Digitizing Snow:

A Study Using Selected Works of Michael Snow and Examining How Digital Reproductions of Contemporary
Photographic Artworks are Pursued by Cultural Institutions

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the current state of digital reproductions for contemporary photographic artworks—how they are made, the purposes they serve, and how they are disseminated by cultural institutions. Using four selected photographic installation artworks by Canadian artist Michael Snow, this research examines how museums pursue reproductions of artworks that are installative by design and possess elements that are not easily reproducible like sound or the use of time. The reproduction process and terminology used at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada (two institutions with significant collections of Snow's artworks) are both examined, as well as how digital reproduction is currently discussed and theorized by museum professionals and digital specialists. Reproductions are used for outreach, research, advertising, and conservation, but between texts and institutions alike there lacks consistent terminologies and purposes for reproductions due to the dearth of research into this type of imagery.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My thesis examines how contemporary artworks, like those by Michael Snow (1929–), fit within the reproduction process at cultural institutions, and more specifically, inquires into the reproduction's virtues and limitations and the nature of the experience that is being elicited through the use of digital copies. How do you photograph a photographic installation in order to maintain the aura of the original artwork, and how is this represented and presented to the public by cultural institutions? This is an important line of inquiry as, increasingly, museums' and cultural institutions' collections are being accessed through the internet, and the reproductions that are produced by these institutions affects how they are interpreted and understood by the viewing public. How these reproductions are made and for what purpose dictates the type of imagery created and the quality of that image. In time, and without clearer terminology and reproduction methodology (within cultural institutions), a reproduction can be misunderstood and misused by those accessing these images in the future.

The selected Michael Snow artworks demonstrate some of the challenges and issues faced by many cultural institutions when making reproductions of contemporary photographic artworks. Snow's installation works are multi-sensory by design. In order to provoke interaction and participation between the viewer and the artwork, these works elicit aural and olfactory experiences while engaging the viewer's sense of time. For example, Snow's piece *Recombinant* (Fig. 2) is not just a slide show, rather it is a sculptural piece that uses imagery, time, perspective, light, colour, and shapes in order to provoke, as John Pruitt describes, "a three-way dialogue between the perceptual modes of sculpture, photography and cinema" (2003, 137). It is a work that combines stillness and movement, simultaneously creating a performative triangle between viewer, maker, and performance. By watching the projection, the viewer becomes aware that certain images 'fit' onto the sculptured screen and others do not. The viewer activates the work by reacting to the various combinations produced while questioning the form before them—is it a sculpture, a projection, or a painting? The self-reflexive nature of Snow's installation allows for more complex layers to slowly unfold before the viewer. *Recombinant*, like the works selected for this thesis, provokes an interactive experience with the viewer. The digital

reproduction made by cultural institutions of an analog image (from an installation) can only serve as a point of reference, and elicits a fairly different response than what was intended, or produced, by the analog version. To question the pursued forms of reproduction is important, as these artworks will fade and reproductions will be our only form of lasting visual representation.

Reproductions also influence an artwork's notion of authenticity, or what Walter Benjamin described in his seminal 1936 text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, as its *aura.* In this text he believed that mechanical reproductions compromised the authority of an artwork's originality in two ways: a mechanical copy separates the original from its *uniqueness* by exposing details only available to a photographic lens; and it allows copies of the original to be found and seen in situations that the original could never attain. The sense of authenticity is degraded through the mass production of a reproduced view of the original. The more an artwork is reproduced, the less authority the original maintains while also experiencing a decrease in the original's uniqueness. Uniqueness is also connected to the traditional context of the artwork's creation. Tradition is connected to magical and religious ritual, and for Benjamin, the artwork's place within this practice is where aura originated. "It is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function" (16). The ritualistic value is associated with the object's original use/intent; photographs purposefully placed and organized into a family album have this value as a result of the relationship between each photograph in the album. The album's use and purpose also contributes to each photograph's aura. A photograph taken out of the album and exhibited independently diminishes its value and aura. For Benjamin, the connection of a work of art to its place in history (through space and time) establishes and creates the work's aura. That is, the sense of awe or mystery a viewer experiences when in the presence of the original. But for Benjamin, aura was also connected to the art market—the more mystery (or aura) an artwork was said to possess the greater its value. Aura is essentially the historical, physical, and mysterious distance created by an artwork regardless of how close you may be to the original. All of these aspects of the aura are dispelled by mechanical reproductions of photographic artworks, and now digital reproductions bring the viewer optically clear images of artworks from anywhere in the world and to any computerised device (at any moment desired).

It was not until Andre Malraux's 1947 text, *Le Musee Imaginaire*, that the relationship between artwork, museum and reproduction began to be more fully examined. In this text he begins by stating that the notion of *Fine Art* has expanded beyond Euro-centric art and has come to include artwork from other cultures and continents. Some of these works are easily shipped and displayed within cultural institutions, however, sculptures and frescoes, for example, are not. Malraux asserts that through photographic reproductions in catalogues, books, and art publications, the viewing public becomes more aware of other institutions' collections, while expanding and diversifying our understanding of what is considered art and what constitutes an art object. We compile our own imaginary art collections as collections now exist (simultaneously) inside and outside of the museum. Malraux foreshadowed contemporary uses of photographic reproductions by online databases and applications like Google Art Project to connect the art-world to the viewer through images. Malraux also acknowledged that through the process of reproduction and exposure to artworks in various media (books, catalogues, slide presentation) a dematerialization of the original art object occurs. This action places an artwork's existence beyond its original physical plane to become part of a shared, non-material and digital existence.

As part of my research it is important to examine how digital technology has affected how museums and cultural institutions manage and disseminate images of artworks. From the beginning, digital technology was seen as a threat by museum officials who believed that visitors would be less likely to visit cultural institutions if they could more easily access high quality reproductions of artworks. In *The Wired Museum* from 1997, author and academic Katherine Jones-Garmil states that to think that providing digital reproductions of artworks "diminish[es] the potential viewer's appetite for the original is demonstrably false" (19). MoMA NYC for example, is currently planning to add 40,000 square feet of exhibition space in order to display more work and to manage large crowds that overwhelm the existing spaces. Locally, the AGO has also seen an increase in attendance, suggesting that there remains an appetite for the viewing of original artworks. More specifically, the advent of digital technology has led to a dramatic increase in the availability of reproduced art objects. Improved access to images opens up collections that have been otherwise inaccessible—be it through distance or cost. But this increased availability to art imagery can also lead to potential misinterpretation, or the misrepresentation of an artwork. The singular view currently being offered of an installation, for

example, omits sensorial, spatial and/or sound elements present within the work. Over time, and through continued exposure to the same image, reproductions may come to be seen as the original, rather than understanding that reproductions are a *view* of the original. More importantly, these museum reproductions will be seen and used as historical documents of artworks from their collections. The museums' production of an image for documentation purposes will be viewed as the official image representing the best possible reproduction of that artwork. Though this surge in digital traffic can be positive for museums and cultural institutions, it can also lead to unrealistic expectations. People become accustomed to these easily accessed high quality, optically clear images, and will likely be disappointed when confronted with an original that is smaller, darker, and in a sense, cruder than the reproduction. This issue is compounded with installation artworks—the viewer will expect something different than what has been presented in the reproductions. Reproductions can also produce meaningful memories and experiences for many people. Julie F. Codell, professor of Art History at Arizona State University, in "Second Hand Images" references results from a series of interviews conducted by Helen Roberts, senior editor of *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, regarding a viewer's memories of reproductions: "[they] were remembered and held dear as beloved objects with their own associations, histories, and affective memories" (215). But if these images are to have a lasting and important effect on the viewer, then there needs to be a reassessment of the methods and procedures with which reproductions are pursued. Though the current framework with which most artwork is reproduced is acceptable, the reproduction of contemporary artworks tends to lack complexity and the information necessary for works employing multi-media.

Through my research I have also discovered that there are inconsistencies with the terminology associated with the reproduction process. Though photographic reproductions can be seen as a collections management/institutional issue, reproductions have become more than just reference images. This is particularly significant with more contemporary works, such as the photographic installations of Michael Snow. These works use photographic media that deteriorates over time, and therefore will leave, in the near future, a reproduction of the original as the only basis of interaction and investigation with the work. Though there is some literature available regarding reproductions at cultural institutions (in the form of instructional and collections management texts), there is a dearth of information on how to make reproductions of modern art works that

possess photography within their makeup. Current research into reproductions is focused on new and immersive methods of digital image dissemination for historical objects and not on contemporary artworks.

Chapter 2

The Body of Work and Methodology

  Using four photographically based works by Canadian artist Michael Snow, this thesis examines current reproduction processes and standards at cultural institutions, how contemporary artworks are reproduced, and the kind of experience evoked and produced by these reproductions. The four works by Snow are as follows: *Recombinant* (1992) and *Atlantic* (1967) from the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO); *Authorization* (1969) and *Plus Tard* (1977) from The National Gallery of Canada (NGC) (these works are described in greater detail below). Each of these works elicits a unique and different interaction between space, the viewer, and the installation. The works chosen use photography as an important element, are constructed to be interactive, and maintain a physical presence within the gallery. They also make use of a variety of photographic media—Polaroid, colour transparency, chromogenic colour print, and black and white silver gelatin print—that degrade over time and to varying degrees. The differences between such media have allowed me to compare how the two aforementioned cultural institutions employ different methods of digital reproduction.

Selected Michael Snow Artworks

Atlantic, from the Art Gallery of Ontario, is a multimedia piece made in 1967 and consists of metal, wood, 30 black and white gelatin silver prints, and arborite. Though this work is sculptural in presence, the photographs of waves reflected on metal surfaces give the illusion of movement through their repetition and reflection (Fig. 1).

Recombinant, also from the AGO, is a multimedia piece made in 1992 and consists of a slide projector, 80 35 mm colour slides, a painted cylindrical stand, and a painted wood wall relief. The slides are projected onto the relief, which has sawed incisions throughout. The projected images interact with the wall relief, sometimes confusing the viewer as to what is image and what is screen, while other images reinforce notions of flatness and depth (Fig. 2).

Authorization, from the National Gallery of Canada, is a mixed-media piece made in 1969 and consists of five black and white Polaroid photographs adhered to a metal-framed mirror with adhesive cloth tape. Photographic historian Martha Langford describes *Authorization* as "a work that is in continuous creation through the participation of the viewer. Its strength is in the works

ability to deconstruct the method of its own creation through the separation of the last image into the top left hand corner" (Fig. 3).

Plus Tard, also from the NGC, was made in 1977 and consists of 25 Ektacolor photographs under Plexiglas and painted wood frames. The photographs were taken in the Tom Thomson gallery at the National Gallery of Canada (Fig. 4).

Methodology

Important to this research is an examination of how the digital reproduction mimics past reproduction technologies while also identifying how it functions differently. Historically, analog reproductions were used for preservation, documentation, and publication purposes. With digital reproductions, cultural institutions continue to use digital images for these same purposes, only now they serve new and necessary purposes as well, such as online databases, conservation, presentations, social media, and advertising. More significantly, the digital reproduction can now move, be altered, and be seen instantaneously unlike its analog predecessor. Through the examination of past and present reproduction methods that the AGO and the NGC have used to photograph Snow's artworks, this thesis will examine their methods, revealing the similarities and differences between procedures, purposes, and uses of reproductions. Though the technology associated with reproductions has changed, its meaning and the methods pursued by cultural institutions have remained much the same. The shift from analog to digital has had little effect on the methodology and terminology employed at cultural institutions, even though reproductions are being used for more purposes than originally conceived, and the artwork being reproduced is increasingly more complex and nuanced. This sentiment is echoed by Fred Ritchin, professor of Photography and Imaging at New York Universities Tisch School of the Arts, in his 2009 book *After Photography*: "digital photography's relationship to space, to time, to light, to authorship, to other media will make it clear that it represents an essentially different approach than does analog photography" (141). This thesis will examine the language and the methods with which the AGO and the NGC (internally) make and disseminate digital reproductions. I will also explore some procedural and philosophical issues surrounding the reproduction process at cultural institutions. During my preliminary research, the following became important to examine: how digital copies *act* as originals; how, through various uses employed within a cultural institution (for publication, through an online database, or for cataloguing purposes, etc.)

the digital copy can elicit a different response based on its optical clarity; and how the artwork was photographed, the image resolution, the method of dissemination, and information associated with the file. As aforementioned, current research focuses primarily on the digital reproduction of historical objects and not on contemporary artworks—particularly photography. I will also examine literature associated with media theory that focuses on characteristics unique to digital images/digital files in order to ascertain how digital reproductions are considered within cultural institutions. This thesis will provide a general but brief history of photographic reproductive technologies employed by cultural institutions (produced with black and white and colour film, transparencies, etc.) in order to place this paper within a larger continuum. Equally important are the following questions: is digital imaging changing the methods by which cultural institutions reproduce photographic artworks, and how are the copies born from these reproductions being used, by whom, and for what purpose? At the end of this thesis are a series of recommendations that attempt to bridge the gap that is present when making reproductions of contemporary photographic installation artworks.

This thesis begins with a brief examination of the body of work and the methodology employed. Next is a literature survey that examines existing texts on the reproduction process at cultural institutions, Snow's use of reproduction in his practice and current digital theory. This is followed by a historical perspective of photographic reproduction and an outlining of current digital terminology. This is important as it contextualizes the research within a larger continuum of institutional practice while examining the associated language. This thesis will then focus on contemporary museum literature that explores perspectives and issues with public access to digital imagery. For this research it is important that there is an examination of methods, procedures, and terminology associated with current reproduction standards at the AGO and the NGC in order to analyze how each institution uses and maintains their reproduction programs. This will be followed by a detailed examination of the selected artworks by Michael Snow—and situating these pieces within Snow's larger body of work. Analysis of the transformative nature of the selected works will be studied in this chapter to examine the ramifications and effects that reproductions have on works of art that, by their very nature, explore ideas of truth and reality in regards to the photograph. Following this will be a short chapter suggesting methods and procedures that can be pursued when reproducing contemporary installations.

Chapter 3

Literature Survey

      Though the history of cultural institutions' use of reproductions has not been thoroughly researched or well documented, it is clear that photography has had a profound effect on how artworks are managed, preserved, and reproduced. To delve further into how contemporary cultural institutions photograph artwork, a survey examining museum literature about the reproduction of photographic objects affords a deeper understanding of what is currently being written on the subject. This survey examines three instructional books (outlining the care and management of art objects) which are available as reference tools in many museums, and current theoretical texts that focus on digital reproductions of artworks. Contextualizing this research will be a survey of current museum digital theory. There will also be a brief examination what has been written about Michael Snow and how he has used digital reproductions in relation to his artwork.

Contemporary Uses and Understanding of Reproduction within a Cultural Institution

In *Museum Registration Methods* (2010), Registrar and Collections Specialist Rebecca Buck states that "museum collections should be documented according to accepted professional standards. Such documentation should include a full identification and description of each item, its associations, provenance, condition, treatment and present location" (398). Visual information in the form of a photographic reproduction is not mentioned as an important aspect of the object's photographic documentation. The term reproduction in this text is used when referencing the rights bestowed upon an institution to physically produce photographic reproductions from the original, and as to what "legal limits exist to reproduction and distribution of images in their collections" (436). Expanding my search for other uses and purposes pursued by museums when photographing artworks, in the "Documentation" section Buck states that digital documentation is used for the purpose of condition reporting (225). She briefly describes digital documentation as a form of conservation, imaging that "can provide passive documentation of unnoticed problems for future confirmation" (225). What she does not indicate is when, how, or what type of image technology to use when making images for the purpose of artwork documentation, and who will have access to these images. In the chapter

"Digital Asset Management" Buck states that digital image collections are being shared amongst almost every department within cultural institutions, and that these images are now being widely published and disseminated using various digital media. She does differentiate between master reproduction and the derivatives born from the reproduction, and she acknowledges the various purposes these derivatives can be used for. Buck briefly states that "considering that many images are used and repurposed by many departments, it is important to preserve a master version of the file" (185). Though she briefly discusses the varied uses of photographic reproductions within cultural institutions and states that increased access to collections through publication and web presence has had a positive effect, she does not examine the following: how a reproduction is made; how to reproduce a photographic piece, in particular; or how reproductions of more complex works, like installations, are to be pursued or even acknowledged by the institution.

Freda Matassa, museum consultant and EU Collections Mobility project member, wrote the 2011 *Museum Collections Management: A Handbook*. This text echoes many of the sentiments discussed in Rebecca Buck's *Museum Registration Methods*. For Matassa, photographic reproductions are explained in two brief paragraphs as involving issues of copyright, reproduction fees, and how institutions legally navigate the production of reproductions of borrowed and lent items. As in Buck's text, it was important to move beyond the term *reproduction* in order to gather an institutional perspective of how photography is used within cultural institutions. In the thirty page "Documentation" chapter, Matassa allocates half a page to the purpose of image production as part of artwork documentation. For her, these images are used for locating an object, for conservation, for cataloguing, and for insurance purposes. The text states that a "procedures manual should provide instructions on how and when to take images of objects" (73), but fails to provide any best practice recommendations regarding when and how to document artwork, let alone what type of technology to employ when pursuing reproductions of art objects.

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler is Chief of the Document Conservation Laboratory at the United States National Archives and author of 2010 *Photographs: Archival Care and Management.* In this text she states that photographic reproductions can be used when the original photograph is too fragile to display (265). In the form of a preservation copy, reproductions help to reduce

handling of the original and can be used for condition reporting and conservation purposes. For outreach and research purposes, the reproduction plays an important role in the form of a physical copy, while through the digitization process, the digital image increases access to the collection while functioning as finding aids for those using the museum's database (352). In the chapter "Digitizing Photographs," Ritzenthaler states that digitizing photographs helps to preserve the original image by reducing the exposure of photosensitive objects to light. Thus, producing a digital master spares the original negatives and prints from repeated copying (377). She sets out in detail how to manage and preserve digital photographs, how to plan for a major digitization program, and the various uses of digital photographs such as e-mail attachments, research, public lectures, and publications (377). She goes on to state that digital surrogates are not accepted as "full preservation surrogates" (377) because a well-defined standard is lacking and the lifecycle of a digital file remains uncertain. If a digital image is not to be considered a viable preservation document, this suggests that an analog image made as part of a museum's documentation process remain the preferred reproduction image. The problem is that most, if not all, cultural institutions are using digital technology for reproduction purposes. The focus of her text is on the preservation and management of photographic objects, and it touches upon the reproduction of photographic works, and more particularly, how to digitize photographic objects. Here she specifically outlines a digitization program, how these digital images are most likely to be used (381), collections management issues associated with digitization (388), and technical specifications (389). In her text she focuses exclusively on flat imagery and does not acknowledge how to make a reproduction of large and oversized contemporary photographs or installations that use photography within their makeup.

For the purposes of preservation and collections management, digital reproduction seems particularly well suited because it functions in much the same manner as the analog copy, as suggested by Ritzenthaler. The dearth of standards, or even consensus, regarding the creation and use of reproductions demonstrates a lack of consistency between instructional texts. Overall, the texts lack any information regarding the purposes of and appropriate methodologies associated with the reproduction of modern photographic works, while highlighting the lack of standards and procedures with which to follow when making reproductions of photographic objects. These texts also do not discuss the new and divergent uses of reproductions (i.e. social media, apps, etc.). Much of the discussion they offer concerns copyright (as it relates to reproductions) and the

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physical reproduction of originals for sale, for research, for preservation, and for display (if the original is too fragile for exhibition).

Contemporary Digital Theory

Proposing a new way of looking at digital images is media theorist and author, Sean Cubitt. Cubitt states that "every digital object, like the older technologies of print or film, is a unique object with its own physical and aesthetic qualities" (Cameron 2007, 64). A file and an image are two separate *objects* as defined by Cubitt. But where does the digital image used for reproduction belong within these opposing ideas? Does it continue to function the same way that analog photographic reproduction has, or should it be considered a unique object? And if so, then this may question the methods with which reproduction is pursued in museums. In *Recoding the Museum* (2007)*,* Ross Parry, senior lecturer in the Museum studies department at Leicester University, states that "digital media are articulated with, and used according to, many of the modes and codes of existing technologies, but their qualities and applications are, to many commentators, unique" (12). Parry's position is that a digital image should be categorized as an object itself. This argument places digital reproduction within a new framework and poses new issues for reproduction programs at cultural institutions, while creating a new group of unique (art?) objects. He states that the digital object's uniqueness stems from its ability to adapt easily to new networks and computers, its ability to be shared and linked to multiple computers and individuals, as well as its ability to be compressed and essentially re-sized. Parry suggests that these qualities and applications make the digital image unique. Though his argument is focused on digital media, the digital reproduction is implicated in his theory. In *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage* (2007), Peter Walsh's essay "Rise and Fall of the Post-Photographic Museum: Technology and the Transformation of Art" suggests that the purpose of digital reproduction is very similar to that of the analog image. Though Walsh does not outline exactly how the digital reproduction is similar to its analog predecessor, he does outline some of its earliest uses for record keeping of incoming loans and the reproduction of potential acquisitions. Dominating the texts in *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage* is an assertion that the digital image is an object itself, and that it is important not to perceive the digital file as a surrogate or a copy. This uniqueness is created through its new and divergent uses from its analog predecessor. Importantly, these texts focus primarily on examining the digital reproduction of historical

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objects and not on the reproduction of photographic based artwork. In the same publication Harold Kraemer, Professor of Design at Zurich University and Professor of Image Sciences at Danube University, wrote a paper titled "Art is Redeemed, Mystery is Gone: The Documentation of Contemporary Art." In this text he states that the term *documentation* is used in many different ways between contemporary art, conservation, the art trade, et cetera. Kraemer does not define what documentation is, rather, he states that its uses and purposes have changed with the advent of digital technologies (199). This article questions the methods that cultural institutions use to *document* contemporary artwork; many of these works now fall outside of current reproduction standards because, as Kraemer states, many of these new works are more "open, transient, interdisciplinary, multimedia-based, processual, discursive, and dependent on concept and context, as well as increasingly aimed at interactivity with the recipient" (194). Kraemer continues stating that the "successful documentation of a work of art, dependent on time and space, contributes considerably to a continuation of high-quality artistic presence in the art world, exhibitions, and museum research" (200). For Kraemer the documentation of modern works of art (which he defines as being transient and using space and time as part of their creation) is insufficient and in need of a new method of documentation that can better replicate the whole experience. He suggests employing new technology and digital media to record and document these transient works, which he believes is a key issue for cultural institutions making reproductions of artworks that are sensorial and installative.

Michael Snow and Texts Written on the Digital Reproduction of his Artwork

Elizabeth Legge, associate professor of Art History at the University of Toronto, states in the introduction to *Digital Snow* (2009) that "Snow is alert to the specificities and possibilities of digital reproduction," and that "Snow has had to make careful decisions about which of his films could withstand transfer to digital media without loss of their properties." An example that Legge uses is the recreation of his famous film *Wavelength* (1967) into the 2003 titled *WVLNT* (Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time). In this piece he took sections from the beginning, middle and end of *Wavelength*, and printed them over top of one another. As Legge continues, Snow is very aware of the limitations of digital reproductions: "in *Digital Snow* we are given excerpts of films and samples of work that can cue us to certain aspects of the material, while being clear that no work can be fully recreated by such production." In email correspondence with Bruce Elder, Professor at the School of Image Arts and Graduate Program

Director of Communication and Culture at Ryerson University, he states that "*WVLNT* is a satirical piece whose premise concerns the misery of film being transferred to video." Satirical or not, the folding of an artwork into a more viewer friendly and shorter piece does suggest that with newer technology available, an alteration in the original is inevitable. Moving from one medium to another changes the work's aesthetic and mode of dissemination which in turn affects content and meaning. In a brief statement Snow made in *Artforum* in 2012, he acknowledges the chemical deterioration of many of his photographic and film based artworks. Snow specifically discusses two acquisitions made by MoMA in 2012 (*Sink* and *Slidelength* both from 1970) consisting of slide and carousel based installations. In order to ensure future presentations of the work, MoMA encouraged Snow to make analog duplicates for the museum, and create digital scans for preservation purposes. Interestingly, he is planning to "stage the two works and shoot an HD-video documentation that could be used in the future when all the slides have finally faded." He continues stating that "these new manifestations would have to be labeled as 'documentation' or 'depictions' of the real work" (*Artforum*, 2012). This is important as it elucidates the difficulty with making reproductions of artworks that have a definitive life span, that are multi-sensorial by design and use space as an important element of their makeup.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the result of the survey suggests that there lacks a consistent or clear definition of what a reproduction is, what are the uses of a reproduction, and what the most appropriate methodologies and procedures are for the reproduction of photographic artworks. There is no mention or discussion of the reproduction of contemporary artworks that are installative; rather, these texts focus on how to reproduce standard, flat photographic works.

Current digital theory proposes that digital images should be considered as unique objects because of their ability to be shared and linked to several computers simultaneously, and the fact that they can be re-sized and compressed. This theory places the digital reproductions made by museums and cultural institutions at odds with their original use and intent. Theorists are beginning to investigate the methods—and their inadequacies—with which contemporary artworks are documented. Though not specifically focused on reproductions, issues that persist with this kind of documentation are similar to the difficulty faced when making reproductions of contemporary photographic artworks, like those of Michael Snow.

Connecting this research to the work of Michael Snow provides an entry point into how an important Canadian artist pursues the current reproduction of his work for documentation or preservation purposes. His methods and reasons may contrast the methods and purposes that cultural institutions employ while collecting and maintaining his artwork. Snow adds an important perspective on how an artist, whose media work is degrading, will use and integrate current reproduction technology into his practice.

Chapter 4

A Brief History of Photographic Art Reproduction and Associated Digital Imaging Terminology

  The history of reproduction employed at cultural institutions is a history of continually evolving technology and developments that parallel the evolution of photography. The use of photography by museums and cultural institutions began shortly after the discovery of the photographic image. While an examination of several histories of photography (spanning thirty years) provides anecdotal descriptions of what was photographed for documentary (informational and collections management) purposes for cultural institutions, some major gaps are revealed.[1] What is not acknowledged in these histories is how cultural institutions used photographic reproductions and why they chose photography to document artworks. Though this history is by no means exhaustive, it is meant to contextualize current reproduction methods and standards within a broader history of artwork reproduction at cultural institutions. Through interviews with Sean Weaver, head of Digital Imaging at the AGO, and Mark Paradis, head of Multimedia at the NGC, I have pieced together a brief history of when certain technologies were employed and for what purpose at both of these institutions.

In the first chapter to *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage* (2007), author and lecturer Peter Walsh states that photography changed "the way art museums treated and displayed art" (27). For Walsh, this change began in 1855 when the South Kensington Museum sent Charles Thurston Thompson to Toulouse, France, to photograph 749 objects for an acquisition proposal (25). The South Kensington Museum also used photography to produce catalogs and make photographic prints to be sold to the general public. Walsh continues outlining the use of the photograph within several museums from the late 19th century, including The Royal Ontario Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. He states that for these institutions, the analog photograph was used for conservation, duplication, and publication purposes. More recently, with the use of digital technology by cultural institutions, Walsh asserts that "the uses museums

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[1] Surveyed were four histories of photography: *History of Photography: The Musée d'Orsay Collection* (2009) by Francoise Heilburn, *Photography: A Cultural History* (2002) by Mary Warner Marien, *A World History of Photography* by Naomi Rosenblum (1984), and *The History of Photography* by Beaumont Newhall (1982).

make of digital photography to interpret and assess art remain similar if not identical to those made of 'analog' photographs of the late 19th century" (31). To what extent this is true is uncertain, but what is clear is that photography became an important part of the South Kensington Museums collections management program (photographing potential acquisitions, condition reporting, and the photographing of loaned work). These uses for photography influenced the methods and purpose of photography at cultural institutions established after the South Kensington Museum. As there is no written history or comprehensive study on the use of photography at cultural institutions, it was necessary to pose questions to curators and technicians at the NGC concerning the photographic technologies they have employed and when. After several conversations with Mark Paradis (NGC), a rough timeline of their reproduction program was produced. The NGC records indicate that their earliest photographic reproductions were made in the early 1900s. These images were mainly used for catalog reproduction. By the early 1950s, the NGC was making 8x10 black and white negatives of artwork that was used for record keeping and conservation purposes. In the mid-1960s, the NGC began to use photography for research and scientific purposes (X-ray photography, ultraviolet, raking light, etc.) They then moved to 4x5 E4 colour slide sheet film in the early 1970s and by 1974 to the E6 process. The NGC could process and develop their own E6, making the shift more financially viable. Due to the inevitable fading and discoloration of chromogenic material, black and white negatives continued to be employed during this time; and though they could not be used for color reference, they did use black and white images to "record surface textures and brush strokes" (Mark Paradis, pers. comm.) for curatorial files and identification imagery. In 2000 they moved to digital capture and have, to date, made 55,000 digital reproduction files. Unlike past analog imaging technologies that necessitated multiple forms of image creation, the NGC, like the AGO, now use one master image from which all reproduction uses are derived. Though this has streamlined and increased the pace of image reproduction, it has also placed increased significance in this one image that is meant to represent the artwork reproduced.

Associated Imaging Terminology

As there is no literature focused on the reproduction of contemporary artwork, this thesis is meant to highlight issues that have not been addressed within the reproduction process at cultural institutions. More generally, terminology associated with artwork reproduction is inconsistent

and not standardized between institutions and relevant texts. For example Mary Ritzenthaler, Chief of the Document Conservation Laboratory at the United States National Archives and author of the 2010 instructional manual *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, uses, at times, terms like duplication, reproduction, documentation, copies, and surrogates interchangeably, making for unclear definitions. Through a closer examination of terminology associated with the reproduction process I have learned that these terms can be used interchangeably while possessing completely different definitions or functions. For example, at the NGC, Mark Paradis states that photographs made of installed works are called documentation, whereas Sean Weaver at the AGO states that a documentation image is made for conservation purposes, highlighting certain aspects of an object's physical condition. A researcher or student accessing reproductions in the future will receive very different images from varying institutions because of this lack of consistent terminology. Freda Matassa, a museum consultant and EU Collections Mobility project member, in her 2011 publication *Museum Collections Management* states that the purpose of photographic documentation (but what she might mean here is photographic reproductions) is for identification, publication, research and condition reporting. Technical staff at the NGC state that they are only interested in gathering as much detail as possible, recording proper colour values, and placing the work in the best possible light. At the AGO, proper photography of an artwork produces a file large enough to record a sharp image with properly calibrated colours—as Sean Weaver stated, it captures "ultimate detail." At both of these institutions one reproduction serves many purposes. The large (original) reproduction photographs are used for publication or large mural prints (advertising), while the same image can also be reduced in size and optical clarity and repurposed for social media, web applications, and database reference imagery. Currently, the AGO uses reproductions mainly for online applications and web based references. There are obvious and glaring discrepancies between Matassa's view of the role and function of a reproduction and how the AGO and NGC make and use reproductions. What is not discussed in Matassa's text is how to define or categorize contemporary artworks when making reproductions. For example, the digital imaging department at the AGO considers *Atlantic* to be a sculpture and photographs it accordingly. Though it may possess some sculptural elements, this type of reproduction relegates the photographic and installative elements of this work as secondary components. The lack of proper classification of contemporary artworks by cultural institutions will in turn direct the type

of reproduction pursued by an imaging department. In the selected works by Snow, there are elements that are sculptural, which is what the imaging department is photographing, but what about the other elements present within these works? In the case of *Recombinant*, the AGO did not scan every slide and they have not photographed each image projected; rather, they have nine different reproduction images spanning a 13-year period. Some images, for example, were taken in a dark room and others in a brightly lit room (Fig. 5). Missing from the AGO's reproduction/image records of *Recombinant* are photographs of the other 79 images projected, the fact that this is a time based artwork, and that it is an installation by design and not solely a slide show projecting one image (as is suggested by these reproductions). Sean Weaver stated that during the most recent reproduction of *Recombinant* they were not sure if they should even have the slide projector in the image: "It was up in the air. Nobody really knew and Sophie Hackett (associate curator of photography at the AGO) had her [own] idea whether or not you should see the projector … " (pers. comm.) but there remained some uncertainty as to what was necessary to photograph. Fortunately, Michael Snow was contacted and he suggested how he would like *Recombinant* to be photographed. Though the digital imaging department at the AGO prefers to work with the artist when reproducing artwork, it is not part of their policy and, by their own admission, does not happen frequently. The representation/image the AGO has created does not include the sound, nor can it capture the process of the slide projector projecting 80 images one after the other. Missing is the time that is inherent in this work as it unfolds before the viewer, and the multiple perspectives possible with this piece that add diverse experiences to the installation. Mark Paradis from the NGC stated that in the case of an artwork like *Recombinant* they would scan each slide but would not photograph each slide projected, rather "they would be focused on the installation and its relation to the room—more of a reference piece for configuration … that's why you go to the art gallery after you have seen it reproduced. Our job is to illustrate the experience" (pers. comm.). It is not the reproduction department's job to produce an image that best illustrates the complexity of a modern work (here I am referencing sound and time in an installation); rather, it is to produce a view highlighting an aspect of that work. Museum imaging departments are not looking to create reproductions that are experiential. Weaver at the AGO states that he is "trying to make an accurate photograph, an accurate digital file of [a] work of art. I guess it's a reproduction but nothing will ever come close to an original

print done by the artist on the wall, but you can experience [it] in a book, on an app, on the screen. But you are just looking at a sample of the work" (pers. comm.).

An important theme in current museum literature is the management and organization of reproductions on museum websites. Though not the focus of this research, it highlights issues related to the improper classification of contemporary artwork. As discussed earlier, the multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted aspects of Snow's work can lead to wide-ranging categorization of the same work between different institutions. Fiona Cameron, senior research fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society, in her 2001 article "World of Museums" states that the more recent museum interface typically "privileges one thematic interpretation over another while limiting the interpretive potential of digital collections … " (309). This privileging of one aspect of Snow's work over another leads to inconsistencies within the collection's file, while also obscuring or ignoring interactive and sensorial components. Cameron also states that the current terminology associated with collections management tends to utilize "traditional museum metaphors such as object labels, graphics, and didactic text panels … " (309). Though useful for flat and static artworks—sculptures or textiles, for example—contemporary photographic artworks are now being forced into a categorization that can be inappropriate or misleading. Conversely, labelling these kinds of photographic works as mixed media is an oversimplification. More specifically, Snow's artwork is forced into an unsuitable grouping. For example, currently the AGO classifies *Atlantic* as a sculpture whereas the 2002 DVD ROM *Digital Snow* describes the work as a mixed media piece. At the NGC *Authorization* is classified as a collage whereas in *Digital Snow* it is classified as a mixed media piece. The incomplete or inconsistent categorization of contemporary works can lead to the omissions of necessary elements present within the work. At an institutional level the photographic reproduction of an artwork can have a profound effect on how an artwork is managed and understood. "Collections management databases are the primary means in which museums document their collections" (Cameron et al. 2001, 81). Cameron goes on to state that "the manner in which an object is acquired and documented will, to a large extent, determine how current and future generations understand it" (81). This highlights the importance of re-examining cultural institutions' means of accessioning contemporary and multi-media artworks. Clearer reproduction procedures and definitions will allow future scholars and researchers to understand what type of image they are looking at, how it was used, and why it was made. More specifically with the artwork of Snow, a

reproduction that presents more than just a singular perspective and evokes a sense that there is also time and sound involved in these works, will allow a clearer understanding of how the work is meant to be seen and experienced. This will become even more important in the future when the photographs in Snow's work deteriorate and become unpresentable.

Understanding how the AGO and the NGC pursue their current reproduction process and the discourse surrounding it is crucial to this research. In conversation Paradis stated that at the NGC almost all forms of reproduction imagery are derived from a single high-resolution digital reproduction (except for what he calls a replicant, which for him is an exact copy of the original). This is unlike the AGO, where they produce three types of digital imagery from the original—a duplication, documentation images, and a reproduction. Through a series of interviews it became clear that terminology associated with the reproduction process is inconsistent between the AGO and the NGC. At the NGC, Paradis makes derivatives, documentation images, conservation copies, and duplicates from the high-resolution master reproduction file. Though the AGO produces the same types of files, what they are called, how they are made, by whom, and for what purpose can be very different. For example, photographs taken for the purpose of documentation at the AGO are taken by the conservation department for scientific purposes, whereas for Paradis at the NGC, the photographic documentation he takes is an installation image and/or series of images focused on individual aspects of a certain piece. Though this may seem anecdotal, when researchers and curators reference these images in the future, the purpose and mode of creation will be lost within this inconsistent and varying terminology. As these inconsistencies are specific to each institution, they demonstrate a lack of standardization that is necessary in order to properly interpret and understand the various types of imagery being produced by these institutions. This will have a profound effect in the future when researchers/students/viewers use these images—why they were made and for what purpose will dictate image quality, content, and aesthetic.

Please find below reproduction terminology and definitions associated with the AGO and the NGC. I have included terms and definitions from the Mary Ritzenthaler's *Archival Care and Management* text as a point of reference.

AGO's Definitions:

Duplication: This is a physical duplicate of the original. It is used in place of the original and possesses the same dimensions as the original. It is made using the same media/process as the original and is lit, installed and handled differently than a reproduction.

Surrogate: By definition, a surrogate is something that stands in place of the original but is not the original. This is a high quality digital file that can be exhibited in place of the original.

Documentation: This is an image that is quickly taken, not necessarily made by a professional photographer, and is mainly used by the conservation department. These images are focused on photographing physical issues with the original and are not interested in proper colour reproduction, lighting, object display, or in making a high quality file.

Reproduction: This is a high quality digital file used for preservation/research purposes. These master files are most frequently used to make copies. These images are high quality and high resolution, and are an attempt to gather as much detail and visual information as possible while recording proper colour values. Reproductions are generally the largest file size possible, are of the highest possible quality and are used by most departments—except for conservation.

Copy: This is a repurposed lower quality/lower resolution digital image that generally derives from a reproduction. These images are generally made in order to be disseminated for a variety of purposes like social media, thumbnail images, online databases, etc.

Facsimile: This is a reasonable reproduction of the original but is not a duplicate. This too *stands in* for the original but is not the original.

Derivative: This is a lower quality/lower resolution digital image born from a reproduction.

NGC's Definitions:

Reproduction: A high-resolution master image, which all subsequent images are made from.

Replicant: This is an exact copy/match of the original made using the same technology (as the original). It is made as a stand in for the original but is not the original.

Duplicate: A derivative of the reproduction but not an exact match.

Derivative: A reduced file size of a reproduction that is used for web, newspaper advertisements, publications, etc. These are files that are made for a particular use.

Documentation: Images made of the work installed within the gallery space. Multiple elements are isolated and photographed.

Conservation copy: A detail taken from the high-resolution reproduction file and used for scientific purposes.

Ritzhenthaler's Definitions:

Documentation: Is a form of recordkeeping documenting the condition of the photographs, preservation or conservation actions, changes in original format, and keeps note of the creation of duplications or copies (209).

Reproduction: Can display high quality reproductions instead of originals. "For preservation duplication, the goal is to make an accurate reproduction of the original, either to reduce handling of the original or to replace the original because it is unstable" (366). Public outreach through high quality reproductions (that are "as true to the original as possible, in terms of size, clarity of image, color, and detailed tonality") made for exhibitions that are interactive and used for advertising the institutions' collection (this definition is what Sean would call a duplication and not a reproduction). "Photographic reproductions still comprise the largest category of copy work required, both for preservation activities when the copy is intended to replace the original, and for publication and exhibition purposes" (367).

Duplication: "Conveys that a new version is as similar to the original as possible. For example, when a duplicate is made of an original negative, the term duplicate implies that it is the same size as the original" (350).

Copy: Is not an exact replica of the original.

Copies/Surrogates: *For preservation purposes*—this is an image used to limit access to the original and satisfy requests to view and reproduce the original photograph (389). These images are also used for outreach and access purposes (352). These digital files act in the place of the original.

Illustration 1: NGC Flowchart of Digital Imaging Terminology

Original

Replicant (an exact copy of the original)

Reproduction

Derivative (lower resolution file used for web, email, etc.)

Documentation (images of installation, individual aspects of artwork)

Conservation Copy (exacts detailed information from image)

Duplicate (a derivative and never an exact match)
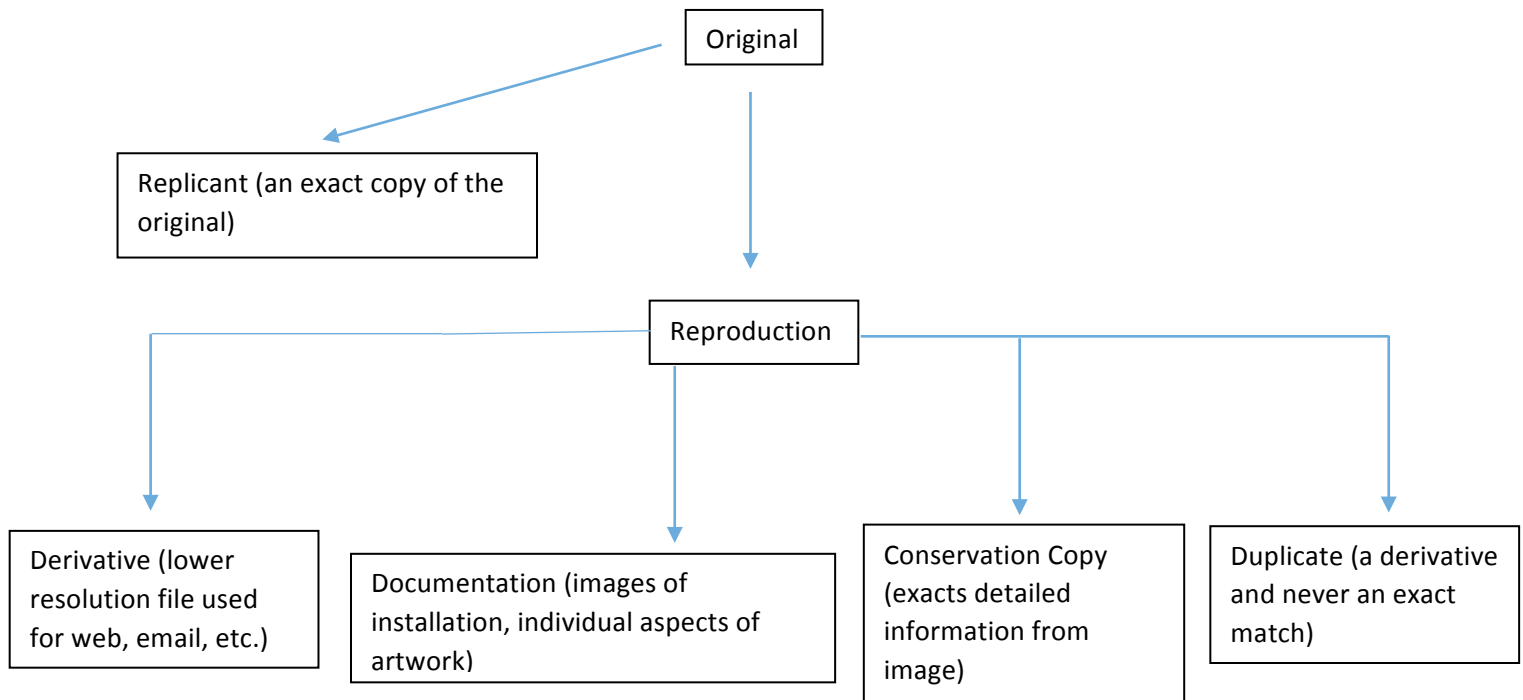
Illustration 2: AGO Flowchart of Digital Imaging Terminology

Original

Duplication: A physical duplicate of the original. Used in place of the original and uses the same dimensions as the original. Is made using the same media/process and is lit, installed and handled differently than a reproduction.

Reproduction File: A high quality digital file used for preservation purposes/research. Is also used as the master file from which most copies are made.

Documentation: An image that need not be the highest quality and is mainly used by the conservation dept. Focused on physical issues and not interested in proper colour reproduction, lighting, and object display.

Surrogate: A high quality digital file that stands in place of the original.

Facsimile: A reasonable reproduction but is not a duplicate

Derivatives: Low quality digital image

Copy: Is a repurposed image. These are low res, lower quality images used for many purposes.

Thumbnail images

Social media

Print Publication

Online Databases

Internal staff use/research

Chapter 5

Contemporary Perspectives On Public Access

Andre Malraux, in 1947, wrote in *Le Musee Imaginaire* that during the process of photographic reproduction, the act of lighting may accentuate something in the artwork "that previously had been only suggested" (82). Malraux goes on to state that black and white reproductions in publications can produce associations between art objects that have little in common. "When reproduced on the same page, such widely differing objects such as a tapestry, an illuminated manuscript, a painting, a statue, or a medieval stained-glass window lose their colors, their texture, and the dimensions … " (84). Though current reproductions produce artworks in colour with increased definition and quality, fifty years after Malraux's text there continues to be issues that persist with the reproduction of artworks. Loss of certain detail, singular perspectives, and the highlighting of particular aspects of an artwork over others are but a few of the issues that these *stand ins* possess. Museum visitors/researchers are increasingly relying on reproductions as valid and important tools for viewing and learning. The move away from object appreciation towards dematerialized digital reproduction produces imagery now being interpreted and used by researchers and students as contemporary *objects*. These optically clear and easily accessed reproductions are now considered to possess similar kinds of visual and experiential information as the original. Helen J. Chatterjee, head of research and teaching of Museums and Collections at University College London, describes in her book, *Touch in Museums* (2008), that this shift away from object-centred research began in "the 1970's and 1980's, in which 'objective' observations were made scientifically, and so intimate understanding, familiarity and connoisseurship became less important; and then the post-modern critiques of the discipline reinforced a move away from traditional object knowledge in the 1980's and the 1990's" (109). This move away from the physical object to dematerialized entity has a profound effect on how the viewer understands reproductions, and more specifically, what the artworks' intentions are, how they are to be viewed and what is to be experienced. As Fiona Cameron states in her 2001 text "World of Museums," "real collections operate to a greater or lesser extent on the visceral thrill of being in the presence of the original, with the digital world the information potential of objects predominates" (310). A digital image is not a transcription or a copy of the medium that it is simulating; rather, it is a conversion of visual information from one medium to another. It is

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a move from the physical realm into the dematerialized world, and with it comes new modes of understanding and (now) new ways of thinking about online imagery.

Throughout the collection of essays in the 2007 *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage* (introduced in the literature survey) is a notion that reproductions help reinforce the idea of uniqueness and what Walter Benjamin coined the *aura*. Benjamin believed that a work's authenticity is derived from its distinctiveness, that is, the artwork's "unique existence at the place at which it is to be found" (13). An artwork's history (the physical and chemical changes in an object and its history of ownership) also provides a basis for this uniqueness. "The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the history to which it testifies" (14). It is important to note that before there was technology that could make mechanical reproductions, there was no questioning an artwork's authenticity. The sense of awe inspired by the auratic distance, as described by Benjamin, has been replaced by the digital reproduction's ability to undermine this distance, thereby destroying an artwork's aura. Some contemporary theorists suggest that Benjamin's idea of the aura may need an adjustment when referencing digital reproductions. Julie F. Codell, in her article "Second Hand Images," states that though "reproductions lacked the aura of the original, reproductions often acquire their own auras" (215). She believes that many people now have connections, stories, and anecdotes from their experiences with the reproductions of originals—be it from a book, website, or presentation. In other words, the sense of awe and mystery once created by the aura is now replaced by the viewer's personal connection to and visual experiences with an artwork. But this suggests that the redefined aura is less about the physical and mysterious distance created by an original artwork, and more about proximity and closeness—in effect, the opposite of what Benjamin suggested. Fiona Cameron, in her essay "Beyond the Cult of the Replicant," echoes sentiments by Sean Cubitt, suggesting that Benjamin's connecting of aura through materiality and provenance can also be used when examining digital historical objects. Cameron states that there is a materiality involved with a digital image and that provenance can still be traced, though not easily. As with analog material, validation of digital objects "involves determining the objects integrity by comparing it with other versions" (Cameron, 67). The digital copy is always an exact replica of the original and produces an image that when compared to the original presents no differences at all—unlike an analog copy, where there are always subtle or not so subtle differences between the original and the copy. Cameron's argument is based on the idea

that digital and virtual "is not a semblance of something else, but an alternative type of entity with properties similar and dissimilar to those with which it is contrasted" (64). The provenance and history of a digital image are not to be found in the image; rather, they are not so easily found in a tracing back of emailed files, website URLs, and through embedded metadata. Reproductions are, in most cases, an individual's first view of many artworks. If these first introductions have a lasting affect and an *aura* to them (as is suggested by some contemporary digital theorists), it is important that these reproductions present to the viewer a clear and defined image (or series of images/videos) that best represent the artwork depicted. It is also equally important to understand how digital reproductions are being seen and perceived by the viewer. Are they seen as separate or original objects, faithful reproductions as good as the original, or as copies with reduced optical and informational value.

Using Snow to examine current reproduction methods of contemporary artwork reveals an artist's work at odds with these ideas. Amy Taubin, American film critic, in her essay "Doubled Visions" from the 2001 exhibition catalogue *Michael Snow: almost Cover to Cover* believes that "Snow is using photography, not in the service of "the decay of the aura," but paradoxically, to affirm its presence. Snow refuses to "bring things closer spatially" (101). Taubin continues: "as history, [Snow's artworks] are reinforcements of the aura. With two exceptions, these [photographic] works are not reproducible because they are not simply photographic prints" (101). For example, in *Authorization*, Snow is reinforcing the originality and objectness of this work through the production of each consecutive self-portrait. By obscuring the *author* and placing the viewer in the position of creator, Snow questions how photographs are understood and created through a visual and conceptual loop, while entering into an active dialogue with the viewer. Fred Ritchin, in his 2009 publication *After Photography*, states that the analog image is an analog object representing a past, and the digital image functions very differently: "not only are bytes, unlike chemistry and film, not palpably physical but they become insistent metaphors for a depiction of reality as informational" (42). These digital images are perceived as vessels that transmit data or information, and they are not approached in the digital realm as presenting something experiential or meaningful. Reproductions, though initially produced as a view of an artwork, have come to be seen (in the digital realm) as a place where information is stored and gathered. Snow and Ritchin are interested in the photograph's uniqueness and how its physical construction and presence are very different than a digital reproduction. What is important to

understand is that the method with which the viewer approaches and understands a digital image versus an analog one are very different. As digital images become the dominant method of dissemination, a better understanding of how the viewer approaches these images will help museums and collections managers make reproductions in the future that reflect these new uses and modes of viewing.

Cubitt, Cameron, and Codell also suggest that rather than reproductions reducing or even destroying the original's aura, reproductions increase and add cultural value to an artwork, thereby augmenting and reinforcing an artwork's aura. They believe that the more an artwork is reproduced and seen, the more mystery and awe surrounds the original. Though the analog reproduction was only one generation removed from the original, it was never considered a valid stand in or an equal visual experience to the original. In these contemporary texts they begin to suggest otherwise. More specifically, Benjamin states that the very nature of film technology allows artworks to be mechanically reproduced, which, by their mechanical nature, diminishes and ignores the value of aura regardless of whether or not the reproduction is analog or digital. But the aura of an object is not solely based upon the viewer's visual experience of an artwork— it is also based upon the object's physical existence in space and time. Ivan Gaskell, professor of Cultural History and Museum Studies at the Bard Graduate Center, points out in *Vermeer's Wager: Speculations on Art History, Theory and Art Museums* (2000) that when looking at an artwork "the viewers' meaningful experience … is not confined to experience of its image component. Experience of its image component alone, abstracted as a reproduction, is not to be confounded with experience of the painting as a meaningful object. As viewers we experience the painting in a contingent manner. Conditions of viewing affect the relationship" (76). The experience of the original through various possible perspectives adds dimensions and complexity that a reproduction cannot attain. More specifically though, looking at an analog reproduction in a book is a very different experience than looking at a digital image online. This is important as modes of dissemination influence the way we approach and engage with material. It is important to note that screens for viewing digital imagery are all different—be it with colours, clarity, size, location, etc. Dominating many contemporary texts is the belief that through interactivity and interconnectivity, the digital reproduction can produce as meaningful an experience as being in the presence of the original object. Increased detail and new technology can produce a more involved reproduction, but it will always be the same image. The viewer who returns to a digital

reproduction a week later will see and *experience* the same image. Helen J. Chatterjee states that "flawed understanding of human perception rooted in cognitive science … [has] underpinned the pursuit of digital perfection in the misguided belief that to attain ever higher digital resolutions and/or virtual manipulations is to provide ever better primary input stimuli which, in turn, allows for the justified supplanting of the real world with a virtual one" (113). In her text she cites a case study that examines the relationship between an artefact used for teaching and the strain placed on cultural institutions to facilitate these experiences. This belief, that through optically clearer imagery the viewer can get an improved or at least clearer perspective of the artwork, has come to dominate much contemporary thinking. But like its analog predecessor, a digital reproduction can only produce a view of the original. There is no denying the positive effects digital reproductions have had on scholarship, museum attendance, and increased access to inaccessible collections. In conversation with Mark Paradis from the NGC, past experiences with more interactive forms have proven to be unsuccessful. For example, in the mid-1990s, the NGC launched a web initiative incorporating what was then the newest and most immersive technology: QuickTime VR (Virtual Reality). This was a process of taking a series of photographs that were then digitally stitched together to form panoramas of a selected space. By using the cursor, the viewer can move back and forth and tilt up and down within these stitched images in order to get a better sense of the museum's space and the objects within it. Within this virtual reality are points of interest allowing the viewer to select detailed views of certain artworks. Though the NGC invested in this new technology, they learned quickly that their audience was slow to interact with this form of technology and consequently stopped using QuickTime VR. Paradis states that "there have been a lot of attempts to try to bring the experience closer and closer to the marketplace, but if anything we are finding that the marketplace is looking for social media's shared experience and dialogue" (pers. comm.). There is much literature directed at the benefits of accessing digital reproductions through websites and databases, and its ability to spurn interest in the arts and to make collections more accessible, though Paradis suggests the contrary. What is desired is not a more immersive or clearer understanding of the work through reproductions but a quick snapshot or glimpse of an artwork that can be tweeted, shared, and posted online. For Paradis, he believes that the museum website is increasingly becoming more of a marketing tool than a mechanism for outreach and interactivity.

There needs to be a re-evaluation of what a digital reproduction is, how it functions differently than its analog predecessor, and how we pursue the reproduction process with contemporary artworks. More precisely, how is a viewer interpreting and understanding a digital reproduction and to what effect, and what is being gained and lost through digital reproductions.

Chapter 6

The Selected Artworks of Michael Snow and Their Reproductions

  An internationally recognized artist, Michael Snow has produced artwork with various media including paint, motion picture film, sculpture and text for over 50 years. For the purpose of my thesis I will examine the transformative nature of four of Snow's photographic installations. Snow's interest in photography was inspired by a series he made between 1961 and 1967 titled *Walking Woman*. This was a series of works derived from the same silhouette of a walking female figure that was reused and transformed through varying media and modes of display. In 1962 he made *Four to Five*, a piece consisting of 16 black and white photographs mounted onto board. This photographic work records the interaction of a 3-D life-sized black plywood cut-out of a *Walking Woman* at various locations throughout Toronto. "I placed it in outdoor urban settings—not to provoke incidents but to take black and white two dimensional photographs of the figure with (in life) three-dimensional figures and locations that would join the *Walking Woman* as they were also converted to black and white two-dimensional static images" (Catsou, 26). In Snow's photographic work, he presents to the viewer various photographic systems that are inherent to the images' creation. He also explores how through the production of a photographic image it abstracts and distorts perspectives and visual hierarchies through the placement of forms within the image surface. For Snow, what is important is what is represented in front of the camera; it is how the camera sees that particular object/subject under those specific conditions. His photographically based artworks foreground the technology and process associated with this medium—aspects that are generally hidden from the viewer and even more obscured through reproductions. Rather than allow the photograph to hide the modes of its creation, the selected works highlight these aspects of the photographic medium while inviting, through their installation, the viewer to conceptually participate in the works' creation. Snow's photographic work is pertinent to my research because he is also conscious that photographs (particularly those in the selected works) are reproducible. That is, how a photograph technically reproduces what it is photographing while also being able to make a copy of itself. Though for Snow, each copy is never a replica of the original, rather, it is always something a little different—that is, unique. Like the object photographed, what the photographer sees and what the camera records are always a little different. Curator and

president of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Louise Dompierre expresses this sentiment that is present in another of Snow's work titled *Venetian Blind*: "more importantly, the work draws attention to the ability of the camera to hold a memory distinct from what the eyes can see and hold normally" (405). An important element to Snow's work is the frame. Framing of the work directs not only the viewer's attention within a prescribed space, but like a photograph, ignores what is beyond the exposed area of the film (or digital screen). The very nature of photography is to record only what is in its view, within the frame of the viewfinder or screen. By bringing attention to the importance of the frame, Snow highlights an integral aspect of photography that is often overlooked and obscured through the act of image creation and presentation, but is integral to image production and comprehension. Time is another important element that is inherent to the photograph and to the proper experiencing of Snow's work. Snow's purposeful image creation highlights the time in and between selected images, but he also reveals time through viewer interaction with his installations. In *Authorization*, it is only through the act of looking, contemplating, and decoding this series of images that the viewer can understand how the work was made, and that time is encapsulated and held within the frame. Each Polaroid is connected, through time and each image's inevitable deterioration, to the one that comes before and after it. The transformative nature of his work moves the viewer between the physicality of an image (the object) and the method of its creation (through framing, choice and time) to the cinematic, or the fact that an image is a frame within time (like in a projected film). His works move beyond media and technique. For example, *Atlantic*, though sculptural in presence, is composed of a series of images that gives the viewer an impression of movement through their repetition. A single image represents a moment but is seen as a whole; the images become cinematic as each square becomes a frame that when looked at consecutively transforms into a sort of film reel. Seen from a distance *Atlantic* is like one image as the reflective surface blurs the edges of each photograph, seemingly forming a single image. The large composite image of either view comprises or is composed of many small images. By spending the time to investigate *Atlantic* from various perspectives, details and impressions are slowly revealed that are, at first glance, not apparent at all. Underlying all of Snow's photographic work is his acknowledgment of the materials of photography, the notion that without the physical object there would be no photograph. For example, *Plus Tard* literally transformed a room at the NGC from an "orderly installation of landscape paintings by Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven into photographs

that record visual memory in a way that only a camera remembers" (Langford, 60). *Plus Tard*, from the National Gallery of Canada, was made in 1977 and consists of 25 Ektacolor photographs under plexiglass and painted wood frames. Snow panned a camera at various speeds and exposed the film inside the gallery in order to record what he says "is a still image that's a record of a gesture, like a paint stroke, but it's still static" (Roberts, 19). Snow looked to these paintings as a point of comparison and departure. Similarly to the early 20th century Pictorialists, the Group of Seven was interested in the materiality of their medium, that is, acknowledging the paint, the canvas surface, and their brush strokes. Snow, with *Plus Tard*, is also acknowledging the materials of the photographic medium, the technology imbedded in this medium and the photographers role in the creation of each image. Unlike the Pictorialists, who were focused on making photographs more painterly, Snow is interested in highlighting aspects of the medium that can be manipulated in order to produce a certain affect, while acknowledging that like a painter, a photographer has similar preoccupations. The same year that Michael Snow produced *Authorization* (1967), Michael Fried authored his seminal text "Art and Objecthood." In it he argues that Minimalist art focused on the viewer's experience with the work of art, and "what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]" (3). He continues, stating "[Minimalism's] sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters [Minimalist] work" (3). The Minimalist artist is interested in making the viewer the subject and the artwork the object while provoking an experience between the two. For Minimalists it is important to be in the presence of the object and that art, for them, occupies space in the real world. "Minimalism became the name for what could only be called a cognitive-aesthetic shift in the thinking about and practising of art…. The broad epoch making movement of Minimalism, which included and transformed the practices of sculpture, film, music, and dance is the proper milieu of Snow's work" (Monk, 298). Modernism, on the other hand, focused on the act of creation and the materials being used. Snow affirms the presence of the work while simultaneously investigating how a photograph is a representation of both a reality and an illusion. Snow can be seen as a minimalist as his works tend to invite the viewer to participate within the work's construction. Snow's work is focused on acknowledging both the *objectness* of a photograph and the viewer, whose presence before his artwork participates in the work by becoming the subject and not a passive viewer. Similarly to Benjamin's notion of the aura, Snow too is interested in exploring the history of a photograph. He does this by examining

the functions and processes of the photographic image and the photographs fluidity within space and time. Snow makes artwork that specifically examines the nature of that medium—its physical presence, the use of time during exposure, the notion of the document, the camera, etc. In his exhibition catalogue *almost Cover to Cover* Snow states that "the transformation from three dimensions to two is an obvious aspect to photography, but its obviousness apparently makes it disappear in most photographic work but my own" (23). Snow presents to the viewer photographic objects with content that directs attention to the technology inherent in the medium and a photograph's ability to compress space and time onto a piece of photographic paper. Snow's work involves more than just a presentation of the physical presence of a photograph. He aims to initiate an interaction between viewer and artwork in order to stimulate, within the viewer, a deeper understanding of how time plays a role in the creation of a photograph, and that perspective and choice are integral to image creation.

Though I acknowledge that any reproduction lacks the presence and aura of the original, it is important to note that Snow's artworks will, over time, fade until they are unable to be exhibited, and the only remaining imagery of these installations will be reproductions. Digital reproductions have now become ubiquitous. Their use and method of production influences the way in which they are understood and interpreted. While theorists suggest that digital reproductions add *authenticity* to the original, Snow's work aims to highlight the uniqueness of the image experience. Snow is interested in asserting the presence of the image, but through the reproduction process this notion of uniqueness and *objectness* becomes diluted and eventually erodes. The installations examined in this paper produce authentic and meaningful experiences that address the photograph's ability to be reproduced, and the effect reproductions can have on an image and their interpretation. As in *Authorization*, with each Polaroid taken, the viewer is visually (through increasingly blurred images) and conceptually taken away sequentially from the first image. But by participating in the work, the viewer is also brought closer to the process of image creation and, by extension, the creator—which it turns out is not only Michael Snow but also the viewer—through the act of looking.

Chapter 7

Reproduction Recommendations

Though there remains much study and consideration to pursue when examining the reproduction of photographic installations, there are also some measures that may be currently employed to produce imagery and documents that better represent these artworks. The installation works by Snow have proven difficult to classify. Art institutions have created systems to streamline the accession process in order to better organize incoming works. This process fails when works are classified into multiple-medium or object categories, and possess various media within the works that are installative and interactive by design. The current system places these works of Michael Snow into the category of sculpture or photography. The initial categorization dictates the type and method of reproduction to be followed within the reproduction process at cultural institutions. I believe categorizing Snow's artworks as *installation* or *installation with photographic elements* will help to produce more meaningful reproductions. For example, by only classifying *Atlantic* as a sculpture, this has dictated how the artwork has been photographed for reproduction purposes, but also how the viewer interprets these reproductions when reading the object heading. Captions have always directed how an image is interpreted and understood, and I believe that labels function much the same way for reproductions. Labelling an artwork *installation with photographic elements* for example, changes how the viewer perceives and understands what they are looking at. Indeed, supplying several images (from varying perspectives) and a short video would help produce an impression of his works' sensorial and installative qualities.

I would also suggest adding more detailed information when accessioning multi-media/installation artworks. An interview with the artist regarding the type of documentation they would like and what the institution is capable of pursuing at that time would be very helpful. A note can be placed in their file so that in the future when resources become available, artist approved reproductions can be pursued. It is the task of the artist to ensure proper reproduction is pursued, but it also the responsibility of the collections manager/institutions to ensure that they reproduce the artwork in the best possible way. When cultural institutions employ new technology, best practices should be re-examined and re-evaluated.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In a conversation with Catsou Roberts, Commissions Curator at Vital Arts, in the exhibition catalogue *Michael Snow: almost Cover to Cover*, Snow states that works cannot be seen in any environment: "works designed for the commitment of a cinema/theatre can't be shown within a gallery because they have a temporal structure with a beginning, middle and end" (19). Snow acknowledges that certain works cannot be presented in certain environments as the viewer, if allowed to casually stroll by the work rather than watch its linear progression, will be given a much different experience than intended. Taken to its logical conclusion, to take an artwork out of its original environment and place it in another precludes the possibility of having the same sort of experience as was originally intended, while also creating something different. Though many museums and cultural institutions have attempted to produce more meaningful and richer visual experiences with reproductions, Mark Paradis from the NGC has learned that quick and easy access is preferred to the more complex and interactive forms of reproduction.

Historically, the use of photography within cultural institutions has focused around the camera's ability to make documents for reference, and to be reproduced and sold as copies or printed into books. More recently (1960s onwards), the use of photography in these institutions has expanded to include the collections management department and conservation and publication. Preservation, research, and newer forms of image dissemination are the main uses of current reproductions. But as newer and more multidisciplinary forms of artworks are accessioned, the reproduction process at cultural institutions becomes strained. Using Michael Snow highlights issues surrounding the reproduction of contemporary photographic artworks, and underlines that the current categorization of multidisciplinary art forms will lead to inappropriate object labelling. Current reproduction standards will, in the future, also lead to misunderstandings and misinformation. This issue is further compounded by the lack of standardized vocabulary associated with the reproduction process.

Like Benjamin's aura, the notion of further displacing meaning through increased reproductions removes the intent and purpose of the original work. In the 21st century, some contemporary

artworks are more than just flat objects or sculptures—they evoke time and space and are better understood when in their presence. The reproduction has increased knowledge surrounding artworks and collections that are difficult to access, greatly assisted and expanded research, and helped to increase interest in museums and artworks in general. It has also forced contemporary photographic installation artworks into a classification and reproduction system that lacks terminology and methodology to properly label and reproduce these works. The insufficient categorization and reproduction of contemporary art is being pursued within a system that has yet to change and evolve with the demands of newer art forms; cultural institutions lack a clearer understanding of how and why reproductions are being seen and interpreted by the public, scholars and researchers.

Though there has been much research into new forms of reproductions for historical artefacts that are more participatory and immersive, there continues to be a dearth of research into how and why reproductions are made by cultural institutions in the 21st century. Museums and cultural institutions collect artworks that need new or altered forms of reproductions in order to give clearer or better impressions of experiential artworks. Clearly being in the presence of the original is different than its reproduction, but if digital theorists, researchers, and those accessing images online are interacting and interpreting these images as *just as good as* the original, or if they perceive these as definitive views of the original, then there needs to be a re-evaluation of the reproduction process.
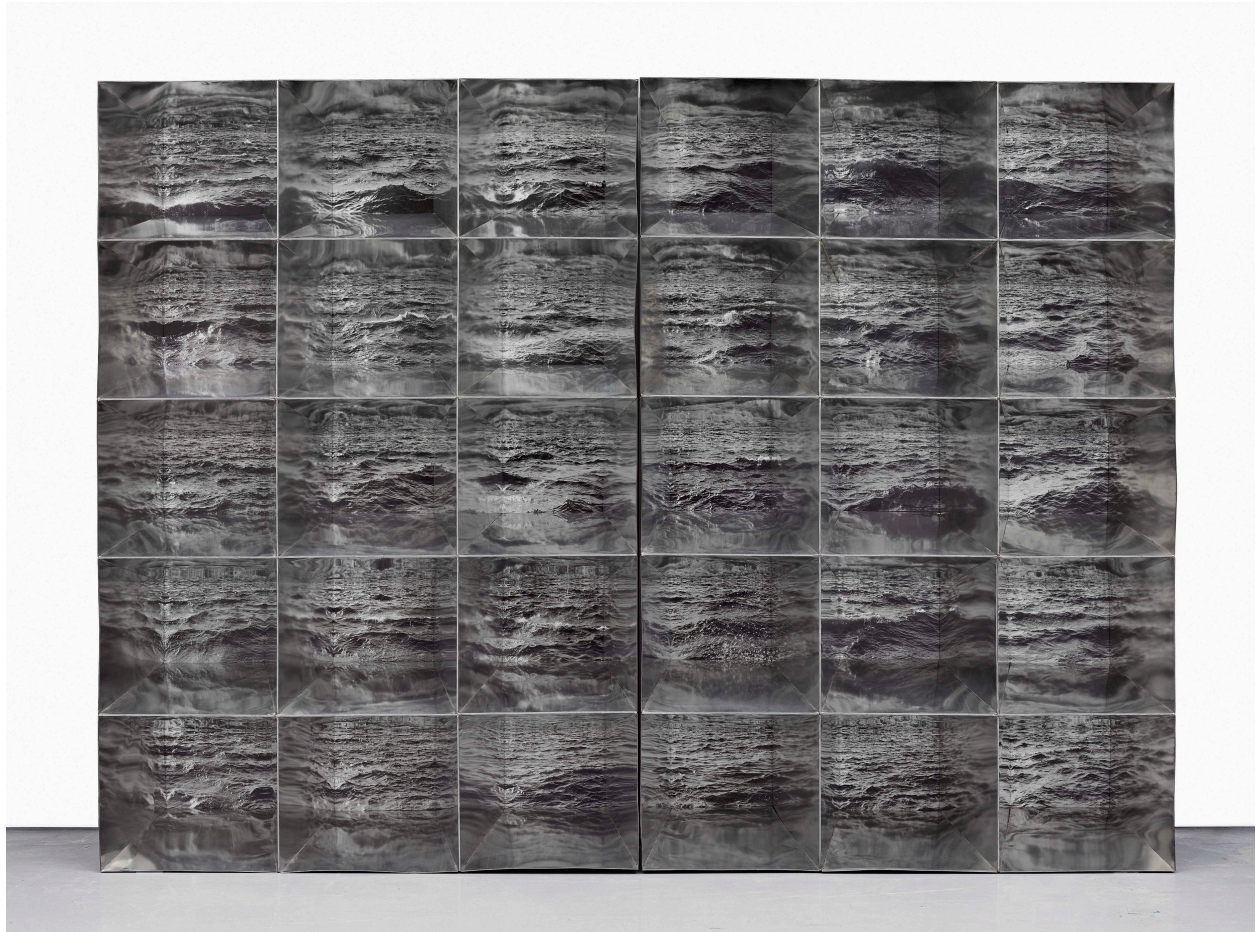
Fig. 1.

Michael Snow, *Atlantic*, 1967, Gelatin silver prints with metal, wood and arborite, 171.1 x 245.1 x 39.9cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

Fig. 2.

Michael Snow, *Recombinant*, 1992, 80 35mm colour transparencies, projector, painted clylindrical stand, plexiglass, wood, (pedestal) 104.1 x 74 x 3.2cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

Fig. 3.

Michael Snow
Authorization, 1969
Instant silver prints (Polaroid 55) and adhesive tape on mirror in metal frame,
54.6 x 44.4 x 1.4 cm with integral frame
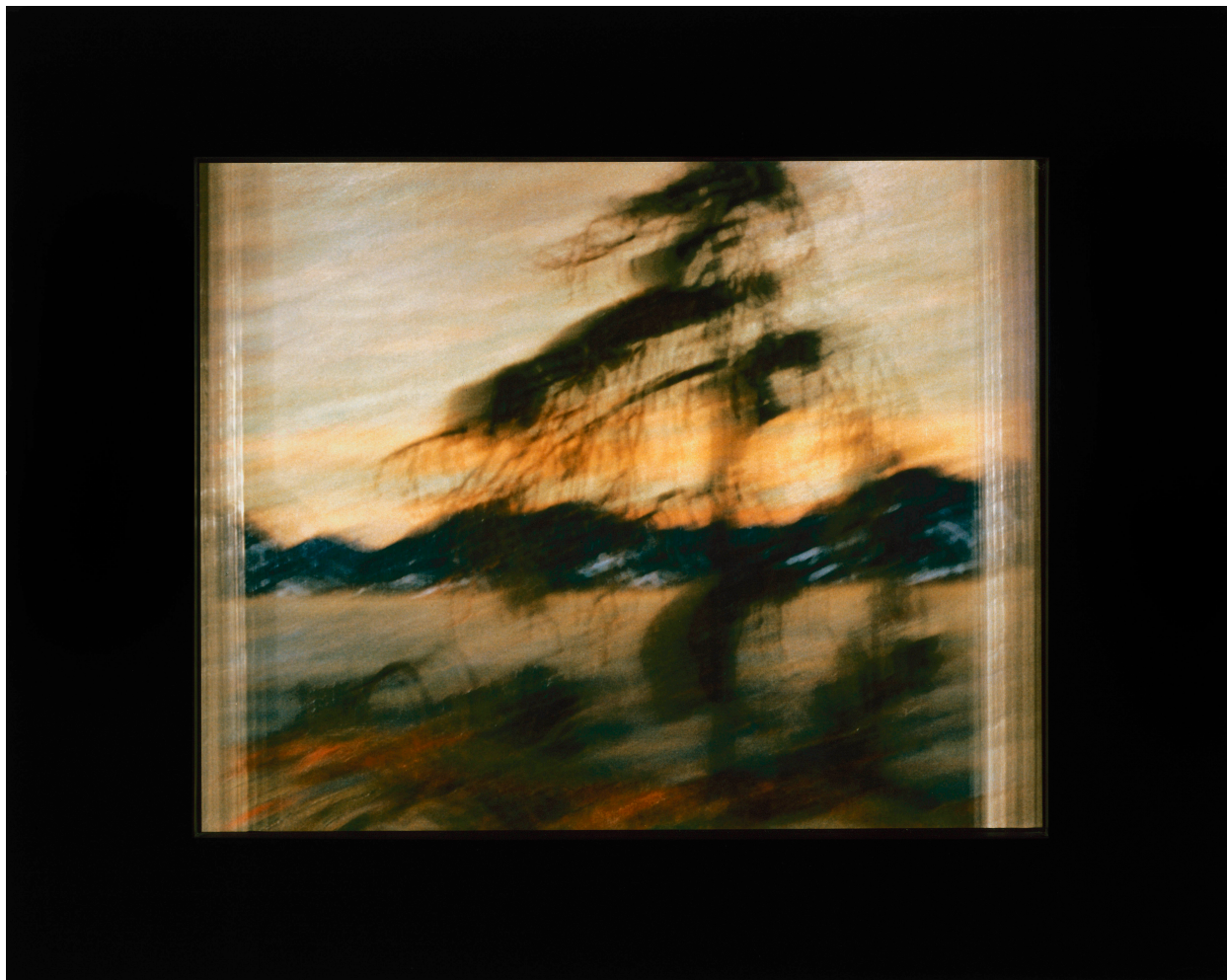National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Fig. 4.

Michael Snow
Plus Tard, 1977
25 framed dye coupler prints, 86.4 x 107.2 cm each
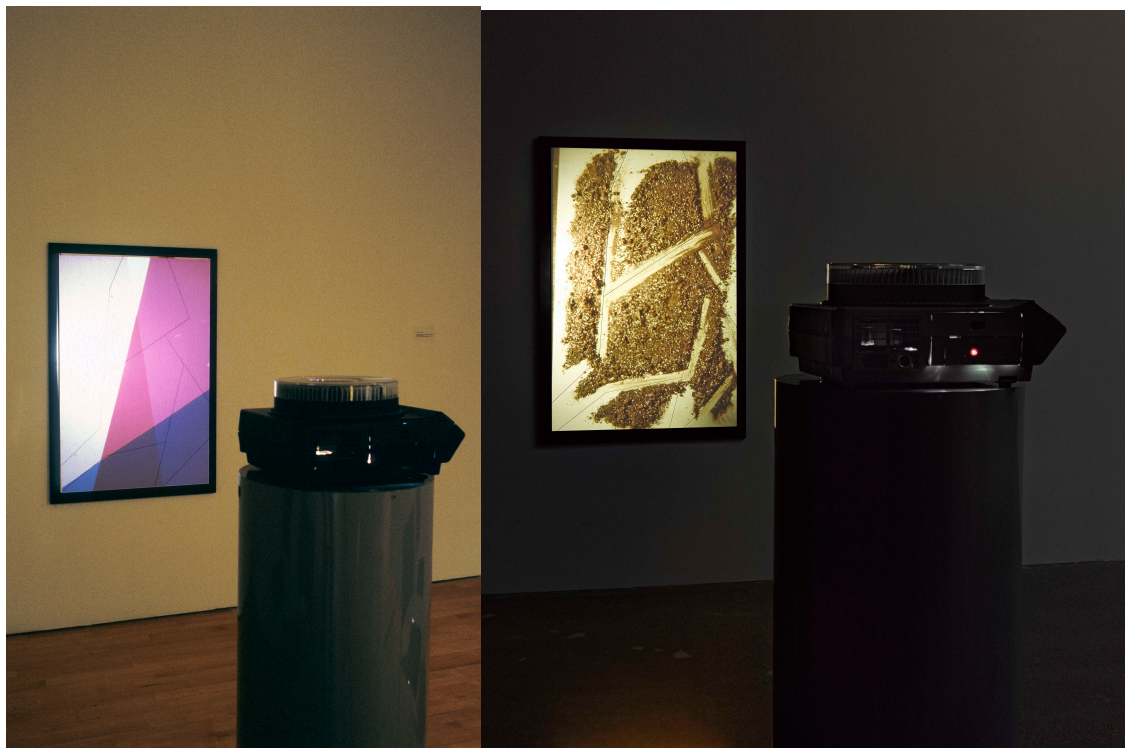National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Fig. 5.

Two reproductions of Michael Snows *Recombinant* spanning a thirteen-year period from the Art Gallery of Ontario.

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