

**THE TWILIGHT YEARS OF PICTORIALISM IN VANCOUVER:
THE ART PHOTOGRAPHY OF PERCY BENTLEY DURING THE SECOND
WORLD WAR**

by

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Abstract

A period of photographic history that has remained relatively unexplored in Vancouver is art photography during the Second World War. This thesis partly redresses this historical gap by examining the pictorial photography of Percy Bentley, a well known commercial photographer who operated a studio, the Dominion Photo Company, in Vancouver for almost half a century. Among the photographs that the thesis concentrates on is Bentley's most successfully exhibited image, *An Eastern Gateway*, which made its debut in 1941. Why did an image of India, originally taken in 1924 when Bentley worked as the official photographer aboard a cruise ship on its maiden world tour voyage, make its appearance as a pictorial photograph 21 years later during the Second World War?

During the Second World War, the government of the Dominion of Canada recognised the role that photography could play in the war; it created the National Film Board of Canada to use the power of film and photography to nurture support for the war. The wartime government also required art and professional photographers to avoid photographing or printing images of prohibited areas that might locate military and industrial sites. The response of pictorialists was to recognise the requests of the government and to adjust their photographic output accordingly. Thus, pictorialists, like Bentley, tended to produce edifying portraits of soldiers. Pictorialists aligned their views with those held by the state. While the documentary photography of the National Film Board of Canada was conscious of its ideological stance and its effort to encode public opinion, Bentley's pictorial photography was just as self-reflexive about reproducing a position which paralleled views held by Britain and its Dominions on the importance

of keeping India within the Empire. During the war, India was being swept by a tide of nationalism that sought independence from the British Empire at the same time that its eastern boarder was being encroached upon by a rapidly advancing Japanese army. I argue that Bentley's image, *An Eastern Gateway*, was imperialistically biased. At a time of national turmoil, the photograph showed a moment from the past in which India is represented as protected by the British Raj and passive.

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of Canadian photography, 1939 is perceived as a moment of rupture, marking the cessation of one period of photographic production and the ascendancy of another. Ann Thomas, curator of photography at the National Gallery of Canada, begins her study of pictorial photography in Canada in 1903 with the first Toronto Camera Club Salon and ends in 1939 for two reasons: it was the year that the last "Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art" was held at the National Gallery of Canada as well as the year that the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) was established.¹ Thomas's selection of an end date infers that the art photography created by pictorialists was replaced by the propagandistic documentary photography of the NFB as the relevant photographic practice on the national stage. Echoing Thomas and the importance of the photography produced by the NFB, the former chief curator of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Martha Langford, writes, "Since the Second World War, The National Film Board has played a principal role in photography in Canada, both from the point of view of culture and of information,"² while the art historian Carol Payne states that the photography of the NFB was "a catalyst for key changes in the production and reception of photography in Canada."³

While the National Gallery of Canada discontinued organising salons of pictorial photography against the backdrop of the Second World War, it was instrumental in legitimising the salon exhibition at art galleries in other regions across Canada.

¹ Ann Thomas, "Between a Hard Edge and a Soft Curve: Modernism in Canadian Photography," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 21, no. 1/2 (2000): 75.

² Martha Langford, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Canadian Photography from the Collection of the National Film Board* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984), 7.

³ Carol Payne, *A Canadian Document* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, 1999), 13.

Beginning in 1934, the "Canadian International Salon" toured the country exhibiting at art galleries in major urban centres. When the fifth and final "Canadian International Salon" was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) in August of 1939, reported to be "one of the most popular [shows] held at the Gallery,"⁴ its replacement came 10 months later in June of 1940 with the debut of the "First International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography." The year 1939 did not signal the demise of pictorialism in Vancouver but rather the emergence of a new stage of pictorial photography distinguished by greater local participation.

The International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography was a collaborative effort between the VAG and the Vancouver Photographic Society (VPS), a camera club of over a 100 members dedicated to the promotion of art photography. Their partnership would last until 1947, for a total of eight exhibitions. Apart from curator Helga Pakasaar's useful but cursory glance at pictorial photography in Vancouver in her essay "Formulas for the Picturesque: Vancouver Pictorialist Photography 1930 – 1945," no other publications have discussed art photography in Vancouver during the war years.⁵ This thesis will partially redress this historical gap by examining the salon photography produced by one of the VPS's most prominent members, Percy Bentley.

Percy Bentley is a useful figure through whom to approach art photography of this period not least because he was an active and respected member of the Society. By 1938, when Bentley joined the Vancouver Photographic Society, he had over 40 years experience as a commercial photographer. Bentley began his career in the photographic trade at the age of 12 in 1894 in London as an apprenticing albumen printer; he

⁴"Salon of Photography," *The Vancouver Sun*, August 29 1939.

⁵ See Helga Pakasaar, "Formulas for the Picturesque: Vancouver Pictorialist Photography 1930-1945," in *Vancouver, Art and Artists, 1931-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 2-3.

immigrated to Canada in 1911 and opened the commercial studio Dominion Photo Company in Vancouver in 1914, which he continued to manage for 48 years until retiring in 1962.⁶ As a pictorialist, Bentley capitalised on his experience as a successful commercial photographer to ascend the ranks of the Vancouver Photographic Society. Over a brief period of time, he received the highest honour available for a pictorialist by being invited to be one of only three judges at the "Third International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography" at the VAG in 1942; after that, he would serve twice more as a judge for Vancouver Salons. The significance of being a judge was not only to act as an arbiter of taste determining which pictorial photographs would be exhibited at the salons; jurors were rewarded with the privilege of exhibiting four of their photographs in the exhibition, the maximum amount of any contributor. A judge was a leader in the pictorial community. The respect that Bentley garnered amongst his peers was a result of the success he had at exhibiting at other international salons. In 1942, Bentley had many pictorial images in circulation. In that year, two of his most successfully exhibited works, *An Eastern Gateway* 1941 [fig. 1], and *Temple Steps* 1941 [fig. 2], had been collectively shown at 30 different International Salons. Finally, like other distinguished pictorialists, Bentley was made an Associate of the Royal Photographic Society in April, 1942, and would later become a Fellow, allowing him to use the letters ARPS and the FRPS after his name.

Pictorialism was an orthodox movement whose standards of practice were determined by a conservative agenda as will be shown in a reading of Bentley's most widely exhibited image, *An Eastern Gateway* [see fig. 1]. During the Second World War,

⁶ See Doris Mason, Percy Bentley to Doris Mason, transcript in the hand of Doris Mason, (Mason Family Records, 1947).

anxiety surfaced amongst the dominant class of Anglo-Canadians concerning the preservation of the British Empire. There was a fear that the British Empire was unable to protect the “Jewel in the Crown”—India—from Japanese expansion through the eastern gateway of Burma. I argue Bentley’s *An Eastern Gateway* is encoded with an imperialistic bias; it reflects a societal hope for the preservation of the British Empire at a time when it was on the brink of collapsing.

The methodology provided by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu structures my research on Bentley’s art photography. Bourdieu’s analytic model seeks to overcome objectivist accounts that concentrate exclusively on artists and their art as a reflection of larger social conditions, and seeks to transcend subjectivist accounts that perceive art’s meaning solely as the creation of artists who work autonomously. Bourdieu writes, “To understand the practices of writers and artists, and not least their products, entails understanding that they are the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions.”⁷

Detailing a history of positions demands mapping out the positions available to the artist in the cultural field; it includes, as well, recognising that the dynamic within each field is one of permanent conflict where each position taken struggles with the other for recognition.⁸ For the Vancouver pictorialists of the 1940s, the cultural field was comprised of the propaganda-documentary practices of the NFB and the “straight” art photography of California such as Edward Weston who exhibited at the VAG. Absent in the bulletins published by the Vancouver Photographic Society is any discussion of where they situate themselves either in competition with the documentary photography

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

produced by the National Film Board or with the “straight” art photography of the modernist Californian photographic group f.64. The failure by members of the VPS to actively differentiate themselves from documentary and modernist art photography led to an ambivalent position on those characteristics that were traditionally pictorial. While Bentley began his pictorial career creating more traditional, softly focused pictorial images, he soon switched to the production of art photographs that utilised the more modern hard-edge aesthetic. In addition, Bentley incorporated the contemporaneous issue of war into his art photography, a theme that was traditionally viewed by pictorialists as one reserved for documentary and news photography. Finally, after attending a lecture about “Record Photography,” the Vancouver Photographic Society encouraged members in their bulletin to experiment with producing objective photographs that could be used for science. The Vancouver pictorialists were affected by the authority possessed by modernist and documentary photography such that elements from both practices appeared in their art photography. The latitude of possibilities available to pictorialists at this time was due to members at the VPS viewing their photography as a hobby; thus, they were less interested in policing the boundaries of pictorialism than amateurs who experimented with different ways to make a picture. The authority the pictorialists possessed during the years of the Second World War was due in large part to the institutionalisation of their art photography at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

A history of dispositions outlines the artist’s *habitus*: the cultural beliefs and historical background of the artist that structures their world view and accounts for their ability to occupy a dominant position within their chosen field. Bentley left Britain for the Dominion of Canada as a skilled photographer at the age of 29, arriving in a country

that had preserved many British institutions and traditions. Thirteen years later, in 1924, Bentley was hired as the official photographer aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway's "Empress of Canada" on its maiden world tour voyage. Bentley sought to do more with the images from his round-the-world trip. Shortly after returning from his trip abroad, he wrote that he wished to publish a book about his journey using his photographs.⁹ As an aide-memoire, Bentley made three large photo albums that reconstructed the trip, taking the time to have some of the album's prints hand coloured in Japan. Almost 20 years later, Bentley joined the Vancouver Photographic Society, an organisation affiliated with the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, where he resuscitated his world tour images by reprinting them according to the dictates of the pictorial style. Bentley's pictorial career drew on his experience as a professional photographer as well on his good fortune to have travelled the world, which included a three week long sojourn in India. As a result, he produced accomplished photographs that were exotic in comparison to the work produced by his peers who were restricted to local subject matter due to the travel restrictions imposed on citizens during the Second World War.¹⁰

Finally, Bourdieu's analysis requires an examination of how a position taking in the cultural field is viewed by the broader field of power. While the state tolerated the practice of salon photography during the Second World War, pictorialists were not exempt from the regulations the government imposed on all photographers. The government was concerned about the photograph's ability to unwittingly disclose information about sensitive locations that were vital to Canada's industrial and military

⁹ Percy Bentley, Bentley to Family Overseas, a typed letter, Mason Family Records (January 18, 1926), 2.

¹⁰ For instance, Bentley was invited to serve as a judge for the International Salon in San Francisco in 1943 but could not attend due to war-time travel restrictions. See Mason, Percy Bentley to Doris Mason, transcript in the hand of Doris Mason, 4.

interests. Members of the Vancouver Photographic Society complied with the expectations of the state; they published letters sent by the Canadian Intelligence Bureau that outlined prohibited subject matter in the society's bulletin and they burned, by request, offending negatives. The Vancouver Photographic Society believed that they were leaders in the photographic community. As leaders, members of the Society were expected to set a good example to other photographers by adhering to the requests of the state to not photograph prohibited sites, thereby, fulfilling a duty to the war effort that aligned the pictorialists' position comfortably with the broader field of power, the Canadian government.

The first chapter will trace out the trajectory of pictorialism in order to situate the field of art photography in Vancouver. In pictorialism's formative years, art photographers adopted subject matter from the painting salons of the French Academy in order to demonstrate to a wider audience that the camera was not merely an objective recording device but could be used artistically. When Bentley joined the salon movement in 1938, almost 50 years later after the first pictorial groups were organised in Europe, pictorial photography additionally adopted stylistic characteristics from its main competitor, modernist "straight" photography. By the 1940s, pictorialism was in its twilight years evidenced by the distance that existed between its practitioners and the movement's traditions. The second chapter discusses the ways in which pictorialists were performing their duty to the war effort as photographers, from not photographing prohibited sites to donating a few exposures of film to those in the service who would enjoy a photograph of their family from home. While pictorial photographers sought to create the illusion of timelessness and placelessness in their photography in order to offer

a visual escape from present conditions, their sense of duty was such that pictorialists adopted the topic of the war as a theme in their salon photography. They produced images that paid tribute to the war effort while avoiding any view that might invoke negative associations with the cost of war, thereby satisfying pictorial sensibilities for their art to be un-provocative. The pictorialist's commitment to duty evinces the proximity of salon photography to the field of power, the Canadian wartime government. The third chapter examines the documentary photography produced by the National Film Board of Canada, the other most significant position occupied by photography in Canada during the Second World War. As an official mouthpiece of the state, the NFB was an extension of the policies of the Canadian government. While pictorialism and documentary photography represented two disparate practices, each circulating in their respective environments, they shared certain characteristics that aligned both practices with views of the state, signalling the importance of photography for war-time governments in the Second World War; however, while the NFB was aware of its ideological purpose to encode public opinion, the pictorialists were unself-reflexive about how their work was ideologically encoded. In the fourth chapter, I situate the emergence of Bentley's *An Eastern Gateway* in its historical moment. As India's eastern border was being encroached upon by Japanese forces and while, simultaneously, India was attempting to throw off the colonial yoke of British rule, the image *An Eastern Gateway* tapped into the views of the British Empire and its Dominions to have India maintain the status quo and remain incorporated within the imperial fold by resisting both external and internal pressures. The thesis concludes by discussing what has not been discussed thus far, Bentley's successful career as a professional photographer and the issues involved

with a study of his commercial negatives that are located in the Vancouver Public Library.

CHAPTER 1 – A HISTORY OF PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, 1890 - 1940

A) Industrialisation and the Origins of Pictorial Photography

Pictorial photography was an international movement of art photography that emerged at a time of rapid industrial growth and proliferation of cheap commodities. During this period, developments made in the technology of photography reduced the price of a camera as well as lessened the required amount of knowledge to produce a photograph, thereby permitting the economically ascending working classes greater access to the camera. One of the consequences of industrialisation and economic progress, writes the photo-historian Ulrich Keller, was “a rise of materialistic attitudes and a decline of aesthetic standards which alarmed ‘enlightened’ members of the upper middle classes. Thus, it was only a matter of time until the tide of industrialization triggered a reform movement aimed at the aesthetic improvement of commodity manufacture.”¹¹

The emergence of the hand held Kodak Camera in 1888, manufactured by the Eastman Company, was one such product from the tide of industrialisation that decisively led the medium away from the exclusive domain of a few dedicated practitioners who oversaw all stages of photographic production towards a more popular practice. The Kodak was released with the slogan, “You press the button – we do the rest.”¹² The camera was little more than a wooden box that was preloaded with a 100-shot roll of film. When the film was fully exposed, the entire camera would be sent back to the Eastman Company where the film would be processed and the camera reloaded. The ingenuity of this design was that it separated the taking of images from other procedures

¹¹ Ulrich F. Keller, "The Myth of Art Photography: A Sociological Analysis," *History of Photography* 8, no. 4 (Oct/Dec 1984): 249-50.

¹² Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King, 2002), 169.

of picture making, permitting greater accessibility to the camera while also being responsible for the proliferation of snapshots, as the Kodak lent itself increasingly to activities of leisure for the growing middle classes to picture themselves. In 1899, Alfred Stieglitz, one of pictorialism's most vocal advocates, wrote in response to the popularisation of photography that "the placing in the hands of the general public a means of making pictures with but little labor and requiring less knowledge has of necessity been followed by the production of millions of photographs. It is due to this fatal facility that photography as a picture-making medium has fallen into disrepute in so many quarters."¹³

Some wealthy and educated members of society who took photography seriously organised themselves into exclusive camera clubs as a means of distinguishing themselves from the photography produced by commercial and popular practices. These clubs such as the Linked Ring Brotherhood in London (1892), le Photo Club de Paris (1894), or later, the Stieglitz led Photo Secessionists of New York (1902), held exhibitions, terming them Salons, and produced their own publications that articulated their aesthetic doctrines in order to fill the authority vacuum left by the initial rejection of photography as a legitimate art form by high art establishments.¹⁴

For pictorialists, photographs which were not manipulated were merely factual recordings produced by a machine. If utilitarian and popular photography expressed a full range of tones, details, and was at times haphazardly framed, then pictorial photography would be its opposite. Conventional pictorial photographs were carefully composed, softly focused and low in tone as seen in the conventional pictorial landscape

¹³ Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 117.

¹⁴ Keller, "The Myth of Art Photography: A Sociological Analysis," 253.

that Bentley made in 1939, titled *Eventide*. [fig. 3] The decrease of tone coupled with the soft focus diminishes the details of the image so that the sliver of a coastline, the partially overcast sky and the rippled body of water are transformed into a series of broad shapes. The image appears more artistic as well because it utilises the technique of asymmetry by placing the setting of the sun off to the left hand side of the image.

In order to convince a wider public that photography possessed a “spirit” and that it should be evaluated by the same critical standards of other visual art, pictorialists made their photographs more “painterly.” From academic painting, pictorialists adopted not only picturesque subject matter such as idyllic landscapes and tranquil rural environments, they also took up the nude and portraiture and rendered it under a soft haze in order to differentiate themselves from the sharply focused photographs of commercial photography. In addition, in order to distance themselves from the mechanical reputation of photography, pictorialists employed handiwork to their prints such as brushwork, engraving tools and dyes.¹⁵ Of the different printing techniques accepted at International Salons (chloride, carbon, fresson, paper negative, cevaluxe) Bentley primarily used the bromide photographic process. With a bromide print, the whites are sharp, the blacks are deep and the greys are enhanced with a silver finish that gives the photograph a lustrous quality.

Pictorialists rarely sought to challenge the past by incorporating contemporary subject matter into their photography, selecting instead old-world imagery that connoted “timeless beauty.” This is to say, pictorialists were prone to reject the present world of

¹⁵ Alan Trachtenberg, "Introduction," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), xi.

industrialisation and commercialisation in favour of images that projected a pre-industrial, Arcadian world.¹⁶

Nicolas Haz, who was invited to Vancouver during the Second World War to lecture on art and who wrote several books that analysed qualities particular to pictorialism, observed that pictorialists photograph “things and people which lyric and romantic painters would paint”; this list includes images of youth, romantic land and seascapes, good looking human beings, interesting interiors and exteriors of buildings, exotic characters and semi-abstract photographs.¹⁷ The pictorialist, concludes Haz, “likes to make pictures that can be hung in homes, and which can be lived with.”¹⁸ This is to say, pictorial photography could be melodramatic or edifying but not provocative. In contrast, he notes, pictorialists do not picture “death, disease, destruction; crime, dirt, extreme poverty...war, pestilence, new ruins, blood and sweat.”¹⁹ While such topics makes for fine subject matter for documentary photographers, “who specialize in photography of the most abhorrent, disgusting, and scandalous conditions they can find in order to shame society,” states Haz, “it is utterly uninviting to pictorialists, who try to escape these conditions into a lyric and romantic, even though imaginary world.”²⁰

The initial goal of pictorialists was societal recognition of art photography. By avoiding provocative subjects, they placed themselves in a position not to risk offence and by adopting subjects and styles tested in other branches of the visual arts they presented their art photography in a form that was more recognisably artistic to audiences

¹⁶ Ulrich F. Keller, "The Myth of Art Photography: An Iconographical Analysis," *History of Photography* 9, no. 1 (Jan/Mar 1985): 4.

¹⁷ Nicholas Haz, *Image Management; Composition for Photographers* (Cincinnati: Ohio, N. Ház Book, 1946), 36.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

²⁰ Ibid.

who, during the formative years of pictorialism, viewed photography primarily as a mechanical recording device.

B) The Photo-Secessionists

A significant event in the history of pictorial photography in the United States was the "International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography of 1910."²¹ This exhibition was organised by Stieglitz and the Photo-Secessionists at the Albright Art Museum in Buffalo. The show exhibited just under 600 prints and was viewed by over 15,000 people, thereby becoming an important moment in the broader recognition of photography as art in North America.

Before the exhibition at the Albright Art Museum, the Photo Secessionists used the Gallery 291 and their magazine *Camera Work*, to promote the cause of pictorial photography. After the 1910 exhibition in Buffalo, the Photo-Secessionists would not exhibit together as a group again and Stieglitz turned his attention more fully to the promotion of modern art. Except for an exhibition of Stieglitz's photography that ran concurrently with the Armory Show in 1913, the Stieglitz-edited *Camera Work* did not discuss photography again until 1916. In that year, the magazine published a portfolio of Paul Strand's photography, which was celebrated for being "brutally honest."²²

Strand distinguished himself from the handiwork that characterised pictorial photography by declining to render the image in a soft haze or to photograph subjects with allegorical or symbolic meaning and produced instead images of clarity, with full

²¹ Christian A. Peterson, *Pictorialism in America: The Minneapolis Salon of Photography, 1932-1946* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1983), 9.

²² Daniell Cornell, "Camera Work and the Fluid Discourse of Pictorialism," *History of Photography* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 298.

details and sharpness that included subjects from the industrial world. In addition, Strand refuted the pictorial practice of manipulating the negative after it had been shot, recommending instead that the locus of art be placed at the level of mental composition. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau recounts, "it has...long been an uncontested claim in standard photographic history that the work of Paul Strand done around 1916 – and more particularly, its championship by Alfred Stieglitz, in the last two issues of *Camera Work* – signalled the coming of age of art photography as an authentically modernist, hence self-conscious art form" and, thus, has been marked as "the moment of reorientation and renewal of American art photography."²³ Solomon-Godeau's point is meant to be read ironically; she challenges the canonical interpretation of art photography which creates a linear view of history by connecting the dots from one innovative style to another. For Solomon-Godeau, the emphasis placed on stylistic differences between pictorialism and modernist photography ignores the structural similarities between the two practices. Nonetheless, the significance of the Photo-Secessionists entry into the Albright Art Museum was the institutional recognition of pictorialism as an art.

C) Pictorial Photography in Canada

Modernist or "straight" photography did not constitute a single practice in the United States or in Europe. Alan Trachtenberg notes that the genre of "straight" photography lent itself to several interpretations: in some cases the "pure" photograph connoted a transcendental spiritualism as was true for Stieglitz and Edward Weston; in other cases, the clarity of image reflected the "genius" of the photographer as it did for

²³ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography after Art Photography," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 106.

Strand; for Lewis Hine, the sharply rendered photography aimed for accuracy and social honesty; while, for Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray, modernist photography “represented a way of altering conventional vision altogether, wrenching it into new perspectives and opening new means of experience”; finally, for Walker Evans, the straight image was a synthesis of documentation and experiment, bringing together the objectivity of report and the subjectivity of feeling.²⁴ However, while salon photography increasingly began to lose its position of authority in the United States and Europe, pictorialism continued to dominate the field of art photography in Canada throughout the 20s, 30s and into the 40s. Thomas writes that, “Stieglitz’s undermining of the supremacy of Pictorialist photography in the United States through his support of modern art and his questioning of the Pictorialist aesthetic, as well as the European experiments with new photographic techniques, had little or no effect on photography in Canada where the Pictorialist aesthetic was kept alive through the network of camera clubs.”²⁵

Pictorialism would continue to flourish in Canada, albeit in a hybrid form. According to Thomas, while Canadian pictorialists sought to refurbish the language of their art “they were willing to do so only to a degree that allowed them to remain within the conceptual and formal tradition of Pictorialism.”²⁶ The advancements made by Canadian pictorialists were done with their gaze turned to the past; so, even when Canadian pictorialists adopted modern iconography and rendered it in sharp detail, it was not done in order to challenge tradition. One notable exception was the art photography created by John Vanderpant, arguably Canada’s premier pictorialist; he is considered as one of the foremost practitioners of the hybrid style that incorporated elements from both

²⁴ Trachtenberg, "Introduction," xii.

²⁵ Thomas, "Between a Hard Edge and a Soft Curve: Modernism in Canadian Photography," 79.

²⁶ Ibid.: 86.

modernist photography and pictorialism. Vanderpant introduced geometric forms in his art photography but persisted in using soft focus, tonal paper, and he would retouch his prints.²⁷

D) Two Trajectories of Pictorial Photography in Vancouver

The central place that Vanderpant occupies in the history of pictorial photography in Canada is a consequence of the resolve he demonstrated to test the limits of the genre while staying within its borders. Grant Arnold has shown how Vanderpant's employment of the operating terminal grain elevators, located along Burrard Inlet, first in 1926 and again in 1934, placed his art photography at the intersection of conflicting discourses. For example, in *Colonnades of Commerce* 1926 [fig. 4], Vanderpant selected a subject that could be recognised as both modern and Canadian and, as such, permitted Vanderpant to participate in the nationalist discourse that was on the ascendant in Canada during the 20s, revolving around the paintings of the Group of Seven and promote of by the National Gallery. Moreover, by selecting subject matter that was Canadian and contemporary, Vanderpant broke with the pictorial tradition of selecting subjects sanctioned by traditions inherited from Europe. Yet, as Arnold observes, "This break with Pictorialism...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 the network and the audience it engaged."²⁸ So while Vanderpant's tight cropping of the elevators simplifies their forms, thereby demonstrating his awareness of modernist aesthetics, he still kept many attributes of

²⁷ Ibid.: 85.

²⁸ Grant Arnold, "The Terminal City and the Rhetoric of Utopia," *Collapse* 5 (2000): 41.

pictorialism such as soft focus effects, low tonality and printed photographs using the silver bromide process.

When Vanderpant returned to the elevator as a subject in 1934 with *Untitled (Verticals)* [fig. 5], he shed the soft focus effects and employed a more dynamic position to the subject. In the later images of grain elevators, Vanderpant subscribed to the mystical belief that through the cultivation of forms and their organisation into harmonious relationships, the art object could bring the subject into view of a higher order. As Arnold states “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.”²⁹ Due to the angle of the shot, the tilting of the camera upwards and the way that the light falls highlighting the edges of the elevators, the grain elevators in *Untitled (Verticals)* are transformed into a series of converging verticals. Critical here for Vanderpant’s utopian project is that the harmonious order captured in *Untitled (Verticals)* could extend beyond the frame. Social progress was thought to be promised by such art during these years of the Depression as it was believed the work would lead to the transformation of human thought and spirituality.

Horace Gordon Cox was a contemporary of Vanderpant’s and like Vanderpant, began an amateur art practice shortly after opening up commercial studios in New Westminster in the early 20s. Both Vanderpant and Cox were highly regarded art photographers; the VAG held three solo exhibitions of their work, respectively, and both were successful contributors to International Salons. Yet, while Vanderpant tested the limits of pictorialism, Cox was a faithful subscriber to its tenets. As curator Bill Jeffries

²⁹ Ibid.: 70.

suggests, "Cox worked within parameters formed by previous generations of photographers in other cities. Within those parameters he is probably the best practitioner that Vancouver has ever known."³⁰ Cox manipulated his photographs so that they would be harmoniously composed. In one series of photographs, Cox created a tableaux in order to exercise total control over his image.

In the photograph, *The Bath* 1927 [fig. 6], two miniature, nude porcelain dolls are seen in evocative poses; they are illuminated by a single light source streamed through a window on the left side of the image. The two figurines lounge in front of a pool of water in the presence of a barely discernible statue of the Laughing Buddha, the Chinese form of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. While the Future Buddha sits upon a raised platform, a sign of respect typically allocated to Buddhist teachers, the statue is placed under a dome shaped arch one finds within Islamic architecture. For pictorialists, historical accuracy was not important; they were more concerned with imbuing the photograph with an aura of mystery that permits the viewer to "participate in a vague esoteric experience, to let him feel like a 'chosen one' dwelling on spiritual heights."³¹ Most pictorialists did not go to the same lengths as Cox to construct a tableaux, opting instead to manipulate the real world through models and careful framing or by manipulating the negative itself, but such efforts reveal the premium pictorialists placed on controlling the photograph in order to produce an image that was compositionally sound.

³⁰ Bill Jeffries, "Athens on the Fraser - the Photographs of Horace Gordon Cox," in *H.G. Cox: British Columbia Pictorialist* (North Vancouver, B.C.: Presentation House Gallery, 2004), 3.

³¹ Ulrich F. Keller, "The Myth of Art Photography: An Iconographical Analysis," *History of Photography* 9, no. 1 (Jan/Mar 1985): 10.

While Vanderpant and Cox incorporated the hard-edge aesthetic in their art photography at different points in their career, neither of them made a full break with pictorialism. Signalling Vanderpant's crisis with pictorialism, he lodged a critique of the genre in 1928 with *The Photographic Journal*, a London based journal published by the Royal Photographic Society that championed pictorialism. In the letter he wrote, "...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."³² Vanderpant's attack was not a total condemnation of pictorialism but was directed at the inability of pictorialists to adopt modern subject matter. For the next four years, Vanderpant would continue to produce softly focused photographs while steadily adopting more and more characteristics of modernist photography in his practice. However, Vanderpant stopped short of full conversion to the hard-edge aesthetic as practiced by his peers, members of the west coast f.64 group, by refusing to use glossy paper to print his photographs; thus, Vanderpant maintained the separation between the "artistic" matte paper and the "commercial" glossy throughout his career keeping comfortably on the side of the pictorialists. Vanderpant also continued to participate in the pictorial community throughout the 30s; he was invited to be a member of the jury for the "Second Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art" in 1935 and continued to exhibit with the National Salon up until its final show in 1939. Lastly, the Vancouver Photographic Society published an obituary on Vanderpant in their first bulletin in November of 1939, noting the Vanderpant was an honorary member and was always ready to help the society

³² Qtd. in Arnold, "The Terminal City and the Rhetoric of Utopia," 31.

in any possible way.³³ Cox's adoption of a greater range of tones and sharper definition were observable by the third solo show at the VAG in 1939, in an exhibition comprising of eighty photographs of a single nude model, titled "The Book of Muriel."³⁴ Yet, Cox would give lectures at the Vancouver Photographic Society for novice members in between the years 1939 to 1940³⁵ and he was a judge for the Vancouver's Second International Salon before moving to Victoria to work for the military for the duration of the Second World War.³⁶ After the war, Cox would continue exhibiting his art photography at the Vancouver Salons.

For Canadian art photographers in the 30s to maintain an ambivalent relationship to pictorialism and modernism is not surprising considering that the genres were not as different as they first appear. As Solomon-Godeau stresses, it is "an almost exclusive concentration on the stylistic developments in art photography, no less than the accompanying preoccupation with its exemplary practitioners, [which] tends to obscure the structural continuities between the 'retrograde' pictorialism of the earlier part of the century and the triumphant modernism of its successors."³⁷ Hence, while pictorialists and modernists approached their art photography from different stylistic positions they both believed that the artist creates the meaning of the work. Belief in the authority of the artist required pictorialists and modernist photographers alike to share a faith in ideas of originality, self-expression and subjectivity.

³³ Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," November 1939, 4.

³⁴ Jeffries, "Athens on the Fraser - the Photographs of Horace Gordon Cox," 2.

³⁵ In his lecture titled "Print Cropping", Cox told his audience that he did not favour such a procedure; however, if it was absolutely necessary, he demonstrated how it could be done with a set of masks. Clearly Cox preferred, like the modernist photographers, to print the image as it was taken in the camera, unedited, such that the composition occurs mentally and not as an after thought. See Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," May 1940, 3.

³⁶ Jeffries, "Athens on the Fraser - the Photographs of Horace Gordon Cox," 1.

³⁷ Solomon-Godeau, "Photography after Art Photography," 109.

Pictorialists were largely indifferent to the stylistic differences of modernist photography, as seen in Bentley's pictorial photographs. When Bentley began his pictorial career, he produced the softly focused photograph of an idyllic landscape, *Eventide* [see fig. 3]; however, soon thereafter, he was consistently producing high contrast, sharply rendered photographs and, after the war, he introduced modern subject matter into his art photography. For instance, in his pictorial image, *Dynamic Symmetry* 1946 [fig. 7], Bentley utilised the effects of high contrast to transform a view of generators, possibly taken at the Stave Falls Hydro dam, into a cascading flow of metallic arches. In his photograph, *Controlled Rhythm*, 1946, [fig. 8] Bentley employed the technique of tight cropping again coupled with a modernist upward tilting of the camera to convert a detailed view of Vancouver City Hall into a play between dark and light rectangles. The one feature common to all of Bentley's photography was his rejection of glossy paper for tonal paper. Matte paper appears slightly grainier than photographs with a gloss finish, thus, providing a slight softening of an image's details.

Members of the Vancouver Photographic Society were also interested in using the camera for objective purposes. In June 1942, Philip Timms, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, gave a lecture on "Record Photography" to the VPS that he described as "the highest type of photography."³⁸ This lecture explained how photography was used in order to keep records for geological, paleontological and sociological purposes. Concerning the sociological use of photography, Timms demonstrated to his audience Vancouver's transition from the use of "oxcart to horse and buggy and then to gas-wagon," by presenting lantern slides of the city's street scenes.³⁹ Timm's lecture was

³⁸ Ibid., 1.

³⁹ Ibid., 2.

received positively, such that the society decided to form a Record Section. In order to get the section started the VPS asked each member to provide one 5x7 print.⁴⁰ With their interest in the objective possibilities of photography, members of the Vancouver Photographic Society had come full circle from the days when pictorialists wanted to distance themselves from the factual connotations associated with photography. Pictorial photography, as practiced by the VPS, continued with the trajectory initiated by Cox of adopting a hard edge aesthetic into their practice, while ignoring modernist aspirations such as those expressed by Vanderpant for their photography to be evaluated by more than aesthetic qualities alone. The consequence was that by the 1940s pictorial photography had entered its twilight years, having lost its connection to its tradition while reproducing itself as a style without a depth of purpose.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2 – PHOTOGRAPHY'S DUTY DURING WORLD WAR TWO

A) The Vancouver Photographic Society

The Vancouver Camera Club (VCC), the precursor to the Vancouver Photographic Society, was founded on January 5th, 1934 by 20 amateur photographers. By 1939, when VCC changed its name to the Vancouver Photographic Society, it had grown to over a hundred members. The name change coincided with the increased popularity of the society as, in the same year, it began to publish a four-page bulletin which kept members up to date with news of the society, photographic tips and dates of upcoming international salons. Bentley joined what was to become the Vancouver Photographic Society in 1938, based on "an urge for some diversion in the way of a hobby."⁴¹ By 1939, he was the Chairman of the Print Committee, a position he held for two years.⁴²

The Society was initially presided over by G.E. Jarvis who organised some of the first group photographic exhibitions held at the VAG in the 30s, annual exhibitions of the Vancouver Mountaineering Club. The Vancouver Photographic Society's motto was "to encourage the beginner and to assist the advanced worker in the art of photography," indicative of the society's belief that everyone had the potential to be artists as long as they abided by the aesthetic rules dispensed by the VPS. The Society wanted to "serve the majority" in its organisation of lectures and demonstrations, so it pursued a "middle course," arranging lectures for both novices and advanced practitioners.⁴³ The Vancouver

⁴¹ Mason Family Records, Percy Bentley to Doris Mason, transcript in the hand of Doris Mason, 4.

⁴² The bulletins published by VPS infrequently listed the positions held by members so there is no clear date of when Bentley left his position as Chair of the Print Committee. In the bulletins, Bentley was recorded as the Chairperson of the Print Committee twice, once in November, 1939 and again in March, 1940; however, by November, 1941, E. Atkinson had assumed the position.

⁴³ Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," Nov. 1939, 3.

Photographic Society, in contrast to photographic societies like the Photo-Seccessionists, was far less elitist, opening its doors to both amateur and established photographers; thus, the authority of the Vancouver Photographic Society during the Second World War to speak as a voice of the photographic field in the city was a result of the institutionalisation of their photography at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Members met once a month for their regular monthly meeting. Routinely, at these general meetings, there was a print analysis of member's photographs as well as guest lectures. For instance, both Haz and Timms were invited to lecture at the society's general meetings. Scattered throughout the rest of the month would be lectures on different photographic techniques. The meetings were regularly held in the Club Rooms in the Victory Building on West Pender Street in downtown Vancouver.

The most important service the Society offered was the critiques they held of each other's work, organised by the Print Committee. In the monthly print analysis, a respected member of the community would be nominated to lead a critique of the submitted photographs. These critiques determined the status of each member. Photographers from the three ranks within the society (beginner, intermediate and advanced) were encouraged to submit their photographs for analysis. The rationalising process that informed the division of the society into different stages of skill level extended itself to how photographers were allocated their status within the society. A VPS bulletin from 1942 laid out the process in which photographers were evaluated and how they acquired their different ranks. For a photographer to move from the status of beginner to intermediate, he or she was required to have won three honourable mentions for photographs that they submitted to either the society's print analysis or at an

International Salon. In the point system used by the VPS until November 1941,⁴⁴ a photograph received an honourable mention when it scored 20 out of 30 points in the three categories, worth 10 points each. Photographs were rated for their general appeal (their pictorial quality), their composition and how successful the photographs were printed (their technique).⁴⁵ For a photographer to move from the intermediate to the advanced group, they needed to have won a minimum of four honourable mentions. Only advanced pictorialists participated at established International Salons.

B) War and Art for Art's Sake

In June of 1943, the Vancouver Photographic Society's Bulletin announced the arrival of Nicholas Haz from New York. Haz was invited to Vancouver for 6 weeks during which time he would serve as one of three judges for the "Fourth International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography," as well as give lectures on art.

Haz was a photographer, a painter, and an author who was originally from Czechoslovakia; he wrote two books on photography where he discussed the grammar of pictorial photography.⁴⁶ As well, Haz had co-facilitated a three-work course in

⁴⁴ The system was changed to a 100 point system because members of the VPS recognised that a photograph could, theoretically, be awarded an honourable mention, while still falling in one of the three categories. The 100 point system was structured so that a photograph required a good showing in all three categories in order to be promoted. See Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," November 1941, 1-2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶ The two books that Haz wrote on photography, *Emphasis in Pictures* (1937) and *Image Management* (1946) were concerned with the basic elements that constitute a picture. How these elements are synthesised determines the effectiveness of the photograph to express an idea or an emotion. Haz arrives at the conclusion that there are 19 elements that can contribute to a successful artistic image by analysing an image of a single black dot. His analysis starts with a single black drop because he believed that every picture could be reduced to a fundamental element—that it is a spot. The subject of the photograph—the spot—can be analysed by its size, its position in the photograph, its size and tone and finally how many dots are present in the picture. In addition, the photograph can be analysed in terms of colour, motion, balance, unity, harmony and emphasis. The success of the image depends on how certain elements of the picture are emphasised over others. Haz does not provide any absolute formulas in the management of the

photographic composition with Ansel Adams in 1937 and his photographic work was valued by Yosuf Karsh, Steichen and Stieglitz.⁴⁷ Stieglitz, commenting on Haz, said, "I know no one more competent or more sincere than Nicholas Haz as a teacher of photography."⁴⁸ Haz gave a total of 12 lectures during his stay, covering such topics as colour photography and abstract art, which was greeted by the Vancouver audience with delight and bafflement according to one report.⁴⁹

The VPS Bulletin reviewed the lecture that Haz gave for the Society at the Canadian Pacific Auditorium where he discussed the importance of photography. In that lecture, Haz is quoted as saying, "fighting the war today depends as much on photography as on tanks, guns, or bombs."⁵⁰ Here, Haz viewed photography broadly as a weapon of war. At the last lecture he gave in Vancouver to the Women's Canadian Club at the Hotel Vancouver on the afternoon of June 11, 1943, he stated that "Without military photographs it would be impossible to carry on a war of the air, such as we are waging against the Nazis."⁵¹ Haz acknowledged photography's utilitarian function as being a source of information. In the same lecture, he suggested that the ability of abstract artists to use personal symbols that lack universal recognition affirms that we live in a free country where an artist can think and paint as he pleases. This is in contrast to Germany where, not only must the works be so simple that a grocer or a ditch digger

picture's elements. The success of every image is dependent on the viewers' tastes. A person interested in advertising or scientific photography will come with a different set of expectations than pictorialists. (See Nicholas Haz, *Emphasis in Pictures; a First Aid to Composition* (Canton, Ohio: Fomo Pub. Co., 1937). and Haz, *Image Management; Composition for Photographers*.)

⁴⁷ Ira H. Latour, *Ansel Adams, the Zone System and the California School of Fine Arts* [Internet] ([cited July 18 2007]); available from <http://www.iralatour.com/writings.cfm?action=show&id=8>.

⁴⁸ Ibid..

⁴⁹ See "Modern Art Baffles and Delights Canadian Club," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, June 12 1943, 11.

⁵⁰ Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," June 1943, 3.

⁵¹ "Enjoyable Discourse on Art," *Vancouver News-Herald*, June 12 1943, 9.

can understand them, "Pictures in dictatorships must serve a socially useful purpose."⁵²

With pictorialism's adherence to aesthetic principles such as composition, harmony and balance, pictorialists produced photographs that pursued the idea of art for art's sake.

Accordingly, pictorialists were participants in the preservation of a freedom not found in dictatorships.

The authority of Haz's voice to speak for photographic production in Vancouver during the war years is evidenced by the attention that he received from the local newspapers and his presence at the VAG as a lecturer as well as one of three judges for the "Fourth International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography." Haz was also held in high regard by members of the Vancouver Photographic Society. Bentley's scrapbook, which was comprised almost exclusively of newspaper clippings discussing his own work, was interrupted with the inclusion of articles about Haz's stay in Vancouver. No doubt, Haz coming from one of the world's centres as well as an associate of prominent modernist photographers lent his opinions greater weight amongst his audience in a city at the edge of the British Empire.

Haz was not alone in believing that artists and art galleries in North America had a duty to preserve "culture." The Vancouver Art Gallery, responding to the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, wrote in October 1939,

Inevitably we fear the present titanic clash in Europe will result in the destruction of priceless treasures of art, of great buildings which have taken generations to establish. Many a lamp of culture will be blown out—never to be re-lighted. Here in Vancouver we have one small shrine of art at present safe from attack. We urge all who love and appreciate the things of the spirit to bear this in mind and to help us in the task that lies before us.⁵³

⁵² Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," June 1943, 3.

⁵³ Vancouver Art Gallery, "The Art Gallery Bulletin," October 1939, 2.

The task that lay ahead for members of the Vancouver Art Gallery, on the one hand, was to provide additional financial support. With the outbreak of war in Europe, the gallery had to resort to month to month financing. On the other hand, the gallery believed that it and the artists it represented had a responsibility to preserve "culture" when it was being lost to war in Europe.

C) First International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography, 1940

The "First International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography" ran from June 4th to June 23rd, 1940. The exhibition included submissions from 17 different countries. A total of 1,026 prints from 272 photographers were received by the five judges and of those 326 prints from 176 exhibitors were accepted.

In order to accept as many prints as possible as well as to maximise the space allocated to the salon by the VAG, the pictures were hung in two rows, separated only by a few inches as seen in one view of the exhibition photographed by Bentley's Dominion Photo Company [fig. 9]. The exhibited photographs were predominately placed on horizontal, 16 by 20 inch mounts. Despite sharing a standard format, however, the photographs varied in size on the mat board.

In a closer view of the Vancouver Salon [fig. 10], a typical cross section of pictorial photographs is presented. Moving from the left of the picture to the right, one can make out a tightly cropped portrait of a woman of Asian descent, a re-created religious scene of Mary with the baby Jesus and a couple of cloud studies. On the middle wall are views of rustic, idyllic villages that are horizontal in format and on the far right wall are more portraits of various types including a woman who is fashionably dressed as

well as a gentleman who sits on an armchair. Counted among this collection of photographs is the one and only salon photograph that Bentley had exhibited in this international salon, *Hands of the Miser* 1939 [fig. 11]. Bentley's salon photograph is the second image above the seated figure; it is of a pair of young hands that appeared aged by being gnarled and veined that rest on a bed of scattered coins. The inflation of the veins seen on the hands was accomplished by wrapping elastic bands around the wrists in order to stem the circulation of blood.⁵⁴ This detailed, full toned photograph is Bentley's parable on the misery of greed.

The *Vancouver Province* wrote an in-depth review of the exhibition. Vancouver's mayor, James Lyle Telford, who was in attendance at the opening, was quoted as saying that "These pictures are natural photographs of things as they really are. The photographers are not only great craftsmen, but they have high artistic sense."⁵⁵ The article's anonymous writer goes on to state that the exhibition is represented by "photographic art at its finest, its most imaginative, but beyond that, particularly the European and Asiatic prints; they are glimpses of a world on the brink of catastrophe."⁵⁶ Studies of clouds, portraits of everyday people, views of rural environments and visual moral narratives, which were included in this small sample of photographs from Vancouver's First Salon, were un-provocative. More importantly, the pictorial photographs did not explicitly speak of the present but instead dwelled in images that connoted a timeless past of peace and beauty, which was appreciated by both the mayor of the city as well as by the reporter of the event. As the war waged outside of North America, pictorialists were indirectly fulfilling their duty as photographers by practicing

⁵⁴ Dorothy Mason, interview by author, digital recording, Vancouver, BC., 28 Feb. 2006.

⁵⁵ "At Art Gallery: Photographic Salon Praised," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, June 5 1940, 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

art for art's sake; thereby preserving a freedom that was presented by Haz as a critical difference between democracies and dictatorships; nonetheless, the government of Canada believed photographers had a greater responsibility yet to fulfill.

D) To Serve in Silence is the Duty of Every Citizen in or Out of Uniform

In the same bulletin that announced the arrival of Haz to Vancouver were two articles forwarded from the Canadian Joint Services Security Intelligence Bureau. Canadian Intelligence, at the local level, was attached to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police during the Second World.⁵⁷ The inclusion in the VPS bulletin of letters from an intelligence bureau is unusual considering that the Society was a non-partisan organisation that brought together photographers, beginners and advanced, for the advancement of the *art* of photography. As noted in a preamble by the President of VPS, the insertion of the letters in the bulletin was done in order to instruct members to "set a proper example by refraining from photographing in and around restricted sites, and to decline to develop or print negatives of prohibited places."⁵⁸ The letter's contents, in addition, highlighted a concern for the danger of rumours; it reported that Axis operatives in Canada could seize upon information provided by citizens and use that information in order to learn about the location of armed forces. As well, these spies might gather, distort and magnify unwittingly dropped information by citizens to wage a psychological battle over the minds of Canadians in order to "put the sand of dissension into the morale

⁵⁷ Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Backgrounder No. 5: A Historical Perspective on CSIS* [Internet] (cited July 18 2007); available from <http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/en/newsroom/backgrounders/backgrounder05.asp>.

⁵⁸ Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," June 1943, 1.

cogs of the war machine.”⁵⁹ The letter concludes with the recommendation, “Silence is the cure for psychological [sic] sabotage!”⁶⁰

E) Silencing Photography

Photography was vital to the war effort as Haz claimed but such importance demanded that the medium be restricted by the state and, as a result, Canadians did not enjoy the freedom to photograph as they pleased. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Japanese-Canadians had their family photographs confiscated as “evidence” of their disloyalty to Canada as well as being forbidden to possess a camera by the British Columbian Securities Commission.⁶¹ Canadians of Anglo-descent, while not suffering from the same racist policies, also felt its repressive arm. In the Dominion Photo Negative Registry, Bentley recorded that he had to destroy nine negatives that he took for the Union Oil Company. Beside the client’s name where Bentley would normally provide a brief description of what was photographed there was a blank space. Over that space, nine lines large, he wrote, “Negatives were burned by request of Canadian Intelligence.”⁶²

Bentley treated the letters from the Intelligence Bureau with respect. In a book that he had bound of all the salon exhibitions organised by the VPS as well as all the bulletins published by the Society between the years 1939 to 1943, he included two

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Namiko Kunimoto, "Intimate Archives: Japanese-Canadian Family Photography, 1939-1949," *Art History* 27, no. 1 (2004): 131.

⁶² Percy Bentley, "Dominion Photo Negative Register, June 19th - December 1945," (Vancouver Public Library Special Collections, 1948), 349.

letters received from the Intelligence Bureau.⁶³ The two letters fold out from the book: one details the amendment made to the War Measures Act in 1942 that prohibited the photographing of any place deemed protected by a competent authority, such as the coastline as well as of any ship; the second was an order that details specifically, in point form, the places and things that cannot be photographed. Protected places deemed off limits included Esquimalt Harbour, Vancouver Harbour, the westerly edge of Point Grey, the Bridges at First Narrows and Second Narrows. As well, photographers were ordered to not photograph any military sites: fortifications; searchlights; listening posts; aerodrome and seaplane stations; barracks or any vessel of war either complete or under constructions. Finally, all roads and railways were off limits to photographers as well as electricity, gas and water works and oil stores.

The Canadian Joint Services Security Intelligence Bureau, representing and enforcing the policies of the Canadian government, regarded photography as potentially treacherous, thus, requiring regulation. Complying with the Intelligence Bureau's rules, Bentley burned the offending negatives of Union Oil Company.

Pictorialists did not need to alter their photographic practices in order to fall into accordance with the expectations of the state. Pictorialists were reluctant to take as their subject modern objects like bridges or ships. Bentley did not begin to adopt modern subject matter into his salon photography until after the war as seen previously in *Dynamic Symmetry* [see fig. 7]. And, even when pictorialists took up modern subjects, the photograph would be tightly cropped so that the location of the site could not be determined. By reducing details in the image, *Dynamic Symmetry* is a photograph of a

⁶³ See Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," (Vancouver Public Library Special Collections, 1943).

turbine and *not* a photograph of the turbines found at the Stave Falls Hydro Dam. So, while Roland Barthes noted that the photograph, “is pure contingency and can be nothing else,” observing how photography yields up details that can be the source of ethnological knowledge,⁶⁴ (which is not unlike Timms’ views on “Record Photography”) the pictorialists were vigilant in editing out those “distracting” ethnographical details in order to give their photography a universal dimension.

It was through the management of details, placing careful attention on excluding those details that would give specificity to the subject, that pictorialists, like Bentley, incorporated the theme of war as a subject. His photograph, *O.C.*, 1944 [fig. 12], is a portrait of a soldier, equipped with a shrapnel helmet, recognisable by the chin strap that secured the helmet on the head as well as by the wide circular brim that provided additional protection to the shoulders. Absent in this photograph is any insignia on either the helmet or the wool overcoat which would assign this soldier a country or rank. The only clue of this soldier’s rank is provided by the title, *O.C.*, a military acronym for officer commanding. This is not of an image of a soldier who recently came from the front lines; he is not covered in dirt, his helmet is neither scratched nor dented and his clothes are un-tattered; rather it is an image that works to provide an ideal presentation of soldiery. This soldier’s look is not downcast, broken by the experience of war; rather, his head is held high and his attention is turned towards the light. Bentley’s *O.C.* demonstrates how members of the Vancouver Photographic Society used their photographic skills to honour soldiers and to pay tribute to the sacrifices they were making for Canada and its allies.

⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 28.

Along with making the soldier a subject for pictorial photography during World War II, pictorialists made additional contributions to the war effort by donating a few exposures for the soldiers serving overseas. In the January bulletin from 1943, the Society writes, "By the way, is there any family in your neighborhood whose boy or girl is away from home in the services? You might have an exposure or two to finish a roll. Why not put into practical effect the suggestion made months ago by our president and take a snap of the boy's family, home or pets? A three by four or four by five print would make the boy or girl happy, would make the family your friends for life and give you a satisfaction that all the money in the world couldn't buy."⁶⁵

As the Second World War was fought on the sea, in the air and on the ground in Europe, Asia and Africa, the membership of the Vancouver Photographic Society attempted to fulfill their duty to the war effort with their photography in indirect ways: they respected the prohibitions issued by Canadian Intelligence; they produced portraits that cast its soldiers in a positive light; they were requested to spare some film for men and women serving overseas and they thought they were safeguarding an artistic freedom found only in democracies. The commitment of pictorialists to their sense of duty aligned their position to the field of powers held by the government of Canada and, as well, to the imperial government of the British whose hegemonic role in world politics was felt more forcefully in one of the Empire's Dominions. But, as will be shown next in the third chapter, the photography produced by the National Film Board of Canada played a more direct role in supporting the war effort. The NFB produced images that sought to encourage patriotism in Canada which was necessary, amongst other things, to sustain the purchasing of war bonds. The National Film Board's photography was

⁶⁵ Vancouver Photographic Society, "The Vancouver Photographic Society Bulletin," January 1943, 1.

conscious about the ideology it was disseminating in a way that pictorial photography was not.

CHAPTER 3 – ENCODING PUBLIC OPINION, THE DOCUMENTARY

PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

A) The National Film Board of Canada

The National Film Board of Canada, founded a month after Canada's entry into the Second World War and led by John Grierson for the duration of the war, employed film initially and photography later in 1941 to foster a sense of national identity, unity and duty.⁶⁶ The NFB produced photographs utilising the authority of the documentary idiom, which drew upon the public's faith in the neutrality and veracity of photography, in order to affect its message of nationhood and citizenship.⁶⁷

With the incorporation of a Photo-Stills Division in 1941, the NFB began to produce photo-stories; they, like film, were meant to circulate as widely as possible, so the photo-stories were placed in magazines and newspapers. The photo-stories dealt with social issues such as industrial achievements and human interest stories; they combined text with images so that the message of the story was clear.⁶⁸ More importantly, the photographs were designed to be uncontroversial and appear as factual. The association of objectivity with NFB photographs was a result of how they were shot. If a photograph featured a figure, that person would be posed and snapped as if the photographer was not there. Either indoors or outdoors, the images were strategically lit, at times fully illuminated in order to be factual and at other times shot with a single light source in order to be dramatic—little was left to chance in these images. As Payne notes, “these photographs of the war years – like those of subsequent decades – were highly didactic

⁶⁶ Payne, *A Canadian Document*, 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁸ Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 273.

images which used the authority of documentary to deliberately encode opinion or ideology.”⁶⁹

B) Our Strength Behind the Forces, 1944

Many of the types of images used by the NFB for photo-stories appeared in the nationally touring exhibition titled, “Our Strength Behind the Forces,” which was so popular it toured the country once in 1944 and again in 1945. Both versions of the exhibition were collaborative efforts between the National Gallery of Canada and the National Film Board. It is uncertain whether the two exhibitions were identical in layout, exhibited photographs and accompanying displays but they were close enough to share similar titles. “Our Strength Behind the Forces” was shown at the VAG from July 21st to Aug 6th, 1944, while “This is Our Strength” was displayed one year later from July 31st to Aug 19th, 1945.

The idea of this type of exhibition organised by the National Film Board, where the show appeared to be similar to the layout of a magazine, was most likely inspired by Edward Steichen’s curatorial debut at the Museum of Modern Art, “Road to Victory,” 1942. In the exhibition “Road to Victory,” the audience followed a path constructed by the layout of large, free standing photographs that were selected to inspire men for the defence of their freedom.⁷⁰ In describing this exhibition, Christopher Phillips writes, the arrangement of photographs was “calculated to produce a visual narrative that combined the most dramatic devices of film and *Life*-style photojournalism.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Payne, *A Canadian Document*, 19.

⁷⁰ Christopher Phillips, “The Judgment Seat of Photography,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 27.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The exhibition "Our Strength Behind the Forces" was exhibited at art galleries across Canada but the photographs were not selected for their aesthetic value. In one view of the 1944 show [fig. 13], photographs of winter rural views and summer urban scenes overlap each other under the heading "Contrast of Scene and Season," as one might expect to find in a magazine layout. As well, the photographs, like images in a newspaper or magazine, were protected neither by glass or frame.

In another view, a display has been set up which details Canadian Industry [fig. 14]. In the bottom left hand corner of the display in the photograph, there is a smaller, fully illuminated photograph of a woman soldering, which partially overlaps a much larger, high-contrast photograph of a welder. The same display includes four other images: one of a tractor system of a tank; another of crowds gathered around an airplane; one of a man inspecting munitions and another of a ship launching. None of the subjects captured in these photographs—the welders, the mechanic, or the munitions inspector—look at the camera. This gives the illusion that the photographer was not present when taking the image. This is to say that this photograph would have appeared as an unmediated slice of reality because the presence of the photographer was not seen to be interfering with the subject of the image. However, the taking of photographs within the darken interiors of a factory, as is the case with the solderer or with the welder, requires the presence of artificial lighting as well as a tripod—film sensitivity, either then or now, is not fast enough to record such actions in detail without such aids. Moreover, in order for these photographs to be both dynamic and informative, the subject of the photograph was posed. Along with being told to not look into the camera, the female solderer is shot in profile. Her arms, which are awkwardly outstretched, not only are strategically placed

in order to provide a clear view of her soldering gun, her gloved hands and her head form three points of a triangle that give this photograph a dynamic composition. The photograph of the welder forms a similar triangle, which is white on black, made up of the line created by the welding surface that ends in a point, angles up through the hunched posture of the welder before dissipating in a cloud of smoke. The dynamic shapes constructed in both of these photographs of factory workers are enhanced by skilful cropping of the image. These photographers were meant to be striking as much as conveyors of information and conformed to Grierson's definition of documentary photography that is "the creative treatment of actuality."⁷²

In order for these photographs to appeal to all Canadians they had to be generalised enough so that could represent factory workers across Canada. There are no details contained in the image that discloses the precise location of the factory which was as important for nurturing a sense of nationalism as it was to inhibit Axis agents from utilising the information contained in these photographs to sabotage Allied forces. To steer the evidential power of these photographers, these images of factory workers were married to the text, "INDUSTRY – Mobilized in support of our Armed Forces and those of our Allies." This room of the exhibition details the contributions that Canadian industry is making towards the war effort, from its steel workers to its munitions plants to its shipbuilding yards.

Along with displays of industry, the exhibition also had rooms that celebrated Canada's abundance of natural resources [fig. 15] (One third of Canada is still covered by forests reads one caption) and its ability to conquer the vast space of the country through transportation and technology [fig. 16]. Concerning this exhibition, the Vancouver critic

⁷² Qtd. in Payne, *A Canadian Document*, 16.

'Palette' states that "in these pictures there is majesty and exhilaration, something that arouses pride and confidence in the land in which we live...[it] should be seen by as many as possible."⁷³ Another critic, Browni-Wingate, less emotively writes, "Shipbuilding, farming, the steel industry, aircraft production and mining are well represented and, as a whole the exhibition presents a panoramic view of the multiple activities that lie behind Canada's production for war, and her future production for peace."⁷⁴ Throughout "Our Strength Behind the Forces," text and photographs of Canada and its citizens are married together to promote the values of the state, which at that time sought to nurture public support for the war. The government of Canada required the continuation of personal sacrifice on the part of its citizens at home either in terms of food or resource rationing or through the purchasing of victory bonds—Canadians still had a duty to fulfill for the war effort. This exhibition sought to instil a sense of national pride that could be channelled into patriotic fervour for the victory of the war, sentiments that were detected and appreciated by Vancouver critics.

C) The Politics of Photography and its Aura

Walter Benjamin's reflections on the nature of photography are particularly useful in characterising how photographs produced by the NFB diverged from the salon images produced by the pictorialists. Benjamin, writing in Europe during the 30s, held an ambivalent view on photography. On the one hand he proposed that the technology of mechanical reproduction possessed a political function that led to the disenchantment of

⁷³ Palette, "'Strength Behind Forces' Seen in Stirring Gallery Display," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, July 28 1944, 13.

⁷⁴ Browni Wingate, "Gallery Displays Photographic Story of Canadian War Industry," *News-Herald*, July 28 1944.

art. The authenticity of art was traditionally premised on the authority it gained from being a unique object; its essence being all that is “transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”⁷⁵ Yet, what is disturbed in the age of reproduction with the proliferation of the copy is *precisely* the authority of the object. Benjamin explains, “One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the work of art.”⁷⁶ Aura is the sense of mystery one feels in the presence of that which is unique; it is the sensation of distance no matter how close one may be. With photography, however, it makes no sense to discuss originality or authenticity and as a result, Benjamin concludes, “the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.”⁷⁷ With the substitution of a plurality of copies for a unique existence, art lost its autonomous function, no longer being the privilege of a few but accessible by the many. With photography’s dispelling of aura from the work of art, proposed Benjamin, it brought art and the masses closer together and signified a shift in consciousness where all that was unique would be overcome.

On the other hand, while reproductive technologies marked a shift from ritual to politics for Benjamin, he recognised that a mere photograph on its own is only able to provide surface details. Benjamin agreed with Bertold Brecht’s observation that “less

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 221.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

than ever does a simple *reproduction of reality* express something about reality,"⁷⁸ which is to say, as Brecht did, that a photograph of a factory cannot disclose, for example, the working conditions of the labourer working in the factory. In order for a photograph to complete its political potential the photograph must be married to a caption. Without the caption, writes Benjamin, "all photographic construction must remain bound in coincidences."⁷⁹

The documentary photography of the NFB and the pictorial photography of the VPS were in many ways opposite sides of the equation established by Benjamin. The photographs produced by the NFB were to be didactic and hopeful while maintaining the appearance of being objective and, in that way, were adhering to Grierson's definition that documentary be the creative treatment of actuality.⁸⁰ In order to effect the desired message, the NFB consistently attached a caption to the photograph thereby directing the message of the photography rather than leaving its interpretation up to chance. The pictorialists, however, sought to imbue the photograph with an aura, enveloping the image with an air of mystery that Benjamin foresaw as photography's destiny to shatter. Pictorialists sought to deny photography its reproductive capability by creating a system that rewarded the circulation of the single unique print. Every pictorial image that was exhibited at a salon was rewarded with a sticker. For instance, affixed to the back of Bentley's salon photograph, *An Eastern Gateway*, are a series of stickers that detail the exhibition history of the image [fig. 17]. Success at exhibitions translated not only in

⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 212.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁰ Qtd. in Payne, *A Canadian Document*, 16.

imbuing the photograph with a more detectable aura but also demanded more consideration by judges of the pictorial salons.

Both pictorialists and the NFB photographers sought to silence the contingency of photography by careful management of the image's details for their own respective goals, the former sought to imbue photography with an air of mystery while the latter sought to direct the power of photography to effect its message of national unity and duty.

However different each position's goals were, they both shared in the responsibility to not exhibit photographs that disclosed visual information about military targets or presented images of the tragedies of war, and, in that regard, placed both practices proximal to the field of power. The proximity of the National Film Board's photography to the policies of the Canadian government is predictable because the agency was merely an agent of the state. The pictorialists however were not self-reflexive of their alignment with field of power; thus, unlike the photography produced by the NFB, which sought to consciously encode public opinion, the photography of Bentley reproduced an ideology, informed by his experience as an Anglo-Canadian, which coincided with the views held by the British and its Dominions on the necessity of preserving its Empire.

CHAPTER 4 – PERSERVING THE STATUS QUO IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE: BENTLEY’S SALON PHOTOGRAPHY OF INDIA

A) The World Tour, 1924

In 1924, Bentley was hired to work as a commercial photographer by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) aboard its steamship, *The Empress of Canada*, on its maiden world tour voyage. Bentley travelled with fellow passengers documenting the tourist sites they visited for the CPR to use for future advertising purposes. The ship sailed from New York on January 30th arriving in Europe a little more than a week later and then travelled through the Mediterranean, stopping periodically, en route to the Suez Canal. From Egypt, *The Empress of Canada* took shore leave at various places across South and East Asia before completing its journey at the port of Vancouver on May 24th.⁸¹

Upon arriving in Bombay on March 4th, passengers had the option of staying on the ship and travelling around the Indian peninsula or paying additional charges to take overland tours across the north-west provinces of India. The overland tours moved eastward, in the direction of Calcutta, where they were scheduled to rejoin the ship on March 23rd. As the ship’s photographer, Bentley accompanied the overland tour and it is on this 19 day journey where he would take many of the photographs that would reappear years later as salon photographs.

Some of the photographs that Bentley took for the CPR were used as lantern slides in an hour long lecture presented by Deane H. Dickason, titled “Round the World in Sixty Minutes: A Microphone Excursion.”⁸² Dickason, like Bentley, travelled with

⁸¹ See Canadian Pacific, “Around the World Cruise,” Mason Family Records, c.1924.

⁸² See Canadian Pacific, “Round the World in Sixty Minutes: A Microphone Excursion by Deane H.

passengers on the *Empress of Canada's* maiden voyage. His lecture, accompanied by orchestral music and Bentley's photography, retraced the 1924 voyage for audiences with the hope to sell the voyage's destinations.

Upon returning from the trip, Bentley wrote in 1926 to family members that he wanted to do something more with the images he took abroad. At that time, Bentley expressed an interest in writing about his experience but recognised he had difficulty with writing. Bentley thought his story coupled with the photographs he took had commercial appeal; he wrote, "it takes me quite a long time to collect my thoughts and put them on paper and then go back to verify some of my statements, because...I had to take for granted everything our guides told us, and I found they were very apt to over-estimate and exaggeratethinks [sic], and I wanted to somewhere near the truth in what I was saying as I think that when I get it finished I shall try to sell the story illustrated by the photographs I took on the trip."⁸³

Bentley never published his journey. But he did recreate it by making three large photo albums as an aide-memoire. Included in the pages of these albums are some coloured prints that Bentley arranged to have painted in Japan. For example, he sent to Japan a photograph to be hand coloured of five sadhus, some of whom are recognisable as Vaishnavites (devotees of Lord Vishnu) who are identifiable by the vertical white lines placed upon their foreheads [fig. 18]. In addition, these albums contain many non-cropped versions of images that Bentley used for his art photography which, when seen in comparison to the pictorial images, offers a glimpse into the ideology that structured pictorial aesthetics.

Dickason." Mason Family Records, 1926.

⁸³ Bentley, Bentley to Family Overseas, 1-2.

B) World Tour Images from India.

The art photography produced by Bentley of India, like many pictorial images, strived to connote a sense of timelessness and placelessness, qualities that were important for the depiction of an imaginary world that sought escape from present reality; however, some of his photographs contained signs of the British presence in India. One photograph that reflects the former qualities was *The Pearl Mosque* 1942 [fig. 19]. The pictorial photograph *The Pearl Mosque* was obtained from an image of a hallway at the Moti Majid in Agra (otherwise popularly known as the Pearl Mosque) [fig. 20]. The pictorial incarnation of the Pearl Mosque had the right hand side of the image cropped out so that the centre of the photograph, the darkened entrance at the end of the hall, was located in the bottom right hand corner of the photograph. With the shifting of the centre of the image to a corner, the photograph employed the aesthetic rule of asymmetry. The cropping of the right side of the image also removed the over exposed parts of the negative bleached out by the sunlight from outside. Completing the pictorial transformation of this image was that it was printed using a toned Bromide process, rendering the photograph in rich sepia. Except for the image's title, there is a lack of details contained in the photograph that suggests where this photograph was taken and little signs that indicate when the negative was snapped. *The Pearl Mosque* was one of Bentley's most well received photographs in terms of exhibition record and it had the distinction of being accepted, along with *An Eastern Gateway*, into the permanent collection of the Royal Photographic Society in 1942.

Another of Bentley's photographs that lacked indicators of temporal and spatial specificity was *The Temple Steps* 1941 [see fig. 2]. A mother and a daughter are captured ascending a flight of steps. Both the mother and daughter are clothed in saris but are indistinguishable by being photographed from the back. The mother is captured balancing a metal water jug on her head, carrying water as people have done for centuries. Edited out of *The Temple Steps* are those details that permit identifying the location of the temple steps as those found at the Galta Temple in Jaipur. In the photograph *Galta Temple in Jaipur*, c.1924 [fig. 21], the larger Hindu temple structure, with its gates and towers, has been removed. Bentley was able to make such a radical cropping because he used a large format camera.

The pictorial image *The Story Teller*, 1939 [fig. 22] however, contains signs that locate the photograph to a specific period. In this pictorial image, a white man is photographed seated above a group of Indian children, communicating to them with the aid of his hands. Two of the children sitting on the ground are shirtless, revealing the sacred cords thrown over their left shoulder that identify them as members of the Brahmin caste. The man, in comparison, is fully clad, dressed in a suit and tie whose attire is complemented with a pith helmet, a popular form of headdress for persons of European descent who spent time in hot climates like India. The headgear kept the wearer cooler by creating space between hat and head. While the pith helmet was worn in the later stages of colonial rule by many Europeans in their tropical colonies, for subjects of the British Empire, this hat has no greater association than with British rule in India.

From the title of the full framed photograph kept in Bentley's photo albums, it is learned that the photograph was taken in Jaipur and that the seated European man is Deane Dickason who is described as a teacher. A comparison of the full framed photograph [fig. 23] with the pictorial image [see fig. 22] reveals that the art photograph was cropped. Edited from the salon photograph is the wall on the left hand side that includes two adults in the foreground and a crouching child in the background. By editing the left side wall and its accompanying persons from the pictorial image, several aspects of the original image have been negated. The second man standing against the wall in the mid-ground, caught looking into the camera, has been removed. His inclusion would have "un-pictorially" emphasised the presence of the photographer in the taking of the image. In addition, with the removal of the two adult Indian men, Dickason became the tallest figure in the photograph. In the image *The Story Teller*, what remains is a photograph of an adult white male, seated in a position of authority above a crowd of Indian children. Significantly, the image of an "adult" white male, instructing the "children" of India, paralleled the asymmetrical relationship that existed between the colonial masters in London and their subjects in India; however, during the Second World War, this image of an unbalanced relationship between the government of Britain and the leaders of the National Congress Party in India was being challenged.

C) The British Empire during the Second World War

Sir Norman Angell, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 1933, had an article published in *Maclean's* magazine in 1943, defending the British Empire; he was responding to critics, largely from America, who queried how it was possible for the

Second World War to be a war for freedom when it would lead to the preservation of British Imperialism if the Allied forces were victorious?⁸⁴ Angell wrote in response to the question that “the main virtue of the Empire is that for the best part of a century it has been abolishing itself, going through a process of de-imperialization, evolving into a partnership of equals.”⁸⁵ Angell’s response was premised on a belief that the British Empire was largely successful in fulfilling the responsibility of raising its colonies up to the same level of “civilisation” as themselves but that their project was not complete.

While the British Empire was undergoing a process of abolishing itself where colonies were gaining greater autonomy, certain colonies were inheriting self-rule quicker than others. Nations settled by the British like Canada, Australia and New Zealand became more autonomous from Britain after being recognised as Dominions within the British Empire. While the British Dominions automatically followed the British when they declared war during the First World War, in the Second World War, the vast majority of Dominions made separate declarations of war. For instance, prior to Canada’s entry into the Second World War, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King called a session in Parliament to debate joining the British in the war on Germany. In contrast, colonies like India entered the war without consultation with Indian leaders. Countries not settled by the British like India, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma were not recognised as Dominions and, as a consequence, their external affairs were controlled from London. The British Empire was thus broadly organised into two types of territories: white dominated nations who could be trusted with greater autonomy and dependencies that “required” more governance from London.

⁸⁴ Sir Norman Angell, "What Is the British Empire?" *Maclean's*, June 15 1943, 10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

The hesitation of the British government to trust Indian leaders to manage their country's own affairs during the Second World War was due in part to the strategic importance of India in the war as well as due to a doubt that "coloured" nations would follow the British wilfully in their quest to preserve its empire. The significance of India in the war was recognised in 1942 by the editorial staff at the *Vancouver Daily Province* when India's eastern boarder was being encroached upon by Japanese forces through Burma; the editorial reads,

From both a diplomatic and a military point of view, India has become the centre of the World War. Germany has been using all the power of her wily and experienced propaganda machine to prevent the working out of an effective understanding between the British Government and the Indian people. Meanwhile, the Japanese are approaching closer and closer. They dominate the air in Burma. They have bombed towns in Ceylon and along the coast of the Bay of Bengal and they have sunk two heavy cruisers and an aircraft carrier in Indian waters.⁸⁶

While India was a significant provider of natural resources and military armaments for the Allies, manpower was at stake for the British Empire with the potential loss of India. In 1943, Angell enumerated the Indian contribution to the war effort in terms of soldiers was 1,500,000 strong.⁸⁷ As well, India possessed close to 400,000,000 citizens who were partially mobilised in armament production and other industries vital to the war effort. With a potential loss of India to Japanese forces, the military and strategic advantage would have shifted in favour of Axis forces.

Along with the threat to India from the East by Japanese forces, the British government had to combat the groundswell of nationalism growing in India led by

⁸⁶ "India Centre of War," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, April, 10 1942, 4.

⁸⁷ Angell, "What Is the British Empire?" 40.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Jawahar Lal Nehru of the Indian National Congress. Congress's position was that before they fought for the cause of democracy they wanted democracy themselves.⁸⁸ As the end of British India appeared to be imminent with the advancement of Japanese forces en route to Assam through Burma, the British cabinet moved in desperation to appease Indian nationalists.⁸⁹ On March 30, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, representing Prime Minister Winston Churchill's government, went to New Delhi offering dominion status to India, but the offer would not take effect until the end of the Second World War. India only had a few days to accept the offer and it was suggested in a report that India had reached her hour of decision "at one of the most fateful moments of her long history, when she is seriously threatened for the first time with a totalitarian invasion."⁹⁰

Angell suggested that the British could not risk the possibility of India establishing an alliance with the Axis Powers after granting it dominion status during the war; he states, "Why should it be assumed that Britain has no moral right in the case, say, of India, to declare: 'You shall be free to secede after the war, but during the war we refuse to give you the right to go out of the war, or to negotiate with our enemies?'"⁹¹ The discrimination of British imperialism was clear: dominions made up of white countries like Canada had the freedom to pursue their own course during the Second World War while other colonies like India did not. Despite rejecting British offers of dominion status after the war, India continued to contribute both manpower and its

⁸⁸ Bernard Potter, "The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1995," London; New York: Longman, 1996, 310.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 311.

⁹⁰ Leland Stowe, "Destiny of India Put in Own Hands by Cripps' Offer," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, March 30 1942, 1.

⁹¹ Angell, "What Is the British Empire?" 41.

resources in support of the Allies and, as a result, was a key participant in the triumph over the Axis powers. Nonetheless, during the years of the Second World War, the fate of India was far from certain.

D) *An Eastern Gateway*

On December 7th 1941, Japan launched simultaneous attacks on the Americans at Pearl Harbour and in the Philippines and on British colonial possessions in South East Asia.⁹² In South East Asia, the independent kingdom of Thailand surrendered to the Japanese almost immediately, Hong Kong fell shortly thereafter, then Malaysia, leading to an invasion of Burma on January 25th 1942. Singapore fell less than a month later; it appeared that the Allies were unable to halt the eastern march of Japanese forces en route to India. Fears of India being the next British colony to fall to Japanese forces increased when the capital city of Burma, Rangoon, fell on March 10th 1942. Burma was to be the gateway through which Japan would launch an attack on India. The Burma Campaign began for the British and its allies with disaster and defeat; however, it would be in Burma where the British would eventually make a stand, fighting its longest campaign throughout the Second World War, concluding eventually in victory in August 1945.

Bentley's art photograph, *An Eastern Gateway* [see fig.1] circulated in international salons within this climate of uncertainty concerning the status of India within the British Empire. This photograph of a richly detailed gate has a strong association with the orient, signified by the dome shaped arch above the entrance to the gate and by the presence of the driver of the oxen led cart who wears a turban. An older, white haired man in the immediate foreground shuffles towards the cart on to the gate

⁹² Potter, "The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1995," 309-310.

where lurking within the shadows of the arch entrance are three children hobbled together.

Edited out from this image as seen in the non-cropped photograph contained in Bentley's photo album that he titled, *Jaipur City Gate*, c.1924 [fig. 24], is the gate's surroundings. Absent are the wooden, derelict sheds that align the gate's wall on either side of the arch. Edited out of the pictorial photograph, as well, is the labouring body of the woman who carries a basket on her head. Gone in the art photograph are the distinct towers that would make the gate more readily identifiable. In many ways, the salon photograph appears timeless with the absence of industrialisation. There are no cars or machinery in the image. As well, the removal of the distinctive towers placed on top of the gate contributed *An Eastern Gateway's* sense of placelessness—it was no longer a photograph of Jaipur's city gate but an image that could serve as any gateway from the "East."

Yet, puncturing this idyllic image of the "East" in *An Eastern Gateway* is the presence of a lamppost on the bottom left hand edge of the gate's entrance. The lamp is a distinctive British, wrought iron, street lamp locating this photograph to the imperial years of the British Raj. Due to the time of day that the photograph was taken, the sun forces the lamppost to reveal itself further by projecting a shadow that awkwardly appears to be protruding out of the left shoulder of the older man in the foreground.

Presented in *An Eastern Gateway* are *not* Indian subjects agitating for independence from the British Empire but rather placated figures going about their daily affairs. Looming over the subjects of the photograph is a gateway that appears secure due to the considerable width that exists between the gate's two entrances and it appears

in good condition considering the preservation of the gate's decorative designs. The eastern gate to the city of Jaipur protected its citizens throughout history in the same way that it was hoped during the Second World War that the eastern gate of Burma, as a line of defence, would offer protection to the Empire's key colony, India. Significantly, protected within the gate are not only Indian citizens but a sign of "civilisation," signified by the presence of the British lamp post. The lamp post was a fitting symbol of British imperialism not only because it was British in design but also because, at the height of British imperialism, the Empire was linked to the symbol of light; it was said that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" due to the colonial holdings it held scattered over the world. *An Eastern Gateway* offered a glimpse of Asia literally on the brink of catastrophe: it was a photograph taken in India in the 1920s but which reappeared during the Second World War at a time when India's place in the British Empire was under threat internally due to the rise of Indian nationalism and externally from the presence of Japanese forces at the eastern gateway to India, Burma.

At the time that Bentley's salon photographs of India were exhibited, *An Eastern Gateway* appeared as placeless and timeless as *A Pearl Mosque*. The fact that the symbols of British imperialism, the pith hat in *A Story Teller* and the wrought iron street lamp in *An Eastern Gateway*, were not considered disruptive to the pictorialist's cultivation of idyllic imagery speaks to the encoded ideology embedded in these works. What appeared timeless was the superiority of the British Empire whose rule was thought to be natural, not conditional.

CONCLUSION

A) Bentley after the Second World War

After the Second World War, Bentley continued to play a role in the pictorial community but his exhibition record does not match his success during the war years. As well, the fortunes of the Vancouver Photographic Society were already on the wane during the Second World War – the publishing of the Society's bulletin stopped abruptly in 1943, with its June edition being the last one. While the VPS would continue organising the Vancouver International Salon at least until 1954, after their partnership ended with the VAG in 1947 they would host the Salon at the Pacific National Exhibition fairgrounds, losing the authority they received from the support of their photography by the Vancouver Art Gallery.

In the summer of 1952, however, Bentley participated in an exhibition in London, titled *Canadian Photography*, co-organised by the Royal Photographic Society and the Toronto Camera Club. Bentley's photography was distinguished by having four of his photographs included: one was *The Pearl Mosque* and another was *An Eastern Gateway*. While a few other photographers from across the country contributed as many as four photographs, Yosuf Karsh exhibited six prints, clearly marking out his fame that preceded the show in London. What is notable about the show in London is the other salon photographers from Vancouver included. Not discussed so far in this thesis are Bentley's peers at the Vancouver Photographic Society: Dr. Joseph Bricker, Evelyn Frith and Hugh Frith. Another highly respected member of the VPS not included in the 1952 show in London, but whose work requires more attention, is that of John Helders who was a close associate of Vanderpant's as well as highly regarded pictorialist

internationally. Further research into these figures will provide greater illumination on a period of photographic history in Vancouver that still remains relatively unexamined.

B) Dominion Photo Company and the Archive

This thesis is not a definitive account of the photography of Percy Bentley. Left unexplored is the huge body of photographs Bentley produced as a commercial photographer for Dominion Photo Company and for which Bentley has been better remembered.

Despite the scope of Bentley's commercial work that covers half a century, little has been said of this photography. In 1976, the VAG held an exhibition titled *Eleven Early British Columbian Photographers, 1890-1940* that focused on Bentley's earlier commercial photography. The show exhibited three photographs [fig. 25 & 26] that Dominion Photo was hired by the B.C. Telephone Company to take and presented Bentley and other commercial photographers as settlers whose photography can be appreciated for detailing the emergence of a new culture.⁹³ Ten years later, Presentation House Gallery mounted *In Transition: Postwar Photography in Vancouver*, curated by Helga Pakasaar. This exhibition was instrumental in helping to map out the unexplored terrain of postwar photography in Vancouver. The show provided a cross-section of photographic practices in Vancouver over a period of 15 years, approximately from 1945 to 1960. Artistic pictorial photography was exhibited along-side photographs employed for advertising, photojournalism and commercial reportage. The common denominator

⁹³See Vancouver Art Gallery., *Eleven Early British Columbian Photographers 1890-1940* (Vancouver, B. C.: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1976).

for all of these images, according to Pakasaar, was that they were selected from collections that “expressed a distinctive personal style.”⁹⁴

Pakasaar’s historical diggings have been invaluable, turning up images and photographers buried in Vancouver’s past; yet, I wish to qualify her comment that all photographs chosen for *In Transition* expressed “a distinctive personal style.” Such a position presents both art and commercial images alike as products of the vision of a single creator and presupposes that all the exhibited photographers exercised equal freedom in the pursuit of their “art.” Absent in this view is any acknowledgment of how the commercial images are a negotiation between the craftsmanship of the photographer and the demands and expectations of their clients.

For instance, a lack of knowledge about the original use of *Display at David Spencer’s Ltd.*, 1942, [fig. 27] a photograph selected from the Dominion Photo Collection, *permits* the image to be appreciated for its surrealistic qualities. I imagined upon first viewing this non-cropped photograph that Bentley was in conversation with the surrealist Hans Bellmer who manipulated a doll in a series of violent poses documented by a camera. Represented in the Dominion Company photograph is a uniformed mannequin, revealed by a hand that is too small for the body and quite possibly feminine due to its petiteness and sharpness of fingers that is laid upon on a wheeled, battlefield stretcher. The fact that the only “people” present in this image are mannequins gives this photography an uncanny feeling—human society appears to have faded away to be replaced with a lifeless copy of itself. Yet, according to Bentley’s records, he took this photograph on the Sunday of June 29th, 1942, the day before the department store David

⁹⁴ Helga Pakasaar, “In Transition,” in *In Transition; Postwar Photography in Vancouver* (North Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 1986), 2.

Spencer's, which once occupied the SFU Harbour Centre Building, hosted a week long display in celebration of "Army Week." "Army Week" was a nationwide campaign and this display was organised at the store in response to the military's refusal to redeploy military hardware for the upcoming Dominion Day parade on July 1st. In order to give the citizens of Vancouver the chance to observe the spectacle of the military machine, the store donated its entire fourth floor to host a display that would feature tanks, jeeps, anti-tank guns, search lights and medical units. The display for "Army Week" opened for the public on Monday, June 29th and ran for a week till July 5th. This photograph, along with 20 plus more, was commissioned by the department store [fig. 28] to be used for an advertisement that ran in the following Thursday edition of the *Vancouver Sun*.

While Bentley brought his expertise as an accomplished commercial photographer to the image, informing his clients how the image would be photographed (that, for instance, to make the photograph suitable for reproduction in a newspaper it would be necessary to provide balanced lighting to the display by placing two flashes at 45 degree angles), what was photographed, why it was photographed, how the image would be used—if used at all—were decisions that laid exclusively in the domain of Bentley's clients. The "aesthetics" of this photograph has less to do with Bentley's personal style than with responding to the needs of the market.

The temptation to validate forgotten photographs of the past as aesthetic objects heightens as their original qualities and intentions fade with time. As Susan Sontag notes, "Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art."⁹⁵ For Sontag, the translation of the photograph into an object of beauty seems built into the very existence of looking at a photograph. For Allan Sekula, the

⁹⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 21.

aesthetic fate that awaits every photograph is realised when it is not approached critically; he writes, “when photographs are uncritically presented as historical documents, they are transformed into aesthetic objects. Accordingly, the pretence to historical understanding remains although that understanding has been replaced by aesthetic experience.”⁹⁶

Ironically, it is the placement of the photograph within the archive that makes the image available for study while silencing the original use value of the image. Sekula explains that in an archive, “the possibility of meaning [of a photograph] is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context. Thus the specificity of ‘original’ uses and meanings can be avoided, and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive...[s]o new meanings come to supplement old ones, with the archive serving as a kind of ‘cleaning house’ of meaning.”⁹⁷ As Bentley’s commercial photography is taken up by fine art institutions it is being burdened with a new responsibility to behave as art.

The archive from which *A Display at David Spencer’s, Ltd.* was selected is part of the Dominion Photo Collection held at the Vancouver Public Library; yet, apart from the three accession books, the negative records of Dominion Photo, which note the negative number, the client, a brief description of the subject photographed and the date, no other information is provided in the archive that assists in the revealing of the negative’s history. Distorting the meaning of Bentley’s commercial photography further is the fact that the VPL only makes 10 percent of their Dominion Photo Collection available for

⁹⁶ Qtd. in Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 57.

⁹⁷ Allan Sekula, *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948-1968: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton* (Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 194.

public viewing and that these images, mostly photocopies placed in black binders, are not necessarily organised by date or by photographer but are scattered throughout with other collections, placed in the latest binder according to the date when the images were made available.

The incompleteness of the archive for public viewing confirms Michel Foucault's observation that an understanding of an archive is always beyond our grasp. However, according to Foucault the archive can never be completed, so it can never be completely uncovered.⁹⁸ Rather than the archive ever appearing in its totality, writes Foucault, "it emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it."⁹⁹ Recognising the futility of awaiting for the archive to complete itself shifts our attention away from a quest for origins to the uncovering of the different permutations that the archive takes over time. Thus, what is proscribed is making explicit the structure that governs the production of meaning, which disciplines the archive to be one thing and not another at a particular time. An archive, declares Foucault, is the "law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events."¹⁰⁰

My intervention with the Dominion Photo Collection has not been with the "law of what can be said," but with what has been excluded from the archive at the VPL—with what has not been said. I became aware of this silence within the Dominion Photo Collection when I tried to locate titles to Bentley's art photography. I learned of Bentley's pictorial photographs from some of his personal records kept by Vancouver

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 129.

City Archives. Failure to find Bentley's art photography at the VPL led me to contact his descendants. What was not sold as part of the Dominion Photo Collection to the VPL was his salon photography. Bentley's refusal to sell his art photography was due to his subscription to the pictorial ideal that art and commerce must be separated, and this had kept his work out of the public domain. Apart from the few societies to which that he donated his art photography, these salon photographs have been largely kept in the private domain of his descendants. Significantly, the absence of Bentley's salon photography from the publicly accessible Dominion Photo Collection parallels a historical absence concerning the history of art photography in Vancouver throughout the 40s.

IMAGES



Figure 1
Percy Bentley
An Eastern Gateway 1941



Figure 2
Percy Bentley
Temple Steps 1941



Figure 3
Percy Bentley
Eventide 1939

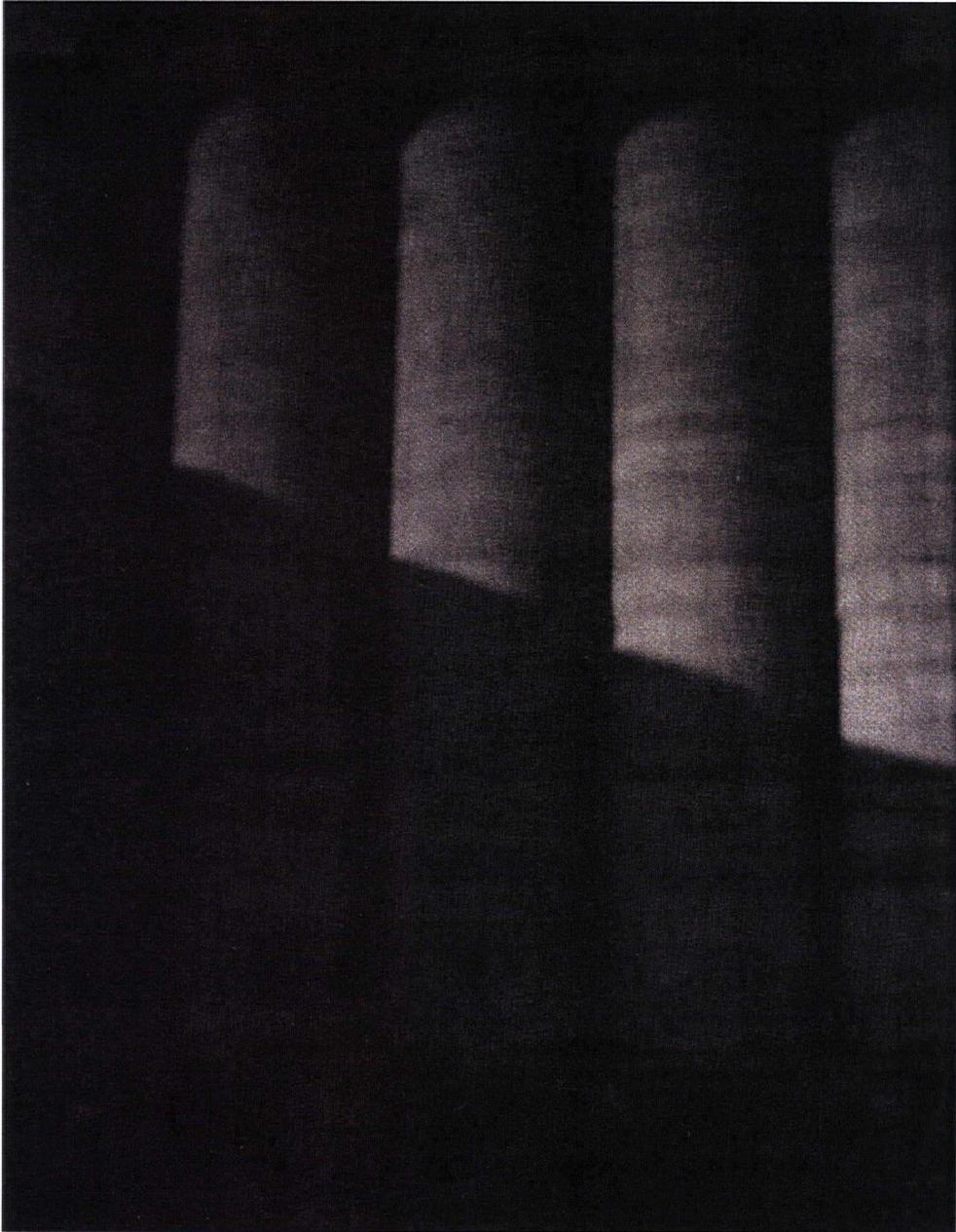


Figure 4
John Vanderpant
Colonnades of Commerce 1926



Figure 5
John Vanderpant
Untitled (Verticals) 1934

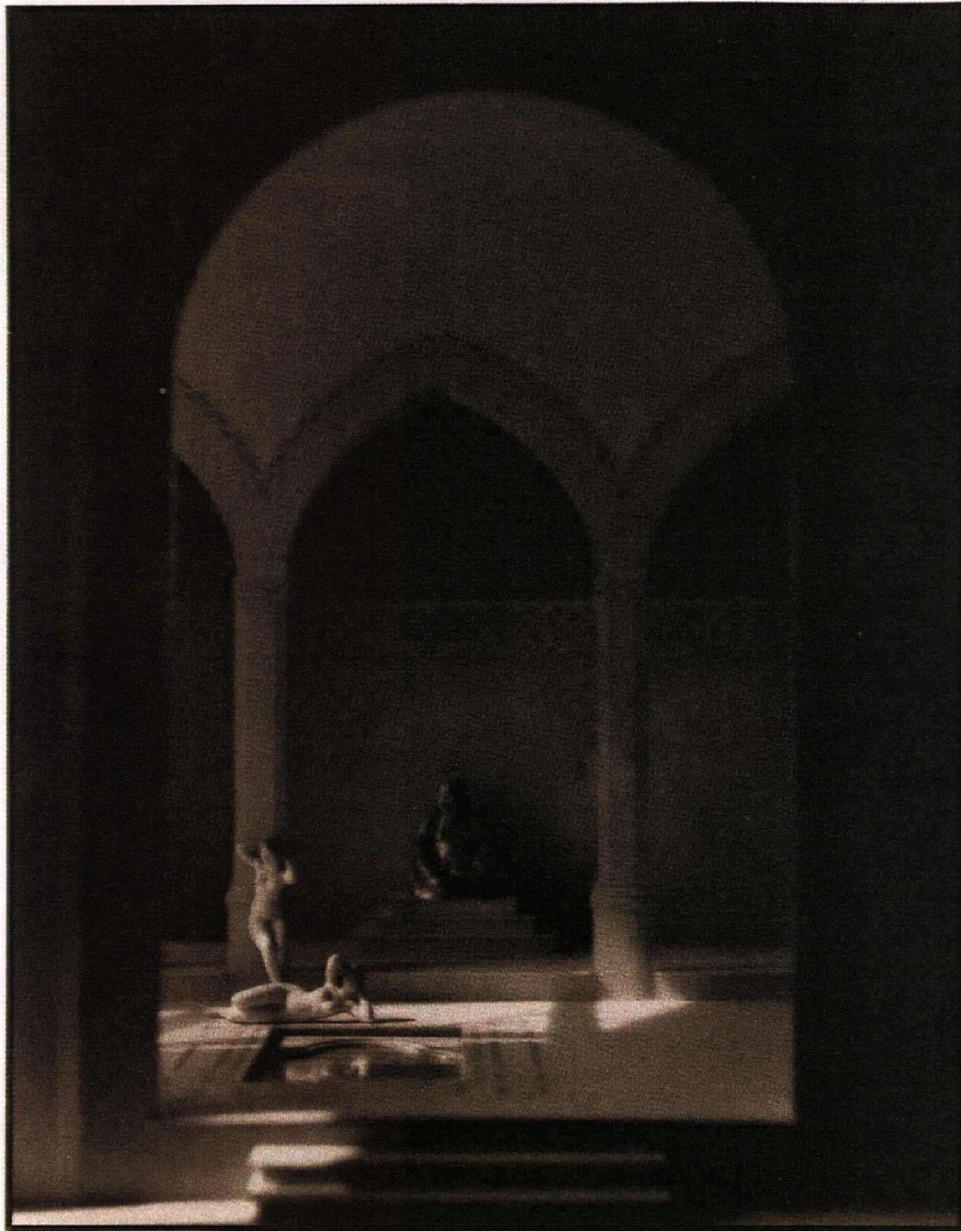


Figure 6
H.G. Cox
The Bath 1927



Figure 7
Percy Bentley
Dynamic Symmetry 1946



Figure 8
Percy Bentley
Controlled Rhythm 1946



Figure 9
Dominion Photo Company
Untitled (View 1 of the "First International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography")
1940



Figure 10
Dominion Photo Company
Untitled (View 2 of the "First International Vancouver Salon of Pictorial Photography")
1940



Figure 11
Percy Bentley
Hands of the Miser 1939



Figure 12
Percy Bentley
O.C., 1944



Figure 13
Anonymous
Untitled (View 1 of "Our Strength Behind the Forces") 1944



Figure 14
Anonymous
Untitled (View 2 of "Our Strength Behind the Forces") 1944

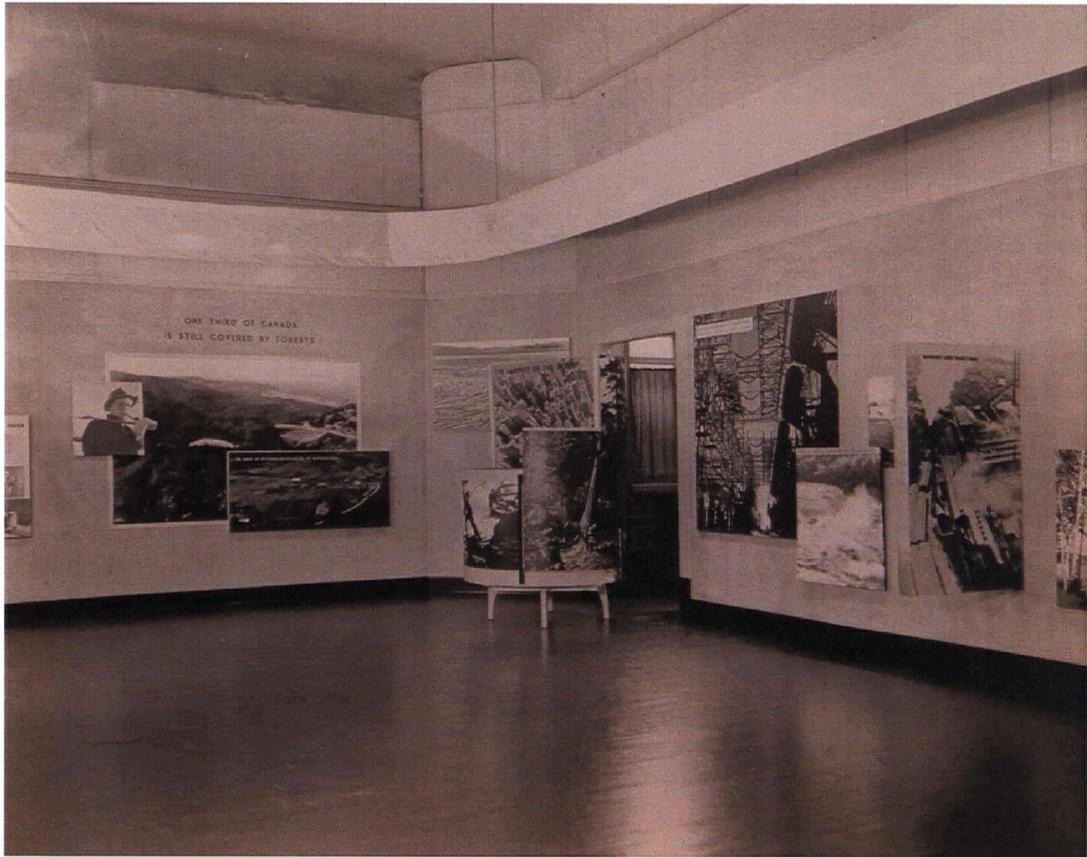


Figure 15
Anonymous
Untitled (View 3 of "Our Strength Behind the Forces") 1944

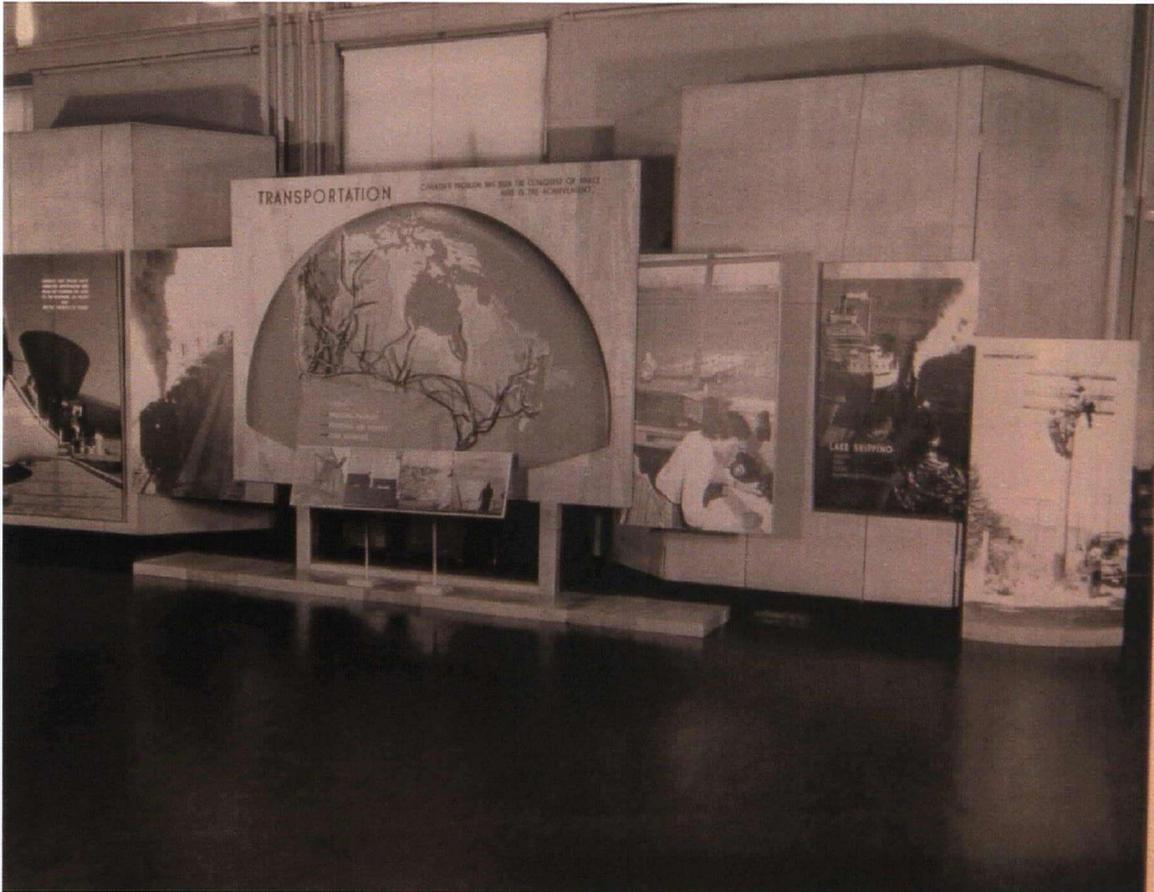


Figure 16
Anonymous
Untitled (View 4 of "Our Strength Behind the Forces") 1944



Figure 17
 The combined backs of
An Eastern Gateway 1941



Figure 18
Percy Bentley
Untitled c.1924

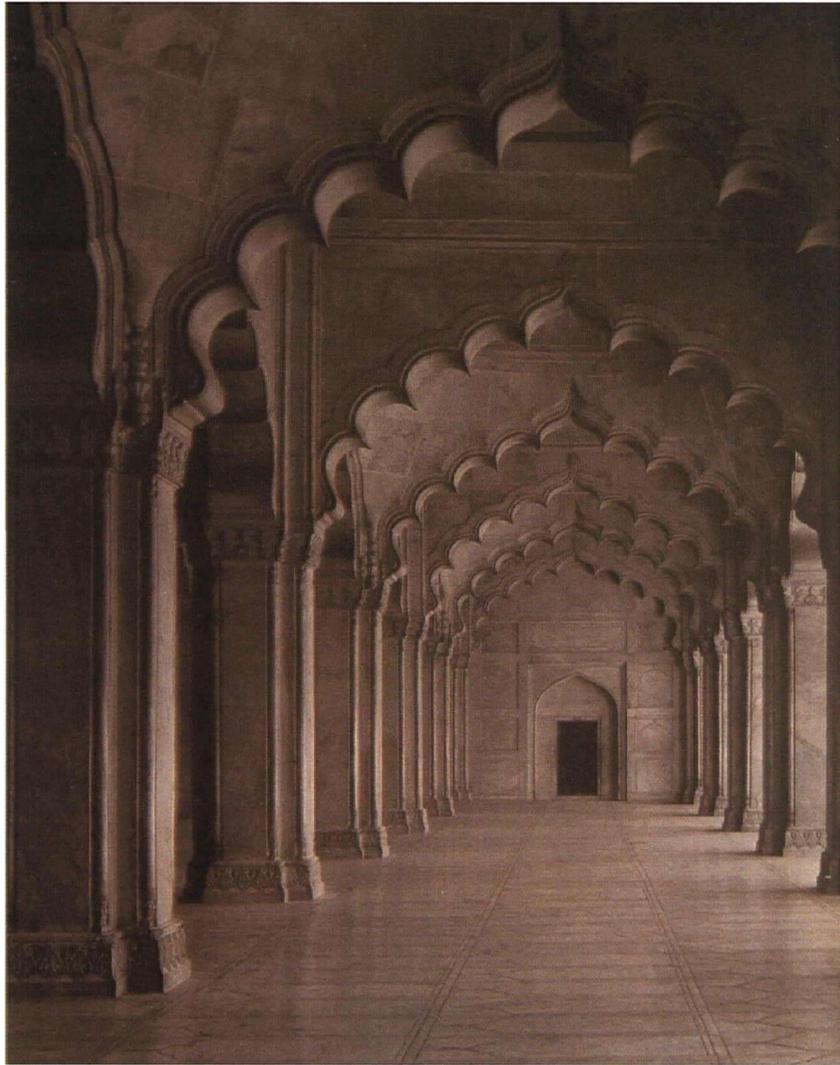


Figure 19
Percy Bentley
The Pearl Mosque 1942



Figure 20
Percy Bentley
Agra – Interior of Moti Masjid c.1924



Figure 21
Percy Bentley
Galta Temple in Jaipur c.1924



Figure 22
Percy Bentley
The Story Teller 1939

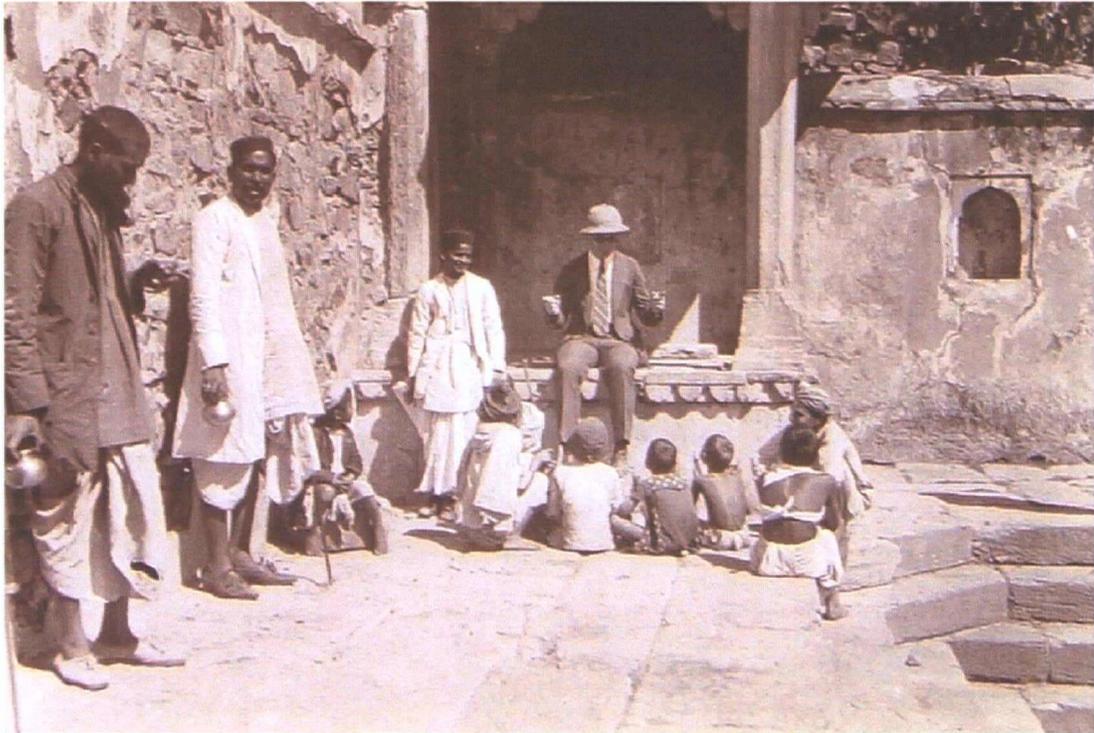


Figure 23
Percy Bentley
Agra – Interior of Moti Masjid, c.1924



Figure 24
Percy Bentley
Jaipur City Gate c.1924



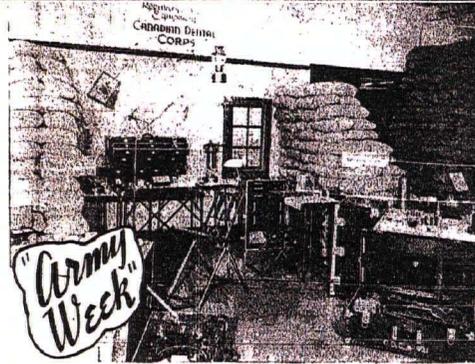
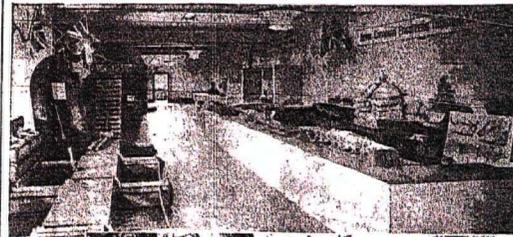
Figure 25
Percy Bentley
Waitress with Tray, B.C. Telephone Company 1928



Figure 26
Percy Bentley
Trench Under Track, B.C. Telephone Company 1929



Figure 27
Percy Bentley
Display at David Spencer's Ltd. 1942



Scenes from the Arms Display on the Fourth Floor at Spencer's

The Army Display

- Is Open This Evening Until 10 o'Clock. Entrance by
- Downstairs Store Doors After Store Closing at 6 p.m.
- Band of the 3rd Irish Fusiliers will Render Selections
- Tonight Between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. on Fourth Floor.

Come and enjoy a leisurely, close-up inspection of the Canadian Army's equipment in guns, munitions, transport vehicles, etc. See the many bridge models made by the Canadian Engineers, the gas cleansing centre, Army vocational training schools, an Army Medical Corps advanced dressing station, the Canadian Women's Army Corps outfit, the large scale relief map of this area, and many other interesting displays. Moving pictures of war activity in many parts of the world.

On Friday Evening the Vancouver Police and Firemen's Bands will Play on the Fourth Floor at Spencer's Between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.

This space prepared and inserted by **DAVID SPENCER LIMITED** to assist in the success of Army Week

Figure 28
The Vancouver Sun
(David Spencer Advertisement) 1942

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