural activity, and out of this human struggle selected to reflect in pattern or
rhythmic play of form relationship, the sentiment of that struggle - the hidden
flavor of lasting value cannot be caught.10

Further, while the work of Bauhaus photographers was linked directly to
industrial design and advertising, and aimed at improving society through
improved production on the part of architects, designers and craftsmen,
Vanderpant continued to position his work within a traditional fine art discourse.11
He rejected advertising as a field in which progress could occur, "Too much of the
modern work [in photography] is commissioned - which is quite desirable were not
the masterpieces in painting commissioned? The fact is that artistic freedom may
be sacrificed to commercial demand."12

Vanderpant's version of photographic modernism was more closely aligned
with that of the Neue Sachlichkeit photographer Karl Blossfeldt, whose book
_Urformen der Kunst_ was published in 1928, and acquired by the University of
British Columbia Library the following year. Blossfeldt's close-up photographs of
plants [figs. 24 and 25] were engaged in a discourse which suggested
correspondences between natural order and architectural forms, and proposed that
modern technology would lead to a new harmony between humanity and nature, a
harmony that would spread throughout the social realm. As Karl Nierendorf wrote
in his introduction to _Urformen der Kunst_:

> Beyond the garden the car established close contact between town and
country; after a protracted alienation from Nature man is now nearer to it
than ever. In film, thanks to the time-lapse cine camera, he can watch the
swelling and shrinking, the breathing and the growth of plants. The
microscope reveals whole systems of life in drops of water, and the
instruments of the observatory open up the infinity of the universe. It is
technology which affords us the new means for artistic development. "The
struggles of the spirit are fought out on canvas." These words were highly
Figure 24
Karl Blossfeldt
Balsamine impatiens c.1915-1925
Figure 25
Karl Blossfeldt
Silphium lacinatum c.1915-1925
appropriate for the nineteenth century, of which the highest artistic
achievements lay to painting. Now, the instruments of struggle are iron,
concrete, steel, light and ether waves. Our architecture, works of
engineering, cars, aeroplanes, like our films, radio and photography, all are
potentially of a high aesthetic standard. And there are a thousand
indications that the oft-bemoaned triumph of technology does not constitute
the triumph of matter; rather, that it is the creative spirit now manifesting itself
under a new guise. ... If ... Blossfeldt's work has demonstrated the
increasingly evident connections between the great and small in the created
worlds, then ... it is contributing to the most important task which confronts
us today: that is to record the profound sense of this present which in all
preserves - in life, art and technology - consists of a striving for a new
oneness.\textsuperscript{13}

The association of modern art and a reconciliation between humanity and
nature neatly intersected with the interest in mysticism that a number of Canadian
modernists shared during the 1920s and 1930s. As we have seen, Lawren Harris
and Fred Housser had both linked a mystical belief in unity with nature to the
shedding of a colonial mentality, an assertion Harris reiterated in his essay
"Creative Art and Canada," published the same year as Urformen der Kunst:

> The creative faculty being spiritual, or rather, being the active channel for the
infiltration of the light of the spiritual realm into the darkness of earth life, is
universal and without Time. We have ... the seeming paradox that it needs
the stimulus of earth resonance and of particular place, people and time to
evoke into activity a faculty that is universal and timeless.\textsuperscript{14}

The arrival of Harris' colleague Fred Varley in Vancouver in 1926
contributed to a heightened interest in Theosophy and aspects of Asian religions,
particularly Buddhism and Hinduism. Varley had come into contact with
Theosophy in England prior to his arrival in Canada in 1912, and had also become
familiar with the writings of the Indian mystic Rabindranath Tagore by 1918.\textsuperscript{15}
Finding Vancouver to be "crude and ignorant of anything of the aesthetic - lacking a
cultural background," he set out to create a community that would function as "a
throbbing centre for the Occident & Orient."\textsuperscript{16}

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Varley introduced his students at the
Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts to "the gamut of Japanese
woodcuts, Hindu mysticism, Russian priests, Chinese horses, Persian manuscripts,
Matisse, and back to Japanese prints." Varley, together with Vanderpant, Jock
Macdonald, and later Harry Täuber (who arrived from Vienna in 1932), became
central figures in a community of artists which had an ongoing and eclectic interest
in mystical thinking. Vanderpant's studio on Robson Street became the primary
salon of this community. The conception of Canada as a meeting ground of East
and West - a position that allowed the resolution of the conflicting claims of
nationalism and internationalism - was clearly articulated in a lecture entitled "Art
and Canadian Life," which Vanderpant gave at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1933:

Let us become aware that Canada between ocean and ocean,
geographically between East and West should be the meeting ground of
European culture and the refining, almost philosophical influences of the
older East. Out of these influences, together with its own vitality, with its
beauty and variety of landscape, its opportunities and ideals, can be born a
national art which though locally inspired, should become capable of
universal appreciation.\textsuperscript{18}

The mysticism that circulated in the Vancouver art community did not arise
out of a precise investigation of any specific Asian religion or philosophy. Rather, it
was a manifestation of a shared desire for reconciliation with nature in the hope
that this would lead to a transcendence of self and a release from material desire.
The kind of contact with nature that the environment around Vancouver provided
was seen, in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, to set "[man's] mind . . . free from
the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his
acquisitions" while an art informed by this environment was seen "to evolve a
harmonious wholeness which finds its passage through our eyesight into
imagination."\textsuperscript{19}

In images such as \textit{Heart of the Cabbage} c. 1929, \textit{Untitled (Cactus)} c. 1933,
\textit{Untitled (Curvature)} c. 1933 [fig. 26] and \textit{Lotus of Light} c. 1933 [fig. 27], Vanderpant
focused upon abstract patterns that could be discerned in common vegetables, in
an attempt to delineate an underlying organic order in nature that intimated the
Figure 26
John Vanderpant
Untitled (Curvature) c. 1933-34
Figure 27
John Vanderpant
Lotus of Light  c.1933-34
possibility of social harmony and unity of purpose. As he stated in a set of notes from May 6th, 1933:

Why is the flower a complete unit, undivided in purpose and expressing only one natural quality? . . . Only man believes in complications and division in outlook and purpose: one side good, the other side bad, with the bad side often trying to disintegrate the good side. But the highest intellect can only be undivided, reflecting as [the] flower: one joy, one love, one desire, one purpose, one accomplishment.20

With the onset of the Depression, this interest in Theosophy and Asian religions was linked to a growing anxiety in relation to modern life - a sense that materialism and self-interest were leading to social conflict - and a perception that capitalism was inadequate as an economic system. However, like many other Canadian modernists, Vanderpant's position was profoundly anti-revolutionary. Social progress would be realized through the transformation of human thought and spirituality, rather than structural shifts in property relations:

Only a hypocrite can find justice - and then only self justice in capitalism. Overthrowing it however by mere revolution would only bring democratic, socialistic capitalism into being - [sic] may be better for a while, but disintegrating gradually into old channels. Capitalism can be undone and lasting denied by education, by letting nations see it for what it is, by breaking the suggestions of limitation, by killing the belief in its fear and uncertainties and to replace gradually these.21

A new economic order as the substructure for new creative expressions will develop in harmony with progressive mental ideals and the knowledge thereof. It will not take away from those who have - even materially have - but it must and will add to those who have not. Man is made to possess - not to suffer lack, either in living, or artistic conceptions - and all this will come about if he knows how to possess. This ideal can only be reached through sacrifice of old self, through the education of a stimulating vision.22

Vanderpant's engagement with modernism and mysticism led to a conception of aesthetic experience that was more fully articulated than anything he put forward during the 1920s, one which was closely linked to the articulation of the aesthetic put forward by Immanuel Kant, which shaped the work of Fry and Bell. This is not to claim that Vanderpant's conception of aesthetics grew out of a close
reading of the Critique of Judgement. Rather, his understanding of the aesthetic, which he shared with other Vancouver modernists, was likely gleaned from an eclectic range of sources, including P.D. Ouspensky's Tertium Organum, the writings of Walt Whitman, and conversations with other artists. Vanderpant did not specifically refer to Kant in any of his writings of the early 1930s. However, an assertion of the aesthetic as a realm separate from that of pure and practical reason, a realm governed by a law which is universal but also inseparable from the particularity of the artifact, is a recurrent theme. As Vanderpant put it in his essay Art in General: Canadian Painting in Particular:

In art forms against form; in music note against note does not seem sufficient to create living emotion, only when one admits that the form in itself reflects certain qualities, vibrates [with] some power from within, stands for the thought behind it . . . lays the secret of expressive or creative desire. Art in this logic would become the manifestation of the artist's consciousness of life . . . the awakening of his oneness with creation as manifested in related forms around him.  

Jock Macdonald — the Vancouver artist with whom Vanderpant's work held its closest affinities — did specifically link his "modality" paintings of the mid-1930s with Kant's conception of the aesthetic as a realm in which the specific and universal coalesce without conceptual mediation. Macdonald described these paintings [see fig. 28] as "Expressions of thought in relation to nature . . . considered by Kant to relate to creative expressions which could not be said to relate to nature (objectively) nor be said to relate to abstract thoughts (subjectively) about nature, but rather included both expressions."  

This relation of the particular and the universal delineated in the Kantian aesthetic closely correlated with the conception of a "national art" linked to a particular place but at the same time capable of evoking "universal appreciation."

What was paramount for Vanderpant and his colleagues was an emphasis on the apparatus of human sensibility and understanding, rather than on the
Figure 28
J.W.G. (Jock) Macdonald
Fall (Modality 16) 1937
material objects apprehended through this apparatus. Fundamental to this activity was the perception not of form itself, but the harmonious relationship between forms as a reflection of a higher order:

I can only see in the so-called Modern Movements, the desire to emphasize mental qualities, mental esthetics . . . much more than the joy of material substance. The artist may not be aware of this change in character, he may hold that he paints form for form's sake, colour for colour's sake . . . [however] to me he is proving or at least successfully experimenting in expressing the vital values of relationship which is binding unessential facts . . . into a balanced whole, into satisfying completeness. 26

Within this framework, the art object was seen to permit the viewer to break free from the mediating function of literal representation, to engage in a kind of thinking in images in order to perceive the cognitive structure of human sensibility, and to find common ground and harmony in the shared processes of perception and understanding, "The more this progress in approach by artist and art-lover is realized . . . the greater will be the aesthetic pleasure derived therefrom by the individual observer, who of course is subject in response to the same laws as was the artist while expressing his ideals." 27

In keeping with Kant's separation of the aesthetic from practical reason, Vanderpant argued that direct engagement with political issues in art could only be misguided and futile:

. . . in Europe - so called individual endeavour and traditional sentimentality was attacked by socialistic art. But "comrade" and "forward sisters" became as a rule as stale as the moonlight and . . . roses may become in sentimentality today. Art and poetry cannot be directed into certain forums. The rise in expressed culture (I do not mean Kultur) can only come through individual intensification of the consciousness of life's experience, out of a deeper contact of the artist's mentality with life's purpose. 28

For Vanderpant, this conception of aesthetic experience was linked to a formal strategy of simplification and the elimination of unnecessary elements, in order to emphasize the interrelationship of significant form. Photography, he held,
was particularly well suited to this task due to the absence of colour, and its reliance on the reflection of light in the production of an image:

The lovely oneness of purpose in photography (which in its simplicity and endless possibilities surpasses any other art) is in the fact that it is concerned with the rendering of light - color of course is also a reactionary result of light - it enriches painting - but it also complicates it and if therefore photography needs a label, I would classify it as an elemental art. . . . In this respect I feel photography as prophetic . . . because it lifts [the image] from the strained density of handling and arranging things - into the reality of reflecting qualities - from the limitation of material subjects into the endless abundance of light, idea, purpose. 29

Vanderpant's mysticism, his Kantian understanding of the aesthetic, and a modernist formal vocabulary came together in a series of grain elevator photographs he undertook between 1934 and 1936. Images such as Untitled (Concrete) [fig. 29], Untitled (Verticals) [fig. 30], Concrete Power [fig. 31] and The Cylinder [fig. 32], all from 1934, are rendered sharply from edge to edge, emphasizing the texture of the depicted surfaces over the surface of the print itself. At the same time, the character of concrete and steel as surfaces reflecting light is underscored in the play of light and shadow across the cylinders, headframes and abutments. The converging verticals — created by tilting the camera upward — combine with precise cropping to set up a spatial ambiguity within the image and impart a sensation of vertigo, as if the viewer is being lifted toward the apex of the elevator. This de-centering of the viewer is heightened through the tension between pattern and deep space, which vie for primacy within the frame. The images verge on stripped down, geometric abstraction in which each element relates harmoniously to the overall composition. As each image is a detail of a larger structure, there is an implication that the order contained within the composition extends outward, beyond the boundaries of the frame, as if a collection of particulars coalesce to form a larger organic order. In writing about these photographs Vanderpant declared:
Figure 29
John Vanderpant
Untitled (Concrete) 1934
Figure 30
John Vanderpant
Untitled (Verticals) 1934
Figure 31
John Vanderpant
Concrete Power 1934
Figure 32
John Vanderpant
The Cylinder 1934
Grain elevators] rise on lakeshore and terminal throughout the land and in their rigid strength and sublime simplicity are the unpretentious tempels [sic] of trade and a trade more vital through distributing and storing of essential grains than any other. There never was an architectural intent to build beautiful silos. They are utilitarian. They grew as usefulness formified [sic] without any intent to show off - yet they become through simplicity - through repetition of the cylinder form - pure architectural monuments of modern life.

... One may have to learn to "see" these elementary creations - which in the combination of simplicity, severity, and usefulness reflect the vitality of a modern, perfect architectural form display. As seen through an artistic mind - using the camera as a means of self-expression - rather than mere rendering... the print gives strength of form and cement - the tenderness of beauty of texture - the design possibility in form and shadow... the feeling of safety in the storage of abundance - they give an almost religious adoration of significant form... the prints reflect... the honesty and sincerity of their subject within the possibility of pure camera work.30

Deployed to invoke "adoration of significant form" over "mere rendering," Vanderpant's formal strategies were intended to disrupt the viewer's habitual perceptions of the elevator and to emphasize the relation between perceiving consciousness and the form of the elevator as the visual embodiment of an order at the limits of comprehension. This emphasis on the relation of consciousness to object, rather than the object in itself, places Vanderpant's work within the tradition of the romantic sublime, a tradition in which — as literary theorist Thomas Weiskel has pointed out — "the attempt to represent [an object] determines the mind to regard its inability to grasp wholly the object as a symbol of the mind's relation to a transcendent order."31 However, while the traditional vocabulary of the sublime addresses a relation between the mind and the power of natural forces, here the sublime has been mapped onto the potential of the modern built world; trade takes on a sacred status, and transcendence is associated with an aesthetic of utility, functionality, and rationalization.

This taking up of the sublime did not separate Vanderpant's work from that of many other Canadian modernists — the connection between Lawren Harris' painting, for example, and a spiritual transcendentalism has been widely discussed. However, although the methods of painting employed by artists such as
the Group of Seven linked nature with modern technology, Vanderpant's elevator photographs did depart from the work of other Canadian artists working during the 1930s in their emphatic relocation of sublime power within the built environment.

Weiskel's investigations into the structure and psychology of transcendence are germane to this relocation of power and the deployment of the sublime in Vanderpant's work. Drawing upon semiotics and psychoanalytic theory, Weiskel has described a three phase economy of the sublime in which an implicit code “authorizes an exchange of outer [sublime object] and inner [perceiving consciousness].”32 Within this economy, the viewer/reader moves from an initial determinate relation to the object to a state characterized by a disproportion or imbalance between the perceiving consciousness and the object. Within this second phase, “surprise or astonishment is the affective correlative, and there is an immediate intuition of a disconcerting proportion.... Either mind or object is suddenly in excess — and then both are since their relation has become radically indeterminate.”33 This excess, Weiskel argues, “cancels the representational efficacy of the mind which can only turn, for its new object, to itself.”34 In the third phase, the mind turns inward to recover a sense of balance by “constituting a fresh relation between itself and the object such that the very indeterminacy which erupted is taken as symbolizing the mind's relation to a transcendent order.”35 In this process the "unattainability of the object" is duplicated as an inner structure, so that an undefinable, infinite domain is discovered within the viewer's own mind."36

Particularly useful for this discussion is Weiskel's distinction between the positive and negative modes of the sublime. The positive sublime (which is associated with the expressivist romantic tradition of representation) is thematically associated with a dimension of verticality, and an attempt to create a "thing per se which stands alone."37 It is characterized by an excess on the plane of the signified (mind) in relation to that of the signifier (object), in which the imbalance essential to
the economy of the sublime is triggered when the represented object initially fails to signify. Temporality is abrogated and meaning is "overwhelmed by an overdetermination."  

The negative sublime, on the other hand, avoids the construction of a thing per se, focussing on the presentation of an immensity "that cannot be comprehended in the form of an absence." The negative sublime is associated with "featureless (meaningless) horizontality or extension . . ." that induces "the sense of on and on." Within this mode, a disruption of syntagmatic flow is triggered by an excess on the plane of the signifier — a sense that the signifiers contain so much that they cannot be grasped or understood, "they overwhelm the possibility of meaning in massive underdetermination that melts all oppositions or distinctions into a perceptual stream; or there is sensory overload."

The photographs under discussion here clearly fall within the positive sublime. Vanderpant's elevator images emphasize verticality, both in their format and in the sense of upward lift they impart to the viewer. Displacement of the elevator's architecture has been effected through a process of drastic simplification. These stripped down, almost abstract, images fail to signify in a traditional mimetic manner; through their shunning of "mere rendering" these photographs placed the perceiving consciousness of the viewer in an excessive relation to their simplified image-content. A balance between consciousness and image could be restored if the viewer could "learn to see" the underlying "significant form" of the elevator and associate an aesthetic of "simplicity, severity and usefulness" with a transcendent order suggested through the promise of "safety in the storage of abundance."

The relation of the positive and negative modes of the sublime to alienation is especially relevant here. Weiskel has argued that the positive sublime is associated with an anxiety that is "at bottom an objective one determined in part by the outer world, or at least by a fluctuation felt to be from without." Unlike the
negative sublime, the positive sublime is a mode in which alienation is avoided, as the source of anxiety is kept outside the form of the work. In this respect, the positive sublime can be seen as a compensatory project that points toward a fear of deprivation, in which the sublime work of art is offered as restitution for a loss while "the anxiety itself is either evaded or expelled (projected)." As anxiety is evaded, objects seem to overflow with a "presence that flows into the mind" and the viewer is positioned as "a 'full' observer of a fantasy of sublime nature(or culture)."

By the mid-1930s Vanderpant's practice was located at an intersection of discourses, drawing upon modernism, mysticism, and a Kantian understanding of aesthetic experience. These discourses coalesced in a body of photographs that mobilized a particular economy of the sublime in which anxiety was displaced. Through this displacement, Vanderpant's photographs resisted any sense of alienation and accessed an optimistic utopian vision in the face of the collapse of the promise of abundance held out by a rationalized capitalist economy during the previous decade. Within his practice, photography appeared as the paradigm of a modern humanized technology; relying on its own intrinsic properties to re-present a structure with specific regional and modern associations, the camera offered the reflection of an ideal order in the material world.

Vanderpant's conception of a "stimulating vision" posited the transformation of the viewing subject through the establishment of a fresh relationship between consciousness and the order underlying the architecture of the elevator, as mediated through his photography. In this respect his work could be positioned within a nationalist project and evince what Fredric Jameson has identified as one of the key determinants of western modernism, "the very real possibility . . . of total systematic change" — a possibility that connected the "vibrant call of all the modernisms [for] some radical transformation of the self . . . [to] the conviction of an ongoing not yet completed, dawning transformation of the object world itself."
NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE


17. Fred Amess, cited in Davis, p. 128.


32. Weiskel, p. 25.


34. Weiskel, p. 24.


36. Weiskel, p. 26. Weiskel acknowledges the limitations of this model, particularly in relation to the diachronic character of the sublime moment. However, he argues convincingly
that a consideration of the sublime moment as an economic event - "a series of changes in the distribution of energy within a constant field" - is crucial if one is to keep the sublime closed to mystical explanations.


38. See Weiskel, pp. 25-7.


40. Weiskel, p. 26. Italics as per the original.


42. Weiskel, p. 137.

43. Weiskel, p. 137. My understanding of Weiskel’s work here has been guided by Watten’s essay.

44. Watten, p. 94.

CHAPTER FOUR
ESSENTIAL SIMPLICITY: UTOPIAN RHETORIC AND THE REAL

As the Depression advanced, both the nature of mechanization and the role of the artist in Canadian society became the subject of intense debate, and the utopian vision of modern industry that shaped Vanderpant's work was called into question. On one hand, artists such as Alfred Laliberté — whose work held a sentimental and nostalgic attachment to 19th century agrarian life — depicted the modern machine as a threat in itself. Laliberté's *The Triumph of the Mechanical Age* [fig. 33] of 1935 presented an allegorical female nude in the throes of death, desperately claspings a set of cogs as she collapses under the weight of mechanization. Laliberté's sculpture was intended as a protest against the advance of industrialization; he described the work as an "image of modern times where the idea of everything which is mechanical has taken over our hearts and minds, particularly with the younger generation which has forgotten, or despises, the old ways."

Artists such as Paraskeva Clark did not see the machine *per se* as the problem; the primary threat to the advancement of civilisation was the relations of power that governed the use of technology within class-based society. Clark derided the emphasis many Canadian artists placed on the uninhabited landscape, and called for an art that participated in the "mud and sweat of [social] conflict" as represented in her 1937 painting *Petroushka* [fig. 34]. This kind of engagement had been seen earlier in the decade in images such as *Grain* [fig. 35], a 1932 wood engraving by Lawrence Hyde, and *Harbour Scene* [fig. 36], a 1933 woodcut by Julius Griffith. Both of these prints included grain elevators within images that challenged the utopian promise associated with modern industry. In
Figure 33
Alfred Laliberte
The Triumph of the Mechanical Age  c.1935
Figure 34
Paraskeva Clark
Petroushka 1937
Figure 35
Laurence Hyde
Grain  c.1932
Figure 36
Julius Griffiths
Harbour Scene  1933
the former work, the three figures staggering under heavy sacks of grain in the
lower right undercut any sense of idyllic life in industrialized society. In the latter,
any sense of abundance that might be associated with the grain elevator is effaced
by the unemployed transient trudging along the railway tracks in the middle right.

John Vanderpant was clearly not one of the artists that Clark attacked in her
1937 essay "Come Out From Behind the Canadian Shield" for lying on a rock in the
wilderness, "aloof from the real life of the country [and] . . . oblivious to what is going
on around them." Vanderpant shared the apprehensions of artists like Clark
concerning industry and unequal distribution of wealth. As he put it, "This is called
the mechanical age - so it is not man running the machine but the machine running
man . . . It is permitted to produce only so much as profit or capital investment
allows. Yet it is meant to give man abundance an the one hand and leisure with
plenty on the other." However, Vanderpant's work broke from Clark's in its
emphasis on social harmony. Further, while Clark and critics such as Frank
Underhill objected to the influence of wealthy patrons on the work of the former
members of the Group of Seven, Vanderpant gave lectures to the business-
oriented members of the Port Arthur-Fort William Kiwanis Club, in order to convince
them of "the intrinsic architectural beauties of their grain elevators" and their
importance as "symbols of confidence, strength and stability." Vanderpant sought
the assistance of the Fort William Board of Trade and the private grain companies
in photographing the Lakehead elevators, and also suggested the grain
companies order some of his elevator photographs and publish a book "on the
beauty of elevators in Canada."

While landscape painting remained the dominant mode within the
institutional spaces of Canadian art, the work of Clark, Hyde and Griffiths was
representative of a direct engagement with social conflict undertaken by a diverse
group of Canadian artists that also included, among others, Miller Brittain, Leonard
Hutchinson, Ernest Neuman, and Ernest Lindner [see figs. 37 - 40]. These artists adopted an aggressive, often confrontational stance, and their work could be clearly identified by a broad public as pro-labour and anti-capital. While Vanderpant shared an anti-capitalist position with these artists, his work differed sharply from theirs in its conciliatory posture; its emphasis on harmony and shared social purpose. Despite this aspect of his work, and despite the anti-revolutionary position Vanderpant articulated in his lectures, the version of modernism he put forward - together with colleagues such as Jock Macdonald and Fred Varley - did not sit well with Vancouver's elite bourgeoisie.

From the late nineteenth century on, the sphere of high culture — classical music and the visual arts in particular — had played an important role in the stratification of Vancouver society. Participation in high culture was one of the sites — along with educational background, religious affiliation (Anglican), and membership in the appropriate organizations (ie the Vancouver Club) — through which a social elite distinguished itself from those who were successful in business, but without social connections or inherited prestige. Historian Robert MacDonald has pointed out that, "Prominent [Vancouver] families who successfully drew around themselves the boundaries of social distinction sought a lifestyle based on shared values and intimate access to one another." Central to this lifestyle was the emulation of elite society in major metropolitan centers, especially London, and among the shared values of this elite was an interest in the visual arts mediated by an obsession with British traditions and aristocratic taste.

The founders of the Vancouver Art Gallery, which opened in 1931, were primarily drawn from this elite, and it was figures such as Henry Stone, W.H. Malkin, W.G. Murrin, and Mrs. B.T. (Bella) Rogers who shaped the collecting activities of the gallery during the 1930s. Throughout the decade, emphasis was placed upon the acquisition of British art, under the guidance of Charles Holmes,
Figure 37
Miller Britain
Workers Arise 1936
Figure 38
Leonard Hutchinson
Lock-out c.1937
Figure 39
Ernest Neuman
Unemployed No.6 1933
Figure 40
Ernest Lindner
Steam Roller of Progress  c.1927
former director of the National Gallery in London, who was contracted as an acquisitions advisor by the board of trustees. The anglophilia underlying the collecting activities of the gallery — a desire that speaks to a will to assume the position of the former imperial authority — is clearly visible in the response of Henry Stone, president of the gallery's board of trustees, to a lecture given at the gallery in the spring of 1932 by Dr. Garnet Sedgewick, head of the University of British Columbia's English department, who pointedly questioned how "so much debris from nineteenth century England had washed up on the walls of the gallery." In a heated exchange of correspondence following Sedgewick's critique of the collection, Stone alleged that Sedgewick was ignorant of proper English decorum, and therefore could not be taken seriously:

... idiotic and groundless sneers do not for a moment excuse you, as a member of the U.B.C. and as a guest of this Gallery for so maliciously and in such a vulgar manner, attacking the efforts of the [gallery's] Founders for the public good. ... You once, I understand, publicly thanked God that you were not born an Englishman, and this fact may account for having missed the opportunity of learning the meaning of the word, "Gentleman."10

Although the gallery did purchase a few modern works by British artists such as Duncan Grant and Graham Sutherland, modernist work from British Columbia was excluded from the collection during the gallery's early years. When works by artists such as Emily Carr were finally purchased, they were acquired only over the objections of prominent board members.11

Challenges to the gallery's acquisition policies were mounted from within the local art community. In the spring of 1931, John Vanderpant organized an exhibition of the "so-called modern local movement" — Varley, Macdonald, Emily Carr, Charles H. Scott, W.P. Weston, M.S. Maynard, Irene Hoffar, Vera Weatherbie and Fred Amess — in the Vanderpant Galleries, with the expressed purpose of convincing Henry Stone that the gallery just then under construction should purchase modern painting by Vancouver artists.12 Although response in the press

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was favorable, and although Vanderpant enlisted Eric Brown to help convince Stone of the merit of modern painting produced in Vancouver, purchases were not forthcoming. The following year Vanderpant, Harold Mortimer-Lamb and Charles Marega ran for the gallery's board of trustees, with support of the local modernists, but were defeated. Charles Scott was elected as a trustee, and was made chairman of the gallery's acquisition committee, but he does not appear to have exerted much effort toward having the gallery purchase modern painting or sculpture by Vancouver artists. By 1933 relations between Scott and many Vancouver modernists had begun to sour, due to the departure of Varley and Macdonald from the faculty of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Art, and Scott's more traditional approach to painting.\textsuperscript{13}

The animosity between the gallery's founders and local modernists — many of whom were in very marginal financial positions — was forcefully expressed by Jock Macdonald in a 1932 letter to H.O. McCurry:

\begin{quote}
The Art Gallery is not turning out as a progressive institution; it is becoming rapidly a museum. They still run it from the businessman's angle and discard the services from artists which would wish the place alive. So far they have made no effort to recognise any B.C. artist and refuse any of the rooms for any Society group in B.C. They wont [sic] have artists on their juries or hanging committees. I have been acting on this committee on invitation but how wasting it becomes to fight alone with no artists to support me on such a committee. Memberships have dropped off tremendously so I expect the businessmans [sic] hobby will fade out and then the gallery can be born again.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

These tensions persisted, even though the work of artists such as Varley, Macdonald, Carr, Scott, and Vanderpant had been exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery by the mid-1930s, and the gallery had acquired one work by a member of the Group of Seven (A.Y. Jackson) in 1932. Vanderpant's frustration with the relationship between the art community and the gallery was articulated in an April 1936 letter to Eric Brown in which he expressed his disappointment with Stone's decision to patronize another photographer for an official gallery portrait, and
alluded to a desire to leave the city, "Vancouver certainly is not very encouraging these days. Stone goes to Greer, McGeer for his official photograph, not to Vanderpant and one feels if it were not for the bloom and blossoms in a setting of mountains, it would be Montreal for Van., instead of Van. in Van."

The debate regarding modernism and the gallery's collection extended into the local press. The views of the founding elite were closely echoed in a *Vancouver Star* article that attacked the selection of modern art which represented British Columbia in the 1932 Canadian exhibition at the National Gallery by alleging, "Today is a time of sabotage in art, a tearing down of all things sacred, spiritual or beautiful, a bowing down to false gods in composition and technique. . . . Modern art is a menace to any country whose citizens call themselves sane, but it will, in all probability die a natural death and leave no mourners." That same year the *Vancouver Province*'s social columnist labelled the work in Fred Varley's solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery "uncouth" and equated his modernism with a dangerous underclass and the disintegration of accepted standards:

> It is difficult to understand why these modern artists should mistake degeneracy for reality . . . . They . . . set up a worship of strange gods that cry aloud shuddering deformities and horrible hues. All this Bolshevism in art may be up-to-date, but is it clever - or lasting - as are the Michael Angelos [sic] and Murillos, and all the other lovely pictures that conform to what is real?"

Despite exclusion from the Vancouver Art Gallery's collection, modern art was not without local support. Harold Mortimer-Lamb published a two page essay in December 10, 1932 issue of *Saturday Night*, enthusiastically discussing the modern work in the first "All British Columbia" exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. A number of lectures in support of modern art were presented in the city; these included talks given by Arthur Lismer — then director of the Art Gallery of Toronto — for the Women's Canadian Club and the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1932. In addition to attacks on modernism, the Vancouver press ran articles sympathetic
to local modernists, including Norman Hacking's "Cabbages and Cameras," a full page article on John Vanderpant — with reproductions of *Heart of the Cabbage* and *Concrete Power* — which appeared in the 30 November 1935 edition of the *Vancouver Province*.

Vanderpant and his colleagues also had staunch and enthusiastic supporters within the bourgeois culture linked to the National Gallery. Harry S. Southam, president of the National Gallery's board of trustees, engaged in an extended correspondence defending Canadian modernism in general, and artists such as Varley in particular, against the attacks of Henry Stone. Although its acquisition budget had been decimated in the early 1930s, the National Gallery did purchase paintings by Macdonald (in 1932) and Varley (1936), and included their work in major exhibitions. John Vanderpant served as a juror for the National Gallery's second annual Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art in 1935, and the gallery sponsored a lecture tour that same year, which took Vanderpant to Ottawa, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, New York and Winnipeg.¹⁸

Thus, the modernism embodied in work by Varley, Macdonald, Carr and Vanderpant — through its formal break with British academic traditions, its attempt to address its environment on its own terms, and its engagement with non-western concepts — disrupted a politics of civility central to the ideology of the elite to which the founders of the Vancouver Art Gallery belonged. At the same time, it received enthusiastic support from the national bourgeois culture associated with the National Gallery; a culture which embraced modernism as long as it remained within very clearly defined limits, occupying what Harry Southam described as a "middle ground" between "the trivial . . . representationalism popular in the late Victorian era especially . . . and on the other hand the chaotic so-called expressionism that has rioted in France and some other countries . . ."¹⁹

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As we can see, then, Vanderpant's modernist utopian vision occupied a complex position within Canadian high culture during the Depression, disrupting bourgeois ideology in one sphere while apparently confirming it in another. In considering this double movement in Vanderpant's work — the support his anti-capitalist project received from a national bourgeois culture, and its role in mediating ideology — it will be useful to return to Fredric Jameson's investigations into modernism and utopian narratives.

Drawing upon the work of Louis Marin, Jameson has approached utopian discourse as the inversion of Levi-Strauss’s model of myth as an imaginary solution to real social contradictions between infrastructure and superstructure. While myth is seen as an operation bearing on the two primary terms of contradiction in a binary opposition, the utopian work is constituted within a much more complex configuration, which includes the "twin contradictories of the initial opposition . . ."20 What emerges out of this configuration is a kind of double cancellation of the initial contradiction, which effects the production of a new disruptive or "neutralizing" term.

Jameson has proposed that to "understand Utopian discourse in terms of neutralization is to grasp it as a process, and to implicitly or explicitly repudiate that more traditional and conventional view of Utopia as sheer representation, as the realized vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal."21 It is possible to consider the utopian text as:

a determinate type of praxis, rather than a specific mode of representation, a praxis less to do with the construction and perfection of someone's "idea" of a "perfect society" than it does with a concrete set of mental operations to be performed on a determinate type of raw material given in advance which is contemporary society itself, or rather, what amounts to the same thing, to those collective representations of contemporary society which inform our ideologies just as they order our experience of daily life.22

In order for "the real" to be dissolved or neutralized, it is necessary for it to be interiorized within the "very fabric" of the utopian work and it is the incorporation
and subsequent decoding of the real that distinguishes the utopian work from idyll or fantasy. This latter form, Jameson argues, "is precisely a representation and musters its narrative resources in order to impose the fullness of an image of a different form of life, an image the fascinated contemplation of which includes both anxiety and longing within itself." 23

For Jameson, it is less productive to consider utopian discourse, as a mode of narrative - as the novel or the epic - than to grasp it as an object of meditation, analogous to riddles or koan of the various mystical traditions, or the aporias of classical philosophy, whose function is to provoke a fruitful bewilderment, and to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualizable consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims and structural limits. Utopian praxis 'is thus to use Kantian terminology, a schematizing activity of the social and political imagination which has not yet found its concept.' 24

In neutralizing the determinate antinomies that underlie everyday experience — in bringing about a kind of pre-conceptual thinking in images — the utopian work may "be supposed to bring the mind up short before its own ideological limits, in a stunned and puzzled arrest of thought before the double bind in which it suddenly finds itself paralyzed." 25 What utopian discourse foregrounds through this process is "its own conditions of possibility as discourse." 26 The primary subject matter of utopian discourse, "and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it, is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to project the other of what is, a failure that, as with fireworks dissolving back into the night sky, must once again leave us alone with this history." 27 In other words, the discourse in which Vanderpant's work participated challenges existing social realities to the extent that it defines an emancipated culture as something that is nowhere already in existence, as something currently beyond conceptualization.

On some levels, Vanderpant's modernist elevator photographs did perform this kind of neutralizing function. Their formal strategies attempted to link the
architecture of the elevator — both unassuming yet closely linked to the narration of a modern Canada — to a transcendental order outside conceptual mediation. His near-abstract depictions of structures used for the storage of "essential grains" evoked a harmonious but undefined order, that can be seen as a neutralization of the conceptual opposition that underlay the relations of distribution within bourgeois democracy during the 1920s and 30s: an opposition between business — governed by pecuniary and predatory instincts — and industry, which was associated with creative capacities. In positioning the structure of the elevator within the realm of the sublime, Vanderpant's work emphasized the relation between a consciousness structured by the self-interest central to life under capitalism and the ghostly trace of an ideal order informed by the disinterestedness and efficiency of the engineer. In this respect, these images could bring the viewer up short in a kind of perplexed awareness of the structural limits of his/her own consciousness - inscribed in the viewer through an order which Vanderpant described as a "world [that] has always been managed from possession down, wages at a minimum profits at a maximum" - and point toward an alternative in which "we begin from below - allow everyone security and plenty and let production and distribution arrange itself accordingly." This vision may seem like an obsolescent fantasy from within the horizons of late capitalism that enclose what Jameson has described as the "one-dimensional landscape of a completed modernism." If the term "modern" has lost its meaning in an environment "where modernization is the law rather than the exception," it is important to consider that Vanderpant's audience of the 1920s and 1930s included a broad public of viewers/readers for whom the possibility of total systemic change and a transformation of the self were particularly resonant and real. The extent of this audience is attested to by the extensive proliferation of technological utopian literature published in North America during the first three decades of this century.
While the incorporation of the "real" is crucial for neutralization to occur within the utopian work, both Jameson and Marin have noted this process is equivocal, and holds the potential for mystification as much as neutralization. If the relation to the real is too comfortable, neutralization can be displaced into a more traditional form of representation, and the utopian work becomes historicized in a manner that suggests "the fuller image of some historically realizable and positively imaginable society." On this level - in its conciliatory relation to the real - Vanderpant's project was on tenuous ground, and its potential for neutralization was held in check.

While Vanderpant's engagement with a modern nationalist discourse — which had achieved a kind of hegemony in Canadian high culture — allowed his work to challenge the ideology of an elite culture within Vancouver, it also placed his project in a position that could easily be absorbed within the kind of liberal corporatism articulated by Mackenzie King. As we have seen, Vanderpant's work deployed a semiotic economy of the sublime that resisted alienation and positioned the viewer as a full observer of sublime power. While the viewer may have been brought up short before the limits of consciousness as the determinate equilibrium of inner and outer was disrupted, there is nothing in the compensatory form of the work to prevent the cleft opened up by the sublime encounter from being sutured by a historicized narrative of the nation, a narrative that confirmed an ascendent ideology that linked utopia to the rationalizing apparatus of the bourgeois state. In other words, Vanderpant's use of the elevator as subject matter not only incorporated the real into the fabric of his photographs, but also wove his work into the myth of modern Canada that lay at the heart of an ascendent liberal corporatism.

This process can be clearly seen in Norman Hacking's 1935 article on Vanderpant in The Province. "Cabbages and Cameras" opens with a paragraph
that points toward the potential of discerning a transcendent order — a sense of productive capacity freed from self-interest — in the structure of the elevator as depicted in Vanderpant's photographs:

When you or I look at a succulent red cabbage in Lee Wong's market we generally think vaguely of corned beef. When we survey the massive grain elevators from the railing of the North Vancouver ferry, we may think of Mr. Mackenzie King's wheat policies.

Mr. J. Vanderpant . . . sees the same things we do, but he sees them with the eyes of an artist. The heart of a red cabbage is a rhythmic pattern of sheer beauty. In a grain elevator he sees concrete power, the vitality of modern construction.34

However, this potential is subsequently absorbed in the accumulated narrative force of the Canadian environment that instilled itself on the artist's sensibilities. Noting that Vanderpant "feels at one with the spaces, the mountainous atmosphere of British Columbia" Hacking describes how through "this love of country" his vision took on a "new clarity" and "grain elevators became of the utmost significance, for they combined grandeur of conception with essential simplicity." This narrative goes on to link Vanderpant's clarified vision to the revelation of an essentialized Canadian identity:

When he was in Fort William recently he gave a talk to the combined Kiwanis clubs of Fort William and Port Arthur. He wanted to point out to them the intrinsic architectural beauties of their grain elevators [sic]. Business men found that their purely utilitarian storage bins were a distinct feature of Canada's artistic life. They had never realized it before. It was a new discovery on old travelled ground.35

Thus, the potential for the kind of neutralization described by Jameson is contained and refracted through an image of Canada's "artistic life." Any cracks in the representational surface are plastered over as utopian possibility is linked to the development of the existing bourgeois culture.

This slippage between Vanderpant's utopian project and the ideology of the Canadian state is even more clearly evident in the design of the Canadian pavilion from the 1937 Paris Exposition Universelle, constructed a year after Vanderpant
had stopped photographing elevators. Drawing upon the same set of symbolic meanings as Vanderpant’s elevator photographs, the pavilion took the form of a terminal elevator with bas reliefs depicting fisheries, mines, forests, wheat and fruit - along with a free-standing sculpture of a large bison - along the base of its cylindrical columns [fig. 41]. The pavilion tapped into the modern spirit signified by the simplicity and grace of the elevator in order to construct an image in which activities and products associated with regions of the country were bound together at the base of a modern temple of commerce, projecting an illusory vision of a nation characterized by social harmony and economic prosperity brought about through a modernized capitalist economy based on natural and agricultural resources.

Positioned at an intersection of modernist and nationalist discourses, Vanderpant’s project was fragile and contradictory. It offered a glimpse of a space uncontaminated by pecuniary interests. However, by enthusiastically embracing a carefully delimited and contained nationalist project, his work attached that space to the rapidly modernizing Canadian state. While he articulated an anti-capitalist stance in his more fully realized modernist photographs of the mid-1930s, the ideological force of this imagery coincided with that of his earlier elevator photographs, and was absorbed within the ideology of modern liberal-corporatism, which promised utopia through the rationalization of social space and success in production while naturalizing the relations of power that govern bourgeois culture.
Figure 41
The Canadian Pavilion at the 1937 Exposition Universelle in Paris, designed by Emile Brunet
NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR


2. Paraskeva Clark, "Come Out From Behind the Pre-Cambrian Shield," *New Frontier*, 1, No. 2 (April 1937), p. 16.

3. Clark, p. 16.


8. Robert J. McDonald, "Vancouver's 'Four Hundred': The Quest for Wealth and Status in Canada's Urban West, 1886-1914," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 25, No. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 63. Although McDonald's study covers the period prior to the First World War, many of the family names he discusses, such as Rogers and Henshaw, were important players within the city's social elite throughout the 1930s.


10. Henry A. Stone, Letter to Garnet Sedgewick, 24 February 1932. I am indebted to Patrik Andersson for providing me with a copy of this document.

11. See Barman, p. 245.


16. J.A. Radford, "Modernist Bunk' Attacked By Critic," Vancouver Star, 9 February 1932. I am indebted to Patrik Andersson for providing me with a copy of this article.

17. Julia W. Henshaw, "The Note Book," The Province (Vancouver) 1933. This quotation was taken from a photocopy of the article, which indicates the year but not the specific edition of The Province. The Varley exhibition referred to in the column was held in November and December of 1933. It is worth noting that by December of 1932, the membership of the Vancouver Sketch Cub, with which Vanderpant was once affiliated, was sufficiently hostile towards modernism to join in the call, led by Royal Canadian Academy president Wyly Grier, for a boycott of the National Gallery due to "flagrant partisanship" favouring modernist painting.


32. For a discussion of this literature see Howard P. Segal, Technological Utopianism in American Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).


34. Hacking, "Of Cabbages and Cameras."

35. Hacking, "Of Cabbages and Cameras."
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